



Editorial

Iain Oldcorn bocmembershipsec@hotmail.co.uk

Welcome to our 88th BOC Newsletter. Neil starts the ball rolling by revealing some of the work of our Conservation Committee; and also, some of their frustrations. In Chairman's Chatter, Robert reminds us of the start-up of our regular winter programmes and makes a plea for more help and guidance from members. Ray Reedman reports on a couple of our walks early this year; Sean Murphy, our BTO Rep, brings us up to date with their work. and later Andy describes a joint NDOC/BOC field meeting in June on Compton Downs. There's an opportunity to find some Warblers and then anticipate a Bat Walk at Maiden Erlegh and remember Christmas Lunch. After Ken and Sarah are recognised by Newbury, there are a few snippets of committee and membership info; finally, another selection of Andy's excellent photos! Enjoy!

Conservation Corner

Neil Bucknell

1 SITE ISSUES

Padworth Lane – sadly the momentum that seemed to be building up towards moving this project along has not been maintained; and there is still no news of progress in taking forward the site restoration plan by Harleyfords, the mineral company that carried out the quarrying of the site.

2 SPECIES ISSUES

Peregrines – Patrick Crowley has reported pairs were occupying the site at the Blade in Reading, and sites in Bracknell and Newbury.

Birds of Conservation Concern – Renton has prepared a draft document identifying potential species that might be the focus of future conservation work; what such action might be has been circulated among committee members for further consideration.

3 SURVEYS

Farm Surveys – the pilot surveys at the Sulham Estate have been undertaken. We intend to start in the coming winter with surveys at candidate farms. We await details of what the DEFRA Local Nature Recovery measures might be.

Downland Curlews – another season of surveys indicated that two downland sites were occupied this year.

4 OTHER MATTERS

Berkshire's LNP – the re-launch meeting of the current partnership, to consider the consultation proposals, was poorly attended. We await hearing if the six Berkshire unitary local authorities are prepared to commit funds to enable a full-time person to be employed thus enabling the plan to move forward.

We are still awaiting, for consultation from TVERC, the draft proposals for a new Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Network.

Chairman's Chatter

Robert Godden chair@berksoc.org.uk

The new season of the Berkshire Ornithological Club gets underway soon with our first outdoor meeting on September 8th and the first indoor meeting on October 5th at the university. We look forward to welcoming you to this season's events, so do check out the programme card. The smooth running of the club is thanks to the efforts of many of its members, not just the committee; there are three areas in particular where we would be grateful for some assistance – offering to lead birdwatching walks either locally or further afield, help with writing some species accounts for the annual reports, and help with the

technical set-up of indoor meetings (see below). Please contact me if you would be prepared to help in any of these ways.

We have been monitoring the in-person and online attendances at indoor meetings and were pleased to find that during the course of the last season, as lockdown restrictions were lifted, the indoor attendance increased but not at the expense of the online numbers. We will therefore be conducting the indoor programme next season in hybrid mode again. Once more, Sue Charnley has put together a varied programme of talks covering species studies, scientific research and iconic locations, so we are looking forward to continuing good turnouts for these talks.

The half hour immediately before the start of these meetings is a busy time, when the chairman and other club officers should be giving the speaker due attention while answering queries etc, so we are looking for some extra help at that time. It would be really helpful if we had some volunteers who could take on the technical set-up and Zoom hosting for each meeting. It entails some familiarity with Zoom, to attend the meeting in person and to run Zoom on one's own laptop to host the meeting – a separate speaker's laptop will run the Powerpoint presentation for the talk but needs to be linked in to the meeting. With a year's experience behind us, we know the steps to follow to connect to the sound system in the lecture hall, we know that it all works and instructions have been fully documented – we could just do with help putting all that into practice on the night!

