

**Editorial**

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

Welcome to our 89th BOC Newsletter. Neil starts the ball rolling by updating our knowledge of some of the work, and frustrations, of our Conservation Committee. Sally Wearing introduces herself as our new Chairman. Bob Lyle takes eight intrepid NDOC/BOC bird watchers round a very wet Pennington Marsh. Sean Murphy pays tribute to the extensive work of the BTO volunteers, brings us up to date with their work, and advises how they are helping track the ravages of Avian Flu. Robert reports on a trip to Bury Down. The warblers are revealed and Ray Reedman wishes he had spent more time understanding bats. Ken White brings us the latest news on "his" Newbury Peregrines. There are a few snippets of committee and membership info; and do check out the STOP PRESS trip news. Finally, another selection of Andy's excellent photos! Enjoy!

**Conservation Corner**

**Neil Bucknell**

**1 SITE ISSUES**

**Padworth Lane** – We have now had a preliminary site meeting with the Canal and Rivers Trust (owners of the site). No news of progress in taking forward the site restoration plan by Harleyfords.

**2 SPECIES ISSUES**

**Peregrines** – Patrick Crowley has reported four successful breeding pairs in the county; raising 10 young between them, although one of the Newbury young had subsequently to be rescued having been found injured. A good season.

**Birds of Conservation Concern** – "Berkshire's Birdscapes", a booklet with a summary of the habitats in Berkshire and the conservation challenges facing the birds that are found there, was prepared by Renton Righelato, and printed shortly before he died in November. Copies will be sent to all members and also to the local authorities and significant landowners in the county to draw these issues to their attention and hopefully ensure that they are taken into account in decision taking".

**Swifts** – we still have a few Swift boxes left over.

**3 SURVEYS**

**Farm Surveys** – waiting for the results of the second survey carried out under the pilot survey at the Sulham Estate. Contact made with Englefield Estate, another of the candidate farms, to discuss taking these forward this winter. Rollout of the new Environmental Land Management Scheme, that is to form the basis of the new agricultural subsidy system, has been paused by the Government pending a review of the scheme as a whole.

We have carried out another season of the more intensive surveys at West Ilsley, so that we have two seasons from both the Dyson Estate at Churn/Compton and this area.

**4 OTHER MATTERS**

There is no news about the re-launch of Berkshire's Local Nature Partnership (LNP), nor progress in formulating the new Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

I am honoured to have been elected at the recent AGM as Chairman of the BOC. When Renton Righelato suggested that I should stand for election, I was rather taken aback; it is not a position that I ever envisaged holding. But no-one else came forward and I have never been any good at saying no when asked me to do something for the BOC.

Many of you already know me, but for those that don't, I will tell you a little about myself and my involvement with the Club. I joined when I moved to Reading in 2007; I've been a birder since the early 1980s, so it was pretty much the first thing I did after moving. I thought I would probably end up volunteering to join the Committee. Small charities exist because people are willing to run them. I know that is stating the obvious, but we really do need volunteers!

At about the time I retired from work in 2014, I was 'head-hunted' by the then Secretary, Mike Turton, who was looking for someone to replace him. I said yes and was elected Secretary for the next six years. In 2020, someone else volunteered to take on the role (thank you Jane!) and since then I have been an elected member of the Committee. I thought that passing on the Secretary's role might reduce my Club 'workload', but I have ended up doing even more.

In 2020, Renton passed on the editorial role for the Birds of Berkshire annual reports. It was split into two: Robert Godden is now the scientific editor and I am the publishing editor. I have somehow become the zoom host for most of our indoor meetings and, also accidentally, the editor of the meeting recordings.

Then Renton suggested a new project early in 2022, intended to further the aim of the BOC to "advance public education in the study of wild birds". He felt that in order to do this, we needed to focus on reaching as many people as possible. Again, I failed to say no and ended up leading the BOC's Strategy Group. With Chris Foster and Bob Lyle, our first actions were all about publicising our indoor meetings, a successful initiative that resulted in a noticeable increase in attendance. We are now focusing on publicising the Club itself and what it does, especially its conservation work.

I think this project deserves more attention and effort. Our constitution is clear – one of the reasons the Club exists is to help educate the public. We should aim to reach a wide audience of all ages.

