

BRITISH TRUST FOR ORNITHOLOGY

REGIONAL NETWORK COMMITTEE

32nd Meeting: Monday 24 September 2012, 09:30 – 12:45
at The British Trust for Ornithology, The Nunnery, Thetford

Present: Dr R J Harris (Chairman) (Council), Mr E M Ab Owain, Mr K F Betton (Council), Mr M F Brown, Dr H M Crabtree, Lt Col R C Dickey (Council), Mr P Overton, Mr C Robinson, Mr R P S Wolsey. Also attending: Mr G F Appleton, Dr D I Evans, Prof R J Fuller (items 9, 10, 11), Mr K Jones, Mr J Marchant (items 9, 10), Dr D G Noble (items 9, 10, 11), Ms K Risely, Ms N A Read (minuting secretary).

MINUTES

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Alan Heavisides, Hugh Insley and Andy Clements. Since the last meeting, Mandy Cook (Development Co-ordinator, Scotland) has left BTO employment.

The Chairman welcomed Kate Risely (national BBS Organiser) to the meeting. KR attended in place of Nick Moran (national BirdTrack Organiser).

2. CONFIDENTIALITY

Committee members were reminded of the need for confidentiality on all items marked with an asterisk, and that asterisks could be added or removed during the meeting if the Committee deemed items to be confidential. Items 5d, 8a and 8b were deemed confidential at the time of compiling the agenda. An asterisk was added to item 4d during the course of the meeting.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING (RNC:FEB12:MIN)

Minutes of the February 2012 meeting were circulated previously. Action points have either been delivered, are in-hand to the agreed timetable, or will be discussed at today's meeting.

4. MATTERS ARISING

a. Volunteer Magazine was produced

Committee members felt that the name of the publication was too general and therefore was not immediately recognisable as a BTO publication. Graham Appleton (Director of Communications) explained that staff involved had been unable to improve on the working title of *Volunteer*. RNC suggested that the name might be changed to '*BTO Volunteer*' and that the logo should be made larger and moved to the same line as the title.

b. Web developments in relation to the Regional Network

William Skellorn, BTO Website Manager, has the production of customisable regional pages for the Regional Network in his current workplan, and Ieuan Evans (Head of Membership & Volunteer Engagement) agreed that these would be available by the end of the year. IE was unclear as to exactly what the webpages would comprise, but advised that RRs would have the ability to log-in and write / update their own pages.

GFA explained that 'MY BTO' would be revamped and improved, and set up to allow Cookies to feed in relevant local information. This would be a bigger, lengthier project and would not be available in the near future.

c. New RR for Staffordshire

Scott Petrek is now in post as RR for Staffordshire.

d*. Feedback from Shetland about national BBS

Confidential

e. Data

Data collected through BirdTrack was used in guiding the design of the new Winter Thrushes Survey.

f. Training courses for nest recorders

Dave Leech (Senior Research Ecologist) is reluctant for the Nest Record Scheme to invest heavily in expanding the training course programme for nest recorders because they are not effective at producing recorders. However, the current programme of courses is well attended and feedback is positive; if funding became available courses could be delivered more widely across the country.

Training is now under the remit of RNC and, from the next meeting, will be a standing item on the agenda.

5. OVERVIEW OF REGIONAL NETWORK (RNC:SEP12:1)

a. Gaps in the Regional Network

There are currently 13 regions without an RR (as outlined in paper RNC:SEP12:1). IE raised the following key points:

- Essex (North-East). An application is pending. IE has no concerns with the application and will make it available to RNC members who wish to see it.
- Skye. An application has been received.
- Devon. Stella Bevan is currently acting RR for Devon. IE would contact her to officially offer her the position.
- Yorkshire. KR has received an email from a BBS volunteer in Yorkshire (South-West) who has expressed an interest in becoming the BBS organiser for the region. It was noted that he does not wish to take on the RR role for the region.

b. Appointment of new RRs

- Lanark, Renfrew & Dunbarton. Andy Winnington's application has been approved by RNC since the last reporting period in February 2012.
- Avon. Gordon Youdale has agreed to succeed Richard Bland, and has appointed David Stoddard as ARR.

c. Regional Conference Programme (RNC:SEP12:2)

The list of conferences was noted.

IE said that there had been a good contribution from RRs this year, and RRs should feel free to arrange conferences in their regions in 2013 if they wished.

Gaps in the 2013 programme will be filled. IE will meet with survey organisers during the next few weeks to determine where the gaps are in terms of survey coverage, and will aim to arrange a conference in these regions next spring.

