

THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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AGM 2012 COMMENTARY Trevor Russell

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

Keith reported that net membership has seen a decline of 22 over the year, taking us to 373 members. Total Income was £7163.29, an increase of £478.30 over 2010.

Expenditure had increased despite the largest cost element, the Annual Report, remaining roughly the same as last year. The increase was largely due to Speaker

costs which had increased by nearly 50%, caused by higher fees and increased travel costs (more expensive fuel) - a pattern which is likely to be repeated in 2012. Postal costs were also up again - a rise also likely to be repeated in 2012. 2011 saw a one-off charge for the re-design of the GOS website.

The overall effect was that Expenditure exceeded Income by £137.

Keith stressed that the postal charges are due to rise again in 2012. Anticipating these further increases, Keith's "take home" message was for everyone to give him their email 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 over £500, the cost of posting the Dipper is almost as much as the cost of printing it.

In his valedictory presentation after five years in office, Chairman, Dave Brassey, again compared the Society's performance against the aims and objectives as defined in the GOS Constitution, particularly in **Education, Promotion, Reporting and Conservation.**

He described how GOS advanced the **education** of the public in all aspects of ornithology with a varied and instructive programme of talks which were supported with a series of relaxed and informative walks led by Steve Butler. Steve's outdoor programme of walks both in and out of the county included the annual trip to Portland.

During the summer we also attended various events at Newport Wetlands, Magor Marsh and Caerphilly's 'Go Wild'. Using bird quizzes and giving the opportunity to use our binoculars and telescopes, we try to tempt people, especially families with young children, to take an interest in birdwatching - and join the Society.

GOS is also active in the **promotion** of research into ornithology and publishes articles, reports and newsletters of ornithological interest. The Bert Hamar Bursary for 2011 was awarded to Steph Tyler to continue her Dipper study on the Angiddy river. We also publish highly informative articles in The Dipper and the new Editor, Keith Jones, was congratulated for picking up the baton so ably from Jackie Huybs.

Mark Newton has created a new website to showcase the Society to a wider audience via this ever growing medium.

Mark Stevens was singled out for his excellent ornithological articles in the Argus.

The GOS annual **report**, known as 'The Gwent Bird Report' has become an iconic publication and editor, John Coleman, continues to maintain the high standards set by his predecessors. It is encouraging to see new names credited to the contributors list.

In the support and encouragement of the **conservation** of wild birds and places of ornithological interest, we continue to track the attempts to resurrect the Severn Barrage, the M4 Relief Road and continuing problems at Llandegfedd reservoir, which still lurk in the background. Conservation Officer Andrew Baker ensures our views are known wherever we feel the need to express an opinion and we are still trying to push projects that will benefit birds, such as the development of a shingle nesting site for Little Ringed Plover at Blaen y Cwm.

Helen Jones had decided to retire after 20 years in various positions on the Committee. Early on, as Field Secretary, Helen introduced coach trips to various out-of-county destinations. These were hugely popular and a real 'glue' for the Society. They only ceased when they became too expensive. As Dipper Editor, and thanks to her computing skills, she was instrumental in giving The Dipper the format that we recognise today. As Membership Secretary few will forget the bags of bird seed and nuts that she would sell at indoor meetings! She has been Membership Secretary for the last nine years and we will sorely miss her contributions to the Society.

Following the Chairman's presentation, Keith Roylance proposed two Resolutions:

"Because the administration cost of being a member of GOS has now increased to almost £12, nearly

matching the Concessionary membership fee of £12, Adult members (£15) and Family members (£18) effectively subsidise Concessions. It is proposed to discontinue the Concessionary membership fee from January 2013”

Keith’s slides were so informative and convincing that there were no questions and the motion was passed unanimously.

“To meet the increasing cost of good quality speakers at indoor meetings, the Entrance Fee for Indoor meetings should be raised to £2 from January 28th 2012”

The Treasurer listed the names of some eminent, albeit expensive, forthcoming speakers and discussion confirmed that our policy of sprinkling the programme with high-profile, expensive speakers was the right one. Again, the motion was carried unanimously.

