



The Buzzard

Shropshire

**Ornithological Society's
Quarterly Magazine**



No 261

Winter 2020

Society Officers and Officials

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Vice Presidents	Brian Andrews, Hugh Blofield, Chris Whittles
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Announcements

Due to the restrictions imposed in response to the current pandemic, the 2020 AGM is postponed until such time that we can meet given number limits and social distancing rules. We suspect that this is unlikely to be before April 2021 (at which time it can be merged with the 2021 AGM). All the necessary regulatory requirements have been dealt with. Please note:

SHROPSHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY AGM 2020

- 1 The Officers and Committee Members have agreed to continue in position until such time that a formal meeting and election can be arranged.

- 2 There were not any records of income and expenditure that require to be reported in accounts to 31 December 2019. Accounts will, however, be prepared for the year to 31 December 2020 in order to report the income and expenditure for the "Save Our Curlews Campaign".

Helen J Griffiths
Hon Secretary, SOS

SHROPSHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY 2005 AGM 2020

- 1 The Board Members have agreed to continue in position until such time that a formal meeting and election can be arranged.
- 2 Following the retirement of Roy Westerman as Independent Examiner, James F Baillie (a Chartered Certified Accountant) was appointed by the Board to carry out the examination of the 2019 Accounts. Mr. Baillie will continue in office until such time as the appointment is ratified by the members. It is to be anticipated that he will then be formally appointed.
- 3 Copies of the certified 2019 Accounts are available from Brian Andrews (bafca@yahoo.co.uk or Tel: 01952 727531). A short resume appears in this copy of *The Buzzard*.

Brian Andrews
Company Secretary, SOS 2005

Accounts for the Year Ended 31st December 2019

Brief Overview

As members will appreciate with the postponement of the A.G.M. due to COVID, it has not been possible to bring the Accounts forward for acceptance by the meeting. As mentioned in the note regarding the A.G.M. they have been examined by our Independent Examiner and so as an interim measure I now in effect show what would have been my report as Company Secretary. Please if there should be any queries, observations or requests for a set of the accounts then contact me at bafca@yahoo.co.uk or Tel: 01952 727531.

The Income and Expenditure Account for the General Fund whilst showing a surplus overall of £5,233 (2018 £2,561), represented underlying figures broadly in line with those reported for 2018. Once Investment Gains are set aside (2019 Increase £9,953, 2018 Decrease £1,393) the Operating Result for the year was a Deficit of £4,720 (2018 Surplus £3,954). These figures showing an adverse movement of £8,674 were impacted by abnormal items, in particular

Avifauna contribution (Net)	£8,399	
Bird Report	<u>£1,600</u>	(Under-provision in previous years)
Sub-Total	£9,999	
Additional Income	<u>£1,034</u>	
	<u>£8,965</u>	

The Conservation Fund in comparison showed a surplus overall of £36,953 (2018 Deficit £7,792). The figures again included movements on Investments (2019 Increase £29,064, 2018 Decrease £4,296) and the underlying figures were 2019 Increase £7,889 2018 Decrease £3,496 (a swing of £11,385). This movement is largely accounted for by:

2018 Hide Expansion	£21,643
2019 Reduction in Grants Received	
	<u>(£9,132)</u>
	<u>£12,511</u>

As will be seen above, the principal figures influencing the Accounts were the Unrealised Investment Gains showing an overall recovery and increase of £39,017 over the 2018 value. The total value of the investments as at 31st December 2019 were £238,236 (Original investment £175,000). It is perhaps surprising to note that with the further investment of £25,000 in 2020 the current (October) valuation is £284,729. Initially there was a sharp downturn in value following the outbreak of Covid-19 but that has been recovered and the current increase for the year (2020) to date is £21,493. Further information regarding the Investments is given in the full Accounts which are available on request (see Notice re A.G.M.).

An active and successful year, with overall funds rising from £247,004 to £289,190, SOS is still hoping to acquire further land and mindful agricultural land prices continues to rise.

Brian Andrews
Company Secretary 26th October 2020

Shropshire Ornithological Society Subscription Renewal 2021

Members are reminded that subscriptions fall due for renewal on 1st January 2021. Those members paying by cheque or cash will find a renewal notice enclosed with this issue of *The Buzzard*. Renewal notices will not be issued to those who have signed bankers' orders as these should be paid automatically.

The rates of subscription for 2021 remain unchanged and are:

- Adult Single Membership £18.00
- Adult Joint Membership £24.00 (Includes up to 2 adults and all children up to the age of 16 years at the same address)
- Junior Membership £8.00 (16 years and under)

STOP PRESS

CAFBank have advised that there will be a significant increase in bank charges from the start of 2021

If we exceed a monthly total of 20 cheques, we will incur a charge of 60p a cheque i.e. 21 cheques mean charges of £12.60!!

Please help to avoid charges either by forwarding your cheque to arrive before 31st December or if paying subsequently using the Bank Transfer method

Bank Transfers

Members can pay 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 Subscription Renewal Notice enclosed with this issue of *The Buzzard*.

Annie Andrews - Membership Secretary

From the Chair

Why did you join SOS? Doubtless all of us share a fascination with birds and a desire to observe and learn about them in their habitats. To this end, we may join SOS field trips, attend SOS meetings and make our own forays into the outdoors to see as large a variety of avifauna as we can. But SOS is more than just a bird-watching organisation. We were formed 65 years ago to encourage the study and protection of birds in Shropshire and elsewhere, to

organise bird-related activities, to produce publications on Shropshire's bird life and to co-operate with other groups with similar aims. Regrettably, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an adverse impact on the achievement of these aims, as it has for all wildlife-oriented organisations. Most notably, it is in the realm of 'bird-related activities' that we have been hit hardest, with the cancellation of society field-trips and indoor meetings, the cancellation and curtailing of survey work and, of course, the limitations to access at our Venus Pool reserve. The hides at VP remain closed for the time being although this decision is being reviewed continuously. Unfortunately, as an all-volunteer organisation we are not able to muster the human resources to follow government guidance on deep cleaning the hides, to maintain a booking system for their use nor to monitor use of the hides for adherence to recommended procedures. We hope that the need for these restrictions will pass soon but, until then, the health of our members and volunteers is paramount.

