

The Buzzard



**Shropshire
Ornithological Society's
quarterly magazine**

No. 239

Spring 2015

Society Officers and Officials

President:	Frank Gribble, MBE.
Vice Presidents:	Hugh Blofield, Colin Wright and Chris Whittles.
Chairman:	Peter Deans, Springfield, Cross Lane Head, Astley Abbots, Bridgnorth, Shrops. WV16 4SJ. 01746 766718. <i>petedeans@btinternet.com</i> .
Honorary Secretary:	Helen Griffiths, 104 Noel Hill Road, Cross Houses, Shrewsbury, SY5 6LD. 01743 761507. <i>hjgriffiths104@btinternet.com</i>
Treasurer:	Brian Andrews, 6 Sytche Close, Much Wenlock, Shrops. TF13 6JJ. 01952 727531. <i>bafca@yahoo.co.uk</i>
Membership:	Annie Andrews, contact details as above.
Management	Society Officers, Graham Walker and Sue Brealey.
Conservation Chair:	Graham Walker, 5 Spa Street, Belle Vue, Shrewsbury. SY3 7PU. 01743 351686. <i>gramanda5@btinternet.com</i>
Committee:	John Tucker, Allan Dawes, Geoff. Holmes, Geoff. Smith, Simon Twigger, Leo Smith and Helen Griffiths, Mike Shurmer, Linda Munday and Martyn Owen.
Development/ Publicity Chair:	Sue Brealey, 6 Nobold, Baschurch, Shrewsbury, SY4 2EA. 01939 262450. <i>susan@suebrealey.plus.com</i>
Committee:	Helen Griffiths and Jim Almond.
Indoor Programme:	Jean Rickard, 98 London Road, Shrewsbury. SY2 6PN 01743 367576. <i>dickrickard@hotmail.co.uk</i>
Field Trip Leaders:	Various Society members as appointed by the Management Committee. See the annual programme.
County Bird Recorder:	Geoff Holmes, 22 Tenbury Drive, Telford Estate, Shrewsbury. SY2 5YF. 01743 364621. <i>geoff.holmes.4@btinternet.com</i>
Website & Bird Notes:	Yvonne Chadwick. <i>sosbirds@yahoo.co.uk</i>

Editorial

In the Society's diamond jubilee year it's very encouraging to see so much ornithology in this issue of *The Buzzard* – thanks to John Tucker and Allan Reese we even have a page of graphs (page nine if you can't wait)!

Their article on migrant arrival dates makes for very interesting reading and is a classic piece of practical citizen science that we can all get involved with. In this mailing of the magazine you will also find a coloured Shropshire Migrant Arrival Dates survey form. Do please keep this form handy so that you can log your sightings and return the information to John.

Elsewhere in the magazine we've got news of a survey of Swifts nesting on churches, Sand Martins nesting within the walls of Ludlow Castle, and a great series of photographs from Gareth Thomas of a close encounter between a Blue Tit and a Sparrowhawk on a peanut feeder.

Please also look out for the *Your chance to get involved* notices on pages 11 and 12. There are lots of potential opportunities to get involved in useful survey work at the moment and it can be very rewarding.

For many years Jim Martin was a great encourager of people in the Ludlow area and did much to increase the amount of enjoyment people got from their birdwatching. It's sad that we have to report that Jim died just as the magazine was being compiled. I'm grateful to John Mackintosh for writing such a nice obituary at just a few days' notice.

Martyn Owen became the new county recorder at the beginning of the year, taking over from Geoff Holmes who has done a great job for nearly two decades. The role requires a rare mix of bird, organisational and people skills so we're very fortunate that both Geoff and Martyn have them in abundance.

Martin

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

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.JPB Grundy, Shrewsbury; Mr D Bennett, Presteigne; Mrs A Bednall,
Church Stretton; Mr G Evans, Shrewsbury, Mr & Mrs JW Lightfoot, Baschurch;
Mr & Mrs D Smith, Shrewsbury; Mrs SE Stringer, Tarporley; Mr RJ Jopling,
Market Drayton.

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.

Treasurer's appeal for an understudy

Our Treasurer is getting a little long in the tooth and having been responsible for the Society's finances for over 20 years is concerned that should he fall off the branch there is no one in the wings waiting to replace him.

This is not an appeal for a replacement at this time but if someone feels able to take on the day to day book-keeping it would at least ensure that there is an understudy available who would know where the money is hidden.

Alternatively if there is anyone who feels that they would be able to assume full responsibility then who are we to stop them?!

A volunteer please!!

Brian Andrews
(contact details on inside front cover)

Shropshire Ornithological Society 2005

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Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 1st April 2015

Bayston Hill Memorial Hall (immediately following the Annual General Meeting of Shropshire Ornithological Society)

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence.
2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 2nd April 2014.
3. Matters Arising.
4. Presentation and Approval of the Accounts for the year ended 31st December 2014.
5. Appointment of Directors.
Mr. B. Andrews, Mr. P.G. Deans and Helen J. Griffiths retire by rotation and being eligible offer themselves for re-election.
6. Appointment of Independent Examiner.
7. Any Other Business.

Brian Andrews
Company Secretary

The Shropshire Ornithological Society AGM 2015

The 60th AGM of the Society will be held on Wednesday, 1 April 2015, at Bayston Hill Memorial Hall at 7.15pm, prior to the Indoor Meeting.

Nominations for Officers and Management Committee Members must be made in writing to the Secretary by any two Members of the Society at least 14 days prior to the AGM.

Any items notified to the Secretary for inclusion on the AGM Agenda are to be in accordance with Rule 7 of the Constitution.

