

The Buzzard

**Shropshire
Ornithological Society's
Quarterly Magazine**



No. 250

Winter 2017

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Welcome to New Members

A very warm welcome to the following new members of the Society:

Etchells,	Mr & Mrs M H	Shrewsbury
Humphreys	Mr P J D	Market Drayton
Davies	Mr G	Wolverhampton
Strong	Mr A	Staunton On Arrow
Furlong	Mr R J	Shrewsbury
Hartshorne	Mr I N	Minsterley
Wilcock	Mr D	Pandy
Lloyd	Mr & Mrs R	Bayston Hill
Greenwood	Mr & Mrs P J	Stourport-On-Severn
Barnes	Mr D	Market Drayton

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

SHROPSHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL 2018

Members are reminded that subscriptions fall due for renewal on 1st January, 2018. Those members paying by cheque or cash will find a renewal notice enclosed with this issue of *The Buzzard*. Renewal notices will not be issued to those who have signed bankers' orders as these should be paid automatically. The rates of subscription for 2018 remain unchanged and are:

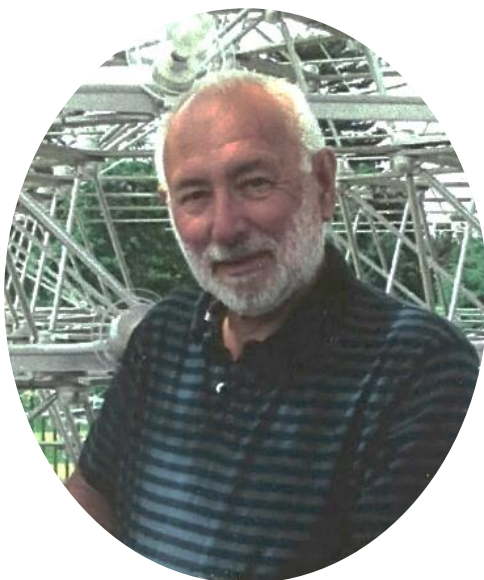
Adult Single Membership	£18.00.
Adult Joint Membership	£24.00. (includes up to 2 adults and all children up to 16 years old at the same address.)
Junior Membership	£8.00 (16 years and under.)

Annie Andrews - Membership Secretary

Geoffrey Smith

6 August 1940 - 25 September 2017

It is with great personal sorrow that I have to inform you of the loss of Geoff. He was a long time member of the Society and he served on the Conservation Subcommittee for many years. He was also County Bird Recorder for six years.



I have many happy memories of our birding weekends in this country plus many more when we travelled abroad.

His interest in bird ringing was triggered by visits to the Farne Islands and Bardsey Island Bird Observatory after which both Geoff and his wife Fiona joined me as my trainee ringers. Their ringing activities were mainly based at their home in Leebotwood but Geoff also joined me on ringing expeditions to the Treshnish Isles. I will miss him, as will the Society.

Peter Deans

Big Day at Venus Pool

Twice a year, reserves across the West Midlands organise a Spring and Autumn 'All Day' birdwatch. Run along the same lines as a 'Bird Race' the aim is see how many birds can be seen (or heard) within a defined location over 24-hour period. As dawn broke on 2 September, several birders had already assembled at Venus Pool to see how their fortunes would fare over the next 14 hours! We were taking on ten other well-known sites including: Belvide, Middleton Lakes and Upton Warren. We wouldn't match the totals they would accrue but a challenging day was in prospect – how many birds would be seen?

The first hour is always a frenzy of ticking the 'usual suspects' but would they all be there? Coot and Moorhen immediately had their name called out. Carrion Crow and Jackdaw were likewise written in the book but where's a Rook when you need one, or even a Jay? A scour of the water produced Canada / Greylag Goose, Black-headed Gull, Mallard, Mute Swan, Teal, Gadwall, Shoveler and Pochard. Common Snipe and Green Sandpiper x 2, Heron, Lapwing and Pied Wagtail were all seen in the margins and overhead: Buzzard, Magpie and Wood Pigeon. Lurking in the bushes adjacent to the hide were: Blackbird, Robin, Wren, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Goldfinch and Willow Warbler. A walk to Lena's feeding station hide was 'rewarded' with Dunnock, Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Long-tailed Tit, Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpecker and a Treecreeper! 34 birds in the first twenty minutes, this was easy? Small teams checked the North Hide finding Little Grebe and the Memorial Hide produced a fly through Kingfisher, Great Crested Grebe and wow, a Black-tailed Godwit (in front of the hide)!

Chiffchaff, Starling, Stock Dove, Coal Tit and Song Thrush soon followed as did a wander to the arable field! This was always going to be productive with Pheasant, Redstart, Reed Bunting, Bullfinch, Marsh Tit, Garden Warbler, Blackcap and Yellowhammer joining the list! The walk over the causeway delivered



Swallow, Sand Martin, Grey Wagtail and Green Woodpecker with Cormorant and Lesser Black-backed Gull overhead. Whilst walking back, real cause for celebration - it was hooray for a JAY and not exactly a parliament, just a single ROOK! Feral Pigeon was also added. This is not a bird I would put anywhere near my personal bird lists but as all the other reserves count it, we

played to their rules rather than being disadvantaged! The Cound Stank hedgerow then came to our rescue for a real prize Venus Pool bird too, House Sparrows! How many of these do you normally see on the reserve and there were two on view! The past four hours had been a blur, we were now on 62!! Time spent looking to the sky proved worthwhile late morning with House Martin, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk over. New birds for the day sneaked into the pool too: two Pintail, a Tufted Duck plus a long awaited Little Egret! A second walk over the causeway early afternoon cleaned up on species we had missed earlier: Common Whitethroat, Linnet, Meadow Pipit, Reed Warbler, Water Rail and Goldcrest, we were now on 74.

A pair of Mistle Thrush near the causeway oak tree together with flyover Collared Dove (another difficult VP bird!), Raven and Peregrine were the only additions during the rest of the afternoon. After a break for sustenance, hopes of breaking the 80 barrier were looking slim until a mini late evening frenzy when, with light levels beginning to drop, two Ringed Plover dropped in, plus a Common Sandpiper flying around the pool! Yessss' we had made a pretty decent total of 80 for the day!

