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Introduction

Iain Oldcorn bocmembershipsec@hotmail.co.uk

Welcome to our 83rd BOC Newsletter. Renton tells how we have put our funds to good use in the last 15 years supporting one of the primary aims of The Club, namely conservation; later he reminds us that Neil will need help with restarting our farmland bird surveys in 2021. We have news and views of Swift boxes near Newbury. Sally updates us on recent Committee activities and Jane dazzles us with the winning entries from our delayed photo competition. We have a few Puzzles to help fill in your time before Christmas takes over. Ken updates us on the Newbury/Bracknell scene, we have some 2020 photo highlights and this edition's Gallery on the last page is devoted to the short-listed entries to the BOC photo competition.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in articles in this Newsletter are those of their respective authors and are not necessarily representative of those of the BOC or of any of its Committee Members.

Conservation Notes

Renton Righelato

To dispel some of the tedium of lockdown earlier this year, I picked up the overdue task of reviewing the work of the Club's Conservation Fund; this fund was started in 2003 by the Birds of Berkshire Atlas Group with the surplus from sales of the first edition of *The Birds of Berkshire*. Following the publication of the second edition of Atlas in 2013 and the success of the Group in raising sponsorship to cover the production costs, the Atlas Group donated all of the proceeds of sales, nearly £25,000, to the Conservation Fund. In total, up to 2020, the fund has received donations of £46,000, two thirds of which arose from sales of the two editions of Berkshire's atlas and avifauna, with the remainder from donations by members.

The Fund is dedicated to conservation of wild birds and their habitats and to underpinning research and monitoring in the county. Over the last fifteen years we have awarded twenty-five grants totalling £18,000. Given the fund's relatively small size, most grants were for less than £1,000, though larger awards may be made for strategically valuable projects and where possible, we seek to gear up grants through cash or in-kind contributions from others. The Fund has supported survey and monitoring work by the Atlas Group and by ringing groups. It has provided nest boxes around Berkshire for many species, including Barn Owls, Marsh Tits and Spotted Flycatchers. The BOC's Swift box scheme has so far distributed 120 nest boxes, most made by our volunteer carpenter Bob Hulley and which have been installed across the county. We have supported conservation work at Lavell's Lake, Fobney Island, Padworth Lane Gravel Pits, Paices Wood, Greenham Common and more. In 2020, we were delighted with the breeding success of Little Ringed Plovers at a site for them maintained with urgently needed help from the fund. The report, with a full list of projects, is available at <http://berksoc.org.uk/conservation/conservation-fund/>, where grant application details are also provided.

Donations to the Club's conservation work can be made by a bank transfer to Berkshire Ornithological Club, sort code 09-01-55 account no. 09138608 (Santander), quoting "Conservation Fund", or via our website <http://berksoc.org.uk/> or by post to Eleanor Pitts, BOC Treasurer, The Squirrels, 79 Kennylands Road, Sonning Common, Reading RG4 9JR.

We hope to restart our farmland bird surveys in spring 2021 and need volunteers to help us.

The farms we wish to cover are mostly in the west of the county - around Compton, the Ilsleys and the Yattendon Estate. The surveys will take about 1.5 to 2 hours to complete on each visit, and there should be five or six visits throughout the spring. No great skills are required, apart from being able to recognise our common (and some now not so common) farmland birds. We will supply the maps on which records are to be noted. We also hope to restart Curlew surveys, which is likely to involve about four visits a year to the relevant areas on the Downs.

If you are interested please contact Neil Bucknell on nebulastreatley@btinternet.com or Renton Righelato on renton.righelato@hotmail.com"

Providing a Home for Swifts

Mike Taylor & Clare Sulston

Like many people, we are fascinated by the spectacular aerial displays of Swifts. We moved into our house in Ecchinswell, just south of Newbury, in March 2017, but by the end of that summer we hadn't seen any Swifts over the village. When we heard that local conservation organisations (including the BOC) were encouraging people to provide nesting sites for Swifts by installing nest boxes, we decided to give it a try, despite the nearest colony being a couple of miles away in Kingsclere.

In July 2018 we took delivery of two Swift nest boxes (bought from BOC) and installed them on the north-facing wall of our house. By that time, we had added Swift to our garden list with two birds high over our garden in late June. The very first evening we started playing Swift calls a bird flew low around the house a couple of times! But apart from another sighting of high-flying Swifts we had no other Swift activity that summer.

