

The Buzzard



Shropshire

Ornithological Society's

quarterly magazine

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Winter 2016

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**Copy deadline for the Spring 2017 issue is a week earlier
than usual:
25th January**

Please send contributions or suggestions to:
buzzard@shropshirebirds.co.uk

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:

ATKINSON,	MR. I.	EDGMOND,	NEWPORT
	MR.&	PATSHULL	
HOLLANDS,	MRS M.	LANE,	ALBRIGHTON,
	MR.&		
EVANS,	MRS.D.	HORSEHAY,	TELFORD,
			SHREWSBURY
WITTMANN,	MR. N.D.	BROCKTON,	,
COTTERELL			
,	DR. S.		BRIDGNORTH,
BUNN,	MR. V. N .	TRENCH,	TELFORD,
			SHREWSBURY
PIERCE,	MR. S.	HANWOOD,	,

Please note that names and addresses are held on computer and anyone who objects should contact the Membership Secretary.

Frank Gribble (1929 - 2016)

Frank Gribble presenting a President's Award to Geoff Holmes at Venus Pool



in April 2012 Photo: Helen J Griffiths

SOS President for 21 Years

We were sad to hear of the death in early September of Frank Gribble, President of SOS, at the age of 86. Several members of SOS went to a well-attended funeral, a low-key occasion at Stafford crematorium consisting of Beethoven and birdsong but no words, followed by a get-together at Staffordshire Wildlife Trust's headquarters at Wolsley Bridge.

Frank was not quite a founder member of SOS, but he was Honorary Secretary from 1958 until he moved to Staffordshire in 1963, BTO rep for Shropshire from 1960 until 1963, and a Vice-President of SOS from 1965 until he became our President in 1995.

Born and brought-up in Bedford, Frank developed an interest in ornithology at an early age, whilst a pupil at Bedford School. He joined the Natural History Society at school where he learned to

ring birds and began a life-time of bird surveys and wildfowl counting. After school, he became a member of BTO and Bedfordshire Natural History Society and played an active part in both, making regular visits to Bedford Sewage Works and the gravel pits of the Ouse Valley, as well as further afield to the East Coast and Breckland. He had joined a firm of stockbrokers in Bedford, followed by two year's National Service in Reading when he was introduced to the Thames Valley gravel pits, and became particularly interested in seabird colonies, and took his leave in the Cairngorms. On his return to Bedford, Frank joined an insurance company, became BTO rep for Bedfordshire, and began to travel abroad on birdwatching trips to such locations as Norway, Arctic Sweden, and the Camargue.

Whilst organising a black-headed gull count in 1958, Frank was asked to move to work in Shrewsbury. On his arrival in Shropshire, Frank met Edward Rutter and Ken Stott and soon became involved with SOS, and he quickly began to explore such birding spots as Clun Forest, the Long Mynd, the Stiperstones and Venus Pool, and soon became SOS Secretary and BTO rep for Shropshire. Frank was very active in both SOS and BTO, organising surveys and wildfowl counts, and being part of a pressure group to oppose large-scale afforestation of the Long Mynd; this group was the origin of Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

In the early 1960s, work began on a "Hand list of the Birds of Shropshire", Edward Rutter having identified a need for an up-to-date account of the status of birds in the county, with Frank contributing historical information, as well as many records. Edward Rutter died before the work was completed, but Frank and Tom Pemberton took on the task of finishing the book which

was published in 1964. This book, covering the years 1950 to 1963, was the first bird atlas for the county of Shropshire.

Whilst in Shropshire, Frank lived in Yockleton at first, and then, after meeting his wife, Hilary, in Longden; they had a daughter in 1961, and then a son, born soon after their move to Staffordshire in 1963. On moving to Staffordshire, Frank became an active member of the West Midland Bird Club, and a founder member of Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. He was BTO rep for Staffordshire from 1965, and from 1967 until 1971 he was Honorary Secretary of BTO, as well as serving on the BTO Council from 1963 to 1967 and from 1985 to 1988. He also continued to participate in surveys and counts, such as summer and winter atlas work, a national black-headed gull survey, and the heron and wildfowl counts at Aqualate Mere which he had been doing until very recently since 1975. In 1973 he was awarded the Bernard Tucker Medal for services to BTO, and in 1997 he was awarded a MBE by the Queen for services to nature conservation.

After retirement, Frank contributed to several organisations, including MAFF (as a specialist ornithologist for the North Mercia Regional Panel), Staffordshire FWAG and the Peak Park Wildlife Group.

Frank retained his enthusiasm for wildlife, and birds in particular, throughout his life and during his 'phone calls to me on Society matters, his first question was always to ask for an update on recent bird sightings in Shropshire. A number of people I have spoken to recently remember Frank for inspiring and encouraging them to take part in bird surveys and counts, as teenagers and young people, and for showing a keen interest in their progress as birdwatchers.

Frank made a huge contribution to SOS and to ornithology in Shropshire and Staffordshire over many years, as well as to the West Midland Bird Club, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, and the British Trust for Ornithology, and we will miss his genuine interest and involvement in the Society.



*Frank Gribble at the opening of the new Main hide at Venus Pool, with John Kalicki (EA) and John Turner (SOS) in 1997
Photo: Phil Pickin
Helen J Griffiths Hon Sec,*

Vacant Appointments

The Society has a remit to ensure that there is a programme of Indoor Speakers and a series of Field Trips during any year. These have traditionally been carried out by a) The Indoor Programme Secretary and b) The Excursion Secretary. The roles include being members of the Development & Publicity Sub-Committee (D&PSC).

Jean Rickard has done an excellent job for organising the annual speakers' programme and being on hand at each indoor meeting to meet the speakers and sort out any problems over the last 7 years. She has now taken on the role of helping Brian Andrews out with the Treasurer's job and being a member of the Management Committee. As such she has indicated that she would prefer to hand the role over to someone else having done a full programme for 2017.

The role of Excursion Secretary has been open for nearly 10 years now with nobody coming forward so the D&PSC have carried out the role of organising the Field Trip programme in the interim. This can be complicated but is not onerous, and certain areas could be split depending. It is really enjoyable in a lot of ways, especially if leading the Field Trips and passing on the knowledge a leading birder can to members and hopefully to the younger generation.

So, it would be of great benefit to the society and its members if there were couple of people within the Society who would enjoy filling these roles. If anyone is interested, please get in contact with Sue Brealey or any other Management Committee member to discuss what is involved and hopefully the remit for the Society can be carried on into the future.

Sue Brealey

Winter wildfowl watch

The Mere attracts large numbers of winter wildfowl, especially Wigeon, Goldeneye, Teal, Tufted Duck, Shoveler, Pochard and Goosander. Great Crested Grebe are present all year round and there is a winter gull roost. The Mere offers visiting wildfowl a safe place to feed and roost with relatively mild weather. The grassy edges enable duck to get in and out of the water easily to find their food.

Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)

This handsome dabbling duck feeds on aquatic plants, grasses and roots. Wigeon are medium-sized, with a round head and short bill. The male sports a chestnut head and neck, yellow forehead, pink breast, grey body and white belly, while females are rusty brown.

Wigeon breed in central and northern Scotland, and also northern England. Many visit the UK in winter from Iceland, Scandinavia and Russia, to escape the harsh winters there. They gather in large numbers on wet grasslands, flood meadows, reservoirs and other bodies of water; a huge flock of more than 22,000 birds was counted in Norfolk a few years ago, but you are not likely to see anything approaching that number at The Mere – there wouldn't be enough space!



Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)

The Goldeneye is a medium-sized diving duck. The male is certainly eye-catching: black and white with a large, greenish-black domed head and a large white spot in front of its yellow eye. Females are smaller, mottled grey with a chocolate-brown head.

