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Introduction

Iain Oldcorn bocmembershipsec@hotmail.co.uk

Welcome to the 79th BOC Newsletter. You may not notice, but this edition is in a different font; out goes Times New Roman and in comes Tahoma, this is a free Microsoft TrueType sans serif font created to help on-screen displays, particularly at small sizes. We have the usual features this month plus a comprehensive report on the club's regular October trip to North Norfolk while Finley gives us a young birder's perspective on The Birdfair; and there is a special offer for BOC members from Raptor Retreats. As usual, this edition's Gallery is on the last page. Good birding and enjoy the festive season.

Conservation Corner

Renton.Righelato@berksoc.org.uk

One key way in which BOC members can make a real contribution to conservation of our natural world is surveying. We carry out surveys broadly for two reasons. Firstly, to understand what is happening to bird populations and create the evidence base to inform conservation actions. Which species are doing well and which need help? Which areas are best to designate for protection? Where would habitat improvement work best be focussed? Secondly, to encourage landowners to adopt and extend conservation measures by showing them what birds they have, how they are doing and what measures work. Right now, we have much surveying to do and we need help! These are some of them:

- Breeding grebes survey; to establish the status of Little Grebes, which appear to be declining in Berkshire. This does not require special expertise; anyone can fill in our online questionnaire about grebes they find or do not find (negative results are valuable too) on water bodies throughout the County. <http://berksoc.org.uk/recording/surveys/grebes-survey/>
- Farm surveys; to show farmers what birds they have and where, to help them improve their land for species of conservation concern. Neil Bucknell is coordinating our activities on the Downs and would welcome volunteers nebulastreatley@btinternet.com
- Willow Tits; the RSPB and BTO are running a national survey of this rapidly declining species. There are about 15 tetrads in West Berkshire that they would like surveyed in 2020. The survey involves walking through suitable woodland in early spring and using a playback of Willow Tit song, which we provide. Please contact me if you can help.
- Monitoring the status of birds; in sites that may be right for designation as Local Wildlife Sites and on existing protected sites. For example, in 2020, we will need a team to monitor Natural England's SSSI at Aldermaston GPs. These follow the national Breeding Bird Survey transect method or are territory mapping surveys. Again, please contact me if you can help.

I do quite a bit of surveying and, once over the shock of getting up early, it can be very rewarding – often going to rarely visited places, exploding with bird song and sometimes stumbling across rare and unexpected birds. It is a great way to start the day!

Annual General Meeting 2019

Renton.Righelato@berksoc.org.uk

It was good to see so many people at the Club's AGM on 13th November. For those who were unable to come, here are the main decisions. Robert Godden was elected Chairman, with Sally Wearing and Eleanor Pitts re-elected as Secretary and Treasurer respectively. Richard Burness, Jane Campbell, Chris Foster, Sue Charnley and Ray Reedman were elected to the Committee. So, the Committee now comprises:

Executive Officers: Robert Godden (Chair), Sally Wearing (Secretary), Eleanor Pitts (Treasurer)

Elected ordinary members: Richard Burness, Jane Campbell, Chris Foster, Sue Charnley, Ken Moore, Ray Reedman

Non-executive Officers: (some of whom are also elected members): Membership Secretary, Iain Oldcorn; Programme Secretary, Sue Charnley; Excursions, Ray Reedman; Archivist, Andy Horscroft; County Recorder, Richard Burness. The Committee has appointed Sally Wearing as its Vice Chair, a new post for the Club.

President: Renton Righelato

The President thanked the outgoing Committee members and all the Officers for their work for the Club. He also thanked our President emeritus, Robert Gillmor, for his continued commitment to the Club, each year providing cover birds for our Annual Report, despite illness.

