

The Buzzard



**Shropshire
Ornithological Society's
quarterly magazine**

No. 242

Winter 2015

Society Officers and Officials

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| President: | Frank Gribble, MBE. |
| Vice Presidents: | Hugh Blofield 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: | Martyn Owen, 34 Peacock Hill, Alveley, Shropshire, WV15 6JX. 01746 780336 & 07736 286675 <i>soscountyrecorder@gmail.com</i> |
| Website & Bird Notes: | Yvonne Chadwick. <i>sosbirds@yahoo.co.uk</i> |

Editorial

As many of you will already know, we lost Colin Wright to cancer at the end of September. Colin played an active part in the SOS for many years, and was a Vice President of the Society. I'm grateful to John Tucker for producing such a nice obituary of his old friend for this issue of *The Buzzard*. Colin and I had been friends and colleagues for almost two decades, and we spent many hours at conferences or exhibitions talking birding, usually managing to get out with our binoculars at the beginning or end of the day. I was with Colin when I saw my first Shore Lark and Twite, had my best ever views of Ospreys fishing with him, and we enjoyed many a fine meal together.

Colin served as the BTO's Regional Representative for the county until handing over to Allan Dawes in 1994. Allan has been an excellent 'RR' for the last 21 years, as Graham Walker outlines in this issue, handing over the role to Jonathan Groom. You can find out more about Jonathan and the ways you can get involved in practical survey work in his introduction piece on page 22.

Getting involved can be as simple as spending two minutes watching the Goldfinches in your garden for the BTO Goldfinch Survey (page 28), or you can take on a BBS square and visit it for many years, as Colin Wright did on Haughmond Hill, deriving great pleasure from the connection with one piece of land and learning more about its wildlife. When we last spoke he told me about a day this May when he visited "the square" at BBS time but, instead of surveying, just sat amongst the bluebells from before dawn and watched the day grow old, describing it as excellent therapy. The rewards of survey work are more than just data!

On page 9 you can read about a competition for a Shropshire birdwatcher aged 16 or under to carry on Colin's enjoyment of the county's birdlife by becoming the new owner of his Swarovski binoculars. This is a lovely idea from Pat and Wendy, giving a young birder access to great optics and continuing Colin's legacy. John Tucker has kindly offered to include a year's BTO subscription if the winner isn't already a member.

Martin

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

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 & Mrs P J Pledger, Albrighton; Mr & Mrs C Thomas, Myddle; Mr G N Stanley, Shrewsbury; Mr N Nash, Telford; P Robson, Pant; Mrs S Whitlock, Church Stretton; Mr V M Downs, Lydbury North; Mr & Mrs A Holder, Condoover.

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.

Shropshire Ornithological Society 2005

Company Limited by Guarantee No. 5322294
Registered Charity No. 1108166

Notice of Annual General Meeting

Wednesday, 6th April, 2016

Bayston Hill Memorial Hall, immediately following the AGM of
Shropshire Ornithological Society

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence.
2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 1st April, 2015.
3. Matters Arising.
4. Presentation and Approval of accounts for the year ending 31/12/2015.
5. Appointment of Directors.
6. Appointment of Independent Examiner.
7. Any Other Business.

NOTE. Only members of the Company are allowed to vote at the AGM. Membership of the company is available to any member of Shropshire Ornithological Society - contact Brian Andrews (Company Secretary).

Brian Andrews - Company Secretary

The Shropshire Ornithological Society Annual General Meeting 2016

The 61st AGM of the Society will be held on Wednesday, 6th April 2016, 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

Shropshire Ornithological Society Subscription renewal 2016

Members are reminded that subscriptions fall due for renewal on 1st January, 2016. Those members paying by cheque or cash will find a renewal notice enclosed with this issue of The Buzzard. Renewal notices will not be issued to those who have signed bankers' orders as these should be paid automatically. The rates of subscription for 2016 are:

Adult Single Membership £18.00.

Adult Joint Membership £24.00.
(Includes up to 2 adults and all children up to 16 years old at the same address)

Junior Membership £8.00
(16 years and under)

Annie Andrews - Membership Secretary

Colin Wright (1938-2015)

John Tucker

I introduced myself to Colin in early 1984; I was then the new conservation officer for what is now Shropshire Wildlife Trust and aware of a difficult relationship between the Trust and the SOS. A keen birder myself and anxious to try to mend the rift I needed a mediator. I found that person in Colin, soon to be a good friend and I am, with many others, particularly his widow Pat and his daughter Wendy, deeply saddened at his loss on 30 September.



The qualities I found in Colin when we first met were of patience, tolerance, quietly-spoken common sense, compassion, human understanding and reliability; I had the privilege of knowing him for less than the second half his life. Colin was amongst those people who seem to manage to squeeze several lifetimes of achievements into one. I can sketch but a few of them here and will concentrate on those relating wildlife in the county and to the SOS in particular.

Colin was born and raised in Enfield, Middlesex and after his National Service in the army he met Pat, in Bronington during a brief period with the Forestry Commission which took him to Aberdovey. They moved to Shropshire and Colin began a career of 31 years in the police force, latterly as a training officer.

Colin joined the then eight years old SOS in 1963 and the following year he started his training to become a qualified bird ringer. His interest in birds drew him closer to the SOS and he became Annual Bird Report editor and recorder from September 1971, a position he retained until 1981 and in 1982 he became county recorder for two years before Jack Sankey took over in March 1984. From 1984 Colin ably guided the efforts of the editorial committee through eight years of work on An Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Shropshire, published in 1992. In spite of the insistence of the co-authors that the book appear over only his name – for he was the guiding force - he prevailed and all six of us appeared in the credits. Concurrently Colin began and for many years maintained, almost daily, the society's web-site. He became an SOS Vice President in 1985 and remained a constant source of knowledge and wisdom on the society's Management Committee, a position he retained for the remaining thirty years of his life.

