

# ***The Buzzard***

**Shropshire  
Ornithological Society's  
Quarterly Magazine**



**No. 251**

**Spring 2018**

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# “GDPR” - General Data Protection Regulation 2018

**This is Essential Reading**  
**Please act to ensure you continue to receive the**  
**Buzzard and other communications from SOS**

The Society has previously relied on implied consent (i.e. you did not object) to the maintenance of members' personal data on computer records. The revised General Data Protection Regulation which comes into effect on 18 May 2018 now requires expressed or formal consent and therefore **it is essential that all existing members complete a Consent Form.**

This can be by completing the Form enclosed with this mailing and forwarding it to the Membership Secretary or by accessing the web-site ([www.shropshirebirds.com](http://www.shropshirebirds.com)) and completing the Form and submitting it on line. (Note: Forms completed by e-mail do not require a signature). Please note that in the case of Joint Membership both members must complete the Form.

Please take particular note of the small print at the foot of the Consent Form because if you do not return a completed form without delay the Society might be unable to contact you.

## Welcome to New Members

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

Mr J S	Chambers	Yeaton
Mr R P	Green	Shrewsbury
Mr J	Thornhill	Wellington
Mrs S	Hopkinson	Telford
Mr P	Robson	Pant
Mr & Mrs P	Sharman	Bulkeley Hall Lane
Mrs S G	Mulcock	Shrewsbury
Mr D J	Martin	Dawley
Mr & Mrs R	Bell	Shifnal
Mr I P	Wynn	Wellington
Mr A	Bunn	Donnington

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

## AGM Notices

### **SHROPSHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The 63rd AGM of the Society will be held on Wednesday, 4 April 2018, at Bayston Hill Memorial Hall at 7.15pm, prior to the Indoor Meeting.

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

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

***Helen J Griffiths, Honorary Secretary***

### **SHROPSHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY 2005**

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

### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

Wednesday 4 April 2018  
Bayston Hill Memorial Hall  
(immediately following the Annual General Meeting of Shropshire  
Ornithological Society)

### **AGENDA**

1. Apologies for Absence.
2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 April 2017.
3. Matters Arising.
4. Presentation and Approval of the Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2017.
5. Appointment of Directors.  
Mr B Andrews, Helen J Griffiths and Mr G J Walker retire by rotation and being eligible offer themselves for re-election.
6. Appointment of Independent Examiner.
7. Any Other Business.

***Brian Andrews, Company Secretary***

## Venus Pool Hides - New 'Members Only' Hide & Key Pad Number Change

Following the new hide extensions at Venus Pool, the Board (Management Committee) has decided to make the Memorial Hide a 'Members Only' hide so that members of the Society have an additional benefit as part of their membership. As a consequence, it will be fitted with a key pad entry system similar to that on the current Members' (North) Hide. Initially, the number on the Memorial Hide will be the same as that on the current Members (North) Hide, but both will be changed on 1 April 2018 or shortly thereafter. Subsequently, both numbers will be changed annually.

**1 April 2018 the new number will be  
C8591**

### What's on in March (2018)

#### 20 Tuesday

##### ***Curlew and Lapwing survey project briefing***

New helpers wanted. All welcome. You only need to be able to recognise both birds. Training provided.

7.30pm Methodist Church Hall, Watling Street, Church Stretton

Contact Leo Smith ([leo@leosmith.org.uk](mailto:leo@leosmith.org.uk) 01694 720296),

Nigel Green ([nigel662@btinternet.com](mailto:nigel662@btinternet.com) 01694 722043) or

John Arnfield ([arnfield.2@osu.edu](mailto:arnfield.2@osu.edu) 01694 724170)

#### 29 Thursday

##### ***Red Grouse count project briefing***

New helpers wanted. All welcome. No expertise required. Training provided.

7.30pm National Trust Chalet Pavilion, Carding Mill Valley. Refreshments provided.

Contact: [Abbi.Knight@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:Abbi.Knight@nationaltrust.org.uk) 07807 447309

**Leo Smith**

## Newsletter

First of all, I would like to wish everyone a very Happy New Year (I realise that it is getting a bit late for that now!). I had a busy year in 2017 starting a new job, but it feels like things have calmed down a bit now and I am looking forward to 2018 with survey season kicking off in April.

There were two important publications last year, that I highly recommend having a read of:

Birdtrends (<https://www.bto.org/about-birds/birdtrends/2017>) pulls together all the data collected each year to give us an annual update on how our birds are doing. The big headline is the continued severe decline of the Greenfinch, which worryingly could soon be the latest addition to the 'Red List'.

The State of UK's Birds 2017 (<https://www.bto.org/research-data-services/publications/state-uk-birds/2017/state-uk-birds-2017>) is a fascinating read which covers a huge amount of information, with a particular focus on the effects of climate change on our birds. There are also short reports on the results of several other recent surveys including the National Hen Harrier survey, Breeding Waders of English Upland Farmland and Non-Estuarine Water bird survey.

I feel that I have to emphasize that the BTO could not do all of this without the support and survey efforts of all of its members and supporters across the country, so I'd like to extend a big thank you to all you.

## How you can help with BTO Surveys

Bird Survey is the main survey to cover the breeding season and is entering its 25<sup>th</sup> year in 2018 (though the Foot and Mouth outbreak in 2001 effectively made that a null year).

A significant part of the data that the BTO uses to create these reports comes from the core volunteer surveys that are carried out across the UK. The Breeding

## Breeding Bird Survey

The Breeding Bird Survey takes place in April-June and involved making two visits to a pre-determined site (this had to be determined at random by the BTO to avoid bias in the results). Birds are recorded by sight and sound – in fact sound is especially important as the majority of birds you encounter will be as singing birds in the distance. There are also Waterways Breeding Bird Surveys which started in 2014 and follow the course of a waterway to collect data about birds using these important habitat corridors.