The highest total for the day came from Middleton Lakes (95) followed by Belvide (94). We finished in 8th place, just pipped by the mighty Upton Warren (81). We had some 'scarce' birds on the day too. Pintail was only seen elsewhere at Middleton and Ringed Plover at just two other locations.

No helpful weather systems, this was just an 'ordinary' day at Venus Pool, nothing special! How many times have you gone there, sat in the hide and declared "there's nothing here"? With a bit of commitment and persistence, we had eked out a pretty decent total – 80 birds in 14 hours and that



didn't include a night patrol for Owls either. Why not come along and take part next year? Or take on a personal 24-hour challenge? It doesn't have to be Venus Pool – try your garden or take on 'Shropshire'? Then do it again at a different time of year – you will learn a lot about the local birds and changing seasons. More importantly, you will be out, looking/listening at every bird and might even find that mega rarity...

With thanks to everyone who took part – see you all next May!

Jim Almond

My Introduction to Shropshire Birding

Growing up on the Norfolk coast, I was rather spoilt. The county offers first class birding all year round, with an array of scarce breeding species, impressive winter spectacles and, of course, the promise of rarities during migration. Being particularly interested in the latter, my knowledge of the UK's geography was based largely on where rare birds have been found. Thus, when I accepted a job in Shrewsbury I can't say I was looking forward to the prospect of moving, as Shropshire was an ominous black-spot on my map! However, five years on I find myself still living there, reflecting on the merits and pitfalls of birding in Shropshire.

When I first moved, I was fortunate to find myself working with Martyn Owen, an energetic and enthusiastic Shropshire birder. On my first lunch break Martyn took me out to see waxwings in Shrewsbury. Perhaps living here wouldn't be so bad after all. The following days and weeks saw us visiting Venus Pool regularly. It's not quite Titchwell, but nonetheless has had its fair share of good birds. The quality of the habitat has no doubt contributed; however, I couldn't help feeling that there were plenty of similar looking pools and floods elsewhere in the county. A visit to Polemere in early January confirmed my thoughts, when Martyn picked a green-winged teal out from amongst the flock of ducks. Since then I've seen garganey, blue-headed wagtail and Greenland white-fronted goose at this small pool, which is set within an expanse of farmland and isolated from natural flyways.

I suspect that the main feature distinguishing Polemere from other similar pools across Shropshire is simply the fact that it has a bird hide. Whilst it is difficult to pinpoint outstanding areas of prime habitat, Shropshire is well-endowed with small pools and pockets of habitat likely to appeal to passing migrants. What it lacks is the birders to watch these pockets. Shropshire may not be an east coast rarity magnet, but places like Polemere prove that good birds can and do turn up anywhere. So if there's a likely-looking 'pocket' near you it may be worth the odd visit.

Winter in Shropshire is generally less spectacular than at other birding destinations, with few impressive flocks or aggregations. However, as in spring and autumn rare or scarce species can be found hidden amongst the usual fare. Flocks of ducks can occur on any significant waterbody (permanent or ephemeral), and the gull roosts at Ellesmere and at Trench Pool, Telford – again, some of the few sites that are regularly watched – consistently produce rarer species such as Iceland and Caspian gulls. Certain birds have a habit of turning up in the same locations year-on-year, such as the great grey shrike at Black Hill, Clun, and the flock of whooper swans which is an annual fixture on the fields between Cross Houses and Cressage. Whixall Moss is also worth a visit, regularly hosting hen harrier and short-eared owl. In winter there is always the potential for something completely unexpected being displaced by

harsh weather or overwintering amongst flocks of more common species, as demonstrated by the discovery of a pine bunting at Venus Pool in January of this year.

Shropshire also supports a variety of scarce breeding birds. Coming from Norfolk, wood warbler and pied flycatcher were at the top of my wish-list. Both species can be seen relatively easily at certain locations where there is suitable habitat, the latter combining excellently with a pub lunch and pint at the Bridges near Ratlinghope. Redstart and red kite are amongst other less widespread species which can be encountered readily on casual walks in the south of the county. Shropshire also has its share of rarer breeders whose locations are not widely publicised, so keep an eye open for the unexpected on less well-trodden paths. Even in the absence of good birds, I've found that most walks in Shropshire at least deliver good views.

My advice to birders new to Shropshire is to get out and explore the area, find a local patch (perhaps one which doesn't receive much attention from birders) and visit it regularly. Keeping records of the species and numbers you see will help you gain an understanding of the status of birds within the county, and will enable you to appreciate and enjoy discoveries of local significance. Uploading your records to BirdTrack is a great way to do this as the system offers a number of ways to visualise and explore your data, and you will be contributing to knowledge of birds in the county and to wider scientific studies in the process. You may still need to make trips out of county to get the occasional fix, but there is plenty in Shropshire to keep a birder happy.

James Grundy

Darvic Colour Ringed Wagtails

On the 6th October 2017 Ed Wilson photographed a Grey Wagtail at Trench Pool Telford it had a red darvic ring engraved with white letters "BT". He posted the information and photographs on the Priorslee Lake blog. That can be found here:



<http://friendsofpriorsleelake.blogspot.co.uk/2017/10/6-oct-17.html>

With Ed's permission I did a bit of research and found the bird had been ringed, by Paul Hopwood, as a juvenile at Shifnal Sewage Farm 7 July 2017.

Paul also informed me he is ringing both Pied and Grey Wagtails in Staffordshire and Shropshire. As well as Grey Wagtails Red Darvics with white letters he also rings Pied Wagtails Black Darvics with white letters.

So if anyone records Grey Wagtails with Red Darvics or Pied Wagtails with Black Darvics he will be pleased to receive the information and he will reply giving the original ringing location and any subsequent sightings.

Paul can be contacted on: seatroutforum@gmail.com

Martin G Grant

Curlew Conservation

SWT/SOS 'Save Our Curlews' campaign

SOS Management Committee/Board has agreed to be a partner in, and actively support, a long-term County wide 'Save Our Curlews' campaign. It is being launched this month, and co-ordinated by Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT).

A multi-agency *Shropshire Curlew Group* is being convened by SWT to oversee the campaign. Two meetings have been held, and a series of action points have been agreed. A further meeting will be held in early December to develop the campaign.

