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### **Introduction**

Don't ask me where the last year has gone – it really doesn't seem that long since I last sent out a festive edition of the newsletter in 2014! I hope you have all had a good year and are looking forward to the New Year – I'm also hoping that 2016 lasts a bit longer than 2015! On behalf of the Club can I send best wishes to all members and their families.

With no sign of real winter at all yet (it looking likely to be one of the mildest ever recorded), I was surprised, and delighted, to see several of my usual winter visitors arriving early in the garden, a few bramblings and redpolls being regular. Even more noticeable and numerous have been the redwings, who have been busy working their way through all the berry-bearing bushes, especially the holly trees, of which we have two fine self-seeded examples. The berry crop this year has been excellent, but with the berries rapidly disappearing by the day, my wife had to get out there pretty sharpish to collect some of the few remaining sprigs for our customary Christmas decorations!

I look forward to seeing you at events in the New Year – there are some excellent indoor talks coming up in the next few months, along with the popular Photographic Competition evening in early March (see item below for further information).

Please note that the next newsletter will go out in February 2016, so can I ask that any relevant items get to me by early February.

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As always, many thanks go to all contributors to this newsletter. Illustrations courtesy of Kingfisher Publications plc.

### **Changes to the BOC Committee**

At the recent AGM, there were some changes to the BOC committee. Tim Ball stood down as Chair and Bill Nicoll as the Treasurer. John Walker and Iain Oldcorn also had to stand down as ordinary elected committee members, as their three year terms of office ended. But Iain has been co-opted to remain on the committee as a non-executive member, so he can continue as Membership Secretary.

In their places, we welcome Eleanor Pitts as the new Treasurer and Sue Charnley as an ordinary committee member. That means the post of chair is currently vacant and there also is one vacancy on the committee. So do get in touch with me if you might be interested in joining the committee.

Our grateful thanks go to the departing committee members for all their valuable work for the Club.

Sally Wearing (Hon. Secretary)

## **Photographic Competition 2016**

Start checking through your images now and pick the best for this season's competition. You can enter up to nine pictures, with a maximum of three in each category; Portrait, Action/Behaviour or Flight.



Your entries must be with Colin by 2nd February 2016, a full month ahead of the Competition date to allow for preparation of the evening. You can send them by email or on a CD. Colin's email address is [colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk](mailto:colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk)

This year the judges will be our own Dickie Duckett and Mike Lane FRPS (who will be known to members for his past visits to the Club and his wonderful photography). They will then have an early viewing so they can select the best for detailed discussion on the evening. Note that all your entries will be shown on the evening - that's one of the reasons for cutting down the numbers from four per category to three this year.

As always, the best entries will be sorted out by the judges for a final showing and then picking of winners and runners up in each category, with prizes being awarded to both. The climax of the evening is the audience vote for the best image of the year - the winner then receives The Gordon Langsbury Memorial Trophy.

We love to have new photographers taking part. If you look at past winners you will see how they vary, whether it be the subject, the style or the photographer.

**So don't be afraid - if you like them, enter them!**

## **From the Membership Secretary**

As you will know, the BOC membership subscription year runs from 1 October; if you do not intend to renew your subscription this year then please drop an email to the membership secretary and, while we will be sorry to lose your support, we will not keep reminding you to pay up.

It is also rapidly approaching that time of the year when we need to start to issue replacement QMR Permits; these can only be sent out to paid up members of the club, so if you want your QMR Permit to be renewed automatically by the club then please check that you have paid your 2015/16 renewal subscription that was due on 1 October 2015.

If you have any questions about your subscription then please contact the membership secretary, Iain Oldcorn, at: [bocmembershipsec@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:bocmembershipsec@hotmail.co.uk)"

## **Little Owls - Records Please**



Last indoor season Emily Joachim told us about her study of little owls and she continues that work. Emily would welcome reports of little owls anywhere in the UK, and she hopes BOC members will help by adding their records at [www.littleowlproject.uk](http://www.littleowlproject.uk)

## **Berkshire Birding Highlights 2015**

(Compiled by Ken Moore)

Ornithologically, 2015 has, up to the date of the AGM, been one of the least eventful in Berkshire for many-a-year. Currently, the leader in the annual Berkshire Year Listing is the BOC's world traveller, Roger Stansfield, has recorded 164 species in the county - at least 20 species below par for the past few years.