They dive for up to thirty seconds, to a depth of four metres, to feed on crustaceans, insects and molluscs. They typically nest ten to fifteen metres off the ground in tree holes, often laying eggs in each other's nests, where, if they get the timing right, a sister, aunt or cousin will unknowingly end up raising their young. The fledglings hurl themselves out of their lofty tree-house home down to the ground to reach water.

UK winter-visiting Goldeneye arrive from Scandinavia and northern Russia, but are normally only seen in small numbers, in contrast to the large flocks of Wigeon you may see.

The Latin scientific name *Bucephala* means “bull-headed”, while *clangula* means “noise” – the whistling sound of its wings in flight.



Did you know Bucephalus was the famed horse of Alexander the Great?

Pochard (*Aythya ferina*)

In winter and spring, male Pochard are easy to identify with their reddish-brown head, black breast and tail and pale grey body. They have a long, dark bill with a wide grey band; females are brown with a greyish body and pale cheeks.

They are a stocky diving duck, smaller than a Mallard, which feeds on a mixed diet of plants, seeds, insects and their larvae, water snails and small fish. They will also up-end, or dabble, for food. They mainly feed at night, so are often seen asleep during the day. The males' call is a whistle, while the females make a harsh, growling sound.

Large numbers migrate to the UK in winter from Eastern Europe and Russia to escape the bitter cold. They often form large flocks with other diving ducks, such as Tufted Duck, with which they are known

to



hybridise – however, that shouldn't cause a problem when identifying them in winter.

Goosander (*Mergus merganser*)



A member of the sawbill family, named for their serrated bill, the Goosander is a medium to large, mainly freshwater diving duck, resident in the north of Britain, but a winter visitor further south.

Goosander are handsome and distinctive: the male

has a dark-green head, black back and narrow, red, slightly hooked bill; the white sides and breast sometimes appear pink. The female is very different in appearance – grey with a gingery-brown head and white throat.

They feed largely on small and medium-sized fish, the serrated bill making it easy to hold on to their prey.

Goosander (sometimes known as Common Merganser) can be confused with Red-breasted Merganser in appearance, though the latter is more likely to be found along Britain's coastline in winter.

Goosanders are excellent at fishing, but their diet, which includes salmon and trout, has brought them into conflict with fishermen. The Wildlife Trusts work closely with fishermen, farmers, landowners and developers to ensure that our wildlife is both



protected and provides a benefit to local people.

“**Shropshire Peregrine nest site to be demolished!**”

John Tucker

My headline will never feature but “**TUMBLE TOWERS**” did appear as a 24cm banner headline on the front page of the *Shropshire Star* on 10 October 2016 along with “Ironbridge landmark likely to be demolished in summer 2017.” I admit to the story for the first time; it goes back to 1998.

In the early days of Peregrines nesting in the county (it began in 1987, Tucker 1997,1998) I was Conservation Officer for Shropshire Wildlife Trust and was then quite involved with the species. I set up the Peregrine Group of site wardens in 1992 at which stage there were three occupied nest sites. Mindful that the population might expand, and it has – in 2016 there were 18 occupied sites fledging 42 young (Shropshire Peregrine Group) - we were on the look-out for potential new sites.

Around 1998 there was a major fire at Buildwas Power Station and the renovations involved massive cranes, almost as tall as the cooling towers. A subsequent fire on 4 February 2014 was in part responsible for the decision to close the plant and it was decommissioned on 20 November 2015 and it is being demolished. However, seeing those cranes towering over the generating halls and not far from the cooling towers, gave me an idea – use one of the cranes to put a Peregrine nest-box on the side of one of the cooling towers. I talked to the power station managers, they liked the idea, I found a nest-box design and they made one, in ‘cotton steel’, the material used for the huge ‘*Angel of the North*’ statue near Gateshead. Cotton steel corrodes, slightly, to a mellow rusty brown and stops corroding further. The picture shows a member of Buildwas staff, I think the man who made it, crouched by the ‘nest box.’

All was ready, in summer 1999. The company had agreed to and funded the ‘nest-box’ and accepted the cost of a few thousands of pounds to pay for the crane’s time to do the job – move the crane and lift the box high onto a vertical point on the side of the tower and bolt it on – to a NE-facing side away from the weather. And I had a £5 bet on with the warden of the station’s Nature Reserve that the box would be adopted by the birds, one or a pair, within a week. Well it was going to be very secure!

Meanwhile back at my desk, then in Frankwell, Shrewsbury overlooking the Welsh Bridge and town, I received a phone call from a local press reporter; it was August, holiday time and

stories were in short supply – did I have any nice news? Yes, of course, we were about to have a Peregrine Box put onto the side of one of the cooling towers – doing something positive for a magnificent bird species. It made the front page shortly afterwards and was followed in short order by a shower of letters objecting to the scheme, from local pigeon fanciers. Their chorus became so strident that the company decided that they should drop the scheme. I should have foreseen the reaction and kept my mouth firmly shut until the box was in place.

The box apparently went to Derbyshire to be used at a quarry somewhere – I never did find out just where. If the box had been put up at Buildwas, and I'm certain soon occupied, then it seems it would now soon have to come down. This might have given the problem that destroying the nest of a Schedule 1 species would be illegal, but only if it were occupied for breeding at the time. While it would have been 'occupied', in that Peregrine pairs holding the 'tenancy' will guard their 'property' throughout the non-breeding seasons, so long as there were no eggs or young present demolition would have been in order. But we are not in that situation and the towers will, it seems, be demolished next year.

Tucker, J.J. (1997):3-20. The peregrine *Falco peregrinus* in Shropshire – the story to the end of 1996, especially the first ten years of breeding in the county”. *SOS Bird Report*. 1997:3-20.
Tucker, J.J. (1998) The Peregrine Falcon on Shropshire, whatever next? *British Wildlife*. 9(4):227-31.



A member of Buildwas staff by the Peregrine nest-box, custom-made from cotton steel and destined, at the time, for the side of one of the cooling towers in the background. It was heavy it took two people to lift it. Scan of a 35mm colour slide. John Tucker.

The curious incident of the Peregrine and the Coot in the day-time - in 1843.

Herbert E. Forrest, in his *Fauna of Shropshire* of 1899, relates a Peregrine story thus: “One of those in the Hawkstone Collection was shot while perching on the top of St Chad’s Church, Shrewsbury, eating a Coot which it had killed.” An intriguing story if thin on detail.

I was delighted recently when Alan Brisbane sent me a cutting from the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* of 20 January 1843. Alan is currently going through the archives for his own researches and kindly sends me birdy items when he comes across them. The extended cutting gives wonderful details of the story though I should say that “Some scenes may upset readers of a sensitive disposition” but I feel I must share the story. Along with wholly new bird records this is the sort of item that makes me carry on with Histo.

CONTEXT. “Shaw” would be Henry ‘Harry’ Shaw, then only 31, of a taxidermy and fishing tackle shop at 45 High Street in

Shrewsbury. The Peregrine subsequently graced the collection of Viscount Clive at Hawkstone and evidently politics then was not as it is today. I have inserted paragraph breaks to lighten the single paragraph and the original spellings have been retained. It is the third Peregrine recorded in the county.

“An extraordinary spectacle was witnessed in the town on Monday [14th], during the approach of the cavalcade which escorted Viscount Clive to his election. A Falcon of the peregrine species was observed perching on a corbel in the highest part of the Spire of St Mary’s Church, leisurely devouring a large water-bird, which it had brought there in its talons alive.