Donald Reid 1933 – 2019

Renton.Righelato@berksoc.org.uk

This summer we lost a long-standing member who had a life-long love of birds and ornithology: Donald Reid. He was one of the Club's first Life Members. A keen photographer, he was the winner of the first of the BOC's annual photographic competitions with his photo of a Willet. Founder of the Donald Reid Group, he was an accountant with a keen sense of charitable duty, an active Rotarian and chair of the Maidenhead Rotary Club in 1979/80. For many years he helped the BOC *pro bono* as the Club's auditor, painstakingly checking our accounts.

Don had suffered from Parkinson's disease for some years but continued to come to Club meetings as long as he could. He would still get out in the field from time to time, in recent years with the help of his son, Daniel. He was committed to conservation and as recently as this spring he visited Lavell's Wetland Trust's Lea Farm Lake project.

One of Don's many talents was poetry, much of it about birds. His wife, Moyagh, has kindly agreed to us publishing one of these:

Dawn Awakening

Just as dawn was breaking

There came a great awakening

And before my very eyes in full flight

Came the cries from that noble sight

The reed-bed came alive

And the nearby woods seemed to thrive

With the rising of the geese from their roost

It's taken all my life to get such a boost

There must have been five hundred or more

Whitefronts in the main began to soar

And the rushing of the wind in their wings

Made my hair stand on end as Kiri when she sings.



THE BIRDFAIR 2019



programme. Then I found out about the BOC coach trip.

As soon as I realised there was a way to get there, I knew I would be stupid not to take it. There were several setbacks in the lead-up, especially safeguarding issues, but I got past them with lots of great help from Ray, reassurance to the rest of the club from Fraser, and Sally agreeing to check in on me during the day.

When my alarm went off at 6am on the Saturday it was a tough start, forcing myself to get up and get ready after a 20 hour day of international travelling followed by a four hour sleep, but I knew it would definitely be worth it so got my birding gear together and arrived at the meeting spot by 7am. The journey was mainly just a case of speculating what the day ahead would hold, but I passed some of the time adding the 15 new species from Greece to my list on Birdguides, and then my first confirmed Hobby flew directly over the coach, seen only by myself and the woman behind me! This was followed by three more in the next week, but it was still a great moment!

As soon as I stepped out of the coach and into Marquee 1, I knew that this event was far bigger than I'd been anticipating. There were people everywhere, browsing the hundreds of neatly laid-out stalls. Up until lunch, I spent all of my time checking out the stands one by one, meeting David Walsh (who I'd been in contact with on Twitter) and adding to my rapidly expanding badge collection at the RSPB's stall.

Once I'd been through the first few marquees, I got lunch and then headed over to the Wildzone for Toby Carter's young birders' walk. For me this was the highlight of the day, partly because we saw some great birds – Ruddy Shelduck, Black Tern, Ruff (all lifers), Great Egret and Osprey – but mainly because I got to meet all the young birders who I'd never actually had the chance to talk to in person before.

Once the walk was over, I filled my remaining day going through the other marquees, checking out the live ringing at the BTO stand (who knew you could tell apart juvenile and adult dunnocks by their iris colour?!), visiting the careers clinic and watching Chris Packham presenting the Bird Photographer of the Year Awards; then it was back to the coach and home to reflect on such a great day and sort through the dozens of photos I took. Thank you so much BOC, especially Ray, Sally and Fraser, for making it happen!



Finley Hutchinson

Since I started birding, The Birdfair had always seemed like a mythical event to me. I would read lots about it in nature magazines, see endless photos online, even receive a programme with Birdwatch magazine. But I was never actually able to go, because it was too far, and it always fell on the weekend that my family and I returned home from our annual holiday. This year was set to be exactly the same – we would arrive home from Greece on the Friday night, and then my mum would (understandably) be way too tired to drive all the way to Rutland – I told myself that I probably would be too, and tried to forget about the whole thing, despite it constantly being mentioned on Twitter and getting the free