Helen J Griffiths
Hon Secretary

25 January 2015

A note for your diaries

27th November 2015 at Shrewsbury Town Football Club.

The Society's 60th Anniversary Dinner and Official Launch of The Birds of Shropshire.

Further details to follow in due course.



Swifts have declined by 39% since 1995 and loss of nesting holes is a major factor in this decline.

Many Swift nests are found within churches and chapels and repair work can destroy or block them if the parishioners and diocese staff do not know where they are found. Caring for God's Acre are starting a survey of Swift nests in church buildings with the aim of building a database of these nest sites. We can then use this data to inform the diocese staff, and working with Swift Conservation, can then advise them on how to carry out necessary work without damaging nest sites or birds. Parishioners will also be able to enjoy and celebrate their Swift summer visitors.

We are hoping that SOS members will be interested in surveying their local sites. The SOS conservation sub-committee has backed this project and we believe it could greatly assist in the conservation of Swifts in Shropshire.

There will be more information available on the SOS website and survey details will be finalised in April.

Please can you contact Harriet Carty on harriet@cfga.org.uk if you are interested in becoming involved?

Harriet Carty

Shropshire Migrant Arrival Data – SMAD

By John Tucker and Allan Reese

As part of the preparation for *The Birds of Shropshire (BoS)* we now have a spreadsheet containing county first-arrival dates of thirty two species of migrant birds, from the first House Martin in Ironbridge on Saturday 17 March 1886 to the earliest Brambling in autumn 2014. It currently contains over 2,900 records from the 129 years and holds the first record for each species as the date (day.month) and day-number in the year. Geoff Holmes and Graham Walker have checked for rogue records and Allan Reese, a statistician from Dorset, kindly checked the whole data set for errors in allocating day numbers so the data set is now as complete and correct as it can be. A useful date to remember is 10 April - day 100 in a non-leap year.

The primary objective of compiling the data was to look for changes in arrival dates. In 1938 Llewelyn Cyril Lloyd (1905-1968) carried out a similar exercise for the Shropshire area and published it in the Transactions of the CSVFC. In a massive exercise he analysed all the data then available, all 5,291 records. He worked with multiple lists from individual recorders and looked at departures as well as arrivals, so had more records to deal with – and no calculator in sight! Unfortunately the novel method he used to calculate arrival dates, deriving average figures from individual observers, is incompatible with the data now available – first arrivals each year. However, to keep faith with his efforts, the dates of his work have been retained in a column in the database and in another column are compared with current averages.

Allan has produced a set of trend-line graphs for BoS (Figure 1) and tested various 'statistical models' using a sophisticated computer program to reveal the changes in arrival dates. Readers will have to wait to see the whole suite of 32 graphs but suffice to say here that they fall into four categories, though with fuzzy boundaries.

- First are graphs which tilt upwards to the right as the years pass. These species appear to be arriving later but the analysis suggests this is an illusion. They include Nightingale (illustrated) and Corncrake; species that used to be common but are now rare. The few individuals found each year have later dates.
- A few species show apparently no change in arrival dates, notably Spotted Flycatcher (Illustrated).

- Most show a gradual tilt downwards to the right as dates get earlier. Sixteen species show this trend. Ordered by speed of change they begin with Whinchat. Whitethroat (illustrated) is about halfway and the steepest reliable trend is shown by Sedge Warbler, now around 20 days earlier.
- Six species show changing trends within the period. We are fortunate to have long data series of 129 years (1886 to 2014) with few gaps. For example House Martin (illustrated) appears to have begun by arriving later (but statistically not significant), until about the 1950s, after which the trend reversed and they are now arriving earlier than ever. One might speculate that this change links in part to the Clean Air Acts of 1956-1964.

Many factors may affect migration timings differentially, not least climate change. The patterns and possible drivers will be discussed briefly in Birds of Shropshire, further in an SBR article and in detail in an academic paper currently in prep.

The database will be maintained for further research and may be consulted on Histo or via the SOS website. The original spreadsheet is available on request for research purposes. So, to keep the database alive please submit your first dates to the SOS this year – the story is ongoing ...

A quiz, and a challenge...

The quiz

The species with the most first dates recorded, out of the 129 years possible, scores with 125 (97% of all years). Can you guess the top ten species with most first arrival dates? I think you may get 2 and 3 right, but not number 1. Answer on the SOS website.

The challenge

There is a piece of work to be done, for the SOS, for us all and 'for science', on departure dates, which are probably just as interesting as arrivals. Comparing arrivals and departures would also then be possible – would it find extended or shortened stays? If someone (or a pair – they would find it much easier and quicker) is willing to give time to creating a list of departure dates please contact JT, certainly before starting work on it – I know a few things not to do and ways to make the job faster. The task might take a pair of workers a month – well worth the time on it.