It might sound like I am complaining about the amount of BOC 'work' I do, but I am not. However, now that I have been elected Chair, I need to find enough time to fulfil my new role. I am currently continuing with the tasks that I have mentioned above, but I am now keener than ever to find more volunteers to help. We are especially looking for people to:

- host the indoor meetings on zoom
- edit and publish the recordings of the meetings
- help with publicity, including via the local media (e.g. writing articles, contacting the media)
- organise and lead educational visits (possibly suitable for a retired teacher?)
- lead field trips, locally and/or further away
- carry out surveys.

None of these tasks need to be time consuming, but they can all be rewarding. If you might be interested in helping, in any way, please contact me at: 07939 488971 or [chair@berksoc.org.uk](mailto:chair@berksoc.org.uk). And please do contact me if you have anything to say about the Club and how we run it. We always want to hear from our members.

I also want to pay my own small tribute to Renton Righelato. He was a real force in the Club, a true champion of our local birdlife, who brought his experience, insight and enthusiasm to many aspects of running the Club, especially our conservation work. I was inspired by him and will miss him greatly.

The delayed Monday trip to Pennington Marsh took place on November 28th with nine members in attendance.

After a slightly delayed start due to heavy rain, we walked down the eastern edge of Fishtail Lagoon finding amongst other things: Pintail, Teal, Wigeon, Black-tailed Godwit, Oystercatcher, Rock and Meadow Pipit. A Great Black-backed Gull was feeding on a carcass and we heard Cetti's Warbler and Curlew.

Due to flooding we were unable to reach the seawall and turned back and inland to traverse the northern edge of Butts Lagoon. Not much to see here on the water save for a Snipe but in the surrounding shrubs we found a group of Song Thrush, Dartford Warbler, Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Stonechat, Goldfinch and a Kestrel.

Two of the group decided it was easier to slide down the muddy embankment rather than walk down and spent the rest of the trip "a brighter shade of brown."

The path to Pennington Lagoon became very difficult but we reached the seawall with judicious use of our tripods as a third leg.

On the corner of the lagoon and the seawall, by the jetty, we had tremendous and prolonged views of a Dartford Warbler feeding in the gorse. The bird was out in the open for at least five minutes and many photos were taken. Unfortunately, I had forgotten my camera.

The lagoon itself did not provide us with much save for a group of 12 Snipe and a few Redshank. Turnstones were on the beach as usual and a pair of Eider were offshore with some Great Crested Grebes. A few more Stonechat and another dartford were found on the water's edge at Oxey Lagoon. We spent some time here looking in vain for the day's "rarity", but no luck. By this time we were getting hungry so we completed the circuit via Oxey Barn.

On Pennington Marsh, by the car park, the field was awash with birds: Canada and Greylag geese, Golden Plover, Pintail, Teal, Lapwing, Shoveler. A Great Black-backed Gull appeared to kill a "duck" by continually dunking it in the water before feasting on it.

After lunch we drove round to Normandy Marsh. On Eight acre lake we found a small group of Little Grebe and Maden Dock provided a "gulp" or "flight" (depends which book you read) of Cormorants in fishing mode.

We are now coming to the most productive area, Normandy Marsh. You name it, it was here. Hundreds of Dunlin and Ringed Plover, Avocet, Greenshank, Redshank, Merganser, Shoveler, Shelduck, Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, Black-tailed Godwit and Spotted Redshank.

On the corner of the lagoon and sea we found the "promised" bird, a Slavonian Grebe which conveniently fished alongside a Great Crested Grebe so that a size comparison could be made. Out on the sandbars there were more Dunlin and Grey Plover with more Lapwing.

Highlights of the day were five or six different sightings of Dartford Warbler, Spotted Redshank, Slavonian Grebe and mud. Approximate total of species seen 61.

