

The Buzzard



**Shropshire
Ornithological Society's
quarterly magazine**

No. 243

Spring 2016

Society Officers and Officials

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>
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Treasurer:	Brian Andrews, 6 Sytche Close, Much Wenlock, Shrops. TF13 6JJ. 01952 727531. <i>bafca@yahoo.co.uk</i>
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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.
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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>
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Editorial

After such a solemn start to the last issue of *The Buzzard* in which several of us wrote about the loss of our old friend and SOS Vice President Colin Wright, it's nice to be looking forward to the spring and to celebrate the legacy of a long serving SOS member who is still very much with us. Pete Deans has done a tremendous amount for conservation in the county over the last few decades, and is also an accomplished moth recorder, in addition to all the time he served as a trustee of Shropshire Wildlife Trust. I hope that many of us will go along to wish Pete well when he stands down at the AGM in April, and to wish every success to whomever is voted in as his successor.

Please read the articles on the Curlew Nest Monitoring Project on page 15, and the appeal for more breeding season (March to May) records from Marc Petty and me on page 24. At this eleventh hour stage all sightings are valuable. Jonathan Groom, our new BTO Regional Rep, has more ideas for ways you can participate in straightforward survey work on page 25, and there are also opportunities to help find out more about Swifts, Rookeries, Kites and Red Grouse elsewhere in this magazine.

An issue I intend to visit in greater depth in the future is how we can do more in the county to encourage and mentor new birdwatchers of all ages. John Tucker writes from the heart about this with a focus on young birdwatchers on pages 7 and 8. I'm pleased to say that the SOS committee awarded a year's free membership of the Society to all of the youngsters who applied to inherit Colin Wright's binoculars, which was a very positive gesture.

To end on an even more positive note, the official British List has just reached 600 with the acceptance by the British Ornithologists' Union's Records Committee of the Yelkouan Shearwater recorded of Berry Head in Devon in July 2008.

Martin

Copy deadline for the summer 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 & Mrs P Towers, Cruckton; Miss I Boland, Shrewsbury;
Mr J Hill, Shifnal; Mr H Underhill, Ellesmere;
Mr & Mrs M Baskeyfield, Stoke-on-Trent;
Mr N Nandan, Telford;
Mr A F Peters, Lydbury North;
Mr R Moores, Norwich;
Mr J D Groom, Shrewsbury;
Mr & Mrs R J Herapath, Ellesmere;
Mr D Guntrip, Westbury;
Mr & Mrs C Turner, Newport;
Mr & Mrs R Padgett, Broseley,
Mr J R Clark, Shrewsbury.

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.

SOS AGM

The Annual General Meeting will be held not long after this issue of *The Buzzard* gets mailed out, so the notices from the last issue are repeated below.

After more years of loyal, dedicated service than it seems polite to mention, Pete Deans will retire from the position of Chairman at the AGM. Nominations for the position of Chairman and the other Officers and Management Committee members are also welcome, please see Helen Griffiths' AGM notice below for information on how to make a nomination.

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

Peter Deans' Retirement as Chairman

Most of you will probably know by now that our Chairman, Peter Deans, has decided to retire as SOS Chairman at the Society's AGM in April, but some of you may not be aware that he has been Chairman for an amazing 37 years, since April 1979!

During that time, Peter has been involved in most of the activities of the Society, from chairing the Management Committee, to attending Indoor Meetings, undertaking bird ringing and recording, management at Venus Pool, and dealing with countless queries and comments from members. Peter will be a hard act to follow, but I am pleased to say that we do have one nominee for Chairman who will be proposed for the role at the AGM. If there are any other nominations for Chairman (or for any other posts) please would you let me know as soon as possible.

The AGM on 6 April 2016 will be Peter's last as Chairman, so it would be excellent if as many of you as possible could attend this year, to thank him for all that he has done for SOS, and to wish him well in his "retirement". We hope, however, that he will still have an active involvement with the Society and that we will see him from time to time.

Helen J Griffiths – Hon Secretary

Peter Deans

I first met Pete in Shifnal in the late 1960s, when we teamed up to catch and ring the swallows that were roosting in a reed bed in Dawley. We ended up catching 13500 swallows in about a month. These included birds ringed in South Africa and we subsequently had many recoveries from there and in many places on route.

We became great friends, competitors and ultimately colleagues, when Pete joined me working for CJ Wildbird Foods. We still work together now, for my new company MasonBees. His knowledge of all thing wild is extraordinary. He was invaluable, when working at the major flower shows talking to the public about all things connected to birds, i.e. feeding, nesting, identifying, song to name but a few. He was excellent company, when in the evenings with the late Colin Wright, Martin George and the rest of the team, we went for a well-earned dinner after a long day at the show.

Pete used to run birding classes for Birmingham University, many of you reading this will remember being in those classes and what was probably your first meeting. Those classes ran for many years and I suspect that the membership of the SOS grew because of it. In the last few years he has become an ardent moth catcher and thoroughly enjoys finding a 'First for Shropshire'.

His 37 Years as Chairman speak volumes, this is an extraordinary length of service. Each year he offered to stand down but nobody offered to take his place. In committee if we had a problem Pete would say "I will have a word". The problem seemed to go away. If you were a non-member that he came across at Venus Pool you would be left in no uncertain doubt that you ought to join the society to help fund its work!

Pete can best be described as your ultimate bird and wildlife enthusiast. Hopefully we will see many more years of him in his retirement.

Chris Whittles – Vice President

Colin Wright raises a crucial issue for the SOS

The competition to win Colin Wright's rather nice binoculars was won in December by Isabel Boland, aged 13, of Shrewsbury. Along with the bins went a years' subscription to the BTO, a donated year of membership of the SOS and few choice books from Colin's library. I am sure that Colin would have been pleased.

