



Berkshire Ornithological Club

Minutes of Committee Meeting

held on Thursday 24th October 2019

Park House, University of Reading

Present: Rob Godden (Chair of this meeting), Eleanor Pitt (Treasurer), Sally Wearing (Secretary), Ken Moore, Andy Horscroft, Jake Bishop, Chris Foster, Sue Charnley, Ray Reedman (RRe), Richard Burness (County Recorder) and Sean Murphy (BTO Rep).

Introductions: Sean Murphy introduced himself as this was the first BOC committee meeting he had attended since he had taken over from Ken and Sarah White. He gave a summary of his role and experience, and said he welcomed the opportunity to get more familiar with the BOC.

1. **Apologies for absence: Renton Righelato (RRi), Adrian Lawson, Iain Oldcorn.**

2. **Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 18th July 2019**

The minutes were approved and signed. The minutes of 11th April 2019 were also signed; they had been approved by email after the last committee meeting, which was not quorate.

3. **Matters Arising**

Sale of Artworks: it had been decided to try to sell the 2010 and 2011 artworks online.

Action: SW to ask Ted Rogers if he would sell the two artworks online.

Photo Competition: a technical problem at the last competition had arisen where the picture on the screen was not as good as on the judges' laptop. It was not known whether this issue had been solved.

Action: SC to talk to Jane Campbell first, then to contact the University if necessary.

4. **Formal record of items agreed by email since the last meeting**

As the last meeting had not been quorate, seven issues were agreed by email. Details of all of these were included in the minutes of the last meeting.

5. **Treasurer's Report**

The draft AGM report, letter from Bill Nicoll, draft accounts for 2018-19, draft budget for 2019-20 and revised investment policy had been circulated before the meeting.

EP said that the accounts were straightforward and balanced completely. She had included a breakdown of stationery and printing costs to explain why the cost was much higher than usual. The figures did not agree completely because the breakdown was approximate.

Action: EP to add that the stationery and printing costs are approximate figures.

The accounts had been thoroughly reviewed by Bill Nicoll, as explained in his letter. EP had kept a copy of the letter for the BOC's records. RG said that Bill's letter made him confident that the review had found that the accounts were accurate. The draft accounts were accepted by the meeting.

Treasurer's report to AGM: One person who had been a member for 30 years had recently left because he objected to the removal of the discount for retired new members and the time it took to publish reports. EP asked whether this should be mentioned at the AGM. SW said it was not usual to report why people had left to the AGM. As IO had mentioned in his contribution to the chair's annual report that many people had voluntarily given up the discount, she suggested that only one person had objected could be mentioned there.

Action: SW to add comment on one person leaving to Chair's annual report.

Budget: RRi had recommended that the budget should include provision for three annual reports, i.e. £4,000. The budget would then show a predicted loss for 2019-20.

Action: EP to adjust the budget to include printing three reports.

Investment Policy: it had been agreed that EP would open a CAF Bank deposit 60-day notice account. However, she had found that it was not operated by CAF, but by Shawbrook who would pay only 0.9% interest to the Club plus 0.2% to CAF. Opening an account directly with Shawbrook would provide a higher rate of interest.

Action: EP to investigate alternative accounts and to transfer funds to a suitable one.

EP had intended to investigate implementing the investment policy but felt that a considerable amount of effort would be required for little return. However, she was willing to look into ethical investments if someone else was willing to help her. RRe agreed that low interest rates meant that there would be a poor return. RG volunteered to help EP.

Action: EP & RG to look for ethical investments that would be suitable for the Club's funds.

EP's draft report to the AGM said that the committee was in the process of investing funds so SW suggested changing this to say that this was being considered.

Action: EP to revise her report to the AGM to say that investing funds is being considered.

RRi had commented on the revised investment policy, saying that investments should not need to be agreed by the whole committee. However, this was not required in the policy, which said "consent of the committee" i.e. the majority of elected members.

6. Membership Secretary's Report

The report was circulated prior to the meeting. RG said that more people had joined since May than had left, but the overall trend was still downwards. It was decided to discuss this issue under Publicity.

QMR Permits: IO had reported that issuing permits was time consuming and recommended a radical review of their purpose., as only a few people visited QMR. SW said that people wanted permits in case there was a twitch. KM and AH agreed. Although Thames Water had changed the access arrangements, it was still possible to visit. JB asked if visitors had to show their permits; AH said they may be asked to, but this rarely happened. Simply showing that they were members of the BOC would not be feasible as one person at QMR had a list of permit holders to check people against; the full BOC list would be too long.

