

THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
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COMMITTEE COMMENTARY

The Big Issue of the September meeting was an email received from the River Usk fishermen (United Usk Fishermen's Association, UUFA) stating their intention to seek a river-length licence to cull Fish-Eating Birds (FEB's) because, they allege, Cormorants, Goosanders, and Red-breasted Merganser are taking "their" fish. They say they have 'ticked all the boxes' except that FEB population data is very scarce for the Usk. They intend to count FEB sightings from now until the end of the fishing season with a 'hope' to start culling with a new licence in March, if their results persuade the Senior Wildlife Advisor to the WAG.

In order to ensure they do not exaggerate the numbers, GOS is resolved to undertake a count of its own by asking GOS members to contribute to three whole river surveys of the Usk, on one day in October, January and March. The whole river approach prevents double counting and is likely to be regarded as accurate. The January and March surveys are particularly important as it is generally accepted that any significant impacts on salmonids from bird predation in large rivers are likely to occur when aggregations of salmon smolt are held up at 'pinch points' caused by low water during their down river migration in late winter/early spring. Further survey details are given elsewhere in this edition.

We are still looking to create a small team of people to assist with selling RAFFLE TICKETS at our indoor meetings. A small group (2 or 3) means that no one person feels obliged to attend every meeting.

We also want to create a Working Party to assist in GOYTRE HOUSE WOOD – bramble clearing and sycamore removal. More details at the Indoor meetings.

In June NWR reported that all the avocet chicks had been predated by Buzzards. It is not yet known whether any subsequent broods were more successful.

LLANDEGFEDD RESERVOIR still gives cause for concern as it continues to deteriorate due to lack of maintenance. It is reported that areas remain unmown, paths are becoming unrecognisable and the Hamar hide has brambles growing in it. We will be complaining, once again, to the Manager.

The proposal to create a shingle beach to enable Little Ringed Plovers to breed at BLAEN Y CWM RESERVOIR would appear to have been abandoned since nothing has been done for the last two years. It is likely that the money has been re-allocated.

The BTO has just started a WINTER THRUSH SURVEY and a BIRDS AND GARDEN BERRIES SURVEY is planned to commence on September 30th. Further details on the BTO website, www.bto.org or email gbw@bto.org for a survey pack.

GWT have re-programmed the MAGOR MARSH OPEN DAY for Saturday, October 27th, 1pm to 4pm

This year's WOS Conference will be held in LLANDOVERY on Saturday, November 10th. Details on the WOS website www.birdsinwales.org.uk

Trevor Russell

Confessions of a Birder (Conclusion)

Constantly learning, I am still amazed of the variations of the Great Tit vocabulary. If we hear a call we are not familiar with, we may guess probably a Great Tit, locating the bird, yes, and it's confirmed. Some Great Tits can sound remarkably like Chaffinch, or Marsh Tit, and only over the first few weeks of this winter I have heard another three variations of calls from birds I am not familiar with. Many of my concerns in this area are identified and debated in the BTO (1992) publication, 'Bird Census Techniques.' Although discussed, these problems remain unresolved, at least to my satisfaction. I guess like all skill based activities, the truth is, birders are never fully proficient at their craft, and continue to learn.

My early incompetence has been well illustrated to me by the development of birding reports on the internet. From time to time I read the Glamorgan sightings page, particularly sightings around my home town of Maesteg. Although I had only rarely seen birds such as Nightjar, Pied Flycatcher, Dipper and Common Redstart during my early walks, these days they seem to be common enough. Changes in bird population? I doubt it; my early incompetence seems much more likely.

Bird watching in my earlier days may not have been particularly satisfactory, but it was certainly thrilling. Back in 1963 while walking alone at dusk, I heard the oddest continuous trilling call. With my very limited knowledge the only bird I thought it could be was a Nightjar, which I had never seen. I could hear it singing hidden somewhere in a bush. Stalking lasted about forty minutes before I was in a position to get a reasonable glimpse of the bird, a little brown job, with a whitish chest, brown back with mottled black markings, mouth wide open and singing for all its worth. Reaching home flicking through Peterson, I diagnosed a Grasshopper Warbler, brilliant, my first. There is no substitute for the excitement of those early lessons.