In 2019 we played Swift calls in the early morning and evenings from the start of May until around the end of July. On 1st June, a Swift flew low around the house and garden calling, but otherwise no interest. At the end of June we saw Swifts feeding high above the garden, but they showed no interest in the calls, despite me turning up the volume!

Knowing that it often takes several years to attract Swifts to a new site, we persevered. In spring 2020, with the coronavirus pandemic, I was spending all my time at home, and kept an eye open for Swifts overhead, and playing the calls every morning and evening from May onwards. We had been concerned that House Sparrows appeared to have taken over the nest boxes, but apparently they often have an early brood and then Swifts move in when they arrive back. We saw a single Swift from the garden on 24th May, flying high northwards, and then on the evening of 23rd June a group of three birds were feeding high over the garden. Early the next morning there was great excitement as two Swifts were screaming and flying around the garden, going up to the nest boxes and the roof gutter either side of them!! A third bird joined them, and we were spellbound as they continued this behaviour all morning. At one point later that day a screaming party of up to 10 birds flew around the house. Over the next two days between two and five birds were whizzing around the garden screaming and going up to the nest boxes and the roof gutter (perhaps looking for potential nest sites in the roof) and sometimes clinging on to the speaker.



We then had a spell of wet weather, and the Swifts disappeared until 8th July, when there was a group of 20 birds feeding over the garden in the drizzle. The weather improved and we started seeing Swifts low over the garden again, and on 10th July we saw one entering one of the nest boxes and staying inside for at least 10 minutes. This happened several times, and both nest boxes were inspected. The next day, two birds entered one of the nest boxes together

and stayed inside for around 20 minutes, and this happened several times (see short video clip at <https://youtu.be/NLwk3vbb19A>). Over the next few days we saw more screaming birds, in groups of up to six or seven birds. The last Swift activity was observed around 22nd July after which, we assume, they had headed off back to Africa where they would remain until next spring.

Swifts don't breed until they are around four years old, and they arrive in three waves: breeding adults arrive in late April and early May, returning to their traditional nest sites; two- to three-year-old birds arrive around the end of May and the first half of June, to look for nest sites and start building a nest for the following year; one-year-old birds arrive in mid-July to seek out a colony to join. The immature birds from the second and third wave can be attracted to new sites by playing Swift calls (per Bristol Swifts <https://www.bristolswifts.co.uk/swift-nest-box-design/>). We believe our Swifts would have been two- to three-year-old birds, and we are keeping fingers crossed for 2021.

When playing the Swift calls we were conscious that we didn't want to cause a noise nuisance for the neighbours. On Thursday evenings during Summer 2020 we went out into the road to "Clap for Carers" and this became a weekly socially-distanced get-together to chat with our neighbours and get to know them better. We often chatted about the Swift calls and what we were trying to achieve, so it was very satisfying when the Swifts put on a low-flying aerial show one Thursday evening in July. We had no complaints about playing Swift calls, and it was great to be able to share our excitement about Swifts with the neighbours.

A note about equipment: at Renton Righelato's suggestion, we used a small waterproof rechargeable Bluetooth speaker (available for £10-£12 online) for playing Swift calls. The speaker has a micro-SD card slot, and it either plays audio via Bluetooth or continuously plays mp3 files from the micro-SD card. The battery lasts for 4-5 hours, which is ideal for playing calls in the early morning and evening, charging it up in between. We also use a 3m USB charging cable to charge the speaker while it is in situ hanging from the soffit next to the nest boxes.



BOC Business

Sally Wearing, Outgoing Secretary secretary@berksoc.org.uk

Since the last Newsletter, there has been both a committee meeting and the AGM. As one of my last tasks as Secretary, here is a summary of both meetings.

Committee meeting: we met on Zoom in October, having taken to online meetings like ducks to water (sorry...). The routine business included reviewing the draft accounts and budget, trying to find a way of issuing QMR permits electronically, discussing future indoor meetings, monitoring progress with producing annual reports, and preparing for the AGM.

A recurring theme was the problem of finding volunteers to help run the Club and to deal with specific issues. Since the meeting, we have found people to join the committee (see below) but we really need more, especially anyone who can:

- use Instagram, as none of the committee is an adept Instagrammer
- redesign the Club's leaflets, newsletter, posters and other publicity materials
- organise the outdoor programme
- carry out farm surveys.

So, if you are interested in helping with any of these issues or volunteering in other ways, please contact the (new) Secretary on secretary@berksoc.org.uk.

One key issue we discussed was how to make the most of the current situation, by using the online indoor meetings to reach people who might want to join the Club. If you have any ideas about how we can publicise the Club and its meetings, we'd be delighted to hear from you!

