

Editorial

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Welcome to our 90th BOC Newsletter. Neil brings us news of progress on the government's review of the ELMS and of the LNP and LNRS; however, the longer-term future of Lower Farm GP is uncertain. Sean T reports on the latest news from the BTO; a new Birdsong Training course and the National Woodcock Survey. We have reports on a clutch of trips; (look out for our next Newsletter when Elaine "visits" Egypt). Our new President, Debby Reynolds, introduces herself; her background and why she is looking forward to contributing to our vision for local ornithology. There's a report from Peter Driver's recent initiative – "Berkshire Birding near Reading". There are a few words on membership before Jane brings us all the results of the latest BOC Photo-competition. Dr Mark Eaton introduced many of us to the RBBP in his talk on 1st Feb this year; in this important follow up he gives further insights to its work. Then you must find some Wandering Waders and finally, another selection of Andy's excellent photos!

Conservation Corner

Neil Bucknell

1 – Support for Newbury Peregrines

We are pleased to report that we have supported the efforts made to encourage Peregrines to continue to use their established nest site in Newbury. Members may have seen Ken White's reports about the pair on BerksBirds. We have provided £300 for work on the nest box and camera.

2 – Farmland Bird Matters

We have at last heard the outcome of the Government review of the Environmental Land Management Schemes, the new basis for agricultural grants in England. Originally there were going to be three core streams for funding: the first aimed at encouraging measures to restore fertility, air and water quality and on-farm measures to improve the rural environment (the Sustainable Farming Incentive – SFI); the second a "Local Nature Recovery" scheme, for which details were never published, but the indications were that funding would depend on showing positive outcomes for nature; and finally a large scale Landscape Recovery scheme – for schemes such as moorland restoration, marsh or peatland restoration over a long time scale.

The Local Nature Recovery stream will no longer proceed. Instead SFI will be expanded. It overlaps with the current Stewardship scheme, which will be enhanced. Farmers will be familiar with this, and with payments by reference to relatively straightforward criteria, such as the area of land managed in accordance with the scheme adopted, rather than referenced to measured wildlife benefits.

In anticipation of the new schemes, we experienced a much greater demand for farm surveys than we were able to meet. While I welcome new volunteers, it does now look like the demand may subside with the removal of any suggestion of the linking of payments to monitored outcomes.

As those who attended the AGM will know, the results of the surveys we carried out in 2019, 2021 and 2022 at Compton and West Ilsley have been written up and will be published in a future annual report. Hopefully our findings will help farmers and landowners select SFI schemes that help farmland birds.

3 – Local Nature Partnership (LNP) and Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

At last, we have some progress to report! A new board for the LNP has been appointed, and BOC will be represented. I have been appointed to represent local wildlife groups. A major task that the LNP

will be involved with is the formulation of a LNRS, to provide a framework for nature conservation in the county in the future. Hopefully there will be more to report soon.

4 – Lower Farm Gravel Pit

Finally, some breaking news. Some of you will be familiar with this site at Thatcham, where our colleagues at the Newbury District Ornithological Club have been maintaining a hide for many years. The future of the site had been a cause for concern for some years, as the owners had indicated that they wanted to sell.

It is recently reported that Newbury Racecourse has agreed to buy the site. The racecourse is next door, but as I write this it is unclear what their plans for the site are. We have offered our support to NDOC, and will report developments as they occur.

News from the BTO

Sean T Murphy

1 - Firstly a new BTO initiative: training to help with breeding bird surveys

As we head into Spring, those who participate in breeding bird surveys, whether for the BTO or other organisations, will be starting to make plans for their surveys. While these surveys are exciting, and provide a chance to combine bird watching with conservation efforts, they can be challenging as they require particular skills. The need to be able to identify common bird songs and calls is one skill that can take time to develop. Acquiring this skill can be a bit daunting, especially for those who are just starting to take-up these surveys. For bird songs and calls, there are of course, good internet (e.g. xeno-canto) or CD options; but for those who like personal training, this year, the BTO are offering a Songbird ID course. The course is led by BTO staff and, within a range of topics, will provide useful coverage of difficult groups such as warblers, pipits and chats. The course will also include training on how to use a smart phone in the field to help with sound-recording and on how to make your own sonograms. The sessions are online but will include interactive sessions with the trainers and thus provide an opportunity to ask questions. The course will be run in May over three sessions (each 100 minutes long), held on Wednesdays over a two-week period. There are several options on dates and on times of day for the course. For further details, and the fee, see: <http://www.bto.org/community/events/202305-songbird-id-3-sessions-wednesdays-10am>

2 – A brief update on the 2023 national woodcock survey.

The third full national woodcock survey is being run this year as mentioned in the last newsletter. From early this year, BTO made available random 1km survey 'priority' survey squares (squares that were included in the previous two national surveys in 2003 and 2013) in appropriate woodland habitat in all the BTO county regions in the UK. In Berkshire, we were allotted 27 but the response from volunteers was so great that we soon had more than 75% of the squares allocated! So, in response, BTO have added further squares for allocation and some of these have already been taken. Other counties have also had a good response but many thanks to all reading this who are participating in Berkshire; this really is a fantastic uptake of this really important survey. Do note that squares are still available, so if you are interested, please visit the BTO web site for this: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/woodcock-survey>. If you have any questions about the survey then either email the BTO National Coordinator David Norfolk (david.norfolk@bto.org), or myself (s.murphy@cabi.org).