An outline strategy has been agreed, extending the strategy developed by the Upper Onny Wildlife Group through the Stiperstones-Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) and 'rolling out' the lessons across the County i.e. develop Community Wildlife Groups (CWGs) to survey areas that hold breeding Curlew to identify nesting areas, and then work with the landowners and farmers to find and protect the nest, and assess the outcomes.

The Curlew breeding distribution map from the recent Atlas project has been used to identify the areas where CWGs are needed. Most Curlew hotspots are already covered, but two new ones are needed, to cover the Oswestry uplands to the south of Oswestry, and the Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence. The campaign will work in cooperation with, and support, the existing CWGs as well as promote the two new ones.

Appeal

A joint appeal has been launched to fund the campaign. The Appeal letter is enclosed.

The SOS Board has agreed to donate £2,500. SOS members are also requested to donate.

The Appeal is being administered by SWT, but will be accounted for separately. SOS members who pay tax are requested to fill in the Gift Aid

declaration. This enables SWT to re-claim the tax you've paid on the amount you donate, so each donation is increased by 25p in the £1.

National conservation organisations are raising money for their own projects and priorities, but none of this money will be spent on saving Shropshire's Curlews. The fate of the local population is in the hands of Shropshire's people, especially SOS members.

Please give generously to support long term action to reverse the decline of one of our most iconic local breeding species.

Upper Onny Wildlife Group

Thank you very much to the people who contributed to the UOWG Curlew appeal included in previous

issues of *The Buzzard*. Donations from SOS members and other individuals have come to over £1,600, and the total in the Appeal fund is over £5,000. The appeal is to fund nest finding and protection, and radio-tagging chicks, starting in 2018, after the LPS project finishes. It will contribute to the same work being funded by the SWT/SOS Appeal.

Donors who provided the UOWG Treasurer with an email address will get a newsletter with more detailed information on progress and action. Further information about the UOWG Appeal can be found on the UOWG section of the Community Wildlife Groups website, www.shropscwgs.org.uk/?page_id=3373

2017 Breeding reaches 50% success

In the LPS area, almost all of the 22

nests found were electric fenced, and half of them hatched chicks. The electric fences, therefore, had a 50% success rate compared to 2015 and 2016 when all except three nests each year were predated at the egg stage (NB all three nests that hatched in 2016 were also fenced). Only two nests were predated by foxes, compared with more than half in 2015 and 2016. Four were predated by Crows, 4 failed for reasons unknown, two did not hatch (probably due to agricultural disturbance) and one was possibly predated by a badger.

Mammalian predators therefore accounted for only 3 nests in 2017 compared to well over half in 2015 and 2016. The electric fences were highly effective in combating mammalian predators.

An increase in the number of chicks hatched increased the chances that some would fledge, and 3-5 did from 2-3 nests (compared to no fledged young in 2015 and 2016). Although this success rate is not sufficient for a sustainable population, it is a big step in the right direction, and the fledging rate can hopefully be increased as experience grows and new interventions are trialled. It is essential that the work continues in 2018 and beyond. This is a primary aim of the SWT / SOS "Save our Curlews" campaign and appeal.

The Upper Onny Wildlife Group continued monitoring its local Curlew population, and found the loss of a further pair. The decline 2004 – 2017 is now almost one-third (32%) in 13 Years.

The two new Community Wildlife Group (CWG) surveys, in the Strettons area and north of Oswestry (the Three Parishes of Weston Rhyn, St Martins and Gobowen), both found several pairs of breeding Curlews, but fewer than the number found in the same squares during the Bird Atlas 2008-13

In addition to them, and the three CWGs in the LPS area, Upper Clun and Clee Hill CWGs have also been counting Curlews. The various CWG reports will be published over the winter.

Several reports have been received of Curlew territories elsewhere in the County. If you know of one, but haven't reported it yet, please tell Leo Smith (contact details below)

Stepping stones

It was hoped that the important work in the LPS area would be funded in 2018 through a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund by National Trust, Natural England and other partners (supported by UOWG) for the "Stepping Stones" project, but that will not be submitted in time. Hopefully it will be submitted and approved in time for funding to be provided for Curlew conservation work from 2019 onwards, in the "Stepping Stones" area.

How can you help?

SOS members would be very welcome in any CWG, and a big asset. Basically, you take on a survey square (a 'tetrad', a 2x2 kilometre square on the OS national grid – same survey unit as the Bird Atlas), and walk round it three times on dates to suit you, around 1 April, 1 May and 15 June, for around 3 hours each visit.

Helpers would be especially welcome in the 2 new areas to be launched next year, the Oswestry uplands to the south of Oswestry, and the Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence, particularly if you would help with the organisation and help recruit new members.

Continuing the work in the Stiperstones-Corndon area after the LPS finishes next March (2017 was the last LPS fieldwork season) will cost money, and members are asked to support the Appeal.

If anyone wants to help with Curlew monitoring work by the various Community Wildlife Groups, or locating nest sites, or setting up new CWGs early next year, 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.

Further Information

The outline strategy for the SWT / SOS "Save Our Curlews" campaign, including the terms of reference for the Shropshire Curlew Group, and a map showing the areas of the existing and proposed Community Wildlife Groups overlaid onto the Curlew distribution map, together with other information about Curlews and the campaign, can be found on the SOS website

www.shropshirebirds.com

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

Why Bother?

28%

The estimated proportion the UK has of the European breeding Curlew population, more in winter.

19-27%

of the world population.

62%

decline

since the 1960s meant the Curlew was added to the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern a year ago.

77%

decline

right here in Shropshire, 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.

Immediate conservation action is vital if the evocative bubbling song of the Curlew is not to be lost from the county forever. This 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 the current breeding season, so we need to establish a means of carrying on with this important work.

Leo Smith

Swifts

It's not too late for your records

have sent me records since that article and to the local groups that have surveyed their town systematically for several years. Surveying is something that needs to be done every year to monitor changes so please do continue to send me your sightings.

Whilst we may have been treated to some fantastic screaming parties, especially during July, which perhaps make us think all is well BTO surveying still reports a worrying decline in swift numbers. The BBS report for 2016 was

In a previous article for Buzzard I wrote about the need to survey and record where we have swifts in Shropshire. Thanks to those who

published by the BTO in August - see <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs/bbs-publications/bbs-reports> and reported that Swifts have declined in the UK by 51% between 1995 and 2015 (20 years) and the decline from 2015 to 2016 is reported as a further 7%. These birds definitely need all the help we can give them.