This year saw another magnificent effort by BTO volunteer surveyors with major contributions to all the BTO core and other surveys. Given the ever-changing fortunes of our bird populations and the factors that drive these, the importance of this effort really stands out when a major catastrophe hits these populations. Tragically, the very serious situation of Avian Influenza (AI) continues in the UK and

Europe. As mentioned earlier this year, the BTO are working with other organisations to understand the impacts and the implications for different species. BTO are also continuing to monitor the national situation in case the situation for bird monitoring changes for volunteers; however, there are no changes for England at present. Indeed, to date, surveyors are already providing important real-time data on the status of bird populations and how they are faring, especially from the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). This importance of this volunteer effort will increase now we are entering the winter months and the arrival of winter migrants, especially water birds. There is also a facility on the new BirdTrack app, that was released in the autumn, to help volunteers record sick or dead birds. With this app, a recorder can use a 'deceased bird' button with the option to indicate any suspected cases of AI. However, if you use this, please also continue to contact DEFRA about any suspected AI outbreaks; there is guidance on the BTO web site - [www.bto.org/avian-flu](http://www.bto.org/avian-flu) - including what to do should you find a bird that seems to have been infected.

On a more positive note, early summaries of the BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) for the 2022 breeding season are now available. In the Berkshire region, we had great coverage of allocated squares across the county with an average of 90% of 66 squares covered for the early and late surveys. The most numerous (total number of individuals) four species were very much the same as from the 2021 results except in 2022, the jackdaw entered the list coming in second place and pushing the blue tit into the 5<sup>th</sup> place. So, in descending order: woodpigeon, jackdaw, blackbird, rook (and then blue tit!). However, the most widespread species across the county remained the same as 2021: woodpigeon, blackbird and blue tit. The survey also indicated that two much less common birds, the blackcap and song thrush, were also widely distributed in Berkshire with individuals recorded from over 90% of the squares surveyed.

For those who are involved with the BTO woodcock survey, or who might be interested in contributing, in 2023 there will be a third full national survey, the first two being in 2003 and 2013. In these national surveys, BTO increase the number of squares available in some regions and also mark some squares as 'priority' to facilitate comparison with the earlier national surveys. So, in 2023, nationally there will be 2515 squares of which 1102 will be high priority. BTO expect to post the square request map, survey method and a slightly revised habitat survey method from the 19<sup>th</sup> of December so if you are interested, please visit the BTO web site for this: [www.bto.org/woodcock](http://www.bto.org/woodcock).

As always, many thanks to all volunteers for the continued support to the surveys.

### **BOC Morning Walk at Bury Down, 8<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

**Robert Godden**

A forecast of strong winds and heavy showers meant that we had to be mindful of the weather (rather than be deterred altogether) as the six of us set off for a birdwatching walk from the Bury Down car park. As it turned out we enjoyed sunny but fresh conditions until the final stretch when we got somewhat wet.

The Berkshire Downs in autumn hold many of the resident farmland species that you would expect plus there's the chance of seeing wintering species such as birds of prey, owls, winter thrushes and flocks of finches. As we walked westwards along the Ridgeway path, we encountered **Kestrel, Yellowhammers, Corn Buntings, Skylarks** and **Meadow Pipits**. A covey of thirty **Red-legged Partridges** moved through the stubble and a large flock of **Starlings** wheeled around. With a menacing cloud approaching we headed for the wooded car park at near Cuckhamsley Hill just inside Oxfordshire. Two **Stonechats** were on the fence line and a small flock of **Chaffinches** also held a **Brambling**. We had several fleeting glimpses of **Bramblings** around the edge of the copse and in the treetops. In the end we followed the course of the Ridgeway through the copse and were surprised to see large numbers of **Chaffinches** moving along the hedge and every so often a **Brambling**, maybe as many as ten of these handsome finches in total.

We then turned back and followed the path that heads down to West Ilsley village for a short way. The hawthorns were full of **Yellowhammers** and a few hundred **Fieldfare** but we had to look hard to find a single **Redwing**. **Red Kites** came close overhead and several **Corn Buntings** perched on top of the bushes. We completed our return leg by dropping down the north side of the Ridgeway and taking a path through the Chilton Downs.

## Where are the Warblers?

Iain Oldcorn

Our last Newsletter challenged you to 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).

	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	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

(The numbers and letters round the edges of the grid are to help understand the answers.)

Here's the solution, in no particular order.

1	E1-A5	Sedge
2	K10-B1	Paddyfield
3	G1-A7	Aquatic
4	J7-J3	River
5	A8-A1	Icterine
6	G9-B9	Booted
7	L8-G8	Garden
8	A9-I1	Subalpine
9	K1-B10	Spectacled
10	K9-K2	Marmora's
11	L2-L7	Barred
12	L9-D1	Sardinian
13	I5-D10	Willow
14	D10-G10	Wood
15	I10-D3	Bonelli's

The final 23 letters can be rearranged to make: **Cetti's**, **Fan-tailed** and **Dartford**.

