

# THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Registered charity number 1088830

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GOS WEB SITE: [www.gwentbirds.org.uk](http://www.gwentbirds.org.uk)

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## **COMMITTEE COMMENTARY**

Trevor Russell

Natural Resources Wales has an unhappy knack of grabbing our attention for all the wrong reasons. We are still contesting the issue of a license to kill 6 Goosanders and 12 Cormorants in order to protect salmon stocks in the river Usk - and we learned that this was just one of 19 Licenses they granted to allow fishing clubs to shoot birds throughout Wales earlier this year! They tell us that each caught salmon is worth £8000! We are disputing the data they use to justify the licence and we will give them the data GOS surveyors gathered when we counted Goosanders and Cormorants on the Usk over three surveys earlier this year.

Our incredulity with NRW was further heightened when we learned that scarification and flailing had taken place in clear-felled areas of Wentwood and Trellech in April, the peak of the avian breeding season! This was allowed because their site-survey did not reveal any ecological or environmental factors which might have prevented or delayed such activity. Pity they didn't look at a calendar, or ask GOS or other outside interests! These exchanges continue in the hope that they will give NRW pause for thought when asked for a licence next year.

Sales of our book "Birdwatching Walks in Gwent" slowed during the summer break. Although we only have a couple of hundred still in stock, we have decided NOT to have a reprint, so snap up those unique Birthday and Xmas presents now, whilst stocks last!

Two bits of good news from our Treasurer: i) Membership is up 12 on this time last year and ii) we will not need to increase our membership fee in 2016 (we need to give 12 months notice of any change at the AGM).

Changes are afoot on our website; the County List has already been updated and the Records/Sightings page will be changed to enable easier record entry and analysis. We are also looking to see if we can incorporate Facebook and Twitter. We attended five Summer Shows recently (see elsewhere in this edition).

Two dates for your diary:

The Monmouth Meadows Group meeting on October 8<sup>th</sup> at the Centenary Hall, Usk, 7pm, when the topic will be Bees. For details contact: Maggie Bliss 01989 750740  
Welsh Ornithological Conference, November 8<sup>th</sup>, Ruthin, Denbighshire. See their website for details: [www.birdsofwales.org.uk](http://www.birdsofwales.org.uk) – but can it possibly be as good as the conference held in Monmouth last year? Answers on a postage stamp!

## **County Bird List updated (or Where on earth is Kestrel?)**

Those of you who use the GOS website will have seen that there's a new tab in the list across the top – click on this and you'll find an up-to-date County List. It's based on the one which appears in the Annual Report although the status of each species is given in abbreviated form.

As you know, GOS follows the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) order and the sharp-eyed amongst you will notice yet another change in the taxonomic order! The advent of DNA sequencing has thrown up some unexpected results in recent years: grebes, less primitive than previously thought, now fall between herons and birds of prey while crows have moved up the list and pipits down. There have been shake-ups within waders, gulls and warblers too. The latest research indicates that falcons are not that closely related to other diurnal birds of prey and they now appear after woodpeckers.

It all takes a lot of getting used to! However, using the online County List to find a particular species is far easier than hunting for it on the written page. Just use Ctrl F, type the species name into the box which drops down and you'll be taken to the right place. An excellent reason for using our webpage.

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## **Rare Species Description Form updated**

Submitting the right information to enable your rare find to be accepted is easy when you use the Rare Species Description Form. Currently, the updated form is on the GOS webpage at the end of the County List but it should soon be accessible under the Sightings tab so do keep checking there.

If you're lucky enough to spot any species with the recording code D, please download and print out this form, then complete, scan and email it to the County Recorder, Tom Chinnick, at [countyrecorder@gwentbirds.org.uk](mailto:countyrecorder@gwentbirds.org.uk) . Alternatively, post it to Tom at 51 Emlyn Avenue, Ebbw Vale, Gwent NP23 5TY.

It is hoped that it will soon be possible to complete and return the form online but at the moment our website package doesn't allow this.

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## **Ever wanted to show a few of your best bird photos to GOS?**

**Al Venables**

Well you will soon have the chance. At the next AGM on Sat 17th Jan, the business will be followed by a Members' Evening at which we would like a few members to each bring along 5-10 minutes worth of photos that can be projected.

The photos could be a few of the most interesting ones from a recent trip or a local habitat, or might just be a collection of pictures from various sources that you would like to show. We used to do this quite regularly and it was generally very successful.

You will need to bring your photos on a memory stick, preferably in a PowerPoint file, but this is not essential. We will be looking for about 6 contributors, possibly more. We will need to know in advance how many members will be showing pictures, so if you would like to participate, please let me know by email well in advance (the sooner the better, although it is a long time off!).