Much of his contribution to the community and wildlife began when he retired. Colin became a full-time volunteer with the Wildlife Trust, from around 1988 working closely with our biological system but also, using his computing and financial acumen, helped to set up greatly-improved financial management systems for the Trust as a whole. Colin used his time and skills for example to begin the Trust's use of Recorder, the computer programme still used to store most of the Trust's nature reserve and core biological data. He remained a one day a week volunteer, computerising new data, until his illness prevented it. He was adept at representing the Trust on wildlife issues for Shropshire Radio with his measured, authoritative voice and his knowledge of wildlife law also very useful at times. Colin's approach to the scientific work of the Trust was based on his sound understanding of the ecological and scientific methods and principles involved in nature conservation.

Colin was never far from caring for people, or wildlife including of course birds, but I must list some of his other interests and successes. He was secretary of the Betjeman Society from 2005 to 2013 and worked with Caring for God's Acre from 1997, becoming the chairman of its Trustees in 2013. The Falkland Islands, to which he made two trips, remained a core concern; he accepted the invitation to become Honorary Secretary of the Falklands Islands Association (FIA) in 2004 and in addition was their Membership Secretary from 2007. He did much to assist the association, including modernising its website and each year in December he organised their Battle Day service at the Cenotaph in Whitehall. His Falkland accolade was the award of the Queen's Certificate and Badge of Honour, announced on Falklands Day in August this year in recognition of his decade of service to the islands and its people. Colin was too ill to travel to either the Falklands or to London to receive the award. Therefore an FIA representative, the former Governor and FIA Chairman Alan Huckle, was given special permission to travel and meet Colin at home to present the award on behalf of the current Governor, H.E. Colin Roberts, see photo.



During a period of remission from his cancer Colin organised a pilgrimage trip with friends to walk part of the Compostela de Santiago way but a relapse left him only able to walk the last 12km stage to the cathedral for prayers. Colin was a devout Christian and not given to proselytising he quietly understood others and was at ease and tolerant with a wide range of people. He continued dedicated work for his church, as a qualified lay preacher, at St George's in Frankwell, Shrewsbury and helped to promote it, as a Grade 2 listed building of the Georgian period. There was a large gathering there at his funeral on 15 October including an impressive showing by 1119 Squadron Air Cadets, 13-20 year olds in uniform, honouring Colin their Squadron Padre. Typically, having taken on the role some five years before, he would frequently accompany them, either on parade or out in the hills in all weathers, supporting them on training exercises. In this, as in all he did, Colin cared, not least for our birds.

A comprehensive summary of many of Colin's achievements can be seen on the Falklands Islands Association website at <http://fiassociation.com/article.php/591>

Competition – Swarovski 10x42WB binoculars seek new home

Pat and Wendy Wright, Colin Wright's widow and daughter, have asked me to find a good home for Colin's binoculars.

If you are 16 years old or younger, live in Shropshire and think you can look after and use them for interesting birding then write and tell me about your plans. Tell me, in up to about 400 words, why you think you should receive them - how the binoculars will help you in your birding. The bins are top quality though heavy, about 1kg, but all good binoculars are. I will chose the best application and pass the bins on to the winner – and I'll throw in your first year's membership of the BTO if you are not already a member, as a tribute to Colin, great friend and long-term BTO member, contributor and supporter. Colin will be delighted to help you on your birding way.

I need your name, DOB, snail-mail and email addresses and phone number and the deadline for applications is Monday 16 December. The prize should be with the winner for Christmas. Send the application to me by snail-mail or email; Oakerley, Clun Road, Aston on Clun, Craven Arms SY7 8EW or john.tucker@lanius.org.uk

The ability to hear Goldcrest song and the implications for bird surveys

Richard Porter first raised the issue of deteriorating hearing with age and the possible implications for the results of bird surveys (*Brit. Birds* 105: 152–153). An editorial comment by AM pointed out that there was little data on the subject, and subsequent correspondence followed (see *Brit. Birds* 105: 276–277, 684). While it is well known that in general, the ability to hear high-frequency sounds declines with age, JT began a survey to determine the precise nature of the problem, specifically related to the ability to hear the song of the Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* as a convenient example.

Respondents to the survey (n=1,056) are not a random sample of the general population. They are birders who replied to the specific question: 'Can you hear Goldcrest song?'. It is likely that all of them knew the song and were aware of whether they could, or could not, hear it. Respondents were also asked to state their age and gender. Some people suggested why they could no longer hear Goldcrests – for example attending (even performing at) too many pop concerts or having had a career in a noisy industry or in the services. Some commented on the effectiveness of various hearing aids. Goldcrest song typically includes frequencies of up to 8 kHz, similar to that of Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* and Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*, two other species that respondents often referred to as also troublesome. There is an online hearing test at:

<http://www.noiseaddicts.com/2009/03/can-you-hear-this-hearing-test/>

Data were received from 799 men aged from 15 to 90 and 257 women aged from 20 to 84. Age distributions were similar for each sex with the majority of respondents in their 50s and 60s (quartiles 50/60/67 for men and 50/60/66 for women). The proportion of people of each sex and age who could hear Goldcrests was modeled as a binomial variable, which assumes only that all responses were independent. A wide variety of models were compared using Akaike's Information Criterion. For men, a broken stick (constant followed by decline from a certain age) model gave the best fit, with the break-point optimised at 42. Overall 83% of males (667/799) could hear Goldcrests but this represents 96% for those in their 40s (and younger) declining to 53% in the 80s. For women, no model was found superior to the null (no change with age), even when extreme ages were excluded. Overall 89% (228/257) of females could hear Goldcrests and there is no evidence from this sample of change with age. Fig. 1 shows the results by five-year age groups and the predictions from the preferred models. The raw data are available in a spreadsheet at **<http://www.lanius.org.uk/Goldcrest>**