Dave Brassey has come to the end of his 5-year stint as Chairman and is required by the Constitution to retire. **Verity Picken** had volunteered to replace him

and her nomination was put to the vote and carried unanimously.

In Any Other Business, **Roger Price** outlined his concern about the proposed **Wales Coastal Footpath** and how it could cause serious disturbance to roosting waders on the stretch Cardiff-to-Peterstone and beyond. The path even follows the sea-wall to Collister Pill. The proposed route would bring people within 400 yards of roosting flocks of waders that would be seriously disturbed by such close proximity. Roger appealed to members to vote against the proposal by signing his petition or by using the Welsh Assembly Government website.

The AGM was followed by a Member’s Evening Finger Buffet which was generous, appetising and most enjoyable. This was, in turn, followed by a fascinating slideshow presented by John Coleman, of a visit he and his wife, Jennifer, made to Costa Rica in 2010. His bird slides were of the highest quality and drew almost as much admiration as his ability to remember their names!

COMMITTEE COMMENTARY

Trevor Russell

Despite Verity Picken having been elected as our new Chairman, she was on holiday and unable to preside over her first Committee meeting; and Keith Roylance took the chair.

Lesley Watson was congratulated for being finally confirmed in her role as Membership Secretary at the AGM, having acted in the role for several months.

The GOS 50th Anniversary is looming large in the GOS calendar and the event will be marked with a joint GOS/WOS/BTO conference on **November 2nd 2013**. A sub-committee led by Al Venables, is already negotiating venue, speakers etc. and details will be published in due course.

From **NWR** Tom Dalrymple apologised for the disturbance that will be caused when a replacement hide is built to replace the one that was vandalised a while ago.

Despite our protests, deterioration at **Llandegfedd Reservoir** continues. The manager explained that due to manpower shortages the work of his Rangers must be prioritised to ‘follow the money’ which means boat and fishing maintenance takes precedence over bird hides, though bird feeders are regularly topped up. We will continue to press for better maintenance of hides and pathways.

Steph Tyler and Jerry Lewis have prepared a management plan for **Goytre House Wood**.

Although there is no grant this year to buy seed for a winter feed crop for the field in front of the wood, we will pay for it ourselves, so Alan Williams was asked to organise the spraying of Roundup to kill Redshank (weed!) and prepare the ground.

Volunteers will be required to man the GOS stand at **Summer Shows**. We have so far received invitations to attend at NWR and Magor Marsh. Call Trevor Russell, 01600 716266, for more information.

We will write to the Goldcliff Ringers to congratulate them for their organisation of car parking of crowds of twitchers at Rhiwderin at the recent sighting of the **Common Yellowthroat**. Seen it yet??

Canada Geese in Gwent : The Recent Years

Keith Jones

During July 1953 N. G. Blurton Jones, through the BTO completed a census of breeding Canada Geese. He calculated a British population of 2600 to 3600 adult and young birds distributed locally in East Anglia and central England from Berkshire north to Dumfries with some smaller isolated populations elsewhere. Although the study included Wales none however were located, but local populations were found in Worcestershire, but none in Gloucestershire. The Wildfowl Trust survey of 1967 – 69 estimated the UK population had grown to about 10,500, including 20 reported in Newport, Monmouthshire. Also, between 1967 to 1968, John Padstow published a series of 8 papers on the status changes amongst breeding birds in Britain and Ireland. Padstow found the neighbourhood had Canada Geese breeding regularly in small numbers in the counties of Glamorgan, Hereford, Gloucestershire, Breconshire but not Somersetshire. By the time of the BTO second atlas of 1988 to 1991 the total UK population had grown to 59, 000 birds.

