



The Buzzard
Shropshire
Ornithological Society's
Quarterly Magazine



No 262

Spring 2021

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Announcements

Thomas William (Bill) Edwards

Bill Edwards joined the SOS in January 1961. He was a lifelong supporter and a familiar face at indoor meetings and field trips, until a few years ago when he became too frail to attend. Sadly, Bill died on 20th December. A full obituary will be published in the 2020 Shropshire Bird Report.

The Oswestry branch of Shropshire Wildlife Trust is raising funds to spend on bird-related projects in the local area in Bill's memory. This might include an owl box or two and kitting out the new bird hide (soon to be finished) at Holly Banks nature reserve. The hide will be named in Bill's memory. If you would like to contribute, SWThave set up an online funding page where you can donate securely.

<http://www.gofundme.com/f/in-memory-of-bill-edwards>

Or, if you prefer, you can send a cheque to David Hardwick (Branch Chairman), made payable to Oswestry Branch, Shropshire Wildlife Trust and post to Tanatside, Llanyblodwel, Oswestry SY10 8NQ.



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The Hirundines of Hopesay Parish: update

Introduction

In 2015, a survey of breeding birds in Hopesay parish (*Buzzard* 2017 249:11-12) found and mapped 160 House Martin nests 99 of Swallow and just two of Swift and a repeat survey was carried out in 2020 to monitor changes.

House Martin nests were down slightly to 135 nests, a loss of 25 (15.6%).

Swallows suffered a decline to 29 nests, a loss of 70 (70.7%).

The number of known Swift nests increased from two to three; the same two in one house as in 2015 and another nest which may have been present and overlooked in 2015, so the situation best regarded as no change.

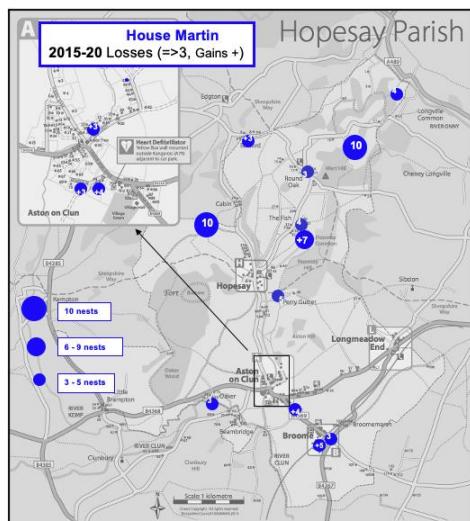
Counting multiple bird nests is seldom an exact science. Once found, perhaps it is not in use, or was earlier in the year, and by what - so the counts cannot be exact. With experience, and sometimes a mirror on a stick to look into open nests too high to reach, it is possible to get a good idea of occupied nest numbers. The counts of total nests here are considered correct to within ten.

Particularly in the case of martins; they arrive, wholly or partly build, then they may desert, or the nest falls down and they don't rebuild or the built nest is taken over by sparrows, so when to 'score' them? Nests can survive year to year and clarifying the exact occupancy of multiple nests is time-consuming.

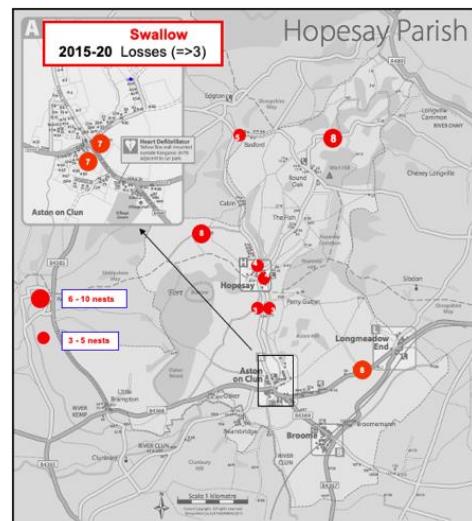
The changes over five years.

The maps 1 and 2 below show the changes between 2015 and 2020 at sites with three or more nests.

Map 1



Map 2



The House Martin, Map 1, shows a mixture of losses and some gains (shown with a +) and they evidence little change over the five years; a 15.6% decline. There has been a reduction in the NE, notably the loss of a colony of ten at a property from which the birds have been excluded by wire netting. Otherwise, the overall pattern of distribution is much the same as in 2015 though with a decline from 10 to two at the farmstead NW of Hopesay and with a few increases, for example from 26 to 33 (+7 nests) at the property NE of Hopesay.

The Swallow, Map 2, dots all relate to losses (3 or more per site) and show the decline almost everywhere and overall 70.7%. However, the reasons are twofold with marked contrasts in their character.

Swallow losses 1. The loss of the two clusters of eight nests each, a fifth of Swallow losses, in the NE and E, are easy to explain and due to, respectively, the demolition of a farmstead and its outbuildings and the conversion of an old barn to a dwelling.

Swallow losses 2. The other major losses are similar in nature to each other though the reasons for them are not apparent:

Seven each were lost from two sites in Aston, one a collection of disused farm buildings now abandoned by the birds, the other disused barns down from eight nests to one. The farm buildings in the extreme NW lost all five nests and the farmstead NW of Hopesay declined from 10 to two. Two groups of farm outbuildings in Hopesay village lost four nests each, both now deserted.

These six typical ‘farmyard’ sites, which between them account for the loss of 35 nests and represent half the Swallow losses, are all from what should be prime habitat for them and they prompt two questions.

Are the farm buildings and their surrounds no longer suitable for Swallows? Were there too few Swallows around this year?