The Birds of Berkshire Annual Report

Richard Burness

The editors of the *Birds of Berkshire Annual Report* are initiating the process that should lead to the reports for 2017 and 2018 being published during 2020. The centre piece of *any* bird report is the systematic list of species seen during the year. Here in Berkshire we rely on a team of volunteer Species Account Writers to assist the editors by each writing a series of accounts. We are always short of volunteers, so if you feel that you can help us, and would like to participate in this communal effort, then please contact the County Recorder at records@berksoc.org.uk

The editors are always looking for ways to improve and enhance the annual report. Illustrations are currently confined to a selection of colour photographs kindly made available by the county's photographers. The text could be further enhanced by the addition of thumbnail bird sketches throughout. Monochrome would be best for the printing process (pen and ink?). If you work in these types of media and feel able to make your output available for the report, please get in touch.

The production of the annual report each year is a volunteer led project, but it is not cost-free to the BOC. One way in which we can defray the cost of printing and distribution is by selling advertising space (or securing sponsorship). If you would like to advertise in the report or know anyone who might be interested in doing so, then please make initial contact with the County Recorder as above.

Climate Crisis Continues

Iain Oldcorn

Since our last Newsletter was published on 7th August, several reports would suggest that the health of our planet may be even more perilous than we had previously been led to believe, e.g. the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 8th August 2019 – what timing! And Governments are scarcely rushing to make changes.

There are a number of websites that can help you understand and “estimate” your carbon footprint; and if one hasn't measured it, then it isn't easy to see where one's efforts would be best placed to achieve maximum improvement for least effort. Then pick the low hanging fruit first before going for the harder and more inconvenient/expensive things; and evolution rather than revolution is most likely to bring you sustainable results. I say estimate as the science is imprecise and different calculations and results come up from different authorities and websites. For example, giving no endorsements to this one rather than another, you could try: <https://www.carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx>. Like some others, this website also gives you the opportunity to buy offsets for your carbon footprint – though again this concept is not favoured by all experts (is it acceptable to buy the destruction of our planet?). Well done if your annual carbon footprint already turns in at less than the current UK average of 7.4 tCO₂e; but don't rest on your laurels, what more can you do? We all need to get this figure significantly reduced as soon as possible.

Moving on, you will remember from the last Newsletter that transport is a big issue and so you have vowed: to avoid cruise ship holidays; to fly to closer destinations for your holidays, or stay in the UK; to replace your car with a hybrid while waiting for the hydrogen powered vehicle revolution to arrive. Most experts say that the next big issue is food and how it is produced (or manufactured!).

Now the impact of food is probably even less accurately calculable than transport and for many it's also tied to ethical issues of animal welfare. Over 40% of our usable land mass is devoted to agriculture and over a quarter of human induced carbon emissions are produced within the food supply chain. And remember, as Kevin Cox, Chair of the RSPB Council, said at the last BOC indoor meeting “it's not the fault of the farmers” when he was referring to the unwanted and unpredicted consequences of many of our farming policies and subsidies. What is surely not contentious is that eating locally produced British food is a great idea, as is: choosing seasonal produce as much as possible, avoiding food transported by air and eliminating food waste (the UK wastes £20Bn of edible food annually, i.e. over £300 per head on average and equivalent to 0.37 tCO₂e).

Now certainly, at present, cows are getting a bad press. In terms of tCO₂e they don't have a lot going for them and are “worse” than sheep/goats, which are worse than pigs and in turn pigs are worse than

poultry, fish and plant-based substitutes in that order. Cows are also woefully inefficient at using our precious land mass, taking 20 times the acreage to produce the same food energy as plant alternatives. The USA is going to miss its 2020 carbon emissions reduction target; if it gave up cows overnight and instead grew the equivalent food "value" in beans it would free up over 40% of its cropland and achieve half of the greenhouse gas reductions needed to reach this reductions target (fat chance!). Cows also give out a lot of methane, and when produced, methane is 104 times more potent than CO₂ in its impact on the climate! The only chink of light is that methane breaks down quite rapidly (in about 12 years against the centuries for Carbon Dioxide) so an equilibrium should be reached if its production rate is constant, the downside is that red meat consumption is increasing as developing economies adopt the lifestyle of the, so called, developed world!

