



# *The Buzzard*

Shropshire  
Ornithological Society's  
Quarterly Magazine



**No 266**

**Spring 2022**

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## General Meeting Announcements

### SHROPSHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 66<sup>th</sup> AGM of the Society will be held on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> April 2022 at Bayston Hill Memorial Hall at 7.15pm, prior to the Indoor Meeting.

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

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

**Mim Elliot-Smith**  
**Honorary Secretary**

# SHROPSHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

## EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

An Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) will be held on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> April 2022 at Bayston Hill Memorial Hall, immediately following the AGM of The Shropshire Ornithological Society 2005, and prior to the Indoor Meeting. This is to allow Members to vote on a proposed change to the Constitution, which will remove the requirement for new Members to be elected by the Committee. Membership will therefore be open to anyone submitting an application on the appropriate form, and upon payment of the necessary subscription fee. The proposed revised version of the Constitution will be available to Members prior to the EGM.

**Mim Elliot-Smith**  
**Honorary Secretary**

## SHROPSHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY 2005

Company Limited by Guarantee No. 5322294

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## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2022

Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Bayston Hill Memorial Hall

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

### AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence.
2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2021.
3. Matters Arising.
4. Presentation and Approval of the Accounts for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021.
5. Appointment of Directors.  
Helen J. Griffiths and Messrs. B. Andrews, G.J. Walker and T. Devanney retire by rotation and being eligible offer themselves for re-election.  
Miss E. Micklewright having been elected as a Director on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2021 has subsequently resigned and is not standing for election.
6. Appointment of Independent Examiner.  
It is proposed by the Board that James F. Baillie be re-appointed for 2022.
7. Any Other Business.

**BRIAN ANDREWS**  
**Company Secretary**

## Vacancy – Associate Editor for the Shropshire Bird Report

The Bird Report has expanded in recent years both in publication size and also in the number of bird records reviewed. This is good in that a better coverage of the county's birds is being achieved but this does take more effort.

It has been decided that two Associate Editors to take ownership of editing and reviewing the species accounts would help significantly in ensuring that we can continue to produce the annual report in a timely manner each year and yet still manage a growing amount of information. We have 18 species account authors who each produce a number of the accounts and the roles will be to ensure these accounts conform to (a small number of) publication standards and read easily and logically.

The main period for the work each year will be from July to September as we attempt to get everything together for publication in November.

One appointment has been made so there remains one vacancy. If you have an interest in Shropshire birds and especially an eye for detail, then there's a role for you. If you are interested please contact me on the address below before the end of March.

**Gerry Thomas, County Bird Report Editor,  
gerry.thomas7@btinternet.com**

## Robins (and Wrens) on my '3B' Local Walk in 2021 Common Birds and BirdTrack Records

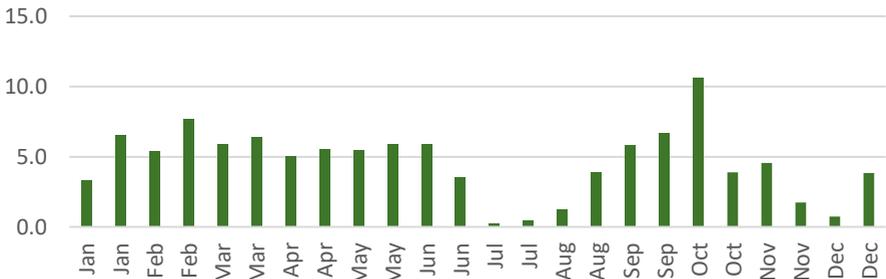
I call my local birding/constitutional walk 3B because it crosses three bridges, two over the Clun at Beambridge and downstream at Coston, the third over the Cauldibook, a tributary of the Clun with its origins on Hopesay Common to the north; the whole 1.6km route is within SO3981. The records are always submitted to *BirdTrack* as a 'Complete List' – contributing data to the BTO and saving it for my own use.

Throughout 2021 I recorded every Robin, along with all other birds and mammals, encountered on 3B. I made a particular note of how I first detected the Robins, to see how differently the birds revealed themselves – by sight, song or call – throughout the year.

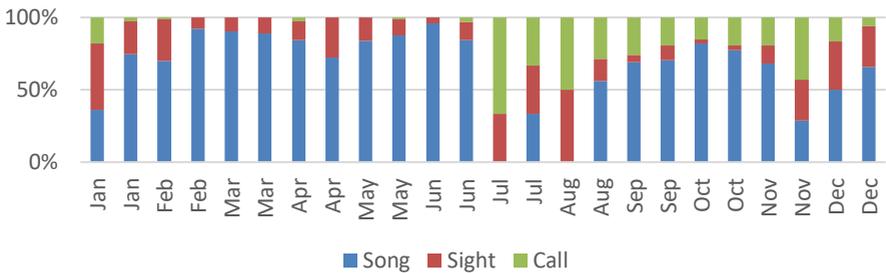
On the 265 recorded visits, I noted a total of 568 Robins, an average of 2.14 per visit, and made a note of just how they were detected on every occasion, summing them by half-month (1 to 15 and 16 to month end). Figure 1 shows

how the recording rate varied throughout the year and in Figure 2 how the birds first revealed themselves. For comparison there is also the record for all Wrens (Figure 3), again by half-month. The Wren total recorded in the year was 1,247, so 4.71 per visit, outnumbering Robins by 2.20:1. That ratio might change following a hard winter, which would probably reduce Wrens more than Robins. I could extend this work using the 12 years of 3B records on *BirdTrack*; recover all my annual Robin and Wren data, find the annual ratio of one to the other and compare that with local weather data, of which I also have a record.

