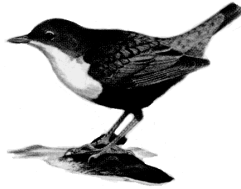


THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Registered charity number 1088830

GOS WEB SITE: www.gwentbirds.org.uk

Newsletter No. 114

March 2010

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING COMMENTARY

Trevor Russell

A total of 56 attendees were welcomed by the President, Ian Walker, who invited Treasurer Keith Roylance to make his presentation on the state of the society's finances.

Keith reported the disappointing news that membership had fallen by 48 year-on-year and pondered whether this was an effect of the downturn in the UK economy and/or a reflection of the ageing demographic of the society?

Reduced attendance at indoor meetings had been offset by an increase in entrance fee and costs had been controlled, particularly in the library and Goytre House Wood.

Anticipating yet further increases in postal charges, Keith's 'take home' message was for everyone to submit their e-mail addresses so that *The Dipper* could be distributed free of charge electronically, rather than becoming an increasingly expensive – and unnecessary – burden in this electronic age. At more than £500, the cost of posting *The Dipper* is almost as much as the cost of printing it!

A further benefit would be to allow easy communication during the otherwise silent summer months when we could need to call for help with summer shows, etc.

In anticipation of future cost increases, Keith proposed that the membership fee be increased from January 2011 as follows: senior from £9 to £12, adult from £12 to £15, family from £15 to £18. The motion was carried by a clear majority.

Dave Brassey, Chairman, compared the society's performance against the aims and objectives as defined in the GOS constitution, particularly in education, promotion, reporting and conservation.

Happily, he was able to do this very easily, pointing to the indoor and outdoor programmes, which this year focussed on UK raptor identification, coniferous wildlife and Croes Robert Wood, as well as the highly informative trips to local patches and further afield to, for example, Portland Bill. **(continues after Contents)**

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Promotion of the society reaches a wide audience through the GOS website and regular articles written for *The Argus* by Mark Stevens while publications, such as *The Birds of Gwent* and *The Dipper*, keep the local membership informed. Ornithological research projects are encouraged through the annual Hamar Bursary award.

The society's principal activity, bird reporting, has resulted in an almost iconic annual publication, *The Gwent Bird Report*. The quality and content of this publication must surely rank it among the best in the country.

Conservation activities continued throughout the year, with GOS members sitting on all the LBAP committees across the county.

A questionnaire earlier in the year identified the website as an area requiring improvement and work is already underway to achieve this. The library, too, has undergone a significant reorganisation and now operates under a far better, computerised system.

Report Editors Verity Picken and Chris Field had earlier signalled their desire to step down and John Coleman bravely volunteered to follow in their footsteps. He was quickly elected as the new Report Editor!

Verity, Chris and Chris Hatch were all willing to become committee members, while Steve Butler volunteered to be re-elected as Field Secretary following the loss of Luke Philips to the RSPB. Trevor Russell stood down as Indoor Programme Secretary and Rob Parsons was elected to succeed him.

A delicious and generous member's evening finger buffet followed the AGM and preceded an interesting presentation by Rick Park, recently appointed CEO of the Gwent Wildlife Trust, who not only painted a picture of his own background but also his vision of the role of GWT-with-GOS.

COMMITTEE COMMENTARY

Trevor Russell

GOS committee meetings have been gaining a reputation lately for being protracted talking shops, so a new target finishing time of 9.30pm was set. This seemed ambitious, given that 13 members turned up - each one a potential obstacle!

Dave Brassey welcomed two observers, Dave Hathaway and Keith Trott.

Headlines from the January AGM were discussed briefly (detailed in the AGM Commentary) In an endeavour to reduce postage costs and communicate more efficiently – particularly during the summer months - we will exhort as many members as possible to give us their e-mail addresses.

John Coleman will take over as Report Editor from Verity Picken and Chris Field. Steve Butler has returned as Field Secretary to take over from Luke Philips. Verity, Chris and Chris Hatch were elected as committee members.

We were pleased to learn that the planning appeal for development at Whitson Aerodrome had been lost, but that the proposed cycleway at Pillmawr will run adjacent to a heronry which, we advised, will disturb them sufficiently to cause them to relocate some way away – contrary to the views of the ecologist involved. We resolved to make our views known to the appropriate decision-makers in future to ensure our opinions get communicated to the appropriate people.

