

<u>Introduction/BTO Surveys</u>	1
<u>Osprey Outlooks</u>	2
<u>Hairy Dragonflies on the Kennet and Avon</u>	2
<u>Newbury News</u>	3
<u>Puzzles Page/Membership Matters</u>	4
<u>What Colour was that Bird?/Disclaimer</u>	5
<u>Garden Lockdown Competition Part 1</u>	6
<u>My New Job/Ken White's Dawn Chorus</u>	7
<u>Gallery</u>	8

Introduction

Iain Oldcorn bocmembershipsec@hotmail.co.uk

This 81st BOC Newsletter is a special edition, intended to help out while you are probably prevented from getting the major doses of birding that you normally enjoy. As usual, this edition's Gallery is on the last page.

BTO Surveys

Sean T Murphy

For 2020 the BTO was intending to carry out a survey on: Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows. Sadly, this survey had to be cancelled because of Coronavirus.

Its purpose was to assess the importance of both existing and new wet grassland and also other breeding wader habitats in England, as provided by agri-environment schemes (AES) for declining breeding birds such as Curlew, Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe. The survey would re-visit sites from the 1982 and 2002 surveys, including sites from the 2009-10 RSPB targeted areas, as well as other sites new since 2002. Surveys conducted in Wales would focus on sites covered from the 2002 survey.

The survey would involve up to four visits between mid-April and end of June to count and map all waders within allocated sites, featuring wet grassland and/or farmland sites containing specific agri-environment scheme (AES) options including arable Lapwing plots. Simple habitat and land management measures would also be recorded during the field work. Although only waders would be mapped, there would also be the opportunity to record ducks and also Yellow Wagtail and Meadow Pipit. There would be about 38 sites across Berkshire.

On a more positive note, May 2020 saw the publication by the BTO of its 2019 BBS Survey; download from: <https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/publications/bbs-report-2019.pdf>

This is the 25th annual report of the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), documenting in 36 pages the population trends of widespread UK breeding bird species during the period 1994–2019 and is the main scheme for monitoring the population changes of our common breeding birds. Since 2017 the BBS has incorporated news, trends and research from the waterways-specific Waterways Breeding Bird Survey monitoring scheme.

A few highlights of this latest BBS report:

- Number of bird species recorded: 223.
- Square with the most species: 72 near Ashton Keynes, south of Cirencester. A mix of gravels pits, scrub, human sites, grassland and semi-natural marsh. Number of squares with fewer than five bird species recorded: 91, of which 36 were "Upland Rovers" squares.
- Overall average species count: 30. For Upland Rovers specifically, the average was 11 species.

- Most widespread species: Woodpigeon and Wren, both on 90% of all squares surveyed.
- Rarest species: Golden Pheasant, Great Bustard, Water Pipit, Stone-curlew.

Osprey Outlooks

Iain Oldcorn

We may not have any opportunity at present to travel to see these magnificent birds on their nests, but that doesn't need to stop us watching them online. Here are links to a number of Osprey nest webcams in the UK (some are slow to load):

- <https://www.cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife/cams/osprey-cam>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgeLp2TX36c&feature=youtu.be>
- <http://www.dyfiospreyproject.com/live-streaming>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTIe41ZvtS4&feature=youtu.be>
- <https://www.youtube.com/c/CarnyxWildWales/live?fbclid=IwAR1BXql3-egcT5dUnT9tDIYYc6aFmE2aaJBXUUpgYQVpuJPUDIW8osBoYFqY>

And here is a link to a general Information website for UK Ospreys (plus much else as well):

<http://www.ukospreys.uk/cams-uk.htm>.

Hairy Dragonflies on Kennet and Avon 20th April 2020

Derek McEwan

Like many people out there I have been working from home since 28th March as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. It's astonishing that, in the space of just a few weeks, all the plans we had for the spring and summer came crashing down like a house of cards. Instead we have social distancing, travel restrictions, entire cities in lockdown, and shops and restaurants closed. However, no-one seems to have told the natural world about the shutdown and, fired by the exceptional weather we've had over the last few weeks, things really seem to have gone into overdrive with blossom bursting open, wild flowers blooming, the first warblers and terns starting to appear, buds bursting into leaf, and a huge number of insects on the wing. The restrictions do allow us to leave the house for exercise and with the weather being so good, my wife and I have been trying to get out for a long walk most afternoons.