## And now for something different.....

Ray Reedman

My life has been peppered with night time outings which have brought me into contact with the world of bats, but I have rarely bothered with the details of them, especially in England. It was, of course, hard to ignore the hundreds which streamed over our camp in the Kakadu outback, their four-foot wingspans reflected dramatically in the waters of the billabong, but these were fruit bats, which entertained us through the night with tree-top rustlings as they gorged on local figs. They were very different beings from those silhouetted, tiny bats that dotted the night skies at home. I had seen these little jobs many times while out walking, birding, camping etc, but had done little to expand my knowledge of them. After all, a bat is a bat is a bat. Or is it?

Without wishing to, I remained painfully ignorant of the bats at home and was pleased when Elaine Charlson agreed to lead her first 'bat walk' for BOC. Then for various health reasons I was unable to attend the first three. Having made up my mind to join the 2022 evening, I then watched it pour with rain all day. By some miracle the skies cleared sufficiently at 6.30pm and suddenly there I was, at Maiden Erlegh nature reserve, along with Gary Kirsopp and Robert Godden, being handed a bat detector and receiving an essential outline for what we might be looking and listening for. It was already fascinating and I suddenly realised that I should have made this effort long ago.



Armed with our detectors, we walked around the woodland edge where we had the first signal – a Common Pipistrelle that we saw in the half light. At the Beech Lane end there was a lot more activity over the open area as one or two individuals hawked around the woodland edge, generally out of sight against the trees. That was typical of that species. Suddenly, it had a bit of character. (Rather unlike the character of the Buzzards that I am more used to seeing at Maiden Erlegh nature reserve.)

We moved back to the fishing area near the island and settled there for a good hour to watch for activity over the water. The detectors were suddenly alive with crackles of various shapes and frequencies. Elaine was able to point out on her tablet screen that there were now Soprano Pipistrelles and Daubenton's with the Common Pipistrelles. The Daubenton's were skimming low above the water and showed pale when they flew through a torch beam, because they have whiter undersides. Another piece of the puzzle had dropped into place. The screen displays showed a wide range of audio clicks, but the two smaller species were concentrated at either side of 50 KHz, and separable on our detectors. That had been one of the features used to split the two species as recently as 1999. They were also hunting a few feet higher, well above the water. Another bit of understanding gleaned! Occasionally one of those flew close to us at face height: as Elaine pointed out, they were perhaps attracted by insects gathering in our chemical aura. As we got used to the situation, we were able to experiment with frequency searches, finding some social communication calls at lower frequencies and identifying feeding bursts. It was fun and could become addictive. Elaine was disappointed that there was no evidence of any high-flying Noctule Bats, but that was a leader's perspective: for a first experience I was more than challenged.

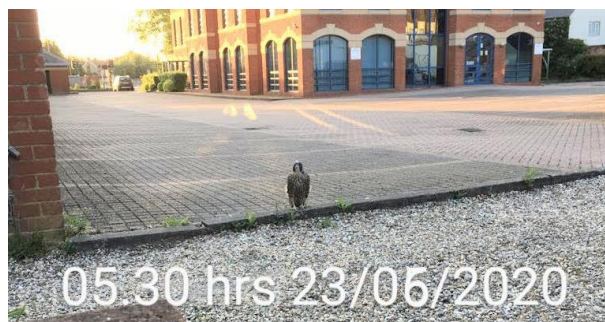
It is said that you can't teach an old dog new tricks, but this old dog was more than happy to have encountered, and metaphorically shaken hands with, three species that had metamorphosed in a couple of hours from little anonymous 'bats' into three distinct species, each with its own character and ecology.

Thanks, Elaine!

## **Newbury Peregrine Update**

**Ken White**

First, exciting news about Blue YL, the only juvenile from the first ever brood of Peregrine chicks reared in Newbury (in 2020) that managed to Maiden Flop while learning to fly from the top of the BT Exchange. This allowed me to pick her up and have her checked out by our BTO ringer Jason Fathers, who, having given her the thumbs up as being fit and well, then colour-ringed the flopped juvenile before she was released back on the top of BT.