AH said that the Club could not abolish the permits. Many people had joined the Club in order to get access to QMR. KM and SW both felt that the Club would lose members if the permits were not available. RG agreed that permits were necessary, but that the system should be easier to administer. SW suggested that permits could be emailed, allowing members to print their own permit. CF and EP agreed. EP volunteered to assist IO.

Action: IO & EP to share issuing QMR permits and to try to simplify how they are issued.

RRi had suggested inviting Peter Newbound to discuss ways of improving the system.

Action: RG to invite Peter Newbound to the next committee meeting.

Safeguarding: IO had revised the draft policy and reissued it shortly before the meeting. Some committee members had not had enough time to review it. RRe said that he thought it would be broadly OK. EP said that the time within which the Club should investigate concerns should be specified, as "promptly" was too loose. She also objected to saying "investigate", as she thought the committee did not have the authority to do this. SW felt that "promptly" was acceptable and similar to other policies available online, and that the Club had to investigate concerns. AH suggested changing the wording to say that "action would be taken promptly". JB felt that point 3 should specify how far in advance parents should contact event organisers. RRe agreed, saying that there needed to be plenty of time.

Action: ALL to review safeguarding policy and respond by email to rest of the committee.

7. Programme Report

It was decided to discuss the programme first, before publicity.

Indoor Programme: SC said that the programme was going well. After a few issues last year with accessing the University's system, they had provided two usernames and passwords. Recently one had failed to work but the second one was OK. She said that IO was keen to find a new venue to reduce costs. SW said this was the wrong approach as it would not encourage people to attend meetings.

RRe had spent a lot of time looking for alternatives without success. The Club was never top priority for other venues, e.g. local halls prioritised community groups. Many venues did not have enough parking or were poorly located. He had presented for local groups at other venues which were dreadful. SC said that the University was good but expensive, with no facilities for teas and coffees. But it would cost the same if there were 100 people there.

The low turnout at the first two indoor meetings was discussed. RG wondered if it was because many birders were away, as well as students. RRe said that two students at the University who were visiting his feeders to study bird disease had not known about the meetings. CF said he would advertise the meetings to the University Students, including informing his colleagues running the bird disease module about the next meeting.

Action: CF to advertise indoor meetings to relevant students at the University.

RG said that RRe had asked whether indoor meetings should be changed to make them more attractive, for instance reinstating the display boards, having other foci in addition to the main talk, special attractions like live raptors or films and events at other venues such as Reading Museum. SC said it was good to have the display and leaflets, so it was decided to reinstate these. RRe suggested having a book swap but this might cause problems if books were left; SW suggested doing at the Christmas meeting.

Action: RG to organise display at indoor meetings.

RRe had also suggested asking members who did not attend why they didn't come. RRe said that this was a lot of work and had been done in the past with little results. SC proposed asking people what they would like to see. One person had told her that meetings were not scientific or stimulating. CF said that what people wanted varied, so the meetings needed to be as well. RRe agreed; membership included attending meetings so members who chose not to come had not lost or gained anything. EP suggested asking why people had joined; she had done so to learn more about birds. SW said it was difficult to cater for all levels and needs. CF asked whether other clubs were experiencing anything similar; RRe said that he knew of an art club with the same problem. CF suggested holding meetings at different locations, but KM said that had been tried in the past without success. RRe said the good motorway connections in Reading helped. CF suggested occasionally holding joint meetings with local RSPB groups; RRe said that they usually got good turnouts. AH said he used to go to meetings but had stopped; he was not sure why as he felt they were just as good now as they used to be. RRe said that meetings needed better publicity. CF agreed, saying that promotion should help as there was nothing enormously wrong.

Outdoor Programme: the report was circulated prior to the meeting. RG welcomed RRe's return to meetings. RRe said that he needs new people to be involved and take over from him. CF asked if this would be made clear at the AGM.

Action: SW to include finding new people to organise the outdoor programme at the AGM.

JB asked if shadowing was possible. RRe said that he depended on a small nucleus of people, but they had all done their bit. RG asked if he had any ideas for people who could take over. RRe said no; those that were already involved were not interested in taking over co-ordinating the programme. But he said that the biggest issue for him was being the backstop, i.e. someone who could take over if a leader was unavailable. Co-ordinating the events was not difficult, but last year had been hard work. More people would make it a lot easier. RG said that the committee appreciated everything that RRe had done.

8. Publicity and Advertising

This section covers all aspects of promoting the Club, including at events and via social media. The report was circulated before the meeting.

CF said that all his actions were ongoing, which are included below, but he hoped to report progress at the next meeting. RRe reported after the meeting that Gerry O'Brien was happy for the Club to use his photos.

Action: CF to review and revise membership leaflet, posters and other publicity material, then circulate for comment.

Action: CF to investigate paying Facebook to ensure that posts are visible and to promote the BOC's events.

