

THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Registered charity number 1088830

GOS WEB SITE: www.gwentbirds.org.uk

Newsletter No. 101

December 2006

THE END OF THE YEAR IS NIGH

Here we are looking down the wrong end of another year. In just three weeks it'll be "Hello 2007!" and the ornithological events of 2006 will slip into the collective birding memory. So, what has been the stand-out moment for you? Did you stumble across a county rarity (or twitch somebody else's)? Did you see a new species in your garden? Have you spent an evening watching the Starling spectacle at the Newport Wetlands? Or have you noticed a decline in a formerly common species, perhaps a breeding species missing from your local patch? Well, before you put your notebook away and reach for the turkey and sprouts, please make the effort to report your sightings to Chris Jones (see page 3 to find out how). All our records build up to form an invaluable dataset on the state of Gwent's birds and go towards producing the Gwent Bird Report, the society's most important publication.

Personally I have been having a lot of fun birding around Gwent this year. The county might not be a birding Mecca, but it doesn't half make you appreciate a goodie when you see one. A case in point is the near perverse behaviour of 'channel-watching' at Goldcliff Point. During a south-westerly blow it is possible to see three or four grown men cowering in the lee of the sea-wall; squinting down their telescopes at distant specks they get momentarily excited by all manner of pretty common (in almost any other county in the UK) seabirds. Gannets raise an eyebrow, skuas and shearwaters a whoop of excitement and petrels a jig of delight. God knows what would happen if a Pterodroma petrel swung into view (an all-night beach party probably).

Darryl Spittle (hopefully former editor of the Dipper, see page 7 for details)

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AVIAN INVASION

Enough's enough, after the 19th bird (and 12th different species) flew into the house when we were going out last week, I decided it was time to ask for advice on how to make our house less attractive to birds.

So far eight different points of entry have been used. The latest intruder was a Blue Tit and it had obviously been roosting in the porch. The only other bird to enter through the front door was a Robin. Most come in through the open conservatory doors in summer; a Chiffchaff in July 2005, on the same day that a Willow Warbler stunned itself by flying into the outside of the conservatory, and a juvenile Pied Wagtail in July 2006. Two young Chaffinches ventured in together and a Greenfinch returned for a second visit after being guided out; but perhaps the most surprising invader was the juvenile Great Spotted Woodpecker, which appeared in June 2005.

A Red-legged Partridge, found tiptoeing across the hall by a visiting Gwent birder, had come in through the sitting room French doors and seemed reluctant to leave. We live in the middle of a large shooting estate and it's not unusual to find partridges sheltering from the rain in our porch. Seeing one asleep on the doormat one night, my husband gently slid his foot under it, lifted it a few inches off the ground and lowered it again – the bird remained asleep throughout.

In the summer of 2006 several House Martins were absolutely determined to nest on our deep-set window frames. As there was plenty of space left under the eaves we felt this a bit unnecessary and attempted to stop it. Even after finding their first bits of mud knocked to the ground, if the window was closed the martins instantly began again. I left the bedroom window slightly open; this merely provided a perfect perch. If the bird was facing inwards we would eyeball each other, a mere foot away, and if it was facing outwards I was able to stroke the tail which stuck into the room. I opened the windows fully; this resulted in the pair flying in and circling above our bed. My husband objected strongly to having his morning cup of tea disturbed. We eventually solved the problem by jamming a large piece of paper in the closed window – the martins hated the fluttering paper and finally gave up.

Not content with nesting in both the front and back porches, Barn Swallows have prospected inside the house as well. Three flew in over my head when I walked out of the back door one morning - they checked out the utility room and kitchen before leaving; two others swooped in through the open conservatory doors.

The first Great Tit sneaked in through the 4" opening of an upstairs window while the second fetched up behind the glass of a gas fire after a helter-skelter descent down a kinked 5m flue. This necessitated a phone call to the manufacturer to find out how to remove the sealed glass door. The Wren found perching on a house-plant must have crept in through the breakfast room door but we don't know how the fierce speckled grey hen got in to the kitchen; it stood its ground when confronted by a startled house-guest. As it's a feral species I haven't included it in the tally; nor did I add the Blackbirds nesting in the back porch or the Jackdaws in the chimney. Lists, even 'inside the house' ones must be kept pure!

So any advice would be welcome – but please don't ask us to keep our doors and windows shut during long, hot summers.

Verity Picken, Llangybi

P.S. Can anyone beat this? And has anyone any idea why so many birds seem hell-bent on invading our territory?

REQUEST FOR RECORDS FOR 2006

Here we are again, it's Christmas and nearly the end of yet another years birding.

Whilst I know that you'll all be out enjoying yourselves Christmas shopping, entertaining, partying, etc., there is always another past time to think about over the festive period, especially when you're chilling out after the Christmas meal or twiddling your thumbs as you're fed up with yet another repeat on the TV

Completing your records for 2006!

Could I ask that everybody makes it a New Years resolution to write / type up their records for inclusion in the 2006 Gwent Bird Report.

The deadline for submission of the records is 31st January 2007.

Let's try and make the next, for 2006, report even larger!

Records can be submitted in several ways:

- 1 Hand written on 'recording slips', which are available from myself, membership secretary, or from the Library at indoor meetings at Goytre village hall (2 blank slips are on page 16)
2. Electronically via email.

