

Editorial

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Welcome to our 91st BOC Newsletter. Neil brings us news of progress (or not!) 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. SeanT brings us the latest news from the BTO and its new Strategy. Not to be outdone Sally introduces our new BOC Strategy. We have reports of three and a half trips to local Berkshire patches; before I apologise for a missing wader. As promised in the last Newsletter, Elaine "visits" Egypt. Jane finds an interesting meeting report in our archives and she has some quality optical equipment for sale. There are a few words on membership, before Sue shares some snippets about her new season of indoor meetings that start on Oct 18th. Jane makes another appeal for copies of our early Annual Reports; and finally, another selection of Andy's excellent photos!

Conservation Corner

Neil Bucknell

1 – Sites issues

Padworth Lane Gravel Pit – the momentum that seemed to be building up late last year in moving forward with the restoration works at this site has apparently dissipated. The Canal and Rivers Trust (owners) report no recent communication from West Berks Council (planning authority) regarding the restoration plan and little from Harleyford, the mineral company that is responsible for implementing it. We have been told that Padworth Parish Council are likely to make a small grant towards surveys and planning.

Lower Farm – NDOC have recently been in contact with Newbury Racecourse, who hope to acquire the site. They have indicated that they are happy for NDOC to continue current management of the site for the time being, but would not support any formal designation of the site as a reserve.

Jubilee River – we are reaching out to contacts at the Environment Agency to find out whether anything can be done about the deterioration of the Dorney Wetlands area, where willow scrub has encroached into the wet meadow area that was created as part of the Jubilee River scheme.

Henley Road GP – although in Oxfordshire, an important site for birds on our borders. A planning application to continue unauthorised water-borne recreation was rejected by South Oxfordshire Council, but an appeal has been lodged. Fraser Cottington has made representations against this.

2 – Farm Surveys

We have just completed breeding season farmland bird surveys on the Sulham and Englefield estates. The former is to help establish a baseline for improvements under a proposal to use part of the estate as a biodiversity net gain site, the latter a repeat of surveys carried out in 2013.

We have also been approached by the owners of Billingbear Farm, Shurlock Row for advice on offsetting measures in connection with a solar farm project. The owners have expressed an interest in surveys on the remainder of the farm, being farmed on a low-intensity regime, as part of their plans to enhance its wildlife value.

3 – Species Report

Peregrines – Patrick Crowley reports that breeding success for Peregrines in Berkshire this year is well down on last year. However, on the plus side, at least eight pairs have been present on 'territory' in Berkshire. Pairs have bred successfully at two sites but others, including the well-monitored pair in central Newbury, have failed for a variety of reasons.

Curlews – Sadly also a disappointing year, with birds present regularly at just one site this year, compared to three sites when we started monitoring back in 2019.

4 – Local Policy matters

A new Local Nature Recovery Strategy is likely to be put in place during the coming 12-18 months by the six local unitary authorities in order to meet their obligations under new regulations introduced by the Government earlier this year. Windsor and Maidenhead Council has been appointed the lead authority to co-ordinate the preparation of Berkshire's strategy. We hope to contribute towards this process via our involvement in the Local Nature Partnership.

The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty authority is also preparing its own Nature Recovery Plan. We have provided input regarding target species and some of the issues that need be addressed.

5 – Conservation Fund

A reminder to members that we have a fund from which we make grants towards local bird-related conservation projects. We have just approved a grant to Lavell's Wetland Trust of £720 towards protective fencing for newly-planted reeds at Lea Farm, but we would welcome more applications for other local projects. Please contact me on conservation@berksoc.org.uk.

6 – Swift Boxes

We still have four left available for anyone wanting to put them up to attract Swifts and provide much-needed nesting sites. We normally ask for a contribution of £25 to the Conservation Fund. Please contact me on conservation@berksoc.org.uk.

