



Berkshire Ornithological Club

Minutes of Committee Meeting

held on Thursday 23rd January 2020

Park House, University of Reading

Present: Rob Godden (Chair), Renton Righelato (RRi), Eleanor Pitts (Treasurer), Sally Wearing (Secretary), Ken Moore, Jane Campbell, Sue Charnley, Ray Reedman (RRe), Andy Horscroft (Club Archivist) and Sean Murphy (BTO Rep).

1. **Apologies for absence:** Iain Oldcorn, Chris Foster, Richard Burness.

2. **Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 24th October 2019**

The minutes were approved and signed.

3. **Matters Arising**

Equipment: SW had been given a telescope and tripod by a BOC member who wanted them to go to young birders or, if not, to be used to raise funds for the Club.

Action: RRe to find out whether Maiden Erlegh School would want the scope and/or tripod.

Sale of Artworks: it had been decided to try to sell the 2010 and 2011 artworks online. EP offered to buy the 2010 artwork (Oystercatchers) for £250 and this was accepted. It was decided to offer the 2016 artwork (Great Egret) for sale now. Limited edition copies are on sale at Cley for £375. It was decided to sell it by sealed bid auction again, reserve price £250. Auction to be advertised in the Newsletter and online.

Action: SW to auction Great Egret artwork, advertising it in the next Newsletter and online.

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

None.

5. **Treasurer's Report**

The report was circulated before the meeting. EP said that the signatories on the bank accounts need to be changed again as RG needed to be added.

Action: EP to initiate adding RG to the bank accounts.

Investments: EP said that the only ethical investment that she had found was Triodos Bank. Their rates were not as good as the ones listed in her report, but it was very difficult to find out how ethical those on the list were. She had already discounted Barclays and other similar banks. RG said that some did appear to offer ethical accounts but Triodos stood out. EP said they offered 1.1% whereas others offered up to 1.65%. RRi pointed out that the difference in a year between these, given the amount to be invested, would only be about £40. It was agreed that Triodos was suitable.

EP said that at least one more bank was needed. She asked if there were any banks that anyone thought should be avoided. RRi said that the Conservation Fund was currently well-funded but that it was expected that funds may be needed for Padworth within the next year, not four years as previously thought. He suggested that £20k could be invested for up to one year, which would leave £10k available.

It was agreed that RG and EP would progress this.

Action: EP & RG to determine where to invest the Club's funds.

6. Membership Secretary's Report

The report was circulated prior to the meeting. As well as the six new members mentioned in the report, RG said that another person had joined at yesterday's indoor meeting.

RRe asked if anyone knew why the new members had joined. RRI said that it was difficult to find out why people left but we should ask new people what had prompted them to join.

Action: EP to email recent new members to ask why they had joined.

Action: IO to ask new members in the future why they had joined.

QMR Permits: RRI said that Peter Newbound (PN) had kept him informed of what was happening. Thames Water had issued 18 keys to the Club for the new lock; it was now not their policy to use coded padlocks. PN had given keys to the six members who visited regularly (i.e. more than three times a year). Anyone with a permit but without a key can enter QMR when the Sailing Club is open. The rest of the keys may be needed to manage access in case of any rare birds. KM asked whether the internal gates had been changed. RRI said they had not. The BOC hut was still accessed by the same code.

RRe said that this policy might annoy people who had joined the BOC to get access to QMR. He found it off-putting, as he needed to know when the Sailing Club was open and was concerned that he may not be able to get out. KM said that the Sailing Club was shut on Mondays and Tuesdays.

It was agreed that PN should continue as planned.

EP said she had offered support to IO with issuing permits, but without success. RRI said that the permits took up a lot of IO's time. PN had proposed that permits should be issued with just the member's name, not their membership number or permit number. Members visiting QMR had to show their permit and photo ID. EP asked if permits had to be issued every year. RRI said they did. SW said that sending a PDF would provide a standard format; this was the usual approach to many tickets and passes. RRe asked if the permits could be credit card sized, but RRI said that this would be difficult due to the amount of information on them. Any new format would have to be agreed with Thames Water.