It was agreed to increase the Hamar Bursary from £100 to £150 per annum to reflect some inflationary increase since the 1980s.

The management plan for Goytre House Wood needs to be reviewed and updated but in the meantime, a maintenance working party is required to pull up sycamore saplings and thin larger sycamores.

Problems with acquiring, storing and cutting wood in time for Nest Box Week meant that we had to abandon the event this year. Hopefully this will be overcome in time for next year's event.

A new website sub-committee was set up to improve access and incorporate, eg, *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Flicker* (photos).

GOS will be 50 years old in 2011 and ideas for suggesting how best to celebrate it rattled onto the table - hopefully to be followed up in the coming weeks, and not simply to ensure that we would finish 10 minutes inside our 9.30pm target!

In memory of Mary Morris

Ian Walker

Mary Morris - who died on December 31, 2009 at the age of 90 - had been a GOS member since 1969, and for well over 20 of the following years had been active at indoor and outdoor meetings.

Her interests and commitment, however, extended to all wildlife. And I think she was even more active in GWT than in GOS. I suspect, too, that the course on plant identification at Oxford House in Risca in 1976-77 (where my wife Judy met Mary) would have been only one among many such courses that she attended.

Her home in the Gwyddon valley in Abercarn seemed very close to the local wildlife. In spite of being on a steep slope, the surrounding garden always looked very well cared for.

In recent years, I met Mary occasionally in the Risca area, the last such occasion being a year or two ago on a Newport-bound bus. When she recognised me, her first thought was to enquire about the welfare and activities of GOS; her second to express regret that she was no longer able to get to meetings. It was good to see her interest in wildlife remained keen even in her later years of restricted activity.

Mary will be sadly missed.

The society has been asked to attend the following events for the activities indicated. We would wish to be there - but can only do so with your help.

Saturday April 24th RSPB Centre, Newport Wetlands Reserve (10am-4pm)

This is an event to celebrate 100 years of both the RSPB and the Girl Guide Association. We have been asked to provide telescopes at the reedbeds and pools to help the guides and brownies with identification of the ducks and other birds present. Around 1,000 guides are expected. Anyone who is able to assist on the day, please contact Helen Jones at membership@gwentbirds.org.uk or tel 02920 691027 (evenings) for further details.

Sunday June 27th Garn Lakes Country Fayre, Blaenavon 10:30am – 5:00pm

This annual event this year celebrates the 10th anniversary of Blaenavon becoming a World Heritage Site and is part of the anniversary celebrations. More visitors than usual are expected because of the anniversary. We are located, with other environmental organisations, in an outside location; a 3mx3m gazebo will house our display and information boards. We are hoping to have a bird identification quiz for the public to participate in. If you can assist, please contact Keith Roylance at treasurer@gwentbirds.org.uk, or call 01633 868410 for more details.

Saturday July 10th Gwent Wildlife Trust Magor Marsh Open Day (2pm – 5pm)

We have supported this annual event over many years, as it attracts families from all over Gwent and we can showcase the society's activities and benefits of membership. We will be located in the hide overlooking the pond and while GWT will provide a number of binoculars for visitors to use. We need scopes and members to highlight the bird life both on the pond and around the reserve in general. If you can help please contact Keith Roylance at treasurer@gwentbirds.org.uk for more details.

Sunday July 18th Newport Wetlands Reserve Open Day. (10am – 4pm)

Similar to the Magor Marsh event (above), we are generally located at the viewing screens at the first reed bed pool. Our gazebo stand will have details of the society and membership benefits. A free to enter bird quiz is provided for members of the public to get to grips with bird identification. Volunteers where possible also man telescopes at the viewing screen to give close up views of the water birds present. Be prepared for a busy day, or a few hours if that is all you can spare. Any help will be gratefully received. More information from Helen Jones membership@gwentbirds.org.uk or Tel: 02920691027

The Dipper June 2010

The deadline for submissions for the next Dipper is May 31, 2010. Please e-mail Jackie Huybs at jackiehuybs@btinternet.com or newsletter@gwentbirds.org.uk. Thanks!

Do you have a favourite bird watching site in Gwent? We are keen to know.