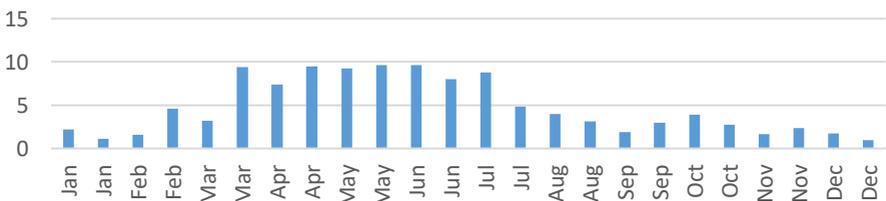
**Figure 1** Robin: Average of all records per visit by half-month, 2021



**Figure 2** Robin: Detected first by song, call or sight by half-month, 2021



**Figure 3** Wren: Average of all records per visit by month, 2021



I have no impression of Robins moving away from my area in July but they are certainly unobtrusive then, as Figure 1 shows. The figures show the strong spring song period well and also that in the autumn, peaking in early October. The October peak was notably higher than that in spring (total 10.6 cf 7.1 birds per visit) – perhaps young birds of the year swelling the numbers.

I suggest that this little project demonstrates the value of keeping local records of common birds and especially submitting them to *BirdTrack*. The records have value not only to the BTO but also for extracting and examining them yourself. The numbers tell you things about your birds and records, especially with common species; even Robins and Wrens can verge on interesting! If you like numbers – they can reveal things.

My thanks to Adrian Tucker for help preparing the Figures.

**John Tucker**

## A County-Wide Project on Kestrels – Appeal for Volunteers

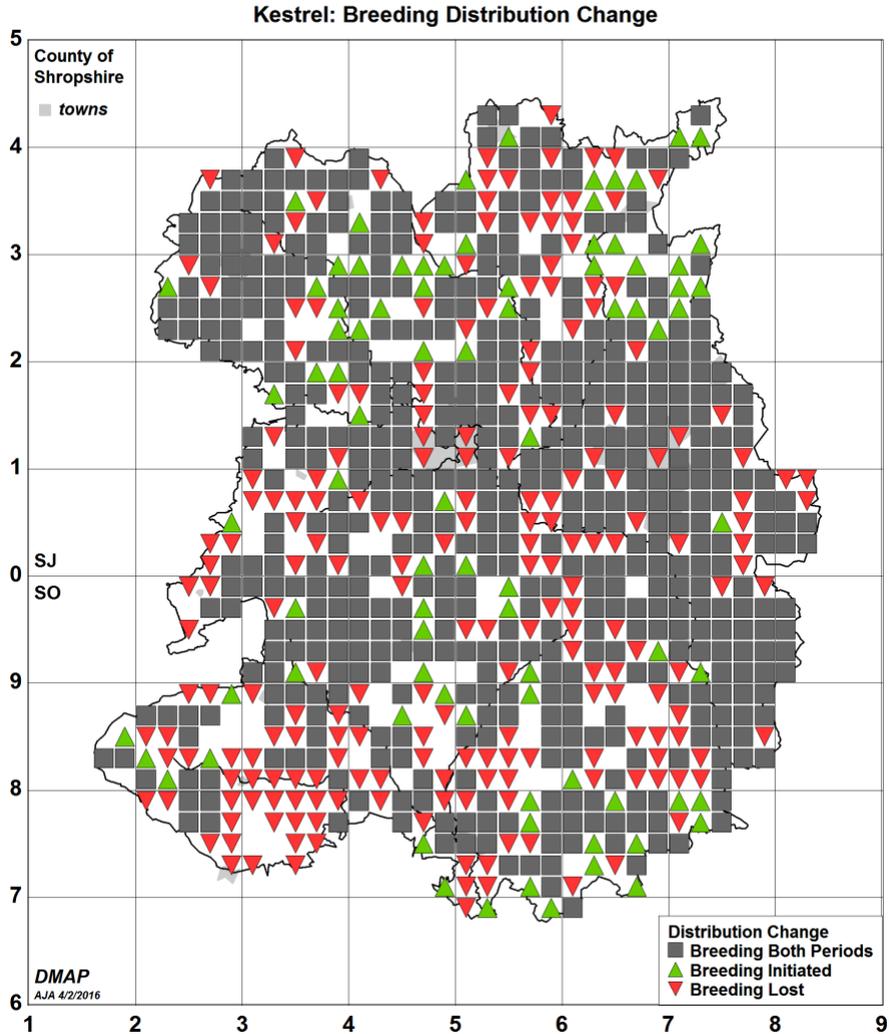
Thanks to the intensive fieldwork for the Avifauna, we have a reasonable understanding of the current status of Shropshire birds. For the Kestrel, once our most abundant raptor, the world is changing, apparently not for the better, and the Avifauna has demonstrated a decline in the range and abundance in our county.



*Kestrel Chicks a few days of age, north Shropshire*

The 1985-90 Atlas project recorded confirmed, probable or possible breeding in 718 tetrads. By 2009-13 this declined to 589 tetrads representing a range contraction of 18% but this increases to a 26% decline if the analysis is limited to confirmed and probable breeding only.