I asked competitors under 16 years and living in Shropshire to write a letter explaining how useful the binoculars would be to them. The appeal went out quite widely; to SOS members via Buzzard, on the SOS website, via a press release and thanks to Dawn Balmer on Twitter and Facebook, to reach the "younger audience". That must have been a potential audience of at least 1,000 so I expected at least four applications and possibly as many as 20. In the event I received just three applications, one at the 11th hour.

Are there really so few young bird-watchers, potential ornithologists, out there? Back in the early 1980s the Young Ornithologists' Club in Pontesbury

(run by June North and where Dawn learned the trade) would alone have at least quadrupled the number of applicants.

I'm talking to 'the SOS', a predominantly grey audience, among whom I am numbered, and with a few exceptions we are the ones currently carrying the torch for the SOS. Who is there in the ranks to replace us and to take the society into the middle of this century, and beyond? I don't see them and perhaps it is our fault for not doing more to coach and encourage the interest which we have and which, if it survives in sufficient quantity, will keep the SOS going. Perhaps the SOS should look at the problem, strategically, as a survival strategy. The way the above pointers are going the future looks, to me, rather bleak.

John Tucker



Isabel Boland with her new binoculars, her father Martin and brother Dan at VP on 22 December – for her early Christmas present.

Images wanted for the SOS website

I am currently working on a revamp of the SOS website that I hope will make it more visually appealing. There are no changes apparent yet - the new site will replace the old one overnight when the former is completed. The main assistance I need in this task is to acquire some images that can be used illustratively on the pages on the website.

I will take pictures of ANYTHING that is consistent with and depicts the aims and activities of the Society but here are a few possibilities.

- (1) Pictures of birds, collectively or individually. These should in most cases be birds that are characteristic of the county (but not necessarily common) but the occasional rarity is OK.
- (2) Pictures of noted birding sites in the County, especially Venus Pool.
- (3) Pictures of people birding. I would like to get a variety of locations, habitats and seasons in these pictures, a variety of compositions (individuals, groups etc), and a variety of activities (looking through scopes from hides, ringing, groups looking through bins etc. I will take pictures of ANYONE but images showing people other than the stereotypical ageing, white, bearded male (i.e. me) would be particularly valuable.

Please note that pictures of children will require parental consent.

Images should be sent to me (ideally as email attachments to arnfield.2@osu.edu). Please send them as full resolution images not "saved for the web". They should be sharply focussed and well exposed (although I can fix any that are moderately under or overexposed).

In most cases, the photographer can be acknowledged. Please let me know if you want this. There are a few situations when this will not be possible.

Captions are valuable, particularly if the subject matter is not obvious. In some cases, however, captions cannot be used. Just put your caption in the email to which the picture is attached.

I would like to be able to crop images where necessary to produce a shape that meshes well with the text. Please let me know if you do NOT wish me to do this.

Thanks you for any assistance you can give me in revamping the website.

Send me some photos and get a chance to make your mark on the new-look SOS web presence!

John Arnfield

Venus Pool Nature Reserve

After all the management activity in the autumn, the reserve has been quieter over the winter, with just the day-to-day jobs to be done. The scrub removal work has opened up a number of areas, and some views, particularly from the Fen hide, are very different. The results of all the hard work have met with favourable comments, on the whole, so, if you haven't visited for a while, go and see the changes for your selves.

The colours last autumn were spectacular, and were followed by a mainly mild and wet winter, so mild that the pool has not been completely frozen at all this winter. Visitors to the reserve have enjoyed quite a "duck- and wader-fest" recently, with large numbers of waterfowl present; there have been up to 400 Lapwing, 40 Snipe, 300 Teal, 150 Wigeon, 60 Shoveler, 18 Shelduck, and two long-staying female Goldeneye, with a male present, too, on several days. Water Rails have been seen from the Fen hide, although a little patience is required for these!

The feeding station has been busy, with Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Coal and Long-tailed Tit, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Greenfinch visiting regularly, and many sightings of Brambling and Marsh Tit; the bird-table has just been refurbished, and a ground feeder added, as part of the ongoing improvement work. A finch and bunting flock of 100+ has been feeding in the arable field, and although most are Chaffinches and Goldfinches, there have also been a few Reed Buntings and Yellowhammers, and up to 25 Bramblings.

There are a few signs that spring is on its way now; buds are showing, I saw a bumblebee a couple of weeks ago, an Oystercatcher arrived at the end of January and several species are beginning to sing, particularly Song Thrush and Dunnock. The sheep, like the rest of us, were fed-up with all the wet weather and are looking a lot happier for having some sun on their backs.

Helen J Griffiths - Hon Secretary

Appeal for Information: Rookeries in and close to Shrewsbury this year

This year *I will* write up the history of rookeries in the Shrewsbury area. I have the detailed work of Llewelyn Cyril Lloyd (1905-1968) in 1938 in the *Transactions* of the CSVFC and later material to compare with – some rather nice maps and graphs will come out of it all.

The last time I checked around, in 2012, I confirmed six rookeries within the rectangle studied in 1938 – a defined area and within about 5km of the centre of town. If you know of a rookery in that area, about to the ring-road to the west, Bayston Hill south, Uffington east and Alkmond Park in the north, please let me know. Then I can visit and count them all for my summary. Your help will be acknowledged in the report – thank you.

Please email swallows@lanus.org.uk or write to me: Oakerley, Aston on Clun, SY7 8EW.

Butterflies of the West Midlands

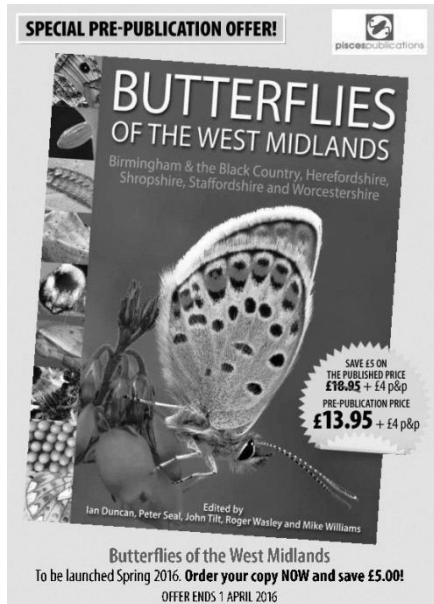
April sees the launch of the first ever book on the butterflies of the West Midlands region. This is an important book documenting for the first time details of the 40 species of butterfly occurring in Birmingham and the Black Country, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Worcestershire. Information is also included on rare migrants and extinct species.