Many of us are familiar with the major sites within Gwent, many of them appearing frequently in the Annual Report, but there are probably many more areas and locations that are visited by the few.

We would like to hear from you about your favourite site(s). It may be a well known location or a 'secret' area known only to a few. Is it your local patch? Why is it a favourite? Is it habitat or species-rich?

Wherever it is, please let us know by sending details to secretary@gwentbirds.org.uk It may be featured in a future edition of *The Dipper*. And if the response is significant, we may produce a *Where to watch birds in Gwent* volume.

E-mail addresses – a request

There are times when the committee would like to contact the membership outside of the normal *Dipper* and indoor meeting schedules.

The need for contact could be to announce changes in the programme or to request volunteers for extra activities being planned.

If you have an e-mail address, please advise Dave Brassey at chairman@gwentbirds.org.uk of the detail

and in that way, improved communication with our members can be maintained.

The information provided will be used by GOS only to notify or alert you of GOS-related actions or activities. Your e-mail address will not go outside the organisation but may be used by any of the officers of the society for society purposes.

This list will not supersede the *Dipper* circulation list held by Helen Jones, Membership Secretary.

BTO NEWS

Jerry Lewis, BTO Regional Rep

We are now completing the third **winter period of the Bird Atlas** - and it looks like the Timed Tetrad Visit (TTV) coverage has been fantastic.

I expect that virtually all of Gwent's 10 km squares will have received the minimum level of winter TTV coverage (eight tetrads in each 10km sq), so we should now be concentrating on filling any species gaps.

Have a look at the species list for a 10k square (visit www.bto.org/birdatlas/) by clicking on the 'any square summary' icon when you first log on. Type in the 10k square reference, eg, ST 49 (don't bother putting in a tetrad letter) and click on 'winter'.

A complete list of all the wintering species recorded in the square will display. Have a look through the list and see what species you think might be missing - you may have seen one when out doing some general birding. And remember, you can include anything you may have seen during any of the past three winters.

Please look back through your records for those more elusive species and either enter them on line or fill out a roving record sheet. At the end of the species list (see above) there is an

option to add further records. Click on this and it takes you straight to the roving records page. If you have any queries, send me an e-mail: jerrylewis@monmouthshire.gov.uk

There is now a short period before the **next summer Atlas survey period** starts on May 1. There are just three 10k squares where coverage is currently well below the minimum number of eight TTVs.

These are **SO 32** - the area in the north of the county and extending into Herefordshire, including Llanvihangel Crucorney, Hatteral Hill, Pontrilas and the Campston Hill areas, **ST 38** - most of Newport and extending out to Underwood, Llanwern, Whitson, Goldcliff and the Wetlands Reserve and **ST 49** - most of Wentwood, Wentwood Reservoir, Devauden, Shirenewton and Caerwent areas.

At the start of the Atlas project, a few recorders reserved several tetrads to survey over the whole four year survey period. I would be grateful if you could each confirm that they are still 'on schedule' to complete your breeding season surveys. If for any reason you are falling behind in your planned programme, please let me know because someone else may be able to take on one of your reserved tetrads.

Anyone who is not able to take on additional TTVs in these 10k squares (and has completed their other TTVs), could now access the full species list for a 10k square (as above but select the 'breeding' option).

Then specifically go birding to look for those species not yet recorded (and submit them as casual records). You could also look at 'key statistics' on the Atlas home page, click on the Gwent map and 'local results'. There you will find the proportion of species considered present, that have been recorded so far, for each of Gwent's 10k squares - the 'species richness'.

The **Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)** has taken a bit of a bridesmaid position during the Atlas - many of its volunteers have continued with their survey squares, but there are always a few squares that are not covered.

The full list of available squares (plus general locations) are SO2214 (Llanelly Hill), SO3011 (Llanellen), SO3304 (Goytre), SO3504 (Chain Bridge), SO3613 (Llanvapley), SO3621 (Campston Hill), SO4502 (Llansoy), SO4617 (St Maughans), ST2097 (Oakdale) and ST3491 (Caerleon).

There are also a couple of vacant squares just outside the county - SO2016 (Llangattock) and SO5117 (Welsh Newton). Each BBS survey involves walking a 2k route within the square, twice during the breeding season (most squares have had previous visits so routes have been established - though these can be changed if you wish).

