

The Buzzard



**Shropshire
Ornithological Society's
quarterly magazine**

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www.shropshirebirds.com

Editorial

In this issue of *The Buzzard* there's lots of evidence that the SOS is in good health as the Society approaches its 60th year. We have some sound ornithology as shown by, for instance, Alan Smith's observations on Greenfinches and Goldfinches feeding on pine seeds, or Martyn Owen's report of the first successful fledging of Common Tern in the county.

Graham Walker provides an update on management work at our Venus Pool reserve, and there is a fascinating piece by John Tucker as he reflects on his 50 years as a member of the BTO. In John's article he mentions a young Dawn Balmer, then a YOC member, now National Surveys Coordinator at the BTO. For her work as *Bird Atlas 2007–11* Coordinator and lead author, Dawn and her five co-authors were recently awarded the RSPB Medal, the RSPB's most prestigious award. That honour is well deserved and, as John puts it so nicely: Shropshire can be proud of her.

Work continues on *The Birds of Shropshire*, the exciting new county avifauna inspired by *Bird Atlas 2007–11*, and there's an update from Leo Smith on page 20. Some species accounts, all of them wading birds, are still lacking an author so if you think you can help please contact Leo for more information.

On 17-18 January 2015 the International Swan Census 2015 will take place across Europe. This five-yearly census aims to estimate the size and distribution of the Iceland Whooper Swan and northwest Bewick's Swan populations. Please read Michael Wallace's note on page 10 and check the SOS website for the latest information on how to submit records.

A big thank you everyone who has contributed to this issue of *The Buzzard*.

Martin

Copy deadline for the spring 2015 issue is 1st February.

I'd greatly appreciate it if copy could be submitted promptly (or early!) as there will be very little slack in the production schedule for that issue.

Please send contributions or suggestions to: **martin@thegreenfuse.net**

Views expressed in The Buzzard are those of the individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the SOS or its Committees unless otherwise stated.

Welcome to our new members

A very warm welcome to the following new members of the Society:
Mr PJ Harvey, Shrewsbury; Mrs SJ Eastman, Kidderminster; Mr & Mrs S Laight, Shrewsbury; Mr & Mrs MW Bott, Higher Heath; Mr R Copeland, Harley.

We hope you will enjoy your membership of the SOS and that we will get to meet you at a Society event or out in the field. The officers listed on the inside front cover will be pleased to help if you have any enquiries.

Please note that names and addresses are held on computer and anyone who objects should contact the Membership Secretary. Please see our website for more information about the Society and local birding. We hope to see you at our indoor meetings, which are interesting and varied with first class speakers, and on our field trips, which are suitable for beginners and more advanced birders and offer expert advice and identification with the chance to have questions answered.

Bushmoor Coppice freehold

The Society now has the freehold of Bushmoor Coppice. This is a small woodland reserve situated approximately 5 miles south of Church Stretton at grid reference SO432879. The reserve is primarily of interest for summer migrants and has been recently equipped with an updated nest-box scheme (sponsored by a local resident).

Access is by track from Bushmoor village. Some improvement work was carried out by Shropshire Wildlife Trust before the transfer but members are advised that until a full survey is carried out any visit must be at their own risk. Care should be taken when negotiating the paths and bridges which can be very slippery. There will be a programme of work for this site but it is unlikely that there will be any further improvement before the end of the 2015 breeding season.

It would be of particular assistance to the Committee if there were a regular (or even occasional) visitor who would undertake to keep an "eye" on the site and report any maintenance issues to Graham Walker 01743 351686 or Helen Griffiths 01743 761507.

Brian Andrews
Treasurer

Opportunist seed eaters

Alan W Smith

Sitting in the garden on the 2nd May, the hottest day so far this year I became aware of a familiar irregular clicking sound, familiar that is to a lifetime forester. It is the sound of a Scots pine cone opening up on a hot day in spring in order to shed its seeds. Pine cones require heat to open up and even for some species the heat of a wild fire is required in order for the seeds to be shed. Pines have male and female flowers produced in late spring on the new shoots and vast amounts of pollen are shed in a breeze. Cones take two years to grow and turn from green to brown when mature. The seeds are small and single winged and when shed drift downwind.

Wandering over to look at the three Scots pines I planted to shelter the garden some 28 years ago I noticed a small greenish bird clambering around in the top of the tallest tree. My first thoughts were could it possibly be a Crossbill? We're less than a mile as the crow flies from Haughmond Hill and the pine trees there. Collecting binoculars from the house I was surprised to see that there were two different birds in the top of the tree.

There was a Goldfinch which was hanging upside down like a tit from the cones and picking out the seeds from between the scales of the opening cones and the greenish bird I had seen was actually a Greenfinch. The Greenfinch was perching on a branch and reaching up into the cones hanging down from the branches above in order to extract the seeds. There were only the two birds which I watched for some time but when I looked the following day there was no sign of them. Finches are known as seed eaters but I had not thought of these two species as eaters of pine seeds and there must be other occasions where birds are taking advantage of local or seasonal food sources.

Buzzards boosted by oilseed rape

Research published in the BTO journal *Bird Study* (vol. 61; part 4: pp 447-456) suggests that oil seed rape cultivation can increase the availability of prey animals (Common Voles) and this in turn can improve Buzzard breeding success. There are caveats, for instance the study area was in western Poland and Common Voles are not found in the UK, but it is possible that the spread of oilseed rape since the 1970s may have been beneficial for Buzzards and other vole-eating birds of prey in the UK.

