

Members' Page Survey – One Year On

Last spring we conducted a small survey via the Club's Forum to seek ideas about newly established the Members' Page on the website and how people wanted to see it develop. We asked for Members' views on various suggestions - local birding groups, a Dorset Birdwatching Week, field trips for less experienced birders, and mentoring/buddying. In response we also had a number of very good suggestions for further developing the page.

One year on it would be good to hear whether Members have any further comments or suggestions.

Things have moved on quite significantly since last spring. The 'Members' Page' has since become a 'Members' Area' with four sub-pages on how to get involved, useful web links, local birding sites and 'birding at home'. The 'get involved' page has a section for young birders, which we hope will get expanded into its own sub-page, on volunteering opportunities, and on local birding groups. The useful web links have been updated and now include some birding blogs. The local birding sites includes site guides for some places not in Keith Betton's new book, and also has downloadable pdfs for local bird reports such as Lodmoor and Lytchett Bay. The home birding page was an attempt to provide a bit of indoor birding stimulus to those of us who were suffering ornithological deprivation from those long, dark, locked down days when we couldn't get out. That time is behind us now but those resources may still be useful for when we are stuck at home for some other reason.

The views we received on the four proposals we particularly asked Members about have been very helpful, and we have given these ideas much thought. Support for local birding groups was strong with 82% of respondents giving this a positive rating, and we now have details of half a dozen such groups, and another half-dozen U3A groups. The Bridport Bird Club is new, and it would be great to see other groups like it emerging. The idea of a Dorset Birdwatching Week was also very popular with an 83% positive response, and when we floated it with other bird organisations around the county we received strong support, and worked up a draft programme for spring 2022. At that time I think we assumed that life would return to normal fairly quickly once the vaccine roll-out was complete but the delta and omicron variants meant that restrictions were still in place for much of the year. With case numbers so high until recently it didn't seem appropriate to push ahead with an event in spring this year so we now expect this to take place in spring 2023.

Because of Covid our outdoor meetings programme was also on hold for longer than expected, but is resuming in June with a visit to White Sheet Plantation and Holt Heath. Future events will include some with a focus on less experienced birdwatchers, as supported by 76% of respondents. The suggestion of a mentoring/buddying scheme has raised some important questions for us a Bird Club. For reasons of safeguarding, and because of our status with the Charities Commission and our insurers, we are reluctant to promote a scheme that could involve 1 to 1 contact, potentially putting someone at risk. Instead we are promoting and supporting group activities such as local birding and nature clubs, and groups for people with shared interests or concerns. As part of this we are very pleased to be supporting the BTO Youth Team, whose three representatives in Dorset are now organising events for under-25s. The BTO Youth Team are building a partnership with the Bird Club, CHOG and other birding organisations in Dorset, with the aim of supporting and encouraging young birders. We are also supporting women birders in Dorset with a WhatsApp Group specifically for women Members of the Bird Club. More details on both these initiatives will be available shortly.

As mentioned before, we received some excellent further suggestions through the survey. Most of these have been adopted, and there are a few that we still intend to take forward, such as working more closely with farmers through informal bird surveys as requested. Another suggestion was to have seawatching advice, and tips for identifying gulls: a series of 'how to' guides has been started, with articles on seawatching, nocturnal migration recording and separating Chiffchaffs from Willow Warblers. Further articles are planned on visible migration watching and identifying larger gulls.

Geoff Upton May 2022