The 'sister' survey to BBS, the **Waterways Breeding Bird Survey (WBBS)**, has just one vacant route, on the Afon Llwyd in Cwmbran. This survey involves walking the riverbank for about 2.5k, twice during the breeding season.

If anyone is interested in helping with any of these annual surveys, please let me know and I can let you have the necessary forms. If you want to know more, or to find out how important this survey information is and how it is used, visit the BTO website www.bto.org and click on 'surveys'.

SIGHTINGS, DECEMBER 2009

HIGHLIGHTS

A Snow Bunting was present at Peterstone (4th to 7th), with a Great Skua also reported at this site (7th). Single Black Redstarts were recorded at Peterstone Gout (14th to 19th), Peterstone (19th) and Sudbrook (31st). A possible Red-necked Grebe was reported from the Newport Wetlands Reserve (17th), while an Iceland Gull was observed at Llandegfedd Reservoir (28th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A Tree Sparrow was seen near the visitor centre (3rd). Other sightings of note included a Barnacle Goose (7th), two Avocets (7th), four Bearded Tits (9th), a pale –bellied Brent Goose (13th) and a Marsh Harrier (29th).

Other sites

Two Red Grouse were reported from Mynydd Maen (5th). Two Mandarin ducks were present at Wentwood Reservoir (from 5th). A Jack Snipe was flushed from the Moorings near Newport (6th), while a Willow Tit was reported from Wentwood (12th).

A Bewick's Swan flew over Peterstone Gout (14th). Water Pipits were reported from Peterstone Gout (one on 14th) and Sudbrook (four on 21st). Bramblings were recorded at a number of sites throughout the month. Single Barn Owls were recorded at Llanover (9th) and Newport (21st). Diurnal raptor sightings included a Merlin at Peterstone (5th), Goshawks at Llangybi (23rd) and Ebbw Vale (31st) and Red Kites at Brynmawr (28th), Cwm (31st) and Mynydd Llangattock (31st).

JANUARY 2010

HIGHLIGHTS

A female Smew was present at Newport Wetlands (1st to 22nd). A Bittern was also reported from the same site (9th). A Great Northern Diver was observed at Llandegfedd Reservoir (10th to 23rd). A Red-crested Pochard was present at Cwmbran Boating Lake (13th and 14th), and a Twite was seen at Leechpool (19th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

Two Avocets were reported, together with two Bearded Tits (1st). A male Hen Harrier was present (3rd), while single female birds were also present (12th, 22nd and 23rd). Single Merlins were reported (9th, 16th and 17th).

Other sites

A Snow Bunting was still present at Peterstone (2nd and 3rd), as was a female Black Redstart (3rd to 9th) and six Water Pipits (3rd). Sluice Farm produced a Short-eared Owl (3rd), with two

birds present (31st). Other sightings at this site included a Jack Snipe (3rd), and seven Water Pipits (31st). Coastal sightings included a Merlin at Peterstone Gout (5th), a Jack Snipe at Black Rock (6th) and a Short-eared Owl, with two Jack Snipe and two Water Pipits at the same site (9th).

Other sightings of note included single Mediterranean Gulls at Ynysyfro Reservoir (2nd and 25th), a Merlin at Trellech (2nd), a male Hen Harrier at Usk (6th), a Mediterranean Gull at Liswerry (10th), a Barn Owl at Goytre (16th) and a Little Gull at Llandegfedd Reservoir (31st).

Bewick's Swans were reported from the Nedern (four from 9th to 19th), and Llanybi (seven on 28th). Red Kites were reported from Llanwenarth (two on 1st), Cwm (8th), Abergavenny (9th), Clydach (9th), Rhiwderyn (10th) and Ebbw Vale (21st).

FEBRUARY

HIGHLIGHTS

A Great White Egret was seen at Newport Wetland Reserve (19th). At the same site, a female Smew was present for most of the month.

Newport Wetlands Reserve

Wader sightings included a Spotted Redshank (from 8th) and seven Avocets (21st). Other reports of note included a female Marsh Harrier (13th), five Bearded Tits (14th) and a Mediterranean Gull (20th).