The book is the culmination of many decades of observation and recording by members of the West Midlands Branch of Butterfly Conservation. Over one million records have been used to determine the current and historical status and distribution of the butterflies of the region.

Like much of our wildlife, the past 25 years have seen many changes in the distribution and status of the region's butterflies. Six species have actually expanded their distribution while 10 have undergone a range contraction. Amongst the species to do well in Shropshire are Essex Skipper, White

Admiral and Marbled White which have all been recorded in the county for the first time and are still spreading.

Conversely, butterflies that have declined include the Grayling, which is found on the Stiperstones and nearby hills, various species of Fritillary and Grizzled and Dingy Skipper. Shropshire remains the regional stronghold for the nationally threatened Wood White plus Large Heath and Silver-studded Blue, species which are only found within the region on two sites, both in Shropshire.



Butterflies are valuable indicators of the health of the environment so these changes have a wide significance for all other wildlife. There are sad stories such as the local extinction of the High Brown Fritillary from the region, a species which formerly occurred in the Wyre Forest and, in Victorian times, on the Stretton Hills. Fortunately, these are outnumbered by the conservation success stories documented in the book such as at the Butterfly Conservation reserve at Prees Heath where the Silver-studded Blue has thrived under the careful management of local Butterfly Conservation volunteers.

The book is full of useful information on the fascinating life cycle of butterflies with photographs of the four life stages: egg, larva, pupa and adult. Twenty five butterfly walks are also included, including several within Shropshire, to show where you can go to see the butterflies of the region.

The book will appeal to butterfly enthusiasts of all ages and experience from complete beginners to those who are already keen butterfly watchers or photographers. Above all, it is hoped to raise awareness of butterflies and to encourage more people to get out recording and enjoying the natural world.

To order the book go to www.naturebureau.co.uk/bookshop/butterflies-west-mids-detail If you order before April there is a £5 saving on the cover price.

Ian Duncan and Mike Williams

Red Kite in Shropshire 2015

The Welsh Kite Trust and the Shropshire Raptor Study Group again tried to find the nests of all breeding pairs of Red Kite in 2015. Three major milestones have now been passed:

1. Over 200 fledged young since first successful breeding in 2006
2. Over 150 fledged young tagged
3. Over 20 tags read on individual nesting adults

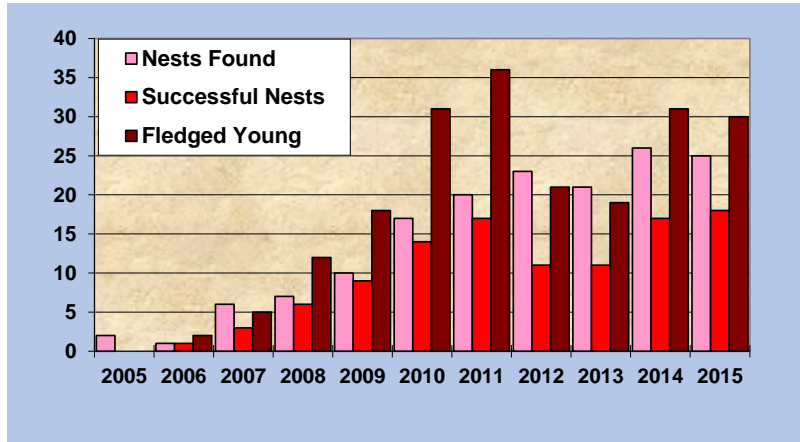
Thirty one breeding pairs were found or reported, compared with 34 last year. Twenty-five nests were found (26 last year). Some of these nests are very close together. Nine of the found nests failed, but 18 were successful (one more than last year) and, assuming that all chicks large enough to tag survived, 31 young fledged from them. Nineteen of the fledged young from 10 nests were ringed and tagged. 2015 tags are green with black letters and black bottom strip on right wing, black with yellow letters and green bottom strip on left wing, as shown in the photo of two tagged chicks in a nest near Knighton.



In common with previous years, the high turnover of nest sites continued. Twelve sites occupied by Kites last year had no nests in 2015, and 17 other sites, which have had breeding Kites in earlier years, were also checked, without result.

Since the first nest was found in 2005, a total of 158 nests have been found, and 107 (68%)

have been successful. Since the first successful breeding in 2006, at least 205 young are known to have flown from Shropshire nests, and 159 have been tagged. Average productivity has been 1.30 fledged young per nest found and 1.93 per successful nest. The number of nests found, successful nests and fledged young in each year is shown in the chart.



No nests were found in the northern half of the County (the SJ Ordnance survey grid squares), but

there were many reports of individual birds in the north, so breeding is expected here in the near future. The steady move eastwards was consolidated, with one of last years nests on Wenlock Edge re-occupied successfully, and another almost as far east as Brown Clee. Four young birds were also seen on Titterstone Clee, but the pair that probably nested there in 2013 did not return.

As the population increases and spreads, nests become harder to find, so the breeding population is now undoubtedly well over the 31 pairs located. Over the years, a total of 24 different tags have been read, 12 males, 10 females and two sex unknown. Males and females have both moved an average of 17 kms from their natal site. If colonisers from Wales are excluded the averages are 5km for males and 10km for females. These figures illustrate yet again how sedentary Kites are, but there is a tendency for females to move further.

The average age of first breeding is 2.5 years, and average last observed breeding is 4 years. Three have reached 7 years old.