One might also have a pot at cows because they are the major source of dairy products. Vegans will tell you that by adopting their lifestyle the average citizen would save 0.9 tCO₂e of their 7.4 tCO₂e footprint; a vegetarian lifestyle would also achieve very similar benefits (0.8 tCO₂e reduction).

And remember the Four-Rs: Reduce, Repair, Reuse and Recycle.

And don't forget that by Dec 13th you will again have an MP against whom you can rail about the lack of any Government action to alleviate the Climate Crisis: the Cambridge – Milton Keynes – Oxford Corridor, Heathrow Expansion, HS2,

[Kilograms or metric tonnes of carbon dioxide emitted per annum (KgCO₂e or tCO₂e).]

North Norfolk, 4th-6th October 2019

Marcus I'Anson

Nine of us met up at the Cley visitor centre/cafe soon after midday on Friday, after fairly smooth drives from Berkshire.

As the winds had generally been from the south and west there were few migrant species on the Norfolk coast apart from brief viewings of Yellow-browed Warblers. We decided to seek out a flock of Spoonbills at a previously unvisited site at Stiffkey Fen. After some confusion we found the correct footpath into the fen and, sure enough, after about half a mile, we found a large pool with a dozen Spoonbills dozing, sleeping or preening. There was quite a variety of other ducks and geese on the same pool.

A quick look for a reported Yellow-browed Warbler yielded nothing so we headed off to Burnham Overy Staithe to find some Cattle Egrets and for a walk out to the dunes at Gunhill. We failed to connect with the Egrets but had a really enjoyable walk along the embankment between the sea and marshes and the fields. There were a good number of usual Redshank, Dunlin, Curlew, Ringed Plover, Grey Plover and some Black-tailed Godwits on the marsh side of the embankment. Little Grebes were in a ditch running alongside. We decided not to go all the way to Gunhill but turned right onto the path back to the road where we'd parked. One field contained four enormous and impressive bulls. Another held about 100 Pink-footed Geese and about 20 Egyptian Geese. As we got closer to the road another field had a covey of perhaps 10 Grey Partridge amongst some Pheasants.

We headed off to the Burleigh in Hunstanton to check in, and then returned to Thornham, where some Marsh Harriers compensated for a fruitless search for Barn Owls; then dinner at the Lifeboat.

Saturday dawned quite mild with a slight westerly breeze which had changed from an overnight northerly. That boded well for a possible influx of migrants. We spent 40 minutes at the seafront scanning for not very much, finding many Oystercatchers and Turnstones, and some Black-tailed Godwits, but not much else. A good breakfast followed and we all headed to Titchwell.

We started with another look for Yellow-browed Warbler, without success, and then headed to the beach, stopping for a few scans across the pools and reedbeds. Several Bearded Tits were seen, a Kingfisher, Avocets, a single Golden Plover, Cetti's Warbler and a variety of Ducks. On and over the sea, there were a few flocks of Common Scoter and several divers including a probable Great Northern and

a close Red-throated. Two Mergansers flew by, some saw a Sandwich Tern, and there were a few juvenile Gannets. A Snow Bunting made a short visit before flying further down the beach. Sanderlings were readily seen scurrying backwards and forwards by the shoreline and a Bar-tailed Godwit flew over. On the walk back, at least one Spotted Redshank was clearly seen next to a Common Redshank giving a good comparison. Water Rail was added. Additionally, Rock Pipit and Knot were seen by some of the group. A probable Hen Harrier was seen by Gray and Adrian, confirmed by a sighting reported on Birds of Norfolk (<http://norfolkbirds.com/>).