There were many late chicks across the country – perhaps an indication that the breeding season had gone somewhat awry. Chicks are expected to fledge in July but I heard of a chick fledging in Leeds on 8 September. This chick had just hatched as we were expecting this year's young to be leaving! Of course the later the season the harder it is for parents to find food and to resist their urge to migrate leaving their offspring.

So whilst we may have had good sightings during the summer it seems that, as for many birds, things are not as good as we like to think. Recent news quantifying the drop in insect numbers (see <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/05/where-have-all-insects-gone>) cannot have come as a surprise to many – we have surely all known that insect numbers have declined rapidly and our liberal use of pesticides, both in domestic and agricultural use, is inevitably going to do what it says on the bottle – i.e. kill things fairly indiscriminately. Are we going to be able to rethink our habits and restore some of the invertebrate populations?

We know that swifts and other insectivorous birds are facing a decline in food availability but the loss of nesting sites for swifts is still a major problem.

Nooks and crannies are essential and mastic and plastic are excluding birds from nest sites that have been used for years. Of course instances of scaffolding blocking nest site access still happen every year and we all need to speak up for the birds if we see this. It's a problem for house martins as well as swifts and everyone seems so keen to get on with building work that no regard is paid for other residents in our houses.

There was great interest in the stand at the Birdfair run by Swift Conservation, Action for Swifts and the Swifts Local Network and around 70 nest boxes for swifts were sold. Let's hope some of those came back to Shropshire. Boxes do work – maybe not always in the first year, but especially with the help of with a call system, you can offer new nest sites to swifts. In Ludlow swifts are taking to boxes that were put up 3 or 4 years ago and I wonder if this is young birds that were born here now ready to breed and looking for a nest site. So, if you are doing work on your house this winter do please consider putting a box up. Contact me shropshireswifts@gmail.com for advice on boxes and positioning and also if you want to borrow a swift call system from the group. New housing – there must be some building going on near you as it seems ubiquitous – is another opportunity. Again I am happy to offer advice for swifts but it is worth asking developers what wildlife friendly features they are including in their development.

Finally, please continue to send me sightings of swift nest sites or locations of screaming parties. It's not too late to send me reports for 2017 so please let me know date, location and what you saw.

Peta Sams
Shropshire Swift Group

Bird Surveying Through the Kitchen Window

There are 245 participants in the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Garden BirdWatch (GBW) survey in Shropshire, the only nationwide survey of garden birds to run weekly throughout the year, providing important information on how birds use gardens, and how this use changes over time. The national project, which is the largest year-round survey of garden birds in the world, is funded by its 'citizen scientist' participants, who have contributed over 7 million hours of their time and about 100 million observations.



The current decline of the House Sparrow was first detected by GBW observers surveying the bird life in their gardens.

Photo: John Harding, BTO Library

This wealth of information has also allowed BTO researchers to examine how, when and why birds and other wildlife use gardens and the resources that they contain, and there have been some ground-breaking findings, including several investigating the decline of the UK's House Sparrow population, first discovered through BTO's garden-based data. It was also thanks to the contributions of GBW volunteers that scientists from BTO and the Institute of Zoology were able to reveal the impact of the disease trichomonosis on the Greenfinch population, which has declined by 30% since 2005. Such findings are reported in the scientific literature and contribute not only to a deeper knowledge of garden bird ecology but also inform conservation decisions and policies.

Since the inception of GBW in 1995, an astounding 481 different species (including birds, mammals, butterflies, bumblebees, reptiles and amphibians) have been recorded in gardens, with an average of 35 species reported per garden, of which 29 are birds. Over the UK as a whole, 30,271 gardens have supplied the simple data on which the survey is based (the maximum count for species seen each week, along with information on any bird food provided). One interesting finding is that participants saw, on average, three more bird species in their gardens in 2014 than they did in 1995!

In Shropshire, the bird species reported in most gardens are Blackbird, Blue Tit and Robin (found in 93, 90 and 88% of the county's gardens), with Woodpigeon, Dunnock, Great Tit, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Coal Tit, Magpie, Collared Dove, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Starling making up the "top fifteen". GBW results for Shropshire reveal that there are certain species that occur in far more of our gardens than in average UK gardens, including Bullfinch, Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Dunnock, while Starlings and Feral Pigeons are less common.

Song Thrush is a regular, but declining, garden visitor. Appropriate plantings and avoidance of pesticides in gardens may help to sustain the population of this Red-listed species.

Photo: John Harding, BTO Library



Why is the BTO interested in gardens? Collectively, gardens in the UK make up a large area, equal to two Snowdonia or three Peak District National Parks. Gardens are diverse in structure, design and plantings and are interconnected to permit birds to move freely from one environment to another. They also contain about half of the trees in Britain outside woodland. At the same time, our rural areas are, in many respects, becoming less bird-friendly with the practices of intensive agriculture.

Gardens offer birds food, shelter, water and nesting sites. It is not just "common or garden" birds that thrive in a carefully designed and well-provisioned garden: some birds from the Amber and Red Lists of Birds of Conservation Concern can benefit too, including Song and Mistle Thrush, Spotted Flycatcher, House Sparrow, Tawny Owl, Swift, House Martin, Dunnock, Bullfinch and Starling.

Because the survey is self-financing, there is a fee to participate (£17 p.a.) but, for this, you receive a colourful and information-packed quarterly magazine, access to the BTO's garden ecology team to answer your questions about plantings, nest-boxes, wildlife ponds etc. and a free book, either *Garden Birds and Wildlife* (224 pages, RRP £14.99) or *Gardening for Birdwatchers* (96 pages, RRP £9.99), as well as the satisfaction of adding to our knowledge of Shropshire's garden avifauna. After all, what other BTO survey can you contribute to while sitting in an armchair with a cup of coffee or glass of wine in your hand!

If you would be interested in participating in BTO GBW, signing up is simple. Just contact one of the two GBW Ambassadors for Shropshire, according to where you live.