Back 12 months to **December 2014** - what did December bring to the table? - RAVENS everywhere, but also 2 WHOOPER SWANS at Moor Green Lakes on the 10th December, a long-staying drake RING NECKED DUCK found on the 23rd December at Bray GPs, a long staying GREAT WHITE EGRET at Lower Farm GP and three BEWICK SWANS on December 28th at Lea Farm.





**January 2015**-the 2nd brought the first GREAT NORTHERN DIVER of the period, at Theale Main Pit, followed by a BLACK-NECKED GREBE two days later at Searles Farm Lane GP. Information from QMR was limited overall during the Review Period, however January was notable for both COMMON SCOTER and BLACK REDSTART. A drake SCAUP was reported on January 18th, and twice more subsequently from Moor Green Lakes, whilst a BITTERN was seen regularly at Dinton Pastures, also from the 18th.

In early **February** there was a single BITTERN was at the Moatlands Car Park Pit, Theale and little else to report.

On to **March** - a male RING OUZEL was at QMR for a day in Mid-March; there was a GREAT GREY SHRIKE on the Downs near West Ilsey and a ROCK PIPIT at QMR towards the end of the month.

**April** started with a GARGANEY at Burnthouse Lane on the 2nd, then on the 3rd two SANDWICH TERN visited Theale Main Pit, whilst another (or perhaps the same) GARGANEY appeared at Fobney Island on the 4th, staying for a few days. QMR recorded a male Hen Harrier on the 4th; there were two COMMON SCOTER at Theale Main Pit the following day and six BLACK-TAILED GODWIT were found at Lea Farm on the 6th. RING OUZEL numbers began to build in various locations: the 13th April was the RING OUZEL DAY with at least 52 counted on the western slope beneath the Gibbet at Inkpen Hill, Berkshire's highest ever count. For the next ten days, up to 14 were still around the same area, last being seen on the 21st. The first definite OSPREY of the year was at Whistley Green, Twyford on the 15th April and a TURNSTONE was seen at the New Workings at Moor Green Lakes the same day. On the 16th, a BOC midweek walk was treated to a male BLUE-HEADED WAGTAIL at Crookham Common, together with three flavissima males. Another OSPREY at Theale Main Pit was seen on the 17th, with yet another on the 21st at Winnersh and a MARSH HARRIER was over Field Farm GP on the 22nd. On the 26th there was a KITTIWAKE at Hosehill and a LITTLE TERN at Theale Main Pit, where the next day a drake GARGANEY arrived. April closed with three BLACK TAILED GODWITS at Hosehill on the 29th, two CRANE flying over Wishmoor Bottom the next day, plus a WOOD SANDPIPER, reported as a 'heard only' at Sandhurst.



**May** brought perhaps the best birds of the Year. A RED-BACKED SHRIKE at Burnthouse Lane on the 17th May and a fabulous female RED-NECKED PHALAROPE at Theale Main Pit on the 30th. Other notable birds for May were three reported GOSHAWKS - I believe all three still need written descriptions to support the sightings. Additionally there were another two OSPREYS, one at Woolhampton GPs and the other at Moor Green Lakes; a single RUDDY SHELDUCK at Moatlands GP, a single GARGANEY at the Loddon Reserve, a reported HONEY BUZZARD over a Bracknell garden and two (no doubt escapes at this time of year) WHOOPER SWANS at Moss End.

The highlights of **June** were an ICTERINE WARBLER trapped and ringed at Kintbury on 6th and a COMMON ROSEFINCH in a Greenham garden around the same date. Finally a one-day visit by a SANDWICH TERN on the 30th at Hosehill Lake.