Action: CF to find out if sightings on Berksbirds can be fed to the BOC's Facebook page.

RRe said that the two students who were using his garden feeders for their research had found him via the BOC but they did not know about the indoor meetings. CF said that students who might be interested in the BOC were in a range of University departments. He suggested putting up posters in the right places for the obvious target audiences. He also had been in contact with the University bird club.

Action: CF to put up posters advertising the BOC at the University.

Action: CF to provide contact details to IO for at least one person in the University bird club.

Social Media: CF was now using Facebook more. There were 254 members on Facebook; not all were BOC members. He said it would be useful to have more people as administrators, as some of the current ones were past committee members.

Action: CF to add SC and SW as administrators on Facebook.

Printed Publicity: CF asked where leaflets were being distributed. SW explained that members were taking them at indoor meetings to put out, but where they were going was not recorded. They could be taken to libraries, museums, NDOC and other bird clubs. She encouraged committee members to take some to distribute.

RG said that short reports about outdoor events could be written by leaders for CF to use and to go in the Newsletter. CF agreed, saying that even a few words and photos would be useful. RRe said he had sent reports to IO in the past but not to CF. SW said that the same should be done for indoor meetings. CF agreed, and suggested asking speakers for photographs. Not all the items about meetings on the BOC website have photos.

Action: SC to ask someone to write a report after each indoor meeting.

RRe said that the Club's programme should be sent to the local RSPB groups and also BBOWT; it was important to get it to BBOWT early. CF asked for people to let him know who to send the programme to. EP suggested Greater Reading Environmental Network.

Action: All to send contacts to CF for him to send out the programme.

Berkshire Show: RG's report had been circulated before the meeting. He recommended having a stand at similar events in the future. RRe suggested Earley Green Fair, held on the first Saturday in August, which was attended by BBOWT, RSPB, etc. RRe said he kept in contact with Earley Environmental Group.

9. Conservation Subcommittee report

RRe's report and the minutes from the meeting of the Conservation subcommittee on 7th August 2019 were circulated before the meeting. The objectives and priorities of the Conservation Fund were included in the minutes.

RG asked if the Club's conservation activities could be advertised via Facebook to attract more helpers. KM said that RRe wished to establish a group of volunteers in the future, but it was too soon to do this now.

10. Editorial Board Report

The report was circulated prior to the meeting.

RB said that the 2016 report was at the printers, who had questions about how the data was presented. He expected the reports would be received by early December. RRi and RB were keen to hold a meeting of the editorial board to improve how reports are planned. RB said that they had taken on board comments about how long reports took to issue and were trying to reduce the time, for instance by asking the species account writers to start on the next report as soon as they had finished the previous one.

11. Election of Officers and AGM Preparation

The report had been circulated before the meeting.

Chair & Vice-Chair: The committee agreed to nominate RG as Chair. It was also agreed to appoint a Vice-Chair from among the committee's members to assist when the Chair was not present; SW was appointed.

Other Vacancies: If RG is elected as Chair, there will be five vacancies for Ordinary Committee Members. CF will stand, so four more people are needed. In addition, SW wished to stand down as Secretary, but no-one had volunteered. RG said that asking for volunteers at meetings was not working. EP asked whether someone else distributing the reports would make the Secretary's role easier; SW said yes, but she did not think that would make the role more attractive.

RG suggested asking people who attend outdoor meetings. SC offered to ask at the next indoor meeting when people are signing in.

Action: SC to ask for volunteers when members are signing in at indoor meeting.

SC, IO and RRe were all eligible to stand as elected Ordinary Members, and were willing to. They were also willing to stand down after one or two years to rectify the timing issue that had developed from people resigning early.

Action: All to approach possible candidates to stand for the committee.

AGM Preparation: SW said that she and RG would not be at the AGM this year, so they needed to prepare the Chair's report and slides as soon as possible. KM would produce the birding highlights report as last year. SW asked for a volunteer to take the AGM minutes.

Action: EP to take the minutes at the AGM.

12. Any Other Business

Asset Register: CF now had the laminator, so the asset register needed updating.

Action: SW to update asset register and issue it for review.

Two Rivers Press: this Reading based publishing house is offering a discount to BOC members on Robert Gilmor publications.

Action: SW & IO to inform members about TRP offer.

Equipment: SW had been given a telescope and tripod by a BOC member who wanted them to go to young birders or, if that was not possible, to be used to raise funds for the Club. The scope was rather old, but the tripod was newer and more usable.

Action: RRe to find out whether a young person he knew might want the scope or, if not, it might be sent to Africa.

13. Date and Venue of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on Thursday 23rd January 2020.

Action: JB to book Park House.

Sally Wearing, 30th October 2019