



# *The Buzzard*

Shropshire  
Ornithological Society's  
Quarterly Magazine



**No 256**

**Summer 2019**

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## Welcome to New Members

Miss B	Cousens	Little Ryton	Mr D	Taylor	Marton
Mr & Mrs J	Walker	Much Wenlock	Mr.R D	Taylor	Marton
Mr & Mrs G	Roberts	Shrewsbury	Mr I M	Donnellan	Broseley
Mr M W	Rogers	Highley	Mr &Mrs C	Lloyd	Muxton
Dr M & Mrs D	Tutton	Codsall	Mr J C	Cribbin	Huddersfield
Mr G	Morgan	Shrewsbury	Mr M	Satterthwaite,	Bridgnorth
Miss E	Spurling	Dorrington	Mr R	Allen	Minsterley
Mr D	Carter	Loggerheads,	Mr &Mrs P	Beardes	Craven Arms
Mr & Mrs B	Kirkham	Cradley Heath			

## From the Chair

I don't make a habit of holding forth in the pages of 'The Buzzard' but two newsworthy occurrences this quarter are worthy of note.

Many of you will be familiar with CJ Wildlife, a local company founded in 1987 on a farm in Upton Magna, near Shrewsbury, and now a leading specialist supplier of garden bird and wildlife products, with a range of food, habitat and care products. As well as supplying the UK market, the company now operates in nine other European countries and is a market leader in the research, design and development of wild bird and wildlife food, and accompanying feeding paraphernalia. They work alongside ornithologists and wildlife experts to research and develop products which can help their customers care for more wildlife in their gardens. Their mission is to make a significant, recognisable contribution to wildlife research and conservation efforts, and they work with more than 20 conservation charities and wildlife organisations across Europe to support the vital work and research they carry out to protect our natural world for future generations.

CJ Wildlife has a long history of supporting SOS, starting essentially with the foundation of the firm. They donate the food and hardware for the feeder hide at VP and cover the Society's mailing expenses for 'The Buzzard' and 'Shropshire Bird Report'.

Our relationship with CJ Wildlife has entered a new phase that will continue to benefit SOS as a society as well as SOS members individually. Their present commitments will continue but our discussions with them have opened up the possibility of other collaborative activities that will be revealed in the coming months. For you – the SOS members – CJ Wildlife will now offer a 20% discount on purchases (except optics and books) made at their reception shop at The Rea, Upton Magna, as long as you show your discount card. The discount card will be found in this mailing of 'The Buzzard' along with a leaflet that describes the features, terms and conditions of the offer. Please note that you **must** present the card to get your discount – there will be no exceptions!

My second news item is that the Society recently took on a new role by assisting a Shropshire university student to enhance the scope of her third year dissertation, by partially funding travel and accommodation expenses at Fair Isle Bird Observatory. Liz Holmes, an undergraduate in Biological Sciences at the University of Reading, had chosen to assess and compare prey in the diet of Great Skuas and gulls, and identify the subsequent exposure to plastic ingestion, by an analysis of their pellets.

This new venture for the Society (The Jack Sankey Research Grant for Young Ornithologists) is dedicated to the memory of Jack, who was member of the Shropshire Ornithological Society and was particularly interested in passing on his knowledge in his roles as a Lecturer in Birmingham University's Adult Education Programme and as a teacher at William Brookes School in Much Wenlock, where he inspired many youngsters in his RSPB club. On his death in 2014, he made a bequest to the SOS and it seems fitting that this be used to further education objectives with an emphasis on young people. You can read about some of Liz's findings on page 10 of this issue.

The SOS Board hopes that these innovations will meet with the approval of the membership. Any comments you have would be welcome at [chair@shropshirebirds.co.uk](mailto:chair@shropshirebirds.co.uk).

**John Arnfield,  
Chair, SOS**

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The Society has prospered since our last AGM and I would like to take this opportunity both to draw your attention to its achievements and to thank those responsible for them.

**Membership** numbers stood at 843 in mid-March of this year, an increase of 11% over the 15 months since the beginning of 2018. This is excellent news and I thank **Annie Andrews** for dealing with membership matters.

Regrettably, the Society continues to have very little representation among young people. While junior memberships have doubled over the same period, this is only from two to four. I encourage anyone with ideas on how to rectify this unfortunate situation to talk to me.

**SOS Finances** remain healthy and I would like to express my appreciation to **Jean Rickard** for her work as Treasurer and to **Brian Andrews** for the shepherding of the Society's investments.

Our programmes of **Indoor Meetings**, in both Shrewsbury and Church Stretton, continue to attract good audiences. My thanks go to everyone who helps to make these evenings such successful events, particularly **Steve Dawes, Jock** and **Mim Elliot-Smith** and others who prepare refreshments, and those who set up and clear the hall for the meetings. I would also like to thank Jock and Mim for reducing our single-use plastic consumption by promoting the use of reusable mugs (and doing the washing up) and **Sue Brealey** for running the raffles. The Bayston Hill meetings typically attract about 55 members and guests while the equivalent number for the Church Stretton branch is around 24.

Our programme of **Field Trips**, organised by the Development and Publicity Sub-committee, and led by several different members, continued throughout the last year, thanks to **Sue Brealey** and all the individual trip leaders.

Progress on eliminating the backlog in the publication of **Shropshire Bird Reports** has continued through the determination of **Gerry Thomas**, following on from **Geoff Holmes**, in the editorial seat. Volumes up to and including 2016 have now been published, 2017 is imminent and Gerry is already cracking the whip for authors of the 2018 issues, which it is hoped will appear in November 2019. We thank Geoff and Gerry, the account authors and the editorial team, as well as **Helen Griffiths**, proof-reader extraordinaire, for this great achievement.

Further to publications, our quarterly magazine "**The Buzzard**", now enhanced by use of colour illustrations, has appeared on time and full of

fascinating articles under the able editorship of **Tim Devanney**. Members are now also offered the option of receiving "The Buzzard" online and a simple form is available on the SOS website to permit you to switch to this option. So far, 108 members (which is about 13%) have elected to receive their magazine in this format, which saves paper, postage and volunteer effort. On this topic, thanks also to the team which gets together four times a year to prepare the magazine packages for posting to members, to **Annie Andrews** for providing lunch and to **Jim Almond** for his Bird Notes contribution each quarter. I am pleased that, once again, our use of single-use plastic has been reduced by switching to biodegradable packing materials for these mailings. I hope you are all recycling the new packages.