Away from the main Swallow concentrations of 3 nests or more accounted for above, some individual properties gained and some lost a nest or two:

Gains		Losses	
Gained two nests	2	Lost two nests	3
Gained one nest	6	Lost one nest	19
Gains	8	Losses	22

Swift

Two nests were known at one property in 2015 and they were active again in 2020. An additional nest was discovered in 2020 and it is likely to have been present but overlooked in 2015, so no change is suggested.

The three Swift nest boxes erected on Aston Village Hall were not occupied during 2019 or 2020. However, a Swift was seen to enter one of the boxes several times on 12 or 13 July, explained as perhaps a young bird prospecting for a home to adopt in 2021.

What is happening elsewhere?

National data from the BTO website and County evidence from *The Birds of Shropshire* (Smith 2019).

House Martins are in slight long-term decline both nationally and in Shropshire so a 15% fall in numbers over the five years is not surprising, and may not be confirmed next year.

Swallow numbers fluctuate considerably nationally and within the County but the 70.7% decline revealed this year is alarming and will be re-examined next year – is this year simply a one-off from which the population will recover?

Swift numbers are plummeting nationally whereas the County trend is bucking that and has declined by only 13% though Swift is on the County's Red List. The difficulties of censusing this species have been reflected in this survey – nest sites are sometimes found almost accidentally by fleeting glimpses of birds dashing into nest holes in the eaves of older houses.

The future:

At the start of the year there was an idea of perhaps repeating it again in 2025 but in the light of the dramatic decline in Swallow numbers this year it will be repeated it in 2021, to see if the reduction has been temporary.

Help to Stem the Losses

As so often in nature conservation, '*If it ain't broke don't fix it*' – or, if you have a natural system which is functioning well, try to [maintain/retain](#) it. If you have any of these nesting with you, please try to keep them.

Swallows, House Martins and Swifts almost exclusively nest on or within man-made structures – without them they will become rare.

House Martins stick their dome-shapes nests high up under the eaves.

Swallows build in out-buildings, sometimes in sheltered porches (one such in Broome in 2020) or old pig sties (3 in 2015, 2 in 2020 in Hopesay and a farmyard).

Swifts nest high up inside roof spaces, entering though small gaps under the eaves.

House Martins



If you have House Martins nesting under the eaves, leaving piles of droppings below, live with that and certainly don't knock them down or block their access with wire mesh or use other tricks. Some people put up ledges under the nests to collect the droppings, others put down pieces of wood or card on the ground to collect them. It is illegal to destroy occupied bird nests.

The House Sparrow problem. The pugnacious little blighters will often try, and all too often succeed, in **requisitioning** House Martin nests for their own use.

If you anticipate this problem put up nest boxes for the sparrows, in winter and close to where the martins will try and nest when they arrive. Hope that the sparrows move in.

Put up artificial martin boxes and leave a stick in the nest hole to keep out sparrows and remove it when the martins arrive.

Sparrows can be discouraged by placing a curtain of weighted strings in front of the nest. Sparrows find it difficult to fly up at a steep angle to the nest, but martins do so easily. The strings should be about 230 mm long, 65 mm apart and no nearer than 150 mm to the nest hole.

Some people knock down the usurped martin nest, *before* the invading sparrows have begun to lay, in the hope that the sparrows will not occupy the martin rebuild. NOT!?

Sparrows are aggressive to martins, driving them away from their territories. There is an apparent example of martins nesting in peace in August, after the sparrows had bred and left them in peace.

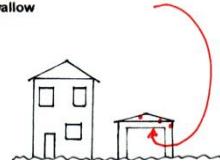
There are local examples of fallen young being 'posted' into nearby nests already with young, the adopted parents apparently successfully rearing their enlarged family.

Martin nests sometimes fall down, depositing eggs or young on the ground. In one such case in Aston this year the four nestlings were taken to the Cuan Wildlife Rescue near Much Wenlock to join a dozen others similarly being cared for there.

Fix scallop shells horizontally about 10cm below the soffit and martins may move in and build, in the secure place without the danger of the nest falling.

Swallows

Swallow



If you have Swallows nesting in a barn or open shed, or one with access through an open window, or perhaps an old pig sty (where two pairs nested this year, three in 2015, at separate locations) then don't demolish the building, leave it accessible to birds wanting to fly in to nest.

Try putting up nest boxes for the sparrows, hoping that they prove more attractive dwellings than those made the martins.

Swifts

Swift



There are few of the high lofts with entry holes, typical of old Victorian houses and favoured by Swifts. Some will use other high holes in walls but holes giving access to loft spaces are their favourite.

RSPB advise:

Sparrows can be discouraged by placing a curtain of weighted strings in front of the nest. Sparrows find it difficult to fly up at a steep angle to the nest, but martins do so easily. The strings should be about 230 mm long, 65 mm apart and no nearer than 150 mm to the nest hole.

The strings should all be the same length to prevent tangling. They can be fixed with nails or drawing pins and weighted with steel nuts or plasticine. This curtain may be erected before the martins arrive but should only be put up during nest building if sparrows attempt to take over.

If house sparrows are keen to nest on your house, placing nest boxes with 32 mm entrance holes under the eaves well away from the house martin nests may persuade the sparrows to nest in these instead.