The Chairman advised that the conference in Liverpool will be co-supported by Merseyside Ringing Group.

d*. RRs causing concern (RNC:SEP12:3)

Confidential

6. REPORTS FROM SCOTLAND, NORTHERN IRELAND AND WALES (RNC:SEP12:4)

Comprehensive country reports were provided in paper RNC:SEP12:4. Shane Wolsey (Northern Ireland Officer) and Kelvin Jones (Development Co-ordinator, Wales) each gave a brief verbal summary of their report. The points in the BTO Scotland paper were noted and the Chairman said that generally there were few concerns relating to Scotland. He added that Mandy Cook's departure would be a loss to BTO Scotland.

7. PLANS FOR MEETINGS OF REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

a. Draft Agenda (RNC:SEP12:5)

Paper RNC:SEP12:5 outlined the draft agenda for the Regional Network meeting in Carlisle on 3 November. There are several matters that need to be fed back to RRs, i.e. survey success, information on training courses, developments etc., but discussion would be a two-way process.

It was suggested that the agenda was a little thin (nothing after 3pm) and needed additional items.

It was pointed out that there is an emphasis on recruiting new members; this matter should be supported by holding a brief discussion about retaining existing volunteers. It was generally felt that it would be useful to hold a 20 minute discussion group on how to retain volunteers. It was suggested that it would be useful to document the ways in which RRs could engage with their volunteers in an attempt to retain their momentum and enthusiasm (a few examples were given), and circulate this annually to RRs.

It was suggested that the item on Winter Thrushes should be split into two separate items; the first a presentation on the survey, and the second a discussion session. RRs would see that adequate time had been set aside for discussion.

KR advised that 'workshop' was probably not the correct word to describe the BBS item. This would focus more on training and discussion about proposed changes to the survey in 2014. KR would demonstrate how to use the new online developments, explaining how to use the mapping system and allocating squares on-line. Computers would be set up so that RRs could familiarise themselves with the system during the event.

b. Long Service Award

Jerry Lewis (Gwent) and Chris Dee (Herts) would be presented with the award in November at the WOS conference and Regional Network meeting respectively.

8. FEEDBACK FROM COUNCIL

The Chairman reported on three key items that were relevant to RNC:

- a) Gary Conway is the new Head of Fundraising.
- b) Four members of Council (including the Chairman) currently sit on RNC. There have been difficulties in appointing people who have skills appropriate to both Council and RNC, and this has restricted the expertise on Council. At the last meeting, Council agreed that one fewer Council member would sit on RNC (i.e. three, including the Chairman). This gives Council the option to appoint someone with a different skill-set for Council without having to factor in who would fit with RNC.
- c) In Bob Harris's absence, Keith Betton would attend the October Council meeting as *acting* Chairman and report on matters from today's RNC meeting.

a*. Medalists for 2012 (RNC:SEP12:6)

Confidential

b*. New members of RNC

Confidential.

9. THOUGHTS ON CHATS, NIGHTINGALES AND THRUSHES SURVEY

a. Wales Chat Survey

David Noble (Principal Ecologist - Monitoring) gave a brief overview.

280 squares were allocated but 89 were not completed due to poor weather conditions.

Software was tested before the survey went live which enabled the IS team to correct a few problems with the system. The majority of surveyors liked the online system. Two issues to update for next year are: (a) enable the option of registering family or group parties; (b) enable the recording of negative visits.

Gaps in survey coverage were the same as those for BBS. Squares where Chats were unlikely to be found were not taken up.

The survey will continue in Wales in 2013. A full UK survey will be run in 2014 if funding is secured.

b. Nightingale Survey

Rob Fuller (Director of Science – Ecological Change Group) gave a brief overview.

64% of priority tetrad data has been input. Further data are still to be received at BTO. In some counties coverage was good, but in others there were serious gaps, particularly in Essex which was one of the four main counties in the range. It would be essential to fill these gaps next year in order to obtain details on population estimates and compare the gross differences between years. A sample of 50-100 tetrads, spread across the core range, would be repeated in 2013.

The survey had very precise methods covering four weekend periods. Unfortunately, spring 2012 was atypical and over two of those weekends weather conditions were poor. Arrival of birds was delayed as a consequence (particularly females); many birds arrived two weeks later than normal.

c. Winter Thrushes Survey

John Marchant (Projects Co-ordinator) gave a brief overview.

The Winter Thrushes survey is a two-part survey:

- Winter Walks – participants can choose a square and enter counts via the website. This operates independently of the Regional Network.
- Core Squares – 2,000 randomly selected squares. RRs match volunteers to core squares. This part of the survey will give a snapshot of thrushes' distribution, their diet, and population estimates.

The survey, which was launched on 12 September, will provide information on a particular period in mid-winter. 1,130 squares have been registered which is encouraging. The survey has started very well and it would be necessary to keep up momentum and continue the publicity.