Breeding Common Terns at Chelmarsh Reservoir

Martyn Owen

During the late summer of both 2012 and 2013 a pair of Common Tern and at least one juvenile took up temporary residence at Chelmarsh Reservoir. The adult birds could regularly be seen feeding the juvenile and it was therefore strongly suspected that they may have bred relatively locally, although not at the Reservoir as the birds only appeared post-fledging. Common Tern are a summer migrant to the UK, nesting between mid-May and the end of August and usually have a single brood, of two to three eggs. Chicks take 22-29 (or more) days to fledge, and remain dependent upon their parents for two to three months.

On 14th July 2014 a pair of Common Tern were observed on eggs on one of the pumping towers near the Yaught Club at the Reservoir. This species usually nests on the ground in the open; often on bare substrate, occasionally near vegetation or in it, or on floating mats of vegetation. The nest site at Chelmarsh was therefore typical, being on concrete at the end of the pontoon, with the two eggs laid against a metal bar; this prevented movement of the eggs, and later afforded the hatched young some protection. This location though was far from ideal, with access for land based predators possible along the gantry to the pumping tower and the railings that run along the gantry and around the tower being a favoured area for gulls.

Two chicks were first observed within the nest on 22nd July. The young birds remained in the vicinity of the nest site until 25th July, when both chicks were observed on the slipway near the pumping tower, presumably having walked along the gantry to the bank. When approached, these birds quickly walked into the water and swam into the Reservoir, before returning to land shortly after. On 1st August just one juvenile was present, now on the dam; it is not known if this bird swam or walked to this location. This juvenile successfully fledged and was seen predominantly around the Reservoir, although also occasionally on the scrape. What happened to the other juvenile is not known.

The first documented record of breeding Common Tern in Shropshire occurred only recently, at Trench Pool (Telford) in 2009. However, no young successfully fledged from this nest. The fledged Common Tern at Chelmarsh Reservoir therefore represents the first successful breeding record of this species in Shropshire.



Breeding Common Terns at Chelmarsh Reservoir.
Photos by Jim Almond

Management Works at Venus Pool

We have been aware for some time that the willow scrub at the rear of Venus Pool has been getting bigger and bigger, but it wasn't until we discovered some photographs taken in January 1997, when the main was hide was being erected, that we realised how significant this growth has been over the last 17 years.



The “then and now” photographs opposite, taken in January 1997 and January 1914, show that what was once open fen grassland is now tall willow scrub which, on closer inspection, has a very limited understorey and ground flora, as can be seen from the picture below.



The clearance work is a big job and beyond the scope of our own volunteers so contractors were commissioned to start phase 1 of the clearance on 20th October with the overall project being completed over two to three years. Fortunately, remnants of the original fen grassland and common reed swamp have survived under the trees so we expect recolonisation to take place quickly. The initial work has also re-opened the original views across the fields beyond the pool.

As well as the willow scrub removal, the investigatory work that was undertaken last winter has revealed a problem with one of the car park trees which will need some work to make it safe. This is being arranged and we will let you know when it will take place.

To coincide with the scrub management, we also undertook our usual end-of-season clear-up which included the use of a compact tractor to top the vegetation on the marsh, in front of the hides and elsewhere around the Reserve.

A number of volunteers joined us and their assistance was particularly helpful. If other members would like to help when we have work party days please send me an e-mail (gramanda5@btinternet.com) or let me have your phone number (01743 351686) so I can let you know when a work day is planned.

Graham Walker
Chairman, Conservation Sub-committee

International Swan Census 2015

Michael Wallace

The International Swan Census 2015 is being organised by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) and will take place across Europe, with the aim to estimate the size and distribution of the Iceland Whooper Swan and northwest Bewick's Swan populations. The five yearly census will be undertaken during 17-18 January 2015, coinciding with the Wetland Bird Survey Priority Core Count date.

We have been requested to count the total number of these species present on each Wetland Bird Survey Site and on any other site where they occur in Shropshire. Wetland Bird Survey Sites are usually surveyed during the day but many swans occur at some sites at different times, particularly at roost at dawn or dusk. Therefore, additional effort will be required for this census to achieve complete coverage for all sites holding Whooper and Bewick's Swans. More information is awaited from WWT and when it is received it, probably towards the end of November, will appear on the SOS web site and announcements will be made at indoor meetings.

Please report presence of Whooper and Bewick's Swans stating the name(s) of the site(s), national grid reference, habitat details, numbers of swans seen and if possible brood information ie numbers of juvenile birds. If you count on a different date, submission of details would be appreciated because such data is useful.

Kindly send your records to the Shropshire co-ordinator:
Michael Wallace, 75 Larkhill Road, Shrewsbury, SY3 8XJ.
T:01743 369035. Email: michaelwallace47@gmail.com

Fifty years as a BTO member

John Tucker

I joined the BTO in October 1964, half a century ago, and have been a member continuously ever since, through almost two thirds of BTO's life (and three quarters of mine). I'm sure there are others in the SOS with equally long, and longer, memberships - this is my personal retrospective. Occasional membership dalliances with the RSPB etc. have come and gone but never for long; the draw of the BTO has persisted with its opportunities to contribute to and draw from the corporate endeavours of its staff and field volunteers.