If members would like to submit their records electronically, they can be entered either into a standard GOS Excel spreadsheet, available from myself, or by typing details into a Word-type document. Records submitted in Word or spreadsheets (excepting the standard GOS spreadsheet) need to follow a consistent format outlined below and described in more detail in the June 2006 Dipper. The minimum information required consists of:

the species name,

the number seen,

the date and the location (including a six figure grid reference where possible).

Other details (e.g. direction of flight) can be added as required.

Please start a new row or line for each record, entering each item of data (species name, etc.) in separate cells in a Word table (or separated by a comma or a tab in a Word document, or in different cells in a spreadsheet). It does not matter if you start a record with the date, the place or the species name but whichever order you choose please follow it for all of your records.

Any queries / advice required, please do not hesitate to contact me:

Chris Jones, 22 Walnut Drive, Caerleon, Newport, South Wales, NP18 3SB

Tel (01633) 423439 or via email at countyrecorder@gwentbirds.org.uk

Please Note. The GOS web page is meant for communicating interesting sightings to other members and is not designed to accept formal reports so please send in your records as well as posting them on the website.

DOWITCHER: MARCH 2005

Did you see the dowitcher at Goldcliff Pools between the 20th and 27th March 2005? Did you take notes or a photograph? The descriptions supplied to date are insufficient to allow acceptance by the BBRC and more information is required. If you have any notes, sketches or photographs please send them to Chris Jones at 22 Walnut Drive, Caerleon, Newport, South Wales, NP18 3SB.

NEW RSPB LAPWING OFFICER

Hello GOS members! My name is Lynne and I have recently been appointed as the RSPB's Heads of the Valleys Lapwing Project Officer. My post has arisen through a partnership between the RSPB, the Welsh Assembly Government and Blaenau Gwent CBC. I am based locally, in the council's Tredegar offices, so I am easily contactable at:

Heads of the Valleys Lapwing Project Officer, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, Business Resource Centre, Tafarnaubach Industrial Estate, Tredegar, Gwent NP22 3AA

Or by telephone on 01495 355826 (office) or 07920 782695 (mobile); or via email at lynne.osgathorpe@rspb.org.uk

My position has been created as a positive move towards conserving the Heads of the Valleys lapwing population. My work will focus on restoring and, where possible, creating a network of sustainably managed sites suitable for breeding lapwing throughout the Heads of the Valleys area. At present the current area I'm operating in covers Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taff.

To achieve this I am going to be working closely with people from many different organisations, including Local Authority staff from across the region, the Wildlife Trusts and local bird enthusiasts – like yourself and GOS.

How can you and GOS help?

Details for 2006: Could I ask that any details (including site location, number of birds / pairs and productivity / success rate) that you may have for Lapwings in the area detailed above are forwarded on to your County Recorder, Chris Jones, who will collate and forward to myself.

Details for 2007: Please forward details **directly to myself** as soon as possible for inclusion into the Heads of the Valleys Project.

Any information you may have which could help identify key sites to target our efforts would be invaluable and help contribute to the conservation of this charismatic species in South Wales. Please feel free to get in touch any time with records, sightings or any other information you think may be useful to help to conserve this breeding species in the Heads of the Valleys area.

Lynne Osgathorpe

WeBS HELP REQUIRED

The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) monitors the UK's Internationally Important Waterbirds, with the help of thousands of dedicated volunteers. Two opportunities to take part have recently appeared in the county. Competent surveyors are needed to undertake monthly counts of wildfowl and waders at Peterstone and to, temporarily, help out Mathern. If you would like to take part in this important monitoring project or know anyone who might want to get involved please contact Dr Niall Burton at Wetland & Coastal Ecology Unit, British Trust for Ornithology, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU, or on 01842 750050 or niall.burton@bto.org

To find more details about the scheme, visit www.bto.org/survey/webs/index.htm

FORTHCOMING INDOOR MEETINGS

January 13th, the 2007 AGM. The main task of this AGM is the election of a new Chairman. It will be followed by the **traditional finger buffet** and a digital presentation by local photographer, **Alan Lloyd**, showing highlights of the wildlife of Kenya, and Yellowstone N.P.

January 27th 'My Family and Other Diseases', Mike Dilger: Until recently Mike worked for the BBC Natural History Unit, Bristol, producing many popular series of nature programmes. Never heeding the warning "don't work with children or animals" this is the story of some of the mishaps, excitements and unique observations that crop up when working with some of the world's most charismatic animals.

February 10th "Everything you always wanted to know about birds but were afraid to ask!" Stephen Moss: Stephen is a BBC TV Producer, author, natural historian and birder. Among the many TV wildlife programmes he has produced he is probably best known for several of the recent Bill Oddie TV series including the familiar "How to Watch Wildlife" and "Springwatch". "Everything you always...." is the title of one of Stephen's books, but as well as slides, this will be a full-on question and answer session! Have your questions ready and your wits sharpened, it's going to be a very interactive evening!

February 24th "Six of the Best Birdwatching Places in the World!" Ian Rowlands: Only a tour operator could and would use a title like that! Ian is a co-founder of Speyside Wildlife (see www.speysidewildlife.co.uk) the wildlife specialist holiday company. Tour-leader, writer and lecturer, Ian is passionate about eco-tourism and conservation issues. He returns with his intriguing list which may include destinations not necessarily exclusive for birds alone...

March 10th "Painting birds in Madagascar" (for a Field Guide), John Gale: John has an enviable lifestyle, travelling all over the world painting birds, mammals, seascapes and landscapes for a living. A couple of years ago he showed us his extraordinary paintings of glaciers in Antarctica. A more recent commission took him to the warmer climes of Madagascar to illustrate a forthcoming Field Guide of Madagascar This is his story of the journey from sketch pad to glossy guide. Simply unmissable!