The decline in range was steepest in the south of the county where 25% of the 'SO' tetrads lost birds, compared to 13% of 'SJ' tetrads. In particular birds disappeared from many tetrads in the extreme south of the county between Clun and Ludlow.



A number of theories to explain the decline have been put forward, including agricultural intensification and loss of marginal land, the increases in medium sized birds of prey such as Goshawk, Buzzard and Peregrine and the persistence of some pesticides, in particular rodenticides.

The decline in Shropshire parallels the similar decline across the UK and in Europe too.

The species has been assessed as Red on the County List of Breeding Conservation Concern. The Species Recovery Working Party of the Conservation Sub-committee is putting together a Species Action Plan with the help and guidance of the Raptor Group.

One of the key objectives of the Action Plan will be to try to understand more about the causes of the decline and the immediate focus will be on finding out more about the breeding success and population changes within the county. To these ends a part of the project will be to find and monitor nests including the provision of nestboxes in selected study areas. Nests will be followed through the season and nest record cards completed and the data published each year either in the Buzzard or the County Bird Report. Though the focus will be on specific study areas, any nest or nestbox within the county will be incorporated into the project so long as we have a volunteer to monitor and maintain the nestbox.

If you know of a nest site or already monitor a nestbox and wish to contribute or help in any way please contact the project email address:-

[shropshirekestrels@gmail.com](mailto:shropshirekestrels@gmail.com). All volunteers will be acknowledged.

Nestlings will be ringed wherever possible including with colour rings, with a view to determining survival rates of the young birds and perhaps the recruitment back into the breeding population. The project can supply colour rings to ringers in the county who monitor nest sites.

A second part of the project will be to understand population changes rather better than we do and to determine how the population can be better monitored between Atlas 'years'. Two approaches to this will be followed. Leo Smith and the Community Wildlife Groups will look for breeding Kestrels in their usual study areas across the county where we hope therefore to get detailed population estimates of these areas. Additionally, we are trialling a more ad hoc approach to see whether or not ad hoc observations of Kestrels in the breeding season might help to monitor the population and will compare these results to those of the Community Wildlife Groups.

For this part of the project any observations of Kestrels between 1 March and 31 July this year will be valuable. As a minimum the information required will be:-

**six-figure grid reference or what3words location; a location name; the observer name and initials; date** and ideally also sex of the bird if seen well and any behavioural notes e.g., sitting on wires, hovering, chasing Carrion Crows etc.

The six-figure grid reference is important as often the male bird will sit in a location where he has a good view towards the nest site so a regular spot may indicate the nest isn't too far away.

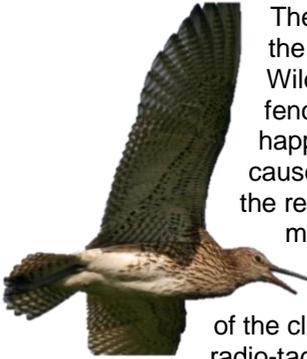
If you come across any sightings between these dates (even for the same location on different dates), please record them to [shropshirekestrels@gmail.com](mailto:shropshirekestrels@gmail.com), or enter them in **Birdtrack** if you have a Birdtrack account. The latter is preferred as these will then be retained in your name for your review at any time. You can set up sites to a four-figure grid reference in Birdtrack easily, but please add the six-figure reference to the comments box, together with any details of your observation.

As with the nest monitoring results, results will be published each year. The Kestrel remains a reasonably common bird in the county with a population of 300-350 pairs (Avifauna), and we hope this project will help us to better understand what drives the population changes here and inform conservation measures.



**Gerry Thomas, on behalf of the Shropshire Raptor Group and Conservation Sub-committee**

## Save our Curlews Project Work 2022



The SOS *Save our Curlews* campaign will again work with the Upper Clun, Clee Hill and Strettons Area Community Wildlife groups, to find nests, protect them with electric fences, and radio-tag and track 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.

In 2021 we proved that the fences are effective (none of the clutches in them were wholly predated), but 20 out of 21 radio-tagged chicks were predated. On average, these 20 chicks lived for only 5.65 days, far less than the 32-38 days they need to fledge.

There is increasing evidence, reproduced on the SOS website, that the food supply provided by the annual release of large numbers of Pheasants for recreational shooting (726,000 in Shropshire in 2018 alone, only one-third of which are shot), supports unnaturally high levels of predators and scavengers, particularly foxes, which in turn limits the breeding success of Curlews.

At the current rate of decline, the county Curlew population will halve in 12 years, and virtually disappear in 25. We do not have much time left to save them. It is therefore vital that we continue with the project work, if we are to have any chance of halting the decline.

The results of this pioneering work are sent to the South of England Curlew Forum, the UK and Ireland Curlew Action Group and the Curlew Recovery Partnership, so the work is an integral part of the case to Government for effective Curlew conservation measures.

We want to see if project work finds the same disastrous results in all parts of the county, so in 2022 we intend to expand the work into the north-west, around Oswestry and perhaps in the Severn-Vyrnwy confluence, if we can raise sufficient funds.