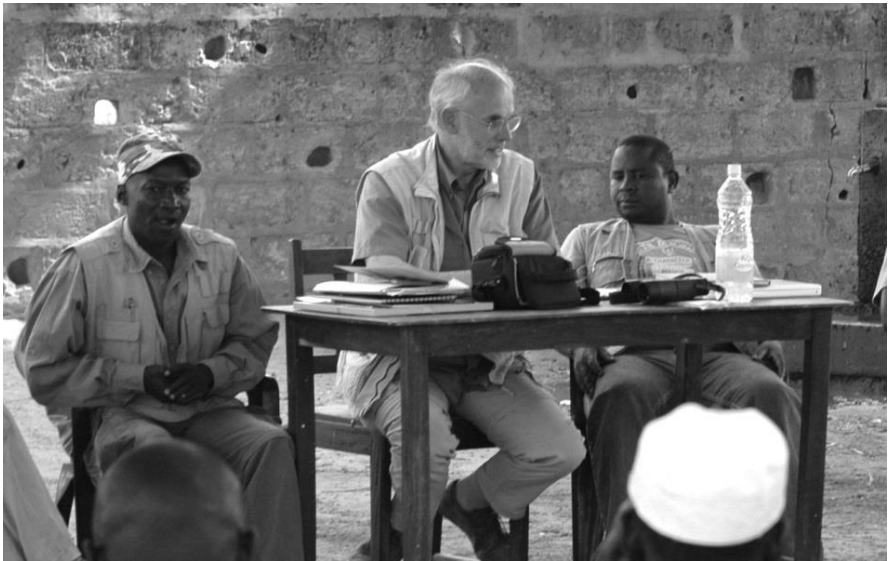
Back in the 1960s birding was a very cliquy business – you had to be one of a narrow 'in-set', wherever you were; I found this in both Portsmouth where I was raised and in Yorkshire where I was at college 1965-68. While up north I would occasionally visit Spurn with my cousin Mike Densley from Leeds (where I was born) – he was a big noise in birding there. I was at Spurn in October 1966 for the first British Penduline Tit and watched it fly through the only hole in a 60' Bridport-Gundrey mist-net! The cliquiness was perhaps a result of limited means of communication then – if something good turned up you had to either phone or go and knock on a door. No – it was very cliquy then, you had to be accepted into a group; it is all so much more in the open these days. I was new to the BTO then but I did contribute a handful of records to the first Atlas (1976), including Ringed Plover nesting on a shingle beach on a quiet stretch of Portsmouth seafront, before leaving for Africa.

I don't chase, much less find rarities; birds have wings and will turn up in odd places, QED; rarities don't interest me and I'm not much good at them. However it is always nice when uncommon birds turn up when I'm doing surveys such as my annual BBS and WBBS routes from the BTO, during considerable work for both county Atlas projects and, after I left Shropshire Wildlife Trust, several years of interesting bird survey contracts around the county - work which conveniently coincided with and contributed to the Atlas. Certainly visiting new countries is always a joy. So surveys are my kind of birding - I can count things and that tells us things. It is the seeking of information, lots of it to see what it means, that for example drove me to organise the rookeries survey in 2008 and three years later to start the ongoing work on 'Histo' as I call it. What is out there and what can it tell us?

It was my six years in Zambia (1970-76) that started off my more serious interest; I was a ringer then and my species-ringed list there still exceeds my UK list. I had a scrubby ringing site in the grounds of the school next to the

boarding halls where I was housemaster; we lived adjacent to the site and I worked it though the rains (the Palaearctic winter) for three years. I colour-ringed the five or six resplendent displaying male Red-throated Widow-birds *Euplectes ardens* and tried to work out how many females each had by colour-ringing them but they were impossible to re-locate in the >2m tall grass where they nested. But the site did give me local species together with a 'bread-and-butter' supply of warblers, Willow and Great Reed, Whitethroats and Sprossers etc. along with the second Zambian Olive-tree and an apparently wintering River (Bull B.O.C. 1978 98(1):2-4), then the only known wintering record and my sole contribution to the BWP *Handbook*.

My one international recovery, a Red-backed Shrike shot in Syria, gave me the logo for my contracting work and I have retained it. Africa prompted me into university when we returned to the UK, first at York and then an MSc at UCL. They took me to working on Hartlebury Common, Worcestershire 1980-83 (*Hartlebury Common, a social and natural history*, Tucker *et al.* (1986)), to SWT as conservation officer through to 2003, five years with the *Blue Remembered Hills* project in south Shropshire, early retirement in 2007 to get my life back and the rest, as they say, is history.



John chairing a village meeting during the preparation of the Management Plan for Farasuto Forest Community Nature Reserve in The Gambia, 19 April 2009 with, left, Babagelleh Bah, at the time chairman of the Kuloro Bird Club, and Yaya Barry treasurer: see <http://farasuto.org>

When I came to Shropshire, three decades ago and living in Pontesbury, I occasionally helped June North with her village Young Ornithologists' Club. I once showed them, in about 1987, how to enter their bird atlas field data onto the SWT's computer (the SOS did not have one then) and then how it's dot-matrix printer tried to print out a species map. One of the group was Dawn Balmer; she went on to work with me as a volunteer at SWT for a year, moved to the BTO and recently was senior author of the last Atlas. I'm pleased to have been part of that process, for both Dawn and for the BTO; Shropshire too can be proud of her.