This proportional growth appears to have been duplicated in Gwent. The 1980's commenced with just one record of a single bird at Llanbadoc on 5th March 1980. Just 3 records followed in 1981 with a maximum of 3 at Ynys-y-Fro Reservoir 22nd March. A maximum of 13 was recorded at Llandegfedd Reservoir 13th February 1983. There were 5 records for 1984 with a maximum of just three birds seen at a time. Nine records occurred the following year, with a maximum of just 6 Canada Geese at Piercefield on 23rd March. The 1987 report concluded *'This remains an infrequent species, but records have increased considerably this decade, and a flock of 21 at Llandegfedd Reservoir on 26th January is by far the largest ever recorded in the county.'* Of particular interest in the 1989 report was the speculation that of the 9 birds on Llandegfedd reservoir during April and May, 5 of these were seen at Gobion on 28th and 29th of April. By the end of the 1980's however, Canada Geese had been sighted at 15 areas including several new sites such as Llanybi, Morgan's Pool, Kentchurch, Llanfair Kilgeddion, while breeding was confirmed at The Hoop, Peterstone Wentlooge trout lake, Kentchurch, Coedkernew, and Tredegar Park Lake.

The 1990 report commenced the decade by stating *'A further increase in records'*. Breeding was confirmed at Dingstow Court, while small numbers were seen at Llandegfedd Reservoir, Nedern, St Pierre Lake, Rogerstone with the maximum number of 12 at Monmouth 14th April 1990. The 1992 report concluded *'The recent pattern of slight passage in the Spring with some pairs staying for the Summer, and a few nesting, was repeated this year.'* Breeding was established at Peterstone Wentlooge Trout Lake, Dingestow Court, and The Hendre. The maximum numbers recorded during 1992 was 14 at Llandegfedd Reservoir, 10 at The Bryn. During 1993 maximum counts included 17 at Brynmawr, and 18 at Dingestow Court.

Although mainly low numbers of birds were recorded during 1996, there was a maximum of 50 at The Warrage, and for the first time in Gwent a count reached into three figures with 120 at Dingestow Court on 30th December. No breeding was recorded in 1997, and the 1998 report concluded *'The Species continued to show an increasing presence within the County. Small parties of up to 9 birds.'* The maximum count for 1998 was again at The Warrage with 137 on 18th December. The decade drew to a close with the recent pattern unchanged, with breeding in The

Hoop, Peterstone Wentlooge Trout Lake, Coedkernew and Tredegar Park Lake during 1999. The maximum counts that year were again 120 at The Warrage on 1st January, and 119 at Dingestow Court 2nd February. By the end of 1999 the status of a Canada Goose was reported as '*Common resident, and since 1989 a scarce but regular breeder.*'

In the new millennium some high counts continued, indeed there were 104 examples of counts into three figures during the decade, including 140 at Dingestow Court September 2001, 210 at Peterstone Wentlooge Trout Lake December 2002, 252 at Newport Wetlands 2003, 309 at Llandegfedd Reservoir 2004, 340 at Ynys-y-Fro Reservoir 2006, 260 at Bulmore Lakes August 2008, 360 at Caerleon Flooded Field October 2009. The highest counts during 2010, on the 50th Anniversary of their introduction, was 304 at the Bulmore Lakes in January, and 308 at the Newport Wetlands. Breeding occurred at 21 know sites from Bryn Bach Park in the north, to Peterstone Wentlooge in the south. In addition, several pairs nested at the same sites including 3 pairs at Woodstock Pools, and Newport Wetlands during 2005, and 5 pairs in Bassaleg in 2003 and counting into three figures became a regular feature in the county. 2010 concluded with a high count of 304 at Bulmore Lakes in January, and 308 at the Wetlands in November, and their status recorded as '*Locally common resident, regular breeder.*'

What does the future hold? On a recent visit to Stratford on Avon I was staggered by the huge number of Canada Geese on the river. Judging by that number there is still room in Gwent for the expansion of the bird if they are left alone. But what of the future expansion of the Canada Geese in the UK as a whole? The Wetland Bird Survey: Water birds in the UK 2009/10 suggested:

'The last decade has witnessed relative stability in the overall British trend for Canada Goose, following the well-publicised increase during the 1980s and 1990s. However, population increases appear to be continuing towards the edge of the range of this naturalised population – exemplified by a marked rise in the trend at WeBS sites in Scotland, notable annual maxima at sites in north-west England.'