If anyone knows the location of a 2015 Kite nest, or finds one in 2016, please don't assume we know about it. Please tell Leo Smith: 01694 720296, leo@leosmith.org.uk

The *Red Kite Experience* at the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre in Craven Arms started feeding last November, with the aim of attracting a limited number of Kites so people can see these wonderful birds at close quarters. However, it was not until May that any Kites started taking food, but only a few turned up sporadically, and they haven't taken meat since early June, nor have they been seen with any regularity over the summer.

Hopefully some will start feeding over the coming winter. Once they are turning up regularly, visiting arrangements will be displayed on the SOS website. As eight of the 25 nests found in 2015 are within 10 kilometres of the Centre, and there are probably others as well, hopefully the wait should not be very long.

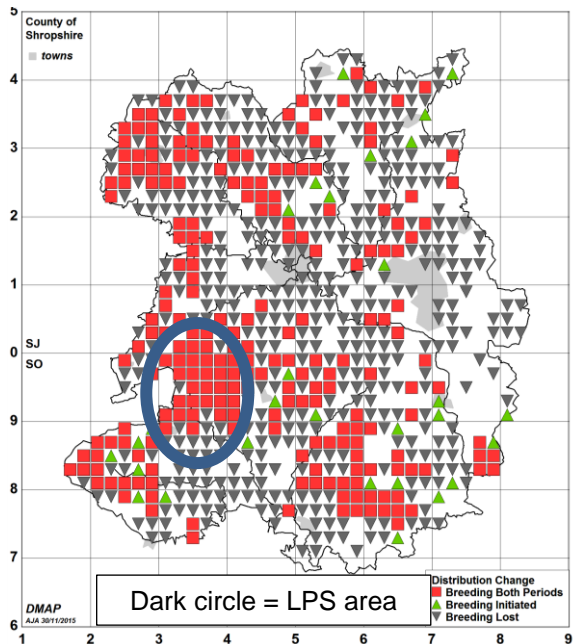
A more detailed report can be found on the SOS website, www.shropshirebirds.com

Thanks to Michelle Frater, Dave Pearce and Vince Downs for helping find and monitor the nests, and to Tony Cross for ringing and tagging the chicks

Leo Smith

Curlew Nest Monitoring Project

Breeding Bird Atlases were carried out in 1985-90, and in 2008-13. The change in Curlew distribution over less than 25 years is shown in the map, to be published in the forthcoming *Birds of Shropshire*. It will be seen that Curlews have disappeared from many parts of the County. In 1990 the population was estimated at 700 pairs, but the population now is less than one-quarter of that a decline approaching 80%



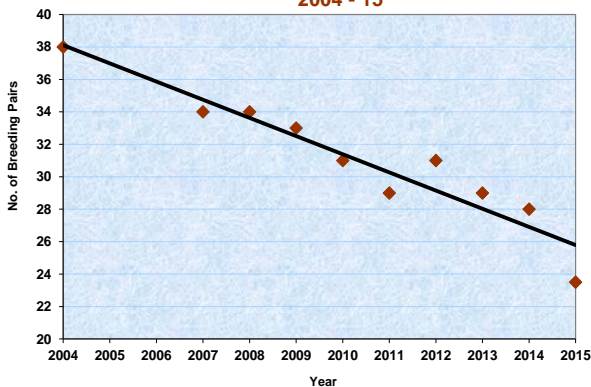
The Upper Onny Wildlife Group (UOWG) has been monitoring a local Curlew population since 2004. Even in the County stronghold, it has declined by around 39% in only 12 years. The chart shows the decline.

This evidence was used to justify including a Curlew Recovery Project in the Heritage Lottery funded Stiperstones-Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme, the county Curlew stronghold, shown on the map. The Project has taken a comprehensive approach, engaging local farmers and landowners, as well as the local community. While there is a strong unanimous view that the Curlew population is declining, there are very different views on the cause, and what can be done about it. Therefore, to start with, it was decided to monitor a number of nests and chicks with cameras and radio tags, to find out the actual cause of poor breeding success. Last year, 12 nests were found and monitored. SOS agreed to provide six cameras to help monitor nests.

Of the 12 nests found, nine were lost at the egg stage, but none of the three broods of young survived either. Predation accounted for all failures, with foxes almost certainly accounting for at least half. In total 36-39 pairs of Curlew were found in the area, but no evidence was found that any young fledged. A Summary Report, and the detailed nest monitoring report, can be found on the LPS website, www.stiperstonesandcorndon.co.uk or the UOWG part of the Community Wildlife Groups website, www.shropscwgs.org.uk

2015 was atypical. The cold dry spring delayed nesting, and may have

**Decline in the Upper Onny area Curlew Population
2004 - 15**



changed the behavior of predators, or increased the vulnerability of the Curlews. Certainly, 100% failure rate cannot occur every year, as some recruitment must occur, otherwise the population would be extinct already. However, the evidence from this atypical year does not support either the current agri-

environment payments to farmers, or any specific potential changes. If we do not undertake further research, we have no basis for an action plan to reverse the decline

The project is therefore being continued and expanded in 2016 and 2017. However, the budget, and additional funds raised from National Trust, Natural England, SOS and Upper Onny Wildlife Group in 2015, were fully spent in 2015 to prove the desperate plight that Curlews are in. This result was achieved, but we now have possibly unrepresentative results from one year, and we need to gather as much hard evidence as possible. Therefore, the LPS is raising funds to continue with an enhanced Curlew recovery Project, particularly further nest monitoring.

Curlew has recently been added to the *Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern*, and BTO and RSPB have both initiated funding appeals for research into the causes of decline. While this national research will help to inform recovery work in Shropshire, we need local research here too. The local primary breeding habitat is cropped farm grassland producing winter food for stock, which is different from the open moorland or upland damp pasture utilized in the national strongholds, and which will be the main subject of other research.