Please be assured, however, that your membership fees are still being put to good use. During the pandemic, maintenance at VP has continued with work on hide roof repair, tree work and agricultural operations in the arable field. Other necessary projects to enhance the habitat of VP are planned to go forward whether the pandemic remains a factor in daily life or not. All these projects are expensive and depend on the income from your membership fees. Likewise, this magazine and *The Shropshire Bird Report* for 2019, which will be with you shortly, are not cheap to publish!

We are hoping to offer some internet-based monthly programmes in the New Year to partially compensate for lack of access to the Bayston Hill Memorial Hall. Please monitor our website www.shropshirebirds.com for the latest on this and other changes in SOS's response to COVID-19. If government guidelines permit, please also consider whether you might be able to host other members who do not have internet access for these sessions.

In the meantime, we urge you to regard your subscription as a contribution to the work of the Society, rather than as payment for services rendered. This is not really about what you get for your money - it is about supporting important bird conservation work and maintaining a healthy bird population in the county for long after the pandemic has ceased to be part of our lives.

Thank-you for your continuing support of the SOS in these unprecedented times: we ask all our members for understanding and patience until the pandemic wanes and/or a COVID-19 vaccine becomes available and widely used.

**John Arnfield,
Chair, SOS**

Save our Curlews Campaign and Appeal



SOS believes that Curlew is a very important conservation priority in the County. At the current rate of decline the population will halve in the next 10-15 years and be virtually extinct within 25. Action to save the Curlew is vital. The species is on the *Red List of Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire* (see p.11).

SOS launched its *Save our Curlews Campaign and Appeal* in February 2020 with the intention of continuing the project to find nests, protecting them with electric fences, and radio-tagging and tracking chicks to find out what happens to them. Failure of chicks to fledge is a major cause of the decline and we need a better understanding of the reasons so we can develop effective conservation measures. This pioneering work feeds into the South of England Curlew Forum and the national Curlew Species Recovery Group. Unfortunately, this work was postponed because of coronavirus restrictions but it will be resumed next Spring.

The project work builds on the monitoring of about three-quarters of the County population carried out by 10 different Community Wildlife Groups. Although the survey work in 2020 was limited by coronavirus restrictions, so coverage was not as good as usual, some records were received from every area. Preliminary results were summarised in the last (Autumn 2020) *Buzzard*. Curlews had another disastrous breeding season. Most nests failed before chicks hatched and almost all the few chicks that did, perished before they could fledge. Returns from CWG areas are still being analysed but it appears that only one pair, just south of Oswestry, produced any fledged young.

It is therefore vital that we continue with the project work if we are to have any chance of halting the decline.

Work so far has taken place in the Upper Clun and Cleve Hill Community Wildlife Group areas, in co-operation with those groups, in 2018 and 2019. Progress reports have been included in previous issues of *The Buzzard* and can be found on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/. We will continue work in both these areas and project work will also start in the Strettons area, partly funded by the Stepping Stones project with support received from players of People's Postcode Lottery.

Further information can be found about the work of the Campaign and Appeal, current plans and reasons for the decline on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

We have raised most of the money we need to carry out the project in all three areas in 2021 from SOS itself, donations from the Appeal in the February *Buzzard* and some grant applications; all carried forward into 2021, but we still need to raise a few thousand pounds more to do all that we would like to.

Members, volunteers in Community Wildlife Groups, and the general public are therefore 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.

The ten Community Wildlife Groups will all continue with their bird surveys to monitor the Curlew population and several other target species. All SOS members can make a valuable contribution to this work and are requested to do so.

Normally, each CWG would have a meeting next February or early March to plan the survey, but it is already apparent that any such meeting next spring would not be safe for people to attend and so the work will need to be organised by email. The ten Community Wildlife Group areas, in order of formation, are:

- 1 Upper Onny
- 2 Upper Clun
- 3 Clee Hill
- 4 Rea Valley
- 5 Camlad Valley
- 6 Strettons area
- 7 Three Parishes
- 8 Tanat to Perry (Oswestry south)
- 9 Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence
- 10 Abdon

A map showing the areas covered by each group, overlain on the Curlew breeding distribution map from the 2008-13 Bird Atlas, can be found on the SOS website. For more information about each CWG and the results of their individual bird surveys, see www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk. To volunteer to help with one of the CWG surveys next year contact the relevant group via the website or email Leo Smith (address below).

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 or ring 01694 720296.

Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire and Species Recovery Action Plans

Red and Amber lists of *Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire* have been adopted by the Board of Shropshire Ornithological Society. The lists are based on local data and observations collected over the last 35 years, culminating in the publication of *The Birds of Shropshire* by Liverpool University Press in 2019. The approach largely follows that used to produce the national lists published in *Birds of Conservation Concern 4* in 2015. The County and national lists are complementary, and both will be used to determine local conservation priorities.

Three main criteria have been used to select the species listed:

1. Disappearance from large parts of the County (from more than 50% of the survey squares they occupied in 1985-90 to qualify for the Red list and from more than 25% for the Amber list)
2. Big reductions in the County population (by more than 50% to qualify for the Red list and 25% for the Amber list, over the same period)
3. The population is vulnerable because it only breeds at a few sites.