Peregrine Persecution in South Wales

Many of you will recall the poisoning of Peregrines in the past two years in the South Wales area. The South Wales Peregrine Monitoring Group (SWMPG) is asking for the public's help in combating this illegal activity.

If you are aware of Peregrines in your locality they are asking that you are vigilant regarding any suspicious behaviour around the nest site. If you come across an illegal poisoning incident (finding potential bait or dead birds) please abide by the following guidance:

1. Do not touch.
2. Warn people to stay away.
3. Note the exact location and record details using diagrams and photos.
4. Cover the evidence if this will not disturb it.
5. Report the incident quickly on 0800 321 600 (or at any police station).
6. If another animal or pet shows signs of poisoning, get help from a vet immediately.

Within the wider Blaenavon area of Torfaen, PC Rob Maddocks can provide support for wildlife crime issues through the Forgotten Landscapes Project. He also advises that any suspicious activity should be reported to the Police on either 999 or 101.

With your help we can minimise the threat to Peregrines and other wildlife.

Outdoor Walk – Date Change

The walk to be led by John Coleman, advertised in the December Dipper as taking place on August 18th 2012 has been re-arranged for Saturday August 11th 2012 as the original date clashed with the Birdfair at Rutland Water. The date is correct in the programme cards issued to members.

Talk by Ian Harrison

Details of Ian Harrison's talk on 24th March 2012. Ian Harrison lived in Oman for twenty years and was Secretary of the Oman Bird Records Committee from 1996-2007. He is now Secretary of OSME. He will describe birding sites and show how the Country's avifauna includes species from three geographical areas. Hopefully the presentation will encourage birders from Gwent to visit this fascinating Country.

GWENT UKBS Report for September 2011

Chris Hatch

Apologies to Chris Hatch and all concerned for not including the September UKBS in issue 121 of the Dipper.

Highlights

Single Wrynecks were present at Garnlydan reservoir (10th to 12th) and the Newport Wetlands Reserve (15th to 18th). A juvenile Sabine's Gull was recorded at Newport Wetlands (12th). A Cattle Egret was reported from the Collister Pill area (14th to 16th). A Grey Phalarope was seen at West Usk/St. Brides (18th to 22nd), as were an American Golden Plover (23rd to 25th) and a Pectoral Sandpiper (21st to 22nd).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

Up to six Curlew Sandpipers were present (9th), with up to two Little Stints (19th) also present. Sea-watching produced five Gannets (6th), an Arctic Skua, a Manx Shearwater and a Storm Petrel (7th), a Great Skua and three Fulmars (12th) and a Little Gull (21st). Other sightings of note included a Black Tern (9th).

Other sites

A Curlew Sandpiper was reported from Peterstone Gout (2nd to 8th), whilst other records from this site included a Storm Petrel (11th), an Arctic Skua (12th), and two Fulmars (12th). Single Little Stints were recorded at St. Brides (15th) and Caldicot (18th). A Yellow-legged Gull was reported from Llandegfedd reservoir (8th), whilst an Osprey was also present at this site (10th to 11th). A Gannet was seen at Sudbrook (6th) and a Black Redstart (9th) and a Mediterranean Gull (11th) were also present here. A Guillemot was seen offshore at Caldicot (12th). Other sightings of note included eight Yellow Wagtails at Dingestow (10th) and a Ring Ouzel on the Bloreng (29th), whilst single Common Terns and Arctic Terns were recorded at a number of locations. Red Kites and Hobbies were also reported from a number of sites within the county.

Gwent UKBS Report-December 2011

Highlights

A Great Grey Shrike was reported from Wentwood (31st). An Arctic Skua was seen at Newport Wetlands (31st). Eight Bewick's Swans were recorded at Llanybi (30th). A Greenland White-fronted Goose was present at Newport Wetlands (from 30th). A very un-seasonal Turtle Dove was reported from Peterstone (28th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A female/ juvenile type Marsh Harrier was present (from 8th), with a Merlin also reported (15th) together with a Barn Owl (19th). A female Hen Harrier was also reported (20th). Other sightings of note included a Bearded Tit (27th).