The total budget required consists of equipment, a contractor to find the nests, install the nest monitoring equipment, and radio tag and track any chicks, an assistant to ensure that cameras are checked sufficiently to function effectively, together with landowner and community engagement and training, assessing the cost of changes in farm management to safeguard Curlews, trialing nest protection measures, and a contract to trial and undertake predator control in the vicinity of nest sites to find out what works.

In the SOS constitution, the first aim is “to encourage the study and protection of birds in Shropshire and elsewhere”. As the foremost conservation body for birds in the County, SOS Management Committee has agreed to make a further funding contribution of £2,500 for 2016.

Fundraising includes an appeal by Upper Onny Wildlife Group for donations by members of the public. SOS Management Committee has therefore also agreed that the appeal is included in this issue of *The Buzzard*, with an endorsement encouraging members to contribute individually.

The Appeal letter is enclosed, and members are requested to make a donation, and pass on the Appeal letter to anyone else who wants to save the Curlew from local extinction.

Swifts and BOCC 4

December 2015 saw the publication of The Birds of Conservation Concern 4: the Red List for Birds^[1]. This list, compiled by a range of bird NGOs, also comprises an Amber and a Green List where birds are of lesser concern than the red list – but still of concern. The previous review in 2009 saw 52 species on the Red List, now there are 67 which accounts for just over a quarter of UK species. The latest amber list has 96 species and the green list 81.

In both the 2009 and 2015 reports the common swift (*Apus apus*) is on the amber list. However many would argue this is just a technicality as suitable swift data from the BTOs Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is only available from 1994. This means that the necessary figures cannot yet be established.

However

- RSPB^[2] quotes declines of 25 – 49% over 25 years
- Birdguides^[3] quote a loss of 70% over 40 years
- BBS reports year on year losses of 3%.

These are truly appalling figures. We really do not want swifts to be on the red list when the next BOCC is published.

There are many groups across the country working to raise awareness of swifts, asking for swift bricks to be put in new developments and mitigation measures put in place for sites that are lost due to renovation and redevelopment. It can be done, it is successful but we are still losing far too birds due to inadvertent destruction of nest sites. Many people are unaware of these birds, unaware that they need our buildings to breed in or else simply think they can easily move elsewhere. But it's not that simple – a friend who surveys swifts in another part of the country reported that in 2014 5 houses had scaffolding erected before the swifts arrived back and in every case the birds not only failed to breed but also abandoned the sites completely i.e. they did not return in 2015. Whether they were successful in another location is of course unknown – but it does show that much work that is done which is outside the planning system, not even needing building control can have a large effect on local swift populations. There are some concerns that food supply can be a contributing factor to their decline but it is agreed that loss of nest sites is the major factor in the loss of these birds – and it is something that is happening under our noses and something that we could and should be doing something about.

Groups across Shropshire did a fantastic job surveying their local swift populations in 2015 but we need more surveying and recording of local swift hot spots, more people speaking up for swifts when development or renovation work is planned. Much work is underway to help farmland birds but urban birds that we live with are declining and need more help. SOS

members are ideally placed to survey their local swifts wherever they live. Whenever you go out wherever you are please look for swifts and pass records to me.

Why not arrange a Welcoming the Swifts Event near you and get local residents interested in these birds. Please get in touch **shropshireswifts@gmail.com** if you want to help these iconic summer visitors and make sure that they are still here for future generations to enjoy. Visiting other parts of the country I find towns that are devoid of birds so, please, let's do something to stop this happening here in Shropshire

Peta Sams - Shropshire Swift Group

References

[1] - BOCC4 Summary at

http://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/shared_documents/publications/birds-conservation-concern/birds-of-conservation-concern-4-leaflet.pdf.

The full details can be found online at <http://britishbirds.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/BoCC4.pdf>

[2]

http://www.rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature/discoverandlearn/birdguide/status_explained.aspx

[3] <http://www.birdguides.com/webzine/article.asp?a=3302>

Red Grouse Count 2016



Volunteers are wanted for the Red Grouse Survey on Long Mynd, please. The Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group is leading the project. Last year there were over 60 volunteers. We want to recruit as many helpers as possible for the 2016 survey. It's easy to do, and new participants will be very welcome.

Counts will be held on six successive Thursdays in April and early May. Additional dates will be arranged on other days of the week, so please sign up even if Thursdays are inconvenient. Participants do not need to come to every count. Please come to as many as you can.

Pairs are secretive in the breeding season, and stay in the deep heather, so they are difficult to count. However, territorial males display around sunset. Most territories are within sight and hearing distance of the road along the top, between the Gliding Station and the Shooting Box car park. The display flight is noisy, conspicuous and unmistakable, and can be observed over long distances, so this is a suitable project for anyone interested in birds or conservation, or who would enjoy being up on the hill at sunset. No special knowledge or skills are needed. A full briefing, and training for anyone that wants it, will be provided

Project Briefing & Methodology

7.30pm – 8.30pm Thursday 24th March 2016

Carding Mill Valley Tea Room (Refreshments provided)

Planned Count Dates (Thursdays). Please be at your Watchpoint by the start time.

Sunset is about 7.45pm on the first date, and gets later by 15 minutes per week

- 6.15pm, 31st March
- 6.30pm, 7th April
- 6.45pm, 14th April
- 7.00pm, 21st April
- 7.10pm, 28th April
- 7.20pm, 5th May

Surveys will be held on other days of the week in mid – late April, so even if Thursdays are difficult for you, please join in – you will still be able to help.