I look forward to hearing from you... JT

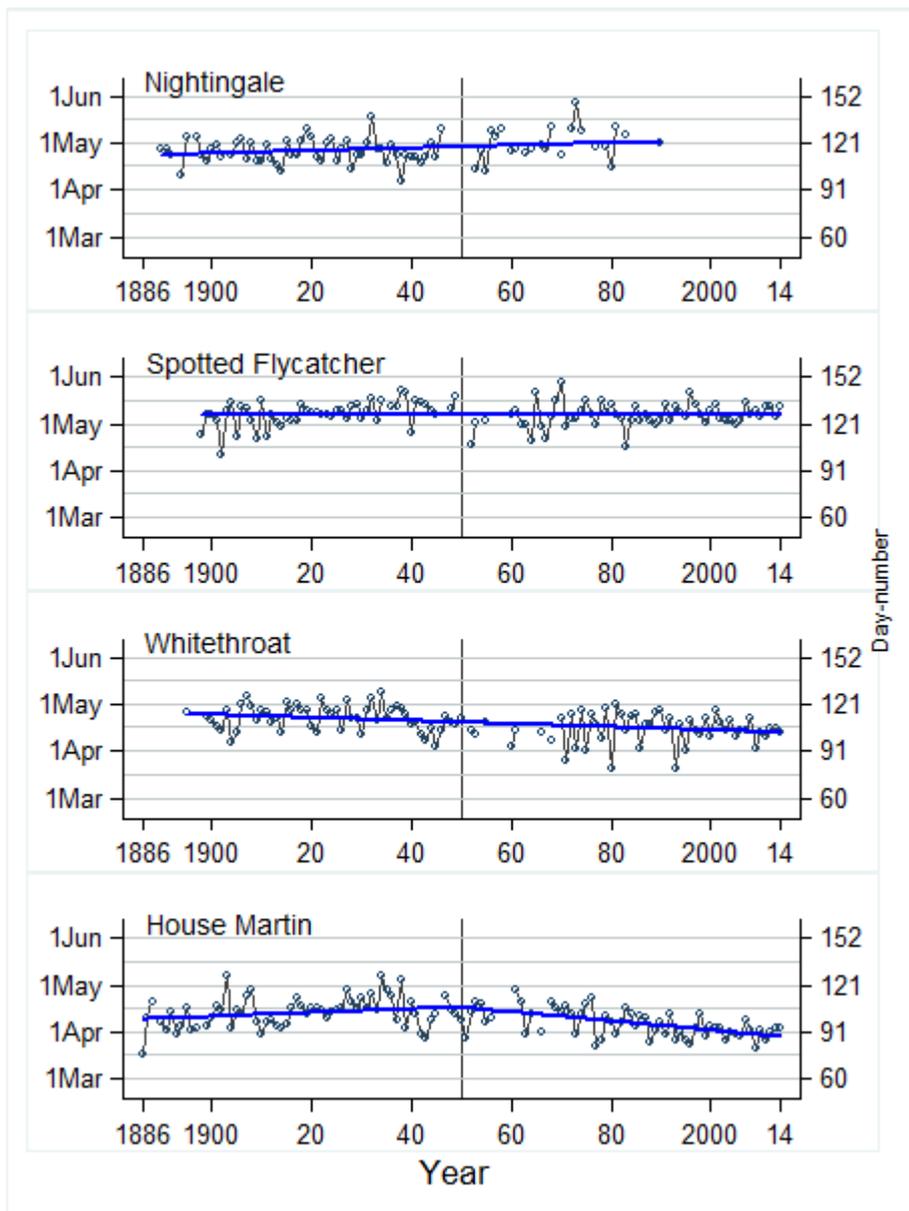


Figure 1. Selected trend-line graphs for *The Birds of Shropshire*

Shropshire Migrant Arrival Dates

With this *Buzzard* comes a coloured sheet of A4, “2015 A trial year; do these dates help to nail down how arrivals happen?”

Please have a go at completing the form as the birds arrive, at least for the top six, send me the form in mid-May and I'll do an analysis for the autumn issue.

Thank you.

John Tucker

New County Bird Recorder: Martyn Owen

After around 18 years as Shropshire County Recorder, at the end of 2014 Geoff Holmes decided to bring his time in the role to an end.

Geoff has shown huge commitment to the SOS during his tenure; among his many achievements he has overseen the transition of records from paper to electronic, implemented a rarity committee and has coped with the ever increasing number of records from an increasing number of sources.

Geoff has been an approachable and friendly face to all he has encountered; the Society is very grateful for all of his efforts over the years.

Martyn Owen has been appointed as County Recorder from 1st January 2015.

Martyn's contact details are:

Email: soscountyrecorder@gmail.com

Tel: 01746 780336

Mob: 07736 286675

Address: 34 Peacock Hill, Alveley, Shropshire, WV15 6JX

Martyn is the current editor of the Annual Report, and will continue in this role for the time being. It is likely that a second editor or editorial team will be identified in the near future with the aim of compiling two reports concurrently until such a time that the Annual Reports are up to date.

Your chance to get involved

Look for Red Grouse

SOS members are wanted to help with counts of Red Grouse on The Long Mynd, around sunset on every Thursday evening between 2 April and 7 May, please. This will update the results of previous annual counts. The results help the National Trust's management of the heathland for this Amber List species.

People who have helped before have received a report of the results, and will be contacted nearer the time. New helpers are invited to a project briefing at 7.30pm on Thursday 26 March at the National Trust's Chalet Pavilion in Carding Mill Valley. It's your chance to get close-up views of this wonderful bird, and see other moorland specialities and birds of prey.

Please help. For further information see the website www.shropshirebirds.com, or contact Kate Price 07972 115725 kate.price@nationaltrust.org.uk

Community Wildlife Groups

There are now eight Community Wildlife Groups. Those covering the Upper Onny, Upper Clun, Kemp Valley, Clee Hill, Strettons area and Wenlock Edge have been joined by two new ones, in the Rea / Hope Valleys, and Camlad, valley areas, developed through the Stiperstones & Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme. All eight Groups will be running bird surveys during 2015, mostly concentrating on monitoring Lapwing, Curlew and a number of other threatened species. This usually involves three half-days, around 1 April, 1 May and mid-June. The results are used to promote local conservation. It's easy, simple instructions are provided, and fieldwork training is available for anyone that wants it.

