

THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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GOS WEB SITE: www.gwentbirds.org.uk

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December 2012

CHANGE OF THE PRESIDENTIAL GUARD

IAN WALKER

It was with great regret that we have received the unexpected resignation of Ian Walker, GOS President, on the grounds of ill-health. Ian is one of our longest-serving members, having joined the Society in 1969. During those long years of membership he has been a consistent contributor of records for the Annual Report and has undertaken countless surveys. He has served on the committee in various roles and was elected President in 2000.

It is the lot of a President *not* to be actively involved in the day-to-day activities of Committee work but it was always very reassuring to be able to turn to Ian and exploit his long experience for sound advice and judgement, when necessary.

We will miss Ian very much and, on behalf of the GOS membership, we wish him well and look forward to seeing him at our meetings from time to time.

NEW PRESIDENT, STEVE ROBERTS

Whilst Ian's resignation came as a shock, he very generously gave us ample time to consider a suitable successor. Steve Roberts was nominated from a short list of names and subsequently our chair, Verity Picken, was delighted to announce that he had accepted our invitation to become the new GOS President.

Steve is another of our longest-serving members having become an enthusiastic birder when he was still in junior school, having been inspired and tutored by Bert Hamar (the founder of the Pontypool Ornithological Society in 1963). History doesn't reveal whether Steve had to use his pocket money to pay his subs back then, but Annual Reports do show that he has been submitting sighting records since 1966!

Over the years Steve's reputation has grown both locally and nationally, not only for his beautiful line drawings used in GOS Annual Reports and his amusing and informative talks at our indoor meetings, but also for his TV appearances with Iolo Williams! Steve is one of the UK experts on Honey Buzzards, with many scientific papers to his name.

You will be able to congratulate Steve on his new role at the AGM on January 19th.

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NOTICE OF Annual General Meeting 2013

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday, January 19th, 2013, in the Village Hall, Goytre, starting at 7:30pm

The Officers and members of the Committee have volunteered to stay in their posts for another year but many are finding that changing circumstances are forcing them to give up or modify their roles and we would like to introduce some succession-planning. **Please help by volunteering to join the Committee** - otherwise an increasing burden will have to be borne by the diminishing remainder. That would be unfair; and without your help and contribution there is a risk that *your* Society could founder.

Whilst other Officers and Committee Members have indicated their willingness to stand for re-election IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE POSTS CANNOT BE CONTESTED! New nominations for *any* and *all* positions are always invited and new faces would be a most welcome sight!

The Constitution allows for up to 8 Committee members in addition to the Officers and there are still several gaps to fill. If you would like to volunteer to have a say in the way your Society is run please submit your name for nomination. **If you feel cautious about committing yourself, why not come along to a meeting and sit-in as an Observer?** There would be no

commitment and who knows, you might even enjoy it!

We meet only five times throughout the year.

Nominations must be received by January 1st 2013. Both the Proposer and Secunder should sign nominations - with the agreement of the nominee - or e-mail me (see Contacts List for details)

In the event that any position or seat is contested selection will be made by a show of hands at the AGM.

The AGM will be followed by a **Finger Buffet**. The trick here is to bring some finger food to be shared by everyone but then select something that looks far more appetising than your own offering!

Following the buffet GOS member Carl Downing will be taking us on a tour through the bird-rich country of Columbia. If you can't afford to visit Columbia this is the occasion to see what you're missing!

Trevor Russell - Secretary

COMMITTEE COMMENTARY

- The big story is, of course, the unexpected resignation of Ian Walker as President, on the grounds of ill-health, and the announcement of Steve Roberts as his successor, more of which appears elsewhere in this edition.
- A Fish Eating Birds (FEBS) survey, for Cormorants, Goosanders and Herons, was carried out as planned on the River Usk in October, but the river was very swollen after the heavy rain, so bird numbers were down. The surveys will be repeated in Jan, Feb and March. **ALL GOS members are asked to submit any sightings of FEB's on the Usk, from**

now until December, together with any *historical* records, in order to paint a picture of population trends. (records to Andrew Baker, please). See below for more details of the survey and its aims.