Proportion that can hear Goldcrest

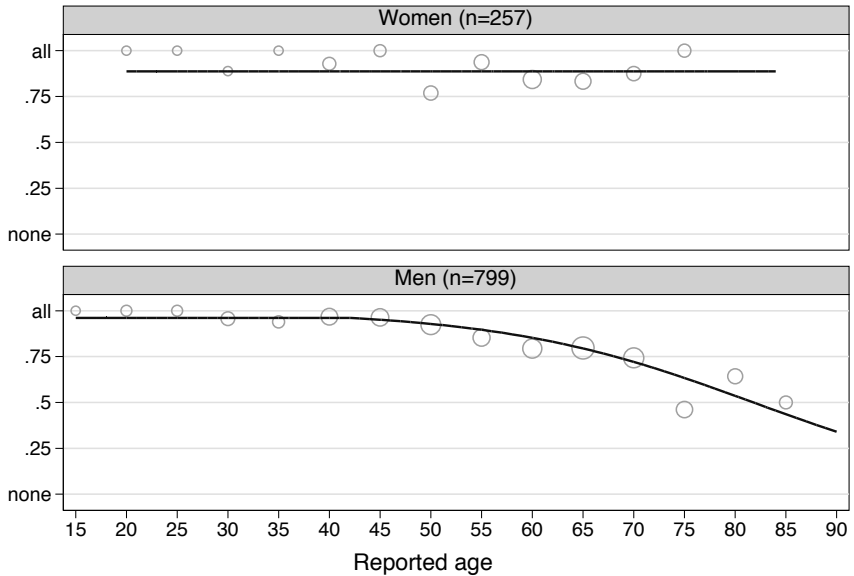


Fig. 1. The reported proportion of recipients who were able to hear the song of the Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*, plotted against age in five-year bands.

In terms of the impact on bird-survey results, the question of whether – or how – to incorporate the issue of age-related hearing loss is quite a complex one. The BTO doesn't have a full picture of the age-profile of Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) volunteers. The best assessment, albeit based on partial information, is that, over the 20 seasons between 1994 and 2013, the proportion of BBS surveyors in their 30s and 40s has declined, the proportion in their 50s has remained fairly constant, and the proportion in their 60s and 70s has increased.

Is this a cause for concern? That depends on a number of other factors. Firstly, while BBS surveyors are very loyal to the survey, with about 85% retention between years, there is clearly some turnover. If the people who are dropping out are those who are struggling more with their hearing, this would reduce any effect (of the declining ability to hear). Secondly, how many surveyors are countering hearing loss with hearing aids? Thirdly, while the average age of surveyors is increasing, we also know that the proportion of female surveyors is increasing (by about 60% between 1994 and 2013), and the results presented here suggest that this change would lessen the influence

of age-related hearing issues to some extent. Finally, Goldcrest is obviously just one (particularly high-pitched) species among many, and even for a small passerine like this, some individual birds will be detected visually rather than by song, which would also lessen the issue.

Over the period of the BBS, Goldcrests increased in the 1990s, then remained roughly level for a while before declining in the face of several hard winters. The official overall change statistic is a non-significant decline of -9% for the UK across the period from 1995 to 2011 (Risely *et al.* 2013). The question raised by this survey is to what extent this measure of change might differ if we could remove the effect of age-related hearing loss. This is not something that we are currently able to answer, but our best guess is that the effect would be relatively small, even for the relatively extreme example of the high-pitched Goldcrest.

From the 2014 breeding season onwards, volunteers will have the option to submit additional information on whether they detected birds by song, call or visually while doing their BBS visits. This should help us to understand better the issues relating to differential detectability.

Acknowledgments

We are very grateful to everyone who helped to circulate and reply to the survey.

Reference

Risely, K., Massimino, D., Newson, S. E., Eaton, M. A., Musgrove, A. J., Noble, D. G., Procter, D., & Baillie, S. R. 2013. The Breeding Bird Survey 2012. BTO Research Report 645, Thetford.

John Tucker, address; e-mail john.tucker@lanius.org.uk
Andy Musgrove, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU
Allan Reese, Riverside Cottage, Forston, Dorchester DT2 7AA

Editor's acknowledgement

This was first published as a letter in the April 2014 issue of *British Birds*, and is reproduced here with permission.

British Birds is a magazine for all keen birdwatchers in Britain - you can find out more by visiting their website www.britishbirds.co.uk, where you can download a free sample copy and find out more about subscribing to a magazine that has been keeping Britain's birdwatchers informed since 1907.

Venus Pool Nature Reserve – Reserve Enhancements 2015

Those of you who have visited Venus Pool recently will have noticed some fairly major changes on the reserve. In July, a new sand martin bank was built beside the pool, between the Main and Memorial hides; in preparation for this, some earthworks were required and we hired machinery to do some earth-moving, which included the creation of a new island outside the Memorial hide. Whilst the machines were on site we also improved access over the ditch in the fen area at the back of the pool, and dug out the small pool in the feeding station which had become very overgrown.

Work began again in October, with contractors undertaking more scrub management (mainly of birch and willow) in several areas around the pool; this is part of a rolling-programme which began last autumn. We also held some work days ourselves, with a few volunteers, doing more scrub clearance, and hiring a mini-tractor to mow various areas, including the marsh, and the fen area at the back of the pool. Work has been done to let more light into the feeding station, and bark chips laid on the ground to ease access for the bird ringers and for those who keep the feeders filled.

With thanks to the volunteers who came to help, and with a plea to others to get in touch to arrange to spend some very worth-while time helping with the management of our Reserve at one of our work days.



Preparing the site for the new Sand Martin bank



Creating a new island outside the Memorial hide



Reserve management underway, with help from some four-legged "volunteers"!



Mowing the marsh, and the fen at the back of the pool

Words and photos by Helen J Griffiths

The State of the UK's Birds report 2015



The two main themes of The State of the UK's Birds report 2015 are farmland birds and how strong partnerships can help to reverse the fortunes of some of our farmland specialists.

The full report can be downloaded from the BTO website www.bto.org

Some of the standout findings from this year's report are

Kestrel down 40% and Sparrowhawk down 15% (1995-2013).

Blackcap up 289% since 1970.