For the time being, besides my contributions to the forthcoming *Birds of Shropshire*, I have pieces in preparation and in mind on aspects drawn from Histo, the ongoing processes of which will keep me going for as long as I have left – by definition it will never be wholly complete. A lurking desire remains to publish in some form '*Beckwith's Shropshire Birds*' which his early death at 48 in 1892 prevented him from producing himself; will I get round to it?

Editorial comment

John kindly wrote this article at my request, as I think, as I'm sure many SOS members do, that 50 years of active membership of any organisation is very impressive. When that organisation is the internationally acclaimed British Trust for Ornithology, John's contribution becomes all the more significant, at least to our partisan eyes!

He is also a very constructive local ornithologist who puts countless hours in for national and county surveys and other work, including the 'Histo', his modest shorthand for *The Historical Ornithology of Shropshire*, an incredibly comprehensive, ongoing web project that simply seeks to provide easy access to all published material about the birds of Shropshire. That's quite a bold undertaking and one that, as John notes, will by definition never be fully complete. If you haven't visited the website, or it's been a while, do click on the link on the SOS homepage, or go straight to www.lanius.org.uk/sos/ and have a delve. You'll be amazed at how much historical information it contains, and the project is regularly updated. I even have to send John a PDF of each issue of *The Buzzard* to add to the archive!

The Histo, a joint project by John and his brother Peter, has been widely admired, and Shropshire is the only county to have such a resource, although I understand that it has inspired other areas to plan similar projects.



RSPB Update

Mike Shurmer
Senior Conservation Officer
mike.shurmer@rspb.org.uk

The State of the UK's Birds 2014

In October, the 15th edition of the State of the UK's Birds (SUKB) was released (www.rspb.org.uk/forprofessionals/science/sotukb). Essential reading for anyone interested in bird conservation, this annual report is published on behalf of the RSPB, BTO, WWT and the UK Governments nature conservation agencies, including Natural England. The SUKB report provides a one-stop shop for all the latest results from annual, periodic and one-off surveys and monitoring studies. It gives an in-depth, up-to-date overview of the status of bird populations in the UK and its Overseas Territories, and provides trends for many of the UK's regularly occurring species.

I was interested to see that this year's SUKB focuses on the migratory birds that spend part of their annual cycle in the UK. One of the headlines of the new migratory bird indicator are the declines in birds that winter in the 'Humid Zone' of sub-Saharan Africa – countries like Senegal, Gambia, Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone. Of the species that winter in this area, 73% are declining, 45% of the species by more than half

Declining species of this area include several we consider to be characteristic of Shropshire – Common Sandpiper, Whinchat, Wood Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Pied Flycatcher and Tree Pipit. Another species, Turtle Dove, now on the verge of extinction in the county. The forthcoming *Birds of Shropshire* will give us an idea of whether these downward trends are mirrored in our county.

Whilst this pattern may suggest that conditions on wintering grounds are the primary drivers of declines, there is a large body of research showing how changes on UK breeding grounds can influence population trends. What emerges is a complex picture and it is likely that conservation action will have to tackle impacts on wintering grounds and migratory routes for these species, alongside action in the UK.

We still have much to learn, and SUKB 2014 gives an update on technological advances in tracking migrant birds. This includes the use of satellite tags and geolocators, small enough to be used on passerines. This technology has been used in recent years to track Cuckoos, Swifts and Nightingales, increasing our knowledge of their migration routes and wintering ranges exponentially. It is an exciting time to be monitoring our migrant species, even though the results of studies can be depressing.

The real heroes of SUKB 2014 are the thousands of volunteers who take part in surveys and report their sightings. Without this information our knowledge would be poorer and our ability to effectively conserve species weaker. Surveys such as BBS and WeBS are used to produce the species trends, and the role of BirdTrack in monitoring bird populations is rightly highlighted. Hopefully this provides some motivation for those struggling to get out birding on a cold winters day!

A couple of interesting ringing recoveries

The first follows on from Mike Shurmer's comment in his RSPB Update feature that Turtle Dove is now on the verge of extinction in Shropshire. For many years The Rea near Upton Magna, home to CJ WildBird Foods Ltd, was the best place in Shropshire to see Turtle Doves, attracting regular visits from year listers and photographers who were keen to see these birds.

Chris Whittles reports that an adult male Turtle Dove ringed there in May 2008 was found "Freshly dead. Shot" near Albacete in Spain (1,500 km due south) in September 2014. In the late 2000s annual numbers at The Rea peaked at 21 individuals (newly ringed or retrapped) before numbers fell to just four in 2012 and a single sighting in 2013. No Turtle Doves were seen or heard on the site in 2014, despite an increase in observer effort. The national decline is largely driven by reduced breeding productivity, with few pairs fledging second broods, but hunting pressure on a declining population may also be an important driver of the decline.

Peter Deans has recently received news of a Chaffinch ringed as a first year male in his garden in March 2013 that was found dead in Oslo (Norway) in September 2014, 1,200 km to the north east. It would be interesting to know, although we never will, whether the bird had taken up residence in Oslo or was passing through on its way back to the UK.

Thanks to Chris and Pete for passing on the BTO recovery forms.

The late Tom Pemberton

We're sorry to report the death of Tom Pemberton, a founder member of the Society. His funeral was held on Friday 7 November at Emstrey in Shrewsbury.