- 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 needs to feel obliged to attend *every* meeting. Could *you* help out occasionally?
- Indoor meeting attendance is down to worrying levels despite a fascinating programme of speakers and themes. We will start sending emails to members to publicise and remind them of forthcoming meetings. **Do check the website for programme updates and last-minute changes.**
- Ash die-back disease is the latest concern at GOYTRE HOUSE WOOD, but with the leaves down, it's difficult to assess whether we have any victims. We also want to create a Working Party to assist with bramble clearing and sycamore removal to allow next spring's new growth to be tackled/sprayed more easily. Details later at the Indoor meetings.
- Tom Dalrymple, Manager of NWR, has confirmed that Buzzard predation had totally wiped out the chicks of 27 Avocet pairs and that only 8 Lapwing chicks fledged from 22 pairs, insufficient to sustain a stable population.
- All Committee Officers and Members have agreed to stand for re-election again next year but new faces are always welcome. Please consider helping to run *your* Society by joining us and letting me know. See you at the AGM!

2013 SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Membership subscriptions become due on January 1st.

Membership rates for 2013 are:

Individual (Any age) £15.00

Family £18.00 (Two adults plus children under 16 at the same address)

We no longer offer a concession rate, it was agreed at the AGM in January 2012 that all individual members should pay the same £15 rate.

**IF YOU PREVIOUSLY PAID THE CONCESSION RATE BY
STANDING ORDER PLEASE ENSURE YOU ADVISE YOUR BANK
OF THE NEW RATE OF £15 BEFORE THE END OF DECEMBER
2012.**

The FEB Pilot Synchronised all River Usk Count: by Stephanie Tyler

Introduction

Because of an application by Usk anglers to cull Cormorants, Goosanders and Red-breasted Mergansers, GOS decided to pilot a synchronised all-river count on Sat 6th October to see exactly how many birds were on the river. Further counts are planned in early February and March 2013.

Methods

The river was divided into 15 sections and volunteers sought for each section to walk along one bank and count the target species

and all other river birds. Volunteers were found to cover all sections but on some stretches of river visibility was reduced partly because of dense tree cover along the river bank but also because of a tall dense swathe of Himalayan Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera*. There were occasional paths through the balsam down to the river to provide access and views up and down but undoubtedly some birds were missed. On the section from Llanellen to the Heads of the Valley road at Abergavenny the observer estimated that he could only see 10% of the river

because of trees and balsam but this was exceptional. For the most part the river was visible to observers, especially where grazing occurred to the river edge. One section, from Llanhennock to Newbridge-on-Usk, was covered by vehicle with frequent stops to view the river and floodplain. This was because of landowner difficulties and was not ideal as some species would have been missed.

To avoid double-counting observers were asked to note the group size and whether Cormorants and Goosanders flew up or downriver. It was generally possible to decide whether sightings related to one or two separate birds.

Results

Twenty species of river bird were seen during the morning. Mallard and Canada Geese were the most numerous species (see Table 1). The number of Canada Geese was of particular note. Flocks were seen flying downriver near Llantrissant and feeding on stubble fields across the river in Llangibby Bottom, totalling about 340 birds. A count of 360 later in the morning around Newport Golf Course between Llanhennock and Newbridge probably related to the same birds.

In all only 23 Goosanders and 29 Cormorant were seen. No Red-breasted Mergansers were seen which is not surprising as this sawbill is an extremely rare bird in Gwent and mainly estuarine.

Less common species included one Green Sandpiper above Newbridge-on-Usk, four Redshank in Newport and eight Teal on the lower river between Newport and Caerleon. Only two Kingfishers were heard and just four Moorhens and two Dippers seen.

Discussion

Unfortunately the river was in flood on 6th October. This made counting species such as Mallard and Moorhen difficult as they were generally skulking in quieter edges under overhanging trees.

Kingfishers would have moved from the river onto ponds and small streams where levels were lower or visibility better. Cormorants and Goosanders because of their size and their usually taking flight would have been less overlooked. The wariness of some Goosanders suggested some persecution. Table of counts on 6th October 2012 along the River Usk from Glan Grwyne to Newport (for sections, see below)

Sp./Section	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	TOT
L. Grebe										2			2			4
G.C. Grebe				2												2
Mute Swan		1	1			22			7	7						38
Canada Goose			2	360		340								1		703*
Greylag Goose				1												1
Goosander	0	0	2	0	0	4	4	0	5	3**	2	0	1	0	2	23
Mallard	14	15	30	24		26	11		53	70	11	2	32	23	47	355
Teal		8														8
Grey Heron				3		2		1	7	4		2		1	1	21
Cormorant	0	1	9	2	0	1	1	0	2	2	3	4	0	0	4	29
Moorhen				1					1	2						3
Green Sandpiper					1											
Redshank	4															4
Bl-h Gull		60				60										120
LBBG		1				3					4					8
H Gull						2										2
Kingfisher				1		1										2
Dipper									1						1	1
Grey Wagtail						1			3		4	1	2		2	10
Pied Wagtail						1			3		2				19	22
TOTAL (waterbirds)		86	44	394		462	16	1	77		19		37	25	76	

Buzzard		1				2		2							5
Sp'hawk						1									1
Raven											1				1

*The flock of Canada Geese near Llantrissant was probably the same seen at Newport Golf Course later in the morning

**Gobion to The Bryn – six Goosanders seen but single probably seen twice as it flew upriver and ditto two other birds – so probably only three birds in all.