March 24th "Wader ID in Breeding Plumage" John Wyatt: Who can forget his outstanding sound-and-slide presentation on the 'Language of Birds' last October? This time John returns to give us some Top Tips for Wader Identification in their Breeding Plumage. This will be followed the next morning (Sunday, March 25th) when John will hope to put theory into practice by leading a walk at the NWR to look for early migrant waders in breeding plumage! Fingers crossed! ***Time of walk to be confirmed and will be announced at Indoor meetings and on the website. If you don't have access to either of these, check with Steve Butler nearer the time.***

In September John will be back to explain wader ID in Winter Plumage.

Trevor Russell, Secretary (01600 716266, secretary@gwentbirds.org.uk)

POSSIBLE NEST BOX EVENT

We are trying to arrange a nest box event to coincide with National Nest Box week. Possible dates are the afternoons of the 10th or 17th February, based at Goytre Village Hall.

Activities would include building nest boxes and perhaps a stroll around Goytre House Wood where GOS has placed several nest boxes.

Details will be announced at Indoor Meetings and on the website. If neither of these are available, contact the membership secretary and she will keep you informed of plans.

FRIENDS OF NEWPORT WETLANDS

The building of the new RSPB Visitor Centre at the Newport Wetlands has now started with an expected completion date around the end of summer 2007 and GOS would like to work closely with the RSPB regarding its use in the future.

Therefore, in order to help raise our profile, can you, and as many of your friends and families as possible, please register as "Friends of Newport Wetlands". To do this all that is needed is for you to send an email to gos@newportwetlands.com and then follow the instructions / requests in the reply. Your family and friends can be included by typing their email addresses in the 'cc' box. You will all then be kept informed automatically of forthcoming events.

FIELD TRIP REPORT

Somerset Levels and Chew Valley Lake – 18th November: Only four members met up at Chepstow for the 'Out of County' trip to the Somerset Levels. Probably the poor weather of the previous few days had put off a number of supporters, but they shouldn't have worried. Apart from a 20 minute shower late afternoon the weather was bright, sunny and cool.

We made our way initially to Westhay Moor, a reserve of the Somerset Wildlife Trust. Bird hides are frequent and placed in strategic positions around a number of the pools. The pools having been created after peat extraction has ceased, although some extraction is still taking place on the southern edge.

Whilst none of the pools was really active our tally of species continued to increase throughout the morning. Sparrowhawk had been noted from the car park whilst Reed Bunting, Chaffinch, Cetti's Warbler & Wren were close by. Shoveler was present on the pool at the entrance as was Moorhen. A Cormorant flew over. Species seen from the next two hides included Mute Swan, Little Egret, Mallard & Pied Wagtail whereas the walks between the hides gave us Starling, Magpie, Long-tailed, Blue, Coal and Great Tit. Gadwall was noted from the next hide together with a resting duck that was not identified even after seeking the advice of a local. As we left the hide we were advised to view the far end of the current peat workings as Water Rail had been seen earlier. Our patience paid off, as both Water Rail and Green Sandpiper were visible for a number of minutes. Buzzards and Kestrels were noted, the former in significant numbers. Before we headed back to the car park for a belated lunch we had noted a number of gulls, Great crested Grebe, Tufted Duck, Heron, Pochard, Coot & Lesser Redpoll. At the car park a small flock of Fieldfare was gathering in trees close by.

After lunch we made our way to Chew Valley Lake, stopping first at Heron's Green Bay where Common, Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls were present. Before the light faded we moved to Herriott's Bridge to conclude the day's bird watching. Lapwing, Ruddy Duck, Shelduck, Goosander, Great Black-backed Gull and Grey Wagtail were added to the day's sightings.

A total of 54 species were seen including: Mute Swan, Canada Goose, Shelduck, Gadwall, Teal, Mallard, Shoveler, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Goldeneye, Goosander, Ruddy Duck, Pheasant, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant, Little Egret, Heron, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Kestrel, Water Rail, Moorhen, Coot, Lapwing, Green Sandpiper, Black headed Gull, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Wood Pigeon, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Robin, Stonechat, Blackbird, Fieldfare, Cetti's Warbler, Long-tailed Tit, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Magpie, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Raven, Starling, Chaffinch, Linnet, Lesser Redpoll and Reed Bunting.

Thanks to Ruth Brown for organising the field trip, her last as 'Out of County' walks organiser.

Keith Roylance

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

2006 Membership Update: Membership at the end of 2006 stands at 329

2007 Membership Update: You will be aware that subscriptions are due to increase. The new rates, effective from 1st January 2007 will be:

Adults £12.00

Family £15.00

Junior/Senior £9.00

You may recall in the last Dipper that I asked that those members who pay by standing order advise me that they had updated their standing orders to reflect the new fees for 2007. This would allow me to send out membership cards with this Dipper. Many thanks to the 37 of you who have done so, and if you didn't pick up your cards at the last meeting, they are enclosed with this issue. For the remaining 90+ who have not advised of an update, cards will be distributed once the treasurer has confirmed that a valid payment has been made.

Thank you to the 52 members who have already paid by cash or cheque for 2007, including four new members. If you at the last indoor meeting, they are enclosed. Subscriptions will be paid in after Christmas so that they will appear on the balance sheet for 2007. I have had two notifications of non-renewal from long-standing members who can no longer participate in GOS events and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their support for GOS over many years, and wish them well.