Great Spotted Woodpecker up 357% since 1970 (1970-2013) and 136% since 1995 (1995-2013).

Willow Tit down 94% since 1970 and Marsh Tit down 71% over the same period (1970-2013).

Starling down by exactly half since 1995 and 81% since 1970.



Was it a good year for Swifts?

BBC Springwatch gave a good start to the swift season with cameras watching nest boxes on a house in Bristol www.bristolswifts.co.uk However as the chicks had not hatched by the time the series ended, further footage of this swift family was continued on BBC Autumnwatch. There was also a very nice piece about swifts in Suffolk on Songs of Praise in September. So, lots of good publicity for these wonderful summer visitors and a huge amount of interest at Birdfair at the stand organised by Swift Conservation www.swift-conservation.org and Action for Swifts actionforswifts.blogspot.co.uk.

But what sort of breeding season was it? Some reported a “normal” year but others felt that the windy spring meant a late start for breeding and consequent late fledging, sometimes after parents had departed. Also there were reports of long occupied nest sites not being used this year and of underweight chicks and adult birds indicating possible feeding problems. How was your swift season? I'd love to have reports of nest sites across Shropshire and anecdotal evidence of how “your” swifts fared in 2015.

Seeing these birds arrive is exciting, seeing them depart a sign that summer is over but that means there is plenty to do over the winter making sure these birds do not fly 7000 miles to find their nest site destroyed: this is a definite contributing factor to their decline in numbers. Can you put up some boxes on houses or in churches where you know there are birds close by? Swifts are a key species for Caring for God's Acre www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk and there is plenty of advice available on where and how to put boxes up.

Use the planning system to ask for swift bricks to be put into new housing developments – if we don't ask no-one will think to provide for these and other building dependent species. Look out for scaffolding – an opportunity to put boxes up and to make sure existing nest sites are retained during building works.

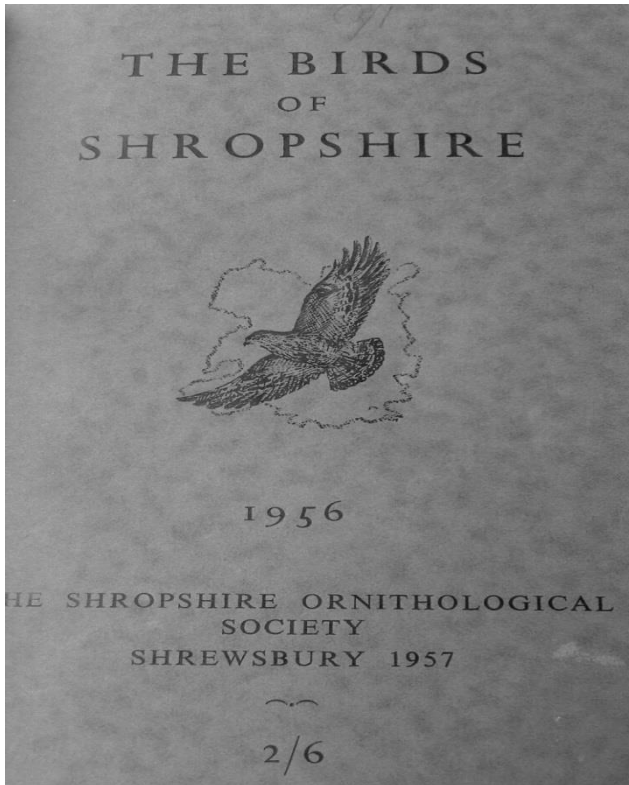
I am currently collating all the information from the 2015 swift season so please send me any information you have and I will write a fuller article in a 2016 edition of Buzzard.

Peta Sams

Shropshire Swift Group

shropshireswifts@gmail.com

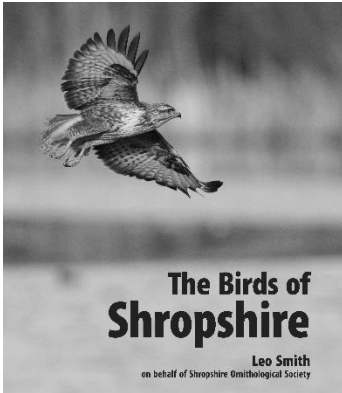
The first Shropshire Bird Report 1956 (or was it 1955?)



The first Shropshire Bird report covered the year 1956 and was published in 1957 (cover shown above); it was 16 pages in length and sold for 2/6d (12.5p). However, the actual first report was an interim report for 1955, which was written but never published.

Helen J Griffiths

Editor's note: Shropshire Bird Reports from 1955 onwards can be viewed on the *The Historical Ornithology of Shropshire* website:
www.lanius.org.uk/sos/annual/index.php



Work on *The Birds of Shropshire* is progressing well, but more slowly than hoped. Most of the 298 species accounts are largely complete, apart from final editing, but there is still much to do on many of them. The publishers, Liverpool University Press (LUP), have started on the design and page layout.

However, it is already clear that the material we have will occupy more than the 500 pages initially planned. The species accounts in particular will be more than the original page “budget”. Most of the other County Atlases and

Avifaunas published recently are largely based on records in County Bird Reports and the local results of the recent national BTO Atlas.

In addition to this, Shropshire has a considerable amount of material not available in other avifaunas, so ours is justifiably larger than most. We have:-

- Comprehensive historical material on the “Histo” website
- Change maps (and a table comparing the result of the two Atlases for each species), because we’ve done two local Atlases, the first in 1985-90.
- Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trend charts for 34 species since 1997, because we have excellent local BBS participation
- Garden Birdwatch graphs since the mid-1990s
- Graphs showing records/year and records in 10-day intervals, showing occurrence patterns for rarities, and migration patterns
- Several local species research projects
- Ringing recoveries

We also have excellent local photographs of most species, provided by 21 local photographers.

The Management Committee has therefore agreed that SOS will fund an increase in the size of the book to 544 pages, perhaps more, to include all the material we have, and make the best photos larger.