Recently the committee has been discussing whether there is any merit in changing the start time of indoor meetings. Bringing it forward to, say, 7:30pm would mean an earlier finish time which may be welcomed by those attending in person, or could offer the possibility of socialising over a drink at a campus bar. On the other hand, those who are still at work may find it hard to make an earlier start time. Before making a change, we would like to gauge the opinions of our members, so please let us know how you feel about it; even if it doesn't affect you either way, we would still like to hear from you – please contact me by email or my deputy Sally on: sally.wearing@berksoc.org.uk or mobile 07939 488971.

BOC at Blashford Lakes, 20th January, 2022

Ray Reedman

Throughout these bizarre months of Covid, flow-tests, masks, and social distancing, birding has been sometimes impossible or at least very tricky. Fortunately, most of this year's activities have survived, though they have not always been well-supported. For a variety of reasons, this was the first event that I had been able to attend in some time. It was good to see old friends again and to meet a new member, John Davies.

Five of us gathered at Blashford Lakes on a bright cold morning. Gray Burfoot was leading and, as we waited for the others to join us, a passing Sparrowhawk marked the start of an interesting day.

The Woodland Hide is always a little unreal for its intensity. We had spent a bit of time searching the trees outside for tiny, elusive and fast-moving targets, but the temptation of a feeder-fest was too strong and we were soon watching a constant flurry of small birds as they refuelled after a very cold night. Chaffinches seem not to be so common around my local birding haunts these days, so it was good to see them in good numbers here, even though none of them would turn into a Brambling (though John Froy found two of those there later in the day). Siskins were fairly plentiful among the Goldfinches, Greenfinches, Nuthatches and commoner tits. Several Jays came in and some people were lucky to see just one Marsh Tit as it dashed in and away.



A session at the Ivy South Hide is always rewarding. A Kingfisher patrolled back and forth in front of us, while a Great Egret sat like a beacon at the top of one of the taller trees. Several Cormorants dried their wings next door. The lake was covered with assorted water birds, dominated by Wigeon, Gadwall, Tufted Ducks and Herring Gulls. The strong low light was tricky, but in spite of it Robert Godden found a vanishing Green Sandpiper on the far bank.



After a short reprise at the Woodland Hide, we next tried Ivy Lake North. Unfortunately, the warden had reported a full flush of four heron species there the day before*, so the Bittern hunters were out in force and the small space was fully occupied. Not a mask in sight, not a thought of social distancing and only two tiny windows to open!

Naturally, we beat a hasty retreat and took up residence in the huge new hide overlooking Ibsley Water. There, a steady northerly breeze strode in through the open windows to whisk any bugs swiftly southwards. The only trouble in those conditions is that birds tend to gather in the northern lee of the lake at the greatest distance from the hide. Nonetheless the light was good and we made out plenty of duck species, including: Shoveler, Pochard, Wigeon and Tufties, plus the scarcer Pintails, Goosanders and Goldeneyes. The island strips held a number of Cormorants. Among these were a good number of Lapwings and Black-headed Gulls. Robert again found a Green Sandpiper and a Snipe, and was also the first to locate the cause of a massive panic flight – a female Marsh Harrier, which seemed to be chancing her luck on the way through. A couple of Herons were roosting in the background vegetation, while to the right of the lake a very distinctive white-bellied Buzzard stood out like a roosting Osprey.

There was a bit of activity on the banks closer to the hide, with a few Linnets and the odd Pied Wagtail, but it was pretty quiet there otherwise.

After midday the gulls started to build up in the middle of the lake, the smaller species - Black-headed and Common - gathering separately from the larger Herring and Lesser Black-backed, but they were mostly facing away into the wind and just too far off to pick out any 'strangers'. On good sessions in the past, we have found four more species, but this time there was not even a Great Black-backed by the time Gray and I left. Luckily Robert was still there to locate a Ring-billed Gull, a scarce American stray that has sometimes been recorded there in recent winters.

We were pleased to receive John's news of the Bramblings as we drove back. Blashford is always well worth a winter visit.