PLEASE NOTE THAT WHEN YOU ARE PAYING AT AN INDOOR MEETING, IT'S MUCH EASIER FOR KEITH AND MYSELF TO TRACK PAYMENTS IF YOU PAY BY CHEQUE AND, IF POSSIBLE, BRING YOUR COMPLETED RENEWAL FORM.

Llandegfedd Reservoir Access: Keys are required for access to the north (Glascoed) end of the reservoir from 1st November – 28th February and are available to members from the Membership Secretary. Cost is currently £1 at indoor meetings or £1 plus 23p SAE by post, though may change with the next batch, so please confirm cost before getting a key by post.

Maps and Grid References: Ordnance survey leaflets on the use of maps and grid references are available free of charge at indoor meetings or by post on receipt of an A5 size SAE with 23p postage for up to 3 leaflets or 37p for all 4. Leaflets available are:

Introduction to Maps

Map reading made easy

Map reading made easy peasy

Advanced map reading made easy

Arrowsmith Bristol Channel Tide Tables, 2007: These are available for collection at indoor meetings at £4.05 each or by post at an extra cost of 55p to cover second-class post & envelope. Tables cover Avonmouth to Milford Haven. A couple of spare copies are available.

2005 Annual Report: Copies were distributed to members with The Dipper in October. Hope you have all received them.

Best wishes to you all for 2007, and good luck with your resolution to send in records on time!

Helen Jones, Membership Secretary (029 20691027, membership@gwentbirds.org.uk)

SITUATION VACANT

Dipper Editor

Having completed two years as 'chaser-of-articles-in-chief', I think it only fair to let somebody else have a go. As a result, we need a new, keen as a bean, editor. If anyone is interested in the role or would like further information, please contact either myself at

newsletter@gwentbirds.org.uk or

Trevor Russell at: secretary@gwentbirds.org.uk or by phone on 01600 716266.

The survey squares allocated for this winter's **Lapwing/Golden Plover** monitoring have now been allocated, and it is hoped that most birds will be picked up during the monthly counts. However some birds are sure to be away from the survey squares, so if any are seen please make a note and let me have the details. The information required is number of birds, date, grid reference and type of habitat e.g. farmland (grass or tilled) salt marsh.

This year's **Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)** has been very successful with the majority of squares being surveyed, most returns are now in and more volunteers are choosing to enter their data on line (which cuts down on the BTO's administrative costs and the time that I have to spend double checking the forms), so a big thank you to everyone that helps with this survey. As always there are a number of squares available for next year - this time more than usual, as two long-term supporters have had to relinquish their squares. Many thanks to Gill Jones and Brian Gregory for their long-term support to the BBS.

For 2007 the followings 1km squares are likely to be available - SO4817 (St Maughans), SO3504 (Trostrey, Usk), ST5194 (Nr Chepstow), SO3304 (Nr Chain Bridge), SO2106 (Abertillery), SO5414 (Highmeadow Woods), ST2689 (Rogerstone), SO3621 (Campston Hill), SO3613 (Llanvapley), ST4894 (Mynydd Bach), SO2317 (Llangenny - Brecon), SO5117 (Welsh Newton -Hereford), SO4502 (Llansoy). If anyone is unsure about the methodology (really easy compared to some other surveys) please give me a ring. Any offers of help greatly appreciated and you will sleep much easier at night knowing you are doing your bit to help monitor a government's "Quality of Life" indicator.

The survey period for the next **National Atlas** is fast approaching; this will be a wintering and breeding Atlas with 4 winter seasons (starting winter 2007/8) and 3 breeding seasons (starting 2008). After a very successful pilot survey, similar methodologies have been developed for both the winter and breeding elements.

The fieldwork is designed to provide a complete species list, and a relative abundance for each species, in each 10 Km square, in both the winter and the breeding season. Winter is November - February inclusive, breeding season is April - July incl. The fieldwork will comprise a balance between "roving records" and "timed tetrad visits", both will give the total species list and evidence of breeding, while the latter will provide abundance data. Both types of fieldwork are of equal importance. Roving recorders will have a very free remit - aiming to amass a comprehensive species list for each 10 Km square (this could be achieved by a mix of providing casual records, a day's birding through several squares or a dedicated search of the habitats in one square). Timed tetrad visits will comprise a compulsory one hour survey (optional two hour survey) during which individuals of each species seen and heard are counted. There would be early and late season visits, so 2 winter visits and 2 breeding season visits to each tetrad.

The aim in each 10 Km square is to have timed visits in at least 8 tetrads (choice of tetrads is up to the observer), but each tetrad need only be visited in a single winter and breeding season. At this stage all that is needed is an expression of interest and an indication of your preferred area (10 Km square), please let me know if you are interested so I can begin to approach other people for other squares in the County.

Jerry Lewis, BTO Representative

BEEN OUT BIRDWATCHING? LOG ON TO BIRDTRACK

An on-line bird recording scheme to increase the personal, local and national value of your sightings. Organised by BTO in collaboration with RSPB and BirdWatch Ireland

www.birdtrack.net

SIGNING OFF AFTER FIVE YEARS AS CHAIRMAN

This has been a busy five years during which the Society has been extremely active. We have played our part in trying to conserve the county's bird populations. This has not been successful in all species, as the Birds of Gwent will show. We have however objected to many damaging projects which have been proposed including the Severnside Airport, Gateway Wales, the Newport UDP, Coity Mountain wind farm and the M4 relief road. We have also made positive moves to protect and improve areas for birds by making grants to Gwent Wildlife Trust and The Woodland Trust to purchase significant reserves on the Gwent Levels and Wentwood respectively.