**Venus Pool** remains one of the finest reserves in the West Midlands, attracting a wide variety of birds, butterflies and other taxa throughout the year. I am pleased to announce that, through the commitment and strenuous efforts of **Graham Walker**, our application for renewal of our Countryside Stewardship Agreement was recently granted. Thanks are due to everyone who is involved in any way with the management of Venus Pool, particularly **Graham Walker**, **Geoff Holmes** and **Helen Griffiths**. I also would like to thank **Chris Whittles** for planning the planting regime for the arable field, and for organising the ploughing and sowing, and to all those who assisted in work parties during the year.

The **Conservation Sub-committee** continues its work, and members are involved in various aspects of conservation-related ornithology in the County, from co-ordinating bird recording to representing the Society on groups with like objectives, providing management advice, involvement with community groups, research and liaison with other conservation bodies. This is important work and thanks are due to **Graham Walker** and his Sub-committee for their efforts. Particular thanks are due to **Ian Grant**, the County Recorder, for the work he does dealing with records, managing the SOS database, extracting information for Bird Reports, and chairing the Rarities Committee.

Last year, the SOS partially funded and joined with the Shropshire Wildlife Trust to launch the "**Save Our Curlews**" campaign and appeal. This project is overseen by the Shropshire Curlews Group, consisting of the Community Wildlife Groups, Natural England, the National Trust, the RSPB as well as SOS and SWT. The initial year's fundraising was successful, and the appeal will continue into the future. The SOS funding was renewed this year and members are encouraged both to contribute financially and to join local projects related to this campaign.

Members of the SOS continue to be committed in **Bird Recording**, contributing to national surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, the Waterways Breeding Bird Survey, the Wetland Bird Survey and Garden BirdWatch. Many are also involved in bird ringing. Additionally, SOS members

submit their own records to the County Bird Recorder, or, preferably to BirdTrack. The latter is now the preferred method of submitting sightings. Shropshire records submitted to BirdTrack are returned to the County Recorder for use in SOS publications and projects. Thank you to all those who have contributed in any way to bird recording in Shropshire during the year.

Work continues on the **Shropshire Avifauna**. All 301 species accounts, with associated maps, graphs and tables are now complete. It is now planned that the book will be released in autumn of this year, with an attractive pre-publication offer available to members – watch your “Buzzard” and the website for details.

The Society’s **website** gets between 200 and 450 hits per day with the most popular pages being “Recent Bird Reports” and “Venus Pool Nature Reserve”. Thanks are due to **Yvonne Chadwick** for maintaining our social media presence that is also carried on the website.

The Society this year awarded a grant to Shropshire-based **Elizabeth Holmes**, an undergraduate student at Reading University, to enhance the fieldwork for her BSc degree in ecology. The award permitted Liz to extend her stay on Fair Isle to collect more data on the plastic content of pellets in relation to types of prey items in Great Skuas and gulls. Some results from her work will appear in “The Buzzard” shortly.

Finally, from time to time, SOS gives a President’s Award to an individual who is considered to have made a particularly notable contribution to the Society and to ornithology in Shropshire. During 2018, we were delighted to make two very well-deserved awards.

**John Tucker** has contributed to the work of the Conservation Sub-committee for many years, has initiated and undertaken much survey and research work on the County’s birds, contributed to bird atlas work, to Shropshire Bird Reports, and to many local and national surveys, and is a member of the working group of the forthcoming avifauna. With his brother Peter, he created and maintained the “Historical Ornithology of Shropshire” website – a valuable and unique resource of the complete history of ornithology in Shropshire.

**Allan Dawes** has also dedicated a huge amount of time to SOS work, been an active member of the Conservation Sub-committee, has organised fieldwork and contributed to bird atlas work, to Shropshire Bird Reports, and to many local and national surveys, and is also a member of the working group of the forthcoming avifauna. He has recently retired as BTO representative for Shropshire, a role he undertook with great dedication and which he held for at least 25 years.

Both John and Allan have made a huge contribution to SOS and to ornithology

in Shropshire, with their expertise and dedication, and these awards are very well deserved.

You will have noticed that, as I delivered this report, the same names keep cropping up in different capacities for thanks. This underlines the fact that we could do with more volunteers to take on various tasks to ensure the smooth running of the SOS. If you feel you would like to contribute, please let me know.

I would like to conclude by expressing my thanks and appreciation for the work of the Board of Directors, the Sub-committees and the Church Stretton branch committee during another productive year, and to all those people who contribute in any way to the smooth operation of the Society who I have not mentioned by name.

**John Arnfield,  
Chair, Shropshire Ornithological Society  
4 April 2019**

A study of the plastic ingestion and associated diet of great skua (*Stercorarius skua*) breeding on Fair Isle Shetland, through the dissection of pellets.

In early 2018 I developed a project proposal for my final year dissertation as part of my Ecology BSc degree. As a lover of birds (particularly those of the sea) and a regular volunteer at Fair Isle bird observatory it didn't take me long to come up with an idea for my project.

With the issue of marine plastic pollution come into the forefront of many global scientific and public discussions I thought this would be an important focus for my project. Previous work as a volunteer at Fair Isle bird observatory saw me collecting great skua pellets to study their diets. I distinctly remember being shocked to find a plastic bottle cap in the centre of one of the pellets. Somehow the bird had swallowed this big chunk of plastic. Thankfully for the skua, its biology had allowed it to remove the plastic from its body, through the regurgitation of a pellet. This got me thinking. Where had this bottle top come from? How did it end up in the line of fire for a skua to gobble up? Did the skua eat it or was it something the skua's prey had eaten before it was eaten by the skua?

These questions led me to form a project idea to look at the pellets produced by these skuas in more detail. A study on the Faroes by Hammer *et al.* (2016) found a significant positive association between fulmar remains in pellets and

the prevalence of plastic debris, reflecting the high ingestion rates of plastic in fulmars, and highlighting the movement of plastics through the food chain. Being a unique study in the northern hemisphere, I decided it would be interesting to replicate within a different great skua colony, on the island of Fair Isle, Shetland. Being raised in Shropshire and participating in activities run by the Ornithological Society I submitted a project proposal to the Society, in hope it might be of interest to the group. The Society was very generous and awarded me a grant of £500, to support my work. This grant allowed me to make the most of the opportunity to carry out my own research.