SOS members can make an important contribution to the conservation of these birds, while enjoying their hobby in superb countryside. All welcome. For further information, see the website www.ShropshireCWGs.org.uk

Shropshire Raptor Study Group

Membership is restricted to people who will go out and actively look for birds of prey, particularly Hobby, Merlin, Red Kite and Goshawk. We co-operate with, but do not duplicate, the work of the Peregrine and Barn Owl Groups.

Birders who have an interest in monitoring and conserving birds of prey, and the skill and willingness to undertake the necessary fieldwork, are welcome to apply. For further information see the website www.shropshirebirds.com, or contact the Convenor, Leo Smith (01694 720296, leo@leosmith.org.uk).

If anyone knows of a nest site of any of the target species, or finds one in future, we would be grateful for details, in the strictest confidence, please.

Red Kites

In 2014, 34 pairs were located, and 26 nests were found; 17 were successful, producing 31 fledged young. It was the best year since 2011, and followed two poor breeding seasons affected by bad weather.

Since the first successful breeding in 2006, more than 170 young are known to have flown from Shropshire nests.

A report on 2014 was given in the autumn edition of The Buzzard.

The Raptor Study Group and Welsh Kite Trust are still hoping to find all nests in 2015, so reports are wanted, please, of a pair together in spring, or displaying, or one seen several times in the same place, or one going into a wood, any time between March and June. Reports of wing-tagged birds are wanted too, please. All reports will be treated in absolute confidence. Kites are very shy, and they are legally protected. It is an offence to disturb them, but this monitoring is carried out under licence. Contact Leo Smith leo@leosmith.org.uk 01694 720296

For more information, see the SOS website, www.shropshirebirds.com

Jim Martin

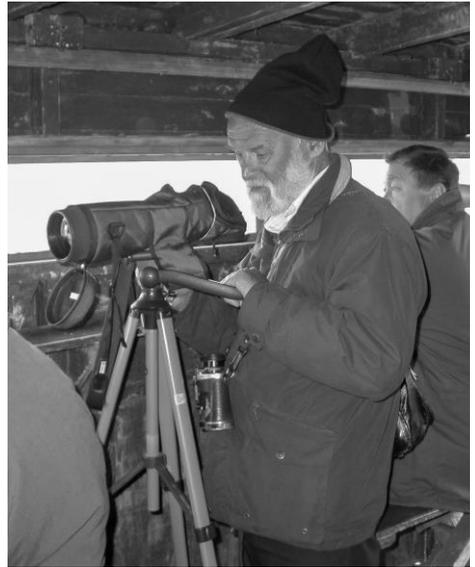
It is with deep regret I have to report that Jim Martin, Chairman of the Ludlow Branch, died on the 22nd January.

Jim's interest in birds began in his youth when soon after his family moved into the country he heard a bird singing in a hedgerow and as he said, "I was hooked". This involvement continued throughout his life. While he was working he was a long time member and for many years Chairman of the Kent Ornithological Society. After retirement in 1999 he and his wife Marian moved to Cleobury Mortimer and he quickly became involved with the SOS and with the Wildlife Trust.

Soon after joining the Ludlow Branch he became a Committee member and in 2004 Chairman. From the start he was a tremendous asset as he brought birding skills and experience that were scarcely matched by anyone else in the group and very importantly he would help the less able with such patience and modesty that no one felt put down.

He instituted the monthly Wednesday field Trips, visits to local sites from Upton Warren to Dolydd Hafren, which were informal and if no one else came, as happened very occasionally, Jim would enjoy the walk himself. He also came on many weekend excursions and all of our residential trips and was always an interesting and congenial companion.

Necessarily many events involved a considerable amount of walking, sometimes steep and muddy and Jim completed these cheerfully despite suffering for many years with considerable and very painful back problems.



This meant that as well as the usual kit of bins, scope and tripod, he had to carry walking aids, at first sticks and latterly a walking frame. Most of us would have given up long ago.

On top of all this and supporting a variety of activities in Cleobury he took part in and made a significant contribution to many surveys both national and local.

He was also the Area Co-ordinator for the BTO and Shropshire Bird Atlases. In all of these things he was an inspirational model of what a birder should be.

He will be sadly missed.

John Mackintosh

Moth trapping at home

by *Bill Watkins*

Trapping and recording moths is like an extension of birdwatching, which can be done in your back garden without having to travel distances to see them. The moths will come to you, attracted by the Ultra Violet light of a trap overnight. An inexpensive moth trap and a good identification guide is all that is needed to begin an absorbing and fascinating hobby.

Just like birds, moths need our help as they are sensitive indicators of the ecosystem. Records provide a really valuable tool to help ecologists discover why species are declining or increasing and the excitement of the hobby is that, just like birding, you just never know what you are going to find right there, in your own garden. Just as with birds, there are occasional migrants so to me it is like Christmas every day as I tentatively start to remove each moth from the trap, before placing them into an inspection box for identification and counting them. Since I began trapping and recording in 2008 I have trapped over 400 species in my garden and each year I get species I have not recorded previously. Records are submitted to the County Recorder.



**A "Skinner" type trap
With 15w Actinic tube**

Brimstone Moth

Moths are gentle, harmless creatures which do not bite, peck or sting so this makes for an enjoyable experience when handling them. Not all moths fly at night and not all are attracted by light, but a huge variety of plain and colourful moths are attracted at differing times of the year. With a bit of practise and a good identification guide most are quite easy to put a name to, while others are more difficult. Experience and practise helps to speed-up the process of emptying the trap ready for the next night's catch.