The falcon was in no hurry to dispatch its meal, but was leisurely seen first to tear out all the entrails and eat them, - then the flesh of the breast, and the head and brains, - but whilst it was ragailing on the latter, Mr. Shaw, bird-preserved, (sic!) of this town, was informed of the circumstance, and procured an elephant rifle from an old Indian officer in the town, he sent a ball though its tail at the second shot, which made the bird sharply shift its quarters to the neighbouring spire of St Alkmond’s, leaving the remains of its prey behind.

There was too much left, however, not to induce the falcon to return and devour it, and again it betook itself to the carcass, and again a ball from the rifle fired by one of the best shots in Shrewsbury found its way through its wing, but did not prevent it soaring away, and finally alighting upon the tower of St Chad’s Church, whence it was followed by some unerring hand, who crept up into the belfry, and sent a ball into the heart of the bird, as it was about to fly off.

The whole weight of the falcon is not more than half a pound greater than that of the bird it devoured; but the extraordinary

muscular power it exhibits, easily accounts for its being able to fly off with, and tear to pieces a creature nearly its own weight. The falcon, a female, and a capital specimen of its kind, is now at Mr. Shaw's, previous to being preserved; and the remains of the poor coote lying by its side shew how keen a relish the falcon had for the dainty parts of its victim, the whole being devoured but the back bone, the thighs, and their tendons of the legs."

I have the impression that the whole event was something of a show witnessed by quite a crowd, perhaps distracting from the cavalcade and the election. The idea of shooting a bird with an elephant gun strikes as 'overkill' and it is perhaps to Shaw's credit that he was able to make a 'capital specimen' of a bird shot at what most have been very close range with such a heavy weapon designed for somewhat larger quarry.

John Tucker

Notes from a Breeding Bird Survey Novice

Getting started

"Would you like to take part in the BTO Breeding Bird Survey?" a birding friend had asked in the autumn of 2015. I most certainly would, I said.

And so, I was one of four new volunteers who arrived at the agreed location on a wet morning at the beginning of April 2016 for our training session with BTO Regional Organiser, Jon Groom.

The training session

There was a great deal to learn:

There are two transects to cover, each of one kilometre in length and divided into ten sections of 200m each;

There are three distance bands used to record each bird, from right in front of your nose, up to a maximum distance of 100m;

Each bird has its own two-letter species code (CC turned out to be the one I recorded most);

Habitat is recorded, using the appropriate levels and codes: a level 1 code for the main habitat type, e.g. A is Woodland; a level 2 code for a particular category of the main habitat type, e.g. Mixed; two level 3 and 4 codes, e.g. Coppice with standards, Moderate shrub layer;

Weather is recorded, with numbered codes for Cloud, Rain, Wind and Visibility; Mammals can optionally be recorded, again using a series of codes;

There is also an option to use Recording Detection Type, i.e. to record whether you heard the bird's call or song, or actually saw it. I'm leaving the latter for next year's survey.

Two visits have to be made to the square: an early visit between early April and mid-May, followed by a late visit between mid-May and late June.

The rain on the morning of our training session was relentless and penetrating, but Jon was well prepared for the weather and so we all set off, listening and watching eagerly. We managed to get to the start of the second transect before he called a halt because of the deteriorating conditions and we all went squelching back to our cars.

It suddenly dawned on me

It was only some time into the first transect on this training session that I realised whose BBS square I had so blithely signed up for, and whose footsteps I would be walking in: SJ5413 is the square surveyed since 1994 by much loved, respected and admired county ornithologist, the late Colin Wright. I felt very honoured to take over his square, but also daunted at the prospect of trying to match his recording skills.

However, I was lucky enough not to be carrying out the survey on my own, but with two birding friends. This added to the enjoyment during both early and late visits, with stiff competition to see and hear as many birds as possible within the agreed time schedule.

Colin had carried out the BBS survey on Haughmond Hill every year from 1994 to 2015, with the exception of 2014. His observations are set out in a grid square summary, available for me to view on the BBS website. They show the bird and mammal species recorded each year and the highest count of that year, from either the early or late visit. My recordings of 2016 have now been added to the summary, giving me a sense of continuity and personal achievement.

Some of Colin's observations

When I first looked closely at Colin's observations, one surprise was the change in fortunes of the rabbit population in his BBS square: in 1994, he recorded 85 rabbits, but by 2015 this number had dropped, plummeted in fact, to a mere three. I recorded only two in 2016. Of course, there may be other populations of rabbits living somewhere else on Haughmond Hill, since we have to stick strictly to recording only birds and mammals seen within the square. From my own observations in Shropshire over the years, there are many fewer rabbits now than, say, ten years ago. Colin recorded 15 in 2006, but that was a small spike, thereafter the slide continued.

Colin recorded a maximum number of two cuckoos, one in some other years, from 1994 to 2008 and thereafter none. Had they moved elsewhere? Or is it further evidence of the recent huge drop in numbers in Britain? I wished I could add our local cuckoo to the list - he was calling less than a mile from the square this year, as every year. But I continue to dread his silence as each spring returns.

Chaffinches have not done well in the square either, declining in number from a maximum of 18 in 2005 to a miserable two in 2013 and one in 2016. This matches my BTO Garden Birdwatch

findings: very few sightings in recent years and then often only of unhealthy birds.

Goldcrest numbers have waxed and waned over the years, with a maximum count of 17 in 2002, but down to none in 2015 and 2016. Jon was, however, confident we would see them, so maybe I was just unlucky this year.

Great Spotted Woodpecker counts have been consistent throughout the years, with a maximum of four between 2005 and 2010, this year three.

Willow Warbler numbers recovered in 2016, when I recorded 13; Colin's highest count was ten in 1996. He recorded between two and nine in all other years; there was no year without them present.

Colin recorded between two and six Garden Warblers every year; I was frustrated not to find one in 2016 and am determined to put this right next year.

I was luckier with Spotted Flycatcher, managing to record one bird this year; Colin only recorded one in 1999 and one in 2006. This year also, I was given privileged access to a nest in our neighbours' dog kennel – a mere mile from my BBS square – to identify the parents and occupants. They turned out to be Spotted Flycatchers, an exciting find. The young went on to fledge successfully and I inherited the rather tired-looking, mini-bug infested nest, complete with a flattened and dried-up nestling that hadn't made it.

The sounds of Haughmond Hill

The Haughmond Hill square is hard work: it is a rich habitat, stuffed full of birds singing, calling, flying purposefully in all directions through the transects, or just flitting around busily on their own territory.

Our ears were assailed by their songs and calls, residents and summer migrants alike. It was an exhilarating and beautiful symphony of sound.

So, what was top of the Haughmond play list this year? Without a doubt it was the Chiffchaff, followed closely by the diminutive but noisy Wren. I recorded 34 Chiffchaffs, the highest count ever; Colin's highest count was 19, recorded in 2002. His highest count of Wrens was 37 in 1999, but numbers fluctuated greatly over the years and this year I recorded 23, a good count.

The bluebell wood

The second transect of the square passes through a bluebell wood. They were just coming into flower on our early visit of 8 April, the full beauty of the flowers and intensity of the blue yet to come. I had been told that Colin loved the bluebells on Haughmond Hill and that his last resting place would be among them.

His close friend, John Tucker, writes: "Colin Wright rests on Haughmond Hill. On 18 April, I accompanied Colin's widow Pat, his daughter Wendy and Murray McBride, the vicar of St George's, Frankwell, to lay Colin's ashes among the bluebells close to a maturing oak in the woodland on Haughmond Hill, an area which Colin surveyed for close to twenty years for the BTO's Breeding Bird Survey."