A year and a bit later she was spotted resting on the spire of St Luke's church in Maidenhead by Patrick Crowley and Dave Fuller; they managed at short range to read the unique code 'YL' through a telescope, but when Sarah and I got there the next morning she had already moved on.

In late October, I had a message from our Andover Peregrines neighbour Hugo Wilson pointing out that he had seen a Twitter request asking for information about a Peregrine recently seen and photographed at Staines Moor, near the Staines reservoirs, bearing a blue coded ring. The photos by Shaun Ferguson were good enough

to read the code 'YL'. Of course, Blue YL will have moulted out her juvenile plumage completely last year and moulted again into a new adult set this autumn, so we can't wait to pay the area a visit and see if we can find her.

Here is a link to my Google Photo Album which highlights Blue YL's progress from a ball of baby fluff to full independence and adulthood: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/gTmmZz7pPts1fGiK7>

The Newbury BT resident pair, B69 & Mrs N, had four chicks this year and successfully reared them to fledging, albeit with two of them Maiden Flopping, creating several challenging situations for the crack rescue team headed by Rhoda Bashford. However, it all got even more complicated when Blue DC Dean was found injured with a trailing wing in one of the Newbury municipal parks. After a heroic team effort Dean was rescued and taken to the Andover Hawk Conservancy. Dean gradually recovered there but was sent to a falconer on the Isle of Wight for further flight training and eventual release. We believe that this has now happened and we await further updates and sightings of him.

We are delighted to confirm that our resident pair of Newbury Peregrines (Black 69 and Mrs N) now have one of their own juveniles living at the far eastern end of the former county of Berkshire, just a mile into neighbouring Surrey. Surrounded by the many reservoirs and gravel pits we imagine there is no shortage of available prey. Shaun says that there is actually a pair of Peregrines that perch on the pylons, so Blue YL might actually have a partner as well.

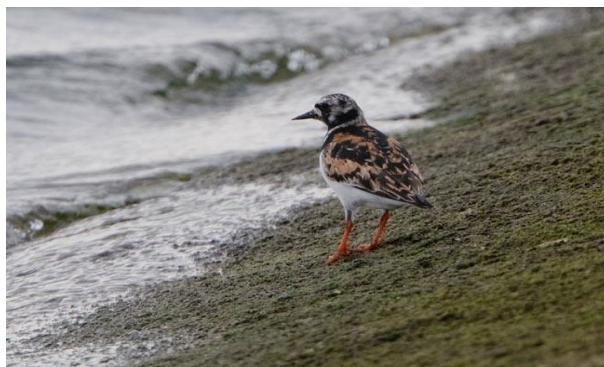
Of the 10 chicks that have managed to fledge from Newbury BT in the last three years, thanks to Jason Fathers, eight have now been colour-ringed. It is normal for colour-ringed juveniles to disappear off the radar for two or three years while they peregrinate away from their natal site to find suitable habitat in which to settle down and eventually to start breeding. Therefore, as time passes, we eagerly anticipate news of some of the other juveniles being spotted and reported back to us. It is wonderful to have created so much science just by the quick and simple act of fitting a uniquely coded colour ring.

Like Blue YL, we hope the other ringed juveniles will survive their vulnerable first year and get to adulthood and breeding maturity.

### **Queen Mother Reservoir Access Arrangements**

**Robert Godden**

Queen Mother Reservoir has for many years been one of the foremost birdwatching sites in Berkshire and, prior to the Covid pandemic, members of the Berkshire Ornithological Club in possession of a permit and a security code could visit for birdwatching. The lockdowns associated with Covid have affected access to Queen Mother Reservoir, and it seems that not all club members are aware of the current arrangements for visiting. Access is now by permit and a key, and, as the number of keys is limited, it is necessary to apply by returning a completed application form to the club's membership secretary (see <http://berksoc.org.uk/county-sites/qmr/>). The form calls for the applicant to name an existing key holder who can confirm that the applicant is a bona fide bird-watcher. The applicant must be prepared to make at least six visits per year to the reservoir.