Tom was born in 1924 and lived on the family farm near Widnes where he developed his lifelong passion for nature and wildlife in general. He tried to join the army in 1940, aged 16, but was retrieved by his mother, but nonetheless joined up as soon as he was 18. Before joining up he captured a Luftwaffe pilot who had bailed out after a raid on Liverpool. Tom was armed with a pitchfork and convinced the German to surrender his pistol, which was promptly confiscated when Dad's Army arrived! His war service was in Burma where he was mentioned in despatches after rescuing a wounded comrade and getting him back to our lines singlehanded.

After the war Tom joined the police and was stationed at Ironbridge, giving him the opportunity to record the migrants using the Gorge including, back then, breeding Nightingales. He was then transferred to Welshampton, near Ellesmere, where he served for ten years. During his time in the county he helped our President, Frank Gribble MBE, in his work on what became *A Handlist of the Birds of Shropshire* (1964), Frank having taken on the work following the death of Edward Rutter.

He then moved on to teaching after a course at Dudley College to which he cycled each way (he was a keen cyclist and even in his later years had an exercise bike in the conservatory). He started in primary education, initially in Wiltshire, but with his natural history background moved to the Field Studies Council and was responsible for setting up a centre on the Gower for what was then the Surrey borough of Merton.

He moved back to Shropshire when he retired and maintained an interest in birds despite failing health. In recent years he helped to collate the records and writings of Richard Gidley Adams whom he first met at the Royal Marines Commando Training Centre on the River Exe in 1942. The work was recently published as *A Boatload of Wagtails* by Honeybee Books and relate to the wildlife on Exe Estuary between 1932 to 1968.

Thank you to Brian Andrews, Frank Gribble and Ken Stott for help in producing this obituary.

Ringling in the Parque Ambientale, Vilamoura, Portugal

Martin George, with additional images by Scott Petrek

For the last eight years the Brewood Ringing Group, who operate just across the border in Staffordshire, have organised a ringing expedition to the Parque Ambientale in Vilamoura, primarily to study the trans-Saharan migrants that pass through this area in the autumn. This year ten of us flew out to the Algarve for nine days at the beginning of October: seven from Brewood RG and three from the Shropshire RG.

The Parque Ambientale has a mix of habitats, of which the most dominant are marsh, scrub, stubble fields and olive groves. Parque staff were very helpful in preparing for our visit and whilst we were there, loaning equipment such as brushcutters and liaising with other authorities such as the local police. We used Portuguese rings on behalf of CEMPA, the Portuguese ringing scheme.

On our first day the weather conditions had grounded many migrants so, despite spending several hours cutting out net rides and erecting mist nets, we managed to catch 189 birds including 2 Western Bonelli's Warblers and a Paddyfield Warbler, which we later discovered was the fourth record of the species for Portugal. Paddyfield Warblers are an *Acrocephalus* or reed warbler species that breeds in Asia and overwinters in Pakistan.



After day one the weather conditions were less suitable for catching migrants as the high pressure allowed the birds to carry on south, and also produced unseasonably warm weather into the high 30s. For those of us who were new to the Algarve there were plenty of other causes for excitement as we were routinely seeing birds such as Hoopoes, Azure-winged Magpies (left) and Cattle Egrets, and catching Bluethroats, Sardinian and Subalpine Warblers.

The ringing was a mix of the familiar and, for the Shropshire contingent at least, the excitingly novel, moving from species such as Reed Warblers and Blackcaps to Little Bitterns, Hoopoes and a Wryneck (below). It was also unusual to see so many Kingfishers in the hand – we caught twenty on the first day. The most remarkable individual bird that we encountered was a Blackcap bearing a BTO ring that, as a quick mobile phone call from the ringing table soon established, had been ringed by one of the Portugal team at Blithfield Reservoir in Staffordshire three weeks earlier!



As well as the targeted ringing of migrants there were also opportunities to explore new areas and try different catching techniques. Some skilful reconnaissance work by one of the team identified an area of well-irrigated grass by some rather posh apartments that was attracting good numbers of birds, including Cattle Egrets, Wheatears, Yellow Wagtails, Hoopoes and Wrynecks. This site could be worked by two or three people and, being very public, was a great opportunity to do some positive public relations work with the many tourists who had flown out for the Portugal Masters golf tournament.

As word spread a small number of British tourists started to join us at the early morning ringing sessions and some of the roost catches, where we attempted to catch migrating Barn and Red-rumped Swallows without also catching flocks of naturalised waxbills and weavers. It was nice for us to be able to show people some of the birds that we caught and to tell them about the journeys that the birds were making. The large amount of fat that the Reed and Sedge Warblers were carrying to fuel the next stage of their migration, perhaps straight across the Sahara, seemed to make quite an impression.

A moon that was approaching full meant that the nights were too bright for dazzling with a torch and hand net to work as a technique, but we did try our luck on a cloudy night shortly after arriving and managed to catch a Red-necked Nightjar and a Crested Lark. That success was down to the skill of one of the Shropshire ringers who is an experienced lamper. We hope to arrange next year's trip to coincide with a new moon!

Being able to ring for as long as we wanted was very liberating for those of us who normally have to balance our ringing with work and family commitments. We had two very experienced ringing trainers with us so the trip was also a great opportunity to improve existing skills and learn new ones.