Section 1. Newport	Ian & Judy Walker
Section 2. M4 to Caerleon	Carl Downing
Section 3. Caerleon road bridge to Llanhennock	Keith Jones
Section 4 Llanhennock to Newbridge	Chris Jones
Section 5. Newbridge to Llangibby Bottom	George Renton
Section 6. Llantrissant to Usk	Steph Tyler
Section 7. Usk to Trostrey Weir	Chris Field
Section 8. Trostrey weir to Clytha Car Park	Trevor Russell
Section 9. Clytha to Gobion	Steve Roberts
Section 10. Gobion to The Bryn rail bridge	John Marsh
Section 11. The Bryn to Llanellen	Nicholas Beswick
Section 12. Llanellen to A465 Abergavenny	Jerry Lewis
Section 13. Abergavenny A465 to Waitrose bridge	Ruth Brown
Section 14. Abergavenny to Llanwenarth	Rob Parsons
Section 15. Llanwenarth to Glangrwyne	Andrew Baker

In addition to the river birds, the following 27 species were noted:

Buzzard (at least 5 birds), Sparrowhawk (one), Peregrine (one at Abergavenny), Great Spotted Woodpecker, Wood Pigeon, Stock Dove, Feral Pigeon, Skylark, Swallow, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Mistle Thrush, Blackbird, Wheatear, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Nuthatch, Tree Creeper, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Rook, Raven, Magpie, Jay, Siskin, Lesser Redpoll, Goldfinch and Chaffinch

Birding walks – more road testers needed!

Lots of members have been doing a fantastic job road testing the walks we'll be publishing in the book – Where to Watch Birds in Gwent - to celebrate GOS's 50th anniversary next year, but we need still MORE road testers.

We'll give you a map and directions and all you need to do is follow the route and tell us if the directions are accurate – we don't want any readers to get lost! Anyone who'd like to discover a new walk in a lovely part of Gwent is asked to email Verity Picken on vpicken@brambling.co.uk or phone her on 01633 450620.

Gwent's Roosting Goosanders: by Richard Clarke

The 2012-13 Gwent Goosander Winter Roost Survey got underway on the evening of 18th November, when local birders visited 17 different sites across the county to look for roosting birds.

The survey is a continuation of work first started in 2011, when the approach was initially piloted in February and then subsequently rolled-out as a series of targeted visits over the winter period 2011-12. The survey aims to determine which of Gwent's water bodies are being used as roosts and to establish the size of the wintering population in the county.

Sites included in this year's survey are widespread from the river Wye at Monmouth in the north east; St Pierre near Chepstow in the south east; Parc Bryn Bach in the north west and Cwm Hedd Lake at Bassaleg in the south west.

There were many excellent records of wildfowl etc noted during this November's survey visit, including a total of 61 roosting Goosander at four sites, comprising 38 redheads and 23 males. Llandegfedd Reservoir was once again the key roosting location, however, Ponthir Reservoir, the

river Wye at Monmouth and Llanwenarth also reported birds. Perhaps surprisingly, no birds were at the traditional roosting site of Garnlydon reservoir.

As this winter's survey progresses we hope to be able to determine trends and draw comparisons between winters. Of interest from the first visit this year was the remarkable similarity in the total number of birds recorded when compared to the November 2011 survey, which returned 62 roosting birds – just one more than this year's survey. There was however a little more variation in the gender mix than with the earlier survey with there being a higher number of redheads (46) and just 16 males.

Survey visits are undertaken monthly and involve being on site approximately one hour before dusk so as to count existing birds and record their movements in and out of the sites. The next survey dates are 16th December, 13th January, 10th February and 10th March.

There are still opportunities to help out with this survey and if you would like to take part then please contact me either by e-mail chykembro2@aol.com or telephone (01633) 615581.