The excitement of those early days can still occur from time to time, particularly when birding abroad, but such times can also be overwhelming. I recall one particular experience during a holiday in north-west Crete. Following the Keridis River near Platania to its confluence with the sea, the walk was alive with birds, some I could identify, but most, just brief glimpses, all those strange calls. Although I identified four lifers, I'm sure I missed out on several more. All very exciting it may be, but frustrating at the same time.

Compared to birding in the UK I have done very little abroad, but have managed to combine a little with family holidays. What little I have done invariably conflicts with family needs. While my wife drives I sit in the front as navigator, and a pair of binoculars around my neck. Spotting a raptor for example on a mountain road, I insist she stops at once, usually on a precipitous hair pin bend in the middle of some remote location. No, it doesn't really work. We quickly learned the only way is to allocate time. For example while staying at Gran Canaria a few years ago; our hotel was only about five kilometres from a top birding spot called La Charca Maspalomas, a tidal

lagoon with its extensive dune system. Most mornings I got a taxi to drop me off there just before first light, and walked back to the hotel. Arriving at the hotel the family would be having breakfast, and were ready for the day. This worked very well but there was a slight problem with the Maspalomas sand dunes. I had heard that the semi desert dune system was a notorious gay cruising area! If asked by someone, 'Are you looking for action?' I had rehearsed my reply, 'No, I'm looking for Spectacle Warblers!' Fortunately I always had the dunes to myself at that hour of the day.

Birding often generates many human emotions including, frustration exultation, disappointment, and guilt, yes, even guilt. On one particular Friday afternoon during the early 60's I had just finished work for the day and after picking up my weekly pay packet, decided to check a quarry near Maesteg. While negotiating a tricky move at the top of the quarry the strap of my binocular snapped, and I watched in horror as my binoculars fell towards the quarry floor far below, and smash into many pieces. Enter guilt. Only one thing for it, shopping in Bridgend where I spent my entire weekly wages on a new pair of Swift Newport 10 x 50 binoculars. Only problem, try explaining that to your newly married wife!

Finally, if you are looking for an entertaining study of the nature of bird watchers in general and the fanatics in particular, look no further than Mark Cocker's (2001) wonderful book 'Birders: Tales of a Tribe.' A very entertaining read and we have a copy in the library.

Keith Jones

GOS Field Trip Reports

Cwmtillery Lakes 13th November 2011

With an improving weather forecast, 12 members had an introduction to the wild and wonderful Vallies Experience of Cwmtillery Lakes. The route started with the old washery pool moving up to the reservoir and then through mixed beech and oak woodland and ending with open moorland.

On the walk to the meeting point the usual suspects were picked up including Chaffinch, Carrion Crow, Robin, Jackdaw, Wood Pigeon, Wren, Blackbird and Blue Tit. Entering the car park, Raven and Green Woodpecker flew over. A good selection of water birds can be seen on the lake including Lesser Black Backed, Herring and Black Headed Gulls; Mallard, Coot, Moorhen and Little Grebe. One real treat was the bright blue flash and high pitched "peep" of a passing Kingfisher.

Walking up the lane Siskins, Buzzard, Mistle Thrush, Nuthatch and Starling were found in the wet woodland. Over the fields passing flocks of Starlings, cormorants and a large mixed flock (over 400) of Fieldfares and Redwings were seen. Around the reservoir edge in the woodland a mixed finch group of

bull, gold and green were seen. Passing the reservoir two jays flew from the woodland to the opposite bank, given away by their multi-coloured plumage. The mixed woodland brought Mistle Thrush, Nuthatch, Long-tailed Tit and Coal Tits. A large flock (about 40) Wood Pigeons flew around the surrounding woodland and after an adventurous stream crossing, a Kestrel gave beautiful views of its plumage and characteristic hovering flight.

Back beside the reservoir a heron flapped overhead and three Great Spotted Woodpeckers nestled in a large tree. Final species seen were a Dunnock and a Grey Wagtail feeding in the outflow of the local mine shaft. The final species count of 40 was a good GOS average especially in this mixed habitat.