The 20th April was typical, bright and sunny with a cloudless blue sky and a slight breeze, so we decided to walk through the Linear Park to Moatlands Gravel Pit, along Mill Lane to the Kennet and Avon towpath. I have a long-standing interest in Odonata and the British Dragonfly Society reported Large Red Damselflies (*Pyrhosoma nymphula*) had started to emerge in other parts of the county and, as this is normally the first species we encounter locally, we hoped that we might catch up with this attractive little insect. Unfortunately, it was not to be. There was a lot of insect activity all along the hedges and water margins – bees, butterflies, hoverflies, crane-flies, the first Alder-Flies (*Sialis lutaria*) and St. Mark's Fly (*Bibio marci*).

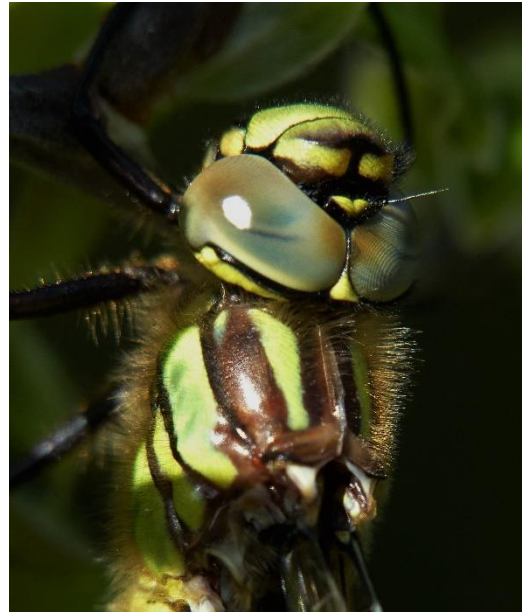


Although we had no luck with the Large Reds, we were delighted to find two Hairy Dragonflies (*Brachytron pratense*) during our walk. Until fairly recently *Brachytron pratense* was an unusual species for this area. Over the last five years the number of sightings and geographic spread have increased so there seems little doubt the species is becoming more established. I've personally found them from May onwards so this is quite an early record, but there have been other records from Kent and Essex. This early emergence has almost certainly been encouraged by the mild winter and warm spring weather.

The first Hairy we encountered was seen in Mill Lane (SU671704) and was very active, coming behind and flying over our shoulders before disappearing through a gap in the hedge. Even a brief view like this was more than enough to confirm the identification. The insect was a typical Aeshnid with a large thorax, a long thin abdomen and a strong, direct flight –

definitely not a demoiselle. However only the Hairy Dragonfly – and perhaps a few unusual migrants like Vagrant Emperor (*Hemianax ephippiger*) – would be active at this time of year, and the latter is easily identifiable by its’ brown body and broad blue “belt” at the base of the wings. The one we saw was much darker, with a yellow thorax and rows of paired spots along the abdomen.

We came across the second about 10 minutes later on the south side of the Kennet towpath (close to the wooden footbridge near “The Cunning Man” – SU676708). Cathy spotted it hanging about 4 feet from the ground on a willow branch, with the sun reflecting off the insect’s wings making each facet sparkle like a mirror. Although the colours had fully developed, we think the insect had only emerged earlier that day as – atypically for a dragonfly where the wings would usually be held at 90° from the body – this one still held its wings together over its back more like a damselfly or butterfly. It was also very reluctant to fly – another sign of recent emergence - allowing us to approach to an extremely close range. I could have stretched out a finger and stroked it! In the sunshine every identification feature was clearly visible. Hairy Dragonflies are medium-sized (around 55-65mms in body length) and this one was clearly an immature male, judging by the blue-green eyes and dark pseudopupils, the yellow and black facial markings (frons), the broad yellow stripes on the top of the thorax and, again, the rows of paired blue spots along the black abdomen (in the females these would be yellow on brown) down to two long anal claspers. The low light even revealed the covering of fine bronze-coloured hairs on the thorax and underside of the abdomen that give the insect its’ common name. When we left, the insect was still happy to sit where we had found it, abdomen gently pulsing as it continued to pump fluid into its wings ready for its’ maiden flight. This was, by far, the best sighting of the species I’ve ever had.