A Birding Trip to Mull: by Keith Jones

No doubt, like several members of our society, there are numerous birds I had not seen from the British list, and as a result it is only natural to try and plug some of these gaps. My previous trips to Speyside and Orkney had claimed most of the Scottish specialities, but a few spaces remained. So enter Mull in an attempt to try and add Sea Eagle and Corncrake to my life list. The plan was to drive up on May 6th 2011 to get the ferry to Mull on the 7th. We were to stay in a small self catering cottage at Bunessan, on the banks of Loch Scridain which was just 15 metres from the sea loch, and just 4 miles east of Iona.

Bird watching started on the ferry across to Mull which turned out to be a very poor sea watch with just Eider, Shag and Red Breasted Merganser of note. That first evening we drove to Fionnphort to view Iona, and although could not hear Corncrake from that distance we had a single Gannet in Sound of Iona. The following day, we awoke to very heavy rain so decided to have a lazy morning, reading and bird watching from the window. We added a few birds to the holiday list including Arctic Tern, Arctic Skua, Oystercatcher, Common Sandpiper, Whimbrel, and Twite. Not bad from the cottage window. The afternoon was dry to start with so we just drove around exploring various birding sites including Loch Beg, Ben More mountains, Loch na Keal, Corran, but very little to show for it. An evening visit to Loch Don however added our first raptor of the holiday, a fine male Hen Harrier.

For the 9th May our plan was to spend most of the day on Iona, with the weather dry but very windy. We boarded the first ferry to Iona at 0845hrs for the 14 minute crossing, and by the time we reached the Nunnery we had heard our first Corncrake from the Fire

Station field. Between the Nunnery and Abbey we heard another four birds calling from the dense beds of Irises. Although we looked hard, we had no sightings even though the birds sounded very close. I guess in the final analysis, we didn't look long enough, and perhaps we lacked the skill on how to really search for this elusive bird. So the best we could do on that trip was to hear five of the 34 pairs of Corncrakes said to nest on the island, but we did add a very rare bird for Mull onto our list, Rook which breeds on the island.

We did the tourist thing in the main on Tue 10th, shopping in Tobermory, but Wed 11th was the big day where we booked two spaces with Arthur Brown of the Discover Mull Wildlife Tour, an insurance policy to get to see some of our target birds. Our first stop on the tour was Salene Bay where we had the usual waders and added Wood Warbler to the list. Onto the north-east corner of Loch na Keal where the eagles are fed the same time each day, and we had very fine views of the White Tailed Sea Eagle, close enough to see the white tail, cream head, neck, and even the large yellow bill. At Loch Tuath we added Common Tern, Redpoll, and had brief but distant view of Otter. Driving on a little further we had fine and extended close views of an adult Otter and its cub. Also at this stop off we added Red Throated Diver, Kestrel, and brief views of Golden Eagle, although I missed sightings of Merlin and Black Guillemot. Driving up onto the mountains we stopped for a picnic lunch and had distant but good views of Golden Eagles. More driving to a few brief stops, but our final stop of the tour was just north of Loch Frisa where we had a glimpse of a male Hen Harrier in display flight in the distance. We ended the day with the long drive south back to our cottage taking the Dervaig to Salen road

over the mountains but we heard several Crossbills in the forest en route.

The next day, the 12th, we had planned to get the 1000hrs boat to Staffa but with very high winds and torrential rain we passed on the idea. But of course 20 minutes later it was glorious, but having missed the boat we drove to Fidden Farm with its extensive Iris beds to try for Corncrakes, and look at the tidal island of Erraid of 'Kidnapped' fame. No Corncrakes, but a short walk added Peregrine, Merlin, Dipper and Stonechat to the list. By the afternoon, the weather improved so we decided to try for Staffa again. Taking the ferry to Iona, we had lunch, and spent some time listening to Corncrakes at the Fire Station field, and yes did see a brief view of a rather scrawny looking chicken. We got our Corncrake. The crossing to Staffa was rather rough, but we added the following to the list. Black Guillemot, Kittiwake, Razorbill, Manx Shearwater, Guillemot, but I dipped with a Great Northern Diver, due to the very heavy swell. The highlight of the crossing however was very close sightings of a rather fine adult Glaucous Gull. Landing on the island we added Puffins at close quarters, also Corncrake, Eider, Rock Dove (the real thing I assume), Short Eared Owl, two Arctic Tern, and out to sea a single Storm Petrel. Gill was able to take the precipitous path to view Fingal's cave, quite spectacular she told me, especially with the tidal swell. Sadly the journey back was equally rough and Gill did turn a strange colour, along with a few other passengers.