Publication is now anticipated next Autumn. The cover price will be £45, but there will be a pre-publication offer of £25. This offer will be advertised in *The Buzzard*, on the SOS and LUP websites, and in several other local and national publications. Watch this space.



Shropshire Wildlife Trust

Wild Christmas presents

This summer, two barn owl chicks fledged from a nest box installed in 2012 at Smalley Hill nature reserve, the owl's only known breeding site in Telford this year. Through our wildlife adoption scheme Shropshire Wildlife Trust is supporting the work of Shropshire Barn Owl group in putting up boxes in suitable locations around the county.

You can adopt a barn owl as a gift for friends or family for £20. We also offer Adopt a Wild Thing gift packages for hedgehog, dormouse, pine marten and ancient holly. Each contains a fascinating factsheet with colour photos, a personalised gift certificate and a photograph of your chosen wild thing.

The wildlife adoption project supports practical measures to sustain wild species. At The Hollies, on the Stiperstones, the funds have contributed to the cost of fencing around some of the most ancient hollies, which were failing to regenerate due to constant browsing by sheep. The fences may not look lovely, but they protect the trees, which are already looking healthier, with shiny new growth.

Fencing has also brought some interesting developments at Clunton Coppice, where browsing by deer had led to a virtual cessation of tree regeneration. A few years ago, our conservation team created several exclosures within the wood to keep out deer. Now we have young oaks shooting up and lots of bramble which is great for dormice. Two sightings this autumn confirmed their presence and with funding from the wildlife adoption scheme we are replacing old nest boxes and putting up new ones, hoping to draw the tiny creatures from the wood's margins into the centre where they will find a feast of blackberries.

Shropshire's pine martens are still making headlines with a very positive response to their discovery in the county. Six landowners in the locality have agreed to camera traps being installed on their land, in an effort to find out more about their distribution.

Hedgehogs need all the help we can give them. Providing them with habitat is integral to everything we do on our nature reserves and other places where we have influence, encouraging the restoration of old hedgerows, planting new ones, avoiding pesticides and creating diverse wild places. Your hedgehog adoption will support this work...you could also do something very directly – make a hole in your garden fence so our prickly friends can move around, find more food and each other.

Wildlife adoptions and gift membership can be purchased online for £20 at shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk or you can buy them at our visitor centres in Shrewsbury and at The Boathouse, Ellesmere.

Sarah Gibson

Communications Officer, Shropshire Wildlife Trust

Allan Dawes – an appreciation

Allan's has just "retired" after working for 21 years as BTO Regional Representative for Shropshire. The SOS has directly benefitted from his time-consuming but unsung work on writing up the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) results, and the results of species-specific surveys, for the Shropshire Bird report each year. The coverage for BBS (over 50 squares annually since 1997) means we have county trends for 34 species for the forthcoming avifauna *The Birds of Shropshire*, and this is a very high level of coverage by national standards, reflecting well on the SOS.

He has also achieved good coverage for the species-specific surveys, which will also feature in the avifauna. In addition, he is writing more than 40 species accounts for the book, a formidable task, as anyone involved in the production of even a small number of these will testify!

Allan has also served on the Society's Conservation Sub-committee since April 1999 and intends to continue to do so, for at least the time being.

On behalf of the Society I would like to thank Allan for his many years of hard work for ornithology in the county, and his ongoing work and commitment.

Graham Walker

Chair, Conservation Subcommittee



BTO News

Jonathan Groom: 07981 820975
bto.shropshire@gmail.com

Time for a change

I have decided to retire from the voluntary position of BTO regional representative for Shropshire and by the time you receive this Buzzard my replacement Jonathan Groom will have taken over. Jonathan's contact details are above and his introduction follows appears on the next page.

Looking back.

My tenure began in 1994, the same year as the Breeding Bird Survey and this has always been one of my main tasks. After 20 plots were surveyed in the first two years a major boost was supplied by SOS and SWT members thanks to invaluable support from John Tucker, this increased the number of active squares to over 50, a level which has been maintained and this enables local trends to be calculated for common species.

Major declines in farmland birds from the 1970s prompted many surveys. Some such as the Winter Farmland Bird and Lowland Grassland Surveys looked at habitat use while the Crops for Wintering Birds and Lapwing and Skylark Plot surveys tested methods aimed at increasing numbers.

Single species surveys included breeding and wintering skylark, rookeries, lapwing, woodcock, tawny owl, nightjar, little ringed plover, peregrine and house martin while species groups included naturalised geese, breeding waders of wet meadows, winter plovers, winter gull roosts and scarce woodland birds.

More recently four years of both winter and breeding surveys for Bird Atlas 2007-11 and two extra years for the local atlas has been a major undertaking. I am proud to have played a part in both projects and look forward to seeing the Shropshire avifauna next year.

The future.

Despite the introduction of new agri-environment schemes the decline of many birds continues. Further research into why some schemes are not working is planned. Continued monitoring is vital, especially as conservation seems to have disappeared from the political agenda.

Thanks. The above surveys would not have been possible without the support of many volunteers and I would like to thank you all for your contributions. I hope you will continue to support the valuable work carried out by the BTO and give Jonathan every assistance.

Allan P. Dawes



New BTO Regional Representative

My name is Jonathan Groom and I am delighted to be taking over the role of Regional Representative for Shropshire from Allan Dawes. I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce myself and I hope to meet many of you at future SOS events or through any of the local bird survey projects.

I have always been a naturalist, with a leaning towards ornithology, and studied Zoology at university followed by an MSc in Conservation Biology, during which I got a taste of both field research and travelling when I carried out my research project in the wilds of Kenya. I have since been lucky enough to travel quite widely and have visited many countries including Oman, Morocco, New Zealand, Australia, many parts of Africa and even worked for a year in the jungles of Costa Rica.

I also previously worked for the Conservation Science department of the RSPB in Scotland, where I was lucky enough to be able to carry out field survey and research into some fascinating species such as Black Grouse, Hen Harrier, Golden Plover and Storm Petrel. Then nearly two years ago, I moved to Shrewsbury to begin a position as Biodiversity Data Officer at Shropshire Council. This position encompasses a lot of different things including biological recording of species and mapping habitats for the County.