Don't be shy - show us what you've got.

Contact: Al Venables: <[wa.venables@zen.co.uk](mailto:wa.venables@zen.co.uk)>

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## **Colour-ringed Curlews**

**Al Venables**

Please keep a look out for colour-ringed Curlews this autumn-winter. Mike Smart, a Gloucestershire birder, has been colour-ringing Curlews on the upper Severn for several years. He would like to know whether any of them turn up on the Gwent coast. The rings are usually 2 on each leg (one being a conventional metal BTO ring), all positioned on the upper part of the leg, just above the joint, so they are easy to see. Goldcliff Lagoons on a big tide usually offers good viewing facilities for this species. Please note the colours on each leg and their position (e.g. Left leg: red above green; right leg: blue above metal BTO ring). There may be light or dark versions of the colours, so note such as 'dark blue', or 'pale green'. Please send details to me and I'll pass them to Mike. If you happen to have a scope and camera with you, a digiscope shot showing the number on metal can be useful in some records.

Many thanks

Al Venables <[wa.venables@zen.co.uk](mailto:wa.venables@zen.co.uk)>

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## **New viewing platform at Goldcliff Lagoons**

### **Mike Pointon**

As most of you know, the third viewing platform at Goldcliff gave poor views of Prior's lagoon, resulting in a number of complaints. After discussion with other birdwatchers it was decided to follow my wife Jackie's suggestion of setting up a Friends of Goldcliff Lagoons (FoGL) group to work together with Natural Resources Wales (NRW). At a meeting with Tom Dalrymple, NRW's Senior Site Manager for Newport Wetlands, the idea of a fourth viewing platform was proposed. I agreed to act as coordinator and to post signs in hides inviting people to join the Friends while Tom made enquiries and obtained the necessary permission. There followed several site meetings to sort out the logistics and in August this year work began.

The viewing platform was erected by NRW staff, their volunteers and members of FoGL. Work began on 18th August and the official opening (see photograph) was on 11th September 2014. Improvements are still being made – on 22nd September we erected screening to prevent disturbance to the birds. Views of the lagoon are greatly improved. Come down and see for yourself!



Those volunteering their services on behalf of The Friends of Goldcliff Lagoons were Mark Hebden, Alan Rosney, John Marsh, John Bennett and Mike Pointon. Prior to helping erect the new platform, the Friends were involved in clearing the sea wall of litter following the winter storms and also assisted with a Bearded Tit census at Uskmouth. It all goes to show what can be achieved with goodwill, co-operation and communication.

## **Swifts break into prison!** **Verity Picken**

This summer GOS members and several local residents helped Aidan Neary, MCC Biodiversity and Ecology Officer, search for Swift nest sites in Usk. Following an initial walkabout survey to identify low-flying screaming parties, four evening surveys were carried out between June and July. These uncovered 40 nests across the town, with nearly half (a large colony of 18 nests) being found at Usk Prison!

With the loss of traditional nest sites often being cited as a major factor behind the recent decline in this species, it is envisaged that this data will be used by the planning authorities when assessing future developments – a contribution to the long term conservation of this magnificent summer visitor. Aidan plans to extend the survey to other towns in Monmouthshire in 2015 so doubtless more volunteer helpers will be needed. Keep an eye open for announcements in the spring to see if there's an opportunity for you to join in – going to prison yourself is not a prerequisite!

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## **Summer Shows** **Trevor Russell**

GOS attended five shows during the summer; the Explorer Day at NWR in early June, Go Wild! At Parc Bryn Bach, Tredegar, on June 14th, the Magor Marsh Grand Summer Fun Day in July, the GWT Open Day at their Dingestow HQ in August and finally, the Blaen Bran Open Day in early September.

To attend five events is a great achievement and I should like to thank all those who helped when and where they could. Unfortunately I still had to decline several more invitations to shows simply because we had no helpers. This is such a shame because helping and meeting experienced and novice birdwatchers with our Bird Quiz is really fascinating and good fun – especially the children, whose abilities can sometimes be quite jaw-dropping.

When the dates of Shows are announced next year, please do think about helping out for a couple of hours – it really is only a couple – and the more that come along the faster we can rotate and the less time you need spend at the stand and enjoy the rest of the Show. Do come, it really is great fun – ask those who came along this year!