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/house-martin/conflict-with-sparrows/>

To encourage House Martins to nest. A muddy pool or puddle where they can collect nesting material is helpful, especially during a dry spring. They appear to choose sites at random, but painting the top half of a building white or cream may attract them. <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/house-martin/encouraging-them-to-nest/>



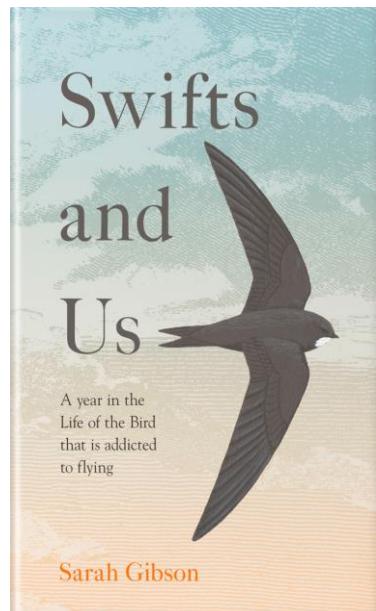
Scallop shell platforms
(Tom Wall)

'Only Connect': Salwey, Lichens, Swifts and Sarah

I like making connections. A little cluster that has pleased me recently starts with Thomas Salwey (1791-1877), the second son of Theophilus Salwey of The Lodge, Richard's Castle, near Ludlow. I came across Thomas when investigating the history of lichen recording at Downton Gorge, near Ludlow, for a book I am editing. Thomas was a lichenologist and an important contributor to The Lichen Flora of Great Britain, Ireland and the Channel Isles, compiled by the Reverend William Allport Leighton (1805-1889) who, incidentally, was born and lived most of his life in Shrewsbury and wrote A Flora of Shropshire (1841), the first for the county.

In those days second sons often followed a career in the army or the church, and I learned that Thomas had chosen the latter, becoming a vicar in Oswestry. This started a bell ringing in my head. When compiling the text for Swift for the Birds of Shropshire, I had, courtesy of John and Peter Tucker's extraordinarily comprehensive Historical Ornithology of Shropshire <http://pgt7.uk/sos/> come across an account of the mysterious discovery of the remains of 57 Swifts and Starlings, principally the former, in a cavity in the tower of a church in Oswestry (see Birds of Shropshire for more in the way of detail). The author of the account, published in Loudon's Magazine of Natural History in 1836, was one T Salway (sic), and despite the aberrant spelling, this surely had to be the Reverend Thomas. I tracked down the account once more, and found that although the author never named the church, he gave his address as Vicarage House, and an enquiry to the very helpful Parish Administrator, Frances Major, revealed that Thomas Salwey was Vicar of St Oswald's, Oswestry, from 1825 to 1871. Connection made.

But how about some more? I contacted the Oswestry Swift Group to find out whether Swifts nest at St Oswald's nowadays. Sarah Gibson, one of the Group, told me that there are currently nest-sites on nearby houses but none on the Church itself. However, the group had erected a dozen boxes in the Church tower and a call system to attract the birds which have shown interest but have yet to nest.



This is an example of the many grassroots efforts of Swift champions in the UK and beyond to keep them racing through our skies. And Sarah tells me that she has written a book about Swifts which is to be published by Collins on 29 April to coincide with the return of Swifts to our towns and villages. The book explores the life of these most aerial of birds, their relationships with people and the work of Swift champions. The book is *Swifts and Us: The Life of the Bird that Sleeps in the Sky*. Connections duly made.

Tom Wall

Swift Bricks – the Universal Solution

Swift box sales soared during the Spring and Summer of 2020 and indeed many Swift box suppliers couldn't keep up with demand and are still busy fulfilling recent orders. There is a wide range of designs available and over the last decade our understanding of what is a 'good' design for Swifts has increased.

External Swift boxes certainly have their place especially as retrofit on our houses – they are the only option that most of us have to offer Swifts nesting opportunities.

But for new housing developments we need to see integral Swift bricks installed as they have many advantages over the range of boxes for a variety of species that are often installed as a somewhat standard response of developers to include provision for birds in their plans.

The Duchy of Cornwall has been involved with many new housing developments in Cornwall and Dorset and has, as part of its sustainability strategy, been pioneering several wildlife enhancing measures including the provision of artificial cavities in buildings (aka Swift bricks) to accommodate a range of nesting birds such as Swifts, House Sparrows, Blue Tits, Great Tits and Starlings. To confirm that installing Swift bricks is having a positive impact on birds breeding in new developments, the Duchy commissioned a Citizen Science project in which residents living in four development sites have reported on the use of the Swift bricks during the breeding season. The results for 2020 show that between 37% and 96% of the bricks were in use across the 4 sites and for those sites that were also surveyed in 2019 the occupancy

rates doubled during 2020. House Sparrows are most abundant with 64 confirmed nests followed by, perhaps surprisingly, House Martins with 31 nests followed by 22 Starlings nests – a great result for brand new developments that often start on a barren site and where food supplies are probably not good until greenery becomes established.

And, the icing on the cake, a Swift was seen to be prospecting one of the bricks at the end of the 2020 season. Blue Tits, Great Tits and Nuthatches have also been observed using Swift bricks – so one brick, many species.