Most people had a light lunch before we headed back to Burnham Overy as there was a report of a Dusky Warbler sighting and the Cattle Egrets had moved to a new location nearby. This time we parked in the harbour car park (it was low tide) and walked back out on the embankment seeing a cluster of birders about half a mile away. "Not seen for an hour", was the refrain from some dispirited birders. Another group of about 10 birders had gathered along the other path lower down. Marcus and John H went down to join them as they seemed to be looking at something specific. Sure enough, they had seen a Yellow-browed Warbler, which obligingly popped up and flew along the hedgerow. It then flew towards us and disappeared in the reeds immediately in front of us. The remainder of the group came down just in time for the Dusky Warbler to make the first of several fleeting appearances, giving just about satisfactory views to most of the group.

We went back up onto the embankment, as we had directions to look at a herd of cattle halfway to Holkham and, amongst them, were the six Cattle Egrets and further away a Great Egret. On the way back to the harbour we got another glimpse of the Dusky Warbler.

Three of the group then went to Holkham to search for Shorelarks and the remainder returned to Titchwell to look for a Yellow-browed Warbler. Reports of this species were coming in from all over the coast. Both groups had a good level of success ... the Holkham party didn't find a Shorelark but did see a large flock of Linnets and quantities of Meadow Pipits, as well as a pair of Wheatears and a late Yellow Wagtail. The Titchwell group immediately saw a male Brambling at the feeders followed by a Treecreeper. After walking past the Fen Hide there was a flighty tit flock which contained a Yellow-browed Warbler, although it was not seen by all. Finally, a small flock of Redwing passed over. Another pre-dinner look for Barn Owl was unsuccessful although there was a distant very probable Tawny Owl.

Sunday dawned very wet as forecast and after breakfast everyone vacated the Norfolk coast as it was supposed to rain until early afternoon. Seven of the group reconvened at Welney and picked up some further birds including: a flock of Tree Sparrows, an over-summering non-migratory breeding flock of Whooper Swans, another Great Egret, two more Cattle Egrets, about a dozen Snipe, Stock Dove and a Bittern in flight. Some late House Martins made an appearance to add to some Swallows seen the day before. A Weasel showed very well as we had a final coffee in the visitor centre.

We all finally said our goodbyes and headed south into lighter skies and even some late sunshine. In total 108 bird species were seen by some or more of the group. We visited some sites not explored by the BOC before and enjoyed some good banter in generally pleasant conditions for two days.

(Thanks to Marcus as usual for organising another successful trip, which will be repeated again in October 2020. Hopefully I'll make it next time. It's not a real birding year without at least one trip to Norfolk! Ray)

RaptorRetreats Treats for BOC

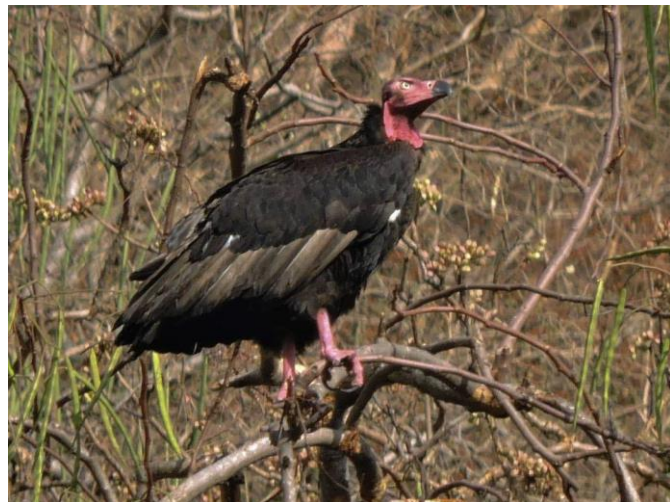
Mike Henderson

World-wide there are 575 species of raptor and owl. However, 52% are in decline with 18% threatened with extinction. [State of the world's raptors: Distributions, threats, and conservation recommendations, Biological Conservation (2018).] There are many reasons, including loss of habitat, hunting and the use of pesticides. Old world vulture numbers have been particularly impacted, reducing by 99% over the last 30 years. In India, this is largely due to the use of Diclofenac, an anti-inflammatory drug, used for cattle. Vultures feeding on dead cattle cannot metabolise the Diclofenac which caused fatal renal failure. The dramatic loss of Indian vultures has led to a huge increase in the number of feral