The Friday was our last full day of glorious weather, no wind or cloud, but within minutes we had a downpour so we had to face yet another day of dodging the showers (but at least no midges!). The idea was to drive the scenic road of the island from south to north,

trying to repeat the success of the Wednesday trip. Taking minor roads (really, they are all minor roads) over the Ardmeanach to Loch na Keal we stopped for the Sea Eagles, and within minutes we had some good views of the bird fishing. We drove on through a shower over the mountains to Ensay where we stopped for lunch but sadly no sign of Golden Eagles.

In the afternoon we were to meet the RSPB Warden at the north end of Loch Frisa, another insurance in case we missed the Sea Eagles on the Wed. We drove down in convey of cars from the hide on the southern end of the Loch. On the way down the last three cars including ours caught site of an eagle so stopping the cars, we had a very fine close view of a Sea Eagle. We reached the hide at 1340hrs for our talk - and to be told the Sea Eagle had not nested at this location for a year or so. The talk was frequently interrupted by call after call of 'eagle,' but each bird we checked turned out to be a Buzzard.

On the way to the cottage our final visit of the day was at Carsaig Bay where we got a Great Northern Diver in summer plumage very close to the shore.

On the Saturday we got the 1245hrs ferry to Oban. While waiting for the ferry at Craignure something struck me, was it Rock Doves or Feral Pigeons that we had seen? The behaviour of these birds, and the location, suggested Feral Pigeons. The same was true of the pigeons we noticed at Tobermory a few days before. The guide books however suggest these birds on Mull are Rock Doves, the genuine thing. But I really wonder.

NEWPORT WETLANDS **JULY, AUGUST & SEPTEMBER**

Birds

The breeding season was a bit of a mixed bag. The Avocets had a disastrous year with no chicks surviving to fledging age out of 27 pairs. Buzzards appear to be the main problem. Lapwing fledged 8 chicks from 22 pairs, far short of the productivity thought necessary for a stable population. Redshank did better with 11 chicks fledging from 17 pairs and the Oystercatchers fledged 7 young from 5 pairs. Bearded Tit numbers dropped from 5 pairs to 2 this year, but they were quite productive with a minimum of 7 chicks fledged. One sighting in mid September of 19 Bearded Tits might mean that 11 chicks fledged. Water Rail territories were up from 2 last year to 6 and Cetti's Warbler numbers have also improved on last year, from 10 to 32 territories.

A record 225 Ringed Plover were seen on the saline lagoons in September. This is over twice the previous record and almost a quarter of the maximum count of the Ringed Plover that migrate up the Severn.

Notable sightings for the period were:

A Buff Breasted Sandpiper at the lagoons on the 9th of September; a Spotted Flycatcher on the 8th Sep; an adult Mediterranean Gull and 2 White Wagtails on the 2nd Aug, a juv Mediterranean Gull on the 23rd and 29th of Jul.

Management

Contractors have cut and bailed 41.5 hectares of rush this year, significantly less than previous years. The reduction is partly due to us cutting more rush ourselves and partly due to success in killing the rush with glyphosate. Despite all the rain this summer there have been enough dry days for us to 'weedwipe' about half the wet grasslands.

In the Saline Lagoons the islands have been cut. The water level was dropped in the fresh lagoon to expose a small island of mud that the waders like to roost on, then the tidal flap was opened to allow tidal exchange between the saline lagoons and the Severn.

Our volunteer team spent many days clearing grass seed heads from the electric wires on the fox-proof fence and generally ensuring that it is in working order for another season. The volunteer team also repaired all the brash screens and made a new one for the Grassland Hide.

After so much rain it wasn't difficult to flood the grasslands this September. Even so, a pump had to be deployed for a couple of days to make sure that there was some flooded grassland for the returning wildfowl.

RSPB volunteers did a great job of pulling Ragwort. They filled eight builders' sacks from Perry Lane and the Dog Leg Track.

Kevin and Volunteers John Bennett, Sheila Dupe, Fiona Illing, Hâf Leyshon and Richard Clarke attended Shrill Carder Bee I.D. training organised by the Gwent Wildlife Trust. They then went on to carry out surveys on the reserve where a Shrill Carder Bee nest was again discovered.

The CCW district team have been surveying ditches on the reserve as part of a wider survey of the Gwent Levels SSSI's. This should give an interesting comparison to see how the ditches have changed under reserve management compared to ditches in the wider Gwent Levels.