Hairy Dragonflies are known to prefer linear habitats with well-vegetated slow-moving water, so a stretch of canal like this is absolutely ideal. I’ve also seen them along the ditches at Heron’s Nest and in Holybrook Linear Park, the streams in Green Park, and in the Dragonfly Pond at Hosehill Lake – all broadly similar habitats. As with other hawk dragonflies, *B. pratense* will patrol a regular beat up and down a stretch of water of 25 to 100 metres, looking for prey or potential rivals/mates. The flight season will last until the end of June or early July.

Newbury News

Ken&SarahWhite

We are pleased to confirm that Black 69 brought in a juvenile pigeon for breakfast this morning (15th May) directly to the high ledge. Mrs Newbury took it straight down to the nest area - the same as last year's location - and stayed down there. She was either caching the food or feeding chicks.



Black 69 then perched on the top of the new nest box for a while, and we suspect that she has nested directly underneath it.

More photos can be viewed on the Twitter account @ToKenWhite

PUZZLES Page

Iain Oldcorn

Let's start on the right with a rather different (maybe unique) style of Word Search; all the hidden words are based on familiar bird species and most can be seen in the UK. There are 15 in the table. Each hidden word is derived from a bird name by either adding or removing one or two letters from the start or finish: for example, Thrush would give us Rush, Hobby could give us Hob and Rook might give us Rookie!

E	E	R	U	H	K	A	W	I	W	W
G	L	S	G	C	U	L	L	W	O	B
G	G	A	R	N	I	B	I	L	R	A
R	A	A	R	E	T	J	L	S	R	K
E	E	A	H	R	V	A	K	G	A	E
S	B	G	O	W	W	I	N	O	W	P
T	N	N	R	W	N	N	D	E	E	R
T	I	I	W	E	L	A	A	T	E	E
I	M	M	P	B	T	W	A	R	S	V
H	A	A	M	E	R	R	H	T	C	O
S	A	A	I	R	R	I	C	O	R	L
O	R	L	E	V	O	H	S	O	O	L
R	O	F	M	E	E	W	A	P	W	P

(Here are the solutions lists for the two Hidden Birds word searches from our April 2020 newsletter.

First grid:

Wren, Blackcap, Jay; Dipper; Crow; Nightingale, Blackbird, Magpie, Raven: Fieldfare, Whitethroat; Dunnock, Redstart, Wheatear; Robin, Stonechat, Chiffchaff, Rook.

Second grid:

Garganey, Canada, Hobby; Pintail, Cormorant, Kestrel, Lanner; Greylag; Pochard; Goldeneye, Shelduck; Saker; Merlin; Bean; Mallard, Barnacle, Shag, Pelican.)

OK – now for another dose of: BOC-U-DO!

Remember this is like SUDOKU but using nine letters rather than the numbers 1 through to 9! Did you find the one in the last Newsletter more of a challenge than Su-Do-Ku?

Below left is a medium one this time around. The rules are like SUDOKU; each Row, Column and 3*3 box must contain each of the letters CDEHIORTW once only.

Starting Letters

C			R			H		D
		R			H			
	T			E				W
T			E					W
		E				O		
	D				O			C
D				O				C
			H			I		
E		H			I			R

Here's the solution for the last Newsletter that used the letters: ACFGLNORY.