Sparrow in Swift brick

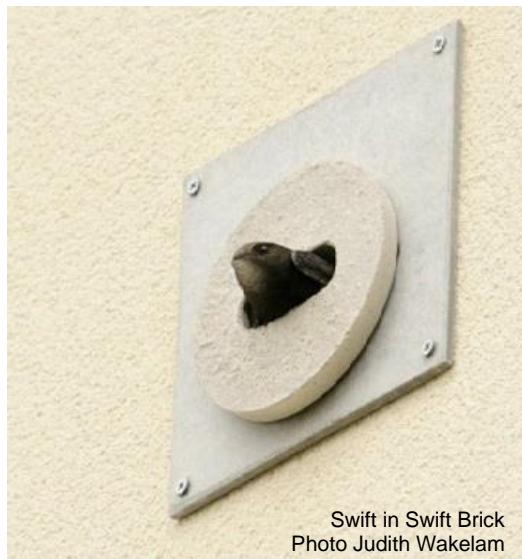
Photo: Hugh Hastings and the Duchy of Cornwall



Sparrow in Swift brick

Photo: Hugh Hastings and the Duchy of Cornwall

The results of this project are good news for developers as it shows installing integrated Swift bricks means that just one brick type will provide a very cost-effective ecological enhancement for a variety of bird species – no need for Sparrow terraces which are often not used, boxes for Starlings, boxes for Blue tits etc. Sparrows and other species are very happy to use Swift bricks but the converse is not true - Swifts cannot use sparrow terraces, house martin cups or blue tit boxes



outside Cambridge. The whole estate was redeveloped and by 2014 almost 160 internal swift nest sites were installed and of these over 70 were in use. The Schwegler entrance hole to simple boxes in the roof void has been a great success.

More recently the S brick has been developed by Action for Swifts and this is suitable for any extensions that you are planning or indeed for retro fitting. Called the S brick as it is suitable for Sparrows and Swifts and, importantly for UK buildings, it spans a single course of bricks. With a wide range of finishes it really can be installed anywhere.

Swift Bricks are very easy to include in routine building practices and provide an inexpensive way to enhance biodiversity – note that the nest site is completely confined within the brick with no access to the roof space.

Like Swift boxes there are a number of designs available and one of the earliest and most successful Swift brick projects has been the Windmill Estate





For more information about S bricks see

<https://actionforswifts.blogspot.com/p/s-brick.html> and for general guidance re residential bird boxes <https://actionforswifts.blogspot.com/p/rbbg.html>

Do let me know if you want advice or if you have put up Swift boxes -

shropshire swifts@gmail.com

Join us on Facebook -

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/shropshire swiftgroup/>

Peta Sams – Shropshire Swift Group

Save our Curlews Campaign and Appeal

Curlew is on the Red List of Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire. At the current rate of decline the population will halve in the next 10-15 years, and be virtually extinct within 25 years.

The SOS Save our Curlews Campaign intends to find nests, protect them with electric fences, and radio-tag and track the 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. Assuming that the coronavirus lockdown restrictions are eased, we will continue this project work in the coming breeding season in the Upper Clun and Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group areas, and will start in a new area, the Strettons.

The project work builds on the monitoring of about three-quarters of the County population carried out by 10 different Community Wildlife Groups (CWGs). Although the survey work in 2020 was limited by coronavirus restrictions, coverage of Curlew territories was good, and showed that Curlews had another disastrous breeding season. Most nests failed before chicks hatched, and 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. Progress reports on work since 2018 have been included in previous issues of The Buzzard, and can be found on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

The work is expensive, but we have raised most of the money we need to carry out the project in all three areas in 2021, from SOS itself, donations to the Appeal in the November Buzzard, and some successful grant applications, but we still need to raise some more to do all that we would like to.

If you have donated already, thank you very much. Your support is greatly appreciated. If not, please consider donating to the SOS Appeal, if you are able to.

A leaflet is enclosed with this Buzzard mailing with more information and details of how you can donate.

The 10 CWGs will all continue with their bird surveys to monitor the Curlew population, and several other target species. This monitoring is an important part of the Species Recovery Action Plan (see p.20)

All SOS members can make a valuable contribution to this work, and are encouraged to do so. It's easy to do, from public rights of way, and participants are provided with simple survey instructions and a map to record sightings. It only takes half a day in each of three two-week periods, around 1st April, 1st May and mid-June, and there will be a practical (socially-distanced) training session around the end of March for anyone who fees they need it.

Normally, each CWG would have a meeting to plan the survey, but it is already apparent that such a meeting would not be safe for people to attend, so the work will need to be organised by email.

The 10 Community Wildlife Group areas, in order of formation, are:

1. Upper Onny
2. Strettons area
3. Upper Clun
4. Three Parishes
5. Clee Hill
6. Tanat to Perry (Oswestry south)
7. Rea Valley
8. Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence
9. Camlad Valley
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 web-site, or email Leo Smith (address below).

Curlews and Pheasant Release

A contributory factor to the decline is now being increasingly understood, the impact of releasing large numbers of Pheasants into the countryside for shooting.

The RSPB announced last October the results of the review of its policy on game bird shooting, which it undertook partly because of the effect of releasing large numbers of Pheasants on the landscape and other wildlife. It is now seeking improved environmental standards, a reduction in the number of gamebirds released and better compliance with existing rules about reporting releases. The RSPB is committed to working with the shooting industry over the next 18 months to bring about this change. If substantial reform is not forthcoming in this period, then the RSPB will press for tighter regulation of large-scale gamebird releases. For further information see www.rspb.org.uk/gamebirdreview

The number of Pheasants and Red-legged Partridges released in the UK EACH YEAR has increased from 4 million in 1961, the first year for which there are figures, to almost 60 million now. Only 35% are shot, and the remainder don't live very long, so they provide a year-round supply of food for every other predator and scavenger. While the number of Pheasants released since 2004 has increased by one-third, the number shot has not increased since the 1990s.

In Shropshire, 726,000 Pheasants were released in 2018 alone, so predation of Curlews (collateral damage from foxes hunting Pheasants) is very high, and the Curlew population is heading for extinction (down 80% since 1990).

