

Report on Website Members' Page Survey

Summary

A survey took place between 26th January and 21st February 2021 about the recently established Members' Page within the Bird Club website. Members of the Club's Forum were asked how interested they would be in seeing information on local birding groups, mentoring and 'buddying' schemes, field trips aimed at less experienced birders, and Dorset Birdwatching Weeks. 23 responses were received, nearly all very positive about all suggestions, with information on local birding groups and Dorset Birdwatching Weeks getting a slightly higher approval than the other proposals. Several comments were made about the contents of the current page – all positive and constructive – and a large number of helpful suggestions were made for further development. This report summarises the main findings from the survey.

Method

A questionnaire was sent to the Forum, which currently comprises 216 members, requesting views on four suggested topics:

- Local birding groups, to let people know of any groups operating in their vicinity and to promote the idea of networks between local enthusiasts;
- Mentoring and buddying, to set up a network of suitable people willing to act as mentors or seeking birding companions;
- Field trips aimed at less experienced birders, to help improve bird identification and basic field craft;
- The idea of a 'Dorset Birdwatching Week' - co-ordinated open weeks, offering guides at various sites across the county.

For each topic the questionnaire asked respondents how strongly they agreed or disagreed that they would like to see information on the Members' Page. Answers were awarded a score of 0-4, with 0 meaning 'strongly disagree' and 4 'strongly agree'. Approval scores for each topic were expressed as a percentage of the maximum possible score of 92.

Results

Approval scores for each topic were:

- Local birding groups – 82%
- Mentoring and buddying – 73%
- Field trips for less experienced birders – 76%
- 'Dorset Birdwatching Weeks' – 83%

Suggestions for future development and comments

Some excellent suggestions for future development were made, and there were many helpful and constructive comments on the Members' Page as it then was. All of these suggestions and comments will be adopted. They included:

- Information on local birding sites, including usual species seen, accessibility, wheelchair use, parking and perhaps a 'league table'. *A new sub-page on birding sites has been created, with pointers to existing publications and downloadable site reports. We hope in the future to feature some sites, giving advice on access and accessibility, numbers of species recorded, and perhaps some kind of 'league table' as suggested by respondents.*

- An 'under-reported area map', which might highlight how patchy our coverage of the county seems to be and help to increase it. *We intend to create such a map for inclusion in the Dorset Bird Report 2020, using 2020 BirdTrack data.*
- Information for anybody wishing to become a bird ringer or a nest-finder. *Information has been prepared and will be included in a suitable section of the website.*
- Offer a bird identification service. *The Club's Facebook page provides this service and has been well used recently, and the Members' Area link entry has been adjusted to highlight that. A 'Question Time' thread has been created on the Club's Bird News and Forum.*
- Helping establish a network of farmers already engaged in or wanting to develop practices which help sustain bird populations. *A Dorset Farm Survey Panel will be set up in order to facilitate informal bird surveys as requested by local farmers.*
- Sea watching tips and advice, and tips for identifying gulls. *An article on seawatching was published in the March 2021 Newsletter and one on gulls is expected in the next year or so.*
- Tide Table links with guidance on what adjustment to use for specific places. *Links have been added to the list of useful websites, with guidance on adjustment.*
- Info on relatively local optics suppliers, especially those offering servicing, repairs, etc. *Links to local suppliers added, with additional advice about considering cruelty-free optics.*
- A car sharing plus cost sharing scheme. *This will be considered further alongside the proposal for setting up some form of mentoring and buddying.*
- "There is possibly too much information, could it be subdivided clearer?" "The Site Report pdfs take up a lot of space on the front page, especially when accessed on a mobile. Whilst it is fine to leave the list of places on the front page, I suggest they would be better on a separate tab." "Help if the links and explanations were grouped a bit more, and to focus on Dorset get what you want to highlight at the top of the page." *We have created sub-pages so that the information can be organised as suggested.*
- "When clicking on a link, it would be best if it opened up in a new tab on the browser, leaving the DBC Members page still open" "It seems strange that the url of the Members Page is <https://dorsetbirds.co.uk/bird-surveys/> when there is a separate tab for Surveys." *We have adopted both suggestions.*
- "It's great for the birding stuff, but it's a bit light on...community and socialness" *We agree, and hope that the Club's Forum and our Facebook and Twitter accounts can be used to foster a sociable, community spirit.*

There were also several appreciative comments such as "Thanks for all the hard work you're putting in on our behalf" and "Thanks for putting some more energy into things. Good on you."

Discussion

The responses probably reflect a reasonable cross-section of our membership, and we were particularly pleased that 6 of the 23 responses were from female members. There was strong support for all four of the proposed ideas, and the survey has been extremely useful in helping the Club work out how to move forward as members would wish. We now have many good ideas, but they cannot all be put in place at present – some require significant planning and input, or need to await lifting of Covid restrictions, or both. Now that we have given these ideas more detailed consideration we are clearer about how to take each of them forward.

Local birding groups

Information about local birding groups is being sought; a couple of examples have been added to the website already and we hope to see more as the word spreads. We'll also be encouraging people to set up their own group if there isn't one in the area.

Mentoring and buddying

We've realised setting up these sorts of schemes isn't as simple as we'd assumed: there may be issues of safeguarding and insurance, and we're not sure of the logistics of how best to actually do it. We have concerns about the idea of 'pairing people up' and think that improving birding and identification skills is probably best done in small groups. We feel we need to take advice before developing this idea further; in any case, during the pandemic is not the ideal time to be introducing such schemes. Meanwhile, we will push ahead with the development of local birding networks and will promote the use of the Forum as a means of people making contact and seeking advice through its new 'Question Time' thread.

Field trips for less experienced birders

The Club already runs field meetings and, once Covid restrictions have been eased, we will consider trips with less experienced birders in mind. There may be opportunities to link with partner organisations such as Birds of Poole Harbour, CHOG, DWT, PBO, RSPB and ringing groups.

Dorset Birdwatching Weeks

This proposal received the strongest support of all, with 83% approval. As with field trips, this idea would offer excellent opportunities to link with partner organisations, perhaps also with private enterprises such as optical companies and birding tour operators. It may also be possible to relate the events to 'how to' articles in newsletters such as the piece on seawatching in the latest issue. We have started to design a possible programme and engage with other organisations to test feasibility of holding an event in spring 2022.

Conclusion

We are delighted with the response we have received both to the Members' Page and to the ideas for the future. There is clearly a good deal of enthusiasm and a strong appetite among members for initiatives aimed at helping less experienced birders. The four proposals we put forward, plus the new suggestions, support the Club's aim to become more inclusive and welcoming and provide excellent opportunities for the Club to strengthen its engagement links with other bodies. They also provide opportunities for our many highly experienced members to share their birding expertise, which many would enjoy.

Thanks to all who contributed to the survey and for the many helpful and valuable comments we have received in the process.