



# ***The Buzzard***

**Shropshire  
Ornithological Society's  
Quarterly Magazine**



**No 259**

**Spring 2020**

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|   |   |
|---|---|
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| <b>Trip Leaders</b>                           | See the annual programme  |
| <b>County Bird Recorder</b>                   | Ian Grant <a href="mailto:soscountyrecorder@gmail.com">soscountyrecorder@gmail.com</a>  |
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## Notices

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

The 64th AGM of the Society will be held on Wednesday, 1 April 2020, 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 1st April 2020

Bayston Hill Memorial Hall  
(immediately following the Annual General Meeting of  
Shropshire Ornithological Society to be held at 7.15 p.m.)

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence.
2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 3rd April 2019.
3. Matters Arising.
4. Presentation and Approval of the Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2019.
5. Appointment of Directors.
  - a. Mrs. A.P. Andrews, Mr. P.G. Deans, Mr. J. Almond and Mrs. J. Rickard retire by rotation and being eligible offer themselves for re-election.
  - b. Mr. W.R. Watkins was co-opted as a Director during the year and is now eligible for election as a Director.
6. Appointment of Independent Examiner.
7. Any Other Business.

***Brian Andrews, Company Secretary***

## **Bank Transfers**

There are now numbers of members making payment of their subscription by Bank Transfer using either the internet or telephone banking services. Please note that it is essential that a reference with adequate information to identify the receipt is given. It should include both the lead name of the membership and the membership number as without this information we shall be unable to allocate the subscription to the right member (this is difficult for certain names - in particular, DAVIES, JONES and SMITH). The reference should read as:  
REF: OTHER, A.N. – 701

Members wishing to commence payment by this method will find our banking details on the Society's web-site.



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## Meetings in Much Wenlock ... a New Branch?

We held two successful meetings in Much Wenlock in October (Jim Almond) and January (Andrew Fusek-Peters). Both have been well attended and we have managed to attract numbers of non-members to both meetings; 21 and 15 respectively, quite remarkable given that it was a foul night in January. A local team of volunteers to assist in setting up has been established and it looks as though we might be on the way to operating as a new branch. A further meeting has been arranged for Wednesday, 25 March at 7.30 p.m. when Jim is returning to give his talk "Shropshire's Magnificent Peregrines". Carol Wood is also attending to update the meeting on "Swifts in Much Wenlock" and to tell us about the new nest box on Holy Trinity Church Tower. Meeting to be held at Priory Hall, Bull Ring, Much Wenlock TF13 6HS.

*Brian Andrews*

## Rookeries in Trouble; More Survey this Year

Last year we collected information from County rookeries, to compare with 2008, with a total of 431 sites, 75% of the 577 logged 11 years earlier. This year I have planned survey work which will examine the remaining 140 or so 2008 sites along with the close to 100 found in 1975 which have not been reported on since. I would like to know how they are all now faring, and then write-up the results.

The results from last year show that almost half (48%) the 2008 sites apparently no longer exist – they were looked for where reported and were just not there.

### The apparent loss of half the sites in a decade is significant and alarming!

This year I am making extensive survey plans and anyone with a little spare time in April/May could help, please. You need to visit the grid reference of the sites and count the nests. However, if the colony is not there you are requested to search for it - it might have what I call 'shifted' locality, almost certainly within 1km. If no shifted site can be found then it will probably be declared 'dead' or 'extinct'. Among this year's 140+ sites from 2008, if the same proportion as last year are 'dead', we might expect 70 of them to be no more.

The aim is to check all sites recorded in the 1975/76 and 2008 surveys and I will write up the results.

## Please help:

While I have several keen recorders, additional help would be much appreciated as I allocate the work, based on people adopting entire 10km squares.

The map shows Shropshire's 10km squares and, within each, the number of tetrads (2km x 2km) which need checking; the smaller number is the rookeries in the 10km square. Most tetrads have one or two sites, rarely more. Volunteers will receive lists of sites in their 10km squares.

I would especially appreciate help from people able to work in the squares south of Telford, towards and south-west of Bridgnorth.

I hope to be able to offer a token payment towards fuel costs to people helping with the scheme, with apologies to the environment.

So; go to the grid reference of the site and count the nests. If the colony is not there then search within 1km and, if you find it, count the nests, or report it apparently 'dead'; then tell me. It is as easy as that.

If you would like to help but are unsure how these squares relate to where you live, do drop me a line and we can talk it through:

[john.tucker@lanius.org.uk](mailto:john.tucker@lanius.org.uk)

As separate little projects a few of us will be checking some of the allegedly 'dead' sites reported in 2019 – to see if the colonies have in fact shifted and are hiding somewhere close by. And a small number of tetrads, from which we have no reports of rookeries, will be checked to see if in fact they do have some.