dogs and over 30,000 additional rabies cases per year. In Africa, poachers regularly bait carcasses so the vultures do not draw attention to them. Again, the loss of vultures and birds of prey has resulted in an increase in disease due to the rotting remains of dead animals being left to fester. Birds of prey are also important to our well-being closer to home. As they are top of the food chain, they help to balance ecosystems by managing the populations of smaller mammals, birds and insects - important for our farmers as well as natural areas.

It is for these reasons, that Raptor Retreats has been set up. Unlike other wildlife tour companies, all our profits go towards support raptor conservation in the amazing destinations we visit, including:

Costa Rica – With 921 bird species, Costa Rica really is a birder’s paradise. This trip takes in a number of habitats including cloud forests and coastal jungle to view as many of these as possible. We have also timed this trip to coincide with the impressive annual raptor migration. Forming a narrow strip between the base of the Talamanca Mountains and the Caribbean Sea, the Kèköldi Indigenous Territory funnels over a million raptors through each season. It is not uncommon to see 10,000 birds of prey in a day. We are supporting the Kèköldi tribe (of Costa Rica's indigenous Bribri people) with their standardised, full-season counts to monitor the health and well-being of these birds. Their watch-tower has amazing 360-degree views above the trees, so you too can see these unique sights, whilst supporting the continuation of the Kèköldi tribe’s important research by going on this tour. (*Introductory offer for BOC members 12 nights Oct 2020 from £2750.*)



Rajasthan, India – Our trip to Rajasthan is enough to blow any nature lover’s senses. We take in temples, tigers and an abundance of birds. With such a decline in vulture numbers, we are supporting the Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre in Pinjore. Here they are developing innovative approaches to breeding and rehabilitating the critically endangered Long-billed, Slender-billed and Red-Headed vultures. On this trip we will get the chance to see some of these species at one of the most beautiful reserves in the world, Ranthambore Sanctuary. (*15 nights Feb 2020 from £3990.*)

Pyrenees and Basque Country, Spain – In Spain we are privileged to be supporting SEO Birdlife (Spanish Ornithological Association). They have a number of projects across Spain including two at destinations we visit, the Ibañeta pass and the awe-inspiring cliffs of Sierra Salvada. We will meet with SEO representatives at these locations to hear about their work and benefit from their local knowledge as to where to find the best views to see all sorts of birds from Wallcreepers to all four of Europe’s vultures. (*Three or six nights March and November from £800.*)

If you are interested please visit www.raptorretreats.com or contact Mike on 07974 704104 or email mike@raptorretreats.com for more information.

The BOC attends the Royal County of Berkshire Show

Robert Godden

The Royal County of Berkshire Show was held on the weekend of 21st and 22nd September, and the Berkshire Ornithological Club accepted an invitation to man a stand in the Countryside Area, not far from the stands of other local wildlife and conservation organisations. Saturday was a fine day and we had thirty visitors to the stand, a mixture of birdwatchers, farmers and country lovers, and we fielded questions on the increasing numbers of Red Kites and their choice of food, and the decreasing numbers of other birds. Sunday was a wet day and the nineteen visitors was indicative of reduced numbers attending the show as a whole. I'm very grateful to Carole White and Chris Foster for helping on the stand – this extra help enabled us to take turns and enjoy some of the other exhibits around the vast arena. However, the days were long and it is hoped that if the club exhibits there again in the future, we could have more volunteers manning the stand on a rota basis. Overall, we thought it was probably worth the effort and are hopeful that we have gained new members as a result.