More detail on the project results, the work of the Campaign and Appeal, current plans and reasons for the decline, can be found on the SOS website [www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/](http://www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/)

## Save our Curlews Campaign and Appeal

We have raised most of the money we need to carry out the project in the three areas in 2022, from SOS itself, donations to the Appeal, and some grants, but we still need to raise a few thousand pounds more to do all that we would like to. We need even more if we are to extend the work into the north-west

**SOS members, volunteers in Community Wildlife Groups, and the general public are therefore encouraged to donate to the SOS Appeal, if they feel able to.**

**The Appeal leaflet, together with details of how to make a donation, is included in his mailing**

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

### **Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire & Species Recovery Action Plans**

Previous issues of *The Buzzard* have reported that SOS has adopted the Red and Amber lists of *Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire*, based on evidence of local long-term decline 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, can be found on the SOS website, [www.shropshirebirds.com/species-recovery/](http://www.shropshirebirds.com/species-recovery/)

Species Champions have been recruited and Species Recovery Action Plans have been drafted for many of the first 23 priority species: 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.

We are still looking for Champions for Pochard, Shoveler, Teal, Great Crested Grebe, Corn Bunting and Yellow Wagtail, and would welcome volunteers.

The policy statement on drawing up and implementing the Action Plans for species recovery, a more detailed description of the role of the Species Champion, and the Action Plans that have already been finalised, can also be found on the same part of the website.

## 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 p12)
- Wood Warbler – suitable woodland throughout the county such as Brown Clee, Bucknell Wood, 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, at 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" p15)
- 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 2021 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](mailto:leo@leosmith.org.uk)

## Getting Involved

SOS members, and other keen birders, are invited to help with several projects and surveys in the 2022 field season. Everyone welcome!!!

If you've helped in previous years, you'll be contacted again. If not, and you want to help with any of them, look on the appropriate website, or contact Leo Smith [leo@leosmith.org.uk](mailto:leo@leosmith.org.uk) 01694 720296.

## Community Wildlife Group Curlew Surveys

The 10 Community Wildlife Groups (CWGs) will all continue with their bird surveys to monitor the Curlew population, and several other target species. These surveys locate the Curlew breeding territories for the nest-finders in the *Save our Curlews* campaign project areas, so they are vitally important (see p12). 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.

The survey involves three visits of about three hours each, around 1 April, 1 May and mid-June. More information about each CWG, and the results of their individual bird surveys, can be found at [www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk)

Most of the Groups are holding a meeting in the second half of March to plan the bird survey, as follows:-

Upper Onny (Monday 14 March, Bishop's Castle Town Hall, High Street, SY9 5BG)

Camlad Valley (Tuesday 15 March, The Horse and Jockey, Chirbury Road, Churchstoke)

Strettons Area (Joint meeting with Church Stretton SOS branch: Wednesday 16 March, Methodist Church Hall, Watling Street, Church Stretton)

Three Parishes (Weston Rhyn, St. Martin's and Gobowen - Thursday 17 March. Venue TBA)

Clee Hill (Monday 21 March, Recreation Rooms, 22A Clee Hill High Street)

Rea Valley (Tuesday 22 March, Minsterley Village Hall)

Tanat to Perry (Oswestry south – Wednesday 23 March, Morda Social Club, Pleasant View SY10 9NS)

Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence and Abdon District CWGs held meetings in February, and there is no meeting in the Upper Clun, but these three Groups need new helpers too. To volunteer to help with one of the CWG surveys next year, come to the meeting, or contact the relevant group via the CWGs website.

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

## Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire

Survey work will be undertaken on many of the species on the local Red and Amber lists. See separate article on p13.

### Shropshire Wildlife Trust reserves

As part of the work on listed species, we are also looking to undertake bird surveys on all SWT reserves.

### Red Grouse Survey

Counts will take place on the Long Mynd every Thursday evening between 31 March and 12 May, from 90 minutes before sunset until 15 minutes after. Please volunteer even if Thursdays are difficult, as counts are often cancelled because of bad weather, and re-arranged for a Monday or Tuesday.

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

Most territories are within sight and hearing distance of the road along the top, between the Gliding Station and the Shooting Box car park. The display flight

is noisy, conspicuous and unmistakable, and can be observed over long distances, so this is a suitable project for anyone interested in birds or conservation. No special knowledge or skills are needed. A Project Briefing Meeting will be held for new participants on Thursday, 24 March, at 7.30pm at the National Trust Tearoom in Cardingmill Valley, and there will be a practical on-the-job training session, explaining how to go about the survey, and record what you see, on the first date, 31 March.

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

Further Information (and Participants form) from [shropscwqs.org.uk/strettons-area-wildlife-group/long-mynd-red-grouse-project/](https://shropscwqs.org.uk/strettons-area-wildlife-group/long-mynd-red-grouse-project/) or Lorna Taylor (email: [lorna.taylor@btinternet.com](mailto: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.

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 2021, 44 nests and 6 additional pairs were found; 31 were successful, producing 49 fledged young, the highest yet. A report is on the SOS website. Each tag is unique, and the colours and letters or numbers tell us the bird's age, and its natal site. Reports are wanted, please, of a pair together in spring, or displaying, or one seen several times in the same place, or one going into a wood, any time between March and June. Reports of wing-tagged birds are wanted too, please. All reports will be treated in absolute confidence. Kites are very shy, and they are legally protected. It is an offence to disturb them, but this monitoring is carried out under licence.

### 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 has organised a survey. Here, the Raptor Group, supported by Jonathan Groom (BTO regional rep) and John Martin (County Bird Recorder), organised a survey in 2021. Potentially suitable woods were identified and, in total, 17 individuals surveyed 20 of them. No Honey Buzzards were seen, but only about half of the potentially suitable woods were checked.