The survey has been running since 1994, and in Shropshire we actually have 6 survey sites that have data for 23 years! The only reason it's not 24 is due to the aforementioned Foot and Mouth outbreak in 2001. This is fantastic long-term data and there are also numerous sites that have data for more than 15 years now, which means Shropshire is making a great long-term contribution to the national data set.

During 2017, 51 Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS) and 10 Waterways Breeding Bird Surveys (WBBS) were carried out. It would be ideal to keep the number of BBS surveys above 50 each year and to keep the long-running survey sites going, so it would be great to have more people involved.

So, if you can identify common birds by sight and sound and can spare two mornings between April and June, please consider getting in touch. It's a way to put your skills to great use and collect vital information about our birds.

You can read more about the survey and the latest report here:

<https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs>

**Training opportunities:** If you would like to take part but you are not sure if its right for you then perhaps some practical training may help. I have had two very kind offers to help train new starters, by highly experienced long-time members of the BBS. So potentially, if there is interest, we could arrange training for people based in the north-west, south and Shrewsbury areas of Shropshire.

Please get in touch if you'd like to get involved or find out more at [bto.shropshire@gmail.com](mailto:bto.shropshire@gmail.com).

*Jonathan Groom*

## Willow Tt in Shropshire

You will know that I have been encouraging people to get out looking for this elusive species since 2016 and I am delighted to report that during 2017, my aim of 20 additional site surveys was smashed and in fact 28 sites were surveyed resulting in 11 positive site records. I am currently working on a webpage with the Shropshire Ornithological Society, where I will be able to put copies of annual reports and share updates. I'm also working on a total list of sites surveyed and results.

I spent some time studying them on my local patch during 2017 and once again I was able to locate and monitor a nest site. In fact, I found two nest sites but one was usurped by Marsh Tits after excavation! Sadly, both of these nests ended up falling victim to woodpeckers. This is sadly the risk taken by nesting in soft, decaying wood. I hope to continue this study next year and hopefully will have more positive results.

Though this species is undergoing enormous decline in the UK, especially in the south where they have seemingly disappeared, the West Midlands and Shropshire still appear to be a stronghold for them. But the only way to be able to notice if the decline is happening here, is to find out where they are. They are under-recorded normally due to their elusive nature and low population densities, so specific surveys are essential.

The surveys are quite easy and involve playing back of their song (most phones are capable of this) at regular intervals throughout a site, in the hope of eliciting a response. If you are interested, particularly if you know a site near you that contains damp woodland or conifer plantations, with a significant proportion of birch or willow with lots of standing deadwood, then please get in touch.

## Swifts in Shrewsbury

Swifts are a favourite of mine, and I always like to remind everyone that you can get involved with recording these wonderful birds in Shropshire. There is a new group covering Shrewsbury coordinated by Holly Woo, Andy Law and Joe Gomme and I was very pleased to be able to meet them this year and join them for a walk around Belle Vue where I was able to show them some nest sites. I was even lucky enough to have swifts nesting on the house that I began renting last year (I was able to view the nest with an endoscope camera and submit as a Nest record – two chicks fledged!). Finding out where they are nesting is vitally important so that we can try and preserve these sites (the Flax mill is a perfect example of this, where swift boxes have been installed as part of its ongoing redevelopment). Holly can be contacted on [shrewsburyswifts@gmail.com](mailto:shrewsburyswifts@gmail.com) and would be grateful for reports of areas with nesting swifts, and can also let you know if any swift-related events are taking place. Swift Awareness Week is running this year from the 16 to 23 June and there are going to be some events planned for Shrewsbury. We are lucky to have so many of these amazing aerial specialists in our towns here in Shropshire, but they are under considerable threat in the UK so the more we do for our local birds, the better. Thank you for reading and as always, please don't hesitate to get in touch if you are interested in anything that I have discussed or if I can be of assistance. I am also happy to help with promoting any local bird-related studies or projects.

**Jonathan Groom**  
([bto.shropshire@gmail.com](mailto:bto.shropshire@gmail.com))

## National Swift Awareness Week

**16 – 23 June  
2018**

While swifts and many of our other summer migrants are still in Africa, here we are starting to prepare for the first UK Swift



## UK Swift Awareness Week

Awareness Week which will be held from 16 to 23 June. Swift groups across the UK are arranging a wide range of events – evening walks and talks, open garden events where visitors can watch swifts, celebrating swifts with local schools, displays in libraries and local fairs. There are lots of opportunities to bring swifts to people's attention and whilst SOS members know well the differences between house martins, sand martins, swallows and swifts there

are a number of people who would like to be more interested in birds but struggle to work out which is which. It is only when you know what something is that you can start to become really interested and then want to work to ensure it is here for future generations. So perhaps Swift Awareness Week could be an opportunity for you, as an SOS member to run an evening walk in your town or village – these events are a great introduction to urban birding and proof that you do not need binoculars or need to travel far to enjoy our wonderful summer visitors.

Shropshire Swift Group will be running a number of events but cannot cover all of Shropshire in just one week. So please think if you could do something where you live to raise awareness of these birds whose numbers have dropped by 50% in the last 20 years and continue to decline at the rate of 3% a year. Unless more people starting speaking up for swifts – and other urban birds – whose nests are destroyed by unsympathetic building work or blocked out by scaffolding (and yes even in the small area of Shropshire that I cover I am aware of at least one incident each year) and asking for more provision for biodiversity in all the new build that is springing up around us all our lives will be much poorer.

*If you plan to run an event or are interested in doing so and want advice/suggestions please get in touch [shropshireswifts@gmail.com](mailto:shropshireswifts@gmail.com) . You can see more about the week at <http://actionforswifts.blogspot.co.uk/2018/01/2018-uk-swift-awareness-week-16-23-june.html>*

**Peta Sams**  
**Shropshire Swift Group**

## Hawfinch invasion

What began as a ‘trickle’ in early October 2017, rapidly developed into a flood. It was literally raining Hawfinch into the UK in unprecedented numbers.

