

Berkshire Ornithological Club

2017-18 Chairman's Report for AGM

1. Membership

At the start of the 2017/18 season, the number of members stood at 288 but this rose to 300 by 30 Sept 2018, mainly due to a flurry of new members and a few returning members joining after 1st May 2018. However, it is too early to decide whether that the slow decline in both total membership and income from subscriptions is reversed as early feedback from membership renewals at the start of 2018/19 season is not encouraging.

The Club prepared for the General Data Protection Regulations that came into force in 2018 by reviewing, and amending as necessary, all its processes around the collection and maintenance of membership details. We determined that there were "legitimate interests" in holding the personal data of members, so that we can communicate with our members in connection with the primary aims of the club, namely education and study of wild birds and their conservation in Berkshire.

We are also in the process of updating our working practices for the protection of our young members.

2. Programme – Meetings and Field Trips

The Indoor Programme for 2017-18 provided a variety of speakers representing a mix of amateur enthusiasts, highly skilled photographers, travel leaders, and major names from the world of ornithology. One late substitution was made by the BTO, so the talk on ringing was replaced with one on geolocators and radio-tracking devices, which proved to be a real eye-opener. Given the sheer quality of many of the presentations, the range of topics covered, and their collective entertainment and information values, it was a pity that attendance levels were sometimes lower than might have been expected. The highest attendance was for Tim Birkhead, followed by Mike Lane. The average turnout was lower than in the previous year.

Sue Charnley has now taken charge of future indoor meetings. The changeover from Ray Reedman went very smoothly. He sincerely hopes that she gets as much pleasure and job satisfaction for doing the task as he did for a number of years. It may have been challenging at times, but great fun too!

The Outdoor Programme 21 trips in all offered a range of weekday and weekend visits to local and more distant sites, the aim being to cover a range of habitats, seasonal changes, and species in the course of the year, and to introduce people to good birding sites. For new birders, this is a chance to learn a few tricks from old hands, and of course to get to know others who enjoy birding. The nucleus of willing leaders just about holds up, but Colin Wilson has finally stepped down after many stalwart years and Renton was unable to participate this year but Adrian Lawson has offered help in his place. Bill Nicoll, Ted Rogers, Marcus l'Anson, Carole White, Chris Foster and Robert Godden all slot in to share the load,

while our association with the RSPB groups helps to provide healthy range of coach trips. Elaine Charlson has kindly offered to introduce us to some bats next summer, so that will be a great opportunity to widen our horizons. To all those who have been so supportive, Ray gives his grateful thanks!

3. Recording and Reports

The Annual Reports for 2014, edited by Derek Barker, and 2015, edited by Richard Burness. Were published in August 2018. Work on 2016 is about to start. We are getting a little closer to our aim of publishing 12 months or so after the year end.

During the year, the Recorder, Richard Burness brought in additional skills and more expeditious procedures to the Berkshire Records Committee, which now includes Adam Basset, Richard Burness (Chair), Adrian Hickman, Andy Horscroft (Secretary), Ken Moore, Hugh Netley, Marek Walford.

4. Conservation

Neil Bucknell has led for the BOC on the fight to maintain the nationally important Nightingale habitat around Theale Lake. An appeal by the developers against West Berkshire Council's refusal to grant planning permission has been adjourned to January 2019.

Our Swift nest box project has got off to a good start: half of our target of 50 boxes have been taken. Other conservation fund grants have gone to Newbury Ringing Group, to winter feeding at a potential Tree Sparrow site and professional help for development of the design and management plan for the proposed Padworth Lane Lake reserve.

Members of the subcommittee are working with landowners on bird conservation measures on the Downs (Neil Bucknell) and in the lower Kennet valley (Ken Moore).

Lastly, our Water Rail survey has been completed, the breeding Grebes survey and Curlew survey will continue into 2019 and a Willow and Marsh Tit survey is planned for 2019-20.

5. Thanks

As ever, the Club owes a great debt of thanks to the team that makes it happen: our Secretary, Sally Wearing, the Treasurer, Eleanor Pitts, Membership Secretary, Iain Oldcorn, our non-executive officers, Sue Charnley and Ray Reedman and other members of the Committee: Jake Bishop, Andy Horscroft, Adrian Lawson, Ken Moore and John Swallow.

However, age and circumstances nibble away at us and we badly need new blood. There are lots of opportunities: join the Committee, be our publisher or PR agent, organise the Club's visits programme or just lead visits to your favourite places or help Sue with the indoor meetings. If you can help, speak to me or any of the Committee.

Renton Righelato

November 2018