- For Shrewsbury and all points south: John Arnfield (arnfield.2@osu.edu or 01694 724 170)
- For areas north of Shrewsbury: Claire Backshall (c_backshall@hotmail.com or 01691 830 691)

Don't worry if you are on the boundary – we'll sort it out!

John Arnfield & Claire Backshall

Red Kite in Shropshire 2017

Introduction

The Welsh Kite Trust and the Raptor Study Group again tried to find all nests. Since the first two were found in 2005, significant results include:

1. 207 nests (143 successful) found and monitored
2. At least 269 fledged young
3. 196 fledged young tagged in the nest
4. More nests were found in 2017 (28) than in any previous year.



Monitoring 2017

Of the 28 nests, 8 failed, 19 were successful and the outcome of one is unknown. At least 32 young fledged.

Sixteen young from 10 nests were tagged. 2017 tags are black with yellow letters. Most were still in the south-west, but a nest was reported from north of Shrewsbury for the first time. Only one nest was found east of the A49 road, near Ludlow.

Reports wanted, please

If anyone knows the location of a 2017 Kite nest, or sees evidence of breeding in 2018, 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 Discovery Centre in Craven Arms started putting out food in November 2014, but very few Kites visited, and the project has now been abandoned.

Further Information

The full 2017 report, including comparison with previous years, the results of tagging and monitoring roost sites, and records of a white Kite, can be found on the Raptor Study Group section of theSOS website,

www.shropshirebirds.com and on the Welsh Kite Trust's new website www.welshkitetrust.wales

Leo Smith

Books

Beckwith's Birds of Nineteenth Century Shropshire

The new book "*Beckwith's Birds of Nineteenth Century Shropshire*" is now available.

From John Tucker john.tucker@lanus.org.uk/beckwith or Oakerley, Clun Road, Aston on Clun, Craven Arms, Shropshire SY7 8EW. £30 plus £5 P&P or you can collect from my home address. A review will appear in the next *Buzzard*.

Softback with 376 pages, three quarters of which are Beckwith's own works – he would have published them, and more, in a book, around 1902. Illustrated with Thomas Bewick wood engravings and with eight colour plates. An ideal companion volume to the forthcoming *The Birds of Shropshire* next year.

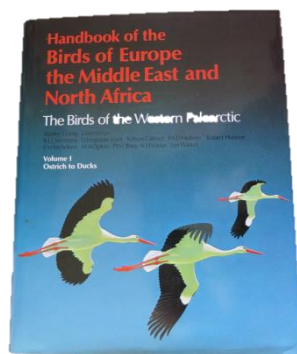
John Tucker

A Splendid Addition to your Birding Library

The Society has received a generous donation of a full set of the nine-volume hardback book set of *Handbook of the Birds of the Europe, the Middle East and North Africa*, often known by its subtitle of *The Birds of the Western Palearctic* or just *BWC* for short. The set was published by Oxford University Press. The donor has suggested that the books be sold, with the proceeds going to SOS funds. The set, edited by S. Cramp and K. Simmons (with others), is one of the most important ornithological reference works and a comprehensive regional avifauna for our zoogeographical region. Described by *British Birds* as a "monumental and utterly indispensable undertaking", it was published volume-by-volume between 1977 and 1994 and is now out of print and hard to obtain.

The books are accompanied by a CD-ROM version (*BWP-i*) dated 2006. (It is not known whether this disc will run under current operating systems.)

The volumes are in superb condition, all with dust jackets, and meet the eBay "fine" criterion for book condition (i.e. "book and dust jacket should be crisp without noticeable flaws or defects").



Used editions of the nine-volume set are currently being offered online for amounts ranging from £175.00 to £525.00 (average about £315.00), with variation largely dependent on condition.

The book set and the CD-ROM will be sold as a set to the highest bidder. To make an offer by the preferred method, please email the Society Treasurer at Treasurer@shropshirebirds.co.uk, with your:

- offer
- full name
- address and
- telephone number.

If you are unable to use email, we will accept phone call offers to (01743) 367 576 providing the same information listed above.

Bidding will end at midnight on 15/16 January, 2018.

The anonymous current highest bid will be posted on the SOS website (<http://www.shropshirebirds.com/>) under "Breaking News". This will be updated every few days initially but more often as the bid deadline approaches.

The SOS reserves the right to withdraw the items from sale to the highest bidder if the amount offered is deemed to be below a reasonable market value.

More for your library?

Due to increasing mobility problems, member Richard Camp is moving to a smaller bungalow and the reduced space means he must sell off many of his extensive

library of bird books. The books are either new or as new or in VGC. Ideal for bird book

lovers or as a Christmas present. Full list available with 10% off to SOS members.

Email at: mail@richardcamp.co.uk , or phone on 01952-405458.

Field Trips

Upton Warren Nature Reserve Saturday, 19th August 2017

A group of three arrived at the Moors Pools car park of this reserve run by Worcestershire Wildlife Reserve. While in the car park Magpie, Woodpigeon and Willow Warbler were noted. A walk was taken along the path straight ahead from the car park. Although not many birds were seen along the path,

good numbers were observed, from the first hide including plenty of Black headed Gulls, together with a Common Tern, Cormorant and Coot. From the feeding centre near the hide, Dunnock, Bullfinch, quite a few Greenfinch, Blue Tit, and Great Tit were seen together with Moorhen picking up droppage on the ground. A further short walk brought us to the next hide with its elevated views over Moors Pool. From here Canada Goose, Greylag Goose, Mute Swan were easily seen, but other species included Oystercatcher, a fair few Swift, plus Swallows and House Martins. Tufted Duck, Mallard and a very brief view of a flying Kingfisher were seen by a couple of the party.

We walked around the pool to Amy's Marsh, the hide giving its different views of the pool, with Gadwall, Teal and Shoveler all well into their eclipse phase of plumage. A couple of Grey Heron were amongst the reeds, Lapwing, Lesser Black backed Gull, at least 8 Little Grebe, and hiding amongst the geese an Egyptian Goose was seen, very well disguised due to its position and being asleep as well. On return to the car park, a few Linnet were seen as well as a Jay and a Buzzard.