Joint NDOC/BOC trip to Warsash. 31st October, 2022

Ray Reedman

Gray, Elaine and I joined others from BOC and NDOC for a joint trip, led by Bob Lyle, at this interesting site at the bottom end of Southampton Water. There were about ten of us in all.

As we set off southwards along the shore, the weather was superb - sunny and mild - a small window in a very wet autumn. The afternoon was to be a different matter.

There were plenty of House Sparrows in the bushes by the playing field, but we were more focused on the waders on the exposed mud: Black-tailed Godwit, Redshank, Turnstone and Ringed Plover, as well as

a Curlew and a dozen or so Brent Geese. More geese were feeding on a spit further out, along with a number of Oystercatcher. On another exposed bar there were several Great Black-backed Gull. A small roosting flock of Black-headed Gull contained several Herring Gull. As we reached the old concrete structure on the shore, I scanned Southampton Water, but found only one Great Crested Grebe, a few gulls and the odd Cormorant.

An alert from a local photographer drew our attention to a couple of corvids mobbing a falcon some way back. The bird eventually flew past us close enough for Elaine to get a record shot or two and confirm that it was a young Peregrine. The whole skirmish lasted for some time and was fascinating to watch, as it was clearly more like a romp than a fight.



The pools in the inland marsh held a few ducks, but of a great variety: Teal, Wigeon, Gadwall, Pintail, Shoveler and Shelduck were all represented, as well as a Little Grebe. A few Canada Geese were noted too. There were also two or three Little Egret in the marsh.



Eventually we pushed on to a point which Bob had quietly targeted – a boggy patch where a Glossy Ibis was feeding. It was quite close, but unfortunately a sheep fence was in the way. After the Fobney bird earlier this year, and the long-staying individual at Moor Green, this bird was not quite as exciting as it might have been, but they are still scarce enough to be special.

There was a good range of passerines along the marsh: I saw only one Skylark, but plenty of Stonechat, a flock of Greenfinch, a couple of Dartford Warbler, plus Starling, Crow and Jackdaw. An unseen Cetti's Warbler called several times. There may have been other finches and pipits too, but we were not always

able to identify them in brief views. As we came back there were good views of a Rock Pipit on a slipway.

The sky had clouded over by the time we took our picnic lunch at the car park. When we walked up the river Hamble footpath, the light was awful and viewing quite difficult. The tide was in and most birds had been pushed into the marsh and the shallows. We added to our wader list in particular, with good numbers of Dunlin, two Greenshank, several Golden Plover and some Grey Plover. There was also three roosting Heron, plus more Curlew, Ringed Plover and Rock Pipit. A Stock Dove and a juvenile Pied Wagtail were also noted.

Having spent my early life within sight of the North Sea, coasts and marshes are always my favourite sites. Warsash lived up to my expectations, with plenty of birds, a couple of 'specials' - and, of course, good company. Thanks, Bob, and to NDOC.

Rain set in as we returned to the cars. Gray had to cope with a torrent as we drove home, while I dozed in the back seat. What are pals for?

A 7.30a.m. start and a full car, on what promised to be a challenging day: what a good way to be off for some coastal birding! The forecast was for stiff winds, with moderate cloud and dry all day. Gray Burfoot was driving and leading and Elaine and Ralph were with us. We were to be joined at the coast by Paul Briggs and Doug, a friend from the W and B RSPB Local Group.

The advantage of being a small group was soon felt as we all fitted into a sheltered spot at the end of the wall at Selsey Bill. Sea viewing was a real challenge the moment anyone stepped out of the lee. The wind was gusting from the west and the waves reared a couple of metres or more high, with wing-jagged tops. Not easy, but promising! Surprisingly, Sandwich Tern obliged first and regularly. I can't get used to seeing them here in winter. It was some time before anyone got a glimpse of a passing Diver. Eventually we saw several Red-throated and just one distant and unidentified Auk (markings indistinguishable but wing-beats frantic). A passing Merganser was our only duck. The odd Cormorant raised our hopes of Great Northern, but we were out of luck. A couple of people picked up very distant Gannets, but large gulls often caused false alarms.

There is a limit to masochism, so the thought of warm cars eventually dominated and we repaired to the relative shelter of Church Norton. The calm of the enclosed churchyard produced very little, so we aimed next for the benches on the harbour shingle. Out of the wind it was not that chilly. With the tide well out, we watched an assortment of waders and other birds. There were Lapwing, Golden Plover, Knot, Dunlin, Grey Plover, Curlews Oystercatcher, some in large numbers, but only one Ringed Plover and not a single Godwit of either species. Teal was plentiful in the gullies and there were one or two Shelduck. Cormorant and Great Black Backed Gull were at roost and we found a small flock of nine Common Gull.