Using Hammer *et al.* (2016) as a model, I set off on the epic journey back up to Fair Isle. Choosing three main areas on the island, I located, and GPS marked more than 30 great skua nests, which I visited every few days, to monitor the development of chicks and collect pellets from each territory. Through the dissection of these pellets I have built a picture of the skuas' diets as well as the frequency and prevalence of plastic ingestion.

Of the 613 pellets I dissected, I found 3.1% of the pellets to contain plastic debris, 59% of these plastic contaminated pellets consist predominately of bird remains, half of which are fulmar, reflecting the results of Hammer *et al.* (2016), with significantly more plastic pellets found within pellets containing fulmar than fish remains. The results also suggest a reflection of the pattern of plastic ingestion rates in different bird groups, with surface feeding fulmars associated with the greatest proportion of pellets with plastic (figure 1).

A higher proportion of plastic was found in pellets with fulmar remains from Fair Isle than from the Faroës, reflecting the pattern of reduced plastic loads of beached fulmars found further north (van Franeker *et al.* 2011). However, pellets of auk, gull and fish remains all contained higher levels of plastic from the Faroës, suggesting great variability in the magnitude of plastic pollution in marine ecosystems across the north Atlantic.

Through infrared spectroscopy analysis of the plastic fragments discovered, user fragments of Polyethylene were found to be the most common type of plastic, reflecting the increase in the magnitude of marine plastic pollution from domestic sources. This study aims to provide a baseline knowledge of the plastic ingestion of this great skua colony to inform future monitoring of the plastic pollution in this marine ecosystem.

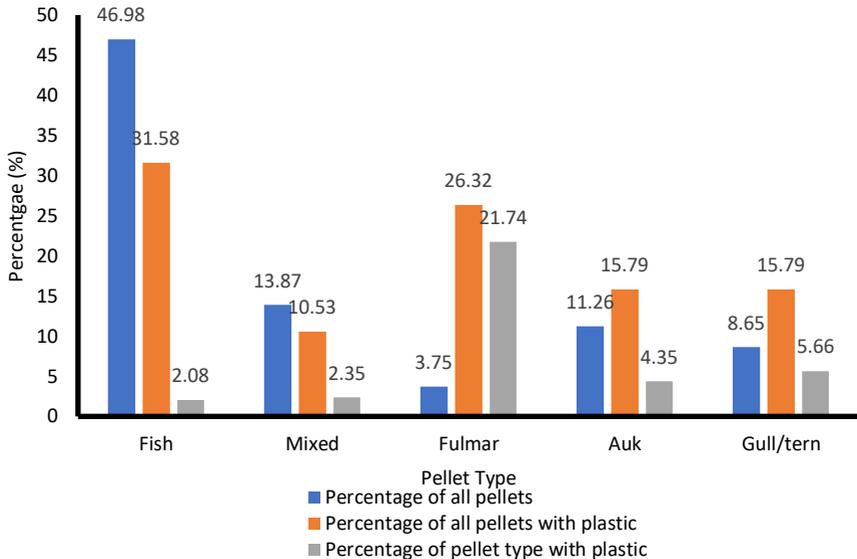
The support from Shropshire Ornithological Society allowed me to spend a month on the island, allowing me to carry out extensive field work (collecting lots of pellets!) as well as gain more valuable experience in practical seabird ecology, through voluntary work with the bird observatory wardens. The grant has opened up the world of seabird ecology research to me, and I can't wait to do more!

## References

Hammer, S., Nager, R.G., Johnson, P.C.D., Furness, R.W. & Provencher, J.F. (2016) Plastic debris in great skua (*Stercorarius skua*) pellets corresponds to seabird prey species. **Marine pollution bulletin**, 103, 206–210.

Van Franeker, J.A., Blaize, C., Danielsen, et al (2011) Monitoring plastic ingestion by the northern fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* in the North Sea. **Environmental Pollution**, 159, 2609–2615.

**Figure 1** Percentage contribution of pellets from each pellet type (blue) and the percentage of pellets with plastic from each pellet type, out of the whole pellet sample (orange) and out of each pellet type sample (grey).



### Example of plastic fragments found in pellets



## Survey season

Surveys are well underway and I have Breeding Bird Survey data coming in already. There is still time to participate if you are interested. The first survey can take place before mid-May.

Most of the high priority survey squares are currently covered which is fantastic, but there are a few in need of attention in the following areas:

1. Between Highley and Cleobury Mortimer
2. Near Albrighton, nr Shifnal
3. Near Chirk and Weston Rhyn

Please let me know if these may be of interest to you. If you are interested but these don't suit then I'm sure I can find something else.

## Local Projects

Caring For God's Acre is asking for bird records from churchyards around the county as part of their Beautiful Burial Grounds project. They have been collecting records of many different types of fauna and flora but bird records remain a bit of a gap.

Churchyards can be a haven for wildlife. In more urban areas such as Shrewsbury and Telford they can offer greenspace for species that may not be common elsewhere in the urban environment, such as woodland species. In more rural or upland areas, old churchyards can be home to such species as redstart or spotted flycatcher amongst others. Swifts and house martins are also key species to be found nesting on older buildings.

Whilst records of declining species like this are a priority, the project would welcome full species lists made during one or several visits in the breeding season. Records of breeding evidence (ideally using the standard BTO definitions) and estimates of numbers of nests/pairs (especially for species like swifts or martins) should also be included wherever possible. Records can be taken from any churchyard, or I have been provided with a list if you wish to go exploring and target some sites in your local area. All you need to do is send me a species list making sure to include the date and churchyard (and the town/village) with appropriate details on breeding/number of pairs. Multiple lists over the course of the season are also welcomed.

***Jon Groom***

Previous issues of the Buzzard have outlined the results of Curlew Conservation Projects in 2018. Full project reports for the work in the Upper Clun and Clee Hill, and an overview of all the work, can be found on the SOS website [www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/](http://www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/)

**Further information about the headstarting project can be found on [www.curlewcountry.org](http://www.curlewcountry.org)**

Ten Community Wildlife Groups are monitoring Curlew populations in their local areas. It's still not too late to get involved. See [www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk)

If you see evidence of breeding Curlews anywhere in Shropshire, please tell Leo Smith ([leo@leosmith.org.uk](mailto:leo@leosmith.org.uk), 01694 720296)



A large number of Curlews have been colour-ringed. Each has a conspicuous orange ring on the right leg, and a yellow ring with two unique letters on the left. If you see a colour-ringed Curlew, please try and read or photograph the yellow ring. If you can't, please let us know of your sighting, and we'll come and try to read it.

