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**Editorial**

**Iain Oldcorn** [bocmembershipec@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:bocmembershipec@hotmail.co.uk)

We hope you enjoy this 84th BOC Newsletter. As you can see, we have changed our presentation slightly. Why not let me know what you think about it; all commendations and brickbats welcome - also let us know what other topics you would like us to cover. Say nothing and we might all miss out on your good ideas. **STOP PRESS – foot of P7.**

**Conservation Notes Spring 2021**

**Renton Righelato**

It was most encouraging to see the bird monitoring report on the **Thames Basin Heaths**, which has shown an increase in key heathland species (Nightjar, Woodlark, Dartford Warbler) since the 1990s. Hopefully, the lessons learnt here will be published to inform heathland management elsewhere in Berkshire; for more information see below and visit: <https://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/news/2020-record-numbers/>

With the anticipated (at the time of writing) relaxation of the "stay at home" rule on 29th March, we plan to start our breeding season **survey programme** at the beginning of April. The government's roadmap indicates that meeting outdoors with up to six people will be allowed (though social distancing measures should be maintained). Furthermore, the voluntary or charitable activities exemption is considered by the BTO to apply, which means that volunteers can continue survey activities without restrictions on travel or group size, though appropriate precautions such as social distancing are necessary. The BOC surveys planned are:

- **farmland specialist birds** on several downland sites in West Berkshire, which we talked about in the last Newsletter. The target species include Lapwing, Skylark, Yellow Wagtail, Linnet, Reed Bunting, Yellowhammer, Corn Bunting. We still need more surveyors. If you would like to help, Neil Bucknell is the organiser, who you can contact at: [nebulastreatley@btinternet.com](mailto:nebulastreatley@btinternet.com)
- **breeding Peregrines** across the County. Please let Patrick Crowley know of any Peregrines that you think may be breeding. We are seeking surveyors to monitor both urban sites and rural sites where there are structures, such as pylons, on which Peregrines may breed: [patrick.crowley@btinternet.com](mailto:patrick.crowley@btinternet.com)
- **Aldermaston Gravel Pits** breeding bird surveys to inform Natural England's management plan for this SSSI. A joint NDOC/BOC team is in place.

The British Trust for Ornithology's guidance for England is that BTO volunteers in England can carry out fieldwork under the 'voluntary or charitable activities' exemption. This means that survey volunteers can continue survey activities without restrictions on travel or group sizes, though risks should be assessed and appropriate precautionary measures taken. Key

BTO surveys in Berkshire this spring and summer are the **Breeding Bird Survey** and a survey of **breeding waders of wet meadows**. Though I fear our few Curlews are restricted to the Downs, we do still have Lapwing and a few Redshank breeding in the river valleys and, if they know about them, farmers are usually willing to help protect them. There are several sites for both surveys in need of a surveyor, if you wish to help then please contact our Berkshire BTO Representative: Sean Murphy [s.murphy@cabi.org](mailto:s.murphy@cabi.org)

In the last Newsletter, I wrote about The Birds of Berkshire Conservation Fund. In this issue you can read about one of its recent successes with Little Ringed Plover at Bucklebury. The fund supports a wide range of conservation work, including: site protection, nest-box schemes, monitoring work and habitat management. Grants are normally in the range of a few hundred to a few thousand pounds, and applications are assessed on their contribution to conservation, feasibility and value for money by the BOC Conservation subcommittee; we are always happy to informally discuss ideas pre-application if that helps. For details and application form see: <http://berksoc.org.uk/conservation/conservation-fund/>

## **Breeding Success**

### **Plovers at the Pang**

As far as we know, 2020 was the first year in which two pairs of Little Ringed Plovers (*Charadrius dubius*) – LRPs – successfully produced a total of six chicks in the Pang Valley at Bucklebury. They are a rare breeding bird species in Berkshire. There were several reasons for this success:

- a suitable wetland habitat on agricultural land was created by exceptional weather and adopted by two pairs of LRPs
- the two pairs attracted to the flooded field were observed by local people who were spending more time at home due to the coronavirus lockdown
- local birders, landowner and farmer shared the plan to enable nesting and feeding
- Birds of Berkshire Conservation Fund provided a grant to delay cropping of the field until breeding was completed.