Other sites

Three Short-eared Owls were present at Waunafon Bog (from 12th). A single Short-eared Owl was reported from West Pill (21st), whilst two birds were seen at Sluice Farm (28th). Single Barn Owls were reported from High Cross (19th) and Magor (26th), whilst single Merlins were recorded at Peterstone (10th), West Pill (21st) and Govilon (24th). A male Hen Harrier was seen on the Coity Mountain. Mediterranean Gulls were recorded at Cwmbran (5th), Llandegfedd reservoir (17th) and the Nedern (22nd). Other sightings included Ring-necked Parakeets at Monmouth (17th) and Clydach (21st), whilst a Lady Amherst Pheasant was reported from Govilon (from 22nd). 64 Goosander were counted at roost on Llandegfedd reservoir (18th), two Scaup were seen at Sluice Farm (28th) and a dark-bellied Brent Goose was present at Peterstone (29th). 40 plus Brambling were recorded at Blaenserchan (19th).

GWENT UKBS Report for January 2012

Highlights

Two Glossy Ibis were present at Newport Wetlands (from 14th). Three Iceland Gulls were present at Llandegfedd Reservoir (from 15th). The Great Grey Shrike was still at Wentwood.

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A female Marsh Harrier was recorded regularly throughout the month, whilst a ringtail Hen Harrier was also observed (7th/8th). An Arctic Skua was reported (2nd), with a Pomarine Skua recorded (26th). A Greenland White-fronted Goose was present (6th to 15th), whilst a Water Pipit were also present (17th).

Other Sites

Up to seven Short-eared Owls were present throughout the month at Waunafon Bog. Two birds of the same species were also seen at Mynydd Lnhilleth (7th). Female Hen Harriers were recorded at Sluice Farm (14th) and Waunafon Bog (25th).

Two Barn Owls were reported from Usk (18th). On the coast, ten Kittiwakes were recorded off Caldicot (3rd), with 15 plus Kittiwakes observed at Sudbrook (5th). A Mediterranean Gull was present at Cwmbran Boating Lake throughout the month, whilst two Med. Gulls were also recorded at Ynys-y-fro Reservoir (4th). Other sightings of note included a Ring-necked Parakeet at Newport (2nd), a Common Sandpiper at The Moorings, Newport (5th), a Hawfinch at The Narth (24th) and remarkably a singing Willow Warbler at Usk (12th).

Gwent UKBS report for February 2012

Highlights

A Common Yellowthroat was present at Rhiwderin (from 16th). A male Smew was reported from Tredegar House Lake (17th), whilst a female Smew was recorded at Llandegfedd reservoir 16th. A Slavonian Grebe was also present at Llandegfedd (from 12th), together with up to five Iceland Gulls (all month).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A female Marsh Harrier together with a female Hen Harrier was reported on several dates throughout the month. A Bittern was present (from 18th), whilst a Brent Goose was also recorded (2nd), together with three Bearded Tits (5th).

Other sites

Female Hen Harriers were recorded at Garnyrerw (11th), Mynydd Garn Clochdy (11th) and Waunafon Bog (17th). Up to four Short-eared Owls were also present at the latter site throughout the month. Merlins were reported from Collister Pill (12th) and Penylan (13th), whilst Red Kites were reported from several locations. Twelve Water Pipits were seen at Sluice Farm (12th), whilst four Whooper Swans were observed at Peterstone Gout (25th). Mediterranean Gulls were present at Cwmbran Boating Lake (all month) and Tredegar House Lake (18th). Other sightings of note included a Greylag Goose at the Bryn (3rd), a Lesser-spotted Woodpecker at Llandegfedd reservoir (12th), a Brent Goose at Collister Pill (5th) and large flocks of Bramblings at Silent Valley (2nd) and Blaenserchan (all month).