Initially, most of the reports involved fly-overs, seemingly as the birds were searching for areas to settle down and feed. Soon after, all the historic hotspots were starting to yield sightings of feeding birds as Hawfinch feasted on their favoured food – Hornbeam or Yew seeds.

In Shropshire, the first record, a single, came from Dothill, Telford on 9 Oct, followed by intermittent fly-over sightings during the rest of that month, with up to 18 birds over the following sites: Venus Pool, Whixall Floods and Cantlop. During early November, the range of locations expanded, and included Brown Clee, Black Hill, Telford Town Centre, random gardens and then what has been historically a favoured hotspot, Whitcliffe Common! The slopes below the common down towards the river hold good numbers of Hornbeams and numerous Hawfinch were seen here daily throughout November and December. At least 63 were captured by photograph in flight on 29 Dec after being spooked by a Sparrowhawk and there were undoubtedly many more present in the Ludlow area.

The Yew seed connection found favour as local observers checked out promising sites during December. Feeding birds were seen in Shrewsbury and Newport cemeteries plus Monkhopton, Fitz, Ashford Bowdler and Meole Village churchyards, where they gave excellent opportunities for photography. Frequently mobile, they have been undoubtedly overlooked at other locations, as a prolonged 'stake out' can be necessary to guarantee sightings. Why have they arrived? The most likely reason is crop failures in their usual wintering areas in central Europe. With the absence of Waxwings this year, they certainly control, and will continue for a while yet, to hold centre stage on the birder's agenda. If you hadn't seen a Hawfinch in the county, there had never been a better opportunity...



*Jim Almond Words and Image*

## Hawfinch sightings

With the abundance of Hawfinch reported. The rarities committee have adopted the approach that the first record for each sighting will require a rarity form submitting. Subject to acceptance, all subsequent records for the site will be logged as per normal.

*Ian Grant, County Bird Recorder*

## Nest box Surveys and the County Bird Report

Writing the species accounts for the County Bird Report is both a pleasure and a responsibility for the volunteer compilers. It is however often a challenge to keep accounts for the commoner species fresh and interesting. Many records are submitted either directly to the County Bird Recorder or via BirdTrack which simply list the species, date and a count. Anecdotal or extra information is not often included by recorders. For species which readily take to nest boxes, there is the potential to include nesting details in the species accounts which would add to both the scientific data and make the articles more relevant. In fact, there must be a wealth of information gathered year after year, by the nest box schemes around the county for species such as Great and Blue Tits, together with other typical nest box users such as Pied Flycatcher and less usual species like Redstart, Nuthatch, Coal, Willow and Marsh Tits.

Please would members who have access to, or who actively manage nest box schemes, submit summaries of their annual records to the County Recorder and make them available for use in the Annual Bird Report.

If you have a nest box scheme of at least 10 boxes and are happy to provide summary information each year, then please include a summary of your nest box success by species in your records to the County Bird Recorder (ideally via BirdTrack at the end of the breeding season), with basic information about your scheme.

The scheme information should include location (site name), grid reference, the number of boxes in your scheme, habitat notes including the predominant tree and shrub species, and the species you have recorded using your boxes. The annual summary information of interest, is, for each species: number of nesting attempts; first egg dates; average clutch size; number of chicks hatched; number of chicks fledged; totals of nests failing at egg stage, those failing at chick stage and those where at least one chick fledged. Other anecdotal information about predation attempts, multi-species broods (e.g. blue and great tit chicks in the same box), and any other notes would be gratefully received.

Sites will be treated as fully confidential if requested and not mentioned directly in the Bird Report.

As in all fieldwork, please make sure the welfare of the birds using your boxes is your first priority. Most species should be left alone at least until their clutches are complete, and it is unwise, for all species, with the exception of Pied Flycatcher, to disturb females on eggs or brooding small young. Particular care should be taken with Redstart, where the recommendation is to check boxes only when you know the female is not in the box.

All contributors will be acknowledged in the Annual Report where data is used. Don't forget the County Bird Report Editor is always keen to receive accounts for publication in the Annual Report, so analyses or accounts of your own nest box scheme would be considered for publication.

Please help us to improve your Annual Bird Report for these species, and if you don't already operate a nest box scheme, why not consider one?

**Gerry Thomas**  
(County Bird Report Editor from January 2018)

## Charles Roberts-Gawen's Diary: update

In last summer's issue of Buzzard (248:13-16) I gave a brief account of the discovery of the handwritten Volume 2 of the Journal of Field Ornithology of Charles Roberts-Gawen (1860-1940). Mr Nigel McGewan found the diary, which spans June 1888 to March 1911, in his late mother's library and kindly passed it to the SOS who handed it on to me for documentation.

The SOS sponsored the copy-typing of the 327-page, ca. 60,000 words and I have checked and processed it all. Peter Tucker has kindly formatted and designed the work into a very presentable document, retaining Gawen's pagination. By the time this note appears the entire diary should be online on Histo: [www.lanius.org.uk/histo](http://www.lanius.org.uk/histo) also available via links from the SOS website. From Histo go to the main 'All Historical Documents' drop-down menu and scroll down to 1911 where the diary's text file is accompanied by an Introduction which includes several useful indexes and appendices.

Charles Gawen, the third son of John Charles Burton Borough, began Vol.2 of his diary while resident at the family home on the Chetwynd estate near Newport, on 11 June 1888. Later that month he describes a collecting trip to the Scillies notably to bring home nestling Larus gulls which were his abiding interest - he documented plumages changes as they matured. In 1890 he spent much of January to March at Downton in Wiltshire, for reasons unclear, after which he was back at Chetwynd until the death of his father in November 1894. At that point, aged 34, he moved south to Spring Grove, Milverton in Somerset where the diary entries resume in November 1895 and there is a gap in the diary between 1898 and 1908; he married in 1901. Entries continue sparingly and conclude with four pages written on 10 March 1911 leaving many empty pages. The whereabouts of Vol.1 are unknown and it is possible that he began a Vol. 3 in another notebook; he died in 1940. The ornithological Societies of the Scillies, Somerset and Wiltshire have been notified of those parts of the diary which relate to them.