Such was the general scene as I started to scope up towards the North Wall, attracted by a flock of about 1000 Brent Geese on the wing. Suddenly the nearer sky was full of Lapwing and Golden Plover, a real raptor flush. I scanned the skies above and around them and could not spot the expected Peregrine; but I suddenly noticed a smaller brownish bird flashing like lightning through the top of the flock – a Merlin, and from its colour and apparent ineptitude, a young bird. It was too far off to see in detail, but was unmistakable in size and style. Soon the others were onto it, but then things calmed down for a while. The scene was re-run two or three times as the little raptor rested and tried again, so everyone had time to enjoy the interaction.

We next walked round to the shingle ridge to check the sea, realising as we did that wind was still very strong. Sea-watching seemed even harder there and our main targets, Slavonian Grebe, were so tiny in the walls of water. One or two were glimpsed by some of the group, while others spotted the odd Merganser, and some found a Grey Seal. It was impossible to see well in the dull grey light which now prevailed. With vibrating scopes and unable to hear each other, we soon retreated. I love sea-watching, but there is a limit!

After a snack, we drove up to check Ferry Pools and the creek. With all the recent rain, the pool was very full and there were relatively few birds - Teal, Shoveler, a couple of Tufted Duck and a couple of Little Grebe. Wigeon were grazing in the rough grass behind, a Heron stalked along a gully and a pair of Stonechat showed briefly. The creek had several Redshank and Moorhen, but nothing else.

We stopped on the way home at Emsworth, where a Spotted Redshank is almost guaranteed. Gray and I had seen one there before and we had been assured by several eminent Hampshire birders that it was there 'all the time, year after year'. This time it had left a Common Redshank on duty and gone to bed. When no-one else saw my Rock Pipit my day had gone really flat!

The final stop was at Warblington to seek out the Cattle Egret. We found two or three among a few Little Egret, but these all had to be spotted among a flock of several hundred large gulls. Under normal circumstances I would have been scouring the gulls for interest, but the light was going fast and, frankly, I was now too exhausted to bother.

It had been a great day out, thanks to Gray's planning and thanks to his generosity in doing the driving.

Seven people assembled at the Moor Green Lakes' car park and set off down the track to get a view of Colebrook Lake North. The lake was partially iced over and a good number of birds were concentrated in a free area on the north side of the lake. Most numerous were Wigeon, Gadwall, Shoveler and Tufted Duck, and a few Goosanders and Pochard were also present. In recent weeks Pintail and one, and sometimes two, female Ring-necked Ducks (the American counterpart of Tufted Duck) had paid sporadic visits to the lakes, but they could not be picked out on this occasion. Nearby a Siskin was attracted to the feeders.

After passing Colebrook Lake South, we turned right along the river to check the New Workings.

Little Grebes and Pochards were on Manor Lake while the gravel areas held large numbers of corvids. No one was in attendance at the distant Barn Owl nest-box. Jays squawked and a Treecreeper crept up tree trunks near the river.



Alongside Grove Lake, two Tawny Owls were in their regular roosting tree, well hidden in the ivy as usual; and a Kingfisher flew off from its perch by the hide. As we took the path around the north side of Horseshoe Lake, the flock of 18 Barnacle Geese were grazing in the paddock behind Grove Lake. Two cars had been left at the Horseshoe Lake car park to return us to the starting point, by which time we had amassed a total of 65 species.

6th February. Titchfield Haven**Ray Reedman**

This was an NDOC day, to which BOC had been invited. In the event, 24 people turned up, so to relieve pressure on the hides etc, we split into two groups, with Gray Burfoot taking the BOC contingent for a short session on Brownwich Cliff before visiting the interior of the site. We met the others back at the car park for lunch and shared notes. After a bit of sea-watching, we then visited the east side hides while they tackled the inner reserve.

To say the conditions were perfect is no exaggeration. Sea-viewing was clear for a long way out and the water flat. Many of the birds we found were Great Crested Grebe, as well as the odd Cormorant, but over the day there were regular views of Eider. Others species reported included: a small flock of Common Scoter; a single Slavonian Grebe; and a Great Northern Diver, this last quickly lost in the glitter on the water. There were a few Brent Geese from time to time, but our best views of those had been of a small flock grazing behind Brownwich Cliffs.

The shingle beach produced two small flocks of Sanderling, while the harbour had its usual contingent of Turnstone, Gadwall and Mallard.

From the various hides there were plenty of ducks, waders and gulls. Most of the gulls were Black-headed. There were a few Common Gull, but just odd representatives of Herring and Lesser Black-backed. Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler and Shelduck were fairly plentiful. A great crowd of Lapwing and Oystercatcher obscured just two Avocet, a handful of Black-tailed Godwit and a few Dunlin. A distant Raven was also reported by some as we identified a few raptors further up the valley.

Later in the day there were just two Curlew on the marshy grass at the inner end of the site near the Panhandle, where, from time to time one of two Marsh Harrier would sweep around on the lookout for the unwary among the many birds that sprang into the air at their approach. The presence of at least one Buzzard and one Kestrel kept things lively. We also watched a Fox stalk some wary Canada Geese from a sedge-rimmed gully. It was all fascinating but there were no big dramas.