### Shropshire's 10km squares and the tetrads (rookeries) to be checked in 2020

|   | 1              | 2                | 3              | 4               | 5                | 6               | 7               | 8              |
|---|----------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 4 | SJ14           |                  |                |                 | 7 <sub>9</sub>   | 2 <sub>2</sub>  | 1 <sub>3</sub>  |                |
| 3 |                | 1 <sub>3</sub>   | 5 <sub>9</sub> | 7 <sub>13</sub> | 16 <sub>29</sub> | 7 <sub>13</sub> | 2 <sub>2</sub>  |                |
| 2 |                | 7 <sub>10</sub>  | 5 <sub>9</sub> | 0               | 3 <sub>5</sub>   | 4 <sub>6</sub>  | 2 <sub>2</sub>  |                |
| 1 |                |                  | 4 <sub>4</sub> | 2 <sub>2</sub>  | 1 <sub>1</sub>   | 1 <sub>1</sub>  | 5 <sub>6</sub>  |                |
| 0 | SJ             | 0                | 0              | 2 <sub>2</sub>  | 1 <sub>1</sub>   | 2 <sub>2</sub>  | 8 <sub>10</sub> | 0              |
| 9 | SO             | 0                | 3 <sub>3</sub> | 5 <sub>8</sub>  | 1 <sub>1</sub>   | 9 <sub>19</sub> | 9 <sub>19</sub> | 2 <sub>2</sub> |
| 8 | 1 <sub>1</sub> | 11 <sub>12</sub> | 4 <sub>4</sub> | 1 <sub>1</sub>  | 2 <sub>3</sub>   | 9 <sub>12</sub> | 1 <sub>1</sub>  |                |
| 7 |                | 4 <sub>6</sub>   | 4 <sub>3</sub> | 1 <sub>1</sub>  | 2 <sub>2</sub>   | 3 <sub>5</sub>  | 1 <sub>1</sub>  |                |
| 6 | SO16           |                  |                |                 | 1 <sub>2</sub>   | 0               |                 |                |

10km squares are named by the SO or SJ and then the horizontal and vertical numbers: eg. SO16 & SJ14

|    |    |                      |
|----|----|----------------------|
| TO | 2  | >10 tetrads per 10km |
| DO | 12 | =>5 tetrads per 10km |

*John Tucker*

## Save our Curlews Campaign and Appeal

The SWT/SOS *Save our Curlews* operated for the last two years. It has protecting them with electric fences, and tracking chicks to find out what happened chicks to fledge is a major cause of the need a better understanding of the reasons develop effective conservation measures. pioneering work feeds into the South of Curlew Forum and the national Curlew Recovery Group.

Project work so far has taken place in the Upper Clun and Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group areas, in co-operation with those groups. Progress reports have been included in previous issues of *The Buzzard*. It is hoped to continue work in both these areas in 2020, and project work will also start in the Strettons area, funded by a Stepping Stones project Postcode Lottery grant.

SWT has now withdrawn, but SOS believes that Curlew is a very important conservation priority in the County, and there is a real danger it will become extinct here in the next few years. It is therefore vital that we continue with the project work, and the SOS has committed funds for the next three years to do so.

SOS has also agreed that it will host the Appeal from now on, and the joint appeal on the SWT website is now closed. Members, volunteers in Community Wildlife Groups, and the general public are now encouraged to donate to the SOS Appeal, if they feel able to. A leaflet is enclosed with this *Buzzard* mailing with more information and details of how you can donate. Through the appeal, and funding applications, we need to raise several thousand pounds to do all that we would like to.

The project work complements the monitoring of about three-quarters of the County population carried out by 10 different Community Wildlife Groups. You can help with this too (see "Getting involved" *below*)

Campaign and Appeal has supported finding nests, radio-tagging and to them. Failure of decline, and we so we can This England Species



The SOS website has been updated to reflect these changes, and current plans. See [www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/](http://www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/)

If, like us, you think that Shropshire will be a much poorer place without Curlews, please support the appeal

For further information, please contact Leo Smith, SOS Curlew Campaign Co-ordinator, email [leo@leosmith.org.uk](mailto:leo@leosmith.org.uk), or ring 01694 720296.

## Getting Involved

SOS members, and other keen birders, are invited to help with several projects and surveys in the coming field season. Everyone welcome!!! Further details can be found on the SOS website. If you want to help with any of them, go to the appropriate briefing meeting, if there is one, or contact Leo Smith [leo@leosmith.org.uk](mailto:leo@leosmith.org.uk) 01694 720296.

### Honey-buzzard survey

Honey-buzzards have bred in most counties between Devon and the Scottish Highland region, so they might breed anywhere with areas of large woodland. However, few are reported so the Rare Breeding Bird Panel is organising a survey. Here, the Raptor Group is leading its organisation, supported by Jonathan Groom (BTO regional rep) and Ian Grant (County Bird Recorder)

A pair bred in secret in Forestry Commission woods in south Shropshire from 1995 to 2006, and there have been several records of individual birds near suitable habitat in the breeding season (see species account in the recently-published *The Birds of Shropshire*), so good coverage of Shropshire is important.