Annual General Meeting: we did not know what to expect for our first online AGM, but you turned out in record numbers to make it a productive meeting. Thanks to everyone who attended.

The meeting covered a range of issues, including:

- the Club's accounts (which are in good shape), the possible effects of COVID, and spending plans (especially for the Conservation Fund)
- re-electing Rob Godden (Chairman) and Eleanor Pitts (Treasurer)
- electing Jane Campbell as the new Secretary (thanks Jane!), and Andy Tomczynski, Marek Walford and Sally Wearing as Ordinary Committee members
- the annual report from the Chairman and other Officers, presented by Rob and followed by questions on several subjects
- the Berkshire birding highlights for 2020, presented by Renton Righelato.

The Chairman's report is on the BOC website; full minutes from both meetings will be posted on the BOC website after they have been approved at the next meetings. In the meantime, if you want to know more or want to volunteer to help, please contact the Secretary.

Membership Matters

Iain Oldcorn bocmembershipsec@hotmail.co.uk

If you change your postal or email address please remember to advise me so that we can maintain contact with you; e.g. to email to you links to our Zoom presentations.

If you have an email address but have in the past asked us not to use it, please reconsider that decision. It is far easier and quicker for us to contact you by email and also considerably cheaper: we write to you three times a year, three Newsletters plus AGM/Events updates which costs us in total for printing and postage some £6 or £7 per recipient per year.

At the time of writing (2 Dec2020) access to QMR for our BOC Permit holders is still problematic. DWSC are hoping to return to normal operation shortly, but that is far from certain. We will keep you advised. And on the subject of costs I can advise that we expect to issue QMR Permit holders with their next Permits as PDF attachments to emails for printing at home; thus, saving between £1.50 and £2 per permit.

I am at present chasing up the late payment of about 20 membership subscriptions that were due on 1st October; details of payments due were sent out in August to all members with the AGM material or in a subsequent email. If you haven't paid your dues and have

decided to resign from the Club then we will be very sad to lose you – but please let me know that you are not carrying on and then I can cease harrying you.

BOC Photographic Competitions

Jane Campbell

See our website for details of our next competition on March 17th 2021 and its revised categories; meanwhile Ashley Grove and Colin Wilson were again the invited judges for our delayed 2019/20 Photographic Competition that was successfully held via Zoom on Wednesday evening, 2nd December. Though the number of submissions was slightly down on previous years, what a treat it was. So many fabulous images from our talented photographers.

The winners of each category were:

Birds in their Environment

1st Snipe by Andy Tomczynski



2nd Australasian Gannets by Brian Winter



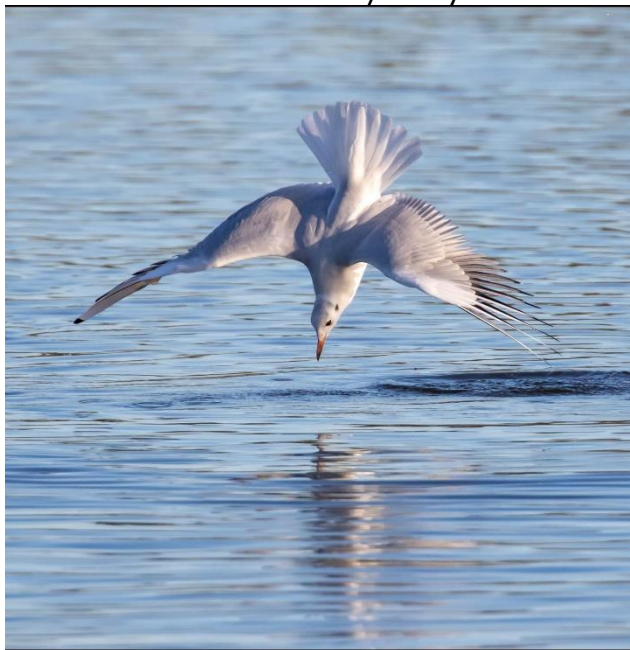
Other finalist in this category: Red Grouse by Dave Rimes.

Flight & Action

1st Black Grouse by Brian Winter



2nd Black-headed Gull by Tony Ward



Other finalists in this category: Eurasian Kingfisher by Ewan Jones and Ring-Necked Duck by John Absolom.

Portrait

1st Collared Nightjar by David Massie

2nd Spotted Sandpiper by Ewan Jones



Other finalists in this category: Crested Tit by Brian Winter; Rufous-Collared Sparrow by Brian Winter and Rainbow Bee-eater by Dave Rimes.