We need more information on where recently-hatched chicks move to because maintaining and improving, and possibly re-creating, the right sort of habitat is the key to long-term success. We also need to have a better understanding of the different predation pressures, and their timing, which are not uniform across the County (hatching rates of unfenced nests appear to be higher in both Upper Clun and Clee Hill, compared with the Curlew Country area).

No scientific study relies on results from one year, which might be atypical for many reasons, and 2018 was certainly atypical. The "Beast from the east" and subsequent cold weather in early spring stopped the grass growing to hide nests and delayed the breeding cycle of invertebrate food, while the following hot, dry weather dried the ground and again affected food supplies. As a consequence, the 2018 project work in Clun and Clee needs to be repeated, but it can only proceed in full if a further appeal raises sufficient funds.

The results of the Appeal to continue the work in 2019 have been disappointing. Enough has been raised so far to continue work in the Upper Clun and Clee Hill, but not at the same level as last year. Hopefully, more can be raised so work can continue at the same level. It's not too late to contribute.

*The Appeal letter sent out last year concluded “If, like us, you think Shropshire will be a much poorer place without curlews please support our appeal”. Please donate if you feel you can. See [www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/appeals](http://www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/appeals).*

### Raptor Group

Members of the Raptor Group are out looking for breeding sites of Red Kite, Hobby, Goshawk and Merlin. If you see breeding evidence for any of these species, please tell the Group convenor, Leo Smith ([leo@leosmith.org.uk](mailto:leo@leosmith.org.uk), 01694 720296). It is a criminal offence to knowingly disturb any of these species without a nest-monitoring licence, which all Group members have. All records are kept confidential, but summaries appear in the annual Shropshire Bird Report.

### Avifauna

The manuscript has gone through the final checks, and almost all of it has been submitted to the publishers. The next Buzzard mailing will include the pre-publication offer to SOS members.

**Leo Smith**

### Shropshire Barn Owl Group

The Shropshire Barn Owl Group (SBOG) 2018 Annual Report is now available on the group's website at [www.shropshirebarnowlgroup.org.uk](http://www.shropshirebarnowlgroup.org.uk).

SBOG is a voluntary group which has been working since 2002 to increase the breeding population of barn owls in Shropshire by providing nest-boxes in areas of suitable habitat and working with farmers and other landowners to improve and conserve their habitat. Since 2002 SBOG has installed 422 nest-boxes across the county which have produced 1,558 young barn owls. A further 280 young have been monitored in natural nest sites. As a result, the breeding population, estimated at 140 pairs when SBOG started out, is now estimated at around 200-220 breeding pairs.

**Glenn Bishton**

## New SOS Facebook group

A new Facebook group has been set up to share bird sightings and other relevant information, for people who are interested in the birds of Shropshire. It's a closed group to prevent abusive or offensive posts, but membership is open to all. Simply search for Shropshire Ornithological Society on Facebook, select the group rather than the society page, and then click on the "join group" button.

## Shropshire Ringing Report – request for information

For the ringing section of the 2018 Shropshire Annual Bird Report I would like to include coverage of the many different projects that take place in the county, both to reflect the hard work that ringers put in, and also to make the report more interesting to the general reader. If you ran a ringing project or study in Shropshire in 2018 please let me have brief details by email to [martin@thegreenfuse.net](mailto:martin@thegreenfuse.net). Depending on the number of responses, I will either include a general, county-wide summary of ringing activities or reply asking for more detailed information so that we can feature one or more of your studies

*Martin George*

## Netting, netting and more netting!

There has been much outcry in recent weeks about the netting put up by developers to prevent birds nesting in hedges that are soon to be removed to allow building to progress. But what was supposed to be used occasionally seems to have become ubiquitous and there have been press reports of trees swathed in white netting in Guildford, kilometres of hedging covered in Warwickshire and Derbyshire and also reports of such netting across Shropshire. It does not always work – there are inevitably casualties and it is not just birds that are trapped – hedgehogs are also unable to escape. The petition to the government at <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/244233> has attracted over 330,000 signatures at the time of writing and although perhaps legislation may not be the solution to this problem it has raised people's concerns. The response when the petition reached 10,000 signatures stated

"On 8 April, we wrote to developers to remind them of their legal obligation to consider the impact of any project on local wildlife and, where necessary, to take precautionary action to protect their habitats. Developments should enhance natural environments, not destroy them. It is vital that developers take these words on board and play their full role to make sure we can deliver new communities in an environmentally sustainable way....."

## The issue will be debated in Parliament at sometime in the future.

Hot on the heels of this story came the news that North Norfolk District Council had placed nets on the cliffs at Bacton as part of a scheme to protect houses and infrastructure in the hope of encouraging the sand martins who use the cliffs to nest to move further along the coast. Again there was much public outcry and it would appear that the RSPB's advice was not followed. It looks as though some of the netting will be removed, although there is still much controversy over what will be left – the mesh size is still a hazard to sand martins and there are reports of a kestrel being caught in the netting. Sand martins have flown from Africa to find their breeding sites blocked.

Closer to home, it seems that swallows, despite being that well known harbinger of summer, are not always welcome...

Closer to home, it seems that swallows, despite being that well known harbinger of summer, are not always welcome – netting church porches seems to be becoming common practice. I watched a lone swallow circle a church tower recently – wondering if it was trying to return to a former nest site as the porch in the church is now blocked by netting. Why are we doing this? Why are we allowing it to be done? There are many churches that rightly cherish their swallows and put boards up to collect droppings or simply sweep and wash as needed. Again these birds have come all the way from Africa and while many like to see swallows flying there seems to be a growing number of people that aren't prepared to let them breed near them. Of course it's always claimed to be in the birds' interest to try to move them to new nesting sites – but where are these new sites? This country spends millions of pounds annually on bird food and nest boxes for the likes of our garden visitors but when it comes to birds that are dependent on our buildings it seems that we just want to move them on. Please if you know of a church porch near you put a positive word in for the swallows and work to get any netting taken down.

I have written frequently about the problems Swifts face but all house dependent species need protection - we need to protect nest sites not just nests and there is a petition to this effect at <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/250845>

## Are you one in a thousand?

I am sure many SOS members are also RSPB members and saw, or heard, some of the articles that were part of the big publicity campaign for Swifts that was launched by the RSPB in February. There were several radio and TV interviews and the RSPB re-launched their Swift family web pages at <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/swift-family/>

## The new web page's big message is

“Swifts are in trouble. The UK has seen numbers plummeting, with a 53% decline between 1995 and 2016. To help them, we want to get 1,000 swift nestboxes put up before they arrive at the end of April. Can you help?”