We therefore plan to survey the remainder in 2022. Most people who helped in 2021 have agreed to participate again, but we need more volunteers, please.

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 1 July to 31 August. Two or preferably three visits at least a week apart over this period are necessary. It therefore requires patience!!! Honey Buzzard is a Schedule 1 species, and prone to disturbance and egg-collecting, so attempts to find nests are discouraged, and secrecy is essential.

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

### Kestrel

See the separate article on p8. on getting involved in the Kestrel project.

### Other Raptors

The Shropshire Raptor Group wants to recruit experienced bird watchers who have the necessary identification skills to find Goshawk, Hobby and Kestrel, and who have the commitment and time to be able to search for nest sites, monitor them and record the outcomes. If you're interested, please ask for details of how to apply.

Leo Smith

## 'Curlew-billed' Great Tit

In January 2022 at a garden in Ludlow, a Great Tit (GT) appeared - separately to 4 other (resident) male GTs - at the feeding station in my garden that was exceptional. His bill was extraordinarily long and neatly down-curved, with the tips of upper and lower parts almost perfectly opposed.

Unusual-length bills in GTs are not infrequently reported, but almost invariably the maxilla and mandible are of very unequal length, not opposed and resulting in inefficient use of bill and therefore deficient feeding and preening.

In this case, with a 'perfect' abnormal bill, the bird had clearly had no trouble maintaining his condition, both in body and plumage: indeed, he is a very fine specimen of the species. The bills, being opposed, enable him to probe through fat balls and also pick out fragments of the other foods on offer. He is not seen to peck at peanuts, nor to take whole sunflower seeds which normal GTs do routinely. Frequently he is seen tossing morsels in the air to re-orientate them for swallowing, much as a Curlew might do with a small crab. Normal GTs never perform this act, having no need for it.



Here the abnormal bill appears to be robust and very useful; clearly he can preen himself well. He will have developed from a hatchling with this abnormality and appears to have adapted his lifestyle perfectly to enable him to flourish. Often abnormal bills in GTs are weak and fragile, as well as being unequal in length of elements, and regularly fracture. This bird has never

known a normal bill and has learnt to 'live like a Curlew' - without any genetic predisposition - by developing the appropriate skills with this unique gift. Conversations at other houses along the same road revealed that he appears at a number of them irregularly over a 500 metre section of the road. I have got spies out to establish where he might breed, for the young of this male



may even reveal that this could be genetically transmitted to them.

Photography so far has been limited to two sessions in poor conditions and through conservatory glass.

**Gareth Thomas**

## Field Trip Reports

### **Sunday, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2021: Pennington Flash Country Park**

A group of eight members arrived at Pennington Flash hoping for a good day's birding. The weather was a lovely sunny morning with clear skies. As a result the temperature was only 4°C, so chilly and a little breezy later in the walk.

An initial scan of the Flash itself, revealed good numbers of Black-headed Gull, Mallard, Canada Goose and Mute Swan, at the side nearest to the car park with Tufted Duck and Gadwall to the rear. The group took a circular route, first to Horrocks Hide. We saw interesting Grebe and Goldeneye behaviours, preening and diving with Cormorant roosting further away.

Another short walk brought the group to Tom Edmondson's Hide overlooking a lake, with a screen opposite which overlooks the Flash. A few members heard a Water Rail from the screen while, from the hide, Gadwall, Teal, Tufted Duck and Shoveler were seen. We were delighted to see a Kingfisher flying along the lake a few times and then a Roe Deer amongst the trees.

Just below was a Snipe, so difficult to see when still, but when feeding its movement revealed its position. When it moved and stretched itself up it appeared like a different bird altogether, before it gracefully disappeared amongst the foliage!

On to Ramsdale's Hide, a couple more Snipe were seen on the far side of the scrape and again a Kingfisher, this time perching briefly on a log.

The group resumed the circular route, wading through a muddy section to the glimpse of a male Sparrowhawk speeding through.

Following the path for a ½ mile or so, through a wooded area, with Blackbird, Dunnock, Blue Tit, and Robin, we arrived at Teal Hide where along with the usual ducks, was another Kingfisher.

This time the Kingfisher perched on one of several angled log perches before demonstrating its hunting skills, hovering over the water and searching for prey, before returning beautifully to the perch. A real highlight.

After a further walk, the Lapwing Screen came into sight. Initially there didn't appear to be anything around, then seemingly from nowhere we saw Redwing and heard the distinctive call of Willow Tit moments before a couple came into view flitting around the trees. Definitely another highlight.

Moving towards the Bunting Hide: a feeding station (seed had been placed on the top of a fence post) and groups of Long tailed Tit and Coal Tit were making the most of the free meal. Once in the hide, it was clear that it was not only the birds who were ready for an easy lunch. Approximately 5 Grey Squirrels were having their fill and squabbling around the area. Amongst this commotion were Great Tit, Chaffinch, Nuthatch, Magpie, Woodpigeon, Dunnock and about 4 Stock Doves.

At the last hide, Pengy's, we could find no further species to add to the list.

Having had a good morning's walk; a well-earned picnic, and time to reflect on what the morning had revealed. Approximately 37 species on this visit that was enjoyed by all who had come.

