

Berkshire Ornithological Club Conservation Subcommittee

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

Draft minutes

1. **Present:** Neil Bucknell, Fraser Cottington, Chris Foster, Roger Frankum, John Lerpiniere, Ken Moore, Renton Righelato. **Apologies:** Richard Burness
2. **Minutes of meeting of 21st November 2018:** Correction to item 10. ii the grant to NDOC was £323
3. **Matter arising**
 - i. **Turtle Dove supplemental feeding:** Richard Crawford and Andy Tomczynski have agreed to monitor Englefield Estate and Hodcott Down respectively for Turtle Doves this spring and help with supplemental feeding if it can be agreed.
4. **Local Nature Partnership** Renton took part in a meeting of the Berkshire LNP on 7th January, which was attended by only five of the 25 or so invitees. TVERC has received limited funding to reactivate the Berkshire LNP. Its immediate objective is to establish an online Berkshire conservation diary on which organisations can post relevant events and other information.

The only other business of the meeting was to discuss BOC proposals, drawn up by Neil, relating to the eastern Berkshire Downs. The first was for an extension of the Downs Biodiversity Opportunity Area, which was agreed with the request that we include appropriate areas on the Oxfordshire side of the border. The second was for a Local Wildlife Site covering the scrub area on Cow Down and the adjacent Ridgeway. It was agreed that this met the LWS criteria on wintering birds and TVERC would put it forward if there was support from the landowner. Neil agreed to follow up on both requests.
5. **Theale planning appeal:** The postponed hearing of the appeal by Berfield against the refusal of their application for a 200+ house development at Theale Main Lake reopened in January. On the opening day, Neil spoke in support of the refusal for the BOC, making the case for the nationally important Nightingale population and on other bird conservation grounds. Other ecological evidence has been heard but discussion of the flood risk issues has been postponed until 7th May to allow more time for the EA and the appellant to complete their flood modelling.
6. **Surveys progress**
 - a. **Farm surveys** (Neil): In response to appeals for farmland surveys this summer, three volunteers have so far come forward. More are required and Neil is seeking OOS participation. He and Ian Lewington plan a meeting with Des Sussex (Natural England)

to determine how best to monitor the effects of stewardship measures and develop collaborations with farm managers, in particular Beeswax.

- b. **Curlew (Neil)**: the surveying referred to above will cover the eastern section of the Downs. Casual records will be sought for the western section, with requests and reminders through the spring and summer via websites and social media.
- c. **Willow Tit (Renton)**: a reduction in the number of tetrads to be surveyed from over 50 to a more manageable 20 has been agreed with the RSPB. Eight in the west of the county are being organised by John Swallow; of the remainder, seven have been allocated for 2019 (Chris Foster, Bob Lyle, Renton) and the remainder can be done in 2020.
- d. **Grebes (Renton)**: Survey responses have been disappointing: 44 locations have been submitted, by 14 observers. To get a useful analysis, data on several times this number of locations would be needed, including sites at which there were no grebes. Neil's offer of creating a list of water bodies that people could sign up to was enthusiastically accepted.

7. Conservation Fund:

- i. **Reserves policy to be proposed to BOC Committee** The Birds of Berkshire Conservation fund was created largely from the donation of the proceeds of book sales by The Birds of Berkshire Atlas Group (approx. £25,000). As no further such donations are anticipated, it is planned to draw on the donation over a number of years. Further, the Fund anticipates grant applications for in the region of £10 – 20,000 for a planned new nature reserve in three to five years' time. For these reasons a fund balance of at least £20,000 will be maintained for the next few years.
- ii. **Investment policy** We do not anticipate calls on the Fund for the planned Padworth Lane reserve for at least two years. So, we would agree to up to half the current reserve being invested for up to two years in a minimal risk instrument, meeting the ethical standards that might reasonably be expected of an environmental charity.
- iii. **Fund objectives** Much of the fund comes from The Birds of Berkshire Atlas Group, which has asked that the objectives of the fund be amended to make clear that survey and monitoring work in support of conservation is also supported. This could be by adding to the criteria for proposals: "Will survey or monitoring work funded support bird conservation in Berkshire?"
- iv. **Further donation from BBAG** Subject to iii above, BBAG propose to transfer the remaining funds (approximately £2,500) it holds to the Conservation Fund and to close its bank accounts. Any further income from sales of the few remaining books would be paid to the BOC for the Conservation Fund.
- v. **Repayment of grant:** Roger Frankum reported that NDOC has obtained a grant for feed at Lower Farm from another source and will, therefore, repay to the BOC the £323 awarded by us.

8. **East Berkshire Living Landscape:** A wide-ranging discussion was held on the bird conservation measures that should be included in the EBLL project. Renton will summarise these and seek input from Brian Clews and Derek Barker prior to drafting a BOC response to BBOWT's request for feedback on their plan.
9. **Natural England – predator control licensing:** BOC wrote to James Cross, then CEO of NE in August 2018 re culling of Ravens arguing for consultation with relevant expert environmental groups (like BOC in this case), prior to licensing. NE responded November 2018 (after James Cross had resigned) "As part of the process of issuing individual licences, we draw on the advice of our Protected Species Licensing and Management specialists, including expert ornithologists, to help us reach decisions on contentious and difficult cases." It was agreed that we should reply to NE letter of 10 November, reiterating our request for consultation prior to any licensing of killing of scarce bird species. We should also propose that license applications are put in the public domain prior to decision (accepting that some details may be withheld to protect anonymity of applicants who may be liable to criminal attack). Renton to write to NE.

Shaw Edwards (Chair, Devon Bird Club) has asked BOC to consider making f.o.i. requests to Defra on number and purpose of licenses issued in the county. It was pointed out that many applications are on safety and hygiene grounds and are not conservation issues and it was felt that we did not have a good case for general foi requests. Renton to respond to Shaw Edwards.

10. Site updates

- i. **Theale:** Ken noted that Richard Crawford is organising a repeat Nightingale and Warbler survey for 2019.
 - ii. **Wasing:** Ken said that the estate manager, Tim Mappas, had left and been replaced by a man and wife team. Plans have been made to clear some of the islands on Woolhampton GPs before the start of the 2019 breeding season.
 - iii. **Padworth Lane:** TABCG are planning to clear the beaches of Buddleia prior to the arrival of Little Ringed Plover in early March.
 - iv. **Poor's Allotment:** A site visit is planned (site manager + Ken, Renton).
 - v. **Lea Farm Lake:** Ron Bryant has bought the lake from Summerleaze and will transfer it to Lavell's wetland trust as soon as can be arranged.
 - vi. **Fobney:** Some work has been done to lower the river bank to allow more frequent flooding of the island.
 - vii. **Lower Farm:** The company owning the lodges adjacent to the nature reserve has collapsed; it is not clear what this will mean for the site.
11. **AOB NPPF (2018)** Following a comment by Fraser on clearances made alongside the M4, Neil noted that the National Planning Policy framework (2018) para 170 (d) calls developers to provide gains for biodiversity. This can be with mitigation measures on site or offsetting elsewhere and could create a source of funds for conservation. However, the M4 work may not be covered if had not required planning permission.

12. **Date of next meeting:** 15 May 2019.