During **July**, BLACK-TAILED GODWITS were well represented in Berkshire, with 28 at five sites (a single on the 6th, 11 on the 13th, 7 on 21st, 3 on 22nd and 6 on the 25th). At QMR on the 19th July there were two COMMON SCOTER and single TURNSTONE and KITTIWAKE - the only report from QMR for the month.

In **August** - 11 more BLACK TAILED GODWITS (7 on 2nd August, 2 on the 5th, one on the 16th and another on the 23rd). There was a KNOT at QMR on the 4th, a COMMON SCOTER on the 10th at Dinton Pastures, followed by two reported SANDWICH TERNS and three LITTLE TERNS on 14th at Theale Main Pit. Three BLACK-NECKED GREBES, a single at Moatlands GP (staying until 26th) and two at QMR which arrived on the 22nd and remained until the 31st. At Aldworth on 23rd August there was a MARSH HARRIER, whilst in the east of the county 3 SANDWICH TERNS made a brief appearance at QMR on the same day. On 26th August another MARSH HARRIER, this time at Lower Farm GP, and two WOOD SANDPIPERS at Moor Green Lakes.

**September** brought 8 records of that popular species, the BITTERN at two different sites, all before the 15th. There was a single Garganey at Moor Green on the 9th, a RING OUZEL at Greenham Common on the 17th, a GREAT WHITE EGRET on the 18th at Lea Farm, and a MARSH HARRIER on 19th at Searles Farm Lane.



**October** -what a strange month – it started with a very flighty, mobile BLACK NECKED GREBE at Searles Farm Lane on the 4th, then little excitement until much later in the month. On the 20th October a GREAT GREY SHRIKE took up residence at Cow Down, on the Ridgeway. Then on 27th October another GREAT GREY SHRIKE arrived, this one took up residence at Woolhampton/Brimpton GPs.

**November**, the 2nd had skulking DARTFORD WARBLER at Fobney , a very good record for the Reading area, and on the 4th a SHORT-EARED OWL was there too. Up on the Downs, the GREAT GREY SHRIKE was seen for the last time, whilst nearby a HEN HARRIER was hunting. On the 9th, an adult female GARGANEY was at Padworth Lane GP loosely mixed with a group of TEAL. Lastly, on the 15th a winter adult MEDITERRANEAN GULL at Hosehill and the GREAT GREY SHRIKE still in attendance in the Brimpton/Woolhampton GP area.

Overall perhaps this was the year the YEAR of the RAVEN, recorded from all over the County. Let us all hope the expansion continues.

### **BOC Outing to the New Forest - May 2015**

One of the hazards of running a fixed programme is that the weather can intervene to spoil things: earlier in the month, a rare heavy band of rain had swept through to wash out our trip to Thursley Common and I breathed a sigh of relief when I got up on this morning to realise that light overnight rain had cleared before dawn. It was cool, but promising...

A little trick which I learned from the late Martin Sell was that it really does pay to get to Bolderwood in the pre-tourist hours, since that is when it best reveals its very special birds. Hence the five of us were waiting at the locked gate at 6.45 a.m. Tom, the first to arrive, had seen a Hawfinch on the lawn, but it didn't reappear for the rest of us. Instead we had to make do with a family of Mistle Thrushes, a couple of Pied Wagtails and a cartload of Chaffinches, but the hopes were now high.



Five minutes into a gentle two-hour stroll we were hearing the thin and very persistent song of more than one Firecrest and one was soon showing well in the dappled leaves of a beech tree, as it defined what appeared to be a fairly tight territory. It is not often that you see our second smallest bird so well that it reveals a minute pink leg-ring! By contrast, a quartet of Stock Doves caught our attention as they sat on a dead snag at a giddy height, but that pause served to allow Sally to spot a sunlit, pale bird sitting quietly mid-way up beech tree: we all had time to see the season's first Spotted Flycatcher well before it flew off. Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Wren were all in good voice, while good numbers of Song Thrush, Blackbird and Robin kept us alert to the possibility of more special species in the deeper shadows. A Treecreeper or two and several tit species showed (though not the hoped-for Marsh Tits). Marcus picked up the sound of a male Redstart, which we found high in an old holly, fully sun-lit and magnificent as it sang its heart out for what seemed an interminable time.