After lunch, we walked past the Sailing Pool towards the Flashes. On the trail, no Peregrine were on the masts. The first hide, revealed an Avocet with its juvenile offspring, about 3 Black tailed Godwit, a Ringed Plover, plus about 10 Curlew. But the highlight was the Sandpipers. Near the hide a Common Sandpiper was noted and then a Green Sandpiper. Having scanned the back of the Flashes a Wood Sandpiper was seen and at least 4 Common, maybe 3 Green and at least 2 Wood Sandpiper. A Goldfinch was seen near the hide, in the fields; Jackdaw, Rook and Carrion Crow. On the far side of the Flashes; at least 4 Stock Dove nearer the hide a Pied Wagtail. Flying all around the water Swallows, Swifts, House Martins and Sand Martins were seen feeding. Then as a final find, a Snipe was feeding along a sand bank. On the way back a Hobby was briefly seen flying by. On the Sailing Pool, was an Arctic Tern resting on a buoy, and a two Great crested Grebe, sleeping on the water. As a finale a few Long tailed Tits flew past and a Wren was heard, but not seen. A great day; 55 species and we escaped the poor weather elsewhere.

Sue Brealey

The Wirral: various sites Sunday, 10 September 2017

A group of 11 members gathered at Leasowes Lighthouse for the start of this trip to various sites on the Wirral. The tide tables showed a high tide for about 12noon, so there was a hope of good things to come. As people were getting ready a juvenile Stonechat was noted amongst the bushes by the car park. Having walked up onto the walkway by the shore, the sands were scanned as the water started to move towards the shore. At first various gulls were seen, including Great Black-backed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull and amongst them some Common Gulls. Amongst the waders seen were some Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew, a couple of Dunlin, groups of Oystercatcher flying in with the tide, a few Redshank and then a group of at least 30+ Ringed Plovers. On the rocks near the walkway about 10+ Turnstone were seen feeding. Then a Bar-tailed Godwit was noted and a little time after that a

Peregrine was noted standing on the sands, mantling a piece of prey, thought to be a pigeon, from the attentions of Carrion Crows. After feeding for some time, the Peregrine appeared to be too full to fly away, so it moved away from the prey leaving it to the corvids, and waited to digest its meal. It was really interesting to observe this piece of bird behaviour. Amongst other birds seen were quite a few Little Egret, Grey Heron, and Cormorant.

The group decided to move onto Parkgate in the hope that the tidal prospects would bring some really good birding during the high tide. However, having arrived, and while enjoying a picnic, the tide did not rise as much as was anticipated, so the usual vegetation was hiding a large number of birds. However, Little Egret was in attendance, some Lapwing flew past, as well as a few Stove Dove and a Buzzard. A couple of Kestrel were seen hovering quite close. But on the whole it proved rather disappointing, so a decision was made to go onto RSPB Burtonmere for the rest of the day.

Once arrived the group gathered in the reception centre. The weather was beginning to turn, with threats of rain coming. The light was very flat, with the sun in front of the viewing area, making it difficult to see the birds easily. However on looking over the nearer area, there were large numbers of Canada and Greylag Geese, and on really looking through them a single Barnacle Goose was noted. Amongst other species seen in this area were Coot, Gadwall, Grey Heron, Lapwing, Little Grebe, Moorhen, and Shoveler. The ducks were still in eclipse so it was quite a challenge to distinguish them especially in the light. After a brief shower, the group started to walk around to the Inner Marsh Hide, stopping at the feeding station where Blue Tit, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Great Tit, and Robin were noted. In one of the fields, amongst some grazing cattle a Cattle Egret was seen. Once at the hide, at first sight there did not appear to be much about. On closer inspection, Swallow, Sand Martin and House Martin were seen flying around, a few Great crested Grebes were noted, but the highlights were a Ruff, a Greenshank, a few Black tailed Godwit and then the controversy of the day. Some small waders were seen, and there was quite a discussion about whether they were Dunlin or Curlew Sandpiper. The light was very flat and the birds' feathering was difficult to distinguish as they were moulting between breeding and winter plumage. However, in the end Dunlin won the day. As the light was fading, the group started back to the car park, having agreed that this had been another delightful day, especially as we had missed getting wet!

Sue Brealey

TO Lunt Meadows 29 October 2017

After a fraught trip across the new Runcorn Bridge (now called the Mersey Gateway and an automated toll), we arrived at the Lunt Meadows carpark to join two other members, four in all.

These wet meadows, under the auspices of the Lancashire Wildlife Trust, are a mecca for wetland birds. The 77 hectare site and runs alongside the river Alt in North Merseyside. It has become known for its abundance of owls with, currently, eight Short-eared and 4 Barn Owls and, occasionally, Long-eared, seen flying out from the distant wood.

The carpark afforded a taste of things to come with 2 Kestrel hunting, Buzzard, Cormorant, Jay, Black-headed and Herring Gull and large flocks of Lapwing (estimated at 600-800) and Starling flying on the far side.

As we followed a circular route, Little Egret, Magpie and Grey Heron were recorded and Grey and Red-legged Partridge, feeding at the edge of a ploughed field, were spotted by one eagle-eyed member. We were disappointed to learn these were birds released by the shooting fraternity. We had a brief stop for coffee and biscuits by a small pool where a pair of Common Darter were flying and mating. In the adjacent hedgerow, Robin, Dunnock and Chaffinch flitted and on a second, larger pool we saw our first duck: Mallard, Tufted and Wigeon.

We then walked along a raised bank which separated the reserve from an expanse of ploughed and stubble fields where farmers were clearing out the ditches. At some distance we picked out 2 Mistle Thrush, Pied Wagtail, Goldfinch, Meadow Pipit and Skylark all feeding.

Suddenly, an estimated 10,000 Pink-footed Geese flew across from the coastal sites at Martin Mere and Marshside, to feed on surrounding fields – a wonderful site and sound.

Looking to the reserve we saw several male and female Stonechat, a pair of Reed Bunting and Wren, the latter occurring all over the reserve. Further along the bank a Sparrowhawk was being mobbed by several Jackdaw and Stock Dove fed in yet another ploughed field.

Arriving at the river, we saw the first Moorhen, but no other life on the water. The Pumping Station, a brick-built building with smashed windows, is the nesting site for the Barn Owls. Sadly, we were told that some photographers, despite being asked to retreat, had sometimes prevented the adults from entering to feed the chicks by getting far too close and crowding round the station.