As for the smaller birds, they were not that numerous: we saw a couple of Skylark behind the cliffs and two Stonechat on the marsh, but the star turn was the tiniest bird of the day. As we left Meadow Hide, a

Firecrest entertained us for several minutes as it foraged on bare branches of a willow. It was just too lively for my camera skills, but we all agreed that we all had the best possible views of that super little bird.

We made contact with NDOC to exchange notes before we left, and some of them joined us at the Bridge Street car park at Titchfield for Gray's 'guaranteed' Barn Owl. And there they were in a split oak just as they were last time we tried. One set off to hunt while we watched. Meanwhile in the nearby pool there were several beautiful Pintail. There was also a gathering of Pied Wagtail on fence structures, with many more feeding among a flock of goats on a nearby slope: it seemed to be a pre-roost gathering. A fly-by Buzzard and a Stock Dove were our last sightings there, but as we packed our gear a Green Woodpecker called just once and Song Thrush sang us out with a lazy, early-season song.

It was good to be part of another combined outing of this sort. It was also good to welcome along a newly-joined couple and to be out with so many old friends, including two who were back to activity after spells of bad health. A day like that is a dose of medicine in itself.

Thanks to Bob Lyle and his gang for their hospitality and thanks also to Gray, both for his chauffeuring and for his impromptu organisation of our part in the day.



BOC Day Trip to Isle of Sheppey with Robert Godden, 25 Feb 2023

John Froy

Five of us, car-sharing, made the drive to the Kent coast, where we were joined by Robert's sister and brother-in-law who live in Kent, to explore the Isle of Sheppey. A chilly northerly was blowing, but at least it was dry. First stop, Elmley National Nature Reserve (ex RSPB). The long drive out to the reserve car park taken slowly can be productive, and we saw a great number of **Lapwing**, choosing nest sites now, even beside the road (you're allowed to stop but not get out). A **Cetti's** was in full voice in the car park as we looked for owls. **Short-eared** were around but not seen today, nor was last week's **Long-eared** in the small wood by the toilet block.



Instead, we were rewarded with a fine **Little Owl** in a nearby ruined house, glaring out with its yellow eye. There were hares and **Stonechat** in the fields above the marsh.

Driving to Capel Fleet raptor viewing point, we were distracted by a **Red-legged Partridge** beside the road, and our car at least missed the ringtail **Hen Harrier** quartering the fields on the other side, offering great views! At the viewing point, a handy knoll with small car park (RSPB) over grazing fields and marshes, we saw **Marsh Harrier**, **Buzzard** and **Kestrel**; but no **Corn Bunting**.

Next to the far tip of Sheppey, Sheerness, a sandy beach of shells, which has a large wader roost at high tide. There was a diver in the choppy waters of the River Swale, which seemed to be a **Black-**

throated, but with no white flank patch visible became a **Great Northern**. We walked to the pill box for shelter from the wind and lunch, and had close views of plenty of small waders along the beach on the incoming tide: **Sanderling, Ringed Plover, Turnstone, Dunlin**, a few **Knot** and **Grey Plover**; several hundred **Oystercatcher** were on the flooding sand bar. We then walked out the other way along the sea wall, viewing **Bewick's Swan** (10) and five kinds of geese: Russian **White-fronted** (c80), **Dark-bellied Brent, Greylag, Canada** and **Egyptian**. The remote hide offered another welcome shelter from the wind, and a large number of **Curlew** (100), **Black-tailed Godwit, Golden Plover**, more geese, a **Great White Egret, Marsh Harrier** (4), and finally a male **Hen Harrier** to make up for the bird missed earlier!

We had an interesting and varied day out with 58 species seen in all.

(All photos © Karen Lynch.)



A Short Introduction to Your New President

Debby Reynolds

Last year, at the AGM, I was proud and flattered to be selected by the Committee to become the President of the BOC for a six-year term. Humbly accepting the role means following in the footsteps of some remarkable people. It has been my privilege to know five former Presidents (Eric Watson, Robert Gillmor, Andy Swash, Neil Bucknell and Renton Righelato) since joining the Club as a member back in the late 70s. It seems we six have come to the role from varied professional, ornithological and personal backgrounds and this short note is to give you some insight into mine. Or at least a short summary of the parts most relevant to the BOC.



At the moment I am in my last year as a Board Member, Trustee and Member of the Finance and Risk Committee of the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). The appointment began in 2014 at the height of austerity when it was a major challenge to keep the BTO afloat financially. There was a need to modernize the governance and diversify sources of funding. My experience as a recently retired senior civil servant and member of several other high-performing Boards was deployed to champion significant transformation in the organization. This has been very enjoyable, highly successful and the next strategy launch, due in May 2023, will see a confident BTO that is an important leader in ornithology and devoted to be even more impactful and inclusive. And I really hope that their recent survey of Bird Clubs will lead to closer relations between them and the BTO.

Over recent years my association with the NGO and Charity sectors has also included chairing the Natural Environment Panel of the National Trust. The work was focused on landscape scale conservation and habitat creation; something we still need to see much more of to enable birds to thrive in the UK.