Now our birds are facing the most damaging project in our history, which is the proposed Severn Barrage. This would create a massive lagoon behind it, covering most of the intertidal mudflats upon which Gwent's wintering waders feed. Data following the flooding of Cardiff Bay suggest that the waders will not be displaced, but will die. There is an alternative scheme of tidal lagoons, which are oval shaped enclosed areas, which fill with water and then empty, thus generating electricity. These would be much less damaging as the intertidal mudflats would be largely unaffected by this scheme. The far more damaging barrage seems to be finding favour at official level as it could carry a road promoting growth, which is more than a little ironic as its main purpose must be to minimise the affects of climate change. Global warming is likely to cause 15-40% of our birds to become extinct by 2050, if the world continues do nothing or very little to alleviate it. Some people think we can continue as we have done, and adapt to the changes. They are wrong, this process is progressive: I quote Stephen Hawking "...the danger is the warming process might be unstable and run away. We could end up like Venus...with a surface temperature of 400 degrees."

Even if it were not for global warming, population increases and the consequent strain on resources, habitat destruction and pollution would probably have had the same effect on our birdlife eventually. Perhaps this is what the world has needed to wake up and look after its environment. The Stern report stated that deforestation should stop as it contributes to climate change, something environmentalists have been calling for, for years, and there is some cause for optimism with political changes in the USA and a Climate Change Bill in the UK.

Thank you very much to all members who have helped me in my role as Chairman. I have enjoyed the past five years much and now look forward to watching Dave Brassey carrying on the good work.

Andrew Baker

I'm sure we would all like to thank Andrew for his efforts over the last five years and wish Dave luck during his tenure (given the threats highlighted by Andrew above, he is going to need it).

SUBMISSIONS FOR THE NEXT DIPPER

The submission date for the March 2007 Dipper is Sunday 4th March please send any contributions, enquiries, requests or feedback to the editor at newsletter@gwentbirds.org.uk

NEWS FROM THE NEWPORT WETLANDS

Work on the Environmental Education and Visitor Centre has finally started. The contractors have been given our car park to use for their offices, storage etc, so we are using the yard next to it as a temporary car park. You are still able to access the reedbeds via Perry Lane, but a much nicer walk is to go the opposite way via the cycle track. The centre is due to be opened in late summer 2007.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome GOS member Keith Jones to our Voluntary Wardening team. Keith will be helping us with our bird counts and his help is especially welcome with the absence of a Senior Reserve Manager and with Adrian Hickman leaving the area. We now have two Voluntary Wardens called Keith Jones. To distinguish between the two I'll refer to them as Keith Jones (Caerleon) and Keith Jones (Undy). It is Keith Jones (Caerleon) who has just joined us, Keith Jones (Undy) having joined in June 2004. We also have a Voluntary Warden called Keith Thomas. He joined in June 2000. Can I just say that we now have our full complement of Keith's (whether Jones, Thomas or any other surname) and no more need apply.

I mentioned in my last article that the BTO have produced a report looking at our first 5 years of bird data against the targets that we were set by Europe. The targets were: "firstly, to ensure appropriate compensation to the scale of loss of the bird populations from Cardiff Bay, the reserve should support at least two species of wintering waterbird in nationally (GB) important numbers. Secondly, that within five years it would have the potential to qualify for Special Protection Area (SPA) status alongside or within an extended Severn Estuary SPA boundary."

A site is considered to be nationally important for a given species when numbers exceed 1% of the estimated national population. For wintering birds, numbers are quantified by taking the five year average of the peak winter counts. The report found that we had reached nationally important numbers during the first 5 winters (2000/01 to 2004/05) for black-tailed godwit and shoveler. The annual peak for pintail exceeded the 1% threshold during the first winter but has declined sharply since. The report also found that we are likely to reach nationally important numbers of little grebe within the next 2 years. This is the 'little surprise' I mentioned in my last article. The numbers of wigeon and gadwall have the potential to do so in the next 6 years if the current trends were to continue. Of course, carrying capacity could be reached before they reach nationally important numbers. For wigeon the 1% threshold was raised from 2,800 birds to 4,060 in 2003. The figure for gadwall is 171, so is much more likely to be attained. The 'big' surprise for us was the black-tailed godwits. We had no idea that the numbers we had were nationally significant – we simply hadn't checked what the 1% threshold was for them. It is only 150 birds and our 5year peak mean is 232!

The report states, "It is reasonable to assume that, since it was established, the reserve has become a functional component of the Severn Estuary SPA. Consequently an extension of the boundaries of the Severn Estuary SPA to encompass the newly created habitats within the reserve boundary would be warranted." It is likely that CCW will wait for another 5 years of data before doing this.

This report would not have been possible without the hard work of several Voluntary Wardens who have taken part in our monthly WeBS counts and fortnightly, winter high tide counts. These are Clive Rutter, Marcus John, Keith Jones (Undy) and Adrian Hickman. Also, John Bennett has helped out when we have been short of counters. Previous Senior Reserve Managers Adam Rowlands and Tony Pickup are also responsible for a large part of the data.