You will soon become aware of the extraordinary variety of shapes, colours and sizes of moths. Of course there are the “little brown jobs” but many moths, like Brimstone and Merveille du Jour, are more colourful than butterflies.



Merveille du Jour



Bufftip

It is a good idea to begin with identifying and recording the larger moths as they are generally easier to deal with. The vast majority of these fall into the group known as “Macro Moths” of which there are about 800 species found in UK. Most of the smaller moths fall into the category of “Micro Moths” of which there are about 1600 found in UK. Unfortunately, the vast majority of Micro Moths have Latin names and many can only be identified through microscopic examination of genitalia. However, there are many others which are given Common names and are easily recognised, so they should not be ignored as a group. The records are still of great value.



Gold Triangle (micro moth)



Small Magpie (micro moth)

There is plenty of help with identification if required on the internet. A Garden Moth Scheme (GMS) exists for those wishing to make a real contribution by weekly trapping from March to November. Further information about how to start out moth-trapping can be found on www.gardenmoths.org.uk

Cliff nesting Swifts and Sand Martins

by Tom Wall, with additional photographs by Gareth Thomas

My request in the autumn issue of 'The Buzzard' for any information on Swifts and Sand Martins nesting on cliff sites in Shropshire elicited two responses. The first, from Allan Dawes, was a 'near miss': Allan tells me that Swifts regularly nest in the cliffs at Llanymynech but 'unfortunately the border runs along the bottom of the cliffs so the nest sites are in Wales!' The last time that Allan remembers seeing them they were in a location known locally as the 'amphitheatre', about 200m the other side of the country boundary.

Such 'natural' sites seem to be used less than in the past, but Gareth Thomas chanced on one in the limestone cliffs of South Gower. He tells me that he became curious when, fishing at dusk on the coast, he found Swifts flying around him. His son returned in daylight and confirmed that they were nesting there.



Whilst no-one provided information on Sand Martins using cliff sites, Gareth came up with the next best thing, sending me photos of them using pipes let into the town wall above The Linney in Ludlow (as reproduced here).

Whilst the use of pipes in river banks is not unusual (I've seen them in use on the Severn in Worcester and Wye in Hereford), this site, which is well away from any water, appears exceptional.

I made my request in relation to texts I am compiling for 'The Birds of Shropshire' and if anyone else has information to offer it is not too late, so do please get in touch. And I wonder whether any readers have experience to share in respect of the use in Shropshire of nest-boxes for Swifts.



Three boxes let into the end-wall of our house near Lydbury North have been used for many years, but Swifts have never shown the slightest interest in two boxes attached to the outer face of the wall (see photo above). Does anyone have experience of boxes of this and similar design being used?

It would seem that the design used successfully by Ted Butcher in the centre of Shrewsbury, similar to that shown below, is a better bet.



A close shave

by Gareth Thomas



Probably all of us who feed and watch garden birds have been stunned by the explosive intrusion of a Sparrowhawk on the speculative hunt for a quick lunch. This can often be at a regular time of day and I had always nurtured the ambition to capture the moment of strike on the camera, – realistically an impossible dream for me.

Last week I thought my moment had come, for a beautiful male landed on the peanut feeder, scattering the throng of tits and finches like chaff in the wind, to all points of the compass.

All but one Blue Tit, that is, who was mutually unsighted to the hawk. Freezing for a second she was hoping to remain invisible to the hawk, who clearly sensed there was something there, though obscured by the feeder's lid (a mini hub-cap actually).

My chance, at last! – when the tit breaks for freedom, I would be ready for the action...



Luckily the tit, quickly abandoning Plan A, chose to leave on the opposite side and escaped safely under cover, leaving the hawk confused and perplexed. I guess he was not that hungry, for on his right leg there is a splash of blood and there is feather-down on his claws from a very recent kill.

A close shave indeed for all concerned, though in truth I cannot pretend to be really sorry.

Woodpigeons, Collared & Stock Doves

by Alan W Smith

Replying to Allan Dawes BTO News, Winter 2013, on the differing fortunes of Woodpigeons and Collared Doves I would make the following comments from the notes I have made over the last few years of maximum numbers seen around Somerwood, near Shrewsbury.

I believe that Collared Doves were more dependent on spilt grain for food and the fact that the farmers have had to increase the biosecurity round their grain stores and to do this they have had to make their stores rodent and bird proof which has greatly reduced the amount of food available. On top of this the increased area of autumn sown crops has also cut down the amount of grain/seeds on unploughed stubbles available to them through the winter.

Living in the country I have a number of maximum double figure counts records from autumn/winter between 2000 and 2005. 20 in Nov 2000, 22 in Dec 2001, 13 Dec 2002, 9-13 in Jan 2003, 29 in Oct 2003, 20+ in Dec 2003 and 36 in Jan 2004. I didn't record any other numbers until Oct 2005 when I saw my maximum count of 67 sitting on electricity wires near the local farm buildings. Since then I haven't recorded any double figure counts and the most seen since were six in Jan 2014 at the same farm where the 67 were recorded in 2005. However there are still 2-3 visiting the bird table this year (2014) but no sign of any fledged young.

I believe that Stock Doves may have also declined in numbers. From my notebooks I see that in Oct 1994 flocks of between 50 and a maximum 86 were on the newly sown arable field opposite the house. Sept 1998 flocks of 31 and 51 and since then only one noteworthy flock of 36 in Jan 2004. A neighbouring hollow oak still has Jackdaws and Stock Doves nesting in it, but the maximum in the garden last year (2014) was three including one fledged youngster. They do come to feed on mixed seeds and grain spread on the grass but they are very wary and fly off at the slightest movement in the window.