Gawen lived at a time when Land Rails (Corncrakes) were common, Snipe were breeding on the still numerous un-drained wetlands and within living memory of when Black Grouse were to be found on the nearby "Flashbrook Common" (and where was that?). He logged a few rare birds close to home

such as Hawfinches, then quite common, and he reported a Black Redstart, a Grey Phalarope and a Black Tern in Shropshire. He wrote of Black Grouse, Stone Curlew, both Great Grey and Red-backed Shrikes in Wiltshire and Woodlark and Cirl Bunting in Somerset.

Most of his observations relate to common species including migrants. He was diligent in recording migrant arrival dates and most of his Shropshire first record dates, between 1886 and 1891, are additions to those previously in SMAD (the Shropshire Migrant Arrival Database – available on Histo). A total of 94 of his first recorded dates have been added to that data set – a valuable contribution in themselves. Referring to Blackcap in 1896 (p.294) he wrote “I believe this species has been observed in England during the winter”, an early reference to a habit also mentioned by Beckwith in 1889 (Tucker & Tucker 2017, Beckwith’s Birds of Nineteenth Century Shropshire p.239) which is perhaps the origin of Gawen’s remark.

He counted nests at a handful of rookeries and the Chetwynd Park colony had over 300 nests 1889-1891 with 356 in the final year, among the very few known rookery nest counts in the county during the nineteenth century. They compare with the largest rookery found in the county in the 2008 Shropshire Rookery Survey – the colony at Kynnersley then numbered a modest 195 nests (Martin Grant to this author, in prep.).

Charles Gawen’s diary is a valuable contribution to our understanding of Shropshire’s birds in the closing stages of the nineteenth century. Perhaps one day Vol. 1 will turn up.

*John Tucker*

## The long-term future of ‘Histo’

I began gathering material for what would later become ‘Histo’ in 2006 by scanning all the late Colin Wright’s collection of Shropshire Bird Reports. I extended my collection, notably all the bird-related work by the Caradoc and Severn Valley Field Club (1892-1972) along with much else.

It was my brother Peter who suggested that my collection should be shared through the vehicle of a website, launched in 2012, which became Histo; he deals with the website and it now includes ‘everything’ known to have been published on the birds of Shropshire. Histo was especially useful to many writers of species accounts for the forthcoming Birds of Shropshire. However, the process of adding new material to the website, recently published and historical work recently come to light, stalled in 2017 as Peter and I concentrated on the Beckwith book.

As for the long-term future of Histo I cannot continue doing it forever and we have decided that it will be brought up to date to the end of this year, to coincide with the publication of Birds of Shropshire. At that stage the website will continue online but ‘frozen’ with no further changes. The paper version will

remain with me and ultimately go to the SOS's archive, in anticipation that there may be no-one to take it over.

The web site "The Historical Ornithology of Shropshire"

[www@lanius.org.uk/sos](http://www@lanius.org.uk/sos)

*John Tucker*

## Lord Harlech's Game Books

Although studying listings of avian corpses is a poor substitute for watching live examples in the wild, it can provide valuable historical insights into bird habitats, distribution and abundance. No published accounts of the birds of Shropshire mention the presence of Red Grouse near Oswestry, but a close reading of game books from the Brogyntyn Estate reveals that in the years 1908 to 1933 grouse were shot at Cefn-y-Maes, Cefn Coch, Selattyn Hill and Brogyntyn itself, all of which lie within the county. How different these places must then have been!

The game books in question (there are three; they run from 1882 to 1933) figured in a recent auction of the contents of Glyn Cywarch, Gwynedd, the family home of the Harlechs, former owners of Brogyntyn. Alerted in March to the inclusion of the game books in the sale at Bonhams, the London auction house, an informal group of Shropshire and Welsh bird-watchers, anxious that the books might disappear into a private collection, contacted the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth. Having established that the Library intended to bid for the books, the group was keen to make sure that it was successful, so they offered to donate funds additional to those the institution intended to commit. In the end bidding closed at £1,500, three times the auctioneer's estimate, and the group's support was instrumental in the successful acquisition.

The Library's interest lay not only in supplementing its existing collection of gamebooks, including earlier ones from Brogyntyn, but in the significance of these books as social history. They provide a window into a highly privileged world. How different life must then have been! (Not least of course for those who ran around looking after Lord Harlech and his peers.)

Take 1908 for example: Lord Harlech started with a shoot at Ruabon on 18 August, where he and seven other guns accounted for a total of 693 Red Grouse. He participated in seven more grouse shoots from 2 to 11 September, at Inchrory and Invermark (Cairngorms) and Delnadamp (now on the Balmoral Estate), with stags stalked on 1st, 9th and 12th. By 19 September Lord Harlech was back home at Brogyntyn, shooting there on the 19th and 21st, before travelling to Glyn Cywarch for another shoot on the 29th. He participated in 10 shoots in October, at Brogyntyn, Orwell (presumably Orwell Park, near Ipswich), where 881 Grey Partridge were shot in three days, and Barnwell (Northants), and six shoots in November, at Brogyntyn and Castle Hill (is this in Shropshire?). On 3 December, at Cound (Acton Burnell), he and

six other guns accounted for 1,605 Pheasants in a 'Record shoot. Very high birds'; Pitchford yielded a mere 104 the following day. Lord Harlech shot a further eight times in December, including at Derrycarne (a Harlech property in Ireland). He shot there again in January, one of 11 times in a month which also included Rangemore (Staffs), Welbeck (Notts) and Powis, as well as Brogyntyn. The season ended there with 75 cock Pheasants shot on 1 February. In some years there was then some Salmon fishing in Scotland. In 1904 Lord Harlech fished on 10 days from 18 February to 3 March, catching 26 fish weighing up to 16 pounds.