A very worthwhile task

I can thoroughly recommend taking part in the Breeding Bird Survey and am already looking forward to next year's survey. I



have been encouraged and heartened by the pleasure Colin's friends and colleagues have expressed on learning that his work on the Haughmond Hill square will be continued. For my part, I am pleased to have joined the large and dedicated network of BTO "citizen scientists", my contribution adding useful data to their on-going work.
Nicola Pacult

Shropshire's BTO Regional Organiser, Jon Groom, adds:

The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is carried out by volunteers like Nicola across the UK, and it has a vital role to play as it used to monitor population changes in the UK's common bird species. Trends in population are updated and reported each year and provide the baseline for bird conservation efforts across the UK. You can read more here <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs>.

The BBS works by taking random samples of squares from each county across the UK, and assigning them to volunteers. Often it leads to exploring of areas that you wouldn't normally visit and you never know what you might turn up. Two of the three squares that I survey each spring are in fairly unremarkable-looking farmland and yet I have found nesting Redstarts, Spotted Flycatcher and even Tree Sparrow and Corn Bunting where they had not been recorded before.

My role is to co-ordinate the volunteers in Shropshire; try to ensure that everything runs smoothly and that we have good coverage of squares. There is always a need for more volunteers and this is a fantastic way to turn your birding skills into real data that informs all facets of UK bird conservation. All you need to do is be able to identify common birds by sight and sound. Training

is available and there are always options to accompany existing surveyors (like myself) to learn the ropes. Please get in touch if you are interested on bto.shropshire@gmail.com

Jonathan Groom



Spoonbills and starter motors

The flooded fields at Roving Bridge, Whixall, that have developed into one of Shropshire's best birdwatching sites, are now (almost) owned by Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

After 3 years of patient negotiation the Trust has finally taken possession of some 35 acres of the floods following their owner's bankruptcy. This year alone, many SOS members will have visited to see the spoonbill, ruff, ibis and the numerous "usual suspects" for wet grassland.

£5 million

This acquisition forms part of a £5 million project to restore habitats around Fenns, Whixall, Bettisfield and Wem Mosses. Included in the purchase is Furber's scrapyards, where many of you will have bought a second-hand starter motor for your Cortina or manifold for your Viva.



This project recognises that birds, in particular, use the centre of the Moss as well as the edge habitats to feed and breed, so both need conservation effort.

Bird hide

To date, access to the floods has been limited to the canal towpath and lane. The Trust plans to build a hide and construct a small birdwatchers' car park on the fields. In a few years, the scrapyards will be cleared to provide additional parking and modest visitor facilities will be installed, so you'll be able to get a cuppa after a hard day's ornithology.

Buying the land has been thanks to a bridging loan offered by the Esmee Fairburn Foundation. This will be repaid with an EU grant (phew, just in time) and Lottery funding we hope to secure.

However, we still need to raise more funds, which is where SOS and SWT members can help. Building the hide and car park will cost £29,000 which we hope to raise from donations. We've already had £500 in memory of someone who died, to start the ball rolling.

If you are able to help to conserve this wonderful area and improve access, the Wildlife Trust, SOS and future generations of birdwatchers will be eternally grateful.

Fenn's, Whixall and Bettisfield Mosses

Peatland Restoration – BogLIFE

The Mosses of



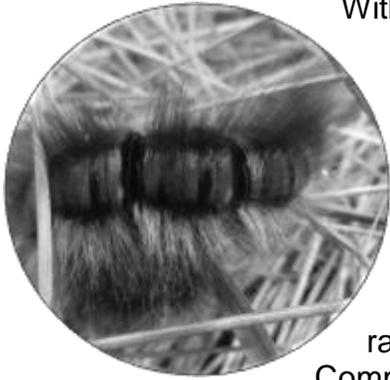
Whixall, Fenn's and Bettisfield form one of the largest, lowland, raised bogs in Britain. It is one of Shropshire's truly remote, wild places. This unique, complex habitat is home to a rich, diversity of wildlife. Commercial peat-cutting ceased in 1990 and restoration of the Mosses has been underway since

then.

In 2001, a large area of self-sown pine forest was felled to restore a large uncut area of the peat bog, known as Bettisfield Moss. Dragonflies, including the White-faced darter, unusual butterflies, such as, the Large Heath and the awesome Raft spider can be found.

The Mosses form the home of quite a range of specialist flora and fauna including 18 species of bog moss, as well as special plants, such as the Round-leaved Sundew, Bog Asphodel, Bog Rosemary, White-beaked Sedge and rare mosses, *Dicranum leioneuron* and *Dicranum bergeri* and golden bogmoss, *Sphagnum pulchrum*. There are hundreds of different species of moth, including the Purple-bordered Gold, Northern Footman, Manchester Treble-bar and the rare Argent and Stable.





With the restoration of water levels, there have been major changes to the rich bird life on the Moss. Well over 160 species have been recorded including breeding Curlew, Teal, Snipe and Shoveler. Raptors are regularly seen, including Hen Harrier, Hobby in good numbers and the short-eared owl. In recent years, there have been more rarities, such as Great-grey Strike and Common Crane.

Natural England has just announced its largest and most ambitious European funded LIFE project to date and which will be delivered in partnership with Natural Resources Wales and Shropshire Wildlife Trust. European funding has been approved to substantially assist with the restoration of the mosses. Five million pounds has been secured to help buy more land, raise water levels and restore the unique bog habitat around Fenns', Whixall, Bettisfield and Wem mosses.



This is good news for the birdlife of the Mosses. The birdlife is diverse and LIFE project will help to secure these unique habitats for years to come. In the wooded-lagg areas, Willow Warblers and Willow Tits can be heard. On the moss itself, Meadow Pipit, Stonechat and Reed Bunting can be found. Curlew and Skylarks are still plentiful in the spring and summer and Cuckoos are regularly heard. The Moss is a special place for raptors, Hobby being the star species where you can easily see ten on a good day, attracted by the rich dragonfly population.

For more information contact Jo Langfield at Fenn's, Whixall and Bettisfield



Mosses National Nature Reserve on 01948 880362 or email joanna.langfield@naturalengland.org.uk

Sad Great Cane News

News broke 18 October 2016 that one of the Great Crane Project's most famous reintroduced [Common Cranes](#) was sadly found shot dead in late September. Damon Bridge, of the Great Crane Project, posted the following announcement on the organisation's website:

"I have some very sad news to report. The body of 'Swampy', a female [Common] Crane, released through the Great Crane Project in 2011, was found by a local farmer in a maize field in late September. The body was handed into the project team, and it was sent, as with any recovered dead crane, for a full post-mortem. The post mortem found four embedded metallic objects by CT scan, one of which was located through examination and has been identified as gun shot. The conclusion is that the most likely cause of death was shooting. The details have been

reported to the local police, as the shooting of a crane is a wildlife crime. Cranes cannot be legally shot in the UK, and we are offering a £1,000 reward for any information leading to a conviction for this crime. The project team and police are now working hard to continue to raise awareness of the presence of the birds, and their legal status, among the shooting and wildfowling communities.

"What is particular galling and frustrating is that Swampy was the Project's best breeding female — having successfully raised two chicks to fledge in Somerset in 2015, and another this year. She would have been highly likely to go on and make many more successful breeding attempts had her life not been cut short. She was also a project favourite, having been nursed back to health by Amy and Harry following an incident in September 2011 when she became trapped behind a gate within the crane pen shortly after release. The bird developed her nickname while still unhatched, within her egg. Amy collected the egg from a particularly foul-smelling and treacherous German swamp and in the process managed to fill her chest waders and start to sink — hence Swampy.

Her mate, Alexander, has been seen continuing to raise the 2016 chick, and it is thought that the shooting shouldn't affect the survival of this next-generation bird. Alexander is likely to find a new mate for the 2017 season — but whether the pair will go on to have the success that Alexander and Swampy did will remain to be seen."