But, you ask, what did I do for work? After qualifying as a veterinary surgeon at Bristol University, and a few months in practice, I completed a PhD on coronaviruses (which has been handy as an adviser in the pandemic). Then followed assignments in: diagnostic pathology, based in Coley Park Reading: animal disease control policy (including TB, rabies, salmonella, Foot and Mouth disease); meat hygiene; and food safety - all based in London. This experience culminated in my being appointed Chief Veterinary Officer

for the UK and Director General for Animal Health in Defra, which was a management board position. There were plenty of challenging ornithological events, especially related to highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 sweeping west out of China. I had to mastermind responses to influenza infection in quarantine birds in 2005 and the Whooper Swan at Cellardyke in Scotland in 2006. This involved successfully introducing professional ornithologists to the animal health teams, with modeling to include wild bird populations and flyways, for the first time. The biggest ornithological thrill of my professional career was when the EU ban on trade in wild caught captive birds was agreed as a consequence and came into effect in July 2007. Sixteen years later the current epidemic still poses a huge threat to wild bird populations.

And then you may ask what about birding? My natural history interest began young at the Abbey School in Reading, blossomed at University, then ROC and NDOC became very influential when I moved back to Newbury. Foreign travels and world lists took over for decades. This included working in former Soviet countries and the USA for 11 years, accumulating a bird list for Georgia that nearly exceeds mine for the UK. My current challenge, a really tough one, is to learn and improve in bird photography.

The President role in the BOC seems quite flexible. My own initial vision is to champion local ornithology, following on from Renton’s legacy, to support the Committee’s work and be present when needed.

Padworth Lane Gravel Pits: Local BOC Bird Walk 25-3-2023 **Jackie Leslie**

We met at the Butt Inn, as the sun came out. Led by Peter Driver we headed towards the canal, stopping to enjoy the flitting Greenfinches before turning right along Mill Lane. The Padworth Lane Gravel Pits are sandwiched between the river Kennet (south), and the Kennet and Avon Canal (north) with Mill Lane and Padworth Lane either side.



Mill Lane, lined with tall trees coming into bud, was fresh from the recent rain and alive with calls from: Great Tit, Blue Tit, Chiffchaff, Jackdaw, Crow and others. The fourteen strong group paused to watch a Mistle Thrush hop rapidly across a paddock, this was followed by the sighting of a Song Thrush. Further along, following its call, we spotted a Nuthatch, before leaving the trees to follow the edge of the “flooded wood” - a gravel pit with trees where more Chiffchaff were singing loudly.



We rounded the first pit and found the fast-flowing muddy coloured Kennet on our right, its ripples sparkling in the sun. Beyond it, the field sloped to Padworth House and College, large and cream coloured; the older manor house was altered in the Georgian and Victorian times.

On our left was the Padworth Lane Gravel Pit, where extraction stopped in 2010. It is owned by the Canal and River Trust and managed in partnership with BOC to protect habitat for ground-nesting birds including waders. Looking across its waters we could see a variety of duck including: "Tufties", Shoveler, Teal, Gadwall and Mallard, plus Great Crested and Little Grebe and on the far shore Canada and Greylag geese; but if the recently sighted Redshank and Goosander were there, we missed them. This was not helped by an intruder we spotted paddling around in the gravel pit on an inflatable, whose presence had probably sent many of the birds to feed elsewhere. However, we did see 40 species on our walk.

We left the lake walking down Padworth Lane towards the canal swing bridge. On our right were the impressive floods beside the twisting river Kennet. On the flooded fields we saw Little Egret and Mute Swan, and the beautiful tumbling displays of flashing white and black underwings of Lapwing.



Several small groups of Redwing flew overhead, and we took turns to peer down Peter's scope at a small flock of Fieldfare perched in the tops of a nearby tree. We then moved on to the canal where we saw a Treecreeper.

Crossing the swing bridge we made our way back along the towpath to Aldermaston Wharf, with a halt to search for an elusive Blackcap, whose song we heard in or beyond the hedge. We passed the newly re-opened canal side tearooms and the adjoining waterways museum. Returning to the road, we moved on for a drink at the Butt Inn (who had allowed us to use their car park).

For the full map see: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/media/original/39864-aldermaston-wharf.pdf> and, or see the BOC entry <http://berksoc.org.uk/county-sites/padworth-lane-gp/>

Membership Matters **Iain Oldcorn**

My harrying of members that have not supported us financially this season has produced about 30 responses. So, if you are one of the 20 or so that still haven't responded then this is likely to be your last Newsletter and we will shortly be removing your name from our membership records.

In recently months we were very sorry to learn of the passing of several long-standing members and ex-members and passed condolences onto their families: Les Blundell and Dot Lincoln.

BOC 2023 Photographic Competition **Jane Campbell**

This year We were treated to many wonderful images at the recent photographic competition. The portrait category was won by Ian Silvester with his Rufous Treepie (1) and the runner-up was Sue Truby's Gannet (2). Dave Rimes won the Flight and Action category with his Shoveler (3); a Blue-footed Booby (4) by Judith Clark was runner up.