A detailed explanation of the criteria, how they have been applied and supporting references can be found in a paper in the *Shropshire Bird Report 2019* (also on the SOS website, www.shropshirebirds.com/species-recovery/)

The County Red and Amber Lists

Red List	Red List (continued)	Amber List
Chaffinch	Snipe	Black-headed Gull
Common Sandpiper	Spotted Flycatcher	Corn Bunting
Cuckoo	Starling	Dipper
Curlew	Swift	Garden Warbler
Grasshopper Warbler	Tawny Owl	Great Crested Grebe
Greenfinch	Teal	Green Woodpecker
Grey Partridge	Tree Pipit	Grey Wagtail
Kestrel	Tree Sparrow	Marsh Tit
Kingfisher	Turtle Dove	Meadow Pipit
Lapwing	Wheatear	Mistle Thrush
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Whinchat	Moorhen

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
Long-eared Owl
Merlin
Nightjar
Pied Flycatcher
Pochard

Willow Tit
Willow Warbler
Wood Warbler
Woodcock

Sand Martin
Shoveler
Sparrowhawk
Treecreeper
Yellow Wagtail
Yellowhammer

The lists will be reviewed regularly. Although only breeding species have been considered so far, non-breeding species will be addressed shortly.

The lists highlight those native species that are under greatest threat in the County. They will steer SOS's conservation efforts and encourage other organisations to adopt the same conservation priorities. There are 32 species on the Red List and 17 on the Amber List – 49 in total.

Species Recovery Action Plans

The next step is to consider all the species on the Lists and decide what those conservation efforts should be: in short, what, if anything, we can realistically do to help reverse the decline of each species?

Initially, this will be set out in an Action Plan for those species where action at the County level is likely to be effective. Overall, the work will be the responsibility of the SOS Conservation Sub-committee and will be carried out by a dedicated "Species Recovery Working Party".

Priority Species

We have identified 25 species for which an Action Plan can make an immediate impact and we hope to start work on all of them next Spring. They are Black-headed Gull, Corn Bunting, Curlew, Dipper, Grasshopper Warbler, Great Crested Grebe, Kestrel, Lapwing, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Long-eared Owl, Marsh Tit, Merlin, Pied Flycatcher, Pochard, Shoveler, Snipe, Swift, Tawny Owl, Teal, Tree Pipit, Wheatear, Whinchat, Willow Tit, Wood Warbler and Yellow Wagtail.

SOS Programme 2021



All indoor meetings are published as provisional due to potential COVID restrictions

Please check the status of all programmed activities on our website:
<http://www.shropshirebirds.com>

Indoor Meetings

Should COVID restrictions prevent live meetings at Bayston Hill Memorial Hall, we will offer an online alternative via Zoom, if our speaker is happy to present in that way. Zoom meetings will be limited to 100 people. Members will be able to register for an event via the website when the meeting is confirmed online. Places will be allocated on a first come first served basis with a deadline for registration. You can also check the website regularly for updates and find links to Zoom tutorials and details of a dry run Zoom call in December for those who want to try it out for the first time.

Field Trips

Field trips will equally be subject to change due to the COVID restrictions.

It is **essential** that all members check with the website for regular updates and keep friends who may not be online informed.

Member planning to join a field trip must inform the leader/organiser in advance so they can plan for the number of people attending.

As always, car sharing is encouraged but only when it is safe and government guidelines allow. Remember that at some locations, amenities may not be available. All directions are suggestions only.

January - No Field Trip

Sunday, 21st February

Colemere

Organiser: Sue Brealey

Car

Half Day - Meet at the Car Park at 9am

Postcode for SatNav: SY12 0QW

Follow the signs for Colemere Country Park from A528

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

Sunday – 14th March

RSPB Leighton Moss

Organiser: Sue Brealey

Car

Full Day – Meet at Car Park at 10.15am

Post Code for SatNav: LA5 0SW

Take M56 to M6 North. Turn off at Junction 35 (signposted for Carnforth) then follow A6 north (signposted Milnthorpe) and then follow the brown tourist signs to direct you to the reserve off the A6.

See: www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/leighton-moss/

Sunday – 18th April **RSPB Ynys Hir** Car
Organiser: Sue Brealey

Full Day – Meet at the Car Park at 10am. Grid Ref: SN682961/SatNav: SY20 8TA
Directions: Take A487 from Machynlleth, towards Aberystwyth, turning right just after Glandyfi. It is about a mile to Car Park.

See www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/ynys-hir/

Sunday – 16th May **Elan Valley** (With RSPB Local Group) Car
Leader: Helen Griffiths/Ian Baggley

Full Day – Meet at 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 over cattle grid and visitor's centre is ahead of you. Grid Ref: SN 928 646

See www.elanvalley.org.uk

3rd - 6th June **Weekend in East Yorkshire** Car
Organiser: Sue Brealey
Please contact Sue for Details

July – No Field Trip

Sunday – 22nd August **Bird Fair 2021 at Rutland Water**
(With RSPB Local Group)
Organiser: Sue Brealey By Coach

Full day – Leaving the Shirehall promptly at 7.45am

Costs include £15.00 for the Coach Fare plus the Entrance Fee to the Fair itself (£15.00 in 2019). For those who have not gone before this is an ideal way of finding out about anything to do with bird watching, from equipment to optics to travels plus lots of other events.

See www.birdfair.org.uk/

Sunday - 19th September **RSPB Conwy** Car
Organiser: Sue Brealey

Full Day – Meet at Car Park at 10am Postcode for SatNav: LL31 9XZ
Directions: From the A55, take junction 18 (signposted Conwy and Deganwy) and follow the brown RSPB signs. The reserve is on the south side of the roundabout.