Other sites

A female Scaup was present on the river Usk at Llanllywel (7th). A total 15 Bewick Swans were reported from Llanybi (9th). A Little Gull was observed at Llandegfedd (9th), while single Mediterranean Gulls were reported from Ynysyfro Reservoir (11th) and the Moorings, near Newport (26th).

A Short-eared Owl was seen at Waunafon Bog (7th) and a Barn Owl was present near Raglan (9th). Single Red Kites were reported from Abergavenny (9th), Silent Valley (13th), and Brynithel (27th), with a pair of birds present at Llanwenarth (27th). Other sightings of note included two little Egrets at Llanfoist (13th) and two Hawfinches at the Minnetts (19th).

LLANDEGFEDD RESERVOIR PERMIT – A REMINDER

A reminder that GOS members no longer have access to Llandegfedd Reservoir without having to purchase a permit in advance,

HOW DO I GET A PERMIT?

Permits are purchased from the Rangers' Office, which is situated inside the main gates to the sailing area of the reservoir at the dam end.

The annual permit costs £6 .00, and will be issued at the time of payment.

Please take your current membership card with you, as the permit is endorsed with your membership number.

When visiting the reservoir for subsequent birdwatching, please ensure you have both your membership card and permit with you. The rangers have the right to view the permit at any time. If you cannot produce it, you may be asked to leave the site immediately.

As a responsible member, we would ask that you obey all instructions given by the authorities at Llandegfedd. If you notice any inappropriate behaviour by anyone on the site, please report it to the Rangers' Office and /or a member of the GOS Committee with as much information as possible.

PLEASE DO NOT ACCESS THE RESERVOIR WITHOUT A PERMIT, AS THIS WILL DISCREDIT THE SOCIETY AND UNDOUBTEDLY PREJUDICE OUR POSITION IN THE FUTURE.

Newport Wetlands

Tom Dalrymple

DECEMBER

Birds

The waterfowl numbers on the wet grasslands up to Christmas were very similar to November: Wigeon - 1,342, Teal - 310, Lapwing - 1,363, Dunlin - 3,110.

The cold weather in the second part of the month drove most of the waterfowl off the frozen grasslands to forage on the salt marsh. Only flocks of roosting Lapwings remained on the ice, along with tight clusters of duck wherever they could find a small patch of open water.

Unusual bird sightings for the reserve at this time of year included a Bar-tailed Godwit on the 20th, Greenshank on the 29th and Spotted Redshank on the 31st

Management

The Abergavenny team (Dave Charles, Lucy Roberts, Rob Parsons and Bryn Jones) came back to finish cutting the path edges of the reedbed for us.

Volunteers Richard Garman and Sheila Dupé helped Kevin cut and remove the decaying vegetation from an area of grassland close to the visitor centre car park. The area is usually covered with Southern Marsh and Bee Orchids in the summer.

We have experienced a few problems recently with joggers ignoring signs and climbing over fences to run along the sea wall. Once the joggers are on the wall, they are silhouetted from both sides and disturb the birds on the wet grassland and the salt marsh.

Kevin organised our volunteer Christmas meal again this year - a thank you to them for all the hard work that they do throughout the year.

Events

On December 6, volunteers Gabi and Angela Horup and Sheila Dupé helped Kevin with our Reedbeds in winter event. Unfortunately, the bad weather meant quite a low turnout.

JANUARY

Birds

We have not experienced the peak in wintering bird numbers we would normally associate with January. In fact, the waterfowl numbers on the reserve remain very similar to the November and December counts. The very cold weather prevents birds feeding on most of the wet grasslands.

Unusual bird sightings for the reserve at this time of year included a Barn Owl on 22nd, female Smew (17th-22nd), Spotted Redshank (24th) and Woodcock (7th).

Management

We have had some success in preventing the loss of water from the reedbed. The Inland Drainage Board has reduced the flow of water by threequarters from the 'mystery pipe' mentioned in my last report. Work continues to find the source of the remaining water.

The IDB has been undertaking other specialist work for us on site. It has installed a new drop board sluice, which should allow us to hold up ditch water levels in the summer, benefiting plants and invertebrates as well as providing drinking water for grazing animals.

The electric fox fence that surrounds the saline lagoons was switched on again at the end of this month, in preparation for the breeding season.

