



# Berkshire Ornithological Club



## Annual General Meeting for 2022

### Chairman's Report

#### **Membership Report – Iain Oldcorn**

As Iain Oldcorn reports there were 287 members on 30th September this year, a modest 2% increase on last year. We typically lose some members at the start of the season through memberships not being renewed and then we hope to gain new members during the course of the year. If you haven't yet paid this year's subs, please do so soon to avoid reminders being sent out. If you receive mailings from the club by post and you are on email, please consider providing Iain with your email address – it will save on administrative costs and makes communication easier. Similarly, if you are able to pay by standing order, please have a word with Iain. Iain reports an interesting statistic, that on average, members stay with the club for just under 14½ years, a duration that appears to be increasing – I have obviously over-stayed my welcome!

Access to QMR is currently via a locked gate for which the BOC has limited number of keys. So, whereas a few years back, BOC membership entitled members to be issued a permit, this is not possible now. A key and permit may now be issued to club members who expect to make a minimum of six visits per year – full details on application. In the event of a major rarity turning up there, like we had with the Buff-bellied Pipit in 2013, it may be possible to make special arrangements and issue day permits. Peter Newbound is the arbiter of the process for handing out keys, and we thank him for undertaking this thankless task.

#### **Outdoor Programme – Robert Godden**

Last season, there was a full programme of local and regional walks last season, mostly well attended. Star birds included Slavonian Grebe, Iceland Gull, Woodlark, Stone-curlew and Quail. This season's programme is similar to the previous one, with some extra excursions shared with NDOC. We look forward to a good turnout.

Outdoor meetings continue with travel to local and regional destination by private car. We are still looking for someone to take on the role of Outdoor Programme Secretary - the main thing with the role is to plan the programme, not so much to lead any of the outings, as we have a team of leaders, though we could do with a few more leaders.

#### **Indoor Programme – Sue Charnley**

Last year all meetings were held online and in person at the university lecture hall; in most cases our speaker was present there too, but on a few occasions the speaker was presenting remotely. Average attendance was 31 online and 16 in person but marked increase as season progressed. Some talks featured the birds and wildlife of particular locations such as Upper Teesdale, China, North America and South Africa, others focussed on the life histories of a particular species or bird family such as Cuckoos or Owls. Other talks described scientific research into bird behaviour, such as wintering warblers, and there were two talks featuring the RSPB – one, an account of the Otmoor reserve, and the other a comprehensive history and update on RSPB reserves around the UK. Our 75th anniversary was marked with talks by Renton, Neil Bucknell and Andy Swash. We're looking forward to seeing members back in the room to support the speakers who have often travelled from a long distance to speak to us.

#### **Strategy Group - Sally Wearing, Bob Lyle & Chris Foster**

This was set up to further the aim of the Club to “advance public education in the study of wild birds”. Actions have been taken to increase attendance at indoor meetings, with successful outcomes. Would changing the time when meetings start be a popular change? A number of people responded to this question; 22 out of 26 preferred a 7:30 start while only 4 preferred an 8pm start. We will continue to check the feasibility before making any change. The group is now focusing on general publicity.

#### **Publicity – Chris Foster**

Chris Foster reported the number of followers on social media: 523 on Twitter, 351 on Facebook and 228 on Instagram compared to 482, 307 and 168 respectively in 2021. This has brought the activities of the club to a wider audience. Chris checks the Twitter account, various members of the committee (and other club members) post on Facebook and the Instagram account is managed by Amanda Garratt. We would welcome more help (and suggestions of any other forms of media – whether traditional or social – we should be using to communicate with members and the wider public.

### **Editorial Board – Sally Wearing & Robert Godden**

The Editorial Board comprising Robert Godden as Scientific Editor and Sally Wearing as Managing Editor have made progress with catching up with annual reports. 2017 has been published, the publisher's draft of 2018 is currently being checked, the first draft of 2019 is complete and 2020 species accounts are being edited. A booklet, Berkshire's Birdscapes, has been produced based upon the talk that Renton gave at the club's 75th anniversary meeting. It has now been published and distribution is underway – as well as conveying a serious message, it also serves as a fitting tribute to Renton. Copies are £5, but members will receive a free copy.

### **Conservation Subcommittee – Neil Bucknell**

No report from the subcommittee for this year can be complete without paying tribute to the many years' leadership and contribution from Renton Righelato. His tireless work produced a number of important results. The establishment of the Fobney Island nature reserve, the acquisition and establishment of Lea Farm and continued efforts to progress the restoration of Padworth Lane GP are all part of his legacy. As one of those that I have heard from in response to news of his death has said – “we need more Rentons”.

During the year, the Padworth Lane project has still not made substantial progress, but it does now seem that the Canal and Rivers Trust, owners of the site, are now focussing on co-operating with the local authority with the aim of enforcing the obligations of the mineral company that undertook the gravel extraction to undertake the restoration plan.

There has been little movement on a second site, Lower Farm Gravel Pit near Newbury. As members may be aware, NDOC has been looking after the site and maintaining a hide on the site for many years. There was a suggestion that the owners might be selling the site, but it has been taken off the market for the time being. We remain ready to work with NDOC to secure the site's future if the opportunity arises.

It has been a good year for breeding peregrines this year. Patrick Crowley has been co-ordinating efforts to monitor sites and liaison with their owners, and Ken and Sarah White have continued to keep an eye on the Newbury pair.

We have continued carrying out farm surveys. A second year of our intensive surveys has been undertaken at West Ilsley. We have been in contact with the organisers of “Farmer Clusters” (groups of local farmers formed to encourage wildlife friendly measures in their area) regarding surveys for their members. A pilot survey has been carried out at Sulham, and further surveys are planned starting this winter on the Englefield Estate. However, we are hampered by a lack of volunteers. There are possibly 30 or more farms that might want surveys, but we have only a dozen volunteers. One matter that we are keeping an eye on is the development of local policies to give effect to the Government's “Biodiversity Net Gain” planning policy, whereby it will be a requirement that any new development can demonstrate that, overall, there is a net benefit to wildlife. Opportunities for offsetting any adverse impact by delivering gains elsewhere will need to be identified, to be embodied in a Nature Recovery Strategy. This is still in the early stages. One problem is that Berkshire's Local Nature Partnership, one of 48 in the country established in response to the Lawton review in 2010, and which should be the focus for this, has become largely moribund. BBOWT has been leading a drive to revive it, and we have played an active role in these efforts.