More information on the SOS website, www.shropshirebirds.com, or the SACWG page of the Community Wildlife Groups Website www.ShropsCWGs.org.ok

If you want to help please come to the Briefing. If you can't make it, but want to help, please contact Pete Carty (National Trust Manager) 07824 514564 Peter.Carty@nationaltrust.org.uk

Field Trip Report to WWT Slimbridge

Sunday, 6th December 2015

Organised by Sue Brealey

This coach trip which has gone to Slimbridge on a fairly regular basis was organised to leave the Shirehall at 8am, where 22 people turned up for the day. The weather did not look good, as the first of the battering storms which December saw had arrived in the North West during the night, which could have been a reason for several cancellations. However, although rather on the windy side, especially on the journey down, the group were rewarded for their stamina, with breezy weather but no rain. This was mentioned throughout the day, with comments of 'how lucky!' The group were joined by a member who lives around the Bristol area, and it was really great for her to come and meet the group and travel around with them.

As usual, once the group had entered the reserve, they split up to go in whatever direction they preferred. The majority of the group first went onto the arm leading to the Holden hide. This two story hide which gives excellent views over the estuary marshes proved to be very windy indeed due to the height and windblown showers proved problematic but the results were excellent. The first really significant bird were at least 4 Crane, the result of the reintroduction work carried out by the Trust. It was very satisfying to see these large elegant birds obviously in good health, feeding and flying around. There were also a large flock of Golden Plover which flew up regularly as there was the presence of a Peregrine, and they settled amongst a goodly flock of Lapwing. Also noted were a group of Barnacle Geese, and amongst some Greylag Geese were some 'European' White fronted Geese. Also from this hide some members saw a Marsh Harrier feeding on a carcass and were lucky enough to have a Sparrowhawk fly closely by.

Starting back along the path towards the Reception Centre, the other hides along this route were visited. Amongst the birds noted were a variety of ducks including Pochard, Pintail, looking very good, Shelduck, Shoveler and lots of Teal & Wigeon. From the Robbie Garret hide, there were brief glimpses of a Water Rail which scuttled between a couple of reed beds. Grey Heron were noted as well as some waders including Redshank, Curlew, Ruff, a Snipe

flying across, and some Dunlin. And of course there were plenty of Swans, including the migrant Berwick's with 80 being on the reserve and Mute's.

By this time, some of group used the facilities of the reception centre for lunch while others enjoyed their picnics. Then it was a matter of walking through the captive bird area towards the arm leading to the Kingfisher hide. This proved rewarding again as along the small river where in season Kingfisher breed (unfortunately not seen on this visit) Gadwall & Little Grebe were noted as well as Tufted Duck. On the surrounding fields, with the help of the warden, a flock of White fronted Geese were seen, but amongst the 'European' ones (*Anser albifrons*) were some Greenland ones (*Anser flvirostris*). It was very good that the group were able to distinguish between these birds which are rarely seen together. Another species seen in numbers were some Black tailed Godwit, which moved from field to field when disturbed.

Again the group walked back towards the reception centre, visiting the hides along the way. At the feeding station the usual suspects were noted such as Great Tit, Blue Tit, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, and in the trees along the path were groups of Long-tailed Tit. A Fieldfare was seen briefly as well as Blackbird. At the Zeiss hide, quite a few of the group were rewarded again by not only hearing but seeing a Cetti's Warbler!! Very unexpected.

Some members noted that amongst some Tufted Duck was a female Scaup, considered wild as it had no leg ring. There may have been an American Lesser Scaup again female, with no leg ring, but smaller than the nearby Tufted Duck.

By 3.45, the members had slowly started their way to the Peng Observatory, where a Buzzard was noted on a post, for the daily feeding of the wild wildfowl in particular the Bewick Swans, which proved to be enjoyed by all who watched, and in the warm!! Afterwards, the group made their way back to the coach for the return journey home.

Considering the conditions, the group had had a very good day. Amongst the other species seen were Black-headed Gull, Canada Geese, Carrion Crow, Coot, Dunnock, Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Jackdaw, Mallard, Moorhen, Pied Wagtail, Robin, Rook, Starling, Woodpigeon, and just for Christmas a hybrid Goose just waiting for the table!! In all the total number of species seen was 50 ++ which was very respectable.

Sue Brealey

Field Trip Report to The Wirral

Sunday, 17th January 2016

Organised by Sue Brealey

On an extremely cold day, with blustery winds, but thankfully no rain, a miracle for this winter, a group of 13 people bravely arrived at the meeting point at the Leasowes at the north end of the Wirral. Unfortunately the tide was well out so any sea watching was not possible, but along the beach several groups of birds were noted including the usual types of Gulls including a Common Gull which flew overhead. A large flock of Curlew were seen plus Red breasted Merganser, Lapwing, Redshank and quite a few Turnstone picking their way along the rockier edges. A Little Egret flew in and on a good scan with telescopes a Grey Plover and Greenshank were seen. A brisk walk up to the group of rocks was undertaken in the hope of seeing Purple Sandpiper which disappointingly were not present. But Pied Wagtail, Redshank, Ringed Plover and Shelduck were included in the list.

A short journey was made to Hoylake, but with the tidal situation this proved very disappointing, so the journey continued to West Kirby. It had been commented on that there was a Great Northern Diver present at the Marine Lake. In very windy conditions and using the telescopes, this was observed very well, diving a lot to feed, Also on the lake was a Great crested Grebe and a pair of Red breasted Merganser plus a full gulls. Considering the cold, the group continued the journey south, this time stopping at Parkgate.

Conveniently the group were able to park facing the saltmarsh, and so it was decided to have a good lunch break, birding at the same time. On arrival a raptor was noted and this proved to be a female Marsh Harrier quartering the area looking for prey. Again with the tide being out there was a great difficulty in seeing birds which were hiding down in the channels, but plenty of Mallard were noted, and also Lapwing, and then a Great White Egret flew in and would jump about as necessary. Then another raptor was seen, but this time happily it was a female Hen Harrier. This quartered the area for a time and then sat on branch sticking out of the marsh so all the group got excellent views of this rare bird. A large flock of Pink footed Geese flew in.