News from the BTO

Sean T Murphy

You may be aware that this year has been a special one for BTO as it celebrated its 90th year (1933-2023) on Saturday 1st July at the BTO Headquarters at Thetford where Staff met with members and other supporters. The day included a series of presentations together with exhibits covering BTO's vital conservation work and the science behind it. In case you were unable to attend, a full account of the day is given on the BTO web site at: [Celebrating BTO's 90th birthday](#)

This year, BTO launched its new strategy, for 2023 – 2030, that details how BTO will contribute to the major challenges that need to be addressed in a world of rapid biodiversity loss, climate issues and other major changes that are affecting the health of the natural world. The strategy retains the three cornerstones of BTO's philosophy – Birds, Science and People – but a central thread of the new strategy strongly emphasises the central importance of its supporters, without whom BTO could not do its vital work on helping driving positive change for birds and people. There are six exciting, ambitious and achievable strategic concepts; read more about the strategy at: [Our Strategy - BTO Strategy 2023–30](#)

Those who take part in two of the main BTO core bird surveys, the Breeding Bird Survey and the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS), will know that the recording season for this year drew to a close at the end of June. The same applied to the 10 year repeat of the National Woodcock Survey that took place this year. So, if you did take part in any of these, many thanks for all your efforts to collect data; I know that some had to put extra effort in to gain access permission for some of the woodcock sites. Now we are at an end, please enter any outstanding data as soon as possible as the checking and validation of records will begin in August.

Sadly, the grave situation of avian influenza continues with now serious impacts on Black-headed Gulls and Common Terns across the country. If you see what looks likely to be a case of a bird that has succumbed to the disease, please report either on the BirdTrack app (if you use that) or to Defra. However, do keep safe if you find a dead bird by not touching it or allowing a dog (if you own one) to pick it up. For further details see: [Avian influenza mortality rises in threatened gull and tern colonies](#)

Finally, news of a new BTO survey for those interested in gulls. The Winter Gull Survey (WinGS) has the aim of providing new population estimates for the principal species that winter in the UK. The survey is planned to run over the next two winters (23/24 and 24/25) and involves co-ordinated visits to key roost sites and additional visits to sample squares inland. Details of the survey are still being finalised so updates will be provided in the next newsletter.

BOC Strategy Statement

Sally Wearing

With this newsletter, we have sent you a copy of the Club's new strategy statement. We want to know what you think of it. Plus, we want to hear your ideas about what else we could do to make it work in practice.

In 2022, the BOC Committee recognised that we needed to refocus our efforts on the aims of the BOC as detailed in our constitution, namely: to educate people about the birds in Berkshire and to promote the conservation of birds and their habitats.

As part of this initiative, we have developed our strategy statement. It sets out our 'vision' – we want to help birdlife in Berkshire by helping improve habitats and bird populations, and engaging more people.

We are now issuing it to all members for consultation. The next stage will be to develop a long-term plan to help us achieve our aims. So, as well as telling us what you think about the plan, we want you to suggest what we could include in our plan. We are already doing many things but we want to make sure we are prioritising our efforts sensibly.

Please send your comments and suggestions to Sally Wearing at chair@berksoc.org.uk. We look forward to hearing from you!

Fobney Island Walk; 15th May 2023

Carl Flint

Seven intrepid birders assembled at 09:00am on Saturday 13th May at the Fobney Island car park just off the A33 in Reading, on a grey but dry morning, with a cold lazy wind from the north east.



Peter Driver had mentioned earlier that wellies would be required due to the heavy rainfall over the last two weeks. He was right, for in places there was water too deep for most pairs of walking boots! By about 10:00am, I got another clothing layer out of my rucksack and soon afterwards got the flask of coffee out. I heard another couple near me say, 'we should have brought a flask with us too!'

As for the birding, we had a great morning - with 40 species recognised. Amongst the highlights, once the grey cloud had broken up, would be: Cetti's, Garden, Reed and Sedge Warblers, Reed Bunting, Gadwall, Sand Martin and Swift.

We had a very exciting moment half way through our walk as in a dead tree, it would appear there was a Tawny Owl, asleep in a hollowed-out hole in the trunk. The tree was a bit too far away to identify clearly with binoculars, whether it was a Little or Tawny Owl. Peter got his telescope on the trunk and confirmed it was nothing more than a trick of the light in the hole! Sighs of disappointment inevitably gave way to strong laughter!

Having had a great walk around the marshes, and Fobney Island reserve, we came back to the cars at midday and looked forward to the next outing.