### **Suitable wetland**

Winter 2019/20 saw an exceptionally high level of rainfall. The high level of the river Pang itself, saturated soil and high groundwater table made two fields near Bucklebury Ford into spectacular freshwater lakes. Geese, swans, gulls and egrets were seen. By May, the standing water on one wheat field receded slightly and created bare areas of stony beach on which the two pairs of plovers were found.

The LRP, rather rare in UK, is a summer visitor to England and has special protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. Most years just 10 to 20 pairs breed in Berkshire. Typically, they nest on bare ground near water, often around gravel workings. But their nest sites are prone to flooding. In 2020 almost all the usual sites were unusable and the Pang provided two of very few successful pairs.

### **Local observers**

Local birders quickly appreciated the importance of this site; especially when it became clear that one pair, visible from the road, had created a scrape and began to incubate a clutch of eggs.

### **Shared vision**

Between us we created an ambitious vision to protect at least part of the field as a breeding area for the plovers. This meant communicating the significance of these LRPs with the landowner, farmer and a few local residents. The main challenge was to delay any agricultural operation to harvest the wheat crop until after breeding was completed. In addition, we received mixed advice on whether the plovers would remain as water levels fell

in the drier spring and summer months. Finally, human disturbance of a roadside site and predation by the crows, weasels, cats and so on were possible. Success was not guaranteed.

### **Birds of Berkshire Conservation Fund**

Flooding of the wheat field already had damaged the crop but it was likely to be harvested, or at least cultivated, as water levels receded; disturbing the birds. It was imperative to secure a period of about three months with no agricultural operation. This was achieved at record speed. The landowner and farmer, frustrated by the flooding, were excited by the news of the new occupants and amenable to a conservation project. A proposal was submitted to the Birds of Berkshire Conservation Fund. This fund was established by the Berkshire Ornithological Club from sales of publications and public donations. The Charity collaborates extensively with landowners and farmers, carrying out surveys, providing advice and help on bird conservation issues.

The wonderful news of a grant was received within a few days. This fast and helpful response was a vital piece of the jigsaw. All that remained was for the plovers to succeed.

### **Breeding success**

Three chicks from the first brood were seen near the first scrape at the end of May. By the end of June, a second brood of three chicks were seen and the family of four adults and six chicks were completed. By this stage, the wheat field was dry and becoming rather inhospitable. However, the second field, a grass paddock, now provided a rich feeding area. It had been completely flooded, but water was receding more slowly and left muddy edges laden with invertebrates. Adult birds commuted between guarding chicks and feeding at the paddock. Eventually the immature birds fed there too.

### **What next?**

2020 was a special event of Little Ringed Plovers breeding in the Pang Valley. The coincidence of factors was probably a one-off. However, it does prove that biodiversity can flourish with very little alteration to the existing environment. The Countryside Stewardship Scheme is receiving ambitious applications in our area. More habitat creation is urgently needed. The wildlife will follow and we can be sure that is capable of helping to secure a more biodiverse future.