A	C	F	O	Y	N	G	R	L
N	L	O	G	C	R	A	F	Y
R	G	Y	A	L	F	O	N	C
C	A	L	R	N	O	Y	G	F
O	F	N	C	G	Y	R	L	A
G	Y	R	F	A	L	C	O	N
L	R	A	N	O	C	F	Y	G
Y	O	C	L	F	G	N	A	R
F	N	G	Y	R	A	L	C	O

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.

The membership details for those few members who had not yet paid their 2019/2020 BOC subscription that was due on 1st October 2019 have been deleted from our records.

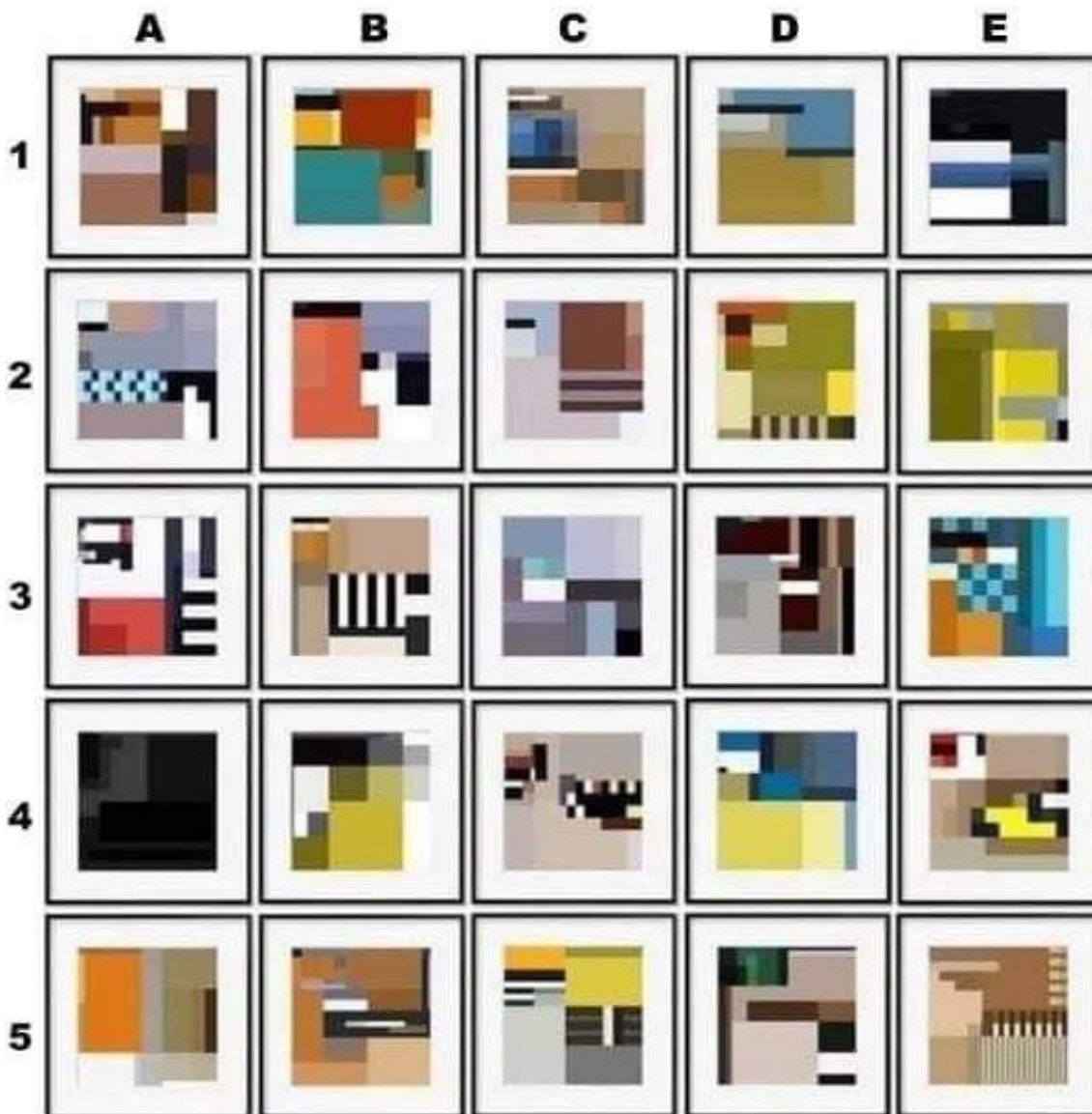
Colour Coded Birds!?