Brian Winter’s Black Grouse topped the audience vote to win the Gordon Langsbury Cup.

This Month’s Gallery on the back page shows all the entries of “the Other finalists”, plus The Cup! (Ed: my favourite was Brian Winter’s Crested Tit. Get ready for our next photo comp on 17th March 2021; see website at: <http://berksoc.org.uk/club-news/photo-competition/>)

Our thanks, as always, to the London Camera Exchange, Reading for donating the prizes.

PUZZLES Page

Iain Oldcorn/Ray Reedman

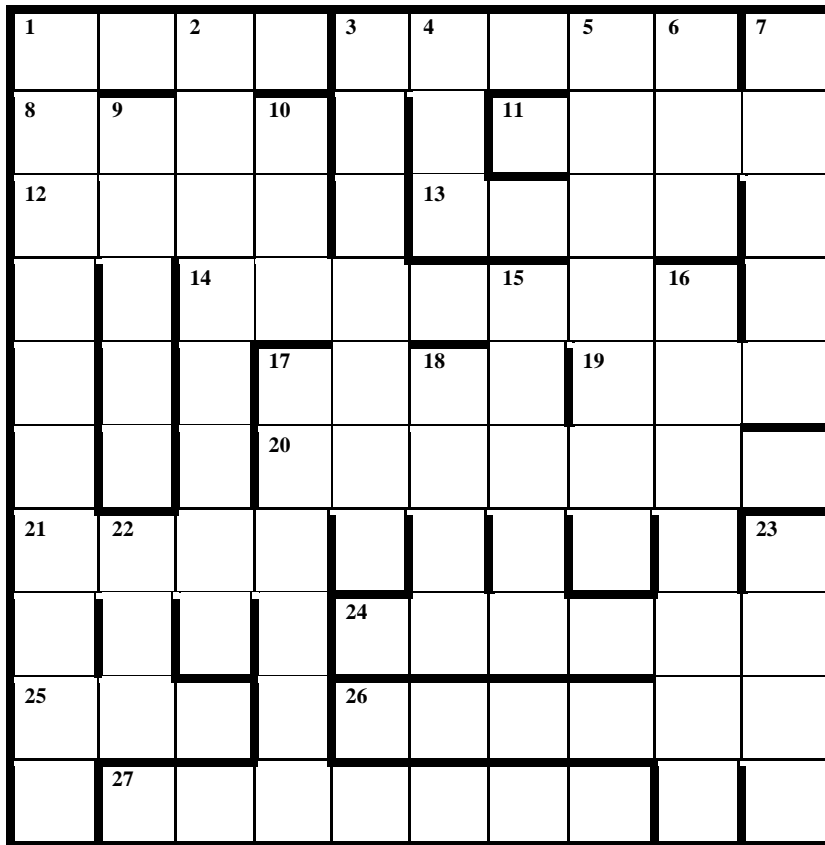
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█	█	U	█	F	█	K	█	L	█	A
G	I	R	A	F	F	E	█	L	E	K
R	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	E
O	W	L	█	C	O	V	E	R	T	S
U	█	I	█	O	█	I	█	O	█	█
S	E	C	O	N	D	A	R	I	E	S
E	█	E	█	G	█	█	█	█	█	A
█	█	█	█	F	O	R	E	N	S	I
█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█

Crossbill Solution

This was another different type of puzzle. Place the words listed in the grid provided – no clues, you just had to work out where they can be slotted in: Lek, Owl, Sac, Hen, Iff, Cur, Via, Roi, Lice, Bill, Crake, Congo, Snakes, Grouse, Giraffe, Coverts, Forensic, Hawfinch, Secondaries, Nictitation.

(Sorry for the bad presentation of a crossword grid and for the two abbreviations, but many of the words have an ornithological flavour.)

Next we have to thank Ray Reedman for one of his traditional puzzles.