See: www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/conwy/

Sunday – 17th October **RSPB Marshside** Car
Leader – Estelle Hughes

Full Day – Meet at the Car Park at 10am Postcode for SatNav: PR9 9PJ
Directions: Take M6 north to J27, Then A5209 to Parbold, and turn right onto B5246
through Rufford until T-junction. Turn left onto A565. At roundabout take 3rd turning onto
Martine Drive. Car Park is at next junction. Grid Ref: SD 353 205

See: www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/marshside

(Please note the Merseyflow notes below)

Sunday – 21st November **Pennington Flash** Car
Organiser – Sue Brealey

Full Day – Meet at the Car Park at 10am SatNav. Post code: WN7 3PA
Directions: - From J22 of M6, take A580 towards Manchester. Turn left onto A572
(Newton Rd). Follow Signposts (Actually the Fire Station, but park is opposite). Pay &
Display Car Park

See: www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Leisure/Greenheart/Pennington-Flash.aspx

Sunday, 12th December **WWT Slimbridge** (With RSPB Local Group)
Organiser: Sue Brealey By Coach

Full Day – Meet at Shirehall Bus Stop leaves 8:15am sharp
Postcode for SatNav: GL2 7BT

Costs: - £15.00 per person for the coach plus entry fees for non-members of WWT

See www.wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/slimbridge

Contact Details:

Sue Brealey 01939 262450//07713 164463

Helen J. Griffiths 01597 810789//07800 880445

Ian Baggley 01939 210520// 07833 647109

Estelle Hughes 01948 840902//07817 243693

Email: fieldtrips@shropshirebirds.co.uk

Note: If using the bridges at Runcorn, please note that there are tolls and payment will
need to be paid at the following website: www.merseyflow.co.uk/pay-for-crossing &
follow the instructions. This needs to be done on the day of the crossing otherwise fines
could be incurred.

Shrewsbury Indoor Meetings

Meetings start at 7:15 pm

Bayston Hill Memorial Hall, Lyth Hill Rd, Bayston Hill, Shrewsbury SY3 0DR

They are free for members: guests pay £2. Tea, coffee and biscuits are served halfway
through the meeting at a nominal charge.

Wednesday, 6th January 2021

Mark Sissons World Primates, Cats and Dogs

A trip around the world looking at the planet's primates, cats and dogs, many of which
are iconic in their own right.

Wednesday, 3rd February 2021

Ashley Grove Mammals and Birds of Trinidad and Tobago
Exploring these beautiful Caribbean Islands to showcase the wildlife that calls them home.

Wednesday, 3rd March 2021

Nigel Spencer Journey to the Arctic
Presentation charting the sights, sounds and wildlife on an epic journey to the Arctic.

Wednesday, 1st April 2021

Annual General Meeting followed by:

Jim Almond Autumn on the Isles of Scilly 2013-2019
A look at the array of birds and other wildlife to be seen in and around the Islands in Autumn.

Wednesday, 6th October 2021

Diane Monether Feed the Birds
Taking us through Shropshire Wildlife Trust initiative to encourage people of all ages and settings to care for our feathered friends and showcasing some of the benefits and successes.

Wednesday, 3rd November 2021

Jeff Clarke Cruisers Go Wild
A fascinating look at the vast array of birds and mammals that can be seen on regular cruise trips with tips on locations, time of year etc., to get the best of both worlds i.e. cruise holidays and wildlife watching.

Wednesday, 1st December 2021

Mike Lane A Lane in Eastern Europe
A look at the diverse Wildlife across several Eastern European countries.

Church Stretton Indoor Meetings

The Methodist Church Hall, Watling Street, Church Stretton and meetings commence at 7:30 p.m., although doors generally open around 7:00. The postcode for the hall location is SY6 7BG. Admission is free to members: non-members are very welcome (admission £2, including refreshments).

Monday 25th January 2021

Jim Almond Another Year Birding in Shropshire

Monday 22nd February 2021

Nick Martin Discovering the Western Isles

Monday 22nd March 2021

Ashley Grove Wildlife of Sweden

Please check the status of all programmed activities on our website:

<http://www.shropshirebirds.com>

Species Champions

We need a Champion for each species to draft the species Action Plan, and lead and co-ordinate its implementation. So far, we have volunteers to lead on most of these species, but we are still looking for Champions for Pochard, Shoveler, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Teal and Great Crested Grebe. Once we have them, and work is underway on these first 25, we can give consideration to finding Champions for the remaining 24.

Each Action Plan will have the goal of restoring/maintaining the chosen species. This is a long-term collaborative project and there will be no pressure to deliver everything at once. SOS has established a Species Recovery Working Party to manage, lead and co-ordinate the work, and each Champion will have the support of the working party, and be able to participate in its work.

The broad role of each Champion can be summarised as:

1. Drafting an Action Plan, following a standard template. This will summarise available knowledge and proposed actions for survey, monitoring and recovery of the population. It will involve some research, and advice will be given.
2. Coordination of Survey/Monitoring. We need to obtain as much up-to-date and specific information as possible about the breeding range and distribution.
3. Development of Proposed Recovery Actions. When appropriate, research into the action to halt and reverse the decline must be undertaken.
4. Delivery of Recovery Actions. This will depend on findings of step 3 above, but may involve providing recommendations to landowners, working with local projects/groups, looking for funding to support actions, responding to planning developments which may threaten/provide opportunities for species.

Champions won't know everything about their species to start with (who does?) but will need to be willing to learn, investigate what is known already, and have enthusiasm and commitment. Champions will also need to be able to communicate well with surveyors, landowners and reserve managers but work within the overall framework provided by the Species Recovery Working Party. We will quickly lose the support of those we need to influence if they are approached in an uncoordinated way by several different Champions with lots of different and possibly contradictory requests.