### **Sunday, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2021: WWT Slimbridge**

The first coach trip for 2 years was attended by 21 eager, willing and able participants. As we were at the start of the Omicron spike, those who came took all the necessary precautions; spreading out around the coach and wearing facemasks. The journey to Slimbridge was straightforward despite a sharp shower. The weather was good: clear with light cloud and the temperature holding around 13°C.

With avian flu on the rise, COVID was not the only virus of concern so members walked through a disinfectant-soaked pad, to help protect the reserve.

The restaurant was closed for an event, so it was picnic lunches as usual. Members separated into groups and went their separate ways around the site.

One group started off towards the northern arm of the hides to observe the wildlife. A first stop at the Martin Smith hide, proved useful with sightings of a great many Wigeon and Teal, amongst them a number of Berwick Swans, together with a couple of Common Cranes, feeding in the pasture.

Moving on up the northern arm, stopping at Willow Hide, a feeding station was being used by Blue Tit, Great Tit, House Sparrow and Robin. At the end of a brook to the right, was a Water Rail that gradually moved up in order to feed on seed that had dropped to the ground. Not for long though as a couple of Brown Rats, one significantly smaller than the other, scared the Rail off before being distracted by a Grey Squirrel. They chased this off, leaving the area open for the Water Rail with a friend, to return. Quite a comical piece of behaviour to observe.

After this amusing encounter, the group went to the end of the north arm, to find the old Tower Hide had been replaced by the new Estuary Hide. This has two higher floors for observation with stairs and lift. The top observation area is open, secured by glass guards, with fantastic views of the estuary and surrounding fields. Even for someone with vertigo issues, such as myself, it felt safe and I really enjoyed the views and also the wildlife we found. These included Canada Goose, Greylag Goose, some Moorhen and Roe Deer. In the distance was a Peregrine sitting on a log (definitely a scope job).

The second floor was again easy to access and enclosed against the weather. This is an excellent addition to the reserve's hides.

We then walked to the Robbie Garnet Hide, and over lunch we saw a group of Dunlin and Little Stint with entertaining Lapwing and Golden Plover in flight above us. In the distance was a flock of Curlew, nearer to the hide Redshank and flying by, Snipe. When a white bird flew in, initially it was thought to be an Egret, but in fact when it turned round it proved to be a Spoonbill.

Onto the Zeiss Hide, via the captive bird area, where Eider Duck, Goldeneye, & Smew were enjoyed just the same. Once at the hide, Cormorant were seen drying their wings while Herring Gull flew over, and beyond a group of Starlings were feeding in the field. Turning south towards the Kingfisher Hide, using the scope, Barnacle Geese were seen and amongst them a Ross's Goose, and a Bar-headed Goose/Snow Goose Hybrid. After a conversation with a local birder, we decided that these were not feral birds, so they were not included in the count.

A Marsh Harrier flew over, and as time was marching on, we decided to return to the Reception Centre, and immediately spotted a Stonechat along the posts of a fence.

Once back at the Centre, members agreed to share their lists and a combined list of 55 species was seen including: - Avocet, Buzzard, Common Gull, Fieldfare, Goosander, Great White Egret, Greater Black-backed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Little Egret, Raven, Redwing, Ruff, Tufted Duck.

**Sue Brealey**

## Bird Notes

### October, November, December 2021

**Barnacle Goose** An unringed bird was present at Venus Pool on 23 Dec.

**Pink-footed Goose** Good numbers in the county again. The first was a single at Venus Pool on 9 Oct. Large numbers up to a maximum of 325 on 9 Nov, were then reported in the Calverhall area between 26 Oct and 13 Nov where they were seen flying from roost to feeding site and vice versa. 25 flew over Cantlogrove on 4 Nov, 35 were seen over Maesbury Marsh on 6 Nov and 47 went over Annscroft on 1 Dec.



**Whooper Swan** (below) The first report came from Venus Pool where five were seen briefly on 9 Oct, then 15 were present all day on 21 Oct. Five went over Cantlopgrove on 7 Nov and four were present at Shavington Park on 8 Dec. A group of 15 were seen over Rushbury on 14 Dec.



**Egyptian Goose** Up to seven were seen throughout the quarter at Venus Pool usually at first light. Three were seen at Chetwynd Pool on 10 Nov and two at Polemere on 14 Dec. Other reports came from Hodnet CP and Dryton.

**Shoveler** Reported throughout the period, the highest count was at Chetwynd Pool, where 126 were present on 19 Dec. Other notable counts included Calverhall where 44 were seen on 8 Oct, and Whixall Floods where 41 were present on 19 Dec.

**Gadwall** The highest count came from Venus Pool where 37+ were present on 31 Dec. 31 were present at Ellerton Mill Pond on 12 Oct.

**Wigeon** Good numbers were reported at several locations throughout the quarter. The highest count of 400 was recorded at Park Farm Floods on 29 Dec. 170 were at Shavington Park on 16 Dec and 109 at Venus Pool on 20 Dec.

**Pintail** The highest count was 29 at Whixall Floods on 2 Nov and twelve at Venus Pool on 21 Dec.

**Common Teal** Reported throughout the County. The highest counts came from Wall Farm where 200+ were recorded on 15 Dec. There were 80 at both Whixall Floods and Hales Pools during Nov.

**Pochard** Seen from 28 Oct onwards with maxima at Cound fishing pool (6) on 27 Nov and Venus Pool (4) on 16 Nov.

**Scaup** Four records of singles came from The Mere, Ellesmere on 29 Oct, Chetwynd Pool on 7 Nov, Priorslee Lake on 19 Nov and Cole Mere on 10 Dec.