**Debby Reynolds, Tim Culley and Renton Righelato**

*(Ed: we are very grateful to Upstream/West Berkshire Countryside Society for permission to reproduce this article: <https://www.westberkscountryside.org.uk/>)*

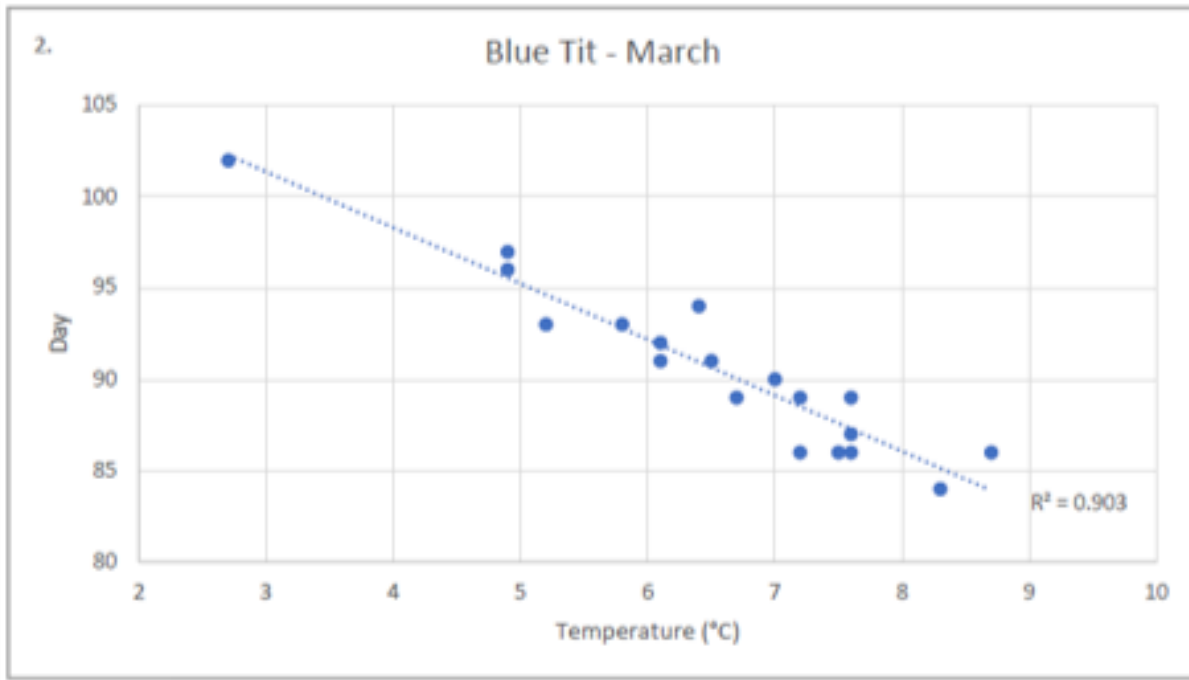
### **Climate Crisis**

**Iain Oldcorn**

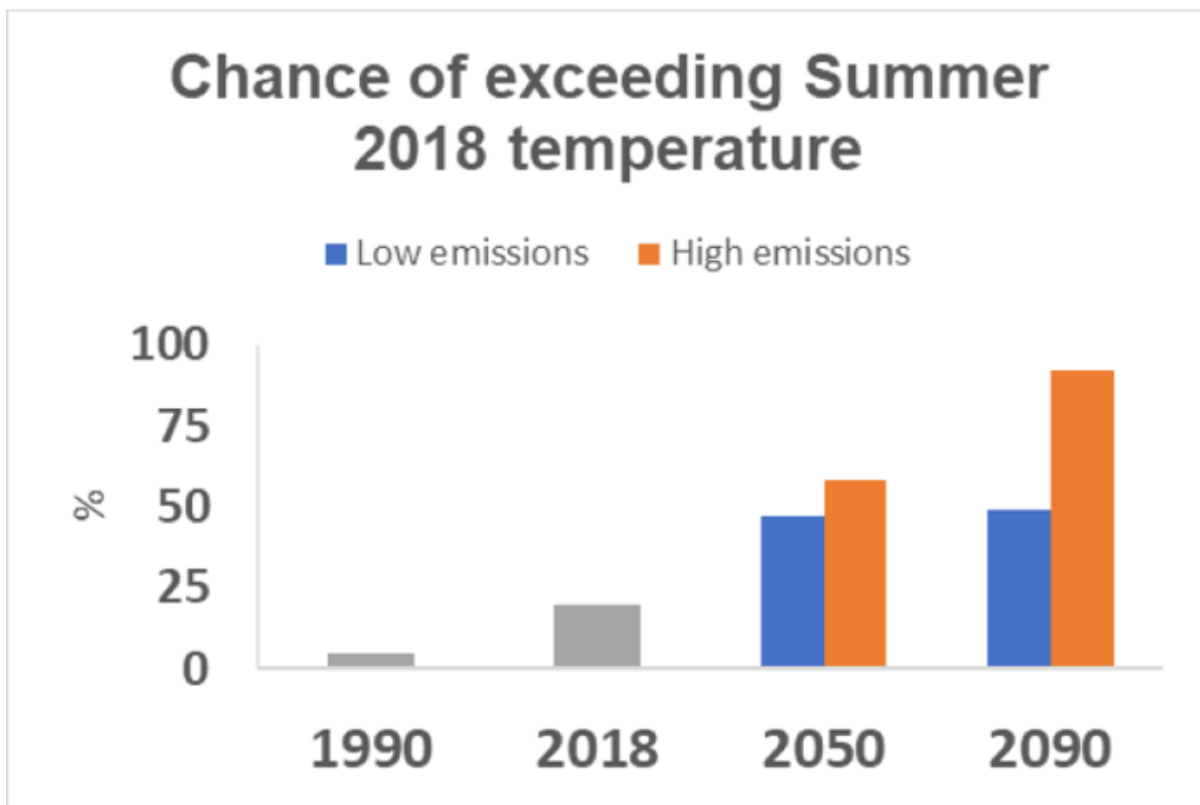
Dr Peter Inness is the Undergraduate Programme Director in the Department of Meteorology at the University of Reading. He recently gave a Zoom presentation to "Ascot Wildlife" on some possible effects of climate change. I thought I should share with you two of the striking Graphs that he showed.

The first demonstrated a correlation between the Day of the Year (vertical axis) on which the first Blue Tit nesting activity was recorded versus (on the horizontal axis) the average temperature in March on the observed day (thus the point at the left hand end of the chart with the very cold temperature and late nesting date was for 2013).

This blue tit nesting graph was developed by Ellie Wilson, an MSc student at Reading University, using data from Natures Calendar (Woodland Trust) and temperature data from the Met Office.



The second is from the Met Office UK Climate Projections report, published in 2018, and shows the results of modelling the likelihood of exceeding summer 2018 temperatures with two different levels of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent emissions. The conclusion that this suggests is that even if we severely curtail emissions going forward the “residual” gases already present in our atmosphere will still likely be causing high summer temperatures in the middle of the current century; and the chances of exceeding present summer temperatures will rise significantly if the current high levels of emissions continue.



This year we have had two talks which touched on the severe problems inflicted by "diclofenac" on carrion eaters such as vultures (Mike Henderson, 'The Vultures of Rajasthan' & Campbell Murn, 'Vulture Conservation'). Unlike the chemical causes of some other catastrophes (think DDT and the ozone depleting chlorofluorocarbons), diclofenac has not been universally "banned" although it is now generally strongly regulated. Indeed, one can easily obtain it in the U.K. as it is a Non-steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drug similar to Ibuprofen and may be prescribed, if for example one has the great misfortune to suffer from conditions such as arthritis, when it may help relieve bone/muscle pain/inflammation. And it is the main active ingredient of at least one pain relief gel that may be purchased over the counter and with your supermarket order! Hopefully it's not used anymore anywhere as a veterinary drug for treating domestic animals that might subsequently become carrion prey.

**Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre/Field Volunteer Caitlin Coombs**

Are you a nature enthusiast? Do you have experience in species identification and wildlife surveys? Would you like the opportunity to visit protected sites, contribute to TVERC's records, and play a role in the success of the Berkshire Local Wildlife Sites Project? You may be able to help us!



[Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre \(TVERC\)](#) are looking for enthusiastic volunteer naturalists with good identification skills and an ability to work alone in the field to help out with additional species surveys on a range of [Local Wildlife Sites \(LWS\)](#) across the county of Berkshire. The LWS's cover a range of habitat types including woodland, wetland, heathland, bog and grassland, and have the potential to support a variety of rare species.

**Please note:** Surveys and procedures are constantly being reviewed and will be undertaken in line with the UK government's and CIEEMs latest advice on Covid-19.

To register your interest, please contact Caitlin Coombs, TVERC Biodiversity Officer, and we can discuss which sites you may be interested in and make further arrangements.  
[caitlin.coombs@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:caitlin.coombs@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

She flies direct  
not undulating.

Alights on wood  
alert and waiting.

An ancient  
bird-cum-dinosaur

Clenching bark  
with thigh and claw

And spring-tail-prop  
of feathers spread

In black and white  
no flash of red.

Sky-pointing bill

an ivory awl.

Intent she seeks  
his trumpet call

In vain  
alone with no fanfare

A mute echo  
a vacant stare.

No longer will his crimson crown  
nestle to her feathered gown.

Unless I fantasize  
and dream

And conjure up  
this wishful scene.



I'm a member of Surrey Bird Club and also Communications Officer for the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area and I'd like to share some good news.

The Special Protection Area was created to protect three species of ground-nesting bird: Nightjar, Woodlark and Dartford Warbler. In the late 1990s, when the Special Protection Area was first discussed, the baseline number of breeding pairs was recorded. Numbers have been monitored annually since then by a team of volunteers coordinated by 2Js Ecology. Last season's results were published in January and we're thrilled that compared to the baseline, all three species have increased. Pairs of Nightjar are up 53% and Dartford Warbler up 60%; even the Woodlark, the rarest of the three, is up by 12%.

There is a note of caution to go with this announcement. Keeping the numbers on the right trajectory requires visitors to keep up the good work in keeping to main paths and keeping dogs out of vegetation. Here at the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership, we'll be working hard this spring and summer to spread this message far and wide across Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire. Obviously, it was an unusual season last year and the proof will be in the pudding as we count the birds again this year.

More information at: [www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/news/2020-record-numbers/](http://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/news/2020-record-numbers/)

**THAMES BASIN HEATHS  
SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA**

Protecting birds protects heaths!  
Protecting heaths protects birds!



8,200ha of heathland <b>That's 12,300 football pitches</b>	Nightjar: Comes from Africa to nest here <b>404 pairs in 2020</b> 	Heathland lost in the last two centuries... <b>84%</b> A Special Protection Area protects it for the future	Our team of <b>12</b> wardens are here to help 	 <b>Keep to main paths</b>
Across 3 counties <b>Surrey Hampshire Berkshire</b> 	Dartford warbler: At home all year in the prickliest of gorse bushes <b>711 pairs in 2020</b> 	<b>FIRE</b> is a major threat and on the <b>INCREASE</b> as summers get hotter and drier 	<b>Connect Respect Protect</b>	 <b>Litter</b> <b>#BeWildfireAware</b>
Protecting 3 species of <u>rare</u> birds <b>Nightjar Dartford warbler Woodlark</b>	Woodlark: Our lyrical heathland songbird <b>167 pairs in 2020</b> 	Join us for... <b>HEATH WEEK</b> Saturday 24th to Friday 30th July 2021	Local councils have created <b>over 70</b> local country walks to protect the heaths	<b>Discover... Greenspace on your doorstep</b>
Because they <b>nest on the ground</b> or in vegetation 	Protection is paid for by a one-off <b>levy</b> on all housing built within <b>5km</b>			

#ThamesBasinHeaths #MoreThanJustNightjars #GreenspaceOnYourDoorstep

**STOP PRESS**

Eleni Hadjicostas is a Geography student at the University of Reading and asks: "Can any of your members spare a few minutes to answer a survey on Reading's biodiversity?" Here is a link to the survey: <https://reading.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/reading-biodiversity-survey>

Ken White says: "Delighted to confirm the delivery of the first egg by Newbury Peregrine Mrs N this morning 25/03/21 at 03.14am!"