**I reported a similar quartet at Lavell's Bittern Hide last December, so you don't really need to rush off to Hampshire.*

BTO Update

Sean Murphy

The advance of the year into July saw the end of some of the main 2022 BTO breeding season surveys: the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), Waterways Breeding Bird Survey (WBBS), Heronries Census and Woodcock Survey; plus the advance of the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) into the new season of monthly monitoring of July 2022 – June 2023. However, those involved in the nest record surveys may still be monitoring nesting success of some species. So, a big 'thank you' to all that participate in these and also the other non-seasonal surveys as all these gather valuable data for the monitoring and study of the UK bird populations. To all of those who do take part in the main breeding bird surveys, the Wetland Bird Survey, and the re-run this year of the Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows (BWWM) please enter any outstanding data as soon as possible as the process of checking and analysing the huge data sets will begin in the autumn. Here's one statistic that reflects just how much tremendous effort goes into these surveys by volunteers: for the BBS this year, surveyors in Berkshire walked a total of 212.2km in covering their early and late transects!

Many will have seen reports in the media about the serious situation of avian influenza that is emerging across the UK and Europe, and particularly affects many seabirds. The BTO are working with other organisations to understand what are the impacts and are also considering the implications for volunteer activities (ringing, nest recording, other surveying). BTO provide guidance on avian flu on their website (<https://www.bto.org/how-you-can-help/take-part-project/health-safety/avian-flu>) and what to do should you find a bird that seems to have been infected.

There is exciting news for those who use the BTO BirdTrack app. A new version, that adds additional functionality to what users already find handy, is undergoing testing at this very time. The updates to the app are based on feedback from users; so thank you if you contributed to this. The plan is to release the new app in the autumn.

If you are interested in improving your wader ID skills, BTO are running a series of virtual two-part training courses (four in all) on dates during the period 10 – 17th August. See www.bto.org/develop-your-skills for further information.

And finally, an advanced alert that the BTO Annual Conference and AGM will be held 28th November – 3rd December. More details about this will be on the BTO website later, but I understand this will be a virtual conference this year.

BOC Walk: Little Marlow Gravel Pit Rarity, 10th March 2022

Ray Reedman

Ten BOC members - a mix of old and new hands – gathered on a distinctly spring-like mild and sunny morning. It was a real pleasure to feel that we were at last back to something like normality.

As we gathered, a Song Thrush was singing nearby and another greeted us in the field to the north of the lake, but both stayed well-hidden. Meanwhile the sky seemed full of Red Kite - Brian counted 25 - and there were three Buzzard up as well. A huge flock of Woodpigeons was feeding on far side of the field and Robert spotted a few Stock Dove before they flew off. The odd Skylark was also recorded.

There were other species singing too, notably several Chiffchaff, to me the true herald of spring. As I tried to locate one of those, the binoculars picked up a Long-tailed Tit with nesting material in its tiny beak. Later there was a Brimstone butterfly on the wing. It really did seem like spring!

All around the lake margins there was plenty of evidence of other familiar song birds, which included the distinctive voice of the Nuthatch and the wheeze of a few Greenfinch. The thin warble of a Goldcrest was so close that we were almost startled. While we followed the movements of more than one of them, we discovered a silent male Blackcap. The canopy also held a couple of Great Spotted Woodpecker and echoed at least once to the yaffle of a Green Woodpecker.

The lake, of course, was the focus of a lot of attention. The most striking feature was the island heronry, where there were at least seven nests and about 20 tenants. There were even more Cormorant and far more of their guano-trimmed nests. My impression was that the Heron are now somewhat out-gunned on that site.



There was an assortment of winter ducks still present in small numbers, including Shoveler, Gadwall, Teal, Tufties, Wigeon and Pochard, but there were also two pairs of very handsome Shelduck. Mute Swans Canada, Egyptian and Greylag Geese were all represented by a few individuals.

However, the spit was white with gulls, mostly Black-headed and most of those already living up to their name. There were just a few larger gulls of various ages and I was hoping that a recently reported Caspian Gull might still be around. As we scanned from the east bank, Robert drew in a sharp breath and almost whispered his find. We all then hastened to pay close attention to the end of the spit where an Iceland Gull stood out as it preened; a body covered to the wing tips and tail in white. It was a vision that we had just not anticipated. With a short black-tipped bill, a hint of dove grey on the mantle and pinkish legs, it appeared to be a second-winter bird. I managed a record shot which gives at least a passable impression.