With the continuing loss of natural nest sites as buildings are renovated together with the lack of legislation to require the installation of swift bricks in new build, this campaign in advance of this year's swift season is very welcome. Germany, Gibraltar and Poland require provision for Swifts in new build and Zurich has been looking after its Swifts since 1929.

I found some very encouraging and inspirational stories in the guest blog posts – you can read all of them at <https://bit.ly/2EobV6e>. It is good to see what is happening across the country – much of it by volunteers who realise that action needs to be taken now. Our Swift Champion MP does a lot of work for the species and it is good to see that some local and unitary councils are recognising the value of urban biodiversity and taking positive action through their planning policies. This really needs to happen across the whole country but until it is accepted practice we all need to use our local council's planning portal to ask for swift bricks – and hedgehog corridors - in all the new developments that are being approved.

Here are 2 boxes that Shropshire Swift Group put up recently

I'd love to receive information and a picture of where you have put your swift box to support the RSPB's campaign for a thousand.

Contact details - [shropshireswifts@gmail.com](mailto:shropshireswifts@gmail.com)

Join us on Facebook -  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/shropshireswiftgroup/>

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

## Items for Sale

### Photographic Equipment

Item	Details /condition	Price
Benbo TREKKER Classic Multi-angle Tripod	Excellent	£100
Cullmann 2703S Hide Clamp MAGIC	As New. Boxed, with Instruction Manual	£45
Nikon NIKKOR AF 35-70 f2.8D lens	Mint. Boxed. with Instruction Manual	£180
Nikon SB27 Auto-focus Speedlight	As new. Boxed with bag & Instruction Manual	£35
Benbo BEN299 Ball and Socket Tripod head	As new	£25
Opticron HR60 Spotting scope with zoom eyepiece	Good. Some cosmetic scratches	£90
Tamrac LTX 4703 Camera Bag		£20
CCS (Camera Care System)		£20
CAMPRO camera Bag		

**Contact: Ann Wenden 07752 847352 / 01743 359965**

[annwenden@gmail.com](mailto:annwenden@gmail.com)

### Bird Books

Still downsizing after moving to a smaller place, I still have some bird books left for sale.

They range from guide books to books on bird related items and where to find birds, including some classic books, from £1 to £5.

**Email for list: [mail@richardcamp.co.uk](mailto:mail@richardcamp.co.uk) or phone 01952 405458**  
**Richard Camp, Telford.**

## Field Trip Reports

**North Wales Coast**  
**Sunday, 20 January 2019**

Six of us braved the journey to Llanfairfechan through very foggy conditions. However, when we arrived at the promenade at high tide the sky had cleared, the sun was out and, although it was cold at about 4°C, Puffin Island was clearly visible across choppy seas. It made for a good sea-watch.

One of the first birds we saw was a female Red-breasted Merganser which was diving for food close to the shore. Looking out to sea, we saw plenty of Black-headed and Herring Gulls, two Great Black-backed Gulls, Eider and Common Scoter, and Dunlin began to fly past from their high tide roosts to their feeding areas. We had excellent views of several Turnstones which landed right in front of us on the shingle, and a very large flock of Wigeon flew past towards the west. Dipper and Grey Wagtail are often seen on the river which enters the sea here but we were out of luck today.

After a couple of hours, we moved on to Morfa Madryn. After the walk across the railway line, we stopped near the first of the lagoons, where the water level had dropped as the tide retreated. Here, a rather smart Grey Wagtail was noted, as well as Little Egret, and some Goosander feeding in the lagoon. At the entrance to the reserve Oystercatchers and Redshank feeding, as well as a couple of Greenshank. A large flock of Curlew (**Image**) were seen on the mudflats, with more Oystercatchers. We ate our picnics in the first hide whilst enjoying great views of the waders which were feeding on the mudflats. At the next hide we

caught up with the large flock of Wigeon which we had seen earlier. A couple of Little Grebes were added to the list, along with a flock of Lapwing, and a Shelduck. A scan of the fields behind the hide added a Buzzard and some Starlings to the list.



Our next venue was RSPB Conwy, where a number of noisy House Sparrows greeted us from the bushes by the Visitor Centre. After a well-earned hot coffee in the café we moved out to the Tal-y-Fan hide which overlooks both lagoons. From here, Mallard and Gadwall in good numbers were seen as well as Coot and Moorhen, and on one island was a Grey Heron which barely moved at all! Here, five Black-tailed Godwits were seen, as well as a male Goldeneye, a few Teal and several Snipe. On leaving the hide, one of the party had brief views of Cetti's Warbler and Goldcrest. A short visit to the Carneddau hide did not add very much to the list, but the view over the reserve to the hills of Snowdonia, some with smatterings of snow on their tops, was very restful. As we returned towards Reception for the drive home, large numbers of Starlings started to gather. However, it was starting to rain and

although many groups of Starlings flew in, they tended to drop straight into the reedbeds to roost, rather than provide a spectacular murmuration to entertain the crowd which had gathered. But it was definitely a lovely ending to a day which had started off so inauspiciously, with 54 species seen during the day.  
***Sue Brealey (Image Jim Almond)***

## **RSPB Marshside Sunday, 24 February 2019**

A group of five members began their day by travelling through dense fog, but the sun eventually came out and it was a beautiful day for the field trip to Marshside, the RSPB reserve at Southport.

Travelling along the coast road bordering the saltmarsh we spied a male Goldeneye and, from the (rather rough) parking area, we were delighted to have a 'morning murmuration' of Starlings with a few hundred performing over the saltmarsh, skeins of Pink-footed Geese, and Skylarks serenading us as we had our coffee (and the obligatory 'cow' biscuits).

We crossed the busy road to the Sangrouser hide, which doubles as a Visitor Centre. From here we saw Little Grebe, a pair of Oystercatcher flew across the pool and Lapwing and Ruff were spotted in the fields beyond the pools. A few miles up the coast is Hesketh Out Marsh, part of the Ribble Estuary NNR, where the RSPB, in partnership with Natural England and the Environment Agency, are working to restore the saltmarsh.