Conversely, the feral breeding population of Pheasants increased by 62%

between 1997 and 2014 (County BBS results), and it is now the tenth most common breeding species in the County (and far and away the biggest in terms of biomass). They have spread from the release sites to virtually every part of the County now.

BTO has published research showing a disproportionate increase in the Buzzard and Crow population in areas with a high number of released Pheasants (Pringle et al 2019).

The massive increase in Pheasant carrion has allowed Buzzard and Raven to spread eastwards across most of England since 1990, and is undoubtedly the food source that has allowed Kites to spread into, and right across, Shropshire in only 15 years.

In 2014 there were an estimated 44,000 pairs of breeding Pheasants in Shropshire, all descended from previous releases (Pheasant is an introduced species), compared to 160 pairs of Curlew and 800 pairs of Lapwing.

Again, further information about this, including references, can be found on the SOS website 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.

If you are able to, please get involved with the monitoring by CWGs

For further information, please contact Leo Smith, SOS Curlew Campaign Co-ordinator, email 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!!! If you want to help with any of them, look on the appropriate website, or contact Leo Smith leo@leosmith.org.uk 01694 720296.

All surveys will comply with whatever Government Covid-19 restrictions are in place at the time.

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 John Martin (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 Birds of Shropshire 2019), 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-four hours duration in good weather during the period July 1st to August 31st. 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 (see p14)is the location of territories by Community Wildlife Group (CWG) surveyors. The survey involves three visits of about three hours each, around 1April, 1 May and mid-June. See www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

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

Other Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire

See separate article on page 20.

Red Grouse Survey

Counts will take place on the Long Mynd every Thursday evening between 1 April and 13 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 unmistakeable, 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 can't be held this year, but a written brief will be provided, and there will be a practical on-the-job (socially-distanced) training session, explaining how to go about the survey, and record what you see, on the first date, 1 April.

If you've done it before, you will be contacted directly.

*Further Information (and Participants form) from
shropscwgs.org.uk/strettons-area-wildlife-group/long-mynd-red-grouse-project/ or Lorna Taylor
(email: lorna.taylor@btinternet.com phone 01694 723301)*

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.

Several of the target species are on the Red or Amber list of Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire, and survey results will be provided to the Species Champions (see p20).

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. A report on 2020 will be posted when it's finished. 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

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

The last Buzzard reported that SOS has adopted the Red and Amber lists of Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire, based on local long-term data published in The Birds of Shropshire (2019). There are 32 species on the Red List, and 17 on the Amber List – 49 in total. The lists, and criteria used to determine them, were described in that article, and can be found on the SOS website, www.shropshirebirds.com/species-recovery/

Species Recovery Action Plans

An Action Plan for those species where action at the County level is likely to be effective in halting and then reversing the local decline is now being drawn up. Overall, the work will be the responsibility of the SOS Conservation Sub-committee, and is being carried out by a dedicated “Species Recovery Working Party” which will manage, lead and co-ordinate the work.

Priority Species

We have identified 23 species for which an Action Plan is likely to make an immediate impact, and we hope to start work on all of them in the coming breeding season. They are Black-headed Gull, Corn Bunting, Curlew, Dipper, Grasshopper Warbler, Great Crested Grebe, Kestrel, Lapwing, Long-eared Owl, Marsh Tit, Merlin, Pied Flycatcher, Pochard, Shoveler, Snipe, Swift, Teal, Tree Pipit, Wheatear, Whinchat, Willow Tit, Wood Warbler and Yellow Wagtail.

Species Champions

We have appointed a Species Champion for most of these 23 species to draft the species Action Plan, and lead and co-ordinate its implementation. We are

still looking for Champions for Pochard, Shoveler, Teal and Great Crested Grebe, and would welcome volunteers. A description of the role can be found on the website. Once work is underway on these first 23, we can begin finding Champions for the remainder, to start work in 2022.

This is a long-term collaborative project and there will be no pressure to deliver everything at once. Each Champion will have the support of the Species Recovery Working Party, and be able to participate in its work.

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/

Systematic Fieldwork and Surveying

We are now looking for lots of volunteers to help with detailed systematic survey work in the coming breeding season on specific species or sites. Please note that systematic means it has to be done to a method set out by the Species Champion or other Survey Co-ordinator. It doesn't mean that it's difficult or takes a lot of time! The Champion will provide the necessary guidance and recording instructions.

Immediate needs are

- *Curlew, in the 10 Community Wildlife Group areas (see Save our Curlews on page 14)*
- *Wood Warbler – suitable woodland at Brown Clee, Bury Ditches, Candy Valley, Clunton Coppice, Dowles Brook area of the Wyre Forest, Mortimer Forest, The Ercall, The Wrekin and Whitcliffe*
- *Willow and Marsh Tit, mainly in March in woodland across the County, using a tape recording to attract a response,*
- *Grasshopper Warbler, to sites across the County in late April*
- *Swift, locating nest sites, mainly in urban areas. The hour before sunset during June and July is usually most productive. A volunteer to co-ordinate survey work in each town with old buildings would be extremely useful.*
- *Lapwing, Kestrel, Cuckoo, Tree Pipit, Meadow Pipit, Wheatear, Whinchat, and other listed species in some areas, also on Community Wildlife Group surveys*
- *Kestrel, Cuckoo, Tree Pipit, Wheatear, Whinchat, Grey Wagtail on Long Mynd Breeding Bird Surveys (see "Getting Involved" page 17)*
- *Corn Bunting and Yellow Wagtail, in north Shropshire.*
- *A survey of all listed species on each of the larger SWT reserves – if you live near one of these reserves, and visit it regularly, this might be ideal for you.*

This list will be added to as the Action Plans develop. The up-to-date list can be found on the website.