When we were able to tear our eyes away from the rarity, the supporting cast included a few Herring Gull and Lesser Black-backed, plus the odd Common Gull, but we seem to have overlooked a near-adult Yellow-legged Gull in all the excitement, because that was picked up and reported later. Behind the gulls was a scattering of Lapwing, as well as a few Coot and Moorhen, the odd Pied Wagtail and the like. At least one Reed Bunting was seen in the reed screen behind the spit.



Other species were seen over the lake in the course of the walk – a Sparrowhawk, a Kingfisher and a couple of Grey Wagtail. Of course, it is normal in a group walk for each person to miss some birds, but a straw poll of four participants gave a group tally of about 54 species, which seems quite impressive for a March morning.

BOC/NDOC Field Meeting, Compton Downs 8th June 2022

Andy Tomczynski

Members from the two clubs met at Staveall, west of Aldworth, for an evening walk along the track to Roden Down and back. Some eighteen members set out on a lovely, sunny, clear evening with a fresh south westerly breeze. This didn't help my hay fever though, with all the grass pollen in the air at this time of year. Several Red Kites and a few Buzzards hung in the breeze over the large fields of wheat and barley. The breeze kept the passerine activity subdued but eventually several of the expected species were seen; such as Yellowhammers, Skylarks and Corn Buntings. A pair of Stone Curlew were picked out at about a kilometer distance, standing in a large square of bare ground "cut out" within a wheat crop. These squares provide a suitable habitat for Stone Curlews to breed. With the very clear air and sunlight, viewing conditions were perfect for seeing the birds at this range, through scopes. A juvenile was also picked out alongside the two adults. A slight detour from the Ridgeway allowed for a closer view of the Stone Curlews, providing more detail, albeit still at half a kilometer distance! We were also able to pick out Grey Partridge, which were heard calling later in the evening.

Further along the Ridgeway a bare strip of land allowed for good views of Hare and Stock Doves. When we reached Roden Down we heard distant Quail singing to the south of us, which became louder as we walked west. We were distracted by a Barn Owl which flew over the track at close range giving superb views. It hunted in the fields either side of the Ridgeway and further along the track was joined by another Barn Owl. They were both successful as we saw both pass over us carrying small rodents. Meanwhile, on further listening to the Quail we determined that its song was oddly truncated. There was zero chance of seeing the Quail of course. However, as we turned around to retrace our steps, a second Quail was heard singing nearby with the more familiar song.

As the sun went down some members made their way back to their cars, while the rest stood around quietly, hoping to see a Long-eared Owl, a species that usually only appears when it's nearly too dark to see them. It wasn't to be our lucky night though, but we did hear two juvenile Tawny Owls calling fairly close to us. As we made our way back to the cars, a scarce plant, Spiked Star of Bethlehem, was pointed out to me. I was really pleased to view it under the torch light of my phone!

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
A	E	N	I	R	E	T	C	I	S	C
B	D	N	S	G	E	I	T	U	D	D
C	E	L	D	I	T	T	B	F	E	O
D	N	E	E	A	L	A	F	L	T	W
E	S	A	U	I	L	L	C	R	O	O
F	L	Q	I	P	F	A	E	L	O	O
G	A	T	I	N	T	Y	L	N	B	D
H	T	N	I	C	I	I	D	E	O	D
I	E	A	E	I	W	D	D	D	R	B
J	D	P	R	E	V	I	R	R	A	A
K	S	S	A	R	O	M	R	A	M	P
L	A	B	A	R	R	E	D	G	S	S

Find 15 Warblers hidden in the grid. Their names run in an unbroken straight line, up/down, forwards/backwards or diagonally. Punctuation is ignored; so, for example, if Ruppell's or Yellow-Browed warblers appeared then of course the apostrophe and hyphen, respectively, are omitted. You would consider yourself to be very fortunate if some of these Warblers appeared in your local patch! Don't give up when you have found all 15 as you haven't finished! There should now be 23 cells that you have not "used" – rearrange the 23 letters in them to anagram the names of three more Warblers (of 6,8 and 9 letters).