I have a passion for survey, monitoring and recording birds and upon moving to the county, I quickly volunteered myself for the BTO surveys available and I am still doing three Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS), several Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) sites and have been involved in both the House Martin Survey of 2015 and the Peregrine Survey of 2014. I am also a very keen participant in the BTO Nest Record Scheme, and had my first big year in 2015 with over 100 nest records collected and submitted. I have also been able to support several local schemes including the annual Red Grouse survey on the Long Mynd, ground-nesting waders in the Stiperstones and a successful nest box scheme also in the Stiperstones. Spring is definitely my favourite (and most busy) time of the year!

The surveys run by the BTO are all vitally important in our ongoing understanding of our bird species, and inform all of the national trends in the UK and many scientific research projects.

The main part of my role is recruiting and managing the Breeding Bird Surveys and any of the species-specific surveys in Shropshire. I can also help you get started with the Wetland Bird Surveys or the Nest Record Scheme. All details of these surveys can be found on the BTO website.

If you are not already involved in any of these surveys, then I hope that you may be interested in helping. It's a great way to put your birding skills to valuable use, although you don't have to be an expert birdwatcher to be able to participate. These surveys are designed to monitor widespread bird species, and not about picking out rarities.

I am willing to support and help new participants as much as I can, and I hope to be able to carry out a Breeding Bird Survey training session at a site near Shrewsbury next year. So if you would like to get a first-hand look at how it's done, please consider joining me. I hope to be able to confirm details closer to the time. If you have any questions or are interested in getting involved, please feel free to contact me any time using the address below.

Kind Regards

Jonathan Groom

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Do you have Woodcock on your land?

Woodcock are highly secretive and largely nocturnal, and therefore very difficult to survey. Results from the 2013 Woodcock Survey show that breeding numbers and breeding range have both declined considerably since the previous survey in 2003, but the UK's winter population is substantially increased by continental birds from as far away as Russia.

An increase in ringing effort is one aspect of a national effort to find out more about the movements and site faithfulness of overwintering Woodcock. I'm looking for suitable sites in NW Shropshire that would let me occasionally walk the fields with a lamp and a net on moonless nights. If you have Woodcock on your ground (or know a friendly person who does!), ideally within 30 minutes or so of Ellesmere, and would consider granting access, please contact Martin George for more information on 07816 556631 or martin@thegreenfuse.net

Bird Notes

July, August & September 2015

Yvonne Chadwick

Mandarin Duck Just three reports, with a male on Whixall floods on 13 Sep, a pair at Venus Pool on 20 Sep and one at Wood Lane on 22 Sep.

Pintail Singles were recorded at Venus Pool on 25 Aug and 18-25 Sep.

Common Scoter A drake was on Cound Fishery on 25 July.

Grey Partridge One was at Ellesmere on 14 Sep, the only report received during this quarter.

Common Quail Ten records of up to three birds between 5 July and 6 Aug came from Kingslow, Aldersey, Prees, Whixall, Lyneal, Child's Ercall and Wyke near Broseley.

Little Egret Arriving in mid-July, up to 5 were at Venus Pool by 13 Sep and one or two were seen regularly in Bridgnorth from late Aug. Single birds were also at Wall Farm, Leighton, Knighton Reservoir, Wood Lane and Aston near Wem.

White Stork A possible was circling over Stokesay on 11 July.

Purple Heron One was photographed in a garden in Whixall on 13 Aug.

Marsh Harrier A female was watched hunting fields near Hadnall during 29-31 July. Others were a female photographed on the scrape at Chelmarsh on 2 Aug, one on Whixall Moss on 9 Aug and another on the Long Mynd on 25 Sep.

Hen Harrier A ringtail was on Whixall Moss on 9 Aug and another on the Long Mynd on 11 Sep and 15 Sep.

Osprey Three sightings during the period; one caught a fish at Venus Pool on 13 Aug, Wood Lane on 23 Aug and one over Whitchurch on 17 Sep.

Ringed Plover One was present at Polemere on 14 Aug and 7 at Venus Pool on 31 Aug.

Golden Plover One hundred were on the High Park area of the Long Mynd on 10 Sep and 17 at Lower Short Ditch, Kerry Ridgeway on 12 Sep.

Dunlin Two were at Venus Pool on 26 July. Singles were here and at Whixall flood until 6 Sep.

Greenshank Just two records, both single birds, at Polemere on 14 Aug and Venus Pool on 31 Aug.

Ruff Up to 6 birds were at Whixall floods between 16 Aug and 3 Sep. A single was also at Venus Pool on 27 Aug and 31 Aug.

Black-tailed Godwit Around twenty reports spread throughout the period from Venus Pool, Whixall floods and Wood Lane. Highest count was of 7 at Venus Pool on 15 July.

Whimbrel A single was at Venus Pool on 10 Aug and 4 flew over Wood Lane on 29 Aug.

Spotted Redshank One was found at Holly Banks, Melverley on 13 Sep.

Common Redshank Two reports, both of single birds, these came from Venus Pool on 17 July and Knighton Reservoir on 15 Sep.

Wood Sandpiper One seen at Whixall floods 15-16 July and another from 14-16 Aug. Two were also at Venus Pool on 29 Aug.

Yellow-legged Gull The eight records, comprising all ages, came from Priorslee Lake, Colemere, Chelmarsh and Cantlop.

Mediterranean Gull A second calendar year bird was in the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere on 27 Sep.

Black Tern An adult was at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 14 Aug.

Arctic Tern A juvenile bird, also at Chelmarsh on 14 Aug.

Common Tern A pair were at Chelmarsh during July, seen fishing and feeding each other, but nesting was not observed here this year. A juvenile stayed at Venus Pool 25-31 Aug, with an adult and a first summer also seen on 31 Aug.

Cuckoo The two records were at Cotwall on 24 July and a juvenile on the Stiperstones on 14 Sep.