If you know which species you want to help with, contact the Species Champion directly through the email address on the website.

If you want to help by surveying a specific site (your choice - not necessarily one of those listed above), or want to be offered opportunities that reflect your general interest or near where you live, please contact Jonathan Groom (bto.shropshire@gmail.com) with a note of the interest, species and/or sites that you want to help survey.

Casual Records - 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. Please send such records to the Champion in the first instance. They will be passed on to the County Bird Recorder at the end of the season, unless you also put it on BTO BirdTrack.

If you only put it on BirdTrack, we won't get it in time to do any useful follow-up during the breeding season.

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
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Ethical Investment

The Society's investments are held in funds managed by CCLA Fund Managers (available to Churches, Charities and Local Authorities). In particular they are held in 2 funds approved for Charities:

- COIF (Charities Official Investment Fund) Charities Investment Fund – Income Units
- COIF Charities Global Equity Income Fund

CCLA state that they follow a client driven ethical investment policy. It specifically rejects investment in Oil sands and Coal Extraction, Tobacco, Adult Entertainment, Gambling and some (but not all) Armaments.

The Society has now received an invitation to switch the COIF Charities Investment Fund into the COIF Charities Ethical Investment Fund which has a broader based ethical approach with further restrictions (in particular those investments effecting Climate Change). The switch would be at a cost of around £900 to £1,000 per annum in an overall reduced return on investment (part dividend part increase in capital value).

The Board have considered the offer to switch but were of the opinion that we should not take it up but attempt instead to support initiatives in Shropshire regarding Climate Change as they might arise and set aside £1,000 each year to aid those initiatives. It was also agreed to explore the possibility of acquiring small parcels of land within the County with the intention of the natural regeneration of woodland and the dual purpose of providing further diverse habitat and the absorption of CO₂ emissions. With regard to the latter initiative then if anyone has a particular area in mind then we should be pleased if they would contact the Conservation Sub-Committee.

Brian Andrews

45 Years of British Birds Available

A collection of the journal British Birds is available to anyone who can give them a good home. The series runs from 1977 to 2020. The first two years are bound, and the remainder are boxed and are in 'as new' condition. If you are interested in this valuable set of magazines, please contact Pete Deans (petedeans@btinternet.com) or Pam Swales (pamstunlaw@outlook.com or by phone at 01952 248 749). The collection cannot be broken up and it will be the recipient's responsibility to pick up and transport the volumes. The owner has suggested a donation to SOS funds in exchange for the set.

Pete Deans

Bird Notes

October, November, December 2020

Dark-bellied Brent Goose A juvenile was present with a flock of Canada Geese at Leighton Bends on 9 Dec. It was seen once more there on 17 Dec and missing in-between.

Pink-footed Goose Good numbers in the County! A flock of up to 300 was present feeding and roosting in the Adderley/Tittenley Pool area, occasionally seen in flight there between 17 Nov and 31 Dec. Another large flock of at least 600 were seen over Market Drayton and Welshampton on 17 Nov. One was occasionally seen at Venus Pool between 1 Oct and 29 Nov, then three on 29 Nov. Two were reported at Chelmarsh Reservoir between 7 – 16 Dec.

White-fronted Goose One was seen at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 6 Dec and another was feeding with the Pink-footed Geese in a stubble field near Adderley on 31 Dec.

Bewick's Swan One was present with Mute Swans, early morning at Venus Pool on 6 Dec. It flew out but returned to the adjacent fishing pool during that afternoon.

Whooper Swan The first report came from Edgerley/Melverley floods where 10 were seen on 9 Nov. The highest counts for the area were: 32 including six juveniles on 21 Nov, then 26 including six juveniles again on 31 Dec. Two were present with Mute Swans in fields near Betton Abbots between 8 – 11 Dec (photo)



Egyptian Goose Two were seen occasionally at Venus Pool between 23 Oct and 12 Dec. Another two were present near Edgmond on 18 Nov and 27 Dec.

Shoveler Reported throughout the period, the highest count was at Chetwynd Pool, where 78 were present on 12 Dec. Other notable counts included: Calverhall (35) on 28 Oct, The Mere, Ellesmere (31) on 29 Dec and Whixall Floods (26) on 19 Dec.

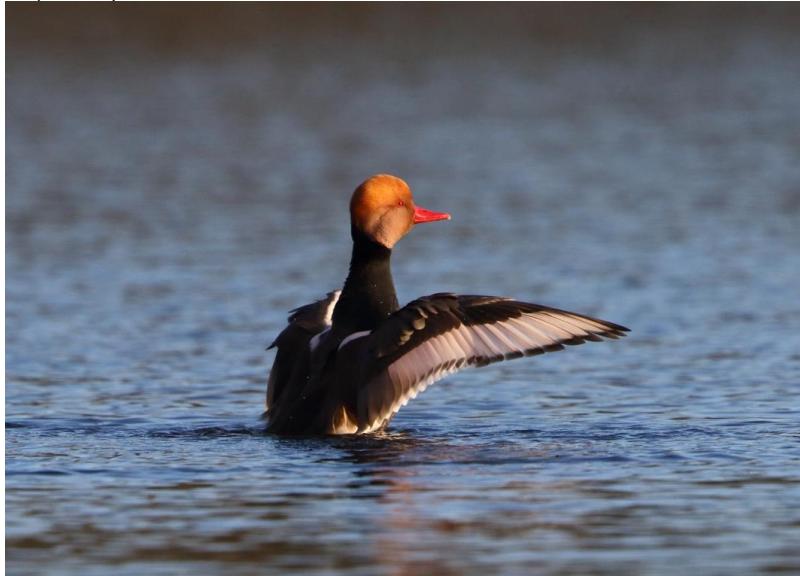
Gadwall The highest count came from Ellerton Mill Pool where 24 were present on 14 Nov. Eighteen were present at Venus Pool on 10 Dec.