Problems raised with the online element have mostly been dealt with, well in time for arrival of the main throng of Winter Thrushes.

A YouTube clip will be produced demonstrating the rudimentary aspects of mapping.

Guidance will be given on how to produce a printable map.

10. SURVEYS AFTER THE ATLAS (RNC:SEP12:7)

A report on BTO's longer-term survey programme can be found in paper RNC:SEP12:7. It was noted that many of the proposed surveys are funding-dependent.

Woodcock Survey

David Noble gave a brief overview.

Funding has been secured to run a Woodcock survey in May–June 2013 and will be a repeat of the 2003 survey. As last time, this will be a joint survey with the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (the funders). Counts of roding males would be undertaken on stratified random sites, plus a random selection of sites. Surveyors would stand on a point and count the number of roding Woodcock on each of four visits (one as a recce). There will be approximately 2,000 selected squares (800 of which were covered in 2003). It would be valuable for the same set of squares as in 2003 to be surveyed to assess population changes. The 2003 survey did not cover Northern Ireland due to our limited mapping at the time, but the practicalities of including Northern Ireland this time would be looked into.

The 2013 survey would differ slightly to the 2003 survey; habitat recording would be simplified, fewer visits in remote areas, and there would be an online element.

It was noted that the level of coverage in 2003 was lower in Scotland and Wales than in England.

11. REPORT ON PROGRESS OF CURRENT SURVEYS (RNC:SEP12:8)

Progress was reported in paper RNC:SEP12:8. KR highlighted some key points:

- Atlas. Work on the publication is going well, albeit to a very tight timetable.
- BirdTrack. BirdTrack now accepts dragonfly records. Long-term plans are to add other species, including mammals, to this model. BTO is currently working in partnership with the British Dragonfly Society on their atlas.
 - The new BirdTrack App is very popular and discussions are taking place about extending this to smartphones and tablets (BTO does not currently have in-house expertise for developing this for iPhone).
- BBS. The BBS Steering Group has approved the proposal for the collection of detectability data. This optional element is likely to be introduced in 2014. Between now and 2014, KR will discuss this with RRs to obtain their views and thoughts, and discuss training, etc. KR will be talking about this at the Regional Network meeting on 3 November.
 - Good feedback was received on the presentation and content of the BBS report.
 - Ten training courses are planned.
 - BBS participants might be offered the opportunity to do online hearing tests. KR explained that there has been much discussion on the radio and in *British Birds* about hearing, and a hearing-aid company is interested in working with BTO on this.
- Heronries. Online records are accepted in various formats, although the preference is to receive the information on the official cards as this gives fuller details of the visit.
 - Funding is being sought to develop an online element. The Chairman suggested mailing members a brief, as someone may have expertise to develop this module in a short space of time. KR replied that BTO is happy to look for expertise for the development of Apps, but surveys are very modular and need to fit with other survey designs. Moreover, BTO survey data should be held in a single definitive database. BTO wants to build up in-house expertise, and IS staff need to be able to understand the programming used. GFA advised that Senior Management discuss issues relating to surveys and are aware of the problems and of customer expectations.

12. DISCUSSION ON 'WORKING WITH BTO VOLUNTEERS' (RNC:SEP12:9)

IE explained that the 'Working with BTO Volunteers' document is to be used as best practice guidelines, giving tips and advice, and would be most useful to new RRs. The document would also be made available to any volunteers who wished to see it.

The Chairman added that BTO is a leading organisation in terms of deploying large numbers of volunteers. He suggested changing the title to 'Working with Volunteers' and adding the logo, and handing the document out (e.g. to the Wildlife Trusts) as BTO literature on how to deal with volunteers. He added that more emphasis should be made on BTO's retention rates.

It was considered that this would also be a useful document to submit with grant applications.

It was noted that some rewording was required in places.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

a. Does the Trust have a system in place for routinely notifying members of events when they are not on the Internet? (Mike Brown)

IE explained that the usual practice is to write to members who do not have an email address. Events are also advertised in *BTO News* and magazines. He added that few members are not on email. Events are publicised by e-mail shots and in all e-newsletters, and IE envisaged that these members would also get to hear about relevant information through friends, etc.

b. Thanks to retiring members of RNC

The Chairman thanked Mel Ab Owain, Peter Overton and Chris Robinson for their contribution to RNC over the past four years.

Additionally, Roger Dickey, Council's representative on RNC, will also complete his term at the end of this year. The Chairman thanked RD for his contribution. In line with Agenda item 8b RD will not be replaced on RNC.

14. NEXT MEETING

Next year's meetings will be held on Monday 18 February and Monday 23 September 2013.