Lord Harlech's shooting companions in this, and in other seasons, included a fair number who held no title or rank, but many came out of the same drawer as Harlech himself, including Lords Hamilton, Dalhousie, Onslow, Mar, Maidstone, Lilford, Denbigh, Fortescue, Ebrington, Dartmouth, Kenyon, Winchilsea, Maidstone, Howe and Powis, the Duke of Portland, Earl of Enniskillen and Lady Wickham. A score of lords (and ladies) served by an army of nameless gamekeepers, butlers, cooks, maids and other retainers.

If you are interested in viewing the game books, it is a simple matter to secure a reader's ticket, but be sure to visit the Library's website for further details. I suggest that you take the train from Shrewsbury and sit on the right-hand side where, in spring and summer, you can view the Osprey nest at Dyfi Junction in passing.

**Tom Wall**

## Kestrels in Shropshire

The Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) used to be one of the UK's most familiar birds of prey. However, pressures from a number of challenges to the population have led to the decline of the Kestrel, resulting in it being moved to amber conservation status in the UK. The number of the present breeding population is estimated at between 36 and 50 thousand pairs – approximately a third of the known historical population for the UK. In Shropshire a joint programme has been established to look specifically at the state of the Kestrel in Shropshire, and in particular the success of breeding pairs. The project will hopefully also feed into national understanding about the reasons why the Kestrel has seen such a decline, and also aid in their recovery.



The objectives of the project are to: -

- obtain statistical data of nest productivity by following Kestrel nesting attempts.
- gain insights into the survival rate of young birds once fledged, by ringing sufficient young birds with BTO and unique colour rings to achieve robust data records.
- identify the number of birds ringed as fledglings that move into new breeding territories in Shropshire (and their success in breeding).
- Estimate the survival rates of adults by the re-trapping of adults, as per BTO guidelines.
- consider the reasons why Kestrels may be more productive in one area, as compared with another.
- strategically place nest boxes to improve potential nesting success.

**Colin Gunnell** Words and Image

## Red Grouse Counts on the Long Mynd



**Photo © Jill Pakenham FRPS**

Red Grouse are restricted to heathland, and the Long Mynd (and Stiperstones) hold the only population in England between Dartmoor and the Peak District. Nationally, the population is falling, and it is on the *Amber List of Birdsof Conservation Concern*. The Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project and Strettons area Community Wildlife Group, supported by the National Trust, have organised a count each year since 2011, and it is being repeated in 2018. It will update the results of previous annual counts, and the results help the National Trust's management of the heathland to provide suitable habitat. More helpers are needed, please.

All of the Grouse territories are on the flat heathland plateau, and many are close to the road, so helpers don't have to leave it, although people who want to wander off the beaten track can do so. Counts take place around sunset on every Thursday evening between 5 April and 10 May, and last about an hour and a half. Counts will also be held on Monday or Tuesday evenings between these dates. The Grouse are conspicuous at this time of day, so anyone can help. You don't need to be an expert. The methodology is simple, and it's your chance to get close-up views of this wonderful bird and see other moorland specialties and birds of prey. Please help.

People who have helped before have been sent a report of the results, and have been asked to help again. Anyone who wants to help this year is invited to a project briefing at:

**7.30pm on Thursday 29 March 2018**

National Trust's Chalet Pavilion in Carding Mill Valley

Refreshments provided. For further information see the Community Wildlife Groups website [www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk) or contact Abbi Knight, the National Trust's placement ranger [Abbi.Knight@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:Abbi.Knight@nationaltrust.org.uk) 07807 447309

**Leo Smith**

## Curlew and Lapwing in the Strettons Area

Lapwing and Curlew have both suffered a massive contraction in range and population decline in the last 20 years or so, nationally and locally. Curlew has been described as the UK's highest bird conservation priority, as we have an estimated 28% of the European breeding population, and 19 – 27% of the world population.

Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group and Church Stretton branch of the Shropshire Ornithological Society organised a survey in 2017, looking for both species, in an area bounded by Leebotwood, Marshbrook, Shipton and Church Preen. It complemented similar surveys carried out by other Community Wildlife Groups in different parts of the Shropshire Hills.

This area was divided into 30 2x2 kilometer squares and surveyors were asked to make three visits, around 1 April, 1 May and mid-June, with each visit lasting around three hours. Forty-three local people carried out survey work, and in total spent over 330 hours doing it.

The populations found in 2017 were estimated at:-

- **Curlew: definitely 4 pairs, probably 6, possibly 7 and perhaps more**
- **Lapwing: 8 - 9 pairs, perhaps more**

A detailed report of the methodology and results has been supplied to all the participants. It can be downloaded from the Community Wildlife Groups website, [www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk)

## Plans for 2018 and the Future

The survey will be repeated in 2018 and future years, so we can get a better picture of the population and distribution of Lapwing and Curlew, work with farmers to promote conservation, and organise nest protection for Curlews.

New participants are needed in 2018. It's easy and enjoyable, simple instructions will be provided, and there's a fieldwork training session for anyone that wants it. If you want to help, or would like further information, please come to the meeting at:



**7.30pm on Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> March 2018**  
Methodist Church Hall, Watling Street, Church Stretton,

or contact Leo Smith ([leo@leosmith.org.uk](mailto:leo@leosmith.org.uk) 01694 720296), Nigel Green ([nigel662@btinternet.com](mailto:nigel662@btinternet.com) 01694 722043) or John Arnfield ([arnfield.2@osu.edu](mailto:arnfield.2@osu.edu) 01694 724170)

**Leo Smith** Words and Image

## Field Trips

### **WWT Martinmere** **Sunday, 3 December 2017**

A group of 34 arrived at WWT Martinmere, after a coach journey from Shrewsbury. The weather was cold, with low clouds, threatening with rain, so all were wrapped up against possible adverse conditions but in fact anything bad waited for another day. A few decided to have a coffee before braving the elements.

It had been a few years since the last coach trip to this reserve, and in the meantime several changes were found to have taken place. The old long Swan Hide which had been looking its age, and had been demolished and replaced by a couple of screens. However, another large hide had been built to the right of the Focus Optics hide. Two thirds were enclosed and heated, and a third open. This was a great addition to the reserve.