Wigeon Good numbers were reported at several locations throughout the quarter. The highest count of 200 was recorded at both Holly Banks/Melverley on 11 Nov and Calverhall on 19 Dec. 76 were at Park Farm Floods on 19 Dec and 50 at Venus Pool on 14 Nov.

Pintail The highest count was nine at Holly Banks on 11 Nov and eight at Polemere on 4 Oct.

Common Teal Good numbers throughout the County. The highest counts came from Cantlop where 200 were recorded at a nearby farm reservoir. There were 120 at Whixall Floods and Dryton towards the end of the year.

Red-crested Pochard A drake was present at Priorslee Lake between 26 - 30 Nov (Photo).



Pochard Seen from 15 Oct onwards with maxima at Calverhall (13) on 13Dec and Priorslee Lake (10) on 27 Nov.

Scaup A female was present at The Mere, Ellesmere on 13 Nov which remained there until year end.

Common Scoter Six were present at The Mere, Ellesmere between 12 – 15 Nov. Multiples were also reported at Chelmarsh Reservoir: two on 19 Nov, three on 29 Nov and five on 7 Dec.

Goldeneye The Mere, Ellesmere produced the first record of two on 23 Oct and the highest count of 25 on 30 Dec.

Goosander Several sites had large gatherings, including: 38 at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 22 Dec, 34 at Colemere on 24 Nov, 33 at Melverley Floods on 10 Nov and 25 on the Severn at Shrewsbury on 27 Nov.

Red Grouse Four reports received, of one or two from the Long Mynd.

Grey Partridge Just two records. Two at Acton Reynald on 17 Oct, and a group of ten near Dodecote on 22 Dec.

Great Northern Diver A juvenile was found at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 4 Nov and was still present on 30 Dec. Despite a gape wound, probably due to a fishing hook incident, it remained apparently untroubled and was feeding well (Photo).



Pied-billed Grebe A 'County first' juvenile was found at Chelmarsh Reservoir during the afternoon of 26 Nov and it remained there until 22 Dec. Despite being wide-ranging and elusive it proved to be very popular and with patience, sometimes showing well close to the Causeway.

Cattle Egret One was reported near Newport via the Bird News services on 5 Dec.

Little Egret 27 reports came from widespread locations throughout the quarter, often involving more than one bird. There were eight at Holly Banks on 5 Dec.

Great White Egret Three were reported near Edgerley / Holly Banks on 9Nov and other records came from several locations: Venus Pool, Chelmarsh Reservoir, Priorslee Lake, River Severn, Morville, Rowton Castle, Chetwynd Park and Wall Farm.

Shag A juvenile was briefly present at Priorslee Lake, during the early morning of 25 Oct.

Hen Harrier One was seen occasionally at Whixall Moss between 25 Oct and 22 Dec. Another report came from Noneley on 30 Dec.

Golden Plover Reported from twenty locations; the highest counts came from: High Ercall (1100) on 20 Dec, Cherrington (250) on 6Nov, and Albrighton (200) on 13 Nov.

Ringed Plover One was seen at Park Farm Floods on 13 Oct and 16 Oct.

Ruff Three were present at Park Farm Floods, near Newport on 4 Oct.

Common Sandpiper Singles were present at Venus Pool on 1-2 Oct, Dinham Weir, Ludlow on 1 Oct. and Shrewsbury Weir on 13 Oct.

Green Sandpiper Two were present at Pam's Pools on 8 Oct and then three were seen at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 6 Nov. Singles were also seen at Brown Heath, Bromfield, Venus Pool and Cantlop.

Woodcock Over twenty records, mostly singles but included some multiples, notably eight at Burleydam on 12 Nov.

Jack Snipe Two were recorded during ringing sessions at Burleydam on 19Nov and eight at Souton on 25 Nov and 11 Dec. Singles were seen at Black Hill, Buildwas, Long Mynd and two at Hales Pools on 15 Nov.

Common Snipe Reported from several locations, the highest counts came from Hales Pools, Coal Brook (c128) on 15 Nov and a site near Wem (c120) on 25 Nov and 11 Dec.

Black-headed Gull The largest gathering at roosts came from The Mere, Ellesmere where 4,800 were present on 21 Dec. 2,500 were present at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 12 Nov.

Common Gull The first record came from The Mere, Ellesmere where six were seen on 2 Oct. Numbers increased there up to a maximum of 550 on 29 Dec. Records also came from: Cantlop, Chelmarsh Reservoir, Crose Mere and Priorslee Lake.

Mediterranean Gull Two (1cy and 2 cy) were present at The Mere, Ellesmere on 14 Oct. Singles were also seen at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 5 Nov, Ellesmere on 12 Nov and Venus Pool on 19 Nov.

Great Black-backed Gull A 2w bird was seen at Chelmarsh on 8 Oct and another single was seen at The Mere, Ellesmere on 23 Oct. Multiples were then seen at Priorslee Lake from 30 Nov onwards with a maximum of nine in the pre-roost on 28 Dec.

Herring Gull The highest count came from The Mere, Ellesmere where 530 were seen in the roost on 29 Dec. 132 were present at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 12 Dec.