**Goldeneye** The Mere, Ellesmere produced the first record of the quarter with five on 1 Nov and subsequently seven on 30 Nov. Seven were also seen at Cole Mere on 26 Nov.

**Red Grouse** Eight records of one or two came from the Long Mynd and Stiperstones.

**Grey Partridge** Ten were seen at Wall Farm on 3 and 11 Oct. Two were present at Treflach on 3 Nov and a single at More on 17 Dec.

**Spoonbill** Two were reported in flight at Ironbridge on 4 Nov (subject to submission / Rarity Committee)

**Cattle Egret** One was reported via the Bird News services at The Mere, Ellesmere on 23 Oct.

**Little Egret** Numerous records throughout the quarter, predominantly from Venus Pool where four were present on several occasions.

**Great White Egret (right)**

A single was seen at Venus Pool on and off during Oct. The same or another bird arrived there on 18 Dec and was seen almost daily until the end of the year, roosting on the willow island.



**Marsh Harrier** One was seen intermittently at Whixall Moss between 14 Oct – 23 Nov. The same or another bird was seen in the same tetrad on 15/16 Dec.

**Hen Harrier** A single bird was reported occasionally at Whixall Moss between 18 Oct and 18 Dec.

**Golden Plover** Reported from 18 locations; the highest counts came from: Tern Hill (400) on 16 Nov, Wall Farm (350) on 5 Nov and Osbaston (300+) on 4 Dec.

**Curlew** Two double figure records came from Wood Lane where 23 were seen on 1 Oct and 14 on 29 Oct.

**Black-tailed Godwit** (below) A first-winter bird was present at Venus Pool between 18 - 22 Oct showing well on occasions. Another surprise first winter bird arrived on 20 Dec and stayed until 31 Dec. Sadly it didn't do the decent thing for the new year and flew out overnight!



**Dunlin** Five flew over Cantlopgrove on 5 Nov and two were reported at Venus Pool on 26 Dec. Singles were seen at Whixall Moss on 9 Oct and Venus Pool on 6 Nov.

**Grey Phalarope** A first-winter was found at Whixall Floods on 11 Nov. This was a very popular bird which attracted a lot of attention and was reported daily until last seen on 20 Nov.

**Common Sandpiper** Just one report, a single at Venus Pool on 21 Oct.

**Green Sandpiper** Four were present at Chelmarsh Scrape on 21 Oct. Singles were also seen at Venus Pool, Whixall Floods, Cantlopgrove, Pear Hill, Longdon and Shavington Park.

**Turnstone** One was reported at Bromfield on 29 Dec (in circulation with the County Rarities Committee)

**Oystercatcher** One was reported calling from neighbouring pools near Dodecote on 15 Oct.

**Woodcock** 16 records were received, mostly singles, but included some multiples, notably five at Burleydam on 20 Dec.

**Jack Snipe** Just two records: a single at Hales Pools on 28 Nov and six at Burleydam on 20 Dec.

**Common Snipe** Reported from several locations, the highest counts came from Burleydam (40) on 20 Dec and Hales Pools (35) on 28 Dec.

**Black-headed Gull** The largest roost gatherings came from The Mere, Ellesmere where 2,600 were present on 1 Nov. 2,200 were present at Chelmarsh reservoir on 18 Nov.

**Common Gull** The first record came from Venus Pool where one was present on 22 Oct. The highest count came from The Mere, Ellesmere where 250 were seen in the roost on 30 Nov.

**Mediterranean Gull** One was present in the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere on 21 Oct and 1 Nov.

**Herring Gull** The highest count came from Chelmarsh Reservoir where 120 were seen in the roost on 18 Nov.

**Caspian Gull** Just two records (via the Bird News services) of singles present at Priorslee Lake on 18 Dec and Trench Pool on 23 Dec.

**Yellow-legged Gull** (next page) The highest count was six at The Mere, Ellesmere on 1 Nov; five were in the roost at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 18 Nov. Two were seen at Venus Pool on 4 Nov, plus singles at Priorslee Lake and Trench Pool in late Dec.



**Lesser Black-backed Gull** Good numbers at the usual roosts and locations with The Mere, Ellesmere producing a count of 4,500 on 1 Oct and 21 Oct.

**Barn Owl** Reported from 16 sites throughout the county during the period.

**Short-eared Owl** Singles were reported at four locations: Bentlawnt, a site near Telford, Black Hill, and Cherrington Moor.

**Little Owl** Reports during the quarter came from five locations: Shrewsbury, nr Whitchurch, Boningale, Kynnersley and nr Albrighton.

**Merlin** Singles were seen at The Long Mynd, Whixall Moss, Ford Heath and Meaton Lane during the quarter.

**Hobby** A late bird was reported at Venus Pool on 10 Oct.

**Ring-necked Parakeet** One was reported in a Newport garden on 2/3 Oct.

**Willow Tit** Just three records, two at Bury Ditches on 6 Oct, two near High Vinnals on 9 Dec and one reported near Market Drayton on 29 Dec.

**Cetti's Warbler** One was heard singing and occasionally seen at Venus Pool between 3 -16 Nov. Two were reported at Whixall Floods between 15 Nov – 20 Dec. A single was reported at Chelmarsh Reservoir on two occasions.