Rob Parsons.

Blaen Bran Woodland Walk, Upper Cwmbran May 26th 2012

A bright sunny and warm day persuaded a few members to join Mick Bailey and Keith Roylance on this three hour walk through the Community Woodland of Blaen Bran. Starting from the car park an uphill wide metalled path leads to the remains of the old Upper Cwmbran Colliery. Bearing left then following the path around to the right leads up through the woodland edge and overlooks the now disused Blaen Bran reservoir. The flank of Mynydd Maen is soon in view with the continuing expanse of Blaen Bran woodland to the right. A metal kissing gate allows entry into the woods proper along a smooth gravelled track with conifers to the left and mixed woodland and open areas to the right, eventually taking a turning to the right which eventually brings one back to the mine ruins and a return back to the car park.

A total of 36 species were noted, notable among them being three Cuckoos all visible together with a fourth calling behind us, Redstart, Peregrine, Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Tree Pipit, Stonechat and Linnet.

Keith Roylance

Monnow Valley Walk August 11th 2012

After meeting our guide, John Coleman, in Monmouth town, the nine attendees moved on to the start of the walk at Osbaston School. The route took us along the banks of the River Monnow through farmland and arable fields. As the footpath along the river ended we turned inland to join up with the road with fields to the left and woodland to the right.

The birds seen were those one would hope to view in such habitats. Whilst birdsong was limited the group managed to see and identify 47 species. Of note among them being Mandarin Duck, Red Kite, probable Hobby, Stock Dove, Swift, Grey Heron, Kingfisher, Raven, Whitethroat, Linnet, Goldcrest, Marsh Tit, Reed Bunting and Yellowhammer.

Keith Roylance

GOS outdoor visit to Ruperra Castle September 30th 2012

With a very dull and dreary start to the day a good group of birders met outside Draethen for a visit around the pleasure Grounds of the Morgan Family at Ruperra Castle. Walking up through the mixed woodland Wren, Robin, Blackbird and Blue Tit were in fine voice. Around the Castle mature grounds many species were flitting about the older trees; these included Great Spotted Woodpecker, Song Thrush, Jackdaw, Chaffinch and two calling Ravens high in the conifers above us.

Moving to the more open fields and paddocks, Jay, Great Tit and Goldfinch were calling from the undergrowth. On the summit area, some time was spent on the general look out for birds but due to the low cloud and general gloom little was seen. The woodland below the site of the summer house gave quick views of Wood Pigeon, Goldcrest in the larger conifers and a passing Bullfinch beside the road. A single nuthatch was seen in the scrub beside the carpark and a large flock of Canada Geese had collected in the farm pond below where the cars were, a passing distant Sparrowhawk produced a welcome highlight to a poor days birding.

Rob Parsons

COUNTING FISH EATING BIRDS (FEB's) SURVEY ON THE RIVER USK

As mentioned in the Committee Commentary we want to count the numbers of FEB's – Cormorants, Goosanders and Red Breasted Mergansers on the River Usk between now and March 2012. Members will be asked to contribute to three whole river surveys of the Usk, on one day in October, January and March. The whole river approach prevents double counting and is likely to be regarded as accurate. The January and March surveys are particularly important as it is generally accepted that any significant impacts on salmonids from bird populations in large rivers are likely to occur when aggregations of salmon smolt are held up at 'pinch points' caused by low water during their down river migration in late winter/spring. If you are interested please contact Steph Tyler, details below. Obviously if you see Cormorants or Goosanders make a note of approximate grid reference and number of birds for each sighting. Note if they fly up or down river so we can avoid as far as possible double counting. Count numbers of all other birds: Herons, Mute Swan, Canada Goose, Mallard, Mandarin, Green Sandpipers, LRPs, Kingfishers, Dippers, Grey Wagtails on your stretch. Submit your counts a.s.a.p. to Steph Tyler at steph_tyler2001@hotmail.com