(The numbers and letters round the edges of the grid are to help supply the answers in our next Newsletter.)

Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve was designated as a Local Nature Reserve in 1996 by English Nature, and consists of: areas of ancient and secondary woodland, grassland, a large lake, a brook, an old woodland pond and surrounding wetland habitat. Oak Wood, within the reserve, dates from at least the 16th century and contains some 18 indicator species associated with old woodlands. The 1820 Maps of Enclosures and the Tithe Map of 1844 both show the woodlands and lake as being almost the same size and shape as today. The Park was purchased by Earley Town Council in 1965, and Old Lane Wood was added later, making an area of around 12 hectares.



(Image © Claire Andrews)

Bats are amazing creatures, the only mammal with true flight. UK bats use echolocation to navigate and hunt insects in the dark. They can live for up to 30 years and only have one baby a year, so populations can take a long time to recover. Of the 18 breeding species of bats in the UK, those known to be present in this reserve are: Common and Soprano Pipistrelles, Daubenton's Bats, and Noctules. Brown Long-Eared bats, and Serotines have also been recorded in the vicinity.

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Join us on Thursday 8th September for an evening walk around the lake area (details in the programme) to learn more, and possibly see and/or hear, with the aid of bat detectors, three or four species of bat. The path is uneven in places, so please wear suitable footwear and bring a torch (red light preferable).

We met at 10am in the car park of the Fox and Hounds a select group of four, There we saw a lady from 'Swan Support' who had been checking on the health of the lake's swans, already 13 had succumbed to Avian Flu. Stopping at the first observation point, we saw swans and many ducks, including six Red-crested Pochard. We crossed the road and checked on Main Pit: lots of Coots, but only one gull, a Lesser Black-backed. Returning to Hosehill we continued our slippery muddy progress around the Lake. We watched at the feeding station on the far side for a while but only saw Great and Blue Tits, and a Dunnock. We did see a Great Spotted Woodpecker but not the hoped-for Nuthatch. Robert spotted 2 Goosander flying over. We listened for Cetti's Warbler, but no luck; I had heard them in November when I checked the site. We also checked the pylons for Peregrines after the previous night's BOC talk, but again no luck. The tally was 32 Species. We then returned to the pub for an enjoyable Christmas Lunch.

(Ed: Apology to Carole for not fitting this report into our last Newsletter.)

Whites Recognised in Newbury

Percy Prendergast

In March 2022, Ken and Sarah White attended the **Newbury Town Civic Award Ceremony**, being nominated for an **Environmental Contribution Civic Award 2022** in recognition of their hard work "monitoring and protecting Newbury's breeding Peregrines and putting Newbury on the wildlife map."



Ken says, "Here are 2 of my favourite photos of the Newbury Peregrines:

- 1). Falcon Mrs N guarding last year's young chicks before they had any feathers, showing the 4th unhatched egg.

- 2). Tiercel Black 69 feeding last year's juveniles just before they fledged."



7.30 pm or 8 pm?

Sally Wearing sally.wearing@berksoc.org.uk

The BOC Committee has been reviewing how we run our indoor meetings. We have decided to continue holding them for the time being as 'hybrids', i.e. both in person and live via Zoom, but we are considering starting them earlier, at 7:30 pm instead of 8 pm. This could give us some time to socialise after meetings, but we realise it might make it more difficult for some people to attend. So we want to know what you, our members, think about this before we make a decision.

Those of you who come to indoor meetings - would starting at 7:30 pm make things better or worse or no difference to you?

Those of you who do not come - would starting at 7.30 pm encourage you to come or make no difference or discourage you even more?