Surveyors will be encouraged to find watch-points that give clear views over large areas of woodland. Some larger woods will require several watch-points to ensure full coverage. A typical watch should be of three to four hours duration in good weather during the period 1 July to 31 August. Two or preferably three visits at least a week apart over this period are necessary. It therefore requires patience!!! Honey-Buzzard is a Schedule 1 species, and prone to disturbance and egg-collecting, so attempts to find nests are discouraged, and secrecy is essential.

Agreement will be reached with volunteers about which woodland to survey, and where from, to maximise effective coverage.

## Community Wildlife Group Curlew Surveys

The foundation of the Save our Curlews campaign (page 8) is the location of territories by Community Wildlife Group (CWG) surveyors. In 2018, 320 people in 10 CWGs covered 267 tetrads and found 94-115 Curlew territories, about three-quarters of the County population. The survey involves three visits of about three hours each, around 1 April, 1 May and mid-June.

The area covered by each CWG is shown on the *Save our Curlews* part of the SOS website, overlain on the Curlew Atlas distribution map. Most of the groups have a briefing meeting, to recap on 2019 results, plan the 2020 survey, allocate survey squares and arrange a fieldwork training session for those that want it.

**Please note that some changes have been made to the list published in the last Buzzard.**

|                                    |                    |   |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|---|
| Tanat to Perry<br>(Oswestry south) | Wednesday, 4 March | Morda Village Hall  |
| Upper Onny                         | Monday, 9 March    | The Crown, Wentnor  |
| Camlad Valley<br>Churchstoke       | Tuesday, 10 March  | The Horse & Jockey  |
| Abdon                              | Thursday, 12 March | Abdon Village Hall  |
| Rea/Hope Valleys                   | Monday, 16 March   | Minsterley Village Hall   |
| Strettons area<br>Church Stretton  | Tuesday, 17 March  | Methodist Church Hall,<br>Watling St  |
| Three Parishes                     | Thursday, 19 March | The Pavilion, St Martins<br>Road, Gobowen(Weston<br>Rhyn, St Martin's and<br>Gobowen) |
| Clee Hill                          | Monday, 23 March   | Recreation rooms, 22a Clee<br>Hill High Street  |

**To help the Upper Clun and Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence CWGs, contact  
Leo Smith**

**All the groups need more helpers  
&  
SOS members will be especially welcome**

## Red Grouse Survey

Counts will take place on the Long Mynd every Thursday evening between 2 April and 14 May, from 90 minutes before sunset until 15 minutes after it. Please volunteer even if Thursdays are difficult, as counts are often cancelled because of bad weather, and re-arranged for a Monday or Tuesday.

This year's survey is especially important, as we need to know if the substantial die-back of the heather has affected the population.

Most territories are within sight and hearing distance of the road along the top, between the Gliding Station and the Shooting Box car park. The display flight is noisy, conspicuous and unmistakable, and can be observed over long distances, so this is a suitable project for anyone interested in birds or conservation. No special knowledge or skills are needed. A Project Briefing meeting, which will explain the methodology, will be held at 7.30pm on Thursday, 26 March 2020 at Carding Mill Valley Tea Room (Refreshments provided). If you've done it before, you will be contacted directly.

## Long Mynd Breeding Bird Survey

The National Trust is recruiting volunteers to help with a survey of the main upland species (including Snipe, Curlew, Grey Wagtail, Tree Pipit, Redstart, Whinchat, Stonechat, Wheatear and Reed Bunting). Maps are provided, and surveyors mark on them the location of each of the target species seen, and a code (similar to Bird Atlas codes) indicating the activity and level of breeding evidence observed.

Records of Whinchat will be particularly useful, as they will be passed on to help a separate conservation project, which involves finding nests, recording habitat in detail, and colour-ringing adults and chicks.

Surveyors take on one of the main valleys and the immediately adjacent plateau, and cover it thoroughly at least three, preferably five, times between the very beginning of May and the end of June. It involves walking on sheep tracks on the valley sides, as well as footpaths, so a good level of fitness is needed.

## Red Kite

The Raptor Group is still trying to find all Kite nests, primarily to look for wing-tags on breeding birds. In 2019 we found 35 nests and 5 additional pairs: 21 were successful, producing 37 fledged young. A report is on the SOS website. Each tag is unique, and the colours and letters or numbers tell us the bird's age, and its natal site. Reports are wanted, please, of a pair together in spring,

or displaying, or one seen several times in the same place, or one going into a wood, any time between March and June. Reports of wing-tagged birds are wanted too, please. All reports will be treated in absolute confidence. Kites are very shy, and they are legally protected. It is an offence to disturb them, but this monitoring is carried out under licence.

**Leo Smith**

## Volunteers Needed to Help Monitor Willow Tits across Shropshire

Jonathan Groom, the Shropshire Regional Organiser for the BTO is asking for volunteers for the National Willow Tit Survey, to help monitor numbers of Willow Tit in Shropshire. Jonathan has been coordinating surveys locally since 2016.

2020 now marks the second and final year of the National Willow Tit Survey led by the RSPB. The Shropshire survey will be contributing directly to this important work.