Kevin discovered 4 Great Crested Newts on the reserve in September as well as a moth, the Birch Mocha, that hasn't been seen in the Vice-County of Monmouthshire since 1892 and another moth, the Brussels Lace, which had never before been seen in the county.

Events & visits

Phil Jayne and Sarah Coakham, Recreation and Partnership Officers from CCW, held a Newport Wetlands stand at the Maindee Festival on the 7th July

The NWR Open Day on the 8th July attracted about 750 visitors including the Newport Mayor, Environment Minister John Griffiths, Newport East MP Jessica Morden and Lliswerry Councillor Allan Morris. A free double decker bus brought people in from the city.

The Welsh Government Environment Committee met at the visitor centre and had a tour of the reserve on the 11th July,

Volunteers Sheila Dupe, Keith Thomas and Andrew Wood helped Tom show moths and other wildlife at the Nash village Fete on the 14th July. Kevin spent a day pond dipping with the children at Duffryn High School for their Eco Day on the 18th of July. Plenty of moths were caught by Kevin and volunteers for the Moths in the Morning event on the 25th July. Kevin and Volunteers Chris Hurn and Angela Horup did an interview for Open Country on Radio 4. BBC filmed the Mesolithic foot prints on the reserve near Goldcliff on the 17th August, and then Time Team filmed them on the 31st of August.

Newport Amateur Radio Society set up a small radio station by the light house to take part in the international event on the 18th August. They were able to talk to 17 different countries. 20 people attended the Damsels and Dragons event on the 22nd August. The Birds and Migration event at the Goldcliff Lagoons was attended by 21 people on the 15th September. RSPB Wales conservation team visited on the 19th September. Breton Assembly Members visited for a guided tour and a meeting with Russell De'ath from CCW to discuss energy and environmental matters on the 27th September. The RSPB organised the Girl Guide Event on the 29th September. The event

was a big success with 733 Guides, Brownies and Rainbows taking part in the activities. CCW staff and volunteers helped man the events.

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

Speakers at GOS Indoor Meetings for the 2013 Season

19th January - AGM

plus Carl Downing: Colombia: a tour through the Richest Country in the World for Birds

As a founder member of the Neotropical Bird Club and a council member and Chairman of that organisation, Carl will lead us through five of the main regions of this emerging Neotropical country.

2nd February

Wendy Conway: A Walk on the Wild Side – A Kenyan Safari

Sunrises, once experienced in Africa, are seldom forgotten: likewise the incredible spectacle of the wildebeest crossing the Mara River during their great migration. This talk takes you on safari to Kenya, first to the northern lands of Samburu National Park full of endangered species such as Grevy's Zebra, Besian Oryx and Lesser Kudu and then south to Lake Nakuru where 2 million flamingos feast on the soda lake. This is also your chance for Leopard, White Rhino and some of the 350 bird species seen in Kenya. The next stop is Lake Naivasha Lodge for beautiful Malachite and Pied Kingfishers, the mighty African Fish Eagle and then we journey to the Mara for big cats and the spectacular migration.

16th February

Colin Mcshane: Studying Migration in Rybachy, Russia

Have a look at a map of the Baltic; in the south Eastern corner is a small area coloured the same as Russia – but separated from it by the new Baltic Countries, this is the Kaliningrad region of Russia. Look more closely and you will see an unusually thin sliver of land off the coast – the Corish Split which is approximately 90km long and roughly 400m wide. This acts as an impressive Highway, especially in autumn where literally millions of birds can be seen along it. The world's first Bird Observatory was established here in the 1920's and is now run by St Petersburg University. Colin has returned over many years and will talk not only about the migration spectacle but also the people and the place.

2nd March

Roger Beck: Wildlife of Trinidad and Tobago

The islands of Trinidad and Tobago provide some of the best bird-watching in the Caribbean. The islands are an extension, geographically, of Venezuela, with over 400 bird species, such as Motmot, Copper-Rumped Hummingbird, Trinidad provides an ideal introduction to the extremely diverse bird life of the South American mainland. Tobago is less diverse, but has the oldest rainforest in the Caribbean and is home to Red-crowned Woodpecker, White-tailed Sabrewing, Red-billed Tropic bird and the National bird, the Cocirco.

16th March

Ashley Grove: Jewels of Gambia

Gambia has long been known as a great place to go and see a wide variety of colourful and interesting Birds with the added bonus of great weather as well! The main species covered will be Kingfishers, Bee-eaters and Rollers. The tour starts and finishes at the coast where we find Little White-throated and Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters but we need to go inland to catch Red-throated, Little Green and Northern Carmine Bee-eaters.