The Woodpigeon is much more catholic in the range of items it will eat, ranging from brassicas, oilseed rape, cabbage and brussel sprouts, berries, haws, seeds as large as acorns and also tree buds in spring/early summer. It will also feed on grass and in particular on clover leaves with which it will fill its crop. The Woodpigeon has long been treated as a serious pest on food crops as large winter flocks can decimate brassicas.

In the past, pigeon shooting clubs were organized with free cartridges supplied but the problem was to organize shooting on the same day over a large area and to reduce a population one has to cull considerably more than would be lost to natural wastage over the winter and with a pair of pigeons able to rear a number of broods every year it is not an easy task. As with a cull initiated by the Forestry Commission after the second world war to reduce the numbers of grey squirrels which were damaging Britain's woodlands it was found impossible, even with a bounty, to reduce numbers sufficiently as squirrels just moved in from estates or parks where no control was carried out.

In the late seventies we were working on a shooting estate in south Staffordshire and usually we were allowed into the main shooting wood on 2nd February once the game shooting season was over but this year we were told to be out of the wood by 3pm as the pigeon shooting had been let and that in late afternoon there were up to 30 thousand pigeons flying in to roost there. We greeted this estimate with some scepticism and this sight we had to see for ourselves. I don't know whose estimate it was, or how accurate, but it certainly was a most impressive sight with thousands of birds in the air above the wood. Fortunately there was nobody shooting that afternoon and we beat a hasty retreat before our presence after the deadline of 3pm was noticed.

Locally the largest flock I have recorded was in the early nineties which I estimated at between 4 and 5 thousand. This was feeding on oilseed rape and an impressive grey/blue colour blend when they lifted off the field. Lately there have been few flocks exceeding a hundred but there are currently between 100 and 200 feeding on oilseed rape growing in the field behind the house.

Living in the country I am not fully aware of how woodpigeons are faring in the Urban environment but I do notice that in parks they are very tame and do not fly off as in the country at the sight of humans where they can be shot at and moved off crops with bird-scarers.

From the SOS yearly bird reports I have found the following records: 1,000 Benthall Nov 1993, 2,000 ASF Jan 1997, 1,000 Somerwood Nov 1998, 2,000 Pimhill Jan 2000 and 1,000 Somerwood and Chelmarsh Dec 2002, 2,500 Wall Farm also Dec 2002. 1,500 Shavington Nov 2004, 1,200 Edgmond Feb 2005 and a large movement of 53 flocks totaling 6,000 over Priorslee on 23/10 2005, 1,900 and 2,100 Edgmond Feb 2006, 2,000 Shavington Dec 2006, several flocks totaling 5,000+ passed over Priorslee Lake heading south on 18th Oct 2007, similarly 2,550 Priorslee Lake Nov 2008 and 1,400 feeding on parsnip fodder at Upton Magna in Feb 2009.

It would be interesting to know whether the large movements seen heading south in the autumn are made up of British or Continental birds or a combination of both? What is rather strange is that looking through the year books there are no reports of winter roosts.

The year books 2007, 2008 and 2009 all report “This is a very successful bird with a strong upward trend in its population both locally and nationally.” It would be interesting to learn how they have fared in the intervening years and whether the increase in numbers reported in the urban situation has also been recorded in the country. In the Somerwood area I have not recorded any notable flocks since Dec 2002.

What is possibly more worrying is the lack of finches coming into the garden this autumn and over the Xmas period and speaking to people living in Shrewsbury they have also noticed the same lack of Greenfinch, Chaffinch and Goldfinch.

Please look out for colour ringed birds

Several species of birds, ranging from Coot to Kestrel to Marsh Tit and House Sparrow, are colour ringed in Shropshire as part of long term studies into their populations, and colour ringed birds from outside the county, most notably gulls, can also be seen fairly regularly.

Looking out for colour rings can add interest to our birdwatching and, as many gull watchers have discovered, can produce interesting results that help to increase our knowledge of birds in Shropshire and beyond.



If you do see a colour ringed bird, or one showing other marks such as wing tags, do please make a note of the details and submit them via www.ring.ac



BTO News

Allan P. Dawes 01691-654245
allandawes@btinternet.com

House Martin Survey

Fieldwork for the new local avifauna found house martins to be widespread, with little change in their distribution since the previous atlas but despite being found in most tetrads and living alongside us, we know surprisingly little about them. Results from other surveys suggest that numbers are in rapid decline and the House Martin is 'Amber listed' in the Birds of Conservation Concern listings. To discover more about House martins and to find out why they are in trouble, a new BTO survey will collect information on population size, breeding ecology and habitat preferences, so they can begin to tackle some key questions about this eagerly awaited summer visitor. The survey is in two parts.

In 2015 volunteers will be required to visit randomly selected 1km squares so that a robust population estimate can be established as a baseline for future monitoring. Three visits will be required, a recce in May and two recording visits in June/July. Volunteers will need to walk around the square and collect information on birds/nests and site details. Visits should take between 2 and 3 hours depending on the habitat within the square. Because of the obvious difficulties of surveying nesting House Martins, a letter explaining the survey will be provided, this can be given to residents in the survey area and care will need to be taken when surveying. This project will be suitable for those new to bird monitoring as well as regular volunteers. Help is always appreciated, please contact me to see if there is a square near you.

In 2016 a nest monitoring study will involve making regular observations of individual nests. This survey will be ideal for observers who have martins nesting on their homes or place of work.

Need help with those difficult species?