Events

Kevin showed Roger Black, Welsh Assembly Member and leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats, around the reserve on the 8th

I gave an interview to ITV Wales regarding the RSPB press release on 'The state of the nation's birds', and I gave another pre-recorded interview to BBC Wales in preparation for World Wetlands Day.

Staff

Mike Mazzoleni, Assistant Reserve Manager, left CCW this month. Mike started soon after the reserve was opened and was instrumental in completing many construction projects. He used his welding and construction skills to help the reserve overcome many of the teething problems encountered in the early days.

FEBRUARY

Birds

While wintering flocks of Lapwing peaked at 1,500 this month, by the end of the month some males had begun to mark out territories and some signs of nest scraping have been witnessed.

Unusual bird sightings for the reserve at this time of year included a female Smew,

regularly seen on the lagoons throughout the month, two Ruff (21st), Great White Egret (19th) and Bittern (11th).

Management

Aqua Clear staff have been working in the reedbeds with their amphibious reed

cutting machine. It has been 10 years since the beds were planted and in that time they have accumulated about 10cm of leaf litter. Aqua Clear will cut about one tenth of the reedbed and rake up all the leaf litter in an effort to prevent the bed drying out.

The Inland Drainage Board has finished casting the last of our overgrown ditches, working on the edge of the reedbeds as well as the grasslands.

Contactors have finished cladding the outside of the workshop and office. They left a small opening in the barn which is used by a local Barn Owl – hopefully, it will return. The contractors have created two viewing windows which give excellent views over the wet grasslands they should make WeBS counts much easier.

Events

Volunteers Angela and Gabi Horrup, Sue Duroq, Sheila Dupé and Chris Hurn helped Kevin with the World Wetlands Day walk on the 2nd. Unfortunately again, bad weather made for a poor turnout.

Kevin gave a talk to the Free Masons' wives on the 18th.

The Greater Gwent Biodiversity Action Group met at Newport Wetlands on the 20th for the recorders seminar.

Staff

Bryn Jones has joined us from the National Nature Reserve team based in Abergavenny. Bryn has taken on the role of new Assistant Reserve Manager. I'm sure the wealth of experience he has gained from working on different habitats and with different equipment will be a great help in managing the site in the future.

PAY YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS PLEASE!

GOS subscriptions run from January to December. According to our records, some members have not renewed for 2010. If you wish to remain a member, please forward payment to Membership Secretary Helen Parry Jones as soon as possible.

If you do not wish to rejoin, it would be helpful if you could let Helen know.

Mail to: Helen Parry Jones, Gwent Ornithological Society, 104 Clodien Avenue, Cardiff CF14 3NQ; e-mail membership@gwentbirds.org.uk

STOP PRESS – FURTHER help needed!

Help is also required at the **Blaenau Gwent 'Go Wild' 2010 event at Parc Bryn Bach, Tredegar on Saturday June 12 from 11am to 4pm**. If you can spend an hour or more helping with the quiz and chatting about birds, your help would be greatly appreciated.

The quiz is normally popular at these events, so it is too much for one person on their own.

Please contact the membership secretary if you are able to help.

Hunting, trapping, poaching, poisoning, baiting, persecution, egg and chick theft are some of the many crimes against wildlife that Gwent Police dealt with last year. It is a growing problem and our thanks go to PC Tracey Bowen-Quirke for sharing with us on March 13 the increased efforts now being made in tackling it.

While these steps are in the right direction, the finite police resources dictate the low priority some of these crimes have in their pecking order despite the fact that they can often unearth other criminal activity.

There is of course no single solution to these activities, especially when many of the perpetrators do not even consider themselves committing an illegal act - as in the examples of picking wild bluebells or tearing up the mountainside with quad bikes. I am sure that some education in the schools at an early age could help, but perhaps not with the self justification of the pigeon fancier who has killed a Peregrine after losing yet another of his prized birds.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are offenders such as badger baiters who conduct their illegal activities surrounded by a cloak of secrecy fully aware of their law breaking. Sadly it's all too true that one man's wildlife crime is another man's pleasure, but we can all do our bit.

Our countryside and wildlife are precious assets that each of us has a duty to protect - so keep your ears and eyes open and if you think a crime against wildlife or the environment has been committed in your local area, report it immediately to the police by ringing **101**.

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