6th April

Ruth Millar and Alan Davies: "The Biggest Twitch"

After birding in 27 countries around the world to set a new world 'year listing' record, Ruth and Alan will share the adventure with you. The Biggest Twitch began in 2008, and they tell a warts-and-all story of the fast-paced adventure of travels around the World seeing over 4,000 bird species. Anyone with an interest in travel, wildlife, or human relationships will be gripped by this epic tale!

13th April

Steve Smith: Whinchat Country

This evening highlighting the life cycle of breeding Whinchats along the Bloreng/Garn-clochdy ridge. The talk will also look at the other species of birds that share the moorland edge habitat, as

well as discussing the long-running intensive ringing scheme covering over twenty years. Other Flora and Fauna will be mentioned along with habitat management issues and techniques.

21st September

Allan Heath: Birding in the Wild West - The Birds of Arizona

The talk grew out of a three week trip to the bird-rich state of Arizona during August 2010, the peak period for Hummingbirds and a diverse supporting cast of North American birds and wildlife. Just the thing to warm the heart as Autumn sets in.

5th October

Jackie Garner: Ancient Egypt – Wildlife Art Detective

This ground-breaking research project with ornitho-egyptologist John Wyatt, investigates the wildlife species depicted in Ancient Egyptian Art. Birds and animals provided endless fascination for the Egyptians, featuring in paintings, sculptures, writing, pottery, farming them, mummified them and even worshipped them. This presentation is a mixture of ancient and modern wildlife images, history and travelogue, for Jackie turned art detective to uncover the wildlife of this ancient land, showing that it is not just a place for the hardy traveller but can be enjoyed by anyone.

19th October

Oliver Smart: Ethiopia

Ethiopia is an astonishing place, with over 1,000 recorded bird species. In Oliver's visit in 2012 he totted up more than 385 species of bird, some still being identified from photographs, many of which he has brought into this fascinating slideshow. This follows a month's travel in this ancient land with its high mountains, unique culture and amazing people.

2nd November

David Fletcher: Antarctic Birds

Starting off as a Dog Driver, then working as a Scientist and eventually becoming Base Commander for the British Antarctic Survey Team, David has a wealth of over 42 years, including 4 winters and 39 summers in this hostile environment. This includes many years as Expedition leader for Adventure Cruise Ships and the organisation "Students on Ice". The talk will develop how birds have adapted to thrive in the most hostile climate on Earth. The species will be seen in the summer and how they change for the winter.

16th November

Nick Martin: The special animals and birds of the Cairngorms

From the elusive Pine Martin to cryptic Ptarmigan, find how these highland specialists exist in the most remote yet beautiful parts of Scotland.

30th November

Terry Wall: A Wall around Bulgaria

Following on from Wendy's talk earlier in the year, we will be wowed by the quality of Terry's award winning Photography and will give an insight into this long forgotten country.

14th December

Keith Offord: An Indian Winter

Anyone who has travelled to the Indian Subcontinent cannot have returned unmoved. There are few countries in the world which offer such an exotic sensation. This presentation explores the fabulous wildlife of the area, starting with the extraordinary water-bird location of Bharatpur, with psychedelic kingfishers and every imaginable Heron and Egret as well as being the winter home for endangered Siberian Cranes. Then on to the star of Indian Conservation, the elusive Tigers of Bandhavgh. All of the stunning wildlife lives alongside some of the greatest cultural riches in the world.

Rob Parsons

GOS outdoor visit to Shapwick and Ham Wall October 27th 2012

A turn-out of 9 members braved the effects of a biting north-easterly wind, but it eventually turned out to be a fine dry and clear day, with the sun neutralising the effects of the cold wind. We were given the news that Catcott Lows had been drained but following a quick discussion we agreed to

visit the adjacent Ham Wall and Shapwick Heath.

Meeting at Ashcott Corner car park we walked west along Shapwick Heath NNR as far as the first two hides where high-lights included hearing Bearded Tits, Cetti's Warbler, seeing Marsh Harrier, and several

Great White Egrets. In fact throughout the day we continued to add Great Whites, in fact these birds were much more common there than Little Egrets and Grey Herons.