The previous week I had failed to locate any Wood Warblers in that circuit, but had found one in a side lane on the other side of the car-park, in a thick stand just fifty or so yards down the hill. Bless its little green plumes! It was now in a beech tree right over the path and spinning its distinctive song as it flitted about, often in full view, especially when it crossed into the better-lit area to the right of the path. It was the easiest of easy finds for everyone to enjoy at leisure.

We still had a short time before the rendezvous set for the later phase of the trip, so we next moved to the open heath-land to the north of the Canadian Memorial. Several Stonechats popped up within minutes, and a pair of Dartford Warblers showed almost as quickly. The ease of these last finds was almost uncanny!

Nobody new joined us at Acres Down, so we set off up the hill into a breezier phase of the day. A Willow Warbler was singing in the birch trees, two Woodlarks were in the open heath at the top, and a Tree Pipit spent most of our stay parachuting from perches on trees around the slopes. Overhead a fairly large flock of House Martins skimmed low over the down, a few Swallows among them.

Among a small knot of watchers at the raptor viewpoint were two other Berkshire birders and the news was that there had been some activity. We waited for some time, a stiff and cool breeze rather marring the enjoyment of scanning the vast horizons. A Common Buzzard or two raised our hopes and we had one short and relatively unconvincing view of a putative Honey-buzzard, a dark bird which glided just above the tree-line and soon disappeared. For a short time, a quartet of Ravens entertained us as they rose quite close by. A Cuckoo was calling in the woodland below, but out of sight. The sky had clouded over, the wind seemed even colder, and the thought of a hot coffee back at the car was becoming dominant in our minds.

Then a large raptor was seen to flap up from the eastern side, a crow in hot pursuit. This second bird was a paler, more ruddy shade than the dark one we had seen earlier, but it showed all the classic features of Honey-buzzard to perfection and was so clearly different to the Common Buzzards in shape and jizz. It soared on flat wings with a little down-droop to the tips and rose steadily into the sky above us. For maybe fifteen back-breaking minutes (one newly-arrived birder wisely watched it flat on his back!) we were able to watch the bird soar high in a huge arc above us before it drifted westwards. With all morale fully restored we decide to hang on for a while longer. There were in fact several more raptors high and well out to the west, but they all seemed to be Common Buzzards. One bird was a bit closer and lower, and for a few moments it shaped up as a possible Goshawk, but then it disappeared into the forest canopy – a frustrating possibility, but not one to claim in such circumstances. We had given it our best shot, but the thought of that warm coffee now won the day. It is fair to say that our day had run fairly close to the ideal script, and that was largely thanks to some better eyes and ears than mine. The day's list was not long, but it certainly had some quality and had been well-worth the effort!



Ray Reedman

### **BOC Weekend Trip to North Wales – June 2015**

Three members of the group were able to leave Reading Area at 9am for the long journey to be broken with a birding stop at RSPB Lake Vyrnwy where we arrived at around 2pm. We walked the 3 mile long Blue Trail involving two hill climbs and a steep decent, highlights included Redstarts, Pied and Spotted Flycatchers, Nuthatch and Song Thrush, overhead were Red Kite, Buzzard and Kestrel. Then it was down more narrow lanes to rejoin the main A5 and on to Betws-y-Coed and our accommodation for the next three nights. Having met the other two members of the group and settled in we walked to the Pont-y-Pair pub for a meal. After as it was still light we stood on Pont-y-Pair Bridge looking at the river, we were lucky to see a Dipper.