The policy statement on drawing up and implementing the Action Plans for species recovery and, a more detailed description of the Role of the Species Champion, can be found on the SOS website:

www.shropshirebirds.com/species-recovery/

When you have read these, if you want to volunteer as Champion for one or more species (preferably from the remainder of the initial batch, listed above) or want more information about the role, please contact the Working Party chair, Leo Smith.

Fieldwork and Surveying

We want to start this work in the next breeding season, so we also need a lot of help with survey work for all these species. If you want to help, please contact Jonathan Groom bto.shropshire@gmail.com with a note of the species and/or sites that you want to help survey. We'll need time to develop the Action Plans and collate the preferences for the fieldwork surveyors, so it will probably be February or March before anyone contacts you about the detail of what's involved.

Every member can help

Casual records can add a lot to our knowledge, so we hope all members of SOS will seek out these species and submit reports which include counts and evidence of breeding behaviour. If you know of breeding sites for these species, in 2020 or in previous years, please let us know.

Please help with this important project

Leo Smith
SOS Species Recovery Working Party
leo@leosmith.org.uk

Roy Westerman

The Society would like to take this opportunity to thank Roy Westerman, who has acted as our Independent Examiner from 1993 (or earlier) to 2018 (i.e. at least 26 years). The role of the person in this position is independently to carry out a competent examination of the accounts of registered charities. This may not be a glamorous position, but it is critical in maintaining SOS in good standing with the Charities Commission and Roy has helped us out in this regard on an entirely *gratis* basis. Thanks Roy! Enjoy your "retirement"!

John Arnfield

Not the first book *Birds of Shropshire* after all.

We are all rightly proud of the recently published *Birds of Shropshire* (Smith 2019) which we believed to be the first book to be published with that title. William E. Beckwith wrote a paper with the same title in 1879 and it appeared in the *Transactions of the Shropshire Philosophical and Natural History Society* – it features as Beckwith's Op. W2.1 in my book about him (pp.84-116).

In August Alan Brisbane kindly told me about sale on eBay of a bound copy of Beckwith's W2.1, with the title *Birds of Shropshire* on the spine. The first page/front piece of "Only twenty-five copies printed" with the title *Birds of Shropshire* is in Beckwith's hand "With the authors compliments" and then "to Chas. Fortey Esq. & by him presented to the Hereford Free Library. January 1880" the latter presumed by Mr Fortey.



I secured the copy and it appears that it was the library, not Beckwith himself, who bound the admittedly very thin book; the 25 copies were unbound offprints of his original Op. W.2.1. The thin volume was falling apart when it reached me, and I have had it repaired. So, there was at least one bound copy of a *Birds of Shropshire* before ours of 2019; it does exist, and I have it.

John Tucker

Weird Rook Story: Marvellous Methods in the Building of Nest.

The following article appeared in the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* on 9 January 1909, under the above heading and I am grateful to Alan Brisbane for sending it to me. It is repeated here *verbatim* from the original, with a paragraph break and some italics added for readability. However, though it does not relate to Shropshire it will be added to Histo and, wearing my 'rook hat', I feel it should be more widely known.

With such sound provenance and apparent veracity, something strange and barely credible was clearly going on: that it really was what is claimed is open to doubt. See what you think.

“Mr. T. Digby Pigott, Controller of H.M. Stationery Office, and a well-known ornithologist, sends to the “*Times*” a weird story illustrative of the almost human intelligence of the common rook. The tale came to Mr. Pigott from no less respectable a source than “*a high Church dignitary*” in North Wales. Close by the dignitary’s rectory is a large rookery. Twice a year – in the breeding season, and again when the birds reassemble to carry out repairs before the winter storms begin – the ground beneath the nests is strewn with small potatoes, all of about the same size, “*in the form of eggs,*” and “*showing no signs of having been pecked at.*”

The explanation given by an old parishioner is that the rooks use potatoes for measuring the insides of their nests, to satisfy themselves by practical experiment that they are neither too large nor too small to hold the eggs comfortably, and that, when they have done this, they “*chuck them away.*” A specimen potato sent to Mr. Pigott is “*a typical form.*” It was picked up one morning “*beneath an aged oak tree on which the rooks had been recently repairing their nests.*” “*In the early spring,*” the rector writes, “*there are heaps of them beneath the trees ... The birds never carry them away again, which they would do if they were brought for eating purposes.*” The potato sent to Mr Pigott closely corresponds in size and shape with an ordinary rook’s egg.

John Tucker

A Discussion on Air Pollution

Those of you who know me well will know that I am not afraid to court controversy sometimes in what I write – which at least should be the catalyst for discussion and consideration, if nothing else! So here are some further thoughts from yours truly which I hope will spark some response on either side of the argument.

Over recent years, relatively few people have been putting forward the argument that our current lifestyle has been slowly destroying the world in which we live. This is so at an international level with, for example, the destruction of the rain forests and the misuse of plastics polluting our waterways and oceans. But it is also happening at a more local level in a neighbourhood near you. Many British birds and other wildlife are in trouble with few success stories and mostly only where enough resources are thrown at a particular species. Has it made that much overall difference? Well, you decide for yourself. I think we need a much wider attack on the problem – not just at international or national level, but also at local level. There are many ways this could be done at local level and one of those ways is put forward for discussion here.

One area that has come to prominence during the coronavirus lockdown is the degree of air pollution which is blighting our lives. In the lockdown air, pollution

has been greatly reduced by much less factory emission as production was scaled down, much less air traffic as holidays abroad were cancelled and considerably less road traffic as people stayed at home under government orders. (Coal and wood burning, as well as other things, also cause air pollution but are not under discussion here.)