After having viewed the area well it was decided to journey onto the final destination at RSPB Burton Mere. On arrival the majority of the group started out to walk towards the old Inner Marsh Farm Hide. Happily after walking through the trees and over the bridge the group were greeted with an excellent view of a roosting Long Eared Owl, perched on a branch in the open. It was difficult to see it at first but once one's eye was in, then it was a really good view. A Kestrel was also noted hovering looking for prey. Having enjoyed this excellent spot, the group travelled onto to the hide only to find that the lake in front on the hide was devoid of birds, a real surprise. Several duck were noted on a lake on the extreme right which included a Goldeneye (male) amongst Shoveler, Mallard, and Teal. Returning to the reception centre at the feeding station smaller birds such as Chaffinch, Blue & Great Tit, and Dunnock were feeding there as well as the usual Grey Squirrel. Back in the centre, on the mere in front a lot of Teal & Wigeon were noted as well as Cormorant, Grey Heron, Coot, Moorhen, Shoveler and Redshank. Then the crowning glory for the day was a Water Rail which was sulking around some reeds right in front of the hide.

By this time the light was going and so it was decided to start on the journey home. So after taking the weather into consideration, the group were lucky to have seen around 40 species with some of them being really good spots.

Sue Brealey

Look out for Curlew this spring

On page 15 you can read about the Curlew Nest Monitoring project in the Shropshire Hills, and I urge you to have a good luck at the enclosed appeal leaflet and contribute if you can.

It's very sad that Curlews are doing so poorly, and there seems to be very little evidence of where the birds may still be hanging on as breeders, but Marc Petty (Wellington LA21 Group) and I both feel that some relict lowland breeding sites may be unrecorded. This is particularly true of overlooked areas such as the Weald Moors or the grasslands of North Shropshire.

Please make an effort to follow up on anecdotal sightings of Curlews in March, April and May, or to look out for them in likely areas, and record your sightings via BirdTrack or however you prefer to do it. Colour ring sightings are particularly valuable and can be submitted via **www.ring.ac** or by email to me (details on page 3).

Martin George



BTO News

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

Welcome to my first newsletter as Shropshire Regional Representative for the BTO. I hope to be able to bring you the latest updates from all of the BTO Surveys, as well as local projects that I have been able to get involved with.

Birds of Conservation Concern 4

This is a major update of the conservation status of all of the UK's bird species. You can read the full document here online at <http://www.bto.org/science/monitoring/psob> There are changes in status for many species, including inevitably and sadly many species moved to the Red List indicating continued or sudden declines in population. This includes some of most beloved and familiar species including Grey Wagtail, Mistle Thrush, Pied Flycatcher, Puffin and the Curlew.

Curlews

The Curlew is also now the subject of an urgent BTO appeal to help secure the future of this species as a UK breeding bird <http://www.bto.org/support-us/appeals/bto-curlew-appeal> At a local level, this species has been the subject of study for some years now in the south-west of Shropshire and fantastic work is being done to try and help reverse this decline (see page 15 of this magazine for more details). Please get in touch with the project if you want to help to preserve Shropshire's Curlews.

Breeding Bird Survey

As I am sure you know the Breeding Bird Survey covers the whole of the UK and is the main source of all the data used to provide robust estimates of how our birds are doing – including the Birds of Conservation Concern discussed above. We need samples of data from every county and we have a good number of survey squares in Shropshire. About 75% are currently allocated and I have had requests already for new participants so I hope that this will increase. Results are still coming in for 2015 so I will report back on this soon. This is one of the most important surveys run by the BTO and I hope to run some introductory field training next year, so please contact me if you are interested in helping out.

Nest Record Scheme

Another method of finding out how birds are doing year to year is by looking at their breeding success. The BTO uses a combination of recording the details of nesting attempts (the Nest Record Scheme) and various methods of bird-ringing, to produce annual trends for breeding success and productivity. The preliminary results for 2015 can be found here <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs/results/nrs-preliminary-results-2015>

Sadly, it seems to have been a poor year for most species, most likely due to the bad weather, including a poor May that hit many species at their peak breeding time. This raises a lot of questions about how the continued extreme weather events that we keep experiencing are going to affect all of our bird species. It also highlights the importance of the nest-record scheme as a highly valuable way that volunteers can contribute good data. Nest-recording can be done by anyone and data for common birds are just as valuable as for rare ones. I am signing up as a 'mentor' for the Nest Record Scheme in Shropshire next year and again if you are interested (and I can't recommend it highly enough), please get in touch. I'll write more about this in future newsletters.

Swifts – Urgent Request for Swift Champions

Swifts are another much-loved species that you may be fortunate enough to have living in or near your house. Like many species they are declining but Shropshire still seems to have a good population. The Shropshire Swift Group have been doing excellent work over the last few years in surveying some towns for nest-sites and advocating for nest-box provision in developments. They initially started in Ludlow and branched out into surrounding towns, into Church Stretton and last year started in Shrewsbury.

The group has accomplished a lot in short space of time and is very passionate and driven, but they are urgently in need of more people that are willing to help speak out for swifts and carry out surveys of our towns and villages looking for nest sites. If you think you can spare some time to help, please have a look at their website and get in touch:

<http://www.shropshireswifts.org.uk/>

House Martins

The House Martin Survey that took place in 2015 aimed to gather enough data to get a national population estimate for this much-loved bird. Shropshire was well represented with many people taking part. I don't have the results back yet but I carried out four squares myself and only found them in one. It was a lovely colony though and was very enjoyable to watch whilst counting the number of active nests.

Frustratingly there were also a couple of nests on a building adjacent to one of my other squares, but that's the nature of sampling in survey design!

This survey will return this year to focus on productivity of individual colonies, so watch this space if you are interested in spending some time with these lovely birds.

Best wishes

Jonathan Groom

Bird Notes

October, November & December 2015

Yvonne Chadwick

Whooper Swan An adult was at Venus Pool on 22 Dec.

Egyptian Goose One flew in to Venus Pool on 7 Dec. It stayed for just an hour before flying out to the east.

