

Berkshire Ornithological Club Conservation Subcommittee
7.30pm Wednesday 7th August 2019, 63 Hamilton Road, RG1 5RA

Minutes

1. **Present:** Neil Bucknell, Chris Foster, John Lerpiniere, Renton Righelato, Lesley Staves.
Apologies: Des Sussex, Roger Frankum, Ken Moore
2. **Minutes of meeting of 15th May 2019:** approved.
3. **Matter arising not covered elsewhere:** Theale Main Lake planning appeal: Because they were not able to bring forward arguments against the EA's flooding risk assessment, the appellants were invited to withdraw their appeal against West Berkshire Council's rejection of their housing development plan. However, it is considered likely that this may not be the end of the matter.
4. **Conservation Fund**
 - a. **Aims and priorities:** the committee reviewed a draft put forward by Renton and, with some amendments, agreed it (attached).
 - b. **Expenditure plan:** The fund makes grants in response to applications and so not forecast expenditure with any certainty. It is anticipated that, in addition to the flow of small grants (< £1,000) and that noted in item 5b, larger applications may arise over the next two years for work at Lea Farm Lake by Lavell's Wetland Trust and work with farmers on the Berkshire Downs. However, a potentially large call for the establishment of a nature reserve at Padworth Lane GPs is not now likely to arise for the next six years (see item 7).
5. **Conservation Fund applications**
 - a. **Swift Tower at Moor Green Lakes:** although he has not put in a formal application, Colin Wilson has asked whether the Fund could part support the installation of a Swift tower and ancillary equipment on the Moor Green Lakes reserve. The committee considered this an unusual site for a species that nests largely on buildings in the UK. However, they would seriously consider an application if there was evidence from elsewhere that Swifts could be attracted to use such a location.
Renton to pass on feedback to Colin.
 - b. **Peregrine box – Newbury BT building:** Ken White had submitted an application for £2,500 - £3,000 + VAT for the installation of a Peregrine nesting platform, webcam and ancillaries on the BT Exchange in Newbury, where a pair had bred unsuccessfully this year. It was agreed that the Fund could provide the costs of a nest platform for installation this winter in the hope that Peregrines would use the site again. It was felt that the cost of a webcam and ancillary equipment would be easier to justify once there was evidence of the birds using the site again. Clarification is required (a) on how the site and equipment would be managed over the next few years and by whom; (b) the breakdown of costs between nest platform and webcam system. It

was asked whether the webcam and ancillaries could be returned to the BOC for use on other projects, if it ceased to be used on this site. Renton to contact Ken White.

6. **Nightingales in the Kennet corridor:** Hillary Philips of BBOWT had approached us for advice on opportunities for habitat improvements for Nightingale in the Kennet corridor. The following points were made (Renton to respond to Hillary):
 - a. The BTO's booklet "Managing habitat for Nightingales" is a useful guide.
 - b. The habitat around the Theale gravel pits needs managing as a high canopy is building up over the scrub. BBOWT should seek agreement with the owners (Prudential largely) to manage the area.
 - c. Habitat management around the Burghfield pits owned by RDAA would also be beneficial.
 - d. Ken Moore is liaising with National Grid on work planned for this autumn around pylon 77 at Theale Main Lake. A meeting is planned to agree the tree/scrub work (Ken Moore).

7. **Padworth Lane GPs:** A meeting was held with the new managers responsible for negotiations with Harleyfords over the restoration of the GPs (summary attached). It seems likely that the nature reserve trust would now not lease the site for around eight years, whilst Harleyfords carries out infill and restoration.

8. **Aldermaston Gravel Pits SSSI:** Des Sussex has asked the Natural England person responsible for the site, Graham Steven, to contact us about a site visit (Renton to chase).

9. **Heathrow consultation:** A wide-ranging consultation on the Heathrow expansion project is open until 13th June (see <https://aec.heathrowconsultation.com/topics/biodiversity/>). As the project will have a large impact on birds in east Berkshire, it was agreed that we should respond, particularly about the biodiversity offset opportunities. Neil and Renton will meet, and Briand Clews if available, to compile an online response.