Barn Owl Six single birds and one pair with young were seen during the period. A recently fledged female was found dead in September possibly having flown into a barbed wire fence.

Short-eared Owl On 2 Aug one was quartering rough ground at Berriewood, Condover. Two sightings also came from the Boiling Well area of the Long Mynd between 23-26 Aug.

Nightjar There was a single report in the Wyre Forest area on 5 July.

Common Swift The latest record received was of 3 at Bishops Castle on 13 Aug.

Sand Martin The latest were noted on 14 Sep at Aston on Clun and 22 Sep at Pentre.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker A female was seen with a mixed flock at Lower Whitcliffe on 16 Aug. Two were also at Haughton on 23 Sep.

Wryneck One was killed by a cat in a Telford garden in September.

Whinchat Seen at Whixall Moss, The Stiperstones and The Long Mynd with breeding confirmed at Callow Hollow on where three young were being fed.

Wheatear The highest count came from Titterstone Clee on 31 July with 21 noted. Also seen at Brown Clee and Shawbury Airfield, with the latest records towards the end of Sep from The Stiperstones, Titterstone Clee and a juvenile at Priorslee Lake.

Wood Warbler One present at Whitcliffe on 2 July.

Garden Warbler Latest record was on 21 Sep at Haughton.

Lesser Whitethroat Three records of single birds were received from Mynydd Myfyr on 22 Aug and also Venus Pool on 6 Sep and 15 Sep.

Common Whitethroat Twenty five records received, with the latest bird being on 6 Sep at Venus Pool.

Spotted Flycatcher Reports from eight locations with breeding confirmed at several of these. The last sighting was on 21 Sep at Haughton.

Pied Flycatcher A late bird was seen at Trefonen on 23 July.

Tree Sparrow Fourteen were noted on Badger Moor on 12 Sep. A juvenile was also on garden feeders in Cantlop on 13 Sep.

Corn Bunting Just two sightings during this period, with 2 birds at Kingslow on 5 July and another 2 at Childs Ercall Airfield on 9 July.

Also recorded in the period - Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Wigeon, Tufted Duck, Gadwall, Shelduck, Teal, Mallard, Shoveler, Pochard, Goosander, Pintail, Red Grouse, Red-legged Partridge, Pheasant, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Goshawk, Sparrowhawk, Peregrine, Merlin, Hobby, Red Kite, Buzzard, Kestrel, Moorhen, Coot, Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Green Sandpiper, Curlew, Common Sandpiper, Snipe, Woodcock, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Feral Pigeon, Stock Dove, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Little Owl, Tawny Owl, Kingfisher, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Skylark, Swift, Swallow, Sand Martin, House Martin, Starling, Tree Pipit, Meadow Pipit, Yellow Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Dipper, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Pied Flycatcher, Redstart, Stonechat, Blackbird, Blackcap, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Reed Warbler, Garden Warbler, Sedge Warbler, 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, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, Linnets, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting, Crossbill.

4758 Records of 144 Species

Thank you for all the records sent to us.

Records for the next Bird Notes by 5 January 2016 at the latest please.

Feeding garden birds shown to affect their evolution

New research by the BTO has revealed that bird food provided in British gardens has helped Blackcaps to rapidly evolve a successful new migration route. This is the first time that garden bird feeding has been shown to affect large-scale bird distributions.

Blackcaps are migratory warblers that historically only came to Britain in summer. Over the last 60 years there have been surprising changes in Blackcap migration behaviour.

Birds from central Europe have started to visit British gardens in winter, rather than heading to their usual wintering grounds in southern Spain. The reasons why Britain has become great for Blackcaps were previously unclear, but now scientists have been able to uncover some answers, using the extensive data on garden birds and feeders collected by thousands of volunteer birdwatchers for the BTO's weekly Garden BirdWatch survey.

The new study, published in the international journal *Global Change Biology*, has revealed that Blackcaps are becoming increasingly associated with garden bird feeding over time, and that supplementary foods, particularly fats and sunflower hearts, are affecting their national distribution in winter. The findings also indicate that changes in the British winter climate have been important in shaping the evolution of this new migration behaviour.

Calling all gardens with Goldfinches

If you have Goldfinches in your garden, you're probably aware that they're becoming increasingly common. However the reasons behind this are not yet fully understood, so the BTO is running a Goldfinch Feeding Survey this winter to work out, with your help, exactly what it is about our gardens that they are attracted to.

Goldfinches are an increasingly common sight in our gardens with 70% more BTO Garden BirdWatch participants reporting them now than they did twenty years ago. However we don't actually know what it is that attracts them to gardens, especially during the winter.

Therefore your help is needed this winter to find out what Goldfinches are feeding on, whether it's the bird food we provide, or the plants that we grow.

Clare Simm, the Goldfinch Feeding Survey organiser said, "It is vital to understand what resources birds are using in our gardens, in order to help them when times are hard. Supplementary feeding in gardens has recently been shown to affect the migratory behaviour of wintering Blackcaps in the UK so it will be fascinating to see if it has also helped the national population of Goldfinches to grow."

Whether you feed the birds or not, if you get Goldfinches please help us by taking part in this survey. All you need to do is count the Goldfinches in your garden for two minutes and record what they are feeding on, if anything. To find out more about the BTO Goldfinch Feeding Survey or to download the instructions on how to take part, visit www.bto.org/goldfinch-survey.

2016 programme of indoor meetings and field trips

With this mailing you should have received a separate booklet detailing the 2016 programme. Details of forthcoming meetings and field trips will be published as reminders in future editions of *The Buzzard*, but the booklet is the main source of information.

The programme will also be available on the SOS website, and will include any unavoidable changes over the coming year, so it's a good idea to check the website as a precaution.