Walk at Cwmtillery Lakes 13th November 2011

Robert Parsons

With an improving weather forecast, 12 members had an introduction to the wild and wonderful Valley's 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. Around the reservoir edge 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.

NEWPORT WETLANDS, WALES REPORTS

NOVEMBER 2011

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

Birds

Wigeon and Teal number have more than doubled since last month, but they are still a little low for this time of year at 972 and 434 respectively. There have been good sized wader flocks using the reserve, 1,672 Lapwing and approximately 1,800 Dunlin, 230 Black-tailed Godwit and 1 or 2 Golden Plover as well. Exciting things have been happening in the reedbeds, there have been several sightings of Bearded Tit juveniles as well as our first Bittern of the winter. The Starling flock has been really spectacular this year with up to 50,000 birds roosting in the reedbed. Merlin, Marsh Harrier and Short-eared Owl have all been seen this month in addition to the usual raptors.

Other notable bird sightings this month include:

Great White Egret on the 6th,

Slavonian Grebe on the 11th and 12th,

Goldeneye on the 17th,

Richardson's Canada Goose from the 13th to the 19th,

A Water Pipit on the 24th,

A Greenland White-fronted Goose from the 13th to the 30th.

Management

The lack of rain this month has meant that we have had to keep pumping fresh water onto the reserve using a pair of electric pumps. Six new PV panels were installed this month taking the total to 12 and the potential electricity generation to 2000 units which is approximately what we use. The installation was made in time to benefit from the governments Feed-In Tariff scheme. Bryn and Richie have been busy installing new NNR signs, cutting path verges, repairing fencing and maintaining machinery. The volunteer team have also been making repairs and maintaining the footpaths, In addition they have laid a willow hedge that acts as a screen between walkers and a sensitive wetland area.

Events & visits

Kevin and Chris Hurn gave a "Reedbeds in Winter" walk on the 6th. 36 people joined them to see the spectacular Starling display.

Gareth Beynon from Cymdeithias Edward Llywd gave a guided walk in Welsh for 18 people assisted by volunteers Chris Hurn.

DECEMBER 2011

Birds

Wildfowl numbers continue to rise, Teal are at about average peak mid winter number but Wigeon numbers are still low compared with other years. The large number of wetland birds continues to draw the attention of the raptors. Merlin and Marsh Harrier were again seen regularly this month along with more common birds of prey. The Barn Owl was seen on the 19th of December. Barn Owls are thought to hunt the reserve all year but they are very seldom seen.

There were sightings of the Greenland White-fronted Goose again on the 27th and 29th of December

Management

The Environment Agency has introduced 2,500 Rudd into the reedbeds. The fish were approximately 6cm long. We hope that some of these fish will breed next year and establish a permanent population. Introduction was necessary as fish haven't been able to colonise naturally. The main reason for this is that the reedbeds are not connected to any other water body. Fish are an important link in the ecology of a healthy reedbed, without them it is doubtful whether the habitat could support larger predators like Bittern.

90mm of rain fell on the reserve in December and I was very glad to see it. By mid December all the field blocks reached their target flooding levels, however the more important field blocks reached their targets much earlier.

RSPB volunteers have been working with CCW volunteers and staff from Newport City Council to improve access through the reserve on what will soon become the All Wales Coastal Path. The work mainly entailed building footbridges over the flooded field drains. The volunteer team have also planted a native hedge which will gradually replace a wooden visitor screen providing a more sustainable and more wildlife friendly alternative.

Events & visits

On the 13th December I gave a guided tour to a delegation from the Japanese Ministry for Land-use Infrastructure Transport and Tourism with Russell De'ath from Countryside Council for Wales and Steve Spode from the Sustainability & Environmental Evidence Division (SEED) of the Welsh Government.