NEWPORT WETLANDS WALES: JUNE REPORT

STAFF: TOM DALRYMPLE (SENIOR RESERVE MANAGER), KEVIN DUPÉ (RESERVE MANAGER), RICHARD SMITH & BRYN JONES (ASSISTANT RESERVE MANAGERS). GLENN RODDERICK (SUMMER WARDEN)

Birds

Buzzard predation has been a massive problem on the lagoons this year. A pair of Buzzard nesting near the lagoons have been seen on several occasions taking Avocet chicks. In an attempt to limit the damage we laid out carrion for the Buzzards but they never took any. By the end of June all the Avocet chicks appear to have gone. Lapwing have fledged four young, the Redshank and the Oystercatchers have so far fledged two. These are minimum numbers and I hope to find more fledged young soon. The Shoveler ducks have done well on the lagoons this year with one brood of 14 and one brood of 11.

In the reedbeds at least one brood of Bearded Tits have fledged. A juvenile Marsh Harrier with green wing tags has regularly been seen over the reedbeds, sometimes with an adult female.

Sea watchers have reported seeing flocks of 120+ Manx Shearwater, 1 Arctic and 1 Great Skua, 17 Gannet, 3 Fulmar, and 3 Common Scoter from the Goldcliff end of the reserve.

Management

In response to the rising number of visitors to the Uskmouth end of the reserve, CCW and RSPB decided that it was necessary to have more of a staff presence on weekends and holidays. Glenn Rodderick has joined us as a part-time Summer Warden to fulfil that role. Glenn works weekends and spends his time at the busiest part of the reserve, meeting people and dealing with any problems that arise.

The very wet weather has made it impossible to control rush on the wet fields with no ground nesting birds. The salinity is also quite low in the lagoons where the rain water has diluted the brackish water. At least we'll have plenty of water in the autumn when the wildfowl return!

Lewis Mitchell joined us for a week as part of his work experience from school.

Volunteers, Richard, Rhys, Sheila, Fiona and Jean have been busy repairing the reed screens at Uskmouth as well as carrying out butterfly surveys.

Events & visits

Kevin and Martin Anthoney, the county Lepidoptera recorder, led the National Moth Night event on the evening of the 22nd. Kevin led a session the following day to look at all the moths that had been caught the evening before. Volunteers Roger James and Sheila Dupe helped with both events.

Unfortunately the weather was so bad on the 16th the Wetlands in Bloom walk had to be cancelled.

Kevin gave a guided walk to the Institution of Ecology and Environmental Management on the 29th of June.

Gareth Beynon was able to give his Wildlife in Welsh walk on Saturday 30th of June for Cymdeithias Edward Llwyd with the help of volunteers Chris Hurn and Keith Thomas.

Tom Dalrymple

GWENT UKBS Report June 2012

Highlights

Four White Storks were at Dingestow (6th to 9th). A Great White Egret was at Newport Wetlands (1st to 6th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A drake Garganey was reported (4th). Seawatching from Goldcliff Point proved profitable, with 60 Manx Shearwaters and two Gannets recorded (6th), 35 Storm Petrels and a Pomarine Skua (9th), and over 120 Manx Shearwater, 17 Gannets, a Great Skua and an Arctic Skua (16th). Other sightings of note included three Bearded Tits (20th) and single Marsh Harriers (20th and 24th).

Other sites

A male Hen Harrier was present on the Bloreng (12th). Seawatching at Peterstone Gout produced 332 Manx Shearwaters and 23 Gannets (16th), 17 Common Scoters (17th) and 436 Manx Shearwaters (23rd). Four Nightjars were present at Wentwood (25th), two Nightjars were recorded at Blaenafon Community Woodland (29th) and a Brambling was reported from Keeper's Pond, the Bloreng (28th).

Gwent UKBS Report for July 2012

Highlights

Three Hawfinches were recorded from the Minnetts woodland near Caldicot (4th).

Up to 11 Avocets (13th) and one Little Stint (22nd) were present at Newport Wetlands.