Ken White

If you would like a bit more frustration with life, have a look below at the colour coded British bird quiz.

You'll get some straight away though the others will take a bit longer. Sent by Chris and Sheelagh from Reading Nats, my thanks to them.

Rumour has it that Patrick Crowley knows the answers, and I'll ask him for them when you've all gone up the wall!!



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.

Berkbirds Coronavirus Lockdown Garden Listing Competition Part One Andy Tomczynski

With the imposition of the Lockdown on March 23rd to control the transmission of the Coronavirus, birding, as we know it, effectively came to an abrupt halt. We at home, had though, started isolating ourselves at home at least a week earlier, and my birding was therefore confined to the garden. We were instructed, by the Government, to stay at home and only go out for exercise once a day. I endeavoured to stick to this and did not wish to use the daily exercise as a pretext for birding and risk being contaminated myself or unwittingly passing it on to others. In fact we only ventured out once a week for a short walk around the housing estate leaving the binoculars at home. It was my way of respecting what other unfortunate people were having to endure.

I just got on with gardening and some external house maintenance during which I could keep an eye out for birds whilst outside. When the Berkbirds Lockdown Garden Listing Competition was posted, I decided to take part for the fun of it and to pass the hours every day. It certainly concentrated the mind and indeed the hours and days did seem to pass relatively quickly. I really got "into it". On many days I was up at dawn, looking out of the upstairs windows, back and front of the house, ventured out into the garden in my dressing gown, was out in the evening until dark and on occasions went into the garden in the middle of the night to listen "live" for birds in the locality or passing over. No "NocMiging" for me as recordings did not count.

We have mature gardens either side of us on the north side of the house, here in north Reading. The houses across the road are backed by tall woodland which obscured some of the sky to the south. There is no significant waterbody nearby, although we do have a small garden pond. There is a large pond in Emmer Green and a smaller one some 500m away. The chances of recording any waterfowl or wetland bird species were therefore remote. During the Lockdown period it was very noticeable how quiet it was, with less traffic on the usually busy road to the west of us and less aircraft movements from Heathrow, which was a relief. This made listening for bird song somewhat easier, although the wind direction did make a significant difference as to what one could pick up in the distance.

The first really interesting bird was a Meadow Pipit that appeared in our tall acer on the 24th March and was a real surprise. I was sitting in the house, gazing out of the sitting room window when I first noticed it. It was probably attracted by the other birds at the feeders in the adjacent apple tree. It reappeared briefly about the same time next day and on another three days subsequently, but never lingered. I had seen Meadow Pipits in the field on the north side of our garden in the past, but never in our garden. I'm not exactly sure what motivated me to start recording every species I saw daily, rather than just adding to the competition list, but I began on the 2nd April and continued this for the next 41 days. I suppose it made each day more interesting in that I wanted to improve on the daily list each day; a competition within a competition. The Meadow Pipit was seen during the daily counting period.

For the Lockdown Competition I managed to achieve a total of 70 species, so coming second in the competition. My daily totals ranged from 24 up to 43 species, the highest coinciding with the 3rd May Bird Race Day 2020. A good score for the Bird Race, but not enough to beat the winning total of 49 for that day. My mean daily total over the 41 days was 32 species. Other competitors managed to see some really excellent scarce species which one would not usually expect to see from one's garden in this part of the world. Nevertheless, I was very pleased myself, to acquire 7 garden ticks for my overall garden list, which I started in 2001 when we moved here. These were: Little Egret, Cormorant, Shoveler, Whimbrel, Cuckoo, Marsh Tit and Little Owl.