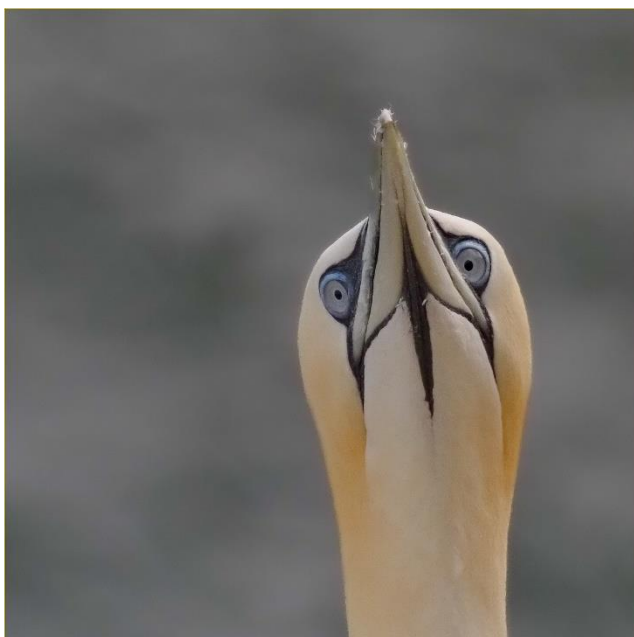
A fabulous Tawny Owl (6) by Dave Rimes was the winner in the 'Birds in Berkshire' category. This image was the audience's favourite and so took the Gordon Langsbury Memorial Trophy while Mike Smith's Black-necked Grebe (5) was runner up.

Johana Simonova's Burrowing Owls (7) won the 'Newcomer' award for the best photograph from someone not previously placed.

(*Ed:* Johana is a member of Reading University who only joined the BOC in February this year! All photos Copyright - © - of their photographers.)



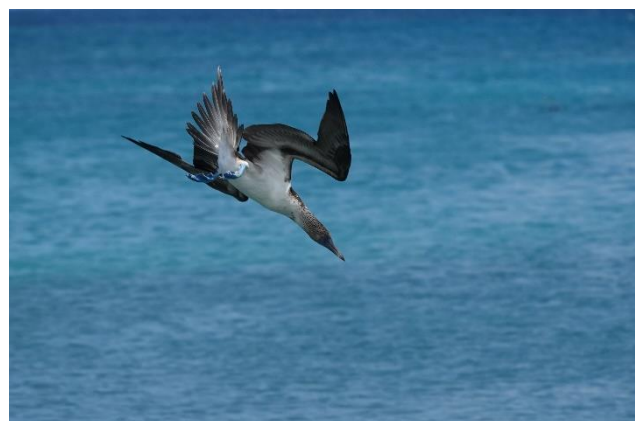
(1) Rufous Treepie – Ian Silvester



(2) Gannet – Sue Truby



(3) Shoveler – Dave Rimes



(4) Blue-footed Booby – Judith Clark



(5) Black-necked Grebe – Mike Smith

(6) Tawny Owl – Dave Rimes



(7) Burrowing Owls – Johana Simonova



The Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) is an independent organisation dedicated to the recording of rare breeding birds in the UK. We seek to encourage responsible interest in finding, recording and reporting rare breeding species to enable us to monitor their populations and inform conservation action to help them. We maintain a secure archive of data dating back over five decades, and use this data to produce annual reports (published in the journal *British Birds*) and provide data for bone fide research and conservation purposes: in 50 years of existence there has never been an incident of accidental or inappropriate release of data from our archive, an important fact to ensure that those submitting data can trust us with it!

The RBBP's data is essential in tracking the trends in rare breeding birds, informing their categorisation on the *Birds of Conservation Concern* Red, Amber and Green lists and thus enabling conservation resources to be effectively prioritised to the species which most need them. Our updates enable the effectiveness of conservation action to be assessed, and can direct the action itself. For example, RBBP data have been crucial in the designation of important breeding locations as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and then the subsequent monitoring to check whether such sites are being managed correctly.

The Panel itself is a small group of experts who guide the work of a part-time professional Secretary (me - Secretary@rbbp.org.uk). Most of the Panel are independent members with a wide range of expertise on rare breeding birds, but three represent the interests of the Panel's funders, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC, who act of behalf of the statutory conservation bodies for the UK's four countries), the RSPB, and the BTO. More details on the Panel, how we work, and our outputs (including our annual reports dating back to 1973) are available at www.rbbp.org.uk.