We took lunch in the warm sunshine while watching a female Hen Harrier being mobbed by Crows. Redshank and a female Goosander were feeding on the pools along with Black-tailed Godwit. Returning to Marshside, we set off for Nel's Hide at the other end of the reserve, stopping at the roadside screen to add two Ravens to our day-list. Nel's Hide is a popular one, having all the previously recorded waterfowl, but in larger numbers, with expansive views over the pools and meadow.

We added Lesser Black-backed Gull to the list and were delighted to see a group of around twenty Avocet, first of the year for some of us. A Peregrine feeding on a kill for quite a while was a highlight of the afternoon.

The finale was a hare, literally 'haring' along the field at the back of the pools. It looked like a small dog. It sat for a while, showing its huge ears and then flattening them to look inconspicuous. This is always a good place from which to watch the typical 'March hare' behaviour.

As we made our way back to the car park, we all agreed that we had had a very enjoyable day visiting such a wildlife-rich part of the west coast of Lancashire, with some 46 species recorded.

***Estelle Hughes***

## **The Wirral**

**Sunday, 7 April 2019**

A group of seven members arrived at Leasowes Lighthouse on the north Wirral coastline, well on time to start this field trip. The tide was well out so there were not that many birds in the vicinity. However, amongst those birds seen included Black-headed Gull, Herring Gull, and Great Black-backed Gull, quite a few Curlew, Oystercatchers flying by and Turnstone near the sea wall. Then using the scopes to scan, right out near the shoreline, a Peregrine was seen, sitting on the sand, not doing too much at all and it was concluded that it must be digesting a meal. The group started to walk along towards the rocks to the left of the car park, but on arrival the rocks were bare except for some Redshank and a couple of Little Egret. Then turning to inspect the local fields, and searched for a reported number of Wheatear. Eventually a group of about six were seen, and their behaviour indicated that they had not long arrived on migration. It was very satisfying to see these lovely birds.

Having seen as much as was thought possible, the group then moved down to RSPB Burtonmere, arriving at about 1.30, and had lunch while watching the birds from the main hide. The weather was found to be cool, with little wind, cloudy and with distant mist which caused the light to be rather flat. The temperature was about 8°C. The lagoon was full of breeding Black-headed Gulls, but amongst them a couple of Mediterranean Gulls were noted together with Herring Gull. Continuing the walk, Chiffchaff and Blackcap were heard singing, and then the group came to the screen overlooking various areas of the reedbed. Cetti's Warbler was heard. Bearded Tit had been seen there and therefore it was worth waiting to see what would come out of the reeds. The distinctive sound of their call was heard and a few lucky people had a very brief view as one quickly flew in and out of the reeds. Satisfying. A bit further on, the group visited the Marsh Covert Hide, again hoping for a Bearded Tit, but instead a Buzzard was seen flying over the reserve. From the right hand side of the hide, a flock of Black-tailed Godwit was noted in breeding plumage, and then a Redshank, so hunkered down in the rising wind, it was quite difficult to confirm identification. From the left side of the hide, more given over to reedbed, a few more Little Grebe came into view. At this point the group split up, some going towards Inner Marsh Hide, while others stayed in the hope of another Bearded Tit, to no avail. As time was moving on the group departed having had a good day.

***Sue Brealey***

## **RSPB Dearne Valley – Old Moor**

### **Sunday, 24th March 2019**

A group of 23 turned up at The Shirehall for the coach trip to this large reserve, located between Barnsley and Rotherham and bordered to the north by the River Dearne, which subsequently runs into the River Don and latterly the River Ouse and the Humber. The weather was clear, with some white clouds, sunny but with quite a sharp winds at times, gusting up to 15 mph. The temperatures were between 6 and 9°C. After a good journey, the coach arrived at about 10.15 in time for a good day's birding.

As ever, the group split up, dividing their time between the two main spears of the reserve, the Reedbed Trail and the Green Lane Trail, together with the feeding stations around the Reception Centre. The day began at the Feeding Station Hide next door to the Reception Centre, and here there were good views of Tree Sparrows, Chaffinch, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Goldfinch, and plenty of Bullfinches in excellent condition. At one point there were two males and four females on the bird table. After this, a walk towards the reedbeds seemed a good bet. A short walk along the Reedbed Trail was taken, coming upon the Bittern Hide, which overlooks a lagoon towards the reed beds. A telescope scan was taken to see what could be seen which included plentiful Black-headed Gulls, but, besides these, Canada Goose, Coot, Cormorant, Gadwall, Greylag Goose, Jackdaw, Moorhen, Tufted Duck, and Wigeon. After this the walk continued along the trail, stopping briefly at the Bittern 'Bus Stop', and then along to the Reed Screen. Before arriving there the distinctive pinging sound of Bearded Tits was heard, but the high winds precluded seeing these lovely birds which resolutely stayed in the depths of the reeds. Not much was seen from the screen so we moved on to the Reed Hide from which we saw more Moorhens alongside a few Little Grebes, a couple of which appeared to be quite aggressive in their behaviour, probably males fighting over a female. From this hide, one member of the group saw three Bitterns, two making a very brief appearance and one in flight for a few metres.

After lunch, a walk was taken on the Green Lane Trail, stopping first at the Family Hide, overlooking the mere with plenty of islands to scan over. The majority of birds were Black-headed Gulls, but a search for a reported Mediterranean Gull was in vain. A further walk took us to the furthest Wathlms Hide. From here a Black-necked Grebe was seen on the far side of the pool. A walk to the Field Pool East Hide overlooking the Wathlms did not produce any new birds, but then a visit to the Wader Scrape Hide, produced Green Sandpiper, Redshank, Oystercatcher, and Pied Wagtail. As time was matching on, a return to the Reception Centre area produced a Brambling and Dunnock at the feeding areas.

By this time, it was approaching 4pm and time to start our journey home. It appeared that all participants had enjoyed their visit. In total, approximately 50 species were seen.

**Sue Brealey**

## Bird Notes

### Jan, Feb and Mar 2019

**Pink-footed Goose** One was reported near Shifnal from 2 Jan until 21 Feb. Another was present at Venus Pool on 31 Mar.

**White-fronted Goose (Image)** A Greenland White-fronted Goose was found at Attingham Park on 18 Feb. It remained in the area, relocating to the Severn at Atcham and then seen occasionally at Venus Pool, until 25 Mar.



**Mute Swan** Numerous reports from sites across the county. The largest regular gathering reported was at Coundlane where there was a maximum count of 121 on 26 Jan.