Ufton Nernet; June 2023

By our Roding Correspondent

Church Plantation, Ufton Nernet, is known as a reliable site to see Nightjar and Woodcock at close quarters. Meeting on the 7th at 8.40pm, well-doused with insect repellent, our group of four members spent the first hour or so walking a slow circuit of this smallish parcel of managed woodland, part of the Englefield Estate, while we waited for the main attraction. A pair of Bullfinches was the highlight of the pre-sunset birds but, as they were flying away from us along a narrow path, some were unable to see them. Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler were singing well. As sunset approached, our wait for the 'headliners' was punctuated by a Sparrowhawk fly-by and the distant croak of a Raven.

A roding Woodcock, conducting an airborne patrol of its territory gave itself away with its high-pitched squeak. Probably the same bird made a few more fly-overs during the next half hour or so, giving everyone a chance to see them, but none were as close as we had hoped.

After sunset the Nightjars remained resolutely silent apart from an occasional 'cuick' call. Then from 9.50pm they treated us to an aerial display of their erratic flight, coming just over our heads on numerous passes. At least three birds were seen but we were struck by the absence of churring. The weather had been fine all day and so the sky was very clear and light; we concluded this was the reason for their slow start. Finally, at 10.10pm the churring began and our group was satisfied that the undoubted stars of the evening had given a most memorable performance.



We totted up 18 bird species during the evening, as well as several Pipistrelle and possibly other bat species.

On 10th June, five of us gathered for a very warm morning walk on Roundoak Piece, Ufton Nernet. This is a popular spot for local birders especially on spring evenings when they can reliably add Nightjar and Woodcock to their year-lists. However, daytime birding in woodland can be more challenging. The deciduous trees along the plantation's edges were in full leaf and most of the pines are mature and very tall making it difficult to spot the small passerines high in the canopy. The morning became an exercise in birdsong recognition with: Chiffchaff, Robin, Coal Tit, Wren, Chaffinch, Dunnock, Goldcrest, Treecreeper and Great Spotted Woodpecker all identified by sound. A Goldcrest made an obliging appearance low down in a silver birch, affording good views for the whole group. Most of us caught sight of a Hobby flying over the wood.

We then crossed the road into Hampshire to visit 50 Acre Piece, a former gravel extraction site. We were treated to views of Whitethroat and Garden Warbler. A family group of larks were eventually identified by call as Woodlark before some much closer views removed all doubt. A Raven flew overhead and joined another Raven on the ground 300 metres away. Two more arrived and settled in a dead tree. As we departed, all four birds were soaring together in circles above the site.

We had started the walk expecting to find perhaps a dozen species, so we were pleased with a final tally of 29. As we parted everyone was looking forward to the next trip.

BOC Field Meeting: Compton Down to Roden Down, and Return

Andy Tomczynski

On 14th June 2023, ten members joined me on this walk, along the Ridgeway on a warm cloudless evening. We set off from the high point at the top of the Churn Road track heading off east towards Roden Down with the usual expectation of seeing some good birds. Nothing was guaranteed, of course. The previous day I had walked a short distance from my car towards the barn down the hill, and most unexpectedly saw a Stone Curlew flying down the track, land and walk towards the barn, at nine o'clock in the morning! Most unexpected for this crepuscular bird. I also heard a juvenile calling and located it just peeping out from a crop by the track. So perhaps that was a good sign.



(Two photos: Berkshire Downs © Andy Tomczynski)

On our walk, we heard and saw the usual common downland birds such as Whitethroat, Linnet, Chaffinch, Skylark, Yellowhammer and Corn Bunting. Fly-over birds included Swift and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. The only raptors seen were Red Kite and Buzzard. At dusk we had really good views of two Barn Owls hunting, one settling on a post not far from us. Whilst scanning the fields from Roden Down we picked out a pair of Stonechats near Roden Farm, and two Grey Partridge in the same locality. Unfortunately, try as we could, we could not find any Stone Curlew but only heard them calling from the Oxfordshire side of the Ridgeway. However, one of our group, who had left us before dusk, heard and saw two Stone Curlews fly across the track in front of him very near to where we had parked the cars! That's life!

As we stood by the Ridgeway, an Electric Range Rover glided its way around the field we were scanning and stopped by us. The driver, who was the owner of Roden Farm, was inquisitive as to what a group of people with telescopes and binoculars were up to looking in the direction of his house? We explained of course, and had an interesting conversation. He had recently bought the farm house (and adjacent land), which had been completely restored into an elegant manor house from its previous dilapidated state. He informed us that he was intending to create a wildflower meadow, on the field we were standing by, which had been left fallow for the past few years. As he glided off, we stood around for a while in the hope of a Long-eared Owl, but only heard Tawny Owl calling.