The lockdown restrictions have meant that it wasn't possible to conduct the club's indoor programme at our regular venue at Reading University so we have held our indoor meetings online via Zoom. The online meetings have suited some people but not everyone but it was the best that we could offer. Indeed, some members who have not been coming to indoor meetings previously have tuned in via Zoom, and this format has appealed to those who are shielding or who have moved away, while the recordings of the meetings on YouTube have benefitted those who have a clash on Wednesday evenings.

Sue Charnley, our Indoor Programme Secretary, has been contacting prospective speakers for the next season. Whereas the club sees uncertainty over whether the meetings can be held at the university, the speakers likewise face uncertainty over whether they can attend an indoor venue to present their talk, and consequently most have a flexible attitude. We would like to offer the best of both worlds – a continuation of the online meetings via Zoom, but when the university venue becomes available the opportunity to meet in person with a speaker either present or based at their home or office (and potentially anywhere else in the world!). We understand from the university that their technology supports this, but we haven't experienced it first-hand.

The trips and excursions which are being planned by Ray Reedman, our Outdoor Programme Secretary, will feature many of the trips that could not take place this season. There will be an emphasis on local and regional destinations with travel by private car, and the trips will only go ahead if they satisfy the prevailing regulations. If you have any ideas for places to visit or would be prepared to lead a trip then please get in contact.

**Peregrinations****Percy Prendergast**

At the time of writing, Mar 18th, Ken White suggested that Mrs Newbury was getting ready to lay; who knows what has happened since then? The Twitterati (I've just invented that term) need to retune to the new Twitter feed @NewburyPeregrin to ensure they're keeping up to date (Ken can spell but apparently one is only allowed 15 characters for a Twitter hashtag keyword).

On March 2nd, Keith Betton of the Hampshire Zoological Society gave a talk on peregrines to the Reading Natural History Society. He concentrated on the birds breeding on Chichester Cathedral and you can follow their activity on their dedicated webcam at: <https://www.chichestercathedral.org.uk/events/chichester-cathedral-peregrines-watch-live-webcam>

A bit closer to home you can find the Woking Peregrine Project. Peregrines have paid attention to Export House in Woking town centre since 2001 with several attempts at breeding; will they be successful this year. The home page of their website includes a live webcam link and can be found at: [the Woking Peregrine Project | Live Web Feed of the Woking Peregrines](#)

Brian Clews reminds us that peregrines can also be seen on Maidenhead churches; and that fountain of bird sightings (<https://www.berksbirds.co.uk/searchbirdnews.asp>) also has reports of sightings in: Reading (including Fobney), Theale, Streatley, Wokingham etc.



And let's not forget our Ospreys! There's certainly been one sighting over East Berks mid-March this year; so why not keep an eye on: <http://www.ukospreys.uk/cams-uk.htm> and see what you can find about this year's osprey action as it unfolds? This website also has links to many useful birding websites.

Or why not go really big and follow the reintroduction of the White-Tailed Eagle to the Isle of Wight and other parts of the U.K.? A useful starting point for information and images can be found at: <https://www.roydennis.org/category/sea-eagle/isle-of-wight-sea-eagles/>

### **BOC Business:**

**Jane Campbell, Secretary** [secretary@berksoc.org.uk](mailto:secretary@berksoc.org.uk)

The BOC committee meeting held on Zoom in January was my first as Secretary and I have a lot to live up to as I replace Sally Wearing who did such an efficient job for so long.