**Bewick's Swan***(Image)* One was in the Venus Pool area between 4 Jan and 11 Mar, commuting daily between the pool and the swan field at Coundlane.



**Whooper Swan** A lone bird was seen with the Mute Swan flock at Coundlane on 3 Jan.

**Egyptian Goose** A single was present at Coundlane on 26 Jan. A pair were seen at Chetwynd Pool on 28 Jan and 17 Feb.

**Shelduck** Widely reported throughout the county. The highest count was at Venus Pool, where 12 were present on 2 Jan.

**Shoveler** Present at various locations throughout the quarter with an impressive 98 at Chetwynd Pool on 28 Jan. At Venus Pool, numbers steadily increased until 3 Mar when 72 were present.

**Gadwall** Most records came from Venus Pool with numbers building throughout the quarter to a maximum count of 42 on 13 Feb. Other double figure reports (both 10) came from: Chetwynd Pool on 25 Feb and Whixall canal floods on 5 Mar.

**Wigeon** Good numbers at the usual sites. Highest counts were: The Mere, Ellesmere (260) on 27 Jan, Venus Pool (90) on 6 Jan, Wall Farm (84) on 19 Feb, and Shavington (55) on 20 Jan.

**Pintail (Image)** Just fifteen records for the quarter, the majority came from Venus Pool where three drakes were present on 2 Jan. Fifteen were reported at Whixall canal floods on 2 Mar.



**Common Teal** The highest counts came from: Shavington Park (150) on 1 Feb and Wall Farm (125) on 15 Feb. Other three figure locations were: Polemere (108) on 11 Jan and Whixall Floods (100) on 4 Mar.

**Pochard** Reported from seven locations, notably 23 at Venus Pool on 10 Mar and 16 at Monkmoor sewage works on 19 Jan.

**Goldeneye** Up to 33 were present at The Mere, Ellesmere throughout the period. Other records came from Colemere

**Goosander** Numerous records from along the Severn and still waters. The highest counts were 164 roosting at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 1 Feb and 74 on the Severn at Shrewsbury on 31 Jan.

**Red Grouse** Records of up to four on the Long Mynd and the Stiperstones during the quarter.

**Grey Partridge** Up to three were seen in the Shawbury area and two at Wall Farm.

**Great Northern Diver** The long staying juvenile at Chelmarsh Reservoir remained elusive but continued to be seen unto 30 Jan.

**Black-necked Grebe** One was present at Cole Mere on 24 Mar.

**Cattle Egret** One was present in the Ellesmere area, often roosting at the Mere, throughout the quarter.

**Great White Egret** Singles was seen at: Crosemere on 4 Jan, Venus Pool on 11 Jan and Wood Lane on 14 Feb / 2 Mar. Another or the same individual was present in the Wall Farm area from 22 Feb until 2 Mar.

**Little Egret** Records of one or two throughout the period from all quarters of the county.

**Osprey** One was reported over Market Drayton on 15 Mar.

**Hen Harrier** Just one report, at Whixall Moss on 9 Jan and 10 Feb.

**Golden Plover** Some large flocks were present during the period, in particular at Wall Farm, Kynnersley, where a maxima of 1,100+ was noted on 18 Feb. 250+ were seen at Hollywaste on 27 Jan and a similar count at Shadwell Hill on 21 Mar.

**Grey Plover** One was reported amongst a flock of Golden Plover at Picklescott on 21 Mar.

**Curlew** Double-figure counts came from Cae Howel, Royal Hill (33) on 6 Mar and Isombridge (18) on 11 Mar. Singles and small groups were reported from various other locations.

**Woodcock** Records of one or two birds came from fourteen locations.

**Jack Snipe** Singles were reported from Market Drayton on 6 Jan, and from Leasowes, Hayes and Shadwell Hill on 21 Mar.

**Common Snipe** Venus Pool consistently produced high counts throughout the quarter with a maximum count of 120 on 16 Mar. 21 were present at Wall Farm on 11 Feb.

**Green Sandpiper** Singles were seen at Aston Locks on 4 Mar, Choulton 7-9 Mar and Cound on 22 Mar.

**Common Redshank** One was at Wall Farm on 18 and 23 Mar. Another was seen at Wood Lane on 29 Mar.

**Black-headed Gull** Reported throughout the county with the most impressive counts from The Mere, Ellesmere, peaking at 4,200 on 3 Jan. 2,500 were at Chelmarsh on 1 Feb.

**Mediterranean Gull** Four reports involving first-winter birds and adults came from The Mere, Ellesmere.

**Common Gull** Most reports came from the north of the county. The highest count was 350 at The Mere, Ellesmere on both 3 Jan and 27 Jan.

**Herring Gull** 600 were in the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere on 27 Jan.

**Caspian Gull** One was present at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 28 Jan and another reported at Wood Lane on 2 Mar.

**Yellow-legged Gull** Up to three were seen at The Mere, Ellesmere between 3 Jan and 23 Feb. Two were at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 1 Feb.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** Reported throughout the period. The highest counts came from roosts at Chelmarsh Reservoir (1,700) on 1 Feb and the Mere, Ellesmere (650) on 5 Jan.

**Barn Owl** Singles were reported at 15 locations throughout the county.

**Tawny Owl** Numerous reports throughout the county. Five were heard simultaneously at a site near Condover on 31 Jan.

**Little Owl** Just two records received, both singles, from Isombridge and Aston, near Oswestry.

**Short-eared Owl** One was present on the Long Mynd on 23 Mar.

**Merlin** Just four records of singles: Bicton Hill on 7 Jan and 19 Mar, Cross Houses on 22 Mar and the Long Mynd on 24 Mar.

**Great Grey Shrike** One was seen at Purslow on 1 Jan and continued to be reported until 17 Jan. Other reports came from Clunton Coppice 6 / 9 Jan, Venus Pool on 28 Feb and Clun on 3 Mar.

**Waxwing** Two were found in a garden in Cockshutt on 3 Jan where they remained until 6 Jan.

**Willow Tit** Records of one or two birds came from 12 locations, mostly in the south of the county.

**Sand Martin** The first record came from Venus Pool, where 20 were seen on 22 Mar. There were more reports at other locations over successive days.