Although conditions remained unfavourable for good numbers of migrants the group managed to catch 930 birds of 49 species, including birds that had been ringed in the Netherlands, Sweden, and, of course, the UK, so hopefully the data we gathered and the birds we ringed will add a fraction more to what we know about the movements of trans-Saharan migrants through the Algarve. Mike Shurmer's article on page 14 comments in more detail on the findings of *The State of the UK's Birds 2014* and that report's concerns about some of these migrant species.

More information on this trip and the rest of the Brewood RG's work, including ringing demonstrations and their other overseas project in northern Norway, can be found on their website: www.brewoodringers.com



A Netherlands ring on a migrant



Corn Bunting



The Birds of Shropshire

A County Avifauna

Previous issues of *The Buzzard* have outlined progress towards publishing a full colour hard back book on *The Birds of Shropshire*, around the time of the 60th Anniversary of SOS in 2015.

The Birds of Shropshire will be the most comprehensive record of the County's avifauna ever published. It will be based largely on the results of six years Bird Atlas fieldwork up until 2013, winter and summer, by 652 different observers who submitted over 319, 400 records. These records have been used to produce maps showing the current distribution of almost 200 different species.

The book will include an account for each species, describing the current distribution and relative abundance, and the breeding status where relevant. The current breeding and winter maps will be compared with those shown in *An Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Shropshire* (1992) and with the County part of the national *An Atlas of the Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland* (1986). Historical data, and results of specific local studies, will also be incorporated.

It will cover every species on the "Shropshire List" (over 300), so migrant species, county rarities and birds that have not been recorded here since 1950 will also be covered. Accounts will be easily readable, with stunning local photographs - a top quality production of which the Society can be proud.

For many species it will show that massive changes have occurred in their population and distribution. The book will shape conservation priorities in the County for the next 20 years.

The Birds of Shropshire will be published by Liverpool University Press, a renowned academic imprint. The cover price will be £45, but it will be available at a pre-publication price of £25. Watch this space

The writing is now well under way. Although we are well behind the original timetable, we may be able to catch up. We still have several species accounts that are not currently allocated to an author: Ruff, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Spotted Redshank, Wood Sandpiper and Turnstone.

If you would like to volunteer to write one or more of these species accounts, contact Leo Smith on 01694 720296, leo@leosmith.org.uk



BTO News

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RSPB medal

At the annual RSPB Members' Day in October, the RSPB Medal was awarded to the team behind the Bird Atlas 2007–11 in a special presentation that acknowledged its role as a valuable resource to everyone involved in conserving, researching or understanding Britain and Ireland's birds.

The medal acknowledges the outstanding contribution of over 40,000 volunteers who submitted records to the Atlas. A project of this scale could only have been successful with a skilled and enthusiastic team behind it. Receiving the medal on Saturday were the six authors of the book; Dawn Balmer, Iain Downie, Rob Fuller and Simon Gillings from the BTO, Brian Caffrey from BirdWatch Ireland and Bob Swann from the SOC.

Atlas Coordinator and lead author Dawn Balmer accepted the medal on behalf of the volunteer birdwatchers and local volunteer Atlas organisers who worked tirelessly throughout the project.

BirdTrack goes to court

On 1 October a former gamekeeper was convicted of two charges relating to the killing of 10 Buzzards and a Sparrowhawk on the Stody estate in north Norfolk. Part of the case for the defence was the idea that the number of dead Buzzards found was too high to have been achieved through illegal poisoning in one place and that the carcasses must therefore have been 'planted'. BirdTrack Buzzard counts from the area over the same period as the crimes took place were extracted and mapped, clearly disputing the claim. The counts were logged by birdwatchers like you and me; who'd have foreseen that the simple action of recording 'normal' sightings in BirdTrack would unlock their huge value in this way?

Something different for Christmas

Why not share your love of birds by giving Garden BirdWatch as a gift? The GBW Gift Pack comes in a smart presentation box and, for Christmas only, is being sold at the reduced price of £17. To order, please call the Garden Ecology team on 01842 750050. The new 2015 BTO calendar is also available with wonderful species photographs and includes useful dates for those taking part in BTO surveys. Order online via our shop www.bto.org/shop. There's also a great membership offer which includes Collins Bird Songs & Calls.

Bird Notes July, August and September 2014

Yvonne Chadwick

Whooper Swan An unseasonal record came from Whixall floods, an adult seen from 13-27 July.

Mandarin Duck A female was at Venus Pool on 11 July and up to 3 were seen in Aug on the River Severn in the Highley area.

Wigeon Reports began on 2 Sep with 2 at Venus Pool. The highest count here was 26 on 27 Sep. Also seen at Priorslee Lake on 16 Sep and Wood Lane from 1 Sep, with a maximum of 4.

Gadwall Just five reports; Ellerton 11 Aug (2) and 14 Sep (28), Trench Pool 16 Sep (2) and Venus Pool 11 Aug (2) and 5 Sep (1).

Tufted Duck Breeding was confirmed at Brown Clee with 10 young, Springfield Mere in Shrewsbury with 5 young and at Devil's Dingle where two broods of 5 and 6 were seen. A notable count of 258 was also made on 21 Sep at Chelmarsh.

Garganey A juvenile was on Whixall floods on 27 July. Another was reported at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 22 Aug.

Pochard Two sightings during the quarter, at Shavington Park on 14 Sep and Priorslee Flash on 16 Sep.

Common Scoter A female was at Priorslee Lake on 20 July.

Grey Partridge Two were seen at Venus Pool on a couple of dates in July and August. One was also reported at Wood Lane on 9 Sep.