Caspian Gull One was present amongst a group of LBBGs at Venus Pool on 1 Oct, a first for the reserve. A 2w bird was then seen at Priorslee on 20 Oct with up to three seen there during Nov. An adult was present in the roost at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 12 Nov and a 1w at The Mere Ellesmere on 24 Dec (Photo).



Yellow-legged Gull The highest count was nine at The Mere, Ellesmere on 16 Oct. Others were seen at Chelmarsh Reservoir (max 5+ on 8 Oct), Priorslee Lake (max 5 on 11 Nov), during the period.

Lesser Black-backed Gull Good numbers at the usual roosts and locations with The Mere, Ellesmere producing a count of 6,000 on 14 Oct and 5,400 on 2 Oct.

Barn Owl Reported from sixteen locations throughout the County during the period.

Short-eared Owl Singles were reported at five locations: Long Mynd, Berriewood, Adderley, Stapeley Hill and Whixall Moss.

Little Owl Reports during the quarter came from just three locations: Noneley, Cantlop and Albrighton.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker One record, from Clunton Coppice on 1 Dec.

Merlin Reports of singles came from fifteen locations throughout the period.

Hobby A late record came from near Oswestry on 8 Oct.

Ring-necked Parakeet One was seen and photographed in Shawbirch on 13 Nov.

Willow Tit One or two were reported from six locations: Wolverton Wood, Cole Mere, Stapeley Hill, Lawley, Mary Knoll and near High Vinnals.

Cetti's Warbler One was heard singing and occasionally seen at Venus Pool between 1 Oct – 14 Nov. Two were present at Chelmarsh on 26 Nov and singles seen or heard at Shavington Park on 188 Oct, Kynnersley Reservoir on 8 Nov and Whixall Floods on 31 Dec.

Siberian Chiffchaff A probable was seen near Eardington on 20 Dec.

Swallow The latest reports were of singles seen on 18 Oct at Cressage and Cantlop followed by a very late individual at Queens Head, Oswestry on 21 Nov.

Sand Martin Just one late record of a single at Venus Pool on 4 Oct.

House Martin The latest reports, both singles, came from Hill Valley on 12 Oct and Prees on 20 Oct.

Yellow Browed Warbler Singles were reported at Kinnerley on 12 Oct and Maesbury Marsh on 5 Dec.

Firecrest Two were caught during a ringing session at Shavington Park, Calverhall on 4 Nov. One was seen at Eardington on 17 / 20 Dec.

Rose-coloured Starling (Right) A juvenile was photographed in a Whitchurch garden on 18 Nov. It remained until at least the 31st Nov and was seen by many visiting birders (Photo).



Starling A few local murmurations were recorded, with estimated counts of 15,000 at both Venus Pool on 20 Dec and Whixall Floods on 31 Dec. A pre-roost gathering of 8,000 was noted at Moreton Say,

Ring Ouzel One was seen in flight over Cantlop on 9 Oct, then singles were reported at Titterstone Clee on 16 Oct and 23 Oct.

Fieldfare Numerous reports and the first sighting (of 14) came from Shifnal on 9 Oct. The highest site count of 800 came from a Cantlop vismig session on 17 Oct.

Redwing First arrivals had been reported in late Sep. The highest count came from Cantlop on 13 Oct where 4983 were recorded in a vismig session. 750 were present at Shavington Park on 18 Oct.

Black Redstart A first winter male was seen and photographed near Oswestry on 22 Nov.

Whinchat There was a late record of one (with image) on the Long Mynd on 22 Nov.

Northern Wheatear Two late individuals were seen on 1 Oct, at Brown Clee and near Leebotwood. Another was seen at Stiperstones on 11 Oct.

Tree Sparrow 23 were reported daily near Newcastle on Clun during October. Up to 5 were present and seen at Oakley Mynd. Singles were seen at Venus Pool on 7 Nov and Pentre on 13/28 Dec.

Brambling A single was present at Venus Pool on 7 Oct and numbers increased up to five at various locations thereafter. An exceptional flock of 50 were seen at Wart Hill, nr Craven Arms on 5 Nov.

Hawfinch One flew NE with thrushes at Cantlop on 17 Oct.

Common Crossbill Reported from fifteen locations. Double-figure counts came from Baker's Hill (20) on 27 Nov, Catherton (19) on 11 Oct and Brown Clee (12) on 14 Oct.

Lapland Bunting One was present at Titterstone Clee on 25 Oct, despite being elusive showing well at times. A second report of one seen in flight at Woolston came on 19 Nov (Photo).



Snow Bunting One was found and photographed by walkers on 6 Dec near the summit of Black Knoll at the southern end of Long Mynd. It remained for three more days, normally very confiding and last reported on 9 Dec.

Corn Bunting The maximum count was 41, seen near Tibberton on 30Dec. Other counts of 20or more came from Maesbury and Cherrington.

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 county rarities should be submitted to the county recorder with notes and / or photos / recordings. For list of county rarities see 2019 Shropshire Bird Report.

Compiled and photos by **Jim Almond**

Indoor (online) Meetings via Zoom

Wednesday, 3 March 2021, 7:15 pm: **Paul Hobson – “A wildlife photographer’s year in lockdown: the trials and tribulations”.**

Wednesday, 7 April 2021, 7:15 pm: **Annual General Meeting, followed by Jim Almond: Autumn on the Isles of Scilly 2013-2019.**

Please note correction of the date from 1 April.

Please see our website for details

<http://www.shropshirebirds.com>

Field Trips

All Field Trips are cancelled until further notice

For updates, please check

Breaking news 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 Summer 2021 issue is: 1 May 2021

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.