Numbers of Willow Tits are disappearing at an alarming rate in the UK. They occupy damp woodland and scrub where they excavate nests in decaying stumps of birch and willow.

The birds are highly sedentary and remain close to their breeding grounds throughout the year, but may occupy large territories. In recent years, numbers have been lost from large areas of southern and eastern England, probably as a result of habitat loss and possibly climate change.

Records from across the County indicate that the species is widespread, though never common. It is vital that we find out more about them so that we can look out for any signs of local declines in the future, and potentially be in a position to advise landowners to help them. This is vital survey work for an elusive species and every volunteer that can help will be contributing to an extremely important knowledge base.

Dedicated volunteers have already helped to cover a significant amount of ground in Shropshire and we have one more year to collect as much as we can to help the National Survey and inform future monitoring efforts.

Survey areas can be found across the County but some priority areas, highlighted by historic records, are as follows:

- Severn Valley area including Dudmaston
- The wider Telford area
- Newport area and the Weald Moors

- Woodland in the Clun Valley
- Cole Mere and surrounds
- The Wrekin
- Woodland south of Church Stretton including The Knolls
- Old Racecourse, Oswestry

Surveys take place between February and April, peaking in March and early April, and normally require at least two visits. All instructions are provided and you do not have to be an expert birdwatcher to take part. Training can be provided on request.

**Anyone who may wish to help with surveys in 2020 should email Jonathan Groom at [bto.shropshire@gmail.com](mailto:bto.shropshire@gmail.com).**

## Gamebird Releases in Shropshire

All 532 pages of *The Birds of Shropshire* will by now have muscled their way on to many members' bookshelves. What a wonderful and thorough volume it is! But even one as detailed as this could not include everything, and I would like to put some additional information on the record.

Amongst the species texts that I compiled were those for Pheasant and Red-legged Partridge. It was clearly important for me to include, if possible, estimates of the numbers of both species released and shot in the County each year. But how could I achieve this?

National figures were available courtesy of a detailed report published in 2006 entitled 'The Economic and Environmental Impact of Sporting Shooting'. The report, by a firm called Public and Corporate Economic Consultants (PACEC), includes a great deal of information, notably on the numbers of gamebirds released and shot in 2004, however, no attempt was made to assess numbers county by county. Numbers were assessed by region but these were not published, however, a PACEC consultant kindly provided me with the figures for the West Midlands Region. These were 7.4% and 5% of the national totals for Pheasant and 'partridge' respectively (PACEC lumped Red-legged and Grey Partridge together, but there are now few releases of the latter and any such releases are of small numbers).

The report's figures for Pheasant and Red-legged Partridge releases have since been updated to 2012/13 by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) who estimated that 43 million Pheasants and 8.9 million Red-legs were released in that shooting season which was the one on which I based my subsequent calculations.

Shropshire occupies 27% of the land area of the West Midlands Region. This provided me with a way of extrapolating rough estimates from the region to the county. But it would have been a simplistic approach based on the assumption that the shooting of Pheasant and Red-legged Partridge is evenly spread across the region, which appears unlikely. So, was there perhaps a measure of shooting activity which might provide a better guide? It occurred to me that the numbers of gamekeepers per county would provide as good a guide as any. Very helpfully, the National Gamekeepers' Organisation and the British Association for Shooting and Conservation provided me with their respective gamekeeper membership totals, both for the West Midlands Region and for Shropshire. From these I worked out the percentage of each organisation's regional membership that was based in the county. Coincidentally, the mean of the two figures was 27%, bringing me back to the land area figure I had first thought of!

Use of this percentage led to the annual release figures published in *The Birds of Shropshire*: 859,000 Pheasant and 120,000 Red-legged Partridge. These are no more than estimates, but the use of a similar methodology at some future date should enable trends to be determined. Estimating the numbers shot introduces other variables. Rates differ between the two species, as do both the numbers of 'wild' birds in the shooting bag and the opinions of researchers, but the figures I have used, expressed as a proportion of the numbers released, are 35% for Pheasant and 40% for Red-legged Partridge.

Since my calculation of the numbers released, Guy Shrubsole, author of 'Who Owns England? How we lost our green and pleasant land and how to take it back' (2019), has come up with county by county figures for the numbers of Pheasants reared in 2018. Whilst being reared, Pheasants are classed as livestock (magically they change status to 'wild birds' when released) and as such their numbers have to be given to the Animal and Plant Health Authority. A Freedom of Information request provided Shrubsole with figures by county, including 726,000 reared in Shropshire. This is considerably lower than my estimate for releases, but his figure of 35 million reared in the UK is well down on the release of 43 million estimated by the GWCT. It has been suggested that birds are reared abroad for release here and perhaps this explains the discrepancy.

Whatever the true figure the numbers are huge. They prompt the really important question: what effects do these massive annual releases of non-native birds have on the ecology of the countryside?