So why is it important to reduce air pollution? The toxin in air pollution was linked to the deaths of 62 people in Telford and 1182 people in the West Midlands in 2017 and it is thought that in 28,000-36,000 deaths annually in the UK air pollution is a significant factor. The true figures are masked because those who die often have other lung problems and their deaths are not immediately put down to pollution. One significant factor in deaths linked to pollution is the release by vehicle and other engines of what are called PM 2.5's. These are dangerous particles which are released into the atmosphere and over a period causes fatal damage to people's lungs. The release of carbon dioxide is another big factor. If pollution has this sort of effect upon humans, its effect upon wildlife, and especially wildlife with much smaller lungs, must also be significant. In other words, our extensive use of vehicles is killing both us and the wildlife we love.

During the main lockdown period, three out of five people noticed cleaner air. Air pollution levels have dropped by 40% in the Midlands urban areas. Global pollution has dropped by 17% in daily emissions with aircraft emissions accounting for 10% of that figure. There have been reports of greatly improved visibility in areas where haze has been caused by fumes and there has been reports of far more insects seen in areas previously plagued with pollution.

We need to reduce our polluting emissions in society as a whole and this will need action by the Government. Less polluting energy production, more things made in the UK instead of being imported, fiscal measures to reduce air travel and encourage more working from home, and a host of other measures need to be fairly extended over society as a whole and this needs government action.

We also need to reduce our polluting emissions individually and this means that we must all examine our lifestyles and see how we can each reduce our pollution – especially by vehicles.

If you have followed my line of thought so far, you must consider with me how birders can reduce their pollution. After all, we are supposed to be aware of environmental issues and to have the welfare of birds (at least) at the centre of our actions.

We should all try and reduce our carbon footprint in our everyday lives, but here are some points to consider relating to our hobby. 1. Perhaps we should do more birding closer to home – say within a 25-mile radius and using cycles where possible. 2. Restrict long trips in the UK to one a year. 3. Make only one birding trip abroad per year – which mostly would also be the main holiday. 4. Club trips would be mostly local with only one or two further afield per year, and then by coach. 5. Bring an end to twitching – except for local

birds – it really does not serve much purpose other than to create longer lists. (How about starting a craze for a TV Bird List instead?) Now, before you think I am taking a swipe at birders, let me say that there are many other hobbies and activities which could similarly reduce their use of vehicles. Football fans drive colossal distances by the thousands to watch their favourite team. It is estimated that each Man United fan averages over 5.5k miles per year just to watch the away games. Playing games in regions up to the quarter finals would considerably reduce this figure. Other games and activities could follow suit. Stopping the practice of driving children to school where possible and doing more car sharing on journeys to work are other ideas. They are just a few to widen the discussion. So, there you have it. After the lockdown is finally over, do we want to go back to killing 30,000 plus people per year and damaging our wildlife, or do we want to do something about it? Now is the time for a debate.

Richard Camp

BIRD NOTES

Jul, Aug and Sep 2020

Pink footed Goose One was seen at Venus Pool on 20 Sep and a flock of 12 dropped in there on 27 Sep, they were gone by the following morning.

Egyptian Goose A pair were present at Polemere throughout the period. One was present at Chetwynd Pool on 5 Jul and 20 Sep plus another at Venus Pool on 28 Aug and 5 Sep.

Shelduck An adult with two well grown juveniles were present at Venus Pool on 5 Jul. Eight flightless juveniles were seen on a pool near Cockshutt on 15 Jul.

Gadwall An exceptional count of 116 were present on Park Farm Floods, east of Newport on 19 Aug.

Goldeneye Three returning birds were present on The Mere, Ellesmere on 30 Sep.

Red Grouse At least seven were present on the Long Mynd during an early morning count on 14 Sep.

Grey Partridge No reports were received!

Common Quail One or two were present at Adderley from 1 Jul until 19 Aug. Singles were also heard at Stevenshill and Tugford, early Jul. Two were present at Childs Ercall on 8 Aug.

Manx Shearwater One was found dead at Titterstone Clee on 11 Sep. It was not shot as at first suspected but possibly attacked by a Peregrine or corvid whilst grounded. A second one was taken into care at Cuan Wildlife Rescue on 14 Sep, it was later released in good health at the coast the following day!

Cattle Egret Six roosted at The Mere, Ellesmere on 17 Sep, reducing to three the following evening then just one thereafter, last seen on 21 Sep.

Great White Egret One was present in the Buildwas to Leighton area of the Severn between 23 Jul – 2 Aug. Another 'long stayer' was seen at Chelmarsh Reservoir between 14 Aug – 5 Sep. Singles were seen at Coton on 7 Jul, Whitemere on 5 Sep, Bishop's Castle on 17 Sep and Walcot Pool on 29 Sep. Two were present at Park Farm floods on 19 Sep.

Little Egret An impressive flock of 14 were seen in flight over Sundorne, Shrewsbury on 1 Aug. Ten were present in roosts at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 16 Aug and five Venus Pool on 1 Jul. several records came from various locations on the Severn. Mostly singles at some other locations including Ludlow, Brown Moss, The Mere Ellesmere, Astley Abbots, Cantlopgrove and Aston Bridge.

Marsh Harrier One was seen near Calverhall on 11 Aug, another at Whixall Moss on 20 Sep, then a juvenile was seen at Venus Pool on 26 Sep.

Hen Harrier A ringtail was present on the Long Mynd on 3 / 5 Sep. Another report came from Berriewood on 9 Sep.

Osprey Single birds were seen at Venus Pool on 4 Aug, 21 Aug and 5 Sep, Leighton on 4 Aug and Chelmarsh Reservoir on 24 Aug.

Lapwing No three figure counts this quarter but ninety were present at both Wall Farm on 18 Aug and Venus Pool on 3 Sep.

Golden Plover Twelve were seen on the Long Mynd on 14 Sep.

Ringed Plover Up to ten were present on Park Farm Floods between 16 Aug – 16 Sep. One was seen briefly at Venus Pool on 5 Sep.