Membership Matters

Iain Oldcorn bocmembershipsec@hotmail.co.uk

If you change your postal or email address please remember to advise me so that we can maintain contact with you; your email address is particularly important to us as using it costs us virtually nothing and is so easy.

There are still a few members who have not yet paid their 2019/2020 BOC subscription that was due on 1st October; they are almost all members that have in the past paid by cheque/CafDonate or by their own direct bank transfer. If you have not paid, then please pay us as soon as possible or advise me that you are resigning from the club – thanks.

You may remember that at the 2018 AGM it was agreed that we withdraw the granting in future of any further "Retired" discounts. We are very grateful to those members who were receiving this discount and volunteered to give it up.

For those members with a QMR Permit, we have to say "watch this space" as Thames Water is considering options which may require some further change in the administration arrangements. So, at present we still only have access at restricted times; please note that these have changed from those as set out in the letter accompanying the issuing of the 2019 Permits – Datchet Water Sailing Club is currently open from 9am to 4.30pm Wednesday through to Sunday, i.e. it is no longer open on Tuesdays at present. It would always be prudent to check on their website (<https://www.dwsc.co.uk/opening-hours/>) before visiting the site. We will advise members if the position alters.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in articles in this Newsletter are those of their respective authors and are not necessarily representative of those of the BOC or of any of its Committee Members.

Birding Highlights: January - March 2019

Courtesy Ken Moore

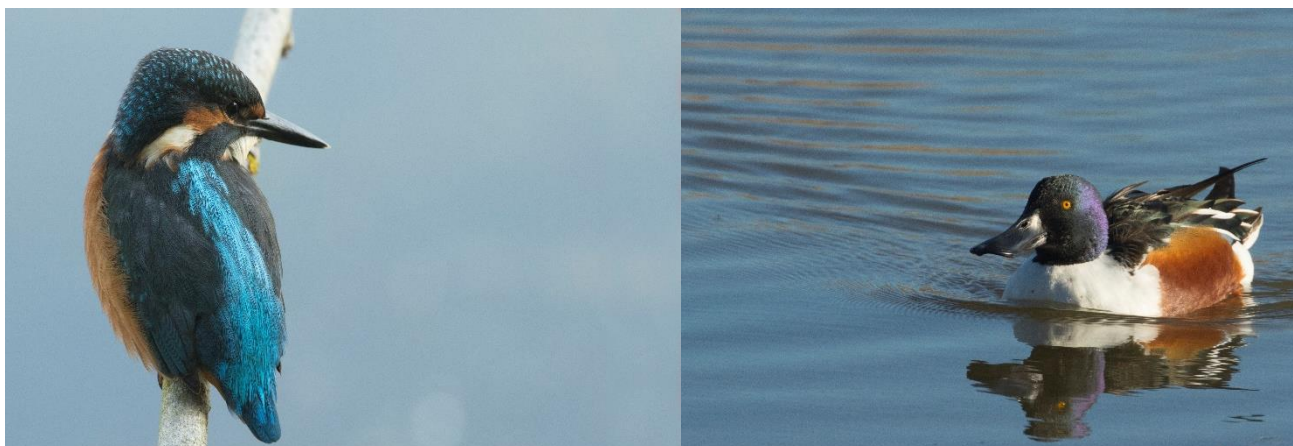
Here's hoping we see similar spectacular species in the next few months this season!



Clockwise from top:

- 6th January – Cattle Egret, Englefield © Rik Addison
- 18th February – Red-breasted Merganser, Hurst Green GP, Twyford GPs © Andy Tomczynski
- 21st March – Glaucous Gull, Queen Mother Reservoir, © Andy Tomczynski

Thanks to Ken Moore for doing the research and to all the photographers.



Longtailed Tit at Dorney Wetland, Lapwing at Fobney Island



Great Tit at Fobney Island and diving Common Tern at Dinton Pastures