Viewing the largest pool from the bank we had a large number of Canada Geese, some of the Lapwing flock and a Common Gull among the Black-headed. We then followed a wide grassy path to a viewing screen (there are no hides) where we had lunch, then on to another screen overlooking the largest pool from the opposite side. We were delighted when a Mute Swan was joined by a pair of Whoopers and the male displayed to the female, dipping its neck and made gentle murmurings. The Mallard were also head-bobbing and 2 Common Snipe flew overhead, constantly calling.

The final screen and pool afforded a sleepy pair of Shoveler and Teal and, at last, a Barn Owl flew from the Pumping Station to quarter below the far bank as we reached the area just before the carpark. A Song Thrush made up the final tally of some 40 species for the day.

We all agreed that a winter visit with dusk in mid-afternoon would be better, but a good day was had by all.

Bird Notes Jul, Aug and Sep 2017

Egyptian Goose One was present at Tittenley Pool on 24 Aug.

Mandarin Duck Three separate females were present on the River Severn at Severn Valley Country Park, each with juveniles (broods of 7, 6 and 4). An elusive pair of adults were seen occasionally at Venus Pool at the end of Jul.

Shelduck Four adults and four youngsters were seen at Ash Magna on 3 Jul.

Gadwall The two adults with eight juveniles, mentioned in the previous Bird Notes, continued to be seen at Wood Lane into August. Returning birds were seen at Venus Pool and Ellerton during September.

Common Scoter Six were present at Colemere on 2 Jul.

Grey Partridge Ten were present at Dodecote Grange, Childs Ercall on 18 Aug.

Common Quail The first record came from Aldersey Lane, Prees on 18 Jun. Other reports followed from Clun on 4 Jul, Child's Ercall from 9 Jul onwards, Venus Pool on 15-16 Jul and Hordley on 2 Sep.

Black-crowned Night Heron The long staying Night Heron continued to be seen in the Dingle, Shrewsbury Quarry Park throughout the quarter. Feathers obtained from this bird have been sent for DNA analysis to confirm it is of the American race (hoactli).

Little Egret The earliest reports were of single birds on the River Severn at Bridgnorth on 5 Jul and Venus Pool on 7 Jul. Four were present on the River Severn at Ironbridge on 4 Aug and up to four were regularly seen at Venus Pool throughout the quarter.

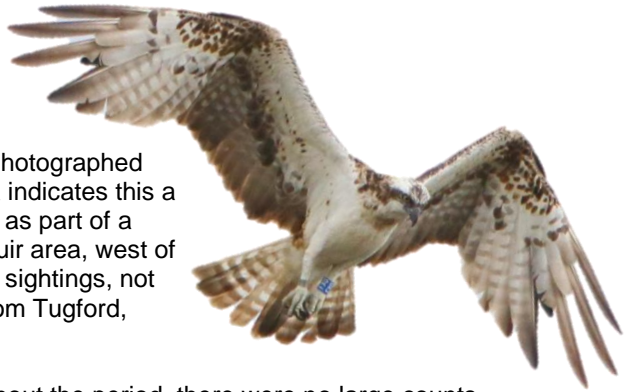
Great White Egret One was seen intermittently at Tittenley Pool from 21 Aug until 1 Sep. The same, or another individual, was present at Venus Pool on 26 Sep.

Goshawk One was reported at Newport canal on 27 Jul.

Red Kite Records of one, two or three birds were received, many from the usual areas in the south of the county but also some sightings from elsewhere. These included: Ellesmere, Oswestry, Ruyton XI Towns and Buildwas.

Marsh Harrier A juvenile was seen at Wall Farm, Kynnersley on 25 Aug. Two records at Whixall Moss followed on 30 Aug and 24 Sep plus one at Venus Pool on 21 Sep.

Osprey The Scottish ringed bird (Blue ring FX0) seen during the previous quarter continued to be seen occasionally at Venus Pool, photographed there on 31 Jul. Ringing data indicates this a 2 year old bird, initially ringed as part of a brood of two in the Tweedsmuir area, west of Peebles on 7 Jul 2015. Other sightings, not necessarily this bird, came from Tugford, Buildwas and Wood Lane.



Hobby Records from throughout the period, there were no large counts but reported from twenty locations.

Little Ringed Plover Up to three reported from the River Severn at Leighton / Buildwas, Wood Lane and Venus Pool during Jul and Aug. A juvenile was present at Venus Pool during Jul, origin unknown.

Ringed Plover Passage birds were seen at Venus Pool from 22 Aug onwards with three long staying individuals present during Sep.

Golden Plover Two were seen at Mason's Bank on 26 Aug.

Lapwing Reported from various wetlands, the highest counts (up to 200) came from Wood Lane during Aug.

Dunlin One was present at Venus Pool from 10-12 Sep.

Ruff One was briefly at Venus Pool on 28 Sep.

Common Snipe The first returning bird was seen at Venus Pool on 19 Aug, numbers steadily increasing there to thirteen by 30 Sep.

Black-tailed Godwit A flock of thirty was present at Wood Lane on 19 Aug. All other records came from Venus Pool where eight were seen on 28 Jul, three on 25 Aug and thirteen on 30 Aug. A single bird was present from 4-5 Sep.

Curlew A flock of up to thirty two was regularly seen at Wood Lane during the quarter. Of interest on 16-Sep was a colour ringed bird (BZ), originally ringed at Dolydd Hafren on 25 Feb 2016. Observers are encouraged to check all Curlews for colour rings and report them. Single birds were also seen at five other locations.

Wood Sandpiper Two were present at Venus Pool on 23 Aug and then singles (possibly the same bird) were seen Brown Moss on 25 Aug and Wood Lane on 26 Aug.



Common Sandpiper Seen throughout the quarter at six locations. Four were present at Priorslee Lake on 29 Jul, three at Wood Lane on 19 Aug and two by the Severn at Leighton / Buildwas on 9 Jul. A single was seen at Whitcliffe, Ludlow on 22 Jul and Venus Pool during Jul.

Green Sandpiper Regularly seen throughout the quarter at Venus Pool with a maximum of five on 5 Sep. Up to three were reported at Wood Lane during Aug and Sep.

Pectoral Sandpiper One was present at Venus Pool during the evening of 29 Aug.