Please do let us know what you think. You can contact me at sally.wearing@berksoc.org.uk or on 07939 488971 or Rob Godden at chair@berksoc.org.uk.

We look forward to hearing from you!

What's That Bird?

Iain Oldcorn

Regular readers will recall that Jane has now converted all Ray Reedman's PowerPoint presentations on bird identification and loaded them up onto YouTube, with links from our website: [Learn to Identify Birds with Ray Reedman](#) :

- Waterside Birds (25min 58secs) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhzFHQ1RZIs>
- Know Your Land Birds (24.40) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-40p2GjYtfg>
- The Why's and Wherefores of Migration (24.11) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rvLB-WU8unI>

(Please note: copy these links to your browser; there is no sound in these YouTube recordings; you may adjust the playback refresh rate in the "Settings" option and the picture format by its adjacent icons.)

The News Headlines (Links)

Iain Oldcorn

- Latest batch of [37 young white storks released](#) at **Knepp** in August
- **July fire** ravages home of BBC Springwatch at [Wild Ken Hill, Norfolk](#)
- **Concern** over dip in UK woodland's ability to capture carbon dioxide as [felled trees not replaced](#)
- **RSPB** reveals that eight bee-eaters have taken up a [summer residency](#) at a disused quarry in Trimmingham Norfolk
- **More BTO news** – follow the [cuckoos on their migrations](#)
- The **Woodland Trust**, supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery, has been streaming live nest camera footage of [breeding ospreys](#) from Loch Arkaig Pine Forest since 2017
- **House of Commons June biodiversity report** to UK Government may be controversial – is it "[Bloom or Bust?](#)"

Coming to a Committee Near You

Jane Campbell

The notice of our next AGM, together with information on committee vacancies, is included with this mailing; if you normally just bin such notices then please change your habit of a lifetime. We welcome (most) contributions to the running of your Club; this time around a number of vacancies arise and we welcome your support in either standing for election or in persuading ANOther to stand!

Nominations to the Committee

Robert Godden ends his term as Chair this year. Nominations to this post are welcome. In addition, we are seeking two ordinary committee members as both Sue Charnley and Chris Foster have completed their terms of office.

Please send nominations for the post of chair, or "ordinary member", in writing to the Secretary (secretary@berksoc.org.uk) by 9th November 2022.

We thank Robert, Sue and Chris for their sterling work over the years and look forward to them continuing to help run the show from the shadows as they have done in the past.

We should also thank Eleanor Pitts for meticulously keeping our books as Hon Treasurer for the last six years and we welcome Edwin Bruce-Gardiner in bringing his experience of this role to the club.

(Ed: how can one have an "ordinary" committee member of a birding Club? It's a contradiction in terms!)

Membership Matters **Iain Oldcorn**

Unfortunately, there have been no changes to the restricted arrangements that we have had to adopt for the Queen Mother Reservoir.

Good News; our annual subscription rates will remain unchanged for a further year!

At the end of Q1 each calendar year, the Treasurer and I reconcile our records and chase up unpaid subscriptions that were due from 1st October the previous year. Usually this results in us losing a number of members who aren't renewing but haven't told us. This year, the process brought in all the late payments and we did not lose any members. During last year we had as many new members as resignations so our total membership has remained stable, whereas it had recently been slowly declining. Let's hope this improving trend continues!

In recently months we were very sorry to learn of the passing of a number of long-standing members and passed condolences onto their families; as well as Robert Gillmor, these losses included Bill Watts, Tony Croucher and Carole Winder. RIP.





Glossy Ibis: Fobney Meadow, 23rd Mar



Bar-tailed Godwit: Lower Farm, 3rd May



Black Redstart: Green Park, 2nd April



Whimbrel: Queen Mother Reservoir, 8th May



Black-winged Stilt: Fobney Meadow, 19th April



Grasshopper Warbler: Several Down, 16th May

(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.)

And finally, a message from your committee – we are looking forward to seeing you again when our new Programme starts up after the long hot summer break.