Kevin Dupé, Reserve Manager

RECENT SIGHTINGS: SEPTEMBER – NOVEMBER

The following is a summary of reports posted to the 'Recent Reports' page on our website (www.gwentbirds.org.uk). 'Notable' records (i.e. those relating to species recorded infrequently within the county and requiring a description to be sent to the county recorder) are in bold type. All areas within the NWR and associated areas of foreshore are treated as a single location. Records relating to rare breeding species, or those susceptible to persecution are omitted. Please note that the inclusion of a record within the following summary does not imply official acceptance and all records should be forwarded to the county recorder.

When posting information to the 'Gwent Sightings' page, please refrain from reporting rare breeding species, or those susceptible to persecution. Please remember that the information on the website is open to all.

Thanks go to the following observers who all contributed records, apologies for any omissions: Nigel Addecott, Malcolm Appleton, Mick Bailey, Andrew Baker, John Bennett, Judy Beswick, Nicholas Beswick, 'Billy', Peter Blackaby, Sam Bosanquet, Mike Bosley, Julian Branscombe, Phil Bristow, Matt Broome, Ruth Brown, Bryn Burgess, Ros Burgess, Steve Butler, Nathan Casburn, Barry Catlin, Maurice Chown, Craig Constance, John Davies, Steve Davies, Allan Dowson, John Evans, Mair Floyd-Bosley, Nigel Garside, 'Glynnis', Tim Griffiths, 'Holly', Richard Howells, Chris Hurn, Jackie Huybs, Barry Ingram, Steve Jackson, Jan Jenkins, Mal Jenkins, Tony Jenkins, 'Joan', Andrew Jones, Chris Jones, Hadyn Jones, Keith Jones, Andrew King, Llandegfedd Rangers, 'Little Dai', Paul Marshall, John O'Sullivan, Gareth Parry, Phil Parson, Lee Parsons, Luke Phillips, Jackie Pointon, Mike Pointon, Mike Powell, Gareth Rees, Tom Rees, Tom Riddington, Keith Roylance, Roger Ruston, Ian Smith, Darryl Spittle, Ed Stevens, Mark Stevens, Brian Thomas, GT Thorne, Mike Tidley, Eddie Wang, Mike Warburton, Craig Watson, Chris West, Julie West, Mike Wheeler, Steve Williams, Leyton Williams-Davies, John Wilson and Graham Woodbury.

Manx Shearwater – One was seen off the NWR on the 6th October with another two on the 8th (Anon. & Chris Jones).

Bittern – Just one sighting reported, a single bird was seen at the NWR on 4th November (Keith Jones).

Little Egret – All records came from sites along the estuary and levels with the highest count being 16 at the NWR on the 3rd November.

Whooper Swan – A lone individual was seen on the 5th and 26th November at the NWR (B. Thomas & D. Spittle).

Snow Goose – The individual at Llandegfedd Reservoir was reported three times between 9th September and 14th October. It, or another, was also seen at Caerleon on 29th October.

Barnacle Goose – Single birds, accompanying Canada Goose flocks, were noted at Llandegfedd Reservoir, Bulmore Lakes and at the NWR.

Brent Goose – Single birds of the dark-bellied *bernicla* subspecies were seen at Collister Pill and the NWR. Both records were from 29th October but possibly refer to the same individual.

Canada Goose x Chinese Goose hybrid – A bird thought to be the result of this pairing was seen at Bulmore Lakes on 21st October.

Cape Shelduck – One was reported from Collister Pill on 9th September.

Australian Shelduck – As with the species above, an individual thought to be this exotic escape was at Collister Pill on 9th September. Observers should be aware that at least two different Shelduck hybrids have been present in the estuary see photos, on the web, at <http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/severnsidebirds/page99.html> and http://gwentbirding.blogspot.com/2006_05_01_gwentbirding_archive.html (scroll down to find the pics).

Shelduck – Three inland records came from Llandegfedd Reservoir with two on 9th September, three on the 13th and one on 11th October.

Mandarin – A male was reported from the Monmouth-Brecon Canal just south of Cwmbran in late November, although it had apparently been present for at least two weeks (S. Williams *et al.*).

Wigeon – Recorded from ten locations throughout the county, three figure counts were made at the NWR, Llandegfedd Reservoir, Collister Pill and Peterstone.

Gadwall – The highest count reported was of 57 at the NWR on 27th November.

Teal – Recorded from 12 locations throughout the county, only the NWR held more than 100.

Pintail – Recorded from various points along the estuary, no counts above 30 were logged.

Shoveler – A count of 100 at Peterstone on 10th November was the highest by some margin.

Pochard – Over 100 were reported from Llandegfedd Reservoir on 21st November, the next highest count was of 42 at Ynysyfro Reservoirs.

Common Scoter – Three records were logged, the first was a male at Llandegfedd Reservoir on 16th September, next were two at Peterstone on 22nd September and, finally, eight were at Llandegfedd Reservoir on 11th October (J. Bennett, E. Wang, C. Constance & T. Griffiths).

Goldeneye – Three were seen on the River Usk on 16th November, whilst another two were at the NWR on the 29th.

Goosander – Small numbers were reported throughout the period, most were noted along the Usk valley and at Llandegfedd Reservoir.

Ruddy Duck – One was at Llandegfedd Reservoir on 16th September and two were at the NWR on 9th October.

Marsh Harrier – One was at the NWR on 8th September with two present the following day. Elsewhere, a late report came from Magor Marsh on 21st October (M. Pointon, P. Bristow & T. Rees).