ACROSS	
1	Sounds as though this South American sprinter is coming up last.
3	The Camargue is one
8	An owl's ear?
11	Is this ornithologist a petrel-head?
12 & 19	If converted, this cloak might be a good place to watch American migrants
13	Ken trusted he would find a plover here
14	Could you tell this Shakespearean bird from a hawk?
17	The colour of an optimistic starling
20	The study of natural balances
21	Would you post this bird?
24	Coral island and the first home of <i>Puffinus puffinus</i> gets a crocodilian
25	Brooding birds do
26	Longest-distance <i>sternus</i>
27	Feline and avian do mix in one Australian and a grey American
DOWN	
1	Blackbird's cousin influenced by Bill Hailey?
2	A melodic Trinidadian, for example
3	Old English for LBJ
4	Boreal ungulate
5	Endless mountain confused leaves a small Nearctic ground-dweller
6	Staple for <i>Picus viridus</i>
7	Enid Blyton's tern?
9	Leg bones (almost) a foot long?
10	Pelagic environment
15	P.J., 1821-1834, British Ornithologist (almost time-expired?)
16	Avian equivalent of a happy puppy
17	Sounds like a bit of a left-over, this <i>larid</i>
18	American 21across
22	Smooth or in the groove? Bill's the clue for this cuckoo's American cousin.
23	Atahualpa's dove?

Newbury and Bracknell Peregrines Update

Ken & Sarah White

For those of us who grew up in the 60s & 70s the excitement of seeing just one Peregrine today in Berkshire is incredibly special, but to be able to go out and reliably see four or five in a single day on Berkshire soil, without the need of a permit or special permissions, is an extraordinary turnaround in such a short time.

Back in July and August, and even early September all you had to do was go to Newbury, sit yourself down somewhere in the town centre near the BT telephone exchange and you stood a very good chance of either adult, the male **Black 69** or the female **Mrs Newbury**, passing over with one of the three juveniles in hot pursuit to grab a meal. Those days are now long gone, the juveniles have dispersed and we are left with B69 and Mrs N resolutely living on and protecting their ownership of the BT building.

But just recently, with a visit to Bracknell town centre, you could crank the numbers of Peregrines back up to five, because a pair that have bred in the Bracknell area have moved into the town centre with a juvenile, or as we now think, the juvenile has moved into the town centre together with the parents.

The juvenile is interesting on two counts. Firstly, it is still dependent on the parents for food; on Sunday 25th October both adults were hunting the abundant town centre Feral Pigeons at the same time, while the juvenile was just tagging on behind. Secondly it sports a very unusually pale plumage pattern with a lot of pale feathers on the head and an overall very pale buff to the body feathers, with not the densest dark streaking that we've seen.



The adult female has an orange colour ring on her left leg. For us she has proved a bit camera shy and has not offered a good opportunity yet for a clear image of the alphanumeric code on the ring. Yet. We do so want to know where she has come from!

One final comment is that, since our second visit on the 15th October and the most recent visit on the 25th October, the juvenile has sustained some noticeable damage to its right-wing secondaries, with even the greater wing coverts affected as well; this shows clearly in the photos. Life is a steep learning curve for all juveniles, and whatever the event was that caused the damage, we hope that there won't be any more for this gorgeous young bird.

See what the Bracknell Peregrines have been up to on the following links.....

[Bracknell Peregrines 15th October 2020 by Ken White](#)

[Bracknell Peregrines 25th October 2020 by Ken White](#)

Stop Press: Green JOL1 is back in town!!!

I first found him at The Wharf in Newbury 3rd of November last year and again a week later. He was ringed in a municipal country park in Oslo, Norway as a 2nd calendar bird (still had juvenile tail band from 2018 when caught and colour ringed). As a member of the 35+ gull flock that hangs out at the Wharf, see if you can find him. The light green ring stands out like a sore thumb once you have got your eye in for it. Please report any sightings to me or Berksbirds (berksbirds.co.uk).



Here's a link to snaps from last year and this: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/SdpqAT7WpCJRNuuQA>

Some of the Birding Highlights of 2020

RentonRighelato/Ken Moore



Jan/Short-eared Owl/Berkshire Downs/R Stansfield



Feb/Hen Harrier/Berkshire Downs/A Tomczynski



Mar/Mediterranean Gulls/Borough Marsh/A Tomczynski



May/Great White Egret/WindsorGreatP/D Barker



Aug/Night Heron/Sandford Lake/R Stansfield



Nov/Kittiwake/A Tomczynski



Sep/Wryneck/Greenham Common/R Young



Jly/Ruddy Shelduck/Theale Main/R Stansfield

Gallery (the Photocomp Runners Up)

All photos © Photographers as Credited



Red Grouse Dave Rimes



Eurasian Kingfisher Ewan Jones



Ring-Necked Duck John Absolom



Crested Tit Brian Winter

(Ed: Apology for some slight cropping of these images.)



Rufous-Collared Sparrow Brian Winter



Rainbow Bee-eater Dave Rimes