The BTO now have quite a range of video ID workshops on their web site. They range from beginners guides to green-coloured finches in gardens and the differences between the song and mistle thrush to the more problematic chiffchaff/willow warbler and marsh/willow tit. There are also guides to less familiar species to inland birders such as grey geese, winter plumage auks and scoters. These and many more species groups can be viewed at www.bto.org/about-birds/birds-id

Bird Notes October, November and December 2014

Yvonne Chadwick

Whooper Swan Two were at Meverley on 23 Oct, with this increasing to 15 by 13 Dec. Three were also at Hilley Farm, Pentre on 6 Nov. The first in the Coundlane / Venus Pool area were 2 on 19 Nov. By Dec, 12 were regularly seen, including a family with 7 juveniles.

Pink-footed Goose One hundred flew south over Trefonen on 4 Nov.

Pintail Up to five were at Venus Pool throughout Oct and Nov. A male was on the floods at Whixall on 16 Nov and one was also at Wood Lane in late Nov.

Long-tailed Duck First seen on 11 Nov, this 1st winter drake remained at Trench Pool for three weeks. The much photographed bird was last seen on 2 Dec.

Little Egret One was on the Severn at Atcham on 2 Oct. At nearby Venus Pool one was present from 7 Oct through to 4 Nov, with 2 reported on 9 Oct. In Bridgnorth, 2 were near the bypass bridge for the first half of October. By 19 Nov the river was very high and just one remained. Single birds were also at Chelmarsh on 23 Oct and on the River Clun at Purslow Bridge 27 Dec.

Great White Egret Seen and photographed at Venus Pool at 7.30am, but soon chased off by herons. Another sighting was made over Sutton, Shrewsbury at 7.45am.

Hen Harrier A ringtail was seen on the Long Mynd on 16 Oct and also 22 & 23 Nov. On Whixall Moss, a male was present throughout the quarter.

Osprey On 12 Oct, one was photographed as it caught a fish at Millerchope Park, near Munslow. A buzzard mobbed the bird and the fish was dropped.

Water Rail Sightings came from Chelmarsh, Priorslee Lake (max 3), Venus Pool (max 2), West Felton and Devil's Dingle.

Golden Plover Most reports were from the Long Mynd from mid Oct to the end of the year, with up to 250 seen. Elsewhere, 68 flew over Cantlop on 18 Oct, 100 at Walcot on 14 Nov and 30 over Lilleshall on 15 Dec.

Curlew Most sightings came from Wood Lane, with the highest count being of 22 birds in Oct and early Nov. One was also at Venus Pool on three dates.

Ringed Plover A single bird was at Venus Pool on 2 Oct only.

Ruff One stayed four days at Wood Lane, first noted on 1 Oct.

Common Sandpiper Just one record this quarter; on 6 Oct at Wood Lane.

Green Sandpiper The twenty four sightings were from Wood Lane, Venus Pool, Cantlop, Cound Stank and Devil's Dingle, with one or two at each site.

Greenshank The Venus Pool bird that was present in Sep, was seen for the last time on 1 Oct.

Common Redshank The only report was from Wood Lane, of a bird present on 10 Oct.

Jack Snipe Flushed from the boggy pools at Upper Marshes, Catherton Common on 1 Nov.

Woodcock Seen at Whixall Moss, Whitcliffe, Decker Hill, Priorslee Lake, West Felton, Beambridge and Wyke near Broseley.

Common Snipe High counts were made at Wood Lane throughout the period, with a peak of 60 on 1 Oct. A good count of 38 was also made on 23 Nov at Devil's Dingle. Other records were from Venus Pool (18), West Felton (2), Wall Farm (3) and Catherton Common (4).

Arctic Tern A juvenile flew through Priorslee Lake on 15 Oct.

Mediterranean Gull A first winter bird was spotted in the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere on 21 Dec and 30 Dec.

Yellow-legged Gull The highest count was of 13 at Priorslee Lake on 15 Oct, consisting of seven ads, one 4cy, a 3cy, two 2cy and two juvs. Further counts of up to 7 were made at Candles Landfill, Chelmarsh, The Mere, Trench, Priorslee Lake and Wood Lane.

Caspian Gull An adult, a 2cy and a 1cy were seen at Priorslee Lake / Candles Landfill in Oct. In Dec three different 2cy year birds were seen along with a 1cy bird. An adult was also in the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere on 9 Nov, with two adults noted on 15 Nov.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker On 16 Nov one was observed with a tit flock in Ercall Woods. Another was reported at Wood Lane on 18 Nov.

Merlin The seven sightings were at Berriewood near Condover, Long Mynd, Candles Landfill, Titterstone Clee and Whixall Moss.

Ring-necked Parakeet The Chelmarsh bird was seen again on 20 Dec, in the wood on the west shore.

Great Grey Shrike Seen on the west side of Black Hill near Fiddler's Elbow on 19 Nov.

Swallow The last ones of the year were on 12 Oct, at Devil's Dingle and an adult and juv on wires at Whixall Moss.

Cetti's Warbler A warbler was seen briefly and heard calling at Priorslee Lake on 3 Dec. Soon identified as a Cetti's, it continued to be heard, and occasionally seen, in the reed bed at the north east corner until 20 Dec.

Siberian Chiffchaff A probable was trapped and ringed at Whixall Moss on 9 Nov.

Starling The only count over a thousand was of 3-5000 at Tern Hill on 29 Dec.

Wheatear Two unringed birds were on Titterstone Clee on 17 Oct. One remained into Nov, with reports on 6 & 8 Nov.

Tree Sparrow Seen at Cantlop on 18 Oct and Chapel Lawn on 10 Nov.

Brambling Seen amongst a large finch flock at Pole Cottage on the Long Mynd from 16 Oct, with at least 20 present by early Nov. A male was also on the Wrekin on 2 Nov.