Hen Harrier – Six records between 4th September and 23rd November. Males were seen a Garnlydan Reservoir and Nash, ringtails were noted at the NWR, Garnlydan Reservoir and Mynydd Maen (many observers).

Osprey – Two southbound migrants were reported, individuals were at the NWR on 10th September and Llanwenarth on the 19th (B. Catlin & A. Baker).

Merlin – Along the levels birds were seen at The NWR, Collister Pill and Peterstone; inland two birds were reported from Garnlydan Reservoir on two dates and another was seen near Bassaleg.

Red Grouse – Four reports came from The Bloreng and Garnlydan including nine at the latter site on 29th October.

Water Rail – A maximum of ten was recorded at the NWR; elsewhere birds were reported from Magor Marsh, The Moorings and along the Monmouth-Brecon Canal.

Oystercatcher – A notable, inland, record was of one bird seen at Llandegfedd Reservoir on 11th October.

Little Ringed Plover – The last record of the year was of three birds at Llandegfedd Reservoir on 13th September.

Ringed Plover – A rare appearance at Ynysyfro Reservoirs consisted of a flyover on 3rd September.

Golden Plover – Single birds were reported from the NWR on the 15th September and 8th October.

Grey Plover – Small numbers were noted along the estuary throughout the period, the highest count being of 23 at Peterstone Gout on 8th November.

Sanderling – Just one report during the autumn, two birds were at the NWR on 15th September.

Semi-palmated Sandpiper – A juvenile/1st-winter was found during the evening of the 6th September at the NWR. This, first for the county and highlight of the year so far, attracted a reasonable crowd until the 9th (M. Powell et al.).

Little Stint – A good passage was noted at the NWR, with birds being present throughout September and into early October. The maximum count was of nine birds in late September. Good inland records came from Llandegfedd Reservoir with a single on the 13th September and four on the 28th.

Curlew Sandpiper – As with the species above, a good passage passed through the NWR during September and early October. The peak count was of 11 on the 15th September. A late record on the 23rd October came from Peterstone.

Ruff – Another species passing through in September and early October. Most records were of between one and three birds but six were seen at the NWR on 24th September.

Jack Snipe – Three reports were logged from Caerleon, Garn Lakes and near Pontypool. All were of single birds between mid October and early November.

Black-tailed Godwit – Eight counts in excess of 100 birds were recorded at the NWR during the period. The biggest flock, of 227, were noted on the 3rd November.

Bar-tailed Godwit – By far the rarer of the godwits in Gwent, small numbers were recorded from the NWR and Collister Pill during the autumn. Fourteen on the 1st November was the peak count.

Whimbrel – Reported from the NWR on the 6th September and at Peterstone on the 25th.

Spotted Redshank – One or two birds were present at the NWR from the 1st September until the 17th.

Greenshank – The vast majority of records were logged between the 2nd September and the 8th October, with all records coming from the NWR. A late straggler was noted at the same site on the 29th October.

Green Sandpiper – Reported from five sites: the NWR, Sluice Farm, Caerleon, Gobion and Raglan. The greatest count was of two at Caerleon on the 15th October.

Wood Sandpiper – The only record, logged during the period, was of one on the 4th September at the NWR (K. Jones).

Common Sandpiper – Six, at Peterstone on the 5th September, was the biggest concentration of this species during the autumn.

Arctic Skua – Two dark phase birds were seen off Goldcliff Point on the 3rd September (D. Spittle).

Mediterranean Gull – Two first-winters were seen; one at Llandegfedd Reservoir on the 11th October, one at Ynysyfro Reservoirs on the 29th November.

Yellow-legged Gull – A bird, thought possibly to be this species, was seen at Peterstone on the 21st September (E. Wang).

Common Tern – Ten were present at Llandegfedd Reservoir on the 12th September, followed by one on the 13th, one on the 14th and two on the 28th. The only record from elsewhere was of two at Peterstone on the 2nd October.

Arctic Tern – The only record was of one, at Ynysyfro Reservoirs, on the 3rd September.

'Commic Tern' – One bird, off Caldicott Pill on the 19th October, could not be assigned to either of the above species.

Black Tern – Records of this species came from Llandegfedd Reservoir, Goldcliff Point and the NWR between the 14th and 24th September. The maximum count was of between 12 and 14 past Goldcliff Point on the 22nd September.

Turtle Dove – A single bird, in a fortunate birder's garden in Magor, was the only record logged of this rapidly disappearing (at least in Gwent) species.

Eagle Owl – An escaped individual was seen tucking into a rat at Silent Valley LNR on the 29th October!

Long-eared Owl – Two birds were heard calling near Blaenavon on the 9th November (J. Huybs).

Short-eared Owl – An early bird was watched, flying in off the estuary, at the NWR on the 26th September. This was followed by three reports, of single birds, in November at Garnlydan Reservoir, Collister Pill and Magor.

Swift – The last report for the year was of “a few” seen at Mynydd Llangattock on the 13th September.

Kingfisher – This eye-catching species was noted at six sites spread across the county.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker – Reported from Silent Valley LNR in late October and November; perhaps less predictably, an individual was also seen flying over the Fox Hunter car park near Blaenavon.

Sand Martin – Last seen at Peterstone on the 25th September.

Swallow – The last birds to be reported were at Caerleon on the 15th October.

House Martin – Last reported from Bedwas on the 10th October.

Tree Pipit – Just one report, birds noted flying over the NWR on the 10th September.