For more information, please visit:

www.thegreatcraneproject.org.uk.

Richard Camp.

Red Kite in Shropshire 2016

The Welsh Kite Trust and the Shropshire Raptor Study Group again tried to find the nests of all breeding pairs of Red Kite in 2016. Three major milestones have now been passed:

Over 230 fledged young since first successful breeding in 2006

180 fledged young tagged in the nest

28 tags read on individual nesting adults



Twenty-three nests were found, the same as last year, but access was refused to monitor one more. Only one additional pair was found, so the number of pairs found was rather less than the 31 last year and the 34 in 2014.

Some of these nests are very close together: two are only around 400 metres apart, both have been occupied for three years, and for the last two years both were successful. One of the new nests is less than 2km from another nest occupied for the last three years. Several other pairs have neighbours within three kilometres.

Five of the nests failed, but 18 were successful (one more than last year) and, assuming that all chicks large enough to tag survived, at least 31 young fledged from them. Twenty of the fledged young from 10 nests were ringed and tagged. 2016 tags are purple with yellow letters and black bottom strip on right wing,

black with yellow letters and purple 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. Three long-standing sites occupied each year 2010-2015 were unoccupied in 2016, and four other sites used last year were also vacant. Seven were at new sites, while 20 other sites, which have had breeding Kites in earlier years, were also checked, without result.

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, including several in the vicinity of Telford, so breeding is expected here in the near future. The steady move eastwards was consolidated, with a nest on Wenlock Edge occupied successfully for a third year, but although several Kites were seen in the vicinity of Brown Clee and Titterstone Clee, no nests were found there.

As the population increases and spreads, nests become harder to find, so the breeding population is now undoubtedly well over the 25 pairs located, and the 31 pairs located last year.

Comparison with Previous Years

The number of nests found is equal to the second largest number in one year since Kites returned to breed here in 2005, after an absence of 130 years, but there were more fledged young (36) in 2011, from only 20 found nests. However, productivity / nest was equal to that in 2015, the highest since 2011, with 2012 and 2013 badly affected by severe weather.

Since the first nest was found in 2005, a total of 179 nests have been found, and 124 (69%) have been successful. Since the first successful breeding in 2006, at least 237 young are known to have flown from Shropshire nests, and 179 have been tagged. Average productivity has been 1.32 fledged young per nest found

and 1.91 per successful nest. The number of nests found, successful nests and fledged young in each year is shown in the chart.

Poisoning?

In 2014, an adult was found dead on the floor directly under one nest. There were no visible signs of injury or persecution, but the landowner had used rat poison in a nearby barn, so it is likely that this caused the death of the Kite. Two well grown chicks were later found dead in the nest, presumably from the same cause. Rat poison is a common cause of death, and it is found in potentially lethal amounts in most dead Kites sent for post-mortem. The corpse of this adult was sent for post-mortem analysis, but the results have still not yet been received, 28 months later, an indication of the effect of Government cuts (“austerity”) on wildlife monitoring and resources to investigate possible breaches of the law.

Wing Tags

Six of the nesting adults in 2016 had wing tags, and five were read. Two females, one now five years old and the other four, were present at the same site as last year. Another three-year-old female was found nesting 7km north of her natal site near Knighton. Two more, also five and four, but sex unknown, were found for the first time. They may have been breeding at the same sites, or elsewhere, in previous years. A six-year-old female, tagged at the same Shropshire natal site near Knighton in 2010, was found for the first time at a nest in Wales, west of Knighton and just over 6km south of her natal site, and she too may have been at this site in previous years.

A total of 28 different tags have been read, 12 males, 12 females and four sex unknown. Males have moved an average of 17 km from their natal site, and females 15km. However, three of these (two males and a female) were long-distance colonisers from Wales in 2007 and 2008. If these three are excluded, the averages are 8km for males and 10km for females. If subsequent colonisers from Wales and the female returning to Wales are also

excluded (i.e. only birds that moved within Shropshire are included) the averages are 5km for males but still 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. The oldest was killed by a car, early in 2015, 8years 7months 7days after ringing.

Several other tagged Kites have been reported during the year, including Blue E5 photographed near the Stiperstones in February. Photographers who take digital pictures of Kites are requested to blow them up and check for wing-tags. If the photo is sharp, the tag can often be read, as in this case, and such photos provide very useful information. This Kite fledged only 2km away, six years earlier.

There was a historic sighting in March, in north Holland, of a Kite tagged in a nest south of Church Stretton in 2014. It is the first ever record of a kite ringed in Wales or Shropshire by Tony Cross crossing the North Sea, out of a total of over 3,000. It was one of a brood of two, and its sibling was seen near the Stiperstones in July.

This is one of several examples of where siblings have survived for relatively long periods, or gone on to join the breeding population. The proportion of siblings at nest sites is considerably higher than would be expected by chance, indicating that some breeding pairs have much stronger genes than others, an example of natural selection at work



The future of Kite Tagging

It is getting increasingly difficult to tag a high proportion of the population. It has therefore been decided to continue tagging chicks in the nest for one more year, in the expectation of reaching 200 tagged young from Shropshire nests.

To ensure that as much as possible is learnt from the tagging, finding nest sites in the hope of locating tagged adults will continue until 2020, by which time Kites tagged in 2017 should have joined the breeding population.

Inter-mingling of Different Populations

The original colonisers were native Welsh birds, and there is no evidence from wing tagging that birds from the various reintroduction programmes have nested here, though a 2005 bird from near Thrapston, in Northamptonshire, was seen at a roost in February 2010 and a month later near Bucknell, and others from the Chilterns have occasionally been recorded in Shropshire Bird Reports. However, recent DNA studies (Skujina 2013) provide evidence that an adult breeding south of Clun in 2012 came from one of the reintroduced populations, possibly from Dumfries and Galloway, but originally from some of the birds introduced from

Spain. The study needs to be extended before its origin can be identified with certainty (Mike Hayward *pers.comm*). The Kite seen in Holland was also possibly descended from one of the reintroduced populations, as those from Sweden are migratory. **If anyone knows the location of a 2016 Kite nest, or finds one in 2017, please don't assume we know about it. Please tell Leo Smith 01694 720296, leo@leosmith.org.uk**

The Red Kite Experience, Craven Arms

The *Red Kite Experience* at the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre in Craven Arms started feeding in November 2014, 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 the following May that any Kites started taking food, but only a few have turned up sporadically since.

Hopefully some will start feeding over the coming winter, particularly if the winter is hard. If not, the future of the project is in doubt. As 10 of the 25 nests found in 2016 are within 10 kilometres or so of the Centre, and there are probably others as well, and there was a winter roost of over 30 within the same distance, it is surprising that there has been so little interest. It is not likely that they are put off by the nearby town or road, given how they feed in other parts of the country, so there must be an abundance of carrion in the surrounding countryside.

Reference

Skujina, I. (2013). Population genetics of an endangered bird of prey: the Red Kite in Wales. A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Philosophy, Aberystwyth University, 2013.

Leo Smith November 2016

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

Red Grouse Counts

YOUR CHANCE TO GET INVOLVED

Advance notice for the 2017 Breeding Season

Red Grouse Counts

SOS members are wanted to help with counts of Red Grouse on The Long Mynd, around sunset on every Thursday evening between 30 March and 4 May, please. This will update the results of previous annual counts. It is an important population, the biggest between Dartmoor and the Peak District, and the results help the National Trust's management of the heathland for this *Amber List* species.