So, all in all, not the most productive evening, but an enjoyable walk nevertheless. My Bird Track app informed me that we had seen or heard 30 species. Eleven days later I stood on the same spot where we had scanned from, on Roden Down, and located three Stone Curlew in the distance on a plot just south west of Roden Farm.

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	L	K
C	A	A	N	R	N	L	A	T	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

If you found 16 Waders hidden in the grid then very well done indeed. Unfortunately, my mind was wandering as I only put 15 in the grid! I also fowled 😊 up two letters in the grid; square B9 should have been "L" and square C8 should have been "T" (as in the corrected grid above)! I'm very sorry.

Here's the solution; in no particular order:

1	E1-J1	Plover
2	B1-K10	Sanderling
3	G2-L7	Avocet
4	L6-H10	Snipe
5	A2-I10	Turnstone
6	E9-L2	Whimbrel
7	F2-B6	Stint
8	A9-I1	Phalarope
9	K10-B10	Greenshank
10	A7-A2	Godwit
11	D1-L9	Sandpiper
12	F9-B5	Curlew
13	L5-I2	Ruff
14	I3-B10	Redshank
15	L4-G9	Dunlin

The final 20 letters can be rearranged to make: **Stilt, Lapwing and Dotterel.**

Serendipitously, Andy has provided photos of some of these in the "Gallery" on the last page!

Another Different Take with "Fowling in the Marshes"

Elaine Charlson

The 18th dynasty tomb chapel of Nebamun is famous for its scenes of idealised everyday life in ancient Egypt. Several fragments of the paintings are displayed in a specially designed gallery opened at the British Museum in 2009. Much of the iconography is shared by tomb chapels of that era, and scenes of fishing and fowling in the marshes of the delta region are a common subject.

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/galleries/egyptian-life-and-death>

In this fragment (see photo) Nebamun is shown on a papyrus skiff, using a 'throwstick' to hunt birds, in the company of his wife, Hatshepsut, and young daughter. This scene is of particular interest because of its vivid portrayal of wildlife, much of which may be identified to species level. Notice that scale was not important, with the goose being shown only slightly larger than the wagtail, and the passerines appearing enormous compared to the waterfowl.

The birds which have been identified are:

- Egrets: (Cattle Egret, Little Egret). Nebamun holds three Egrets either for use as decoys, or birds that he has just caught. It is usually not possible to identify the exact species of egret in Egyptian art because of the different bill, leg and feet colourations which change throughout the year
- Juvenile African Finfoot: an underwater specialist



- Pied Wagtail: Extremely rare in Egyptian art. Here there is some deviation from the living bird (no black throat or facial markings). Only one other example is known (Dyn. V mataba of Ti at Saqqara)
- Egyptian Goose: This is possibly being used as a decoy. It may also have symbolic significance here, perhaps of an erotic nature (a goose was often used metaphorically in love poetry to portray the lover taken in the snares of the woman he is attracted to) or because they were sacred to Amun. Egyptian Geese are reputed to be bad tempered, pugnacious, and need plenty of space. "You are worse than the Egyptian Goose of the riverbank, that abounds in mischief. It spends the summer destroying the dates, and the winter destroying the seed-grain. It spends the balance of the year pursuing the cultivators. It does not let seed be thrown to the ground before it has got wind of it. It cannot be caught by snaring, nor is it offered up at the temple, that evil bird of piercing sight that does no work". (Papyrus Lancing, BM 9994)
- Pintail: The most frequently represented species of waterfowl in Egyptian art and hieroglyphs. They are easily tamed and seen as extremely desirable for the table, but there is no evidence that the ancient Egyptians bred them in captivity. They could also have subtle erotic associations
- Bittern or Little Bittern: Routinely appear in Egyptian art from the 5th dynasty onwards.

See also what birds you can identify in the hieroglyphs surrounding the image.

Other wildlife includes two Tilapia, Puffer Fish, a possible Mullet and Plain Tiger butterflies, also known as African Queen and African Monarch.