It is pleasing to report that volunteers were found for a couple of roles: Mike Taylor is now our Webmaster and Tracie Garratt is posting on Instagram. We still need help in some areas so do contact me if you can offer your expertise to:

- help Chris Foster redesign the Club's leaflets, posters and other publicity material
- organise the outdoor programme
- carry out farm surveys.

Indoor meetings on Zoom continue to attract good audience numbers and with the sad closure of the East Berks RSPB group the committee agreed to offer their members access to these meetings for the rest of the season. Analytics showed that recordings of these meetings on YouTube have been viewed or part-viewed hundreds of times. It is the club's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in February 2022 and the committee discussed events to mark the occasion.

Robert Godden, Sally Wearing and their teams are working hard on the bird reports with Andy Tomczynski taking the role of photographic editor. Those of you on email who have QMR permits will have received them via email, a process which saves the Club time and postage costs.

The next committee meeting is in April and all minutes are posted on the website.

### **Membership Matters**

**Iain Oldcorn**

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 links to recordings of our Zoom presentations.

At the time of writing (23 Mar 2021) access to QMR for our BOC Permit holders is still problematic. DWSC are hoping to return to normal operation shortly. However, we then need to review and agree our access provisions and change access codes as appropriate. We will keep you advised. Where we do not have an email address, we will issue QMR Permits on paper in due course.

After unsuccessfully chasing up the missing subscription payment of about 12 members, that were due on 1<sup>st</sup> October, we are assuming that these people are wishing to resign from the Club and so regretfully this will be the last communication that they receive from us.

*(Disclaimer: The views expressed in articles in this Newsletter are those of their respective authors and may not be representative of those of the BOC or of any of its Committee Members.)*

Who says that the Carrion Crow is just a boring black bird in a field? Not our audience who chose David Massie's image as their overall winner at the 2021 BOC photographic competition. An entertaining evening via Zoom was provided by judges Colin Wilson and Rob Still who rated 193 entries received from 21 photographers.

Next year's competition will be in March 2022 and will have two familiar categories – Portrait and Flight & Action. New for 2022 is a third category "Plumage" which could be a close-up of part of a bird or any other interpretation you feel fits. You have a whole year to get out there snapping. Full details will be published on the website soon.

### **2021 Results**

Birds in Berkshire Winner and the audience favourite winning the Gordon Langsbury Memorial Trophy: Carrion Crow by David Massie



Birds in Berkshire 2nd place: Pectoral Sandpiper by Marek Walford



Flight and Action Winner: Mandarin by Dave Rimes



Flight and Action 2nd place: Coot by Bill Watts



Portrait Winner: Cattle Egret by Brian Winter



Portrait 2nd place: Robin by Brian Winter



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

1.R	H	2.E	A	3.D	4.E	L	5.T	6.A	7.N
8.O	9.T	U	10.S	U	L	11.Z	I	N	O
12.C	A	P	E	N	13.K	E	N	T	D
K	R	14.H	A	N	D	15.S	A	16.W	D
T	S	O	17.R	O	18.S	E	19.M	A	Y
H	I	N	20.E	C	O	L	O	G	Y
21.R	22.A	I	L	K	R	B	U	T	23.I
U	N	A	I	24.C	A	Y	M	A	N
25.S	I	T	C	26.A	R	C	T	I	C
H	27.C	A	T	B	I	R	D	L	A

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 21 Aacross
	22	Smooth or in the groove? Bill's the clue for this cuckoo's American cousin.
	23	Atahualpa's dove?

(Ed: I thought this was hard. How did you get on?)

**Gallery (Selected Photocomp Runners Up)**

**All photos © Photographers as Credited**



Dunlin Andy Tomczynski



Cuckoo Dave Rimes



Greylag Geese Bill Watts



Peregrines Ken White



Gt Spotted Woodpecker Marek Walford



Horned Lark David Massie