All members are invited to these trips which are friendly and open to beginners and experts alike. Advice on learning about the birds seen can be obtained from the group as a whole. Meet at the location given, no later than the time stated. Please can all those proposing to come on Field Trips follow the guidelines which have been sent to members in the past. In order to indicate the numbers proposing to go on each trip, could you please contact the leader/organiser designated for the trip concerned (phone numbers below) As always if car sharing can be organised this would help all concerned. Remember that at some locations, amenities may not be available

Sunday 17th January Wirral – Leasowes, Hoylake, Burton Mere.

Organiser: Sue Brealey By car Full day

Meet at the Leasowes car park at 10am
Grid Ref: SDS353205

Directions: - Travel towards The Wirral and go onto M53. Come off at J1 onto A554 going north. At the 'T' junction turn onto A551. Just as the road turns left go straight ahead onto rough road towards the lighthouse. The Car park is on the left.

Sunday 14th February Llanfairfechan & North Wales coast

Organiser: Sue Brealey By car Full day

Meet at car park at 9.30am
Post code for SatNav - LL33 0BY

Directions - take A55 from Chester towards Anglesey. After going through Conwy road tunnel, exit after 2nd roundabout (J14) into the town. At traffic lights turn right and continue to the car park on the sea front.

See: www.llanfairfechan.org.uk/newsite/for-visitors/about-llanfairfechan/birdwatching/

Sunday 6th March **RSPB Dearne Valley – Old Moor**
Organiser: Sue Brealey By coach Full day

Meet at the Shirehall car park to leave promptly at 7.45am.
Cost £15.00 per person for the coach.
Booking from December 2015

Sunday 17th April **Moore Nature Reserve**
Leader: Estelle Hughes By car Full day

Meet at car park at 9am
Post Code for SatNav - WA4 6XE
Directions: Take A56 at J11 of M56, turn at the traffic lights opposite the Walton Arms public house, following the signs for Moore. From Moore village turn right into Moore Lane. Follow road over the swing bridge to arrive at car park.

See: www.wrg.co.uk

Sunday 22nd May **RSPB Ynys Hir**
Organiser: Sue Brealey By car Full day

Meet at car park at 10am
Post Code for SatNav - SY20 8TA

Take A487 from Machynlleth towards Aberystwyth turn right just after Glandyfi. It is about a mile to the car park.

Leaders' and/or organisers' telephone numbers

Sue Brealey 01939 262450 // 07713 164463
Estelle Hughes 07817 243693 // 01948 840902

Church Stretton Branch Meetings

Indoor meetings are held from October to March (excluding December) on the fourth Monday of the month. The venue is The Methodist Church Hall, Watling Street, Church Stretton and meetings commence at 7:30 p.m. Admission is free to members: non-members are very welcome (admission £2, including refreshments).

January 25th, 2016. AGM, followed by “The Complete Owl” (Michael Leach)

Based on Michael’s best-selling book of the same name, this talk reveals resident British owls in folklore and fact; it looks at barn owls and tawny owls, little owls and cat owls, and the specialised techniques that help them hunt. It dispels myths and reveals the realities of an owl’s life. The talk is illustrated with dramatic high-speed photographs of owls in flight.

February 22nd, 2016. “Birds in Shropshire Gardens” (John Arnfield)

What are the top ten most often reported birds in gardens in Shropshire? If you don’t know now, you will after this talk, illustrated by images from the library of the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). In this talk, John focuses on Shropshire gardens as habitats for avian life.

March 21st, 2016. “British Wildlife in Macro” (Nigel Spencer)

Nigel is an award-winning wildlife photographer from southern Leicestershire. This new lecture focuses on the UK’s smaller wildlife including butterflies, orchids, dragonflies, moths, and many other species. Nigel has photographed all 58 species of British butterfly and describes some of the challenges of this project. Visit his website at www.nigelspencer.co.uk for examples of his spectacular images and more on his photographic objectives.

2015 Indoor meeting, Bayston Hill Memorial Hall, 7.15pm.

2 December

Michael Leach

Enchanted Islands

The Galapagos Islands are home to some extraordinary wildlife. Michael has visited several times and will tell the story of many of the animals that live there.

2016 Indoor meetings, Bayston Hill Memorial Hall, 7.15pm.

6th January Nick Martin : The stories of our British Mammals

It is 5 years since Nick, an amateur photographer, last visited SOS. He starts the year for us with a talk on some of our great and small fascinating mammals

3rd February Dee Doody : An evening with Dee Doody, Wildlife cameraman, artist and TV Presenter

Born in South Africa, Dee developed an early love of wildlife and was heavily involved with the reintroduction of the red kite into Wales and Scotland. He was suddenly taken ill when last due to visit, but I am sure the wait will be worthwhile

2nd March Dawn Balmer : Monitoring and Migration

Many of you will know, or have heard of Dawn, who is Head of Surveys & National Survey Coordinator for the BTO plus many other roles. As a local person, her wealth of knowledge should present an interesting evening.

6th April Annual General Meeting Ashley Grove : Lammergeiers of the Spanish Pyrenees

The Society's Annual General Meeting will be conducted promptly, immediately followed by Ashley's talk.

After a humorous and entertaining talk last time, Ashley returns to speak about the life history of the Bearded Vulture. Knowing the quality of his photography, this promises to be a great evening about a bird most of us know little about.

5th October John Robinson : The Natural History of the Wyre Forest

John was Senior Warden at Wyre Forest Nature Reserve before retiring in 1999. His passion for nature and photography skills won him the BBC Photographer of the Year title in 1981.

2nd November Andy Warren : From Palm Trees to Pack Ice - winter birding in Japan

An ex RSPB warden, countryside officer and conservationist with Thames Water, Andy has a birdlist of over 3000 in 47 countries since 1973. Now an Ecological Consultant, his travels to Japan will be interesting to hear.

7th December Ian Butler : Walking in the Malvern Hills in search of Wildlife

An RSPB volunteer, Ian also works with conservation bodies and ecological consultancies. Although widely travelled, his talk tonight centres on somewhere closer to home and perhaps will provide an incentive to visit.

Shropshire Ornithological Society is supported by CJ Wildlife

www.birdfood.co.uk