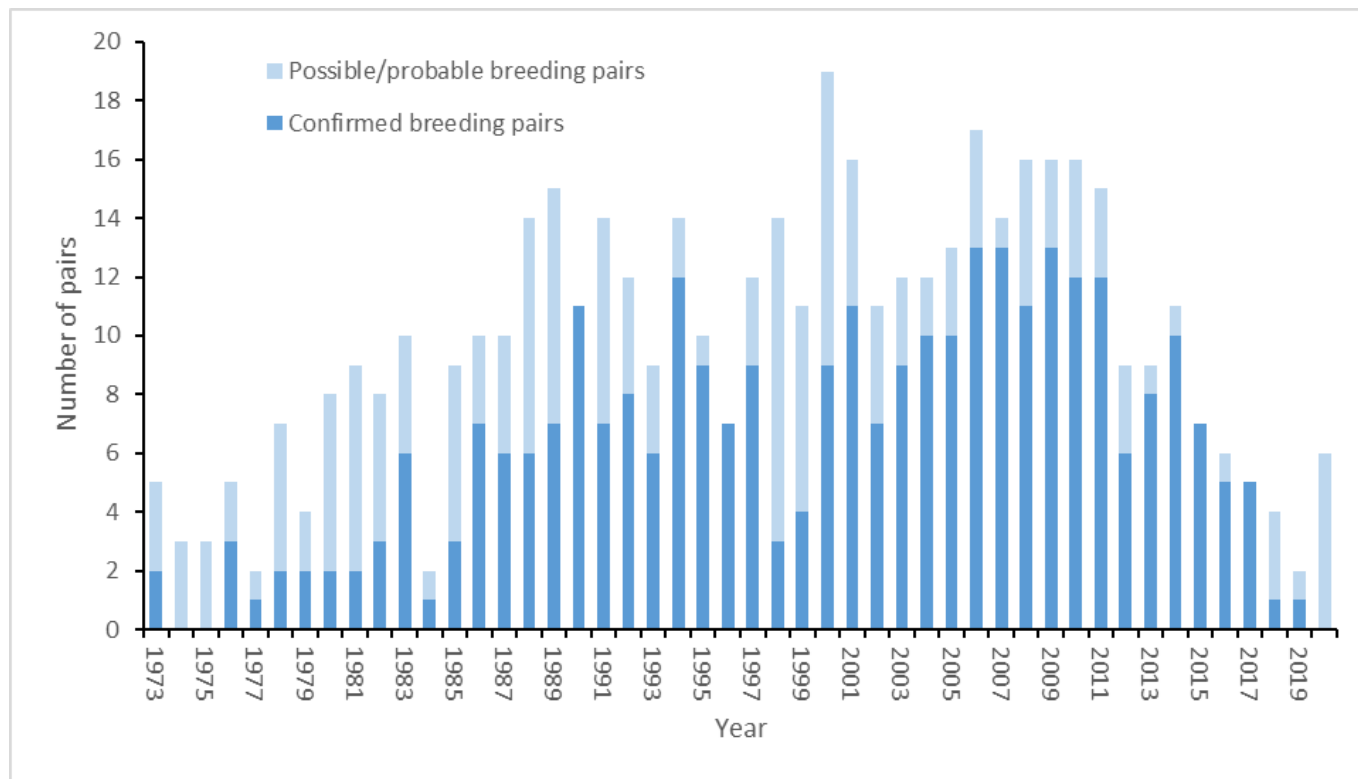
We define a "rare breeding bird" as any species with a population consistently lower than 2,000 pairs in the UK. That threshold is relatively high, meaning that quite a number of the species we monitor might be regarded as "scarce" species rather than genuinely rare – for example Little Egret, Peregrine, Avocet and Shoveler. At the other end of the spectrum are the real rarities – species that only occasionally breed in the UK, such as Bluethroat and Bee-eater, and a considerable list of species that have never bred, but have shown breeding behaviour such as singing and establishing territories, sometimes thousands of miles from their natural ranges. We collect data on these species – after all, it is possible that they could turn out to be the next colonising species to follow the likes of Cetti's Warbler, Little Egret and, more recently, Great White Egret and Cattle Egret.

In all we have reported on 180 naturally occurring species or races of rare breeding birds since 1973, but only about 80 of these might be considered regularly occurring breeders, and in a normal year our reports feature a total between 90 and 100 species. Some species have left our list over the years as their populations have increased – such as Red Kite, Firecrest and the aforementioned Cetti's Warbler. Unfortunately, other species have become rare breeding birds due to population declines – Turtle Dove being a recent example. The full list of species covered by our work can be reached [here](#). Note that as well as native species, the RBBP also collates data on rare non-native species such as Indian Peafowl and Black Swans.

The RBBP does not run surveys or employ fieldworkers to record the species we monitor. Rather, we work by collating the data collected by others, which reaches us by a variety of routes. The most important source of data on rare breeding birds is the records collated by the county bird recording network. Every year county bird recorders, or assistants helping them, make a submission of rare breeding bird data to the RBBP. This provides about 70% of the 6,500 unique records we receive every year (adding up to about 25,000 pairs of rare breeding birds in total). To these submissions – from a network which covers the entirety of the UK as well as the isle of Man and the Channel Islands – we add data received from other sources. These include data from RSPB reserves and species conservation projects, from the BTO/JNCC ringing and nest recording schemes, from raptor study groups and other specialist groups, and from submissions to the statutory conservation agencies made as a condition of disturbance licences (e.g. for photographic purposes).

About 85-90% of the data we receive comes from volunteers, and most of this from the activities of birdwatchers, finding rare breeding birds and submitting data. Hence this article – to encourage you to help with this valuable effort (and if you’re already helping, to do more!).

An example of RBBP reporting, showing the numbers of Montagu’s Harrier breeding in the UK – 2020 was the first year without confirmed breeding since the 1970s – this species is on the brink of extinction in the UK.