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A maximum of five Bearded Tits were recorded (5th). Single Mediterranean Gulls were reported (23rd and 29th)

Other sites

A Common Scoter was reported from Llandegfedd reservoir (6th). Two Nightjars were present on the Trellech plateau (24th), whilst four Nightjars were present at Beacon Hill (24th). A Mediterranean Gull was reported from Sluice Farm (5th). Two Short-eared Owls were present on Mynydd Llanhilleth (19th).

GWENT UKBS Report for August 2012

Highlights

A Black Tern was seen at Peterstone Gout (25th). 31 Red Grouse were recorded on the Bloreng (14th)

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A female Marsh Harrier was present (4th to 18th).

13 Curlew Sandpipers were reported (18th), together with eight Avocets on the same date. 41 Black-tailed Godwits were present (25th). Other sightings included a Hobby (11th), five Whimbrel (18th), a Common Tern (21st), a Little Stint (8th) and a Spotted Redshank (16th).

Other Sites

29 Black-tailed Godwits were recorded at the Nedern (19th). A Mediterranean Gull was reported from Sudbrook (2nd to 8th). A Common Tern was present at Llandegfedd reservoir (14th) and a Spotted Redshank was seen at The Moorings, Newport (28th). A Hobby was reported from Mynydd Llangatock (10th), with two Hobbies present at Gobion (26th). A Red Kite was seen at Garn yr Erw (24th).

Chris Hatch

SNIPPETS

Flying High - DVD.

In celebration of its 100th birthday, RSPB Cymru has brought out a DVD entitled 'Flying High'. It has drawn together five films that celebrate the work of RSPB Cymru in Wales over the past 100 years. The five films featured are:

'Aren't Welsh Birds Brilliant', 5 minutes featuring some Welsh iconic birds.

'Wings over Wales', 27 minutes focusing on their work to protect birds in Wales.

'Ynys-hir', 21 minutes on the reserve in Mid Wales.

'Y Barcud', 29 minutes which features their work to protect the Red Kite.

'The Commendable Crow', a 25 minute film on the Chough. A copy is available in the Library.

Keith Jones

RSPB Ramsey Island's 20th Anniversary Art Exhibition goes on tour

Date from September 2012 until January 2013

Cost: Free

We are delighted to announce that RSPB Ramsey Island's 20th anniversary Art Exhibition will now be showcased in the Lakeside Suite at Newport

Wetlands Environmental Education and Visitors Centre near Newport, South Wales from September 2012 until January 2013.

Keith Roylance

Donation

We would like to thank Bailey's Outdoor Stores of Wyndham Arcade, Cardiff, CF10 1FH. (www.thearmystore.co.uk) for donating their 5p Bag Charge to our Society. Their donations in 2012 already exceed £100 for which we are very grateful. Donations like these are invaluable to a small environmental charity such as ours.

Keith Roylance.

Swifts

A headline in the 'i' newspaper, Wildlife section, read, 'Swifts saved by walls of sound.' The report dated 5.11.11 described how playing a soundtrack of bird calls helped save a colony of swifts during housing redevelopment. New homes built in Fulbourn near Cambridge had special bird boxes built into the cavity walls.

Keith Jones

Geolocator Project - Swifts

Witherby's et al epic work published in 1938 mentions breeding distribution, and migration dates of the Swift, however they do not mention wintering quarters. Bannerman in his 1955 12 volume work, 'The Birds of the British Isles', stated '...the majority apparently wintering in South Africa.' As a result of the 1997 Migration Atlas it was known that our birds sped across a broad sweep of Africa from the Congo through eastern Africa to the Indian Ocean beyond. The recent innovation of fitting of satellite transmitters to track the movements of birds has added greatly to this knowledge. The information gained from these transmitters confirmed the known pattern of migration to West Africa and provide new information on routes, speeds and stop overs. The BTO recently published details of the movements of such a bird, A320.