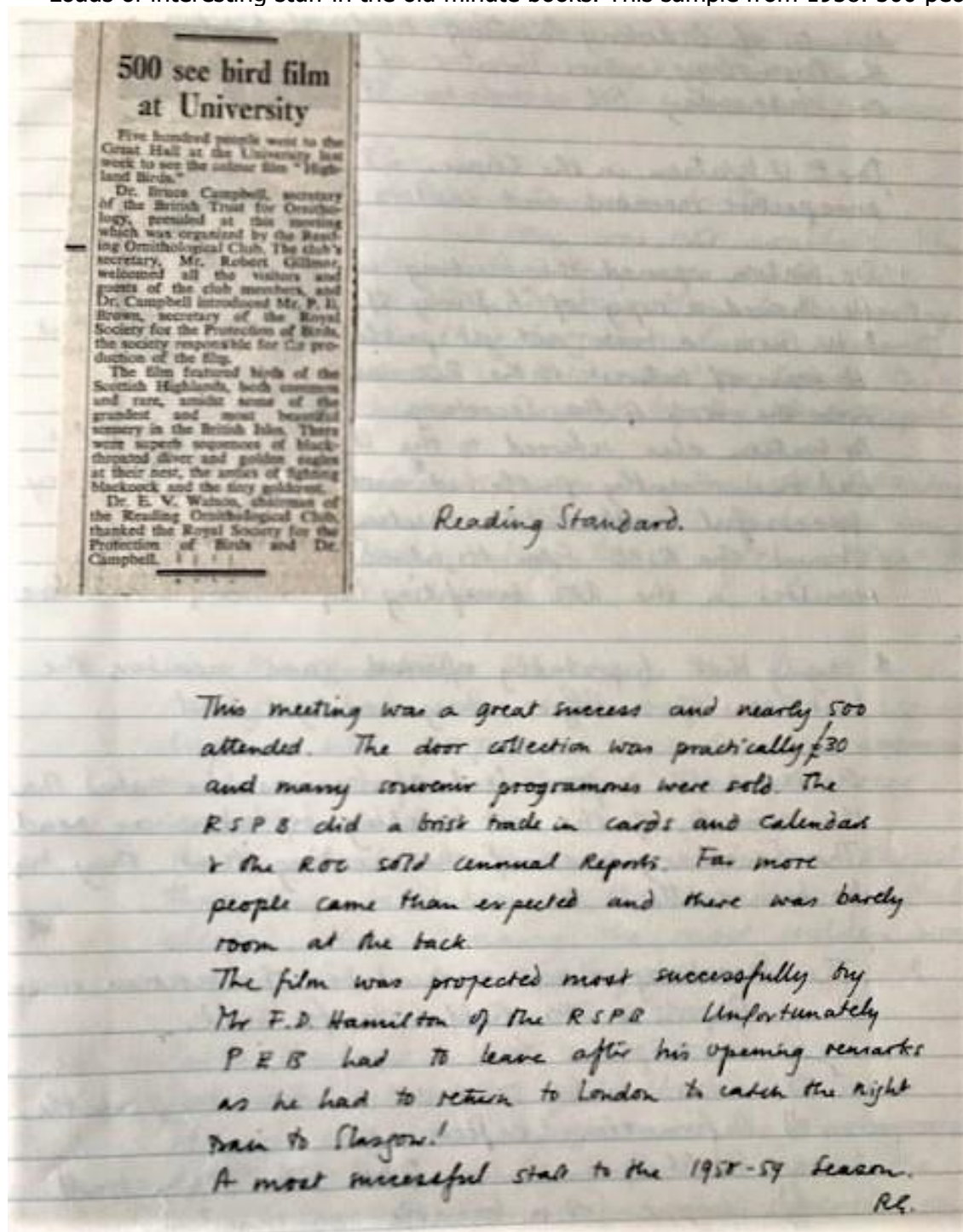
References:

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- Between Heaven and Earth: Birds in Ancient Egypt, Oriental Institute Museum Publications 35, 2012
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- Bailleul-Lesuer, Rozenn F., The exploitation of Live Avian Resources in Ancient Egypt, 2016

From our Archives: How Interesting

Jane Campbell

Loads of interesting stuff in the old minute books. This sample from 1958. 500 people!



(Ed. Apology if the clipping is difficult to read.)

The Club is fortunate to have been donated some optical equipment; the original owners hoped that the Club could raise funds by their sale to members. If you are interested, please email your offer to berksocsecretary@gmail.com

There are two items that are available, either together or separately, as follows:

TRIPOD;

- Velbron CX-540, three section legs, crank-operated central pole, three-way PH-656 panhead with quick-release mounting system,
Spec: 152 cm maximum height, 61 cm long when folded, weighs 1.5 kg.,
Appears to be in good working order. Carrying strap included.

TRIPOD and SCOPE;

- Opticron HR66 GA telescope, with tripod and waterproof cover.



If interested, you will be able to inspect the equipment at our October indoor meetings (if still available!).

We have had four new members join us since the start of May this year; bringing up our total membership to 275 active members. Many of you will recognise that this means that we are still losing a few members each year. Elsewhere in this Newsletter, and from material supplied in parallel, you will learn from Sally Wearing about our new BOC Strategy; can you play a part in it by helping us extend our membership? On average our members have been with us for 15 years - so we must be doing something right. If you enjoy your membership of the BOC, why not encourage your family and friends to join you and us by becoming members?

Details about joining can be found on our website: <http://berksoc.org.uk/about/club-membership/>

2023/24 Indoor Meetings "Heads Up"**Sue Charnley**

Our new season of wonderful talks restarts on Wednesday, October 18th, and we are looking forward to welcoming you back to the Palmer Building to listen to their broad ranging themes.

Steve Watson and Richard Sale are travelling from Gloucestershire to visit us and will be delivering a fabulous talk to open the season – a 'Peregrine Monograph' and they are promising to unleash some 'great video footage on us'!

The club has very much missed having members in person - some of our speakers travel from quite a distance and it must be disappointing to find only around 10 people in the room to greet them.

Do note that in future all our meetings will now be starting at 7.30pm and ending at 9.30pm, so we should be getting home earlier.

One or two of the meetings will be delivered by Zoom (one speaker is based in Canada!), this will be made clear in the meeting-reminder email that you will receive shortly before each meeting is due to take place. I probably should also say that the meetings will be available to attend on the day via Zoom.

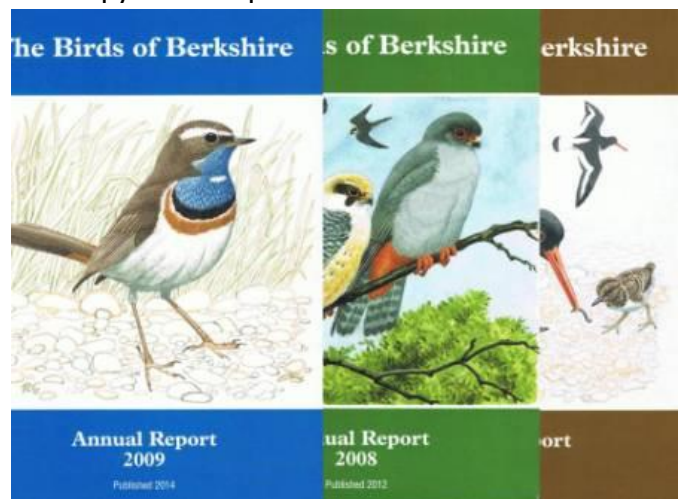
We will also still have free refreshments provided by me, so please do come in person and support your club!

Annual Reports – Appeal for Archives and Stock**Jane Campbell**

We recently appealed to members asking for help to complete our archive of annual reports. Many thanks to all who responded as we now have at least one copy of most publications.

In addition to our archive, we hold stock of old reports that are sold to raise funds for the Club. There are many Robert Gillmor enthusiasts who collect his work and a substantial amount has been raised by selling copies to them. Additionally, if members want to complete their set of reports let me know what you need.

A few gaps remain - can you help by donating reports from **1947 up to and including the joint report of 1996/1997**? If so, then please email me at: secretary@berksoc.org.uk.





Hawfinch: Aldermaston; 24Feb2023



Black-necked Grebe: Lower Farm; 22Mar2023



Goosander: Ufton Nervet; 3Mar2023



Turnstone: QMR; 9Apr2023



Wheatear: Wishmoor Bottom; 15Mar2023



Bar-tailed Godwit: Moor Green Lake; 21Apr2023

(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:
We hope that you are enjoying the summer break and looking forward to next season.**