Action: RRI to ask PN if permits could be sent out by email.

EP pointed out that IO had said he did not want to email permits. RG offered to help IO produce them, using Mail Merge.

Action: SW to discuss with IO the possibility of sending out permits by email.

Safeguarding: version 4 of the draft policy had been circulated before the meeting. RG had commented on it, then IO had revised it and issued version 5, which had not been sent to the whole committee.

RG said that the latest versions were an improvement on early drafts. EP felt that the sentence about family members in the first paragraph (about family members) was not clear. After discussion, it was decided to remove this sentence as it was not necessary.

SW explained the main difference between versions 4 and 5. IO had added a section covering how young people should get to and from meetings and events. RG said that he didn't think it was sufficient to allow children to just be dropped off. SW said that the section was now too restrictive; someone in the mid-teens might be able to travel safely by themselves to an event but version 5 said that they had to be accompanied. AH pointed out that 17 year olds could drive but would not be able to attend a BOC meeting if they drove to it without a parent or guardian. RRe said that some older primary school children were allowed to travel by themselves. EP suggested accepting the revised wording but then making exceptions for older children. SW said this was the wrong approach; the policy should be less prescriptive. RRI said that the policy was making it too difficult for young people to come to BOC events, whereas the Club should be welcoming them. SW proposed simplifying the wording to say that parents were responsible for making sure that children travelled safely.

Action: SW to revise safeguarding policy as discussed and reissue it for comment.

7. Publicity and Advertising

This section covers all aspects of promoting the Club, including at non-BOC events and via social media.

SC said that CF had been publicising indoor meetings. SW said that he had told students at the University about last night's indoor meeting, which was attended by several students. SC had also been asking Ted Rogers to advertise events. RRe said that numbers at indoor meetings had increased since the start of the season. CF had produced a flyer to use at the University for the shearwaters talk on 19th March.

The following actions are ongoing.

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.

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: SC and SW were now administrators on Facebook. SC had received requests for people to join but was not sure what she needed to do. JC said that any of the administrators could accept new members. RRe pointed out that the BOC had 250-260 members on Facebook, so may be reaching more people than the Newsletter.

8. Programme Report

Indoor Programme: The report was circulated before the meeting. SC was working on the rest of the 2020-21 programme, and already had one more possible talk. She would then have three more evenings to fill. She was seeking ideas, especially for talks that were more scientific. RRe, SW and RRe offered suggestions.

Action: RRe to ask Des Sussex if he could provide a talk focused on birds.

Christmas Social: SC was looking for three talks as in 2019. SW suggesting having two talks plus a short quiz, possibly something taking a different approach to those in the past.

Joint talk with University: RRe and CF will find a suitable high-profile speaker.

Photo competition: JC had updated the website to show the closing date and revised categories. Two categories had been amalgamated to one (Flight and Action) and a new one added – Birds in their Environment. She would consider different categories next year. The judges were confirmed.

Action: SC to contact LCE to arrange prizes for the competition.

Venue: one of the recent indoor meetings was held upstairs at St Peter's Church, Earley. SW said that the parking was a major problem; one person had gone home because they could not find anywhere to park. SC said that they should have opened up the school playground. AH had not attended because it was upstairs, and it was difficult to park. SC said that the next one at the same venue would be downstairs, but it was not possible to always use the downstairs hall because of regular bookings. She had asked the University for all the next season's dates and was waiting to hear from them.

Action: SC to check that the playground will be open for the April meeting at St Peter's.

At the last meeting, it had been decided to try to produce short reports, possibly with a photo, after each indoor meeting. This was ongoing.

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

Outdoor Programme: the report was circulated prior to the meeting. RRe said that recent walks had not been well attended. Bill Nicoll, who had been very useful over the years, will

be standing down from leading walks and Marcus l'Anson would not organise any more trips to Norfolk after October 2020. This meant that the situation was now critical and RRe would have to reduce the programme. RG had tried to find new leaders by asking at indoor meetings. He asked why active birders in the Club did not volunteer to lead walks. RRe said it was not onerous, as it could just be visiting their local patch. AH agreed to raise the issue at the next meeting of the Dead Gannet Society. After that, RG would try contacting more people.