Following on from Shapwick Heath, we walked the length of the Ham Wall loop from the Ashcott Corner car park as far as the tea room at Sharpham where we all enjoyed a rest and a snack before the return journey. We walked about 11 kilometres throughout the day, on well surfaced and maintained footpaths. The high-light at Ham Wall were Bitterns, which at first only one or two of us were getting glimpses. Eventually however, with patience, all of the group had very good views of birds both on the ground, and in flight. We had completed the Ham Wall walk by late afternoon and drove onto Grey Lake where we added Chiffchaff, Fieldfare, a female Hen Harrier, and a constant stream of Starlings flying to roost. By luck the Greylake hide was manned by a young enthusiastic RSPB volunteer who was well versed with the Common Crane project. He advised us of where and how to look for our other target bird. In thickening light, we finally located the footbridge bridge over the River Parrett near

Aller Moor, and we made for a decoy wooden crane in a field of stubble. The decoy was quickly joined by the real thing, five Common Cranes, a great way to end a rather successful day.

A day total of 70 with Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Wigeon, Gadwall, Teal, Mallard, Pintail, Shoveler, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Pheasant, Cormorant, Bittern, Little Egret, Great White Egret, Grey Heron, Common Crane, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Marsh Harrier, Hen Harrier, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Kestrel, Water Rail, Moorhen, Coot, Golden Plover, Lapwing, Snipe, Green Sandpiper, Black-headed Bull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Wood Pigeon, Collard Dove, Tawny Owl, Kingfisher, Green Woodpecker, Magpie, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Raven, Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Bearded Tit, Skylark, Swallow, Cetti's Warbler, Long-tailed Tit, Chiffchaff, Treecreeper, Wren, Starling, Blackbird, Fieldfare, Redwing Mistle Thrush, Robin, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, Reed Bunting.

Keith Jones

Gwent UKBS Report for September 2012

Highlights

There were unconfirmed reports of two Wilson's Phalaropes at Newport Wetlands (28th). A Buff-bellied Sandpiper was present at the same site (8th to 9th). A Grey Phalarope was recorded at St. Brides (13th) and a Pectoral Sandpiper was reported from Sluice Farm (28th).

Newport Wetland Reserve

Three Little Stints were present (3rd). A female Marsh Harrier was reported (12th). 19 Bearded Tits were recorded (17th) and an Osprey was present (29th).

Other Sites

Eight Common Scoters were seen at Peterstone Gout (2nd). Mediterranean Gulls were present at Tredegar House Lake (2nd to 8th), The Moorings (two on 6th) and St. Brides (13th). A pale-bellied Brent Goose was recorded at Peterstone Gout (6th), with five birds present at Collister Pill (18th). Female Hen Harriers were reported from Mynydd Llanhilleth (3rd, 20th and 28th) and Peterstone Gout (23rd). An Osprey lingered at Gobion (14th to 26th), with another bird recorded at Sluice Farm (29th).

Gwent UKBS Report for October 2012

Highlights

Yellow-browed Warblers were reported from Llandegfedd reservoir (12th) and Great Triley (13th). A Firecrest was seen at Peterstone Great Wharf (9th). A Black Redstart was recorded at Sudbrook (20th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

Up to six Spotted Redshank were present for most of the month. A female Marsh Harrier was reported (14th, 18th and 19th). Merlins were also recorded (10th, 14th and 19th) and a male Scaup was observed (29th).

Other sites

Ringtail Hen Harriers were reported from Brynithel (1st), Brynmawr (14th) and Mynydd Maen (28th). Barn Owls were recorded at Collister Pill (4th) and Llanelli Church (15th). A Short-eared Owl was Gwent UKBS Report for September 2012-10-02

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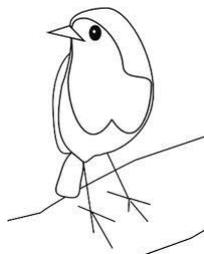
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Chris Hatch

BTO news: BTO Winter Thrush Survey

Local interest in this survey has been quite good, but few of the core squares have been taken up. Just two of the 20 core squares allocated to Gwent have a volunteer, with most of the remainder spread across the northern half of the County. The BTO has now sent out an urgent request for more to be surveyed, please visit the website to see where they are and how to choose one <http://www.bto.org> then select volunteer-surveys and Winter Thrushes Survey. You can choose your own route through the square, and then count all the thrushes you see, only one visit is needed (between 27 Dec and 10 Jan) but you can do more if you wish. Please visit the website and select a square, and contact me jerrylewis@monmouthshire.gov.uk 01873 855091 if you have any queries.

Jerry Lewis



MERRY CHRISTMAS

AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR