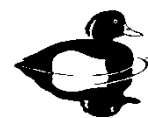


Berkshire Ornithological Club



2024-25 Report of Chair and Officers to BOC AGM

1. Chair's Report

Firstly, I apologise for not being able to attend the AGM. I am grateful that our President is able to present this report on my behalf.

This was my third year as Chair and therefore my last. It was an honour to be elected Chair of our Club. As usual, there has been more to do than time available. Although I am standing down as chair, I will continue my work as the Managing Editor of our reports, as well as being involved in running our hybrid meetings and other issues.

We have had two major changes on the committee in the last year. As well as being Publicity Officer, Peter Driver has taken over the task of organising the outdoor programme from Robert Godden. We are very grateful for this. And Iain Oldcorn, our longstanding Membership Secretary, decided to stand down. We owe him many thanks for having carried out this vital role successfully for the last 13 years. We are delighted that Angela Gunn has agreed to take the role on and we welcome her to the Committee.

We are always looking for volunteers to help run the Club; we have a range of tasks that need doing, so any help is welcome, from a few hours to taking on a specific role.

2. Membership

Overall membership numbers have continued to slowly reduce. We have seen minor cost savings as the number of members who do not provide an email address has declined.

The continued, and increasing, use by members of the costly and fragile CAF Donate route for their annual membership payments is becoming unsustainable. We are looking into a replacement for CAF donate.

The simplification and consolidation of the handling of all aspects of our permits to visit Queen Mother Reservoir and liaison with Thames Water have been useful. Peter Newbound is our QMR Officer, managing the whole process.

The change in Membership Secretary gives us the opportunity to introduce new ideas and technology to this BOC administration role. For the 2025-6 membership year, we are moving our membership database to a service called Membermojo. A single form can be used by both new members and those renewing. The service has the advantage of being a single central database which will allow members to log in and update their contact details when necessary.

We have decided to give free membership to anyone under 25.

3. Programme

The Indoor Programme

We have had another good season of talks, travelling from Norfolk to Southern Ecuador and from Peregrine Falcons to Tree Sparrows. We were grateful to Colin Wilson for standing in at very short notice when Professor Tim Birkhead pulled out of his Great Auk talk in March.

We used a new location at the University, room G44 in Edith Morley, when Palmer 109 was not available, which afforded a different atmosphere but was comfortable and 'friendly'! It was particularly well suited to the Christmas Social.

Attendances from members continued to slowly rise and are almost back to pre-Covid numbers. Zoom is well-used and more students are showing interest in some of the talks. We have had quite a few new faces in the room and several of those people have become members.

Sue Charnley, our Indoor Programme Secretary, continued to provide ever popular refreshments of juice and biscuits. She also provided a wonderful seasonal spread for the Christmas Social.

The Outdoor Programme

The outdoor programme has run successfully over the last year, with a full programme of trips to birding sites in Berkshire and further afield. We are grateful to all the organisers for leading some very good visits and giving our members some excellent birding experiences. Thanks are due to Gray Burfoot, Debby Reynolds, Robert Godden, Brian Bennett, Andy Tomczynski, Elaine Charlson, Chris Ezard, Bob Lyle and Peter Driver for their contributions to the 2024-25 and current programmes. Grateful thanks are due to Robert Godden for taking overall responsibility for the outdoor programme in recent years. Robert has now passed that baton to Peter Driver, who took over the role in the summer.

Bob Lyle continued his joint NDOC/BOC Monday trips, fortnightly from September to April. These daytrips have explored a range of sites, mostly along the south coast. Highlights included Glossy Ibises at Titchfield Haven, Whimbrel and Bar-tailed Godwit at Pagham Harbour, Slavonian Grebe and Little Stint at Pennington, and Razorbill, Guillemot and Kittiwake at Portland Bill.

Peter Driver has continued the monthly Saturday morning 'Intro to Berkshire birding' walks. Highlights included finding a Marsh Harrier at Padworth Lane floods, wonderful views of a Goshawk at Inkpen and three Otters playing in the Kennet at Padworth Lane GP.

Popular features in the programme included: the January coach trip to Slimbridge, shared with Bracknell and Wokingham RSPB group; the early morning birdsong walk in May led by Brian Bennett; the minibus trip to Global Bird Fair at Rutland Water; and the evening walk on the Downs in June led by Andy Tomczynski. We are pleased to say that all of these will be repeated in the current programme.

Following the very successful residential trip to Somerset in February 2025, Robert Godden agreed to lead another residential this month, with a weekend birding on the North Norfolk coast.

Our day trips continue to be free of charge and open to all, as part of the Club's educational charitable object. They usually attract between eight and sixteen attendees, with several new members joining during the year.

4. Publicity

The Club's activities are promoted through our website and social media outlets. Indoor and outdoor meetings are featured in regular mailings from our Membership Secretary. The talks programme is also advertised through the Reading Arts and Culture website *WhatsOnReading*.

Elaine Charlson has been a great help with poster design this year.

In January 2025, a few Committee members staffed the BOC stand at the inaugural Wild Tilehurst Nature Fair. We met many visitors, distributed membership leaflets and sold several BOC publications. We have decided to take part again next year, on 10th January 2026. It would be good to see members from the Tilehurst area at this lively event, showcasing a wide range of local nature and conservation bodies.

On August 2nd, we gave BOC's new gazebo its first outing at Earley Green Fair. The stand received a steady flow of interested visitors, with several publication sales and at least one new member joining the Club.

Peter Driver has been a guest on BBC Radio Berkshire a few times this year, talking about what the club does, inviting people along to our events and discussing what birds to look out for at particular times of year.

In addition to the website, BOC has an online presence on Facebook, Instagram and Bluesky. Keeping the sites active has led to an increase in followers since the last AGM. Our Facebook group now has 639 members (up by 97), Instagram 323 followers (up by 41) and Bluesky 514 followers in the first year.

Members who use social media are reminded to tag BOC in any of their bird-related posts, using hashtag #berksbirds for local sightings so we can share and repost where appropriate.

We also publicise the club's activities through the popular Berkshire Birds Facebook group.

5. Editorial Board

The 2020 report was published and distributed at the start of the year. It was the last one to have one of Robert Gillmor's artworks on the front cover. Robert produced the linocut of Tufted Ducks when he was 18, for the 1954 report. We felt it was a fitting last cover.

We are currently checking the 2021 publisher's draft. Martin Hallam, a local artist who had previously provided artworks for inside some of our reports, has kindly prepared a suitable painting for this report.

Robert Godden, the scientific editor, has made good progress with the species accounts for the 2022 report. We plan to publish the 2022 and 2023 reports jointly, as has often been done in the past.

Andy Tomczynski, the photographic editor, is keen to receive more photos of birds taken in Berkshire that may be suitable for future reports. As well of pictures of rare and scarce birds recorded during the year, we also want good quality photos of common species to show the wide diversity of birds in the county. We want to encourage more photographers to contribute their photos – please send your suitable photos from 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025, to Andy or Robert.

6. Conservation Sub-committee

During the year we continued to engage with the process of formulating a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Berkshire, participating in working groups producing a list of priority species and of priority conservation measures, mapping the latter where appropriate. The strategy was adopted by the six Berkshire local authorities to fulfil their obligations under the Environment Act 2021, and it was launched publicly at the Newbury Show in September. It can now be found on the Windsor and Maidenhead Council website. It is a substantial document in three parts. The Club's contribution is acknowledged, both as participant in the process and in providing sources of information, notably Renton Righelato's publication *Berkshire's Birdscapes*.

The Padworth Lane project has made disappointing progress. We have been waiting all year for a new restoration plan from the mineral company that extracted the gravel on the site, but it still has not been produced. These will then need to be approved by the owner, the Canal & Rivers Trust, and the local council. In the meantime, the site continues to deteriorate. Ken Moore found a local farmer willing to do work on the site, and there has now been a helpful suggestion by the CRT that the Club makes an interim partnership arrangement with them to enable some works on site. This is being progressed.

Little progress has been made with a possible new scheme for a small wetland at Streatley, although we have been successful in ensuring that the site has been fenced securely from a newly laid out footpath with dog-proof fencing by West Berkshire Council.

We have completed a third round of farm surveys for the Sulham Estate, helping them to establish baseline information in connection with wilding and biodiversity net gain projects on the estate and to monitor the effect of the creation of a new wetland by the railway just outside Pangbourne. Unfortunately, the very dry summer has not helped this site. Our contribution was acknowledged at a volunteers' event held in October. Thanks to Andrew Taylor for his help in this.

Patrick Crowley has continued co-ordinating efforts to monitor Peregrine breeding sites and liaison with their owners. Two grants have been made from the Conservation Fund towards these efforts, one for a monitoring camera at Newbury, the other to fund a new box ready for use at the next site where it appears that a box is needed to encourage breeding.

We also made a grant to Lavell's Wetland Trust from the Conservation Fund, for the provision of a tern raft at Lea Farm Lake. Although we are still safeguarding funds in the hope that the Padworth Lane project will proceed, please remember that we do have funds available for small grants so please contact Neil Bucknell, the Chair of the Conservation Sub-committee if you have a suitable project seeking support. We have not had an application since March, so we would very much welcome one soon!

7. Thanks

I have only been able to fulfil my role as Chair with the help and support of our committee. Many thanks to all the committee members for their hard work and contributions over the last year. Unfortunately, both Elaine Charlson and Robert Godden have come to the end of their three year terms as Ordinary Committee members. Many thanks to both of them for all their work.

Helping run the Club is rewarding work. Not everyone has the time to volunteer, but please do consider putting yourself forward. Your Club needs you!

Sally Wearing

Chair

November 2025