Of the 70 species seen, only 14 were seen every day over the 41 days; the real "bankers". They were: Blackbird, Blue Tit, Chaffinch, Crow, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Jackdaw, Magpie, Pheasant, Red Kite, Red-legged Partridge, Robin, Starling, Wood Pigeon

Twelve species were only seen or heard on just one occasion during this period of which eight were fly overs (f=seen flying and heard; h=heard only): Canada Goose (f), Fieldfare (f), Lesser Whitethroat, (f), Little Egret (f), Little Owl (h), Marsh Tit (h), Mute Swan (f), Rook (f), Shoveler (f), Whimbrel (h), Whitethroat (f), Yellowhammer (f).

Blink, and any one of the flying birds could have been missed, which is where really staying alert paid dividends.

About half, 34 of the total, were species that were recorded as being within the garden. Six species were heard only, either calling or singing: Little Owl, Tawny Owl, Linnet, Marsh Tit, Cuckoo and Whimbrel.

(Ed. To be concluded in our next Newsletter; Andy's photos fill this month's Gallery on the last page.)

My New Job

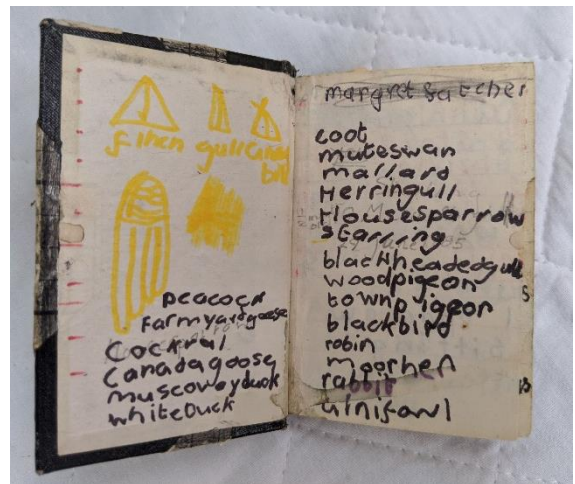
Marek Walford

I'm very excited to be taking on the role of County Recorder and I thought I would take this opportunity to introduce myself. I'll start at the beginning. I was born in Leicester in 1977 but moved to Norfolk when I was four. I went to university in Sussex to study Computing before moving to Reading in 2000. I've now lived in Berkshire for longer than anywhere else.



I've been birding for as long as I can remember but my first notebook is from 1984. It's beautifully decorated with a drawing of a legless Kestrel! There's no date or site on the first page, but somewhere, sometime in 1984 I saw a Coot! Interestingly, that page also includes a crossed out "Margaret Thatcher". I think this is a reference to the Brighton bombing as I was visiting relatives at the time!

Since then I've dabbled in many areas of birding, including foreign birding, photography, surveying, twitching, patch working, bird racing and ringing. These days I do nearly all of my birding in Berkshire.



I've run the berksbirds.co.uk website since 2000, which, thanks to the support of Berkshire birders, has become an important source of bird news and records for the county database. I wrote the county database software and I've been the Database Manager since 2005.

As Recorder, I would like to be open and transparent, so please get in touch if you have any questions. Email me at marek.walford@gmail.com or phone me on 07748682099.

Ken White - Bird Song Recordings - Plastow Green

Ken says "The habitat local to our house is intensive arable in well hedgerowed fields, a little livestock [beef and sheep] with occasional small copses and occasional large gardens. I have taken to recording the local bird song and on 6th May I recorded the dawn chorus; here is a link to it on my Google Drive: [Ken White Dawn chorus 6th May 5.06am 8 minutes/18.1 mbs](https://drive.google.com/file/d/18.1mbs/view) "

(Ed. Cntrl+Click on the link and you will be presented with a mainly black screen in your Internet browser which will be loading Ken's Dawn Chorus recording; this will take a few seconds depending upon the speed of your Internet connection before you will see the familiar right pointing solid triangle to show that it has loaded then clicking on the triangle will start to play it and after a few seconds silence the dawn chorus will start up. Adjust your speaker's volume as necessary.)

Gallery

All photographs © Andy Tomczynski