Action: AH to seek new leaders for walks at the next meeting of the Dead Gannets Society.

Action: RG to seek new walk leaders by email.

RRi asked if it was possible to offer more of other group's events. RRe said this already happened for coach trips (four this year), which were usually successful. It would be the BOC's turn to run coach trips to Slimbridge and the Bird Fair next year. East Berks RSPB had three trips planned for next year, but they might not all suit BOC members. Other groups seemed to get good turnouts for walks. RRi asked if there was any scope for joining up for walks; RRe said he was not sure it would work as well as the coach trips did, but he would be happy to talk to other groups about this.

Action: RRe to approach local groups about the possibility of sharing local walks.

IO had suggested putting an appeal for new walk leaders in the next Newsletter.

Action: RRe to write an appeal to go in the next Newsletter.

9. Conservation Subcommittee report

The report and the minutes from the meeting of the Conservation subcommittee on 6th November 2019 were circulated before the meeting.

Peregrines in Newbury: IO had asked why the webcam would cost £3,000. RRi said that the camera itself was cheap, but the rest of the equipment to transmit the signal, etc, was not, especially as it was to be on a BT Tower. He hoped the webcam would create interest as well as helping discover the causes of nest failure (as happened in 2019).

Aldermaston Gravel Pits: this used to be a very good wetland site but had deteriorated. Natural England had recognised this and was trying to decide what to do with it. The BOC was helping them with surveys and some minor restoration work, including reroofing the hide, clearing edges, etc. EP asked how people knew about this work. RRi said it was led by Bob Lyle; he would find out whether Bob needed any more people to join the work party. EP suggested putting an article in the Newsletter about it.

Padworth: The BOC was currently negotiating with the Canal & Rivers Trust about the plans for the site. RRi said that circumstances had changed, and the extractor wanted to avoid the cost of the restoration. EP asked if a separate charity would need to be set up for this, as that might take up to a year. RRi said a new one would be needed, but he had set one up in the past in two to three months. He expected that there would be at least a year's notice before the BOC had to take over responsibility for the site.

Burnhouse Lane: KM said that the farmer had agreed to some vegetation being cut down to give better views of the pools, improving the visibility for birders.

The Committee also discussed the consultation in Wokingham about extensive development plans. RRi said that, if there were any bird conservation issues, then the BOC would comment on the plans. In answer to a query from IO, he also confirmed that the Moor Green Lake Group had been involved in the suggestion that the East Fen was a potential site for mitigating the expansion of Heathrow.

10. Editorial Board Report

The report and minutes of the meeting of the Editorial Board on 21st November were circulated prior to the meeting. The 2016 report was being distributed. RRi said that new species account writers (SAWs) were being sought for the 2017 report. Work on the 2018 report would begin soon after the 2017. It was intended to publish both this financial year.

AH reported that the BRC had finished the 2017 records, and he hoped that the 2018 records would be done soon, possibly within a couple of months. There were some issues with records where more information was needed. The BRC received a poor response when trying to get descriptions to support reported sightings. KM said that they needed to change the interpretation of 'description', which was being taken too literally. If the diagnostic information was provided, the rest of the bird did not need to be described.

As well as more SAWs, RRi said that RB needed more proof-readers. EP asked whether proof-readers needed specialist knowledge or not. AH said that the SAWs should have made sure there were no obvious data errors and the text was also read by RB, so proofing was about typographical errors, consistency of style, etc.

RRi was keen to find someone to take over from him as managing editor after this year.

Action: RRi to write job description for managing editor.

SC needed more copies of the Where to Watch Birds booklet to sell at indoor meetings.

Action: RRi to give 12 copies of Where to Watch Birds to SC.

11. Any Other Business

Breeding Waders & Wet Meadows Survey: Sean Murphy informed the meeting that the BTO and RSPB were planning to run this survey in 2020. A list of suitable sites in Berkshire had been drawn up, which he had reviewed. It was due to go live in January.

12. Date and Venue of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on Thursday 2nd April 2020.

Action: CF to book Park House.

Sally Wearing, 28th January 2020