



Berkshire Ornithological Club



Minutes of the Annual General Meeting for 2022

8.00 pm 16th November 2022, held at Reading University and on Zoom

The Chairman, Robert Godden (RG), in the chair and 42 members present both in person and on Zoom.

Robert started the meeting with a tribute to Renton Righelato who sadly passed away on November 8th.

1. **Apologies for absence:** Bob Lyle, Sue Truby, David Fuller and Fiona Farnsworth.
2. **Minutes of the AGM held on 17th November 2021:** the minutes were approved via a show of hands and a poll and will be signed by the Chairman.
3. **Matters arising:** None.
4. **Honorary Treasurer's Report and the Club Accounts:** these were presented by Edwin Bruce-Gardner (EB-G). The accounts and Treasurer's report had been circulated before the meeting and will be available on the Club's website.

EB-G thanked Eleanor Pitts for her thorough handover of the Treasurer's role. Our constitution requires that our accounts are reviewed, and the Club is grateful to Martin Newell for doing this.

RG thanked EB-G for his clear accounts and reports.

The accounts were accepted via a show of hands and an online poll.

5. **Election of Executive Officers:** The Committee proposed the following:
Chair – Sally Wearing Treasurer – Edwin Bruce-Gardner Secretary – Jane Campbell

They were all elected via a show of hands and an online poll.

6. **Election of Ordinary Members of the Committee:** there are six elected Ordinary Members. This year there were three vacancies, due to the retirement of Sue Charnley, Chris Foster and Robert Godden as Chair.

The nominations from the Committee were Robert Godden, Anna Mortimer and Elaine Charlson. All were elected via a show of hands and an online poll

7. **BOC President:** At the beginning of the year Renton Righelato informed the committee that he would be standing down as President due to ill health. The committee embarked on a search for a successor and is delighted that Debby Reynolds accepted the post.
8. **Report of Chairman and Officers:** this was presented by the Chairman, RG. The full written report will be published via the Club's website.
 - **Membership:** Club membership is slightly down this year. 17% of members have not paid for this season. To reduce administrative time and costs it was requested that if possible, members provide an email address and use standing orders to pay subscriptions. The access restrictions remaining at QMR were explained.
 - Indoor Programme:** All meetings last season were held online and in person. The average attendance was 31 online and 16 in person with a marked increase in person as the season progressed. Holding meetings using Zoom enabled some speakers to present remotely. 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. The Club's 75th anniversary was marked by talks by Renton Righelato and Neil Bucknell.

- **Outdoor Programme:** A full programme of local and regional walks was offered last season which were mostly well attended. This season's programme is similar to the previous one, with some extra excursions shared with NDOC.
We are still looking for someone to take on the role of Outdoor Programme Secretary - the main responsibility of the post is to plan the programme, not necessarily to lead any of the outings, as we have a team of leaders who do this.
- **Strategy Group:** This new group was set up to further the aim of the Club to "advance public education in the study of wild birds". Actions were taken to increase attendance at indoor meetings, which were successful, and the group is now focusing on general publicity. The suggested change to the start time of indoor meetings from 8pm to 7.30pm was popular with members who responded to a survey, and this is being fully investigated before a decision is made.
- **Publicity:** Chris Foster publicises the Club on social media, and this has brought its activities to a wider audience. We have a presence on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. 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:** The 2017 report was published last year and three more are in progress as follows:
 - 2018 currently checking publisher's draft
 - 2019 first draft complete
 - 2020 species accounts being edited

Additionally, a booklet, Berkshire's Birdscapes, has been produced based upon the talk that Renton gave at the club's 75th anniversary meeting. This has 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:** The sub-committee paid 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.

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. 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.

Farm surveys have continued. A second year of 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 to start 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.

- **Closing Remarks:** RG thanked the committee for their work during the year.
9. **Birding highlights for 2022:** the full version of the birding highlights will be published in the next Newsletter and on the Club's website. A selection of photos of the most notable birds for each month of the year was shown. RG thanked Ken Moore for his suggestions and the photographers for allowing their photos to be used.
 10. **Any other business**

There was one question from Trevor Guyatt concerning access to QMR. RG and Andy Tomsynski explained that Thames Water are unwilling to replace the broken entry keypad meaning access now requires a key. The Club has 17 keys, and these are allocated to members who request them and can commit to at least six visits per year. It was noted that should a rarity be found, it might be possible to arrange special access.

Iain Oldcorn proposed a vote of thanks for Robert's work in many areas and as Chair over the last three years.

The Chairman wished his successor, Sally Wearing, the best of luck and closed the AGM at 20:45.

Refreshments were served followed by a talk from Neil Bucknell on farm surveys in West Berkshire.