Little Ringed Plover Up to three were present at Park Farm Floods, between 20 Aug and 15 Sep.

Whimbrel One was heard calling over Shrewsbury on 24 Aug and two or more were recorded nocturnally at Cantlopgrove.

Curlew A flock of up to 36 roosted at Wood Lane on 29 Jul and 10 were seen at Park Farm Floods on 30 Aug. Singles were reported at Ightfield, Montford Bridge, Caer Caradoc and Oakley Mynd.

Black-tailed Godwit Four were seen at Pepperhill Pool on 9 Jul. One was present at Park Farm Floods, east of Newport between 18 – 25 Aug.

Ruff Up to three were present at Park Farm Floods, between 29 Aug – 17 Sep. Two were seen at Stockton Flash on 15 Sep and a single dropped in briefly at Venus Pool on 27 Sep.

Curlew Sandpiper One was present at Park Farm Floods on 6 Sep.

Dunlin Passage birds were recorded over Cantlopgrove on 7 Aug and then a single at Northwood Flood on 25 Aug. Up to ten were present at Park Farm Floods between 3 – 27 Sep.

Little Stint One was present at Park Farm Floods between 7 – 16 Sep.

Common Sandpiper Three were present on Chelmarsh Dam on 6 Jul. Singles were then reported throughout the period at Cantlopgrove, Venus Pool, Northwood Flood, Park Farm Floods, Stockton Flash and at a few locations by the Severn.

Green Sandpiper Up to six were seen regularly throughout the quarter at Venus Pool and at Underton Quarry, Bridgnorth on 10 Aug. Up to four were present at Chelmarsh reservoir and other reports came from Tibberton Moor, Wall Farm, Northwood Flood, Attingham Park and Bicton Hill.

Redshank One was seen at Venus Pool on 28 Sep.

Greenshank Three flew over Chelmarsh Scrape on 2 Aug and up to three were present on Park Farm Floods, east of Newport between 1 – 17 Sep.

Woodcock One was seen roding over Black Hill on 2 Jul.

Common Snipe The earliest record came from Wall farm, Kynnersley where three was present on 19 Aug. There were no large counts but steady increase to a maximum of nine on 24 Sep at Venus Pool.

Arctic Tern A county record flock of 32 were present at White Mere on the evening of 25 Aug in the aftermath of Storm Francis. Earlier in the quarter two were seen at The Mere, Ellesmere on 4 Aug and one was at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 21 Aug.

Common Tern Six were present on jetties at White Mere in the aftermath of Storm Francis on 25 Aug. Singles were seen at Priorslee Lake on 21 Aug, Chelmarsh Reservoir on 1 Jul, 2 / 22 / 24 Aug and The Mere Ellesmere on 26 Aug.

Kittiwake A juvenile was in the roost at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 10 Aug.

Black-headed Gull The largest roosts reported were at Chelmarsh Reservoir where the maximum count was 2500 present on 19 Aug. There

were much lower numbers generally at The Mere, Ellesmere where the highest count was 400 on 30 Sep.

Mediterranean Gull One or two juveniles were present in the roost at Chelmarsh reservoir between 26 Jul – 5 Sep. Other single juveniles were seen at Venus Pool on 17 Aug, The Mere, Ellesmere on 12 Aug and Bridgnorth playing fields on 20 Aug.

Common Gull Most records came from Chelmarsh Reservoir where up to seven were seen on 10 Aug in the roost. Six were seen at The Mere, Ellesmere on 19 Sep.

Great Black-backed Gull Single 1cy birds were reported at The Mere, Ellesmere on 28 Aug / 30 Sep and at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 24 Sep.

Herring Gull Mostly single figure counts until early September with the Mere, Ellesmere producing at least 80 in the roost on 30 Sep.

Caspian Gull A 3cy bird was in the roost at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 26 Jul and 4 Aug, followed by a juvenile there on 19 Aug and an adult on 25 Sep. One was present near Condover on 18 Sep and another at Cantlopgrove on 29 Sep.

Lesser Black-backed Gull Reported at various locations throughout the quarter with evidence of breeding including 6 or more chicks / juveniles on a factory roof near Ludlow during July. Some very large roosts were noted including 5700 at The Mere, Ellesmere on 30 Sep and 3000 at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 25 Sep. A very striking leucistic first winter bird was seen at both Venus Pool and the adjacent fishery during late Sep.

Yellow-legged Gull Eighteen were present in the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere on 22 Aug. Up to six (on 2 Sep) roosted at Chelmarsh Reservoir throughout the period.

Cuckoo A juvenile was present at Wall Farm, regularly feeding on the same fence line between 24 Aug – 6 Sep.

Barn Owl Records of single birds came from, near Bridgnorth, Noneley Cantlopgrove and two near Enville.

Little Owl Reported from just four locations: Meadowley, Cantlopgrove, near Whitchurch and Wistanstow.

Tawny Owl Five were recorded at Chelmarsh reservoir on 5 Sep and a family group of four at Cantlopgrove on 2 Jul. Single birds were also reported at twenty other locations.

Nightjar No records received!

Common Swift The highest count was 100 at Venus Pool on 2 – 4 Jul, 50 were seen at Cranmere Bog on 24 Jul. The last sighting came from Shrewsbury on 8 Sep.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker There were four reports: Pontesbury Hill on 2 Jul, Beambridge on 15 Jul, Wistanstow on 13 Aug and Stiperstones on 8 Sep.

Merlin Singles were present at the Long Mynd on 17 and 23 Sep. One was also reported at Rhos Fiddle on 22 Sep.

Hobby Seen at numerous locations throughout the period, mostly single birds but four were present at Chesterton on 24 Aug. Three or more were sometimes seen from Cantlopgrove and Upton Cressett during Aug.