From this new addition, the Swan Lake was looked over, and amongst the birds noted were plenty of Whooper Swans, Greylag Geese, some Canada Geese, Mallard, Wigeon, Pintail, Shelduck, Shoveler, a few male Pochard, Coot, Cormorant, Lapwing, Black-tailed Godwit and Ruff. Amongst the gulls' present were Black-headed, Great Black-backed, Herring, Lesser Black-backed, and also single examples of Common Gull and Mediterranean Gull. A walk was taken towards the large Harrier hide, and along the way, some of the birds noted were Carrion Crow, Magpie, Woodpigeon, Blue Tit, and Great Tit. At the hide where a feeding station was placed, Blackbird, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, and Long-tailed Tit were feeding, while Moorhen and Pheasant picked up the scraps. A short walk to the Harrier hide showed a difficult view due to the light, the sun being ahead, but on the pools Gadwall, Tufted Duck, and Goldeneye were viewed, together with a few Little Grebe. From the next hide, while we were having some lunch, a Marsh Harrier was seen quartering the reed beds, and then a couple of Buzzard were noted, perched on fence posts. A Sparrowhawk flew across the fields. In the ditches, a Little Egret was seen, and then a Kestrel was seen hovering looking for food.

The return walk didn't really give up any more notable birds. A return visit to the new hide brought views of quite a few Pink-footed Geese grazing in a far field. A walk towards the Ron Barker hide proved quiet but at one of the hides, around another feeding station, were some Tree Sparrow which were really good to see, and a Wren. Once at the Ron Barker hide, a Mute Swan was seen in the ditches. A Kingfisher was noted perched in a large bush, and was seen fishing using another bush as a second perch. Also, a Water Rail was seen briefly in the ditch in front of the hide. Returning to the new hide, the group came together in order to enjoy the Swan Feeding time, always enjoyed by all. As the time neared 4pm, people began to return to the coach, for the journey home. On the way, flights of Pink-footed Geese were seen returning to the reserve for roosting, having fed in the nearby fields during the day.

Other birds seen during the day were Teal, Grey Heron, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Stock Dove, Coal Tit, Dunnock, Robin, Fieldfare, Jackdaw, Starling, Reed Bunting, Merlin, Redwing, Rook, Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush, Stonechat, and Treecreeper, a total of approximately 65.

It was concluded that another enjoyable day had been had by all.

***Sue Brealey***

### ***Colemere Sunday, 7 January 2018***

On a very cold day, but dry, a small group of four, including a new member, started to arrive at Colemere for a half day walk. While we waited in the car park, Blackbird, Blue Tit Chaffinch, Great Tit and Redwing were noted scurrying around the area, and a Kestrel was hovering nearby. Once everyone had arrived, we set off to walk anti-clockwise around the lake.

After going through the first gate, we started to scan the lake. Along with the usual Canada Geese, Mallard, Coot and Black-headed Gull, there were what was at first thought to be Tufted Duck, but on closer inspection the small group proved to be a male and two female Goldeneye, looking really good in the light. The marshy area to the right, did not appear to show any other birds, and the group continued towards the wood. This appeared to be rather quiet, possibly a result of the low temperatures and dog walkers. However, a Great Spotted Woodpecker was spotted as well as Woodpigeon. A check of the nearby fields found nothing of note except for Carrion Crow and Jackdaw. The walk carried on through the wood, and then climbed up towards the canal, and the Yell Bridge. Again, the woods were very quiet, but going down towards the lake a Robin was seen feeding on the ground. Further along a Song Thrush was seen. After going past the Little Mill, a large group of Goosander were seen in a bay on the mere, and then a group of Cormorant were seen fishing. A Grey Heron was seen on the far side of the lake.

Unfortunately, during the rest of the walk the number of birds around was really low. So after having enjoyed a nice walk, the group finished it and then went back to our homes. A total of about 21 species.

**Sue Brealey**

## Not only ... Night Heron at The Quarry ... but also.

A lot of interest arose when a Black-crowned Night Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax*, appeared at Venus Pool and later at The Quarry in Shrewsbury in April and May last year (*Buzzard* 249:2-5) and it prompts me to mention some other records from 'The Quarry.'

While the exact date is unclear, Thomas Pennant (1726-1779), one for Britain's early ornithologists, records that Great Britain's first Little Bittern was found (and undoubtedly shot) at The Quarry, in around 1800. Somewhat later *Eddoes' Journal* of 25 May 1847 relates the tale of a Nightingale which was singing in The Quarry and how a bird-catcher, who was attempting to catch it, was threatened with arrest if he continued. There was then no law against it – perhaps a local constable of some kind took it upon himself to make the threat.

Beckwith relates that the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker "*is found of frequenting the vicinity of the town; and it is often to be found around Shrewsbury, and a brood was reared in the Quarry there in 1882.*" He also tells that "*Tree Creepers are always to be seen among the large trees in the Quarry walks in Shrewsbury, and in 1889, a pair chose and extraordinary nesting-place. A notice-board is affixed on the fish-hatching hut and behind this they built and reared their young regardless of the people who were constantly passing. On June 10<sup>th</sup>, being Whit-Monday, a Fête was held there, and I was pleased to see the old ones feeding their young ones, though in flying to and fro they had*

to pass over the heads of the crowd which thronged the walks on that occasion.” Beckwith again, in his 1878 ‘List of Birds found near Shrewsbury’, noted that the Nuthatch “*nests every year in The Quarry.*” That Shrewsbury list also mentions, under Long-tailed Tit, that “*I have seen all five kinds of Titmouse in the Quarry Walks.*”

At the end of the nineteenth century there was a sizable rookery in the trees along the riverside Quarry Walk. Forrest, in an article in the *North Western Naturalist* in 1928 wrote “*I can remember fifty or sixty years ago [so 1860s or 1870s] practically the whole of the Rooks in Shrewsbury nested in the Quarry.*” At that time there were “*well over a hundred nests*” and the birds were “*so numerous that it was not safe to walk in the bottom avenue*” (Lloyd, 1939). The colony moved away from the Walk across the river towards Kingsland at some stage in the 1890s (Shrewsbury’s Rookeries, *in prep.* for SBR) and later died out.