Greenshank Two dropped in at Venus Pool on 15 Aug and individuals were present on 22 Aug and 8 Sep. One was seen at Wood Lane on 11 Aug and another at Wall Farm, Kynnersley on 21 Aug.

Yellow-legged Gull Up to seven roosted at The Mere, Ellesmere between 1 and 25 Sep. Adults were seen at Wood Lane on 23 Jul and at Venus Pool on 9 Sep. Two, (2cy and 4cy) were seen in a stubble field near Condover on 24 Sep.

Caspian Gull A 4cy bird was seen in a stubble field near Condover on 24 Sep.

Arctic Tern Single birds were seen at Wood Lane on 3 Aug and The Mere, Ellesmere from 11-12 Sep.



Common Tern One was present at Priorslee Lake on 8 Jul.

Barn Owl Two were reported at Tibberton on 14 Sep and records of single birds came from four other locations: Cold Hatton Heath, Walton near Onibury, Bishops Castle and Uckington.

Little Owl Reported from three sites: Edmond Marsh, Pentre and Romsley.

Tawny Owl Two were seen at Walton near Onibury on 7 Sep and near Market Drayton on 27 Sep. Single birds also reported at Whixall Moss on 15 Jul and Muxton on 26 Sep.

Long-eared Owl One was accidentally flushed near the river Clun at Bicton Hill UC Wetland on 14-Aug.

Nightjar Two reports, both from the Stiperstones on 13 Jul and 10 Aug.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker Two records: the first from Wood Lane on 2 Aug and another from Market Drayton on 6 Sep.

Common Swift The last report came from Ludlow on 27 Aug. Highest count was of twenty at Ironbridge on 4 Aug.

Sand Martin The highest count was seventy at Wood Lane on 23 Jul. No reports received after 4 Aug.

Swallow Reported until the end of the quarter, the highest count was of 190 birds at Trefonen on 22 Sep.

House Martin The last record for the quarter, a solitary bird on 26 Sep, came from Aston-on-Clun. The highest count was 70 at Whitcliffe on 23 Sep.

Wheatear Up to two birds on passage reported from six locations.

Whinchat Seen at Long Mynd (up to 2), Wall Farm Kynnersley (2) and Masons Bank West UC Wetland (1).

Cetti's Warbler One was heard and seen from the hide at Wall Farm, Kynnersley on 25 Aug.

Reed Warbler Recorded at seven locations with a highest count of six at Maesbury. The last report was on 23 Sep at Wood Lane.

Garden Warbler The latest record came from Venus Pool on 4 Sep.

Common Whitethroat Seen at fifteen sites with the latest report on 21 Aug at Ludlow. The highest count was seven at Wall Farm, Kynnersley on 1 Aug.

Spotted Flycatcher Numerous reports throughout the county with the last on 4 Sep. Many of the reports noted families or groups, the most impressive being nine feeding together on Black Hill beside one of the clearfells.

Willow Tit One record, a single at Eardington Nature Reserve on 2 Sep.

Tree Sparrow Good numbers seen at Whitcott Keysett where up to forty, including fledglings, were seen between 20–26 Aug on a field of barley, before and after harvest. Twelve were seen in a mixed flock by a freshly manured stubble field near Aston on Clun.

Pied Wagtail An interesting pre-roost gathering in the horse field at Polemere noted between 9 and 17 Sep. Up to forty were present at dusk including at least ten White Wagtails (*Motacilla alba*) and one Yellow Wagtail.

Lesser Redpoll The largest count came from Whixall Moss, where sixty were seen on 30 Sep.

Common Crossbill Two were seen at Shavington Park on 14 Jul, one at Cefn Coch on 18 Jul and two on Black Hill on 24 Sep.

Corn Bunting Three were seen at Showell Grange on 9 Jul, one near Edgmond on 28 Jul and one at Wall farm, Kynnersley on 1 Aug.

Goldfinch Numerous reports with a mobile flock of 140 in the arable field at Venus Pool on 8 Sep and 90 at Whixall canal floods on 20 Sep.

Some sightings are subject to acceptance by the Records Committee.

Photos and compiled by Jim Almond

Upcoming Field Trips

Sunday, 7 January **Colemere**

Organiser: Sue Brealey Car

Half Day - Meet at the Car Park at 9am

Postcode for SatNav: SY12 0QW

Follow the signs for Colemere Country Park from A528

See <http://www.shropshiresgreatoutdoors.co.uk/site/colemere-countryside-heritage-site/>

Sunday, 18 February **Rutland Water**

Organiser: Sue Brealey By Coach

Full Day – Meet at Shirehall Car Park at 8am

Cost will be £15 per person for the coach plus £4 for entry to the reserve. Please book with Sue Brealey from September 2017

See <https://www.rutlandwater.org.uk/>

Sunday, 25 March **Moore Nature Reserve**

Organiser: Sue Brealey Car

Full Day – Meet at the Car Park at 9.30am

Post Code for SatNav - WA4 6XE

From the A56 (from Warrington of the M56 J11) turn at the traffic lights opposite the Walton Arms public house, following the sign for Moore. From Moore village turn right into Moore Lane. Follow this road over the swing bridge to arrive at Moore Nature Reserve. See

<http://www.fccenvironment.co.uk/moorenaturereserve.html>

Indoor Meetings

Bayston Hill Memorial Hall, Lyth Hill Road Shrewsbury, 7:15pm -10:00 pm

For more details visit: <http://www.shropshirebirds.com/indoor-meetings/>

Wednesday, 3 January

Andrew Fusek Peters

The Long Mynd: Birds, Wildlife and Landscape

Previously a well-known children's poet, Andrew changed direction 4 years ago and took up photography based on nature near his home in the Shropshire Hills. He has since published a couple of related books. It will be interesting to see the wildlife of the Long Mynd through fresh eyes

Wednesday, 7 February

Keith Offord

The Teardrop Island

Keith is going to talk this time about the birds and wildlife of Sri Lanka which will no doubt be up to his usual excellent standard.

Wednesday, 7 March

Gordon Yates

Birdlife through 40 Pennine Years

Another regular at SOS, Gordon will be presenting observations of his patch over the last 40 years.

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.

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

Copy deadline for the Spring 2018 issue is:

1 February 2018