**Tom Wall**

# The Diaries (1892-1949) of Douglas & Cecil Meares

I began working on Histo in 2007, with no idea quite how it would grow or how useful it would be in the preparation of *The Birds of Shropshire* (2019). I will maintain Histo with recent data to the end of 2020. The website will remain online ([www.lanius.org/sos](http://www.lanius.org/sos)) but it will not be updated beyond this year though SMAD, the migrant arrivals data-base, will be updated annually. However from time to time valuable old works will doubtless come to light, to join the previously dispersed work of Beckwith and the Journal of Charles Gawen, now published in their own volumes.

In 2017 the diaries of Douglas & Cecil Meares were published in book form. The brothers, initially of Clive in north Shropshire, detail their egg collecting and general birding from 1892 to 1949, much of it in Shropshire. Publication was the initiative of TA (Tony) Waddell, but was restricted in that it was produced as images of the handwritten diaries, in around 370 pages, with a limited print-run of 50 copies. Tony was kind enough to present me with a copy, for Histo/SOS use, but until recently it was impractical to put the volume on Histo.

It was clear from first glance that the diaries are important for Shropshire's ornithological record. On the opening page there is a note of a clutch of four Ring Ouzel eggs collected on 21 April 1893 at Pim Hill (SJ488212) which is currently wooded but was then perhaps open heath. The only comparable record from 'lowland' north Shropshire is that reported from Myddle, 3.5km north-west of Pim Hill, by Forrest in his *Fauna of Shropshire* (1899), conceivably referring to the same locality.

Another example of the Meares' valuable contribution is that cited in *The Birds of Shropshire* where reference is made to the regular breeding records from 1902-1911 of Common Sandpiper on streams just south of Shrewsbury such as the River Cound, a situation unimaginable today.

The transformation in the process of putting the Meares' diaries onto Histo was in January when the publishers were asked by Tony Waddell to release the 24 PDFs from which they produced the book. The species index I prepared for the Shropshire records gives access to them, now online. We have prepared an additional index to localities outside Shropshire for Douglas travelled widely after the death of his brother Cecil in the Battle of Somme on 30 July 1916. That index will be sent to each relevant county and the diaries are now available on Histo in the All Historical Documents menu at 1949 <http://www.pgt7.uk/sos/general/index.php>

**John Tucker**

# Field Trip Reports

## **WWT Martin Mere**

**Sunday, 15 December 2019**

The group of 35 arrived at Martin Mere by coach at about 10.30 am. The weather was clear on arrival with temperatures of 6°C, but as the day progressed the weather became more overcast with rising winds.

As usual, the group dispersed to enjoy the reserve in their own way. A walk to the Barker Hide at the end of the right-hand arm of the reserve revealed that there had been a great deal of rain; the fields around the reserve were water-logged and areas of the path were under-water.

From the Barker Hide, the premier migrant birds were soon noted, in Whooper Swans in the fields close to the hide, and Pink-footed Geese seen flying in their usual formations as well as grazing in groups on the fields. Scanning the pools we saw Wigeon, Teal and Mallard ... on closer inspection in front of the hide a Little Egret flew by, followed by Common Buzzard, Kestrel and Marsh Harrier. To the right of the hide was a grazing long-horn bull, and a Barn Owl was quartering the field hunting for food.

After a short walk, we found the elevated, round and open hide. Here, at a feeding station, Pheasant and Dunnock were dining on the fallen feed, whilst on feeders we watched Tree Sparrows, finches and tits.

A further walk took us to the heated enclosed hide, overlooking the main pool, where we had lunch. Unfortunately, we were looking into the sun, in spite of which we were treated to splendid views of Pintail and, perching on a fence, a Mistle Thrush.

We arrived at the main hide, where later in the day the birds were due to be fed. Here we saw Grey Heron, Black-tailed Godwit, and Pochard. With the weather gradually getting cooler and the wind rising, a cup of hot coffee beckoned. As we enjoyed our drinks the weather began to break and we returned to the coach with the rain hammering down. At least 42 birds had been seen, and, it appeared, everyone had enjoyed their day.

***Sue Brealey***

## **Meresands Wood and Lunt Meadows**

### **Sunday, 24 November 2019**

Meresands Wood is a Lancashire Wildlife Trust reserve at Rufford, near Ormskirk. Its name derives from when it was on the shores of WWT Martin Mere.

Five members gathered at the Centre and set off to the nearby Marshall Hide for a welcome coffee and biscuits. Along the path we noted Robin and Wren, while from the hide a range of duck: Tufted, Shoveler, Mallard, Teal and a beautiful male Goosander were seen. Black-headed Gull, Cormorant, a solitary Canada Goose, Coot, Moorhen, Carrion Crow, Magpie and Wood Pigeon were added to the list. We were entertained by two Goldcrest which flitted in gorse bushes in front of the hide.

En route to Ainscough Hide we saw Blackbird, Great and Blue Tit and more Goldcrest, while from the hide we heard, then saw, skeins of Pink-footed Geese over towards Martin Mere. Two Mute Swan cygnets, but no adults, were the only swans present.