People who have helped before will receive a report of the results, and will be contacted nearer the time. New helpers are invited to a project briefing at 7.30pm on Thursday 23rd March 2017 at the National Trust's Chalet Pavilion in Carding Mill Valley. It's your chance to get close-up views of this wonderful bird, and see other moorland specialities and birds of prey. Last year's report and project briefing can be found on the Strettons area part of the Community Wildlife Groups website

www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

Long Mynd Bird Survey

The National Trust are looking for a small team of volunteers to help with the 10-yearly breeding bird survey, organised by Leo Smith. The survey runs for 3 years and will take place in Spring 2017, 2018 and 2019. If you are experienced at identifying the species that inhabit the moorland and upper valleys, or are willing to undertake training, please register your interest with Barbara.Burns@nationaltrust.org.uk. Further details will be provided of what's involved, and the commitment needed.

Community Wildlife Group Bird Surveys in the Shropshire Hills

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

People who will commit more time can help to locate Curlew breeding territories. See separate article on Curlew conservation

SOS members can make an important contribution to the conservation of these birds, while enjoying their hobby in superb countryside. All welcome.

For further information, see the website

www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

Curlew Conservation – Please Help

Curlew is probably the highest priority for bird conservation in the UK, as the country has an estimated 28% of the European breeding population, more in winter, and an estimated 19-27% of the world population. Curlew was added to the *Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern* a year ago because of a decline of 62% since the 1960s.

Here in Shropshire, the population has declined by an estimated 77% in only 20 years, from around 700 pairs in 1990 to around 160 pairs in the recent Atlas period. Monitoring carried out by Community Wildlife Groups shows that numbers are still going down. Nest monitoring by the Stiperstones-Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) in the county hotspot, with a quarter of the breeding pairs, found another disastrous breeding season in 2016. The detailed LPS report is not yet available, but results will be published in the next Buzzard.

Immediate conservation action is vital if the evocative bubbling song of the Curlew is not to be lost from the county forever. National conservation organisations have launched their own Curlew appeals, but they do not intend to spend any of the proceeds here. The fate of the local population is in the hands of Shropshire's people. SOS is committed to supporting Curlew conservation, and has supported the LPS financially over the last two years. SOS members can help.

Firstly, members can help monitor the population by taking on a survey square for one of several Community Wildlife Groups, or surveying in an area where monitoring has not yet started. There may be opportunities for people who have the patience and can give the time to help locate nesting territories.

Secondly, funds are needed to pay for nest finding and protection, the essential first step for any conservation action. The Upper Onny Wildlife Group (UOWG) raised over £2500 at the beginning of the year to help with this, with the help and support of SOS members. Thank you very much to everyone who contributed. Halting and reversing the decline is a long term project, which must start with working with landowners, finding and protecting nests and monitoring the behaviour of chicks through radio-tagging. Expert help must be bought in to do most of this, and make maximum benefit of volunteers' time. The LPS finishes after one more breeding season, so we need to establish a means of carrying on with this important work. The UOWG appeal will therefore be included again in the next Buzzard. Members will have the opportunity to make one-off donations, but, as reversing the decline is a long term project, donors will be

encouraged to give through multi-annual standing orders or direct debits. Based on the level of commitment shown by CWG members monitoring 76 tetrads, and the money raised in the appeal, applications will be made to various Trusts to double our money

If anyone wants to help, or to make a donation now, or has any ideas about who we can approach for funding or how we can raise more money for Curlew conservation, please let me know.

Leo Smith 01694 720296 (leo@leosmith.org.uk)

Field Trip Report to Kingsbury Water Park & RSPB Middleton Lakes

Sunday, 16th October 2016

Organised by Sue Brealey

A group of eight intrepid members drove through driving rain across to these reserves near Tamworth, in the hope that they would not be alone and that the rain would clear. Fortunately for all, the weather cleared as the group met up and the rest of the day proved dry, if windy at times, with good light to see the birds.

The group collected at the Broomey Croft part of Kingsbury Water Park, which is placed between the River Tame and the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal, and started a circular walk around Broomey Park & Canal Pools, with hides overlooking another lake with scrape areas. From the car park, a great spotted Woodpecker was seen flying into a nearby tree, but soon flew off. The main pools were scanned and these showed a great many Coot, Mallard, with plenty of Great Crested Grebe, especially with juvenile individuals. Canada Goose, Widgeon, Gadwall, Black-headed Gull were amongst those seen. Walking

further round Tufted Duck were seen, and amongst the trees surrounding the lake, groups of Long-tailed Tit, with Blue Tit, Robin, Dunnock added to the list. At the first of three hides the group was able to add Cormorant, Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Pied Wagtail, Wigeon, Teal and Little Grebe to the list. On further inspection of a mudflat area, a Lapwing was seen with two groups of three Snipe huddled together. Onto the bushes near the hide a pair of Reed Bunting were noted, as well a couple of Chiffchaff. At the second hide, giving a different view of the same area a single Lesser black-backed Gull was seen as well as a Grey Heron and a couple of Little Egret. A kestrel flew over and waited in a nearby tree for possible prey, and a Buzzard flew across, the only raptors of the day. A third hide was visited but although the views were just as good, there were no more new sightings. The group walked further round joining up with the towpath of the local canal, and turn off the circular route to go to the fourth hide on site. The walk along the canal did not add any new sightings, but on the path to the hide, a skylark was seen and a Green Woodpecker was heard. The hide over the Otter Pool showed more Lapwing with Shoveler being added to the list. It was noted that all the duck were still in stages of eclipse and looked rather grubby. Walking back to the car park via the canal again added Wren & Chaffinch to the list.

After some lunch, the group moved off and drove around to RSPB Middleton Lakes, which is situated only a couple of miles away, and to the north of Kingsbury. Half the group had not been to this reserve, still in the process of being developed into a major reserve for the RSPB. The walk towards the main part of the reserve through a wood brought Coal Tit, Great Tit, House Sparrow, Goldfinch, and Greenfinch to the list at the feeding station. The walk through the woods didn't add much to the list and once on the main part of the reserve having inspected the canal while crossing its bridge, it was disappointing how quiet it appeared. Inspection of the first lake did not add anything to the list, except a Water Rail called out in its usual manner but wasn't seen. A further walk brought the group to the first screen/hide

and although it was really good to hear a few calls from a Cetti's Warbler in the bushes, again not seen, everything appeared just as quiet. As such the group decided to turn in for the day and start the drive back to Shropshire.

It was agreed that having had such a bad start to the day, in fact the birding side of the matter had been very successful, with in fact about 45 species seen.

Sue Brealey

Field Trip to RSPB Marshside Reserve

Sunday 13 November 2016

Seven members met at the reserve on the coast at Southport. Hundreds of Shelduck lined the edge of the water as we drove along the coast road and a number of Linnet were perched in a bush near the carpark.

An immediate decision was made to head straight off to Hesketh Outmarsh, a little further up the coast, to catch the end of the high tide.

This area of coastal saltmarsh and channels is where the RSPB has been working with local farmers and the Environment Agency to construct a new sea wall before breaching the old one, thus affording protection from flooding and a wonderful habitat for birds.

We were greeted by a spectacle of thousands of duck, Widgeon being the most numerous. Teal, Mallard, Shelduck and Shoveler were present, with Lapwing, Redshank, Little Egret, Heron, one Snipe and one Curlew representing the waders.

Skins of Pink-foot Geese and a few Greylag flew in to feed on the marsh, where a few Mute and Whooper Swan were also

feeding, the latter accompanied by three youngsters. A Great Black-backed Gull sat, almost motionless, on a muddy bank.

Several Fieldfare and a Blackbird fed on hawthorn berries along the hedgerow and Starling, Song Thrush, Dunnock, Skylark, Robin and Reed Bunting were recorded. Corvids were feeding on the ploughed fields. The hoped-for Twite which are relatively common here were, sadly, absent.



