

Berkshire Ornithological Club Conservation Subcommittee

7.30pm Wednesday 6th November 2019, 63 Hamilton Road, RG1 5RA

Minutes

1. **Present:** Neil Bucknell, Richard Burness, Roger Frankum, Ken Moore, Renton Righelato.
Apologies: Fraser Cottington, Chris Foster, John Lerpiniere, Giles Sutton, Des Sussex.
The committee sent its best wishes to John Lerpiniere, who is recovering from a major operation.
2. **Minutes of meeting of 7th August 2019:** accepted.
3. **Matter arising**
 - a. **Conservation fund applications**
 - i. Swift tower Moor Green – as there was no evidence of likely success of a tower in such a wetland location, the grant application was rejected.
 - ii. Peregrine box and webcam at Newbury: The committee had offered funding for a nesting platform, but not for the webcam system pending return of the Peregrines to nest. Ken White argued that a webcam is needed to monitor nesting from the start and identify problems the birds may encounter. The committee agreed and offered to fund the request in full (up to £3,000), with the condition that the webcam system be returned to the BOC if the birds deserted the site.
 - b. **LHR expansion – ecological impact consultation.** A submission from the BOC was sent 1st September (attached).
 - c. **Swift nest boxes.** Request continue to come in: 48 via Ailsa Claybourn, including 10 for St Nicholas, Newbury. It was agreed that we should supply a further 50 boxes for the start of the 2020 nesting season at a cost of approximately £600. Bob Hulley, who has made almost all of the BOC boxes to date may require help to meet the demand. Ken Moore suggested that Ken Spring may be able to help (Renton to follow up).
4. **Downs developments**

There has been no response from David Carlisle to Neil's request for their agreement to the designation of the Bury Down scrub area as a Local Wildlife Site. It may be possible to pursue this further if the proposed Farmer Cluster for the area is established. Neil plans to attend the North Wessex Downs AONB forum on 15th November and the Southern Curlew Forum on 28th November.
5. **"Net Gain" biodiversity offsets**

Two proposals for potential offsets had been put forward by us as Heathrow expansion mitigation measures (Lodge Wood Lake and Battlemead Common) and more suggestions have been invited. It was felt that it would be useful to compile a portfolio of potential biodiversity offsets for developers seeking to create "net gains". Renton will circulate a pro-forma table for members of the committee to incorporate their suggestions. Initial sites suggested were Borough Marsh, the East Fen at Moor Green and the Lower Kennet (several potential sites to be listed).

6. Reading BAP 2020

The BOC had been invited to participate in the Steering Group for a review of Reading's Biodiversity Action Plan. The first meeting is on 20th November. John Lerpiniere was suggested as our nominee if he is well enough. Renton will be a reserve.

7. Aldermaston Gravel Pits SSSI

A site visit has been arranged for 16th November, with Graham Stevens of Natural England. All members of the committee are invited and Roger Frankum agreed to ask Pat Martin to join in if she is available.

8. Padworth Lane GPs

Our main contact with the Canal and River Trust, Oda Dijksterhuis, will be leaving the Trust in December and it is keen that the BOC formalise its role with them as a custodian of Padworth Lane GPs. With her colleague, Steve Manzi, she is looking at how best to do this.

9. Poors Allotment

Ken reported that Peter Hickman had been told that the agenda for the October meeting of the Poors Allotment trust was too full for him to put forward our proposal for developing the site as a wet heathland reserve. Ken agreed to ask Peter to draft a letter regretting that he was unable to present and explaining the proposal again. Before sending the letter an exploratory phone call should be made by Ken or Renton to the trust secretary to determine whether the trust is interested in exploring our proposal.

10. Strategies for protection of "informal" nature reserves

Renton noted that, from time to time, we are asked what can be done to protect sites that conservation volunteers have worked on from development. Neil's advice was (i) to establish a formal contract with the landowner and (ii) to seek LWS designation (which the BOC has done successfully for several sites).

11. Surveys progress

- a. **Farm surveys:** Neil will plan 2020 surveys and try to extend their coverage in the planned Ridgeway Farmer Cluster.
- b. **Grebes:** Renton will prepare a list of water bodies for which surveyors will be sought early in the New Year.
- c. **National Willow Tit survey:** Four of the 20 tetrads requested by the RSPB have been surveyed. None of the North Hampshire Downs tetrads had been covered. The 2019 data is to be submitted to RSPB (Renton). Roger Frankum agreed to seek surveyors for the western tetrads, a list of which Renton would provide.

12. Site updates

- a. Burnthouse Lane: Ken is arranging clearance of patches of Willow that obstruct views of the pools.
- b. Padworth GPs: Ken had seen a Sika Deer on the site.
- c. Roger Frankum noted that Lower Farm has new owners.

13. AOB

- a. **West Berkshire Council:** The committee welcomed the news that Gareth Ryman has been appointed as the Council's Ecologist. It was suggested that we keep him informed of the BOC's conservation activities.

14. **Date of next meeting:** Wednesday 12th February.