Hawfinch Three were observed feeding high in the beech at Whitcliffe Common on 30 Oct.

Twite One was reported in Shifnal on 5 Dec.

Snow Bunting Seen near the Trig Point on the Long Mynd on the afternoon of 22 Nov, but no sign the following day.

Corn Bunting Just two reports this quarter; one at Wall Farm, Kynnersley on 17 Oct and at Venus Pool on 2 Nov.

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, Mandarin Duck, Wigeon, Mallard, Shoveler, Pochard, Goosander, Red Grouse, Red-legged Partridge, Pheasant, Golden Pheasant, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Goshawk, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Peregrine, Red Kite, Kestrel, Moorhen, Coot, Lapwing, 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, Tawny Owl, Kingfisher, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Skylark, House Martin, Meadow Pipit, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Dipper, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Meadow Pipit, Stonechat, Blackbird, Fieldfare, Redwing, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Willow Tit, Marsh Tit, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Jay, Magpie, Jackdaw, Rook, Crow, Raven, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, Linnet, Redpoll, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting.

Records: 5336

Species: 127

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

Records accepted by the County Records Committee:

2011

Manx Shearwater, taken into care but died, Lydham, 11/09/11

2012

Short-eared Owl, Whixall Moss, 21/12/12 - 15/02/13

2013

Bewick's Swan, 2 ads & 2 juvs, Coundlane/Venus Pool, 27/11/13 - 23/02/14

Brent Goose, dark bellied, Alberbury, 03/01/13

Green-winged Teal, drake, Polemere, 02/01/13 - 31/01/13

Red-breasted Merganser, female, Chelmarsh Reservoir, 11/11/13

Great Northern Diver, The Mere at Ellesmere, 27/12/13 - 19/01/14

Glossy Ibis, Wall Farm at Kynnersley, 29/09/13

Black-necked Grebe, two, Chelmarsh Reservoir, 26/09/13

Turnstone, Chelmarsh Reservoir, 15/05/13

2013 (continued)

Short-eared Owl, Brown Clee, 13/01/13

Short-eared Owl, Chelmarsh Reservoir, 12/04/13

Short-eared Owl, Whixall Moss, 19/04/13 - 22/04/13

Blue-headed Wagtail, Tong, 15/06/13

Great Grey Shrike, Lower Whitcliffe, 31/03/13 - 02/04/13

Two-barred Crossbill, 2 males & 1 female, Postenplain, 28/11/13 - 31/03/13

2014

Black-necked Grebe, Chelmarsh Reservoir, 04/02/2014

Velvet Scoter, fem, Priorslee Lake / Priorslee Flash, 15/01/2014 - 15/02/2014

Marsh Harrier, juvenile, Long Mynd, 15/05/2014

Marsh Harrier, female, Whixall Moss, 07/05/2014 - 09/05/2014

Crane, two from a re-introduction project, Wall Farm, 04/05/2014 - 05/05/2014

Avocet, two, Wood Lane, 18/05/2014 - 20/05/2014

Avocet, one, Wood Lane, 31/05/2014

Grey Plover, Wall Farm at Kynnersley, 15/05/2014

Dotterel, twelve, Long Mynd, 17/04/2014 - 18/04/2014

Bar-tailed Godwit, Venus Pool, 05/05/2014

Caspian Gull, 1st winter, Buildwas / Candles Landfill, 03/01/2014 - 13/01/2014

Caspian Gull, adult, Priorslee Lake, 10/01/2014

Caspian Gull, 1st winter, Redhill nr Crem / Candles, 27/01/2014 - 26/02/2014

Caspian Gull, adult, Redhill / Horsehay / Candles, 03/02/2014 - 26/02/2014

Caspian Gull, 2nd winter, Horsehay Pool, 06/02/2014

Caspian Gull, 2nd winter, Priorslee Lake, 25/02/2014

Caspian Gull, 2nd winter, Candles Landfill, 26/02/2014

Caspian Gull, 1st winter, Candles Landfill, 28/02/2014

Wryneck, Yockleton, 01/09/2014 - 04/09/2014

Wryneck, Ludlow, 18/09/2014

Firecrest, Cefn Einion, 13/04/2014

Siberian Chiffchaff, probable, Venus Pool, 11/02/2014 - 09/03/2014

Ring Ouzel, male, Newport, 02/01/2014

Parrot Crossbill, female, Postensplain, 18/02/2014

Ring-necked Duck, male, Wood Lane / The Mere / White Mere, 27/04/2014 - 07/05/2014

Main Society Field Trips

Indoor meetings resume in October, details in the programme, SOS website and the autumn issue of *The Buzzard*.

Field Trips – Full Details in the Programme
(Check the website for fuller details)

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.

Sunday 12th April **Titterstone Clew followed by Venus Pool**
Organiser: Sue Brealey By car Full Day
Meet at Car Park at 9am

Sunday 3rd May **Venus Pool**
There will be no leader/ By car Full day
organiser for this event
Reserve watch from dawn to dusk. Not an organised day but as many people as possible drop in.

June **Weekend Trip**
Organiser: Sue Brealey By car
Date & Venue to be announced at a later date. Please see Sue Brealey for details. Maximum numbers – 16

Saturday 4th July **Prees Heath & Whixall Moss**
Please note the change of date from the SOS programme
Leader: Estelle Hughes By car Full Day
Meet at 10am
See the Guide to sites on the SOS website: www.shropshirebirds.com

Please share cars whenever possible.

Shropshire Ornithological Society is supported by CJ Wildlife

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