The feeder station beside the path through the wood proved fruitful with Coal Tit, Nuthatch, Chaffinch, Treecreeper, Mistle Thrush, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Collared Dove seen.

From Redwing Hide (no Redwings, sadly) where we ate lunch, two male Goosander along with Common Snipe and Grey Heron were added. Jackdaw were feeding on the ploughed field and the last hide, Rufford, afforded good views of two Green Sandpiper, which flew over the lake showing their white rumps. The two male Goosander were joined by five females and a lone Little Egret fed in the marshy pool. Returning to the Centre we had a flock of Long-tailed Tit.

A thirty minute drive took us to Lunt Meadows, which was a 75 acre area of farmland along the River Alt, bought by the Environment Agency and now under the auspices of Lancashire, Manchester and Merseyside Wildlife Trusts. It is famed for its Short-eared Owls – would we be lucky?

Taking a circular route along a very muddy path (one sensible member wore wellies), we noted a series of small, newly-excavated pools, presumably for dragonflies and amphibians. All the species previously seen were present, with the addition of Gadwall, Pintail and Wigeon. A Lesser Black-backed Gull flew across and a juvenile Common Gull stood in the water with a number of Lapwing, while Pink-footed Geese were seen in the distance. A Kestrel was

the only bird of prey thus far, sitting in a tree and Long-tailed Tits flitted in the bushes.

We climbed onto the embankment along the river and a small flock of Linnet sat on a telegraph wire above the carrot fields. At that moment a man and his little grandson (complete with binoculars) appeared and said we'd just missed a Short-eared Owl, very close. Oh dear, a familiar story.

We spotted a small group of birders on a bridge crossing the river to the return path, who told us there were six to nine Short-eared Owls currently on the site. As we waited for the light to fade a Buzzard and Kestrel hunted over the rough grassland and a small group of Pink-footed Geese fed on the carrot field, almost invisible against the dark soil.

We were strongly advised to hang on for another ten minutes and, suddenly, a pale owl flew towards us, then a second joined it. There was a third one, very dark, which the locals had christened, Tiger, because of the stripes on the underwing and which has returned to the site for the last four years. Finally, as we returned to the path, we heard them calling and four owls flew over our heads in the dusk. What a finale! A magical end to an enjoyable day.

*Estelle Hughes*

## Bird Notes

### October, November, December 2019

**Pink-footed Goose** All but one of the records were of birds in flight. 60 were seen heading east at Tibberton on 12 Oct then another large group 150 flying north over Walcot on 1 Dec and finally, 80 over Whitchurch on 31 Dec. A single was seen on Middle Pool, Trench on 30 Dec.

**Whooper Swan** The first report came from Noneley where one was seen on 9 Oct, then up to 25 were present on Floods near Edgerley between 4 and 11 Nov. Five were present on The Mere, Ellesmere on 2 Dec and eight at Melverley Green on 13 Dec. A single was seen at Cross Houses/Venus Pool between 1 and 31 Dec. (*Photo page 19*)



**Egyptian Goose** Seven were reported at Colemere on 15 Oct and then presumably the same group of seven were present on floods near Melverley between 6 and 9 Nov. Two were seen at Venus Pool on 7 and 12 Dec.

**Shoveler** Reported throughout the period, the highest count was at Venus Pool, where 69 were present on 2 Nov. Counts of 40 came from Whixall canal floods and Calverhall during Oct and then 41 at Chetwynd Pool on 15 Dec.

**Gadwall** The highest count came from Venus Pool where 21 were present on 28 Nov.

**Wigeon** Good numbers were reported at several locations throughout the quarter. The highest count came from Wall Farm, Kynnersley where 125+ were present on 30 Dec. Other notable gatherings included The Mere, Ellesmere (102) on 24 Nov and Melverley Bridge (100) on 22 Dec.

**Pintail** The highest count was 20 at Melverley on 22 Dec. Up to four were seen at Venus Pool during Oct and Dec.

**Common Teal** Good numbers regularly seen at Wall Farm, Kynnersley peaking during mid Nov when 150+ were present. The maxima at two other

key sites included 92 at Venus Pool on 2 Dec, and 80 at Whixall Floods during mid Oct.

**Green-winged Teal** An elusive drake was present at Wall Farm between 11 and 25 Nov.

**Pochard** Seen from 18 Oct onwards with maxima at Venus Pool (8) on 23 Nov and Priorslee Lake (7) on 7 Dec.

**Scaup** A first winter was present at The Mere, Ellesmere from 19 to 23 Oct.  
*(Photo)*



**Goldeneye** Reported from six sites, the highest count was 20 at The Mere, Ellesmere on 1 Nov.

**Goosander** Several sites had large gatherings, including:44 at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 11 Dec, 31 on the Severn at Shrewsbury on 18 Dec and 15 at Holmer Lake on 11 Dec.