**Melodious Warbler** This county first was seen and photographed in a Lydbury North garden on 15 Oct. It flew out later that day and was not seen again.

**Firecrest** A showy bird was present at Pole Cottage on 21 Oct.

**Ring Ouzel** One was reported at Titterstone Clee on 4 Nov.

**Fieldfare** (below) Numerous reports and the first sighting of four came from Plex on 14 Oct. Large numbers were then recorded nationally in the first week of Nov and an estimated 7,780 flew over Cantlopgrove on 4 Nov.



**Redwing** Arrivals were noted from 7 Oct with a steady increase in numbers culminating in four-figure counts during early Nov. 7160 were logged at Cantlopgrove on 5 Nov, with 1990 noted over Venus Pool the same day. 1800 were counted moving west at Whixall Moss the following day.

**Northern Wheatear** Two late individuals were reported, on 4 Oct near Walford Heath and at Cleehill on 6 Oct.

**Red-flanked Bluetail** One was photographed by an automated camera trap on 5 Nov at an undisclosed sensitive site. The camera wasn't checked with regularity and the bird's presence was only revealed on film later in the month. Another first for the County!

**Tree Sparrow** 29 were reported near Newcastle on Clun on 22 Dec. Up to six were present and seen near Bishop's Castle throughout the quarter. Other sightings came from a Hanwood garden on Oct 22, Roden on 10 Nov and Pentre during Nov/Dec.

**Water Pipit** One was found at Whixall Floods on 20 Nov where it was seen most days until 5 Dec. The same or another bird was reported on 28 Dec.

**Brambling** A single was present at Catherton on 9 Oct and numbers increased up to 15 at various locations shortly thereafter. Three-figure counts were noted on four occasions, topped by an exceptional flock of 540 at High Lane, South Shropshire on 21 Nov.

**Hawfinch** Just two records: three flying SW over Cantlopbridge on 4 Nov plus a single reported near Ludlow.

**Common Redpoll (Mealy – flammea)** One was photographed at Whixall Floods on 20 Nov.

**Common Crossbill** Reported from seventeen locations. Double figure counts came from Ceri Ridgeway (33) on 16 Dec, Bury Ditches (25) on 9 Nov and Black Hill (23) on 6 Oct.

**Snow Bunting** Two were seen at Titterstone Clee on 2 Dec and another photographed on Llanfair Hill on 9 Nov.

**Corn Bunting** (below) The maximum count was 54, seen near Tibberton on 17 Dec. 27 were seen at Wall Farm on 17 Dec.



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

Records for Bird Notes are extracted from the quarterly Birdtrack report for Shropshire. Due to the volume of records produced, common species are not normally included. Records must be recorded by observers in Birdtrack by the 5<sup>th</sup> 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 2020 Shropshire Bird Report.

**Jim Almond**

## **Indoor Meetings**

### **Shropshire Ornithological Society**

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

Please monitor the SOS website ([under "Breaking News"](#)) for confirmation of the arrangements under which each talk will be held, including the use of Zoom.

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

**Wednesday, 2 March 2022: Megan Morris-Jones – “Cuan Wildlife Rescue: the Work of the Centre Year Round”.**

A talk about the work the centre does on rescuing, rehabilitating and releasing injured wildlife from all over the County.

**Wednesday, 6th April 2022, 7:15 p.m. Annual General Meeting followed by Allan Heath – “Magic Moments”.**

Allan shares images and experiences which have left a lasting impression on him and fuelled his passion for the natural world.

**Wednesday, 5th October 2022, 7:15 p.m. Nick Martin – “Wild Wales”.**

A journey into some of the wildest places in Wales and the wildlife that inhabits them.

### **Shropshire Ornithological Society (Church Stretton)**

**The Methodist Church Hall, Watling St. South, Church Stretton SY6 7BG**

Meetings commence at 7:30pm, doors generally open around 7:00pm.

**Monday, 28 March 2022.**

“Curlews, and Efforts to Save Them” by Leo Smith.

## Field Trips

### Sunday, 20<sup>th</sup> March – RSPB Leighton Moss – By Car – Organiser: Sue Brealey

- Full Day – Meet at car park at 10.30am.
- 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/](http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/leighton-moss/)

### Sunday, 3<sup>rd</sup> April – RSPB Ynys Hir – By Car – Leaders: Jock & Mim Elliot-Smith **NOTE: the date of this trip has been changed**

- Full Day – Meet at the car park at 10am.
- Grid Ref: SN682961
- Postcode for SatNav: SY20 8TA
- Directions: Take A487 from Machynlleth, towards Aberystwyth, turning right just after Glandyfi. It is about a mile to the car park.
- See [www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/ynys-hir/](http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/ynys-hir/)

### 19<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> May – Weekend in Somerset – Organiser: Sue Brealey

Please contact Sue Brealey for details

### Sunday, 12<sup>th</sup> June - Woolston Eyes – By Car – Leader: Estelle Hughes

- Full Day – Meet at barrier for access at 9.30am.
- Postcode for SatNav: WA4 1NN
- Directions: Approaching from the south you should cross the ship canal swing bridge on the Knutsford Road (A50), take the right-hand lane through Latchford and cross Kingsway South into Thelwall Lane.
- See [www.woolstoneyes.com/woolston-eyes/](http://www.woolstoneyes.com/woolston-eyes/)

#### Contact Details:

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

**Copy deadline for the Summer 2022 issue is: 1 May 2022**

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