While our existing network provides an incredible wealth of information on the UK’s rare breeding birds, there are of course many gaps in our recording, with birds going undetected (or, sadly, detected but unreported). The list of rare breeding birds to have been reported from Berkshire in the last five years is given below – could you help by submitting records of any of these species? In some cases the existing reporting is highly likely to cover all records of a species, but there are some such as Hobby and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker for which it is very likely breeding pairs are being missed. Please keep an eye and ear out for these species in suitable breeding habitat during the breeding season. Even better, why not add interest to your birdwatching by making special efforts to find them?

Black Redstart

Dartford Warbler

Garganey

Goshawk

Hobby

Honey-buzzard

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

Little Egret

Little Ringed Plover

Long-eared Owl

Mediterranean Gull

Peregrine

Pochard

Quail

Shoveler

Stone-curlew

Turtle Dove

Wigeon

Woodlark

In addition, we would encourage birdwatchers venturing elsewhere in the breeding season to make sure any relevant records are submitted to the correct local bird recorder. One easy way of doing so is to use the BTO-run BirdTrack online portal – any record submitted to the system is automatically made available to the relevant recorder to include in their annual RBBP submission. We are particularly keen to receive records from those lucky enough to be taking spring or summer holidays in northern and western areas of the UK, especially Scotland. Remote upland and mountainous areas have some wonderful rare breeding birds from divers to eagles and, unsurprisingly given the sparse human population, birdwatching effort is low – so records from visiting birders can be really valuable.

The Long-eared Owl is an elusive and under-recorded species – is it possible there are undiscovered pairs in Berkshire? (Photo © Mark Eaton).



Whether finding Little Ringed Plover in Berkshire, or Snow Bunting on a remote Scottish mountaintop, the important thing is to ensure that records are submitted, and that those records contain all the information we need. Crucial information includes precise location details, dates, counts, ages and sexes of birds involved (for example, was there a pair?) and any breeding evidence observed – was there a singing male, were birds courting, was a nest found or adults seen carrying food, were fledged birds seen? But even if there was just a single bird seen, in breeding habitat, this is a record worth submitting.

I should remind you, of course, that the interests of the birds themselves should always come first! This means ensuring that any efforts to find and record details of breeding attempts by rare birds do not unduly disturb the birds themselves. Many of the species we cover are listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside act (1981) which means that intentional or reckless disturbance of such breeding birds can be a criminal offence – read more [here](#). Given the risk of disturbance of sensitive breeding species, observers lucky enough to find them should give careful consideration to how and with whom they share details. Yes, you should absolutely ensure that the record is submitted to the relevant county recorder (Marek Walford in Berkshire), but please give due consideration before sharing details with other birders, and particularly before putting details out on social media. Further RBBP advice on this can be reached [here](#).



Mediterranean Gull – possibly the next species to leave the RBBP list, as numbers have risen rapidly and exceeded 2,000 for the first time in 2018. (Photo © Jack Bucknall).

Finally, as you may have already worked out from references above, 2023 sees the RBBP celebrating our 50th anniversary. To mark the occasion there will be website developments, papers on our work in the journals *British Birds* and *British Wildlife*, and we held an online conference on a wide range of issues around rare breeding birds in March. You can watch all of the talks from the conference on our [YouTube channel](#). You can help us celebrate by contributing to our work – so please, get out there and get looking for rare breeding birds!

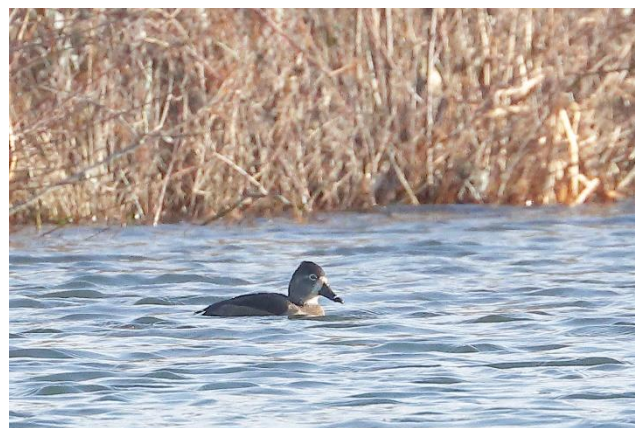
Wandering Waders? **Iain Oldcorn**

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

Find 16 Waders hidden in the grid. Each of their names runs in an unbroken straight line, up/down, forwards/backwards or diagonally. Punctuation is ignored. You would consider yourself to be very fortunate if all of these Waders appeared in your local patch! Don't give up when you have found all 16 as you haven't finished! There should now be 20 cells that you have not used – rearrange the 20 letters in them to anagram the names of three more Waders (of 5,7 and 8 letters). (The numbers and letters round the edges of the grid are just to help supply the answers in our next Newsletter.)



Glossy Ibis: Moor Green Lake; 27Oct2022



Ring-necked Duck: Moor Green Lake; 15Jan2023



Gt White Egret: Hosehill LNR; 14Nov2022



Cattle Egret: Chapel Green; 28Jan2023



Blackcap: Reading, RG4; 16Dec2022



Pink Footed Goose: Home Farm; 4Feb2023

(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.)

(Ed. A lot of Owallys around in this edition! Groan.)

**And lastly, a message from your committee:
We hope that you are enjoying the Easter break and looking forward to the Coronation.**