Quail Heard at Child's Ercall, Ellerdine, Llanfair Hill and up to 3 at Aldersley. One was also caught by a cat in Hordley.

Little Egret Seen at Atcham, Chelmarsh (3), Bridgnorth, Ludlow, Venus Pool and Wood Lane.

Red Kite Twenty six nests were found in Shropshire this year, the largest number since Kites returned to breed here in 2005. Seventeen of the nests were successful, producing 31 fledged young. Twenty of these were tagged and ringed.

Marsh Harrier One was photographed hunting the reed bed at Venus Pool on 11 Aug.

Hen Harrier Ringtails were seen over Church Stretton on 17 July, on the Long Mynd 19 Aug and at Whixall Moss on 4 Sep.

Osprey One was seen near Sutton Maddock on 7 July and another over the Long Mynd on 24 Sep. This bird's ring showed it to have been one of a brood of three, ringed in the Aberfoyle area of Scotland on 27 June. There were also several sightings of a bird circling Wood Lane and the meres, 5-16 Sep.

Peregrine Twenty six sites were monitored this year, nineteen of these were occupied. A successful year saw 33 young fledge.

Water Rail Sightings came from Chelmarsh, Priorslee Lake, Wood Lane, Venus Pool and Wall Farm.

Little Ringed Plover Breeding was confirmed at one site, with 2 chicks seen after the pair's second attempt. Other records came from Whixall floods, Devil's Dingle, Leighton, Knighton Res and Venus Pool.

Ringed Plover Single birds were at Chelmarsh on 10 Aug and 21 Aug and at Venus Pool 17-21 Sep.

Dunlin Present at Venus Pool on 13 & 19 Aug and also 13-20 Sep, with one at Chelmarsh on 21 Sep. A juv was also at Knighton Reservoir on 7 Sep.

Ruff Between mid-July and late Sep, there were fourteen records. The earliest being 2 males and a fem/juv at Whixall floods on 13 July. Single birds were at Venus Pool on 11 Aug and 15 Sep and up to four were seen at Wood Lane between 29 Aug and 20 Sep.

Common Snipe Highest counts were made at Wood Lane, with 30-36 in Sep and at Venus Pool with 16 on 25 Sep. Birds also seen at Pen-yr-estyn, Chelmarsh, Long Mynd, Devil's Dingle, Wall Farm, Tibberton and Whixall floods.

Black-tailed Godwit There were eighteen reports of 1 or 2 birds at Venus Pool, Whixall floods and Wood Lane. Higher counts were of 6 on the floods at Whixall on 1 July, 3 at Wood Lane on 3 Aug and 6 at Venus Pool on 5 Sep.

Whimbrel The two sightings were at Wood Lane on 11 July and over Whixall floods on 22 July.

Curlew The highest counts were in July at Wood Lane, with a max of 23 on 11 July. Also seen at Whixall and Venus Pool.

Common Redshank Three were at Wood Lane on 16 Aug, with singles at Polemere 29 July, Venus Pool 30 Aug and Wood Lane on 1 Sep.

Greenshank The twenty three reports of single birds were made between 10 Aug and 27 Sep at Chelmarsh Res, Knighton Res, Priorslee Lake, Venus Pool and Wood Lane.

Mediterranean Gull One was at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 18 Aug.

Little Gull Two were at Hordley on 27 July and reports also came from Whixall Moss between 17 July and 8 Aug.

Yellow-legged Gull The highest count was of 11 at Redhill on 4 Aug, consisting of 6 ads, 1 4cy, 3 2cy and 1 juv. Further counts of up to 7 were made at Candles Landfill, Chelmarsh, Cantlop, Condoover, Priorslee Lake and Colemere.

Caspian Gull A juvenile was at Candles Landfill on 12 Aug.

Black Tern Early morning on 6 Sep, one was watched at Trench Pool for forty minutes before it departed.

Common Tern A pair were observed to be sitting on three eggs in early July. All hatched but two of the chicks were predated. The third took its first flight in early Aug and could be seen with the two adults around the Reservoir and scrape up until 29 Aug. This is the first known successful breeding of Common Terns in the County. Elsewhere, 3 were at Priorslee Lake on 18 Aug and one at Venus Pool on 28 Aug.

Ring-necked Parakeet One was seen at Shrewsbury School on 13 Sep.

Cuckoo A juv was photographed being fed by Reed Warblers at Venus Pool in the first week of July. The only other report was from Wood Lane on 10 July, the latest of the year.

Short-eared Owl The only sighting was of one at Boiling Well on the Long Mynd on the evening of 18 Sep.

Common Swift The latest reported were at Condoover on 19 Aug and two at Shavington Park on 23 Aug.

Wryneck One was seen briefly in a Yockleton garden on 1 Sep, then again on 4 Sep when a photograph was taken. Three days later, one was picked up out of the road near Hawkstone Park. It recovered and was later released. Another was seen in Ludlow on 18 Sep.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker A pair was reported in a garden in Broncroft on 10 July, the only record for the quarter.

Sand Martin The latest sightings came on 22 & 28 Aug at Venus Pool and the River Severn at Highley.

Whinchat Most sightings were on the Long Mynd, with one or two seen at Ashes Hollow, Minton Batch, Wildmoor Pool, Batch Valley, Callow Hollow and Cardingmill Valley. Two were noted at Market Drayton, up to 4 at Venus Pool, 2 at Titterstone Clee and 4 at Brown Clee along with singles at Whixall Moss and Chetwynd Park.