**Red Grouse** Just one report received of a single at The Stiperstones on 15 Dec.

**Grey Partridge** Three reports of up to three birds at Wall Farm West, Kynnersley during Oct, Nov and Dec.

**Red-necked Grebe** One was found on the Fishing Pool adjacent to Venus Pool on 12 Nov, where it remained and was seen daily until 27 Nov.

**Cattle Egret** One was reported near Oswestry on 6 Oct via the Bird News services.

**Little Egret** There were sixteen reports from widespread locations throughout the quarter, all involving single birds.

**Great White Egret** Singles were reported at Colemere and Kempton during Nov. More reports of a single came from Walcot Park and Lydbury North during Dec. One or sometimes two were seen at Crosemere between 21 and 27 Dec.

**Marsh Harrier** One was reported at Whixall Moss on 5 Oct.

**Hen Harrier** One was occasionally seen at Whixall Moss between 23 Nov and 9 Dec.

**Golden Plover** Reported from ten locations; the highest counts came from: Shadwell Hill (300) on 28 Oct, Stokesay (200) on 14 Dec, and Long Mynd (100) on 27 Oct and 24 Dec.

**Ruff** One was present at Venus Pool between 4 and 15 Oct.

**Dunlin** Two were seen at Venus Pool on 11 Nov.

**Common Sandpiper** One was reported at Venus Pool on 27 Oct.

**Green Sandpiper** One was present at Cantlop Grove on 4 Oct and then up to three were seen at Venus Pool intermittently until 8 Dec. Singles were seen at Chelmarsh Scrape on 11 Dec and the river Perry at Milford on 29 Dec.

**Woodcock** Eight records, mostly singles but included some multiples: fifteen at Burleydam on 12 Dec and seven at Brownheath Moss on 29 Nov.

**Jack Snipe** Two were recorded during ringing sessions at Wolverley and Brownheath Moss during Nov and at Burleydam on 12 Dec.

**Common Snipe** Reported from several locations, the highest counts came from Brownheath Moss (c120) on 24 Nov, Burleydam (c50) on 12 Dec and Black Hill (32) on 17 Nov.

**Redshank** Two were present at Venus Pool on 24 Nov.

**Black-headed Gull** The largest gathering at roosts came from The Mere, Ellesmere where 2,500 were present on 1 Nov. 2,000 were present at Chelmarsh reservoir on 23 Oct and 13 Dec.

**Common Gull** The first record came from The Mere, Ellesmere where twenty were seen on 10 Oct. Numbers increased there up to a maxima of 300 on 24 Nov.

**Mediterranean Gull** An adult was seen in the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere on 24 Nov.

**Great Black-backed Gull** Nearly all the records came from Priorslee Lake from 25 Nov onwards, where up to 11 (adults and younger birds) were seen. Seventeen were present at Telford Crematorium on 8 Dec and ten at Redhill Farm, Shifnal on 13 Dec.

**Herring Gull** The highest count came from Chelmarsh Reservoir where 300 were present on 13 Dec.

**Caspian Gull** An adult roosted at the Mere, Ellesmere on 10 Oct and then two were seen there on 19 Oct. Subsequently there were over 60 reports from Priorslee Lake, nearly all relating to a long staying 1cy bird first seen on 31 Oct then most days until the year end. A 3cy bird was seen occasionally at the same location during Dec. (*Photo*)



**Yellow-legged Gull** The largest count was eighteen (various ages) at The Mere, Ellesmere on 10 Oct. Others were seen at Chelmarsh Reservoir, Priorslee Lake, Trench Pool and Middle Pool during the period.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** Good numbers at the usual roosts and locations with a new County record being set at The Mere, Ellesmere where 6,100 roosted on 1 Nov.

**Barn Owl** Reported from twenty locations throughout the County during the period.

**Short-eared Owl** Three records of singles, the first at Whixall Moss on 23 Nov. Another was at Pole Cottage on 17 Dec, then one at Long Mynd on 30 Dec.

**Little Owl** Reports came from just five locations: Chelmarsh Reservoir, Wall farm, Annscroft, Brownheath Moss and Edgebolton.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** Just two records for the quarter, singles reported at Meaton Lane on 3 Nov and Wyre Forest on 7 Dec.

**Merlin** Singles were seen at Noneley (5 Oct), Long Mynd (16 and 23 Oct), Venus Pool (13 Nov), Middleton Scriven (4 Dec), and Rednal (19 Dec).

**Hobby** One was present at Canlop on 4 Oct.

**Willow Tit** One or two were reported from three locations: Mary Knoll, Whixall Moss and The Wrekin.

**Cetti's Warbler** One was heard singing and occasionally seen at Venus Pool from 29 Oct until the year end. Another single was reported at Chelmarsh scrape on 10 Nov.

**Swallow** The latest reports were of singles seen on 16 Oct at Whixall and then Wall Farm West on 29 Oct.

**Sand Martin** The last report was of five at Polemere on 4 Oct.

**House Martin** The latest reports came from Meaton Lane where 10+ were present on 6 Oct and then two at Noneley on 10 Oct.