There is the only county record of a male Red-winged Blackbird, *Agelaius phoeniceus*, of North America on 13 July 1926 (CSVFC Record, 1926:5) – an escape obviously but another bird for the Quarry List.

A Pheasant was noted at the Quarry in the winter of 1891-92 (Beckwith once more, in 1893) but how unusual that is compared with today, as with all these, I cannot say. There may be other records for The Quarry lurking in Histo but regrettably most of its material is not word-searchable so do please let me know of any other Quarry records you may come across.

I seldom visit the Quarry, so I have no idea of the modern species list for the place – does anyone keep one? If you visit The Quarry frequently it would be a worthwhile project to produce a species list for the place, perhaps using *BirdTrack* to store your sightings, as a record of what occurs there these days - a worthwhile list for *Buzzard* - and posterity.

References. All the above can be tracked on Histo.

**John Tucker**

## Shropshire Rookeries re-survey NOT this year

I had planned to organise a re-survey of rookeries this year, a neat decade since the search I organised as SRS08. I have instead decided to concentrate on a final year of Histo - see the note elsewhere in this issue. I intend to organise the re-survey next year so do please keep an eye (and ear) open for rookeries this year with a view to reporting them, just the location and nest-count, next year. Thanks.

**John Tucker**

## Bird Notes

### October, November, December 2017

**Mute Swan** The highest reported count was 11 at Stirchley Grange on 1 Nov. Ten were present near Cound on 6 Dec.

**Whooper Swan** Two were present on the Mere, Ellesmere on 7 Oct.

### Pink-footed Goose



A skein of 70 flew over Whixall Moss on 11 Nov and further movement noted on 1 Dec when 60 flew over Trefonen and 42 over Gobowen. Up to six were present on Whixall canal floods at the end of Oct.

**Mandarin Duck** 20 were present at Stocking Nursery, Bromfield on 5 Dec and 12 at Hardwick Pool, Hardwick on 5 Nov.

**Wigeon** Good numbers reported at Venus Pool during November with a maximum count of 110 on 2 Nov. 72 were on the Whixall canal floods on 31 Dec.

**Gadwall** The highest counts came during Nov, at Sambrook Mill on 19 Nov (26), Ellerton on 21 Nov (21) and Venus Pool 16 Dec (18).

**Common Teal** 150+ were present at Hilley Farm, Pentre on 4 Oct, 144 on Whixall canal floods on 31 Dec and 62 at Venus Pool on 22 Dec.

**Pintail** The highest count was 39 on the Whixall canal floods on 31 Dec.

**Shoveler** Reported throughout the period, the highest count was at Venus Pool on 2 Nov when 48 were present. 35 were seen on the Whixall canal floods on 31 Dec.

**Pochard** Seen from 6 Nov onwards with maxima at Venus Pool 28 Nov (11), Shavington Big Pool 19 Nov (6), Priorslee Lake 28 Nov (4).

**Goldeneye** Reported from three sites with maxima at The Mere, Ellesmere 30 Dec (14).

**Goosander** Multiple sites had notable counts, including: Colemere (25) on 23 Nov, the Mere, Ellesmere (25) on 30 Dec and Holmer Lake Stirchley (15) on 27 Dec.

**Red Grouse** Just one report received of a single at Pole Cottage, Long Mynd on 8 Nov.

**Grey Partridge** A single report of 11 at Dodecote Grange, Childs Ercall on 2 Oct.

**Black-crowned Night Heron** The long staying American Night Heron continued to be seen spasmodically in the Dingle, Shrewsbury, although presumably the same bird was seen at Mousecroft Pool near Shrewsbury on 9 Oct. After concern from the public regarding poor health, the bird was taken into care at Cuan Wildlife Rescue on 27 Nov where it remained at the end of the year.

### **Cattle Egret**



One was present at Venus Pool on 26 Oct.

**Little Egret** Three were seen at Venus Pool on 10 Oct and one or two continued to be seen there until 24 Nov. Singles seen by the Severn at Ironbridge/Leighton late Oct, also at Whitcliffe, Newport, Trefonen, Aston on Clun and Whittington during the period.

### **Great White Egret**

An impressive number of records for the period with one individual seen regularly at Tittenley Pool from Mid Oct to early Nov. Other records in Nov came from Wroxeter and Kempton, then one was at Strefford/Upper Affcot on 24 Dec.



**Marsh Harrier** A juvenile was present at Wall Farm, Kynnersley on 5 Nov.

**Hen Harrier** Occasional reports during Oct and Dec of one at Whixall Moss/the canal floods. A single seen at Wild Moor, Long Mynd on 31 Oct.

**Common Crane** One was reported in a rough ploughed field near Wem on 1 Dec.

**Golden Plover** Reported from eleven locations; the largest flocks were seen at Cherrington Moor (300) on 28 Dec, Llanfair Hill (150) on 26 Nov and High Park (100) 6 Oct.

**Ringed Plover** One was present at Wood Lane on 26 Oct.

**Dunlin** A single was present at Venus Pool on 24 Nov.

**Green Sandpiper** Three were present at Ightfield on the 3 Oct. Another was seen at Cantlop on 22 Oct and 2 Nov.

**Common Redshank** One was at Venus Pool on 27 Oct.

**Woodcock** Two were seen near Tibberton on 23 Dec and one near Shrewsbury on 6 Nov.

**Common Snipe** The majority of reports came from Venus Pool where birds were seen most days, up to seven on 22 Dec. Polemere produced the highest count of 22 on 11 Nov.

**Barn Owl** Seven reports from five locations throughout the period. Seen at Tibberton, Lydbury North, West Felton, Roden and Bridgnorth.