A peregrine caused some consternation among the birds and it afforded good views when it obligingly perched on a post. A Kestrel was the only other bird of prey seen – sadly, the often-seen Merlin didn't show.

We had lunch in the Visitor Centre Sandgrouser hide where the main attraction was a Cattle Egret, preening on a bank before joining the grazing cattle to feed. A pair of Pied Wagtail were very busy feeding and flitting to and fro in front of the hide.

At first glance across the pools it seemed as though all the birds had vanished, but they were mostly feeding in amongst the grasses and marshes.

The ubiquitous Widgeon and Teal were dominant, with sizeable flocks of Lapwing and Starling. An eagle-eyed member spotted a Pintail before it disappeared behind the bank, only one Coot was seen and a few Gadwall. More Pink-foot flew in, Curlew and the first Black-tailed Godwit and Canada Geese were also present. Stopping briefly at the roadside screen we added Common and Black-headed Gull and Wood Pigeon.

It was a walk of a few hundred yards to the last hide – Nel's. There were many Pintail, Teal, Shoveler, Mallard, Black-tailed Godwit, Pink-footed Geese and, yes, WIDGEON!

Magpie, Wren, Moorhen Herring Gull and Pied Wagtail brought the day's total to some 38 species and we headed home, thankful that the weather had been kind to us.

Estelle Hughes

Bird Notes

July, August, September 2016

Mandarin Duck Just three reports, with up to seven present at Whitcliffe on 12 Jul. Two were present at Chelmarsh scrape on 24 Jul and one at Wood Lane on 30 Aug.

Gadwall Three were present at Venus Pool on 25 Aug and 17 at Ellerton on 22 Aug.

Garganey A juvenile was at Shavington Park, Calverhall on the morning of 25 Sep.

Black-necked Grebe An adult in winter plumage was at Shavington Park, Calverhall on the morning of 25 Sep.

Puffin A dead fledgling was found at Ruyton XI Towns on 10 Sep.

Grey Partridge Five records received all during July. Singles at Ellesmere, Wood Lane and Tibberton, two on Shawbury airfield and three at Shifnal.

Common Quail Four records of a calling bird came from a site near Prees, between 10 July and 24 July.

Little Egret The earliest report was a single bird at Venus Pool on 11 Jul with regular sightings there of one or two throughout the period up to a maxima of 4 on 24 Aug. Singles were seen at Bridgnorth and Leighton and up to 3 at Chelmarsh on 7 Aug.

Great White Egret One present at Wood Lane on 10 Sep.

Marsh Harrier One flew over Knighton Pool on 15 Aug, a first for the site.

Hen Harrier A ringtail was seen on Whixall Moss on 31 Aug and another on the Long Mynd on 9 Sep and 10 Sep.

Osprey There were four reports during the period. Single birds seen over Nesscliffe on the 8 Aug, Venus Pool on 17 Aug, Wood Lane on 27 Aug and Little Ness on 29 Sep.

Merlin Two records, one on the Long Mynd on 6 Aug and another at the Stiperstones on 1 Sep.

Ringed Plover A juvenile was present between 4 Sep and 16 Sep.

Golden Plover Just two reports for the period, 12 at The Rea on 27 Sep and 70 on the Long Mynd on 30 Sep.

Corncrake One was heard calling from the Llangollen canal near Ellesmere on 14 Jul.

Pectoral Sandpiper A juvenile was first seen at Wood Lane on 13 Sep and reported up until 28 Sep. Initially mobile and elusive, it settled down and showed really well during the last few days of its stay.

Dunlin Single birds reported at Venus Pool from 26 July, with two present on 16 Sep.

Common Sandpiper Up to two birds reported at Priorslee Lake, Wood Lane, Venus Pool and Quarry Bank Pool with a single at Knighton Reservoir.

Ruff One was reported from Venus Pool on 25 Aug and eight were present on Whixall Moss on 1 Sep.

Whimbrel Three were seen and heard calling as they flew south west over Much Wenlock on 23 Aug.

Black-tailed Godwit Two were present on Whixall floods on 3 July. Twenty one reports came from Venus Pool between 29 July and 29 September with a highest count of 6 on 1 Sep.

Bar-tailed Godwit One was present at Venus Pool on 27 Aug.

Glossy Ibis One present at Whixall floods from the 2-7 Jul.

Curlew Individual birds reported at Venus Pool and Whixall Moss and up to 26 present at Wood Lane during the period.

Common Redshank Three were present at Venus Pool on 25 Jul and another individual was present between 25-27 Jul.

Greenshank Single birds reported at Whixall Moss on 24 Sep, Wood Lane on 30 Aug and Venus Pool from 22 Aug to 8 Sep

Wood Sandpiper Individuals were Wood Lane on 13 Sep, Venus Pool on 20 Sep and Whixall floods from 21-24 Sep.

Arctic Tern One was seen at Chelmarsh reservoir on 25 Aug.

Black Tern Singles were present at Chelmarsh reservoir on 25 Aug and at Venus Pool on 28 Aug.

Common Tern A single was present at Venus Pool on 28 Aug.

Little Tern One was reported at Venus Pool on 3 Jul.

Mediterranean Gull A juvenile was at Venus Pool on 26 Jul and then again from 24-31 Aug. Two ringed birds, a juvenile and 1st summer, present at Venus Pool on 27 Aug were later proven to be continental ringed birds.

Turtle Dove Just the one record. A bird was seen at Priors Halton in Ludlow on 9 July.

Ring-necked Parakeet One was seen in several Newport gardens on 14 Aug.

Cuckoo Two individuals reported, one at Wall Farm on 12 July and one at Hilley Farm, Pentre on 9 Aug.

Little Owl Three reports of single birds in late July at Roden, Llyclys and Ludstone. Two were present near Leebotwood on 11 Jul.

Long-eared Owl A juvenile suspected as being present in conifers in the Craven Arms area, with squeaking sounds heard and pellets found matching those of LEO.

Nightjar One was calling from farmland near Maesbury on 15 Aug.

Common Swift The largest count was of 100 in Bridgnorth on 24 July. The last was on 31 Aug over Oswestry.

Wryneck One was in an Alveley garden on 31 Aug, another in Cockshutt on 4 Sep and one at Kinsley Wood in Knighton 17-18 Sep.

Sand Martin The latest record received was on 3 Sep at Brockhurst Farm, Wem.

Whinchat Seen at Whixall Moss (max 2), Shawbury airfield, The Long Mynd (max 3) and Whixall floods.

Grasshopper Warbler One was reeling at Whixall moss on 4 Jul.

Cettis Warbler One was reported in the Shifnal area on 5 Jul.

Garden Warbler The latest record was at Venus Pool on 24 Aug.

Willow Warbler The latest reported were on 12 Sep at Venus Pool and 13 Sep at the Stiperstones.

Wood Warbler Individuals were at Bringewood on 3 July and in Colemere Village on 8 July.

Lesser Whitethroat Up to two birds were reported at Venus Pool from 2 July to 5 Sep. Singles at Chelmarsh on 13 Aug Tibberton on 28 Aug.

Common Whitethroat Seen at sixteen sites with the latest on 20 Sep at Venus Pool.

Spotted Flycatcher Reports from thirteen locations with the last noted on 13 Sep.

Willow Tit Records came from Mary Knoll Valley, Bringewood and Whixall Moss.

Yellow Wagtail Ten records were received between 2 July and 30 Aug from Polemere (max 4), Venus Pool (max 2), Lyneal Mill (4), Child's Ercall and Tibberton.

Tree Sparrow Nine were recorded in Oswestry on 31 July.

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

Yvonne Chadwick

Indoor Meetings: Church Stretton Branch of the SOS

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).