**Yellow Browed Warbler** One was present at Venus Pool on 6 Oct, another was reported at Ironbridge on 27 Nov. A single was found at Shifnal Sewage Treatment Works on 29 Dec and was still present into the new year.

**Dartford Warbler** One was reported singing at Bury Ditches on 15 Dec.

**Firecrest** One was caught during a ringing session at Shavington Park, Calverhall on 30 Nov.

**Ring Ouzel** Eight were seen at Titterstone Clee on 16 Oct both on the hill and south of the old quarry. Two were also seen there on 19 Oct.

**Fieldfare** Numerous reports and the first sighting came from Sugnall on 3 Oct. The highest site count came from Ellerdine on 1 Nov where 1,200+ birds were present. 530 were seen at Cantlop on 2 Nov.

**Redwing** First arrivals were reported at Cantlop and Whixall Moss between 4 and 5 Oct. The highest counts came from near Clungunford where 700 were seen on 30 Oct and at Cantlop, 606 were present on 11 Nov.

**Black Redstart** One or sometimes two were seen at Titterstone Clee between 27 Oct and 3 Nov.

**Northern Wheatear** Two late individuals were seen at Hope Bowdler on 12 Oct and Long Mynd on 16 Oct. (*Photo*)



**Tree Sparrow** Just a single record! Four reported at Bishops Castle on 10 Dec.

**Brambling** Reports and numbers were well down on 2018. A single was seen on the Long Mynd on 16 Oct and eventually two groups of 50 birds were seen at Pole Cottage and Walcot Park during Dec.

**Hawfinch** 17 were reported at Horderley Wood on 25 Dec. Singles were also reported at Meaton Lane, Kinlet Bank and Whitcliffe Common during Dec.

**Common Crossbill** Reported from eight locations and numbers were down from the same period in 2018. The only double figure counts came from Bury Ditches (15) on 20 Nov and Cefn Forest (10) on 23 Oct.

**Snow Bunting** Two were present on Titterstone Clee between 7 and 9 Nov.

**Corn Bunting** The maximum count was 68, seen at Wall Farm Marsh on 13 Dec, 44 were present at Tibberton Moor on 22 Nov. Other flocks were seen at Shrawardine (24) and Walcot (17) during Dec.

**Some sightings are subject to acceptance by the County 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 and photos by 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/>

**4 March 2020**

**Amanda Perkins**

**Shropshire Curlew  
Project**

Talk on the work on the project to date, results so far and the future challenges for this wonderful wader

**1 April 2020**

**Alan Heath**

**Annual General Meeting  
and  
'A Moment in Time'**

An image is captured in a fraction of a second but in that moment the connection with the natural world can last for a lifetime. A collection of images that have special memories and significant meaning..

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

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

**23 March 2020**

**Ashley Grove Crane Spotting**

Lake Hornborga in Sweden plays host to one of Europe's most spectacular wildlife watching experiences each spring. Over 25,000 Common Cranes stop here to refuel en route to their breeding grounds further north, joining hundreds of ducks, geese and Whooper Swans in the area. Time your visit well and you can also see all five of Europe's grebes here, White-tailed Eagles, Capercaillie, beavers and much more. Wildlife photographer and tour leader Ashley Grove will give us some geography and history on this wildlife-rich area, all illustrated with stunning images from his experiences in Sweden

**26 October 2020**

**John Hughes**

**Fungi: the Questions You  
Never Dared Ask**

**23 November 2020**

**To be  
announced.**

**23 November**

## Don't get locked-out

### Access Code change for the Members' Hides at Venus Pool

Please note that at a date in early April the existing code (C1958) for the keypads which give access to the North and Memorial hides will be discontinued.

The new number is printed on the reverse of the 2020 Membership Card which (assuming you have paid) is included with this issue of The Buzzard.

There are a few members who regularly pay late and they are urged to bring forward the date of their payment as there are not any arrangements in place to identify them and cards will not be issued until payment is received (in the case of bankers' order payments this might be delayed until the next bank statement is received).

## Upcoming Field Trips

**Sunday,  
15 March**

**Moore Nature Reserve  
Leader: Estelle Hughes**

**Car**

Full Day – Meet at the Car Park at 10am      Post Code for SatNav - WA4  
6XE

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

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

**22 to 29 April**

**South Portugal Holiday  
Organiser: Naturetrek**

Please contact Sue Brealey for details

**Sunday, 17 May**

**Elan Valley (with Shrewsbury RSPB  
Group)**

**Car**

**Leader: Helen J Griffiths**

Full Day – Meet at the Car Park at 9.30am      Post Code for SatNav: LD6  
5HP

Directions: From Rhayader, follow the B4518 west out of the town. The left turn for the Visitor Centre is signposted after three miles. If following SatNav, ignore any advice to cross over the iron bridge; instead, drive right, over the cattle grid and straight on to the Visitor Centre. Grid Ref: SN 928 646 See

[www.elanvalley.org.uk](http://www.elanvalley.org.uk)

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

**Copy deadline for the Summer 2020 issue is: 1 May 2020**

*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.*