Ring-necked Parakeet One was reported in a garden at Ackleton between 12 - 14 Aug.

Willow Tit Four were seen at Black Hill on 9 Aug including possible young as well. Other records came from: Stapeley Hill, Bury Ditches, Mary Knoll Valley, Whixall Moss, Clunton Woods, Colstey Wood, Bentlawn and Flounders Folly.

Sand Martin The highest count was 50+ at Chelmarsh Scrape on 24 Aug. The latest report was on 24 Sep.

House Martin These were still being reported at the end of Sep. The highest counts were 150+ at Meaton Lane on 13 Sep, 140 at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 5 Sep and 100 at Cantlopgrove on 1 Sep.

Swallow Numerous records with counts of 110 at Venus Pool on 15 Aug. Increased numbers were seen in September with 250+ at Wall farm, Kynnersley on 8 Sep, 180+ at Cantlopgrove on 8 Sep and 150 over Cockshutt on 13 Sep.

Cetti's Warbler Up to three were reported at Chelmarsh Scrape throughout the period, two juvenile birds were trapped and ringed there during early July. One was reported at Venus Pool from 3 Sep onwards. Other singles included a bird ringed at Ruyton XI Towns on 20 Sep and another calling at Priorslee Lake on 30 Sep.

Grasshopper Warbler One was reeling on and off for much of the day at the Old Riverbed SSSI, Shrewsbury on 2 Jul.

Garden Warbler Relatively few records, mostly singles. The latest record came from Chelmarsh Scrape on 6 Sep.

Lesser Whitethroat Singles reported from eight locations, the last sighting was at the Mere, Ellesmere on 19 Sep.

Common Whitethroat Noted at numerous sites with the maximum of seven at Wall Farm on 15 Aug. The latest record was on 20 Sep, near Wem.

Reed Warbler Seen at seven locations with a highest count of six at Shifnal sewage Works on 16 Jul. The latest record was on 20 Sep at Chelmarsh Scrape.

Spotted Flycatcher Numerous sightings throughout the county with the last report on 3 Sep. Several reports noted families or groups, with a maximum of eight at Wall Farm on 18 Aug.

Whinchat Five were reported on the Long Mynd on 14 Jul and four at Park Farm Floods on 1 Sep. Other records came from Hidmore (23 Jul), Noneley (3 Sep), Whixall Moss (6 Sep) and Venus Pool (26 – 27 Sep).

Wheatear Eighteen were reported on Titterstone Clew on 1 Sep, six on Caer Caradoc on 10 Jul and five at Bicton Hill on 4 Sep. Other records came from the Long Mynd, Stapeley Hill, Meadowley, Stiperstones, Brown Clew, Cantlopgrove, The Wrekin and Roden.

Tree Sparrow Up to 27 were seen daily at a location in Newcastle, 20+ at Meadowley and up to nine at Oakley Mynd. Other reports came from Pentre, and Upton Cressett.

Yellow Wagtail Some impressive counts came from Tern Hill during late August when 63 Yellow Wagtails were counted amongst a flock of 200 mixed Pied/Yellow. At least 28 were in a field following plough near Conover on 6 Sep.

Tree Pipit Five were seen in Mary Knoll Valley on 12 Aug. Other reports came from Cefn Coch, The Bog, Cantlopgrove and Venus Pool.

Common Crossbill Seven were seen at Myndtown on 29 Sep. Other records came from Cefn Coch, Bury Ditches, Shavington, Stiperstones, Meaton lane, Topley and the Long Mynd.

Corn Bunting There were no double figure counts, nine were seen at Cherrington on 6 Sep. Other records came from Tibberton, Hopstone, Kingslow, Childs Ercall, Chesterton, Beckbury, Northwood and Wall Farm.

Some sightings are subject to acceptance by the Records Committee.
compiled by Jim Almond

Wetland Bird Survey: Volunteer Counters Required for 2020-2021

There are 69 actively counted Wetland Bird Survey Sites (WeBS) in Shropshire. The following seven sites are vacant for which counters are required: (1) Chelmarsh Reservoir, SO731877 near Bridgnorth. This is an important and an interesting site of year round interest which attracts a diversity of water birds and passerines throughout the year; the species list is 62. (2) Two Dudmaston Pools are close together and share the same map reference SO744887. (3) The Bog Cranmere, SO752976. (4) Blake Mere, SJ558425 and Ossmere, SJ556438 are in close proximity and are near Whitchurch. (5) River Severn at Leighton, SJ623041 and (6) Sutton Farm Pool, Market Drayton, SJ671314. Additionally, there are numerous other unlisted sites in the county that merit counting and would improve the Shropshire's species population indices.

I would appreciate if WeBS counters would encourage fellow birders to participate in our interesting WeBS isurveys. **If you know of a birder who may be interested in surveying an existing site or of a new site of his/her choosing, please let me know asap or alternatively, give the person my contact details and ask the person to contact me. Training will be given to new recruits, if required.**

Michael Wallace, BTO Shropshire WeBS Local Organiser
michaelwallace47@gmail.com 01743 369035

Upcoming Field Trips

January - No Field Trip

Sunday, 21st February

Colemere

Organiser: Sue Brealey

Car

Half Day - Meet at the Car Park at 9am

Postcode for SatNav: SY12 0QW

Follow the signs for Colemere Country Park from A528

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

Sunday – 14th March

RSPB Leighton Moss

Organiser: Sue Brealey

Car

Full Day – Meet at Car Park at 10.15am

Post Code for SatNav: LA5 0SW

Please check the status of all programmed activities on our website:

<http://www.shropshirebirds.com>

Please send contributions or suggestions for *The Buzzard* to **Tim Devanney:**

buzzard@shropshirebirds.co.uk

Copy deadline for the Spring 2021 issue is: 1 February 2021

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