Wheatear The twenty reports came from Titterstone Clee, with a maximum of 15 noted during this quarter. Others were at Stiperstones, Long Mynd, Brown Clee, The Lawley, Market Drayton and Springfield Mere in Shrewsbury.

Ring Ouzel An adult female was seen on a rocky outcrop in Cardingmill Valley on 10 Sep.

Cetti's Warbler One was trapped and ringed in the Atcham area on 9 Sep.

Grasshopper Warbler Males were heard reeling at Telford Town Park on the evening of 11 July and also Priorslee Lake on 21 July.

Sedge Warbler The latest seen were at Wood Lane on 13 Sep.

Lesser Whitethroat The eight records came from Venus Pool, Wall Farm, Cantlop, Colemere and Brockton near Bishop's Castle.

Wood Warbler Just the one record; on 27 July at Blakeway Coppice on Wenlock Edge.

Spotted Flycatcher Sightings were received from twenty one locations, with the latest seen on 10 Sep at Ragleth Hill and Pentre-cefn.

Pied Flycatcher The latest were at Moelydd on 24 July and Granville CP on 10 Aug.

Tree Sparrow The three sightings were at Moretonwood, Broncroft (2) and also Wood Lane (2), which was the first report at this site for about three years.

Corn Bunting There were only five reports, these came from Tibberton, Ellerdine (3), Upton near Shifnal and a count of 4 adults and one juv at Child's Erccall.

Some sightings are subject to acceptance by the County Records Committee.

Also recorded in the period - Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Cackling Goose, Barnacle Goose, Shelduck, Teal, Mallard, Shoveler, Pintail, Pochard, Goosander, Red Grouse, Red-legged Partridge, Pheasant, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Goshawk, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Kestrel, Merlin, Hobby, Moorhen, Coot, Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Green Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Feral Pigeon, Stock Dove, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Barn Owl, Little Owl, Tawny Owl, Kingfisher, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Skylark, Swallow, House Martin, Tree Pipit, Meadow Pipit, Yellow Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Dipper, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Tree Pipit, Meadow Pipit, Redstart, Stonechat, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Goldcrest, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Willow Tit, Marsh Tit, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Jay, Magpie, Jackdaw, Rook, Crow, Raven, Starling, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, Linnet, Redpoll, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting.

Records: 6821

Species: 150

Thank you for all the sightings. Records for the next Bird Notes by 3 January 2015 at the latest please.

Church Stretton Branch meetings

Fourth Mondays at 7.30pm in Methodist Church Hall, free to Members.

Visitors very welcome; non-members £2, including refreshments.

Secretary: John Arnfield (01694 724 170 or arnfield.2@osu.edu).

January 26th

AGM and "The Complete Owl" by Michael Leach

February 23rd

"The Wild Wood" by Keith Offord

March 23rd

"Secret Wildlife of the Forest of Dean" by Nick Martin

Ludlow Branch

No events have been planned for the immediate future.

Main Society Field Trips

Sunday 25th January Whitcliffe Common, Ludlow followed by Venus Pool

Leader: Dave Pearce By car Full day

Meet at the car park at 9.30am

See the guide to sites on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com

Leave Ludlow going south on the B4361 and after crossing the Teme at Ludford Bridge turn right into Wigmore Road. Park in the designated car park on the left or on the road adjacent to the Common.

Grid Ref: SO 506 743

Sunday 8th February Severn Valley Country Park

Organiser: Sue Brealey By car Full Day

Meet at Car Park at 9am

See www.shropshire.gov.uk and search for Severn Valley Country Park

Drive to Alveley on A442 between Bridgnorth and Kidderminster. Follow the brown signs to the park.

Grid Ref: SO 756 838

Sunday 29th March RSPB Newport Wetlands

Organiser: Sue Brealey By coach Full day

Meet at the Shirehall Car Park to leave promptly at 7.45am.

Cost will be £15.00 per person for the coach. Booking from December 2014.

See www.rspb.org.uk

Sunday 12th April Titterstone Clee followed by Venus Pool

Organiser: Sue Brealey By car Full Day

Meet at Car Park at 9am

Leave Ludlow on A4117 towards Kidderminster. After about 3 miles turn left onto unclassified road sign posted Dhustone. Grid Ref: SO 098 636

Please share cars whenever possible.

Indoor meetings

Bayston Hill Memorial Hall, 7:15pm.

3rd December Chris Ward Quetzal Quest: Costa Rica

Chris Ward is a regular speaker at numerous RSPB and local bird clubs, so he is well qualified to give us a stimulating and informative talk about this trip.

7th January Keith Offord: Land of Contrasts

Keith starts the year for us with a talk on Namibia's various habitats which are home to wildlife ranging from endemic birds to the endangered black rhino.

4th February Alan Heath: The Raptors of Shropshire and Beyond

Many of you will know Alan and will look forward to hearing more about our local raptors, plus a few not so local.

4th March Jim Almond: Memorable Birding Moments

Our very own Jim returns for a ramble around his most exciting and rewarding birding moments.

1st April Baz Fewster: Shropshire Wildlife Trust, its work and vision for the future.

This talk about the Trust and the work they do should be interesting and enlightening.

Shropshire Ornithological Society is supported by CJ Wildlife

www.birdfood.co.uk