November 28, 2016

“Wilderland, Wildlife and Wonder from the Shropshire Borders”
(Andrew Fusek Peters)

January 23, 2017

AGM, followed by “Golden Birding Moments” (Jim Almond)

February 27, 2017

“Creating your own Springwatch – Creative Use of Cameras to Capture your Local Wildlife” (Kate MacRea)

March 27, 2017

“The Secret Lives of Puffins” (Mark Sisson)

This talk will take us through Jeff's calendar year, the highs and lows, the mishaps the madness and the sheer beauty of the natural world.

**December, Nick Martin Discovering Scotland's
6th Western & Northern Isles**
Including Skye, the Outer Hebrides and the Shetlands this talk has Images of landscapes and wildlife - everything from eagles to orchids and Skuas to otters. A must for lovers of Scotland.

SOS Field Trips – 2016 &17

The programme of Field Trips for 2017 has been compiled by the Development & Publicity Sub-Committee in the absence of an Excursion Secretary.

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

Leaders' and/or organisers' telephone numbers

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

Sunday 11 December

Pennington Flash

Car

Organiser Sue Brealey

Full Day – Meet at the car park at 10 am.

Post Code for SatNav: WN7 3PA. (This is for the Fire Station but the park is opposite.)

Directions: From J22 of M6, take the A580 towards Manchester, turn left onto A572 (Newton Road) & follow the sign posts. Pay & Display car park.

See <http://www.wlct.org/wigan/parks/pennington-flash>.

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

NB There will be no Field Trip in JANUARY

Sunday, 19 February **RSPB LEIGHTON MOSS** Car

Organiser: Sue Brealey

Full Day – Meet at Car Park at 10.15am

Post Code: LA5 0SW

Take M56 to M6 North. Turn off at J35 (signposted for Carnforth) then follow A6 north (signposted Milnthorpe) and then follow the brown tourist signs to direct you to the reserve off the A6.

See: www.rspb.org.uk/reserves

Sunday, 26 March **BURY DITCHES** Car

Leader: Dave Pearce

PLEASE REMEMBER THE CLOCKS GO FORWARD THIS WEEKEND!!

Full Day – Meet at the Forestry Commission car park at Grid Ref: SO325837 at 9.30am
From Clunton, take the road towards Brockton and the B4385. The Forestry Commission car park is about 2 miles up the road.

See: www.forestry.gov.uk & follow links England, West Midlands, Bury Ditches

Sunday, 30 April **QUEEN'S HEAD CANAL** Car

Leader: Allan Dawes

Full Day – Meet at Car Park at 9am

Grid Ref: SJ339268.

Directions: At Queen's Head, turn right from the A5 if coming from Shrewsbury, or left if from Oswestry. Use the canal car park. A walk along the canal, looking for spring migrants and other birds.

Sunday, 21 May **ELAN VALLEY** Car

Leader: Helen J Griffiths

Full Day – Meet at Visitor Centre Car Park at 10am

Post Code: LD6 5HP

Grid Ref: SN 928646

Directions: From Rhayader follow the B4518 west out of town, towards the Elan Valley. The left turn for the Visitor Centre is signposted after three miles. Do not cross over the iron bridge, instead, turn right over cattle grid and Visitor Centre is ahead of you.

See www.elanvalley.org.uk

Thurs. 1 to Sun 4 June **TRIP TO PEMBROKESHIRE** Car

Organiser: Sue Brealey

Please contact Sue Brealey for details. Maximum number: 14

Sunday, 25 June- GRONANT DUNES (Little Tern Colony) Car

Leader: Estelle Hughes

Full Day – Meet at Car Park at 9.30am

Post Code: LL19 9TT

Take A483 towards Chester, then take A55 towards North Wales. Take turning J33 onto A5119 to Flint. Turn left in Flint onto A548 towards Prestatyn. At Talacre (Point of Ayr) carry straight at roundabout towards Prestatyn. After 1½ miles turn right for Lower Gronant. Use car park on left before railway bridge.

NB There will be no Field Trip in JULY
Saturday, 19 August UPTON WARREN

Car

Organiser: Helen J Griffiths

Leader: from Worcs. Wildlife Trust

Full Day – Meet at the Flashes Car Park at 9.30am

Post Code: B61 7ET

Grid Ref: SO 936 677

Take A38 north towards Bromsgrove from Junction 5 of M5. Go past Webbs Garden Centre and turn in the Flashes car park on the right after about 1 mile. This lane is not tarmaced. There will be small charge unless a member of a Wildlife Trust. Details to follow.

See www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/reserves/the-christopher-cadbury-wetland-reserve-at-upton-warren

Sunday, 10 September WIRRAL: LEASOWES, HOYLAKE & BURTON MERE

Car

Organiser: Sue Brealey

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, 29 October LUNT MEADOWS

Car

Leader: Estelle Hughes

PLEASE REMEMBER THE CLOCKS GO BACK THIS WEEKEND!!

Full Day – Meet at car park for 10.30am

Post Code: L29 7WL

Directions: Take A55 west & join M56. Turn onto Weston Expressway (A557) then M57. At end of M57 continue on Brickwall Lane (B5422). Go to Sefton village & turn left onto Lunt Road. Follow this through village, and turn right onto the reserve, just after leaving Lunt. A new reserve on the lookout for owls.

See: www.lancswt.org.uk/reserves/lunt-meadows

Sunday, 12 November TREGARON BOG (CORS CARON)

Car

Organiser: Sue Brealey

Full Day – Meet at Car Park at 10.30am

Grid Ref: SN 695630

Directions: From Llangurig take A44 towards Aberystwyth, then turn left onto A4120 for Devil's Bridge. Take B4343 for Tregaron & park in reserve car park.

See www.naturalresources.wales/out-and-about/places-to-go/mid-wales/ Cors Caron National Nature Reserve, near Tregaron

Leaders' and/or Organisers' telephone numbers

Sue Brealey	01939 262450 // 07713 164463
Dave Pearce	07582 352061
Allan Dawes	01691 654245
Helen Griffiths	07800 880445// 01743 761507
Estelle Hughes	07817 243693 // 01948 840902

Indoor Programme for 2017

To be held at Bayston Hill Memorial Hall, starting at 7.15pm

January, 4th Oliver Smart Butterfly Britain

Some of you may remember Oliver's talk on Grizzly Bears six years ago. This time it is a slightly smaller subject! Identifying butterflies gives a new dimension to birding in the summer months.

February, 1st Mike Lane A Digital Lane

A regular and informative speaker at SOS. Mike's entry into the digital world should present an even more enjoyable evening.

March, 1st Philip Mugridge Yellowstone National Park

Someone else we haven't seen for a while, Philip and Helen concentrate their photography on birds and mammals, attempting to capture digital images with a more adventurous approach.

April, 5th Jim Almond Scilly: Pelagic Magic

Adventures aboard MV Sapphire from St.Mary's on the Isles of Scilly. From Gulls, Fulmars and Gannets to the passage of Skuas, Petrels & Shearwaters enjoy the magic of seabirds & other marine creatures.

October, 4th Mark Sissons Alaska to Argentina Some wild encounters in the Americas

Mark's presentation was so good when he came in Oct. 2016 I booked a speedy return. He is local, from Newport, writes in the Shropshire Magazine and runs photography workshops, hence the quality of his presentation. One to look forward to.

November, 1st Jeff Clarke A Naturalist's Year

This talk will take us through Jeff's calendar year, the highs and lows, the mishaps the madness and the sheer beauty of the natural world.

December, 6th Nick Martin Discovering Scotland's Western & Northern Isles

Including Skye, the Outer Hebrides and the Shetlands this talk has Images of landscapes and wildlife - everything from eagles to orchids and Skuas to otters. A must for lovers of Scotland.