**Swallow** One was at Atcham on 22 Feb and more followed at various locations, in ones and twos, thereafter.

**Cetti's Warbler** One was heard (calling only) at Shavington Park on 16 Feb.

**Dartford Warbler (*Image*)** One was found on the Long Mynd on 24 Mar; it remained for several days.



**Ring Ouzel** All records came from Titterstone Clee with the earliest (two) on 24 Mar. Seven were present the following day and smaller numbers were reported until 28 Mar.

**Fieldfare** Plentiful throughout the period, there were many three-figure counts. The highest counts were at Condover (500) on 28 Jan, Wall Farm (300) on 8 Mar and Bury Ditches (250) on 17 Jan.

**Redwing** Numerous reports from around the county. There were several three figure counts, including 218 at Longford on 3 Jan, 200+ at Middleton Scriven on 9 Feb and 200 at Aston Locks on 4 Mar.

**Wheatear** The first arrival was on the Long Mynd on 9 Mar with further records coming from Clee Hill, Isombridge, Stoney Pound and Caer Caradoc from 18 Mar. The highest count was 7+ at Titterstone Clee on 26 Mar.

**Tree Sparrow** A maximum count of 30 came from Stybank in South Shropshire where birds were seen regularly. Up to fifteen were also reported throughout the period at Oakeley Mynd.

**Tree Pipit** One was present singing at Westcott on 26 Mar and another was seen at Meaton Lane on 31 Mar.

**Brambling (*Image*)**

Reported throughout the quarter with some good counts including: 100+ at Sowdley Wood (east end) on 3 Feb and 21 at Clunton on 25 Feb.



**Hawfinch** One or two were seen at the Wyre Forest between 19 Jan and 4 Mar. The latest report was of a single at Woolston on 24 Mar.

**Coues's Arctic Redpoll** One was present in a garden at Church Aston on 9 Mar.

**Common Crossbill** The highest count was from Brown Clee (70+) on 6 Jan. Good numbers were also seen at Ceri Forest (up to 30), Upper Short Ditch (20+) and Clunton (20).

**Corn Bunting** Flocks of 20 were seen at Kingslow and Tibberton, with singles and small groups noted at other regular locations.

**Snow Bunting** A female was present at the Long Mynd on 4 Mar.

Some sightings are subject to acceptance by the Records Committee. Records for Bird Notes are extracted from the quarterly Birdtrack report for Shropshire.

Due to the volume of records produced, common species are not normally included.

Records must be recorded by observers in Birdtrack by the 10th of the month following the end of each quarter to ensure consideration for inclusion.

Given the short timescale for processing 'Bird Notes' it is not always possible to process personal lists.

All rarities should either be entered into Birdtrack or submitted to the county recorder.

**Compiled by Jim Almond  
Images and cover image: Jim Almond**

## Indoor Meetings

**Bayston Hill Memorial Hall, Lyth Hill Road, Bayston Hill, Shrewsbury  
at 7:15pm**

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

**Wednesday,  
3 April**

**Jim Almond**

**AGM followed by:  
Shropshire Birds**

Another year looking at the local bird world

**2 October**

**Steve Watson**

**Peregrines and Goshawks**

A detailed look at and comparison between the lives of two of our most prolific predators

**6 November**

**Ashley Grove**

**Birding in the Gambia**

A look at the amazing birdlife in this West African country

**4 December**

**Helen Mugridge**

**Tanzania**

A journey through Tanzania looking at the endless array of birds and animals

## Indoor Meetings Church Stretton Branch

### **Indoor Programme for 2019 Church Stretton Branch**

All meetings are held on Mondays in the Methodist Church Hall starting at 7.30pm  
Tea and Coffee on arrival

**28 October**

**Peter Carty**

**Nature Conservation and  
The National Trust in  
South Shropshire**

**25 November**

**Ben Waddams**

**The Meres and Mosses of  
North Shropshire**



*Great White Egret  
Jim Almond*

## Upcoming Field Trips

**23 June**                      **Upton Warren**                      **By Car**  
**Organiser: Sue Brealey**  
**Full Day – Meet at the Moors Car Park at 9.30am**                      **Postcode for SatNav:**  
**B61 7ET**

Directions: Take A38 north towards Bromsgrove from junction 5 of M5. Go past Webb's Garden Centre and turn in the Moors car park on the right after about 1 mile. This lane is not tarmaced. There will be a permit charge of £3.00 from Worcestershire Wildlife Trust unless a member of the Wildlife Trusts. Grid Ref: SO 936 677 See [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/reserves/the-christopher-cadbury-wetland-reserve-at-upton-warren](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/reserves/the-christopher-cadbury-wetland-reserve-at-upton-warren)

## No Trips in July or August

**8 September**                      **Cors Caron (Tregaron Bog) NNR**                      **Car**  
**Organiser: Sue Brealey**

**Full Day – Meet at Old Station Car Park with**                      **Postcode for SatNav:**  
**Visitor Centre**                      **None**

Directions: From Llangurig take A44 towards Aberystwyth, then turn left onto A4120 for Devil's Bridge. Take B4343 for Tregaron & park in Reserve Car Park. Grid Ref: SN 695 630 See [www.naturalresources.wales/days-out/places-to-visit/mid-wales/cors-caron-nature-reserve](http://www.naturalresources.wales/days-out/places-to-visit/mid-wales/cors-caron-nature-reserve)

**13 October**                      **Kingsbury Water Park and RSPB**                      **Car**  
**Middleton Lakes**  
**Organiser: Sue Brealey**

**Full Day – Meet at Broomey Croft Pool Car Park**                      **Postcode for SatNav:**  
**B76 0EF**

Directions: Take M6 south then M42 north. At J6 take A4097 Kingsbury Road to Marston, turn left into Bodymoor Heath Road. Go past the main entrance and go over M42 and find a second entrance on the right. Follow the lanes until the car park is reached at the end. Grid Ref: SP 203 970.  
See [www.countryparks.warwickshire.gov.uk/country-parks/kingsbury-water-park](http://www.countryparks.warwickshire.gov.uk/country-parks/kingsbury-water-park)

**RSPB Middleton Lakes**                      **Postcode for SatNav:**  
**B78 2AE**

Grid Ref: SP 192 967  
See [www.rspb.org.uk/reserves](http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves) then Middleton Lakes

### Telephone Numbers for Organisers and Leaders:

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

Please send contributions or suggestions for *The Buzzard* to **Tim Devanney:**  
**[buzzard@shropshirebirds.co.uk](mailto:buzzard@shropshirebirds.co.uk)**

**Copy deadline for the Autumn 2019 issue is: 1 August 2019**

*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.*