Rock Pipit – Again, just a single report, from Collister Pill on the 5th November.

Water Pipit – A flock of ten pipits, thought to be this species, but not seen well enough to confirm, was recorded at Peterstone on the 10th November (N. Garside).

Yellow Wagtail – Reported from the NWR, Collister Pill and Peterstone during September; the highest figure recorded was eight at Collister Pill on the 9th and the NWR on the 10th.

Redstart – Four records of migrants were logged from Osbaston, the NWR, Sudbrook and Peterstone. The latest was at Peterstone on 23rd October.

Whinchat – Noted at seven sites throughout the county, whilst those in the north may have still been on breeding grounds most were migrants moving south. The best count inland was four near Brynmawr, whilst on the coast, three at the NWR was the biggest number logged.

Wheatear – Recorded at ten widely scattered sites away from the levels reports came from Brynmawr, Trelleck and Bassaleg. Along the estuary birds were noted from Sluice Farm in the west to (ironically) West Pill in the east.

Fieldfare – First logged in late October, the only really large count was of 444 at Gobion on the 2nd November.

Redwing – Arrived slightly before the species above, the first being at Abergavenny on the 7th October. Counts above 100 were logged from Fforest Coalpit on the 30th October and Garn Lakes on the 5th November.

Cetti's Warbler – Recorded from the NWR, Peterstone and Magor Marsh, the maximum count was of 26 at the NWR on the 24th October (many observers).

Grasshopper Warbler – A single bird was seen at the NWR on the 11th September.

Sedge Warbler – The last report of the season was at the NWR on the 24th September.

Reed Warbler – Again the NWR produced the last bird of the year, this time on the 17th September.

Lesser Whitethroat – An incredibly late record was logged from Silent Valley LNR on the 24th October.

Whitethroat – The last report of the year was at the NWR on the 24th September.

Garden Warbler – The last, and only, report of the period was at Llandegfedd Reservoir on the 9th September.

Willow Warbler – The latest record was of one at the NWR on 17th September.

Spotted Flycatcher – Birds were noted in early September at Dingestow and Osbaston.

Bearded Tit – Three reports, involving at least three different birds, at the NWR on the 8th September, 29th October and 3rd November. (K. Jones, J. Bennett, M. Pointon and C. Hurn).

Brambling – Four singles were recorded in November from Wentwood on the 3rd, Peterstone on the 8th, Manmoel on the 16th and Silent Valley LNR on the 20th.

Crossbill – One or two birds were noted at Wentwood, Llantilio Croesenny and Garnlydan Reservoir between the 3rd October and the 1st November.

Hawfinch – Just a single record of two at Silent Valley LNR on the 24th October.

Yellowhammer – Four records, all from near Bassaleg, the highest count being of seven on the 27th October.

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING 2006

GOYTRE VILLAGE HALL 25TH NOVEMBER 2006

Those present; Chairman, Andrew Baker, and 63 members.

The meeting was called to allow those present (the Membership) to vote on the proposal put by the Committee that:

“GOS should sign an Agreement with SEWBRc (South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre) whereby GOS will submit all of its’ bird sighting records to SEWBRc for computerisation in order that they will be used as a more potent tool against the burgeoning planning proposals which threaten to damage our environment and biodiversity”

Because the details of the proposal and the arguments for and against had been well ‘trailed’ in a recent edition of The Dipper, there were no further questions.

A vote was taken and the motion was carried unanimously.

The meeting closed at 19:45hrs.

Bird Watching Courses in Gwent

The next course is the [Birds of Gardens, Woods and Fields](#).

This will be starting on Tuesday 6th February 2007 at [The Hill](#) Education & Conference Centre, Abergavenny, NP7 7RP (grid ref. [SO 294 154](#)). The Hill College buildings have been renovated and are now ‘accessible’. Please check these and other venue details directly with staff: Tel. 01495 333 777.

These bird watching courses have always been appreciated for their effectiveness, friendly & humorous nature and accessibility. All elements including: lectures, handouts and field trips, are designed around people’s requirements. A pair of binoculars is very helpful and advice on these will be given on the first evening. A couple of pairs can also be loaned during field trips if this helps.

Full details about this course (no. [G06W006ZSK](#)) and about how to [enrol on a course](#) are available from Cardiff Centre for Lifelong Learning (LEARN) Tel: 029 2087 0000.

Places are limited and those persons enrolled in advance have priority. If the course does not run, you receive a full refund from the University, so there is no risk to an early enrolment. If you have any questions, please contact me by email or phone 01600 713561 (evenings & weekends). Thank you for your interest - I hope to hear from you soon.

Ian Smith birdwatchingcourses@gwentbirds.org.uk

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Committee Members should be wearing name badges at the indoor meetings so, if you are new to the club or have a query, just make a beeline for one of us.

<div style="text-align: center;"></div> <p style="text-align: center;">Observer</p> <p>Notes <i>Information must include: number of birds and site name, along with any other details of interest eg. indications of breeding, unusual behaviour etc.</i></p> <hr/> <p>Date <i>Please use month name eg. Jan</i></p>	<div style="text-align: center;"></div> <p style="text-align: center;">Observer</p> <p>Notes <i>Information must include: number of birds and site name, along with any other details of interest eg. indications of breeding, unusual behaviour etc.</i></p> <hr/> <p>Date <i>Please use month name eg. Jan</i></p>
<p>Species</p>	<p>Species</p>