**Merlin** Singles seen at Cantlop, Longden, Whixall Moss, Wall Farm, Kynnersley, Lower Dinchope, Choulton and Badger.

**Great Grey Shrike** One was present on Black Hill on 15-17 Oct.

**Willow Tit** Reported from just two locations: Eardington Nature Reserve and Whixall Moss

**Swallow** The latest reports were on 3 Oct, with two over Pentre and then on 4 Oct when one was seen at Leighton.

**House Martin** Ten were seen over Chirbury on 1 Oct and the final report of a single came from Bromfield on 9 Oct.

**Blackcap** Eight were seen in Cae Glas park, Oswestry on 28 Dec. Two were present in an Ironbridge garden 9 – 11 Dec and singles were reported from five other locations.

**Fieldfare** Numerous reports, with the first report from Hilley Farm Pentre, where 50 were seen on 4 Oct. The highest site counts (during Nov/Dec) were: Wall Farm, Kynnersley (350), Cherrington Moor (250) and Cantlop (213).

**Redwing** Arriving on 4 Oct with the Fieldfares, with 50 present at Hilley Farm on 4 Oct. Impressive counts came from Cantlop where 945 were present on 31 Oct and 387 on 1 Nov.

**Black Redstart** One was present on the quarry buildings Titterstone Clee on 6 Dec.

**Tree Sparrow** Seen daily near Choulton with a maximum of 18 on 9 Nov.

**Pied Wagtail** A 'quietly spectacular' pre-roost gathering of c400 birds was seen near the Welsh Bridge, Shrewsbury on 25 Nov.

**Brambling** Just two double-figure groups reported: 10 at Pole Cottage, Long Mynd on 8 Nov and 10 at Tir-y-coed, near Molverley Green on 28 Dec. Smaller numbers reported across the county.

## Hawfinch



See separate article for a summary of the birds seen locally during the national irruption..

**Lesser Redpoll** Most records came from Whixall Moss, where 80 birds were trapped and ringed there on 14 Oct. Other double-figure groups seen at Tibberton (10) on 19 Nov, Wyre Forest (13) on 6 Dec and Ludlow (10) on 24 Dec.

**Common Crossbill** Reported from four locations with highest counts: 14 at Cefn Coch on 22 Dec and 4 at Black Hill on 25 Nov.

**Siskin** Numerous reports around the county with the Aston on Clun area producing a maximum count of 110 on 10 Dec.

**Snow Bunting** One was present on Black Hill on 5 Nov. Seen on the track near a clearfell above Sowdley Wood

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

*Jim Almond Words and Images*

## 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, 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.

### Wednesday, 4 April

#### **Annual General Meeting followed by**

#### **Alan Heath: Shropshire Birds - A Diverse Picture**

Most of you will know Alan and appreciate his interesting and instructive talks about our local area. We look forward to hearing his latest exploits.

### Wednesday, 3 October

#### **Chris Ward: Wildlife Down Under**

Centred on the rich and varied habitats of SE Queensland, New South Wales and the 'Top End', visited during a 3 month winter experience, this will be an extravaganza of colourful, rare and iconic australian wildlife. Enjoy birds, mammals, reptiles, insects and others.

## Indoor Meetings (Church Stretton)

The Methodist Church Hall, Watling Street, Church Stretton 7:30 pm

### February 26,

#### **Keith Offord: Roadrunner Country**

For a first wildlife-watching trip to the USA it would be difficult to beat the southern states in spring and no better a starting point than Texas. This massive state straddles both the east and west with a finger of land pointing down into Mexico. Moist woodlands in the east gradually give way to more arid stony desert in the west, bordered by the magnificent Rio Grande. In addition to a fabulous array of resident bird species (including such specialities as Greater Roadrunner and Green Jay), springtime sees the massed arrival of travellers from the south, including multitudes of warblers, hummingbirds, flycatchers and raptors. There are alligators, coyotes and rattlesnakes as well. This talk takes a close look at some of the most exciting wildlife of the southern states, following the Gulf coast right down to Mexico, up to the Big Bend National Park then into the beautiful Edwards Plateau. For more on Keith's work, see <http://www.keithofford.co.uk/>.

### March 26,

#### **Philip Migridge: Finland Through the Seasons**

Finland is a fantastic country for wildlife. Phil has visited many times through the seasons and he will show us birds, including birds of prey, grouse species, owls and a variety of northern passerines. He will also show us bears and other mammals. For more on Phil's work, see <http://www.willridgeimages.co.uk/>.

## Upcoming Field Trips

**Sunday, 25 March**

**Moore Nature Reserve**

**Organiser: Sue Brealey**

By car

Full Day – Meet at the Car Park at 9.30am

Post Code for SatNav - WA46XE

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>

**Sunday, 8 April**

**Bury Ditches**

**Leader: Dave Pearce**

By car

Half Day – Meet at the Forestry Commission Car Park at 9.00am Grid Ref: SO 325837

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](http://www.forestry.gov.uk) & follow links England, West Midlands, Bury Ditches

**Sunday, 20 May**

**RSPB Ynys Hir**

**Organiser: Sue Brealey**

By car

Full Day – Meet at Car Park at 10.00am Grid Ref: SN682961 Post Code SY20 8TA

Directions: Take A487 from Machynlleth, towards Aberystwyth, turning right just after Glandyfi. It is about a mile to the car park. See [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

**Sunday, 10 June**

**Queen's Head Canal**

**Leader: Allan Dawes**

By car

Half Day – Meet at Car Park at 9am Grid Ref: SJ338268

Directions: Turn right from the A5 if coming from Shrewsbury or left if from Oswestry, at Queen's Head. Use the canal car park. This will be a bird-watching walk along the canal, looking in particular for spring migrants

**July and August: No field trips**

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*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](mailto:buzzard@shropshirebirds.co.uk)

**Copy deadline for the Summer 2018 issue is: 1 May 2018**

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