10. **Downs developments:** Des Sussex has proposed that we meet with a newly-formed farmers cluster for the Ridgeway around West Ilsley and Neil has offered to represent the BOC. Des also asked that we elaborate for the landowners the benefits of designation of Bury Down as a Loal Wildlife Site and what else we might offer. A particular concern of the farmers is trespass, some of which is by birders and bird photographers. Neil suggested we might help with signage and possibly a viewing site. Neil to liaise with Des Sussex and write to the farmers concerned (David Carlisle and others).

Neil said that contacts with Beeswax have gone quiet and it was noted that they had cut rough verges in July when many birds and butterflies were still breeding.

11. Surveys progress
 - a. **Farm surveys** (NJB): Surveys of Compton Downs have been completed as planned. Good numbers of Corn Buntings, Yellowhammers and Linnet had been recorded along with breeding Stonechat, Reed Bunting, Yellow Wagtail and Stone Curlew. Curlew had been recorded as probably breeding at three sites in Berkshire and

confirmed at one. Given the support from surveyors Neil will plan additional survey for 2020.

- b. **Grebes survey** (RR): the numbers of responses to our Grebes survey have been a little disappointing, with reports from only around a quarter of the Berkshire's bodies. In particular, more records from west Berkshire are needed. It was decided to run the survey in 2020, with calls for surveyors for groups of sites that Renton will identify this winter.
12. **Swift box provision** (RR): 76 boxes have been built, most by Bob Hulley, and issued at a cost of £953. In Tilehurst, Reading, Crescent Road became a Swift street with the help of SSE who provided a cherry picker to install the boxes. In June, 16 more boxes, built by Bob Hulley, were put up on eight houses in Hamilton Road by the SSE team, organised by Ailsa Claybourn, our Swift Champion. A further 17 boxes have been requested. The committee at its last meeting had approved up to a total of 100 boxes, a further 24. Renton will collect feedback from box recipients on their progress in 2019 (installation and Swift occupancy or close by activity).

13. Site updates

- a. **Poors Allotment** – Cathy McEwan and Peter Hickman will present proposal at Trustees' meeting 29 October.
- b. **Roundoak Piece**: Ken Moore is liaising with head forester of Englefield Estate over improving site for Nightjars.

14. **Date of next meeting**: 6 November 2019

Birds of Berkshire Conservation Fund: Objectives and Priorities

The Birds of Berkshire Conservation Fund was established by the BOC initially from funds (c £5k) given by the Birds of Berkshire Atlas Group that remained from the production and sale of the first edition of *The Birds of Berkshire*. The proceeds of the second edition have recently added substantially to the fund (£25k) and further donations have come from BOC members and others. The purpose of the fund, agreed with the Birds of Berkshire Atlas Group, is to support conservation in Berkshire of wild birds and their habitats and to underpinning research and monitoring. Although the Fund will consider any proposals falling within this scope, its priorities are:

1. To support conservation measures aimed at bird species threatened nationally and in Berkshire.
2. To protect, create or enhance habitats that support threatened bird species or assemblages of species characteristic of habitats under threat. In Berkshire, these include acid heath, some types of broadleaf woodland and scrub, wetlands (marsh, meadow, woodland).
3. To support monitoring work, such as surveys and ringing, and other research that underpins conservation.

Although there are no upper or lower limits set for grants, most will be no more than £1,000. For larger projects, as the Fund's resources are modest, we are particularly keen to gear them up by using them to unlock funds from other sponsors.

Applications (see <http://berksoc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/BoBCF-APPLICATION-FORM.pdf>) are reviewed by the Conservation Subcommittee of the Berkshire Ornithological Club. Proposals will be judged against the above priorities and the following other criteria:

1. Benefit to species of conservation concern,
2. Long term viability,
3. Project management plan and capability,
4. Value for money,
5. Importance of the grant to the success of the project (what other funding is available or being sought; what will happen if a Birds of Berkshire grant is not awarded?).