JANUARY 2012

Birds

Wigeon numbers finally got up to a respectable 1,377 this month whilst other wildfowl numbers remained similar to their December levels. Slimbridge staff tell me that wildfowl numbers are low

there this year as well. It is likely that wildfowl numbers are low for the whole of the Severn Estuary, possibly the mild early winter caused more birds to “short stop” on their migration. The three previous hard winters may have increased mortality rates.

Kevin and Goldcliff Ringer, Richard Clarke carried out a survey of Water Rail in the reedbeds using a tape lure. They recorded 23 adults which was very encouraging given the population collapse last winter due to the freezing conditions.

The Greenland White-fronted Goose remained with us for most of January. Glossy Ibis have attracted the most attention from bird watchers this month. One was spotted on the 14th, it spent most of its time on the flooded grasslands, where it was joined by another Ibis on the 17th. The two birds remained on the reserve with visitors able to get quite close views for the rest of the month. There was a very unusual sighting on 26th of January, a Pomarine Skua was spotted standing on the side of a reedbed pool at Uskmouth.

Management

The Environment Agency have introduced another 150 Rudd into our reedbeds. These fish are much larger than the ones released last month, 15 to 20cm long compared with 6cm long. These fish will be much more likely to breed this year.

All lifting equipment went for inspection this month. Unfortunately this meant closing the tidal flaps for a week. The salinity is about right in the lagoons at the moment, but allowing the tides in helps to keep the water from freezing, providing shelter for waterfowl from the exposed Severn and the frozen fields.

Richie and Bryn undertook wood chipper training this month and have been engaged in a lot of vehicle and equipment maintenance.

The volunteer team have cut brush for screening, carried out maintenance to footpaths and helped clear undergrowth at Penhow Woods NNR.

Events & visits

On the 9th January I showed Assembly Member Vaughn Gethin around the saline lagoons with staff from RSPB Wales HQ.

5 members of the Gwent Wildlife Trust visited in January for a tour of the reserve.

SNIPPETS

Feeding Wild Birds. A study conducted by the University of Birmingham found Tits which were given supplementary food in woodland during spring and summer, have smaller broods. The study highlighted how little is known about the long term effects of artificial feeding, but cautioned not to stop feeding until much more is known, as research shows feeding birds aids birds survival in the winter.

The study conducted in a broad-leaved woodland in Worcester provided food supplements to Blue Tits and Great Tits. The birds were split into 3 groups involving 288 nests boxes. Two groups fed a commercially available peanut cake with 50% ground peanuts, and 50% beef tallow. The control group of 96 nest boxes were not fed. Over three years, the feeding was rotated so each group of birds were fed peanut cake two years out of three. The high energy food was

provided from early March about 4 to 5 weeks before the birds began laying to the end of July, about 6 weeks or more after fledging. The study found in both Blue Tits and Great Tits food supplementation advanced the onset of laying and shortened incubation periods, but the study did not predict reduced productivity as a consequence of food supplementation. The study expected supplemented birds to lay more eggs and to have larger broods, but the opposite occurred. Broods sizes declined significantly, with food supplemented birds hatching half a chick fewer, on average, per nest. Although the cause is unclear it is speculated that the extra food changed the diet of the birds at a crucial stage before breeding, creating a knock-on effect. Alternatively, territorial birds may have fought more over well provided sites, harming their breeding success. The researchers were keen to stress that people should continue to put out food for birds. Dr Harrison concluded:

'...numerous studies have shown that feeding during winter can enhance the survival prospects of birds. However, the influence of provision across the breeding season is still relatively unknown.'

Pin Badges. While not trying to undermining our own excellent society pin badges featuring a Dipper which are offered for sale at Indoor Meetings, members may also be interested in the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds pin badges. The pin badges collection boxes are an important mechanism for raising donations for the society. The badges cost £1, and each box can make £70 - £100. These boxes are available in many outlets, not only reserves but also hospitals, GP surgeries, Pet shops, charity shops and so on. There are several dozen badges available including various animals, flowers, butterflies and to date about 83 featuring British Birds. Recently the RSPB has brought out another batch, one of which, the Dipper, will no doubt be of particular interest to some members of our society. The badges are much bigger than our own pin badges being 2.5cm wide in a white metal enamelled with 6 colours. Interested parties may obtain the Dipper badges at the visitors centre at Uskmouth.