Pink-footed Goose Four flew over Whixall Moss on 18 Oct. One on Whixall floods on 26 Nov and another at Polemere on 12 Dec.

Barnacle Goose One seen on the dam at Chelmarsh on 17 Nov and 19 Nov.

Mandarin Duck Two males flew towards Cound Fishery on 4 Oct. Others were a male at Mereside, Shrewsbury on 6 Nov, 2 at Adleymoore Common on 14 Nov, one at The Mere on 21 Nov and a male at Wood Lane on 5 Dec.

Pintail The highest count was of 14 at Venus Pool on 24 Dec. Up to 3 were also at Whixall floods in Nov and 2 at Chelmarsh on 6 Dec.

Garganey One was reported at Devils Dingle on 19 Oct and another at Polemere from 30 Oct - 15 Nov.

White-winged Black Tern One was found on The Mere at Ellesmere on 13 Oct and remained for three days.

Common Scoter Six females were seen on The Mere, Ellesmere on 21 Nov.

Great Northern Diver A juvenile was present for half an hour at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 3 Dec.

Goldeneye Up to 4 were seen at Venus Pool from 20 Nov. Also present at Shavington Park, Colemere and The Mere (max of 23).

Grey Partridge Two sightings from the arable field at Venus Pool with up to six seen in early Dec.

Little Egret Single birds were seen at Leighton on 7 Oct, Onibury on 20 Oct and Bridgnorth on 3 Nov. Three were also at The Mere on 21 Nov.

Great White Egret The two reports came from The Mere on 13 Dec and Whixall Moss on 18 Dec.

Osprey One flew over Wood Lane on 10 Oct.

Hen Harrier One seen at Wem Moss on 16 Nov and a male on 23 Dec at Whixall Moss.

Merlin Seen at Childs Ercall on 27 Nov, Darliston on 15 Dec and Whixall Moss 23-24 Dec.

Cuckoo A juvenile was photographed on 14 Oct at the Stiperstones.

Golden Plover Seen at five locations; the largest flocks were 120 at Venus Pool on 23 Oct and 650 at Waters Upton on 10 Dec. Others were noted at Whixall Moss, Shifnal and fields to the east of Priorslee.

Dunlin At Venus Pool, singles were seen on 21 Nov and 22 Dec.

Green Sandpiper The six records came from Venus Pool, Devils Dingle and Knighton Reservoir (2).

Ruff One was present at Venus Pool on 28 Oct.

Jack Snipe Individuals were seen at Catherton Common 4 Dec and Shavington Park on 20 Dec and 2 at Market Drayton on 29 Dec.

Woodcock Individuals were seen at Black Hill, Church Stretton, Shavington Park, Priorslee Lake and flying over the A5 in Shrewsbury.

Common Redshank One was at Knighton Reservoir on 31 Oct.

Mediterranean Gull A first winter was at Telford Crematorium on 11 Dec and a second winter at The Mere on 15 Dec.

Yellow-legged Gull Regularly seen throughout at The Mere, Priorslee Lake and Trench. Highest counts were of 5 individuals at The Mere on 7 Nov and 15 Dec.

Caspian Gull A fourth winter was at Priorslee Lake on 4 Nov.

Kittiwake An adult was at Priorslee Flash on 1 Dec.

Short-eared Owl Seen on Black Hill on 14 Oct, Black Mountain on 17 Oct, Newport on 24 Nov and Stanton Lacy on 6 Dec. Up to 2 were also present on Whixall Moss during the quarter.

Swallow The latest reports were on 10 Oct at Condover and Edmond Marsh and The Mere on 7 Nov.

House Martin Three reports during the quarter; the latest being of 2 over Whittingslow on 14 Oct.

Ring Ouzel Three records, a male at Ashes Hollow on 11 Oct, 4 (2 females) at Titterstone Clee on 14 Oct and a male at Black Hill on 16 Oct.

Wheatear The last of the sightings for the autumn were of single birds at Titterstone Clee, seen on 14 Oct and 17 Oct.

Yellow-browed Warbler One was trapped and ringed at Whixall Moss on 10 Oct.

Cettis Warbler One was regularly seen at Priorslee Lake from 31 Oct to 23 Dec.

Firecrest One was reported at Spunhill, Ellesmere on 7 Oct.

Willow Tit Singles were seen at Black Hill, Picklescott and Priorslee Lake, along with up to 3 at Whixall Moss.

Great Grey Shrike Seen at Black Hill 14 Oct and 18 Oct, Whixall Moss on 20 Oct and Anchor 24 Oct.

Tree Sparrow Six were present at Wykey on 28 Dec.

Brambling Up to 14 were frequently seen at Venus Pool, with others noted at Chelmarsh, Black Hill, Tibberton, Whixall Moss, Cockshutt, Cefn Coch and Wellington.

Corn Bunting One was singing at Childs Ercall on 24 Nov, also seen on 14 Dec. Up to six were also at Tibberton during the period.

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

Records: 4,743

Species: 132

Forthcoming field trips

See the website or 2016 programme booklet for details of all of this year's field trips.

Sunday 17th April

Leader: Estelle Hughes

Moore Nature Reserve

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

Organiser: Sue Brealey

RSPB Ynys Hir

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.

31st May – 5th June**Trip to Scotland**

Organiser: Sue Brealey

Please contact Sue Brealey for details. Maximum numbers – 16 – Travelling days 31st May & 5th June. Staying at Grantown on Spey

There will be no Field Trip in July**Saturday 20th August Rutland Water – For the Bird Fair**

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, plus entry fee to the fair. This could be discounted depending on numbers going. Booking from February 2016

There will be no Field Trip in September**Leaders' and/or organisers' telephone numbers**

Sue Brealey 01939 262450 // 07713 164463

Estelle Hughes 07817 243693 // 01948 840902

2016 Indoor meetings, Bayston Hill Memorial Hall, 7.15pm

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