The following day after a good breakfast we followed the A5 north over the Britannia Bridge to Anglesey heading first to RSPB Valley next to the RAF Base, here we added common water-birds, Willow, Sedge and Reed Warblers, Meadow pipits and Skylarks to our list. Then it was up to RSPB South Stack high on the Cliffs looking out to the Irish Sea, seeing Common Scoter, Gannets, Puffins, Razorbills, Guillemot, Choughs and Peregrine Falcon. We then enjoyed coffee and a cake in the café, before heading across the island to Cemlyn Bay in the shadow of Wylfa Power Station. Here on an island in a tidal lake protected from the sea by a shingle bank, nest Common, Arctic and Sandwich Terns and a few Mediterranean Gulls also present Ringed Plover and Dunlin. We finished the day walking out to the headland where we watched passing Manx Shearwaters.



The next morning we went to the Aber Valley a National Nature Reserve, following the wooded trail up to the base of the Rhaeadr fawr which plunges dramatically into a deep basin below. We found Redstarts and typical woodland species we hoped for flycatchers but were out of luck. At lunchtime we headed to Anglesey again, this time to Penmon Point, where we again lunched on coffee and cakes before heading down to the shore to watch the strait between the headland and Puffin Island. The Island has breeding sea-bird colonies, we saw Razorbills and Guillemots, a few Puffins and the delightful Black Guillemots fairly close in but of course we would have liked them closer. We did search to no avail for Grasshopper Warblers but were rewarded with another Peregrine Falcon and a Raven.

After breakfast on Sunday it was decided to return home via Lake Vyrnwy to hopefully find the Flycatchers for the rest of the group. This time we took the Yellow trail a much gentler walk here we were rewarded with good views of Pied and Spotted Flycatchers, also a Great Spotted Woodpecker.

The group then split up to make their separate ways home after an enjoyable weekend. With thanks to everyone who took part and assisted me in finding birds and driving.

Carole White

## And Finally - Crossword 2

|    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1  |    | 2  |    | 3  | 4  |    | 5  | 6  | 7  |
| 8  | 9  |    | 10 |    |    | 11 |    |    |    |
| 12 |    |    |    |    | 13 |    |    |    |    |
|    |    | 14 |    |    |    | 15 |    | 16 |    |
|    |    |    | 17 |    | 18 |    | 19 |    |    |
|    |    |    | 20 |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 21 | 22 |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 23 |
|    |    |    |    | 24 |    |    |    |    |    |
| 25 |    |    |    | 26 |    |    |    |    |    |
|    | 27 |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |

| ACROSS  |  |
|---------|--|
| 1       | Sounds as though this South American sprinter is coming up last.               |
| 3       | The Camargue is one  |
| 8       | An owl's ear?  |
| 11      | Is this ornithologist a petrel-head?   |
| 12 & 19 | If converted, this cloak might be a good place to watch American migrants      |
| 13      | Ken trusted he would find a plover here  |
| 14      | Could you tell this Shakespearean bird from a hawk?                            |
| 17      | The colour of an optimistic starling   |
| 20      | The study of natural balances  |
| 21      | Would you post this bird?  |
| 24      | Coral island and the first home of <i>Puffinus puffinus</i> gets a crocodilian |
| 25      | Brooding birds do  |
| 26      | Longest-distance <i>sternus</i>  |
| 27      | Feline and avian do mix in one Australian and a grey American                  |
| DOWN    |  |
| 1       | Blackbird's cousin influenced by Bill Hailey?                                  |
| 2       | A melodic Trinidadian, for example   |
| 3       | Old English for LBJ  |
| 4       | Boreal ungulate  |
| 5       | Endless mountain confused leaves a small Nearctic ground-dweller               |
| 6       | Staple for <i>Picus viridus</i>  |
| 7       | Enid Blyton's tern?  |
| 9       | Leg bones (almost) a foot long?  |
| 10      | Pelagic environment  |
| 15      | P.J. ...., 1821-1834, British Ornithologist                                    |
| 16      | Avian equivalent of a happy puppy  |
| 17      | Sounds like a bit of a left-over, this <i>larid</i>                            |
| 18      | American 21across  |
| 22      | Smooth or in the groove? Bill's the clue for this cuckoo's American cousin.    |
| 23      | Atahualpa's dove?  |

With thanks to Ray Reedman. Solution in next newsletter