The Big Year. Following the publication of Mark Obmascik's book 'The Big Year' in 2004, a DVD by the same title is to be released on 26th March this year. The story is an American slant on Twitching, or the length some men will go to travel long distances to see a new species just to add to their "year list". Three men are at a crossroads--one is experiencing a mid-life crisis (Owen Wilson), another a late-life crisis (Steve Martin) and the third a no-life crisis (Jack Black). A sophisticated comedy about three friendly rivals who, tired of being ruled by obligations

and responsibilities, dedicate a year of their lives to following their dreams.

Starlings. Recent results from the Breeding Birds Survey (BBS) saw a 58% decline in the Welsh breeding Starling population between 1995 and 2000. The birds has been placed on the Welsh Red List, and a detailed analysis of the BBS has shown decline hot spots, with the steepest declines (up to 15% per year) taking place in Central Wales. It is thought the decline is linked to the amount and availability of their food (moth and leatherjacket larvae). To understand more there is a need to measure the diet, growth and survival of chicks and monitoring colonies of Starlings that nest in Boxes. (Y Barcud 2011).

Black Grouse. When considering the status of British Birds although there are inevitable winners and losers, we can be forgiven for concluding it is mostly all gloom and doom. It is all the more refreshing then to read about the success stories, and an example entailed, 'Early birds: Black Grouse numbers increase ahead of schedule', appeared in Winter 2011 issue of 'Y Barcud' RSPB News from Wales. The issue reported 'Numbers of Black Grouse have increased in Wales this year: a minimum of 326 "lekking" males were recorded across six key sites this spring.' This was at least a 39% increase from the previous year, and great news considering the population had fallen to just 126 males in 1997. As a result, the Welsh Black Grouse Conservation Project was launched in 1999. Patrick Lindley, RSPB Cymru Species Officer however remains cautiously optimistic suggesting, 'But maintaining a resilient population and restoring the species to areas where it was once a key feature remains a major challenge'.

BTO News

Jerry Lewis

The **Atlas** fieldwork period is now over, as is the facility to enter casual records on line. The Lists of species for each 10 km square make very interesting reading, and, if after looking at the website www.bto.org/birdatlas/ you realise you have a record of a species not yet recorded in the square there is still a way of adding your record - please get in touch with me in the first instance. **Atlas** fieldwork has taken up most of everybody's time for the last four years, and it is now time to redirect effort back to the regular surveys, notably the **Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)**. This involves just two visits to a (pre-selected) 1 km square to record every bird you see or hear, a preliminary

visit may also be necessary to familiarise you with your route. It isn't necessary to be an "expert birder" to take part, as records are compared with the previous year, and everyone gets progressively better. Each visit should not take longer than a couple of hours, the first is in the early breeding season (May/early June period), and the second in late June/July. It is an ideal way to improve your birding skills and to get to know the area better. There are always a few vacant squares, and some new for this year – in the south of the County – ST2385, ST2484, ST3482, in the central parts of the County – SO3304, SO3504, SO3613, Nr Monmouth – SO4817, SO5117, and near Abergavenny – SO2214, SO3621, SO3228. In 2012 there will also be a **Wales Chat Survey** – again randomly selected 1 km squares looking for Whinchat, Stonechat, and Wheatear. It will be an on line survey and the system should be "up and running" by the time you receive your Dipper. Anyone will be able to view the squares and request any they want. I saw a preliminary list a few weeks ago and my initial thoughts were that some may not be too suitable for Chats (the problem with random selection, but negative results are just as important as positive, as bird numbers can then be extrapolated across different habitat types). There is however an option, when the chosen square is totally unsuitable habitat, to visit one of the adjoining 8 squares instead. If anyone is interested, check the website www.bto.org.uk and request a square. If anyone has any queries get back to me on jerrylewis@monmouthshire.gov.uk

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