### **The News Headlines (Links)**

**Iain Oldcorn**

Here are links to some snippets of news, ranging from the interesting through the seriously worrying, which have caught my eye recently:

- Read about some of the RSPB's work on helping species recover in their [Saving Nature 2021](#)

- If you don't get to see a migrant Siberian Rubythroat live in person try the [RSPB photos](#)
- EA Head signals desire to change law that provides [tough water testing regime](#)
- .... but why not dip into the [BTO ringing report](#)

## **News from the Secretary**

**Jane Campbell**

At the recent AGM two new committee members were appointed. We welcome Elaine Charlson and Anna Mortimer as elected officers with Sally Wearing replacing Robert Godden as Chair.

### **Executive Officers:**

Chair: Sally Wearing

Hon. Secretary: Jane Campbell

Hon. Treasurer: Edwin Bruce-Gardner

### **Elected Committee Members:**

Bob Lyle

Anna Mortimer

Elaine Charlson

Marek Walford

Andy Tomczynski

Robert Godden

## **Membership Matters**

**Iain Oldcorn**

At this time of year, I may be the least popular member of the club as I try to encourage supporters to give us their money! As you know, our financial year runs from 1<sup>st</sup> October to the following 30<sup>th</sup> September, Thus near the end of October, I emailed about 70 members who had not given us their usual 1<sup>st</sup> October donation. Unfortunately, this has only produced about 20 responses. So, if you are one of the 50 or so that didn't respond – please do so soon; hopefully to give us some money, but if not then please just let me know that you no longer wish to support our activities and we will stop bothering you. Thanks.

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 Renton Righelato, these losses included: Peter Spillet, Jean Nicholls and David Fuller. RIP.

## **Stop Press**

**Bob Lyle**

Here are some additional trips that BOC members are welcome to attend; please note that car parking charges apply at most of these sites. Please contact me ([lylesatbyles@greenbee.net](mailto:lylesatbyles@greenbee.net)) at least three days in advance if you intend to join us; also advise whether anyone under 18 will be attending.

Date	Destination	Meeting Details
Jan 16th	Blashford Lakes	Meet 09:30, Visitor Centre, Ellingham Drove, Ringwood, BH24 3PJ
Feb 6th	Titchfield Haven	Meet 09:30, Hillhead car park, Cliff Road, PO14 3JT
Feb 20th	Pagham/Selsey	Meet 09:45 RSPB visitor Centre, Selsey Road, Pagham, PO20 7HE
Mar 6th	Lepe/Calshot	Meet 09:45, Lepe CP Exbury, SO45 1AD
Mar 13th	Pennington Marshes	Meet 09:45, Lower Pennington Lane, SO41 8AJ
Mar 27th	Poole Harbour	Meet 09:45 Upton CP Poole Road, Upton BH17 7BJ
Apr 3rd	Weymouth/Portland	Meet 10:15 RSPB Lodmoor, Weymouth, DT3 6HS
Apr 24th	Rye Harbour	Meet 10:30 Harbour Car park, Harbour Road, TN31 7TY





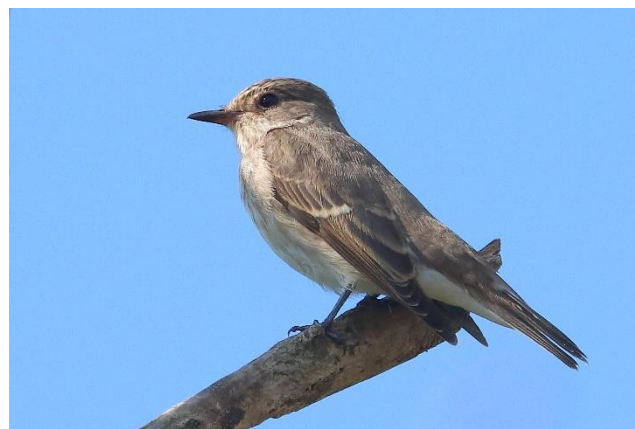
**Ruff: Queen Mother Reservoir, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sep**



**Dartford Warbler: Wishmoor Bottom, 17<sup>th</sup> Feb**



**Wheatear: Cold Harbour, Knowl Hill, 4<sup>th</sup> Sep**



**Spotted Flycatcher: Sonning Meadows, 27<sup>th</sup> Aug**



**Spoonbill: Lower Farm GP, 14<sup>th</sup> Sep**



**Arctic Tern: Black Swan Lake, Dinton Pastures CP, 7<sup>th</sup> Oct**

*(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 lastly, a message from your committee:  
Best Wishes for Christmas and the New Year.**