The bird known as A320 was tagged overnight with a geolocation device on 21/22 June 2010 at Fowlmere in Cambridge, and its movement was followed from 25th July 2010 to 8 May 2011. Details were published in the BTO News, specifically, after crossing the channel, it flew down western France, into Spain, where the bird crossed into Africa via Gibraltar. It followed the west coast of North Africa, reaching Senegal by 1st August. Flying east-south-east it reached the Congo on August 17th, where it spent the next 4 months, before

reaching the east African coast of Mozambique on 22nd December. It commenced its return journey on 24th January 2011, reaching the Congo on 5th February where it spent eight weeks presumably fattening up ready for its journey back to Britain. Reaching Liberia on 17th April, it flew north after a few days. On this occasion however, rather than following the coast, it flew slightly inland over Mali, Mauritania, and Algeria, reaching Morocco on 3rd May. A320 was finally recorded back at Cambridge on 8th May.

Keith Jones

Traffic effects of nest mortality on breeding birds

Little attention is given to the effects of traffic on breeding birds and nest mortality. A study was conducted in Denmark to measure the effects of exposure to traffic noise, visual disturbance and the risk of collision with cars and trucks on nesting Great Tits. The study was conducted using nest boxes placed in hedgerows along roads which were characterised by two different volumes of traffic and average velocity. The study took place in April to June 2006 and 2007 using 150 Great Tit nest boxes mounted at 50 metre intervals on three types of hedgerows, all surrounded with crop fields, one with no human disturbance, the second with dirt roads and slow and infrequent traffic, and the third tarmac roads with fast and frequent traffic. The study found: 'numbers of fledglings per breeding attempt, were significantly lower adjacent to fast and frequent traffic and the most likely explanation is traffic related mortality of the parent birds' This poses the question whether the increasing road traffic along hedgerows might be a factor contributing to the decline of some species which frequently use hedgerows for their nest sites.' (Bird Study Vol 58, Part 4 November 2011).

Keith Jones

Bearded Tit Taxonomy

The Bearded Tit has always been an enigma in the order of bird families, but recent advances places the bird in a category of its own. It is not a tit, a babbler or a parrotbill, but somewhere between a tit and a lark, and on balance it could be argued it is closest to the larks. (BTO News Issue 299, May/June 2012).

Keith Jones

Birdwatching in Wales - DVD

Bird Images DVD Guides has recently announced a new DVD which is due out on 4th September 2012, 'Birdwatching in Wales.' Bird Images claim, 'We've picked twelve key sites, one for each month of the year, and we show

a typical birdwatching day at that time of year'. It runs for 2 hours 11 minutes, features 129 species and the cost is only £15.50 (including P&P). Not surprisingly many of Welsh key sites are included such as Point of Ayr, Gigrin, Strumble Head, Conwy, Ramsey, Grassholme, Ynyshir, and of particular interest, Newport Wetlands during November is included. (Bird Images Newsletter Autumn 2012). We have a copy in the library.

Keith Jones

BTO NEWS

If you haven't already done so, please could you return any outstanding survey forms – BBS, WBBS, Heron cards, Welsh Chat Survey or report online.

A simple **Winter Thrush survey** - to take part, all you will have to do is map the thrushes you see on your favourite winter walk, or in your local neighbourhood, observe their habitat and behaviour and report details to the survey using a simple online recording system. The survey will run from 12 September 2012 to early April 2013 and again in winter 2013/14. Full details are available on the BTO website www.bto.org

A parallel piece of work, launching on 30th September and running over this winter, examines how wintering thrushes use the berries and other fruits available in gardens. This work, the '**Birds and Garden Berries Study**' will identify which fruits (both native and non-native) are used at different points throughout the winter. It will also establish whether birds show preferences for particular types or colours of berry. Further details are available on the BTO website www.bto.org

Jerry Lewis

Autumn Indoor Programme

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|---------------------------|---|
| Oct 6 th | Promoting Biodiversity in the Overseas Territories with Mike Pienkowski |
| Oct 20 th | Hungarian Rhapsody with Paul Rogers |
| Nov 3 rd | Birding ID with Jim Almond |
| Nov 17 th | Exploring the Rainforest Reserve of Regua in Brazil with Alan Martin |
| Dec 1 st | LIPU – Working in Britain for Birds in Italy with David Lingard |
| Dec 15 th | Birds and Islands with Al Venables |
| Jan 19 th 2013 | AGM |