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## Report from Outdoor Meeting at Llangorse Lake

### Janet Cormack

There was no bank holiday weather curse on the August outdoor meeting led by Steve Butler, with the weather being dry and calm. Six of us met at Llangasty at 7.30 am where we surveyed what was on the lake before heading across the field to meet up with Jerry Lewis. While Jerry recorded a variety of birds, he showed us just how much information you can discover on the condition of a bird from observation while ringing. A band across the tail (fault bar) of a sedge warbler showed that its feeding had been compromised, probably by the weather, during the feather development. If the timing of adverse weather is known, differences in the position of the fault bar on different individuals, can give an indication of the timing of their hatching/development, and of first/second broods. Differences in how advanced moulting was another indicator of birds being from a first or second brood. It was also a great opportunity to compare chiff-chaffs and willow warblers including the difference in length and shape of wing feathers reflecting the difference in migration patterns. Willow warblers going all the way to sub-Saharan Africa have longer, and more pointed, wings compared to chiff-chaffs which are 'only' heading as far as the Mediterranean. When they return their feathers will have faded from the African sun, just as our hair bleaches in the sun. A robin showed one of the perils of ground-feeding in grass: an engorged tick burrowed into its head, which was smoothly removed by Jerry (apparently the secret with tick removal is to turn anti-clockwise as ticks burrow in clockwise).

Among the birds we expected to see around the shoreline, there were most unexpectedly two juvenile spotted redshank. However for confident identification purposes there were conveniently next to a redshank. Among the non-avian sightings was a good view of a water shrew.

Many thanks to Jerry and Steve for a fantastic morning.



## GOS Library Report for 2013

Keith Jones

Library use during 2013 was up a little on the previous year. During 2012 17 items were borrowed from the library, which compares with 23 borrowed during 2013. Excluding items taken during 2013, just 6 items taken over the 2010 – 2012 period, have still to be returned '*Birdwatching in Europe*', '*Collins Bird Nests and Eggs*', '*Birds of Switzerland*', '*Bird Songs and Calls*', '*The Redstart*,' and '*Lesbos in the Spring*.'

The following 12 DVDs all donated by the librarian were added to the library during 2013:

'*The Minsmere Year*'. A one hour DVD featuring the 2392 acre RSPB's flagship reserve Minsmere seen during the four seasons. Including not only birds but mammals, plants, butterflies, moths, dragonflies and damselflies, narrated by David Attenborough, filmed and produced by Hugh Maynard. GOS number 829.

'*The Eagle Odyssey*' A 49 minute DVD featuring the story of the return to Scotland of the United Kingdom's biggest bird of prey, the White-tailed Sea Eagle. Donated by the librarian, GOS number 830.

'*Finding Birds in Mallorca*', a 72 minute DVD featuring a Dave Gosney guide to the best 18 birding sites, and gives you a real 'feel' for what it's like to go there. GOS number 831.

'*Finding Birds in Andalucia*', a 78 minute DVD by Dave Gosney which is a guide to the best birding sites in southern Spain featuring 25 birding sites with footage of over 60 species. GOS number 832.

'*Finding Birds in North Spain*,' another 68 minute DVD from Dave Gosney which features a guide to the best birdwatching sites in north Spain. GOS number 833.

'*Finding Birds in Estonia*', another 85 minute DVD from the Dave Gosney collection, which covers no fewer than 27 of Estonia's best birding sites featuring footage of 80 species. GOS number 834

'*The North Norfolk Coast; A New Birder's Guide. A film about the pleasures & Practicalities of visiting an area of outstanding ornithological interest*' A very detailed 114 minute DVD which focuses is on places, practicalities and possibilities, such as really when is best time to visit Titchwell. A very comprehensive guide which cover all the sites between Snettisham to Cley. GOS number 835.

'*Birdwatching in The Canary Islands: Tenerife & Fuerteventura*.' A 53 minutes DVD by Steve Evans which gives an introduction to two of the Canary islands which explores the huge range of habitats and bringing you footage of the Birds you can expect to find, such as Fuerteventura Chat, Blue Chaffinch, Lustral Pigeon, Cream-coloured Courser. GOS number 836.

'*Finding Birds in the Gambia*,' another 92 minute DVD by Dave Gosney visits 30 of the most exciting sites on the coast and upriver, featuring footage of 168 birds. GOS number 837.

'*Portrait of an Estuary*.' This 4 hour DVD features the birds and other wildlife found in and along the English side of the Severn Estuary. It outlines 118 species of birds, commonly and not so commonly seen in this exceptional area. Divided into 4 parts Winter, Spring, Summer and Autumn, it is narrated by Barry Paine, and filmed by Nigel Tucker who describes his DVD as a project which started as a way of getting out of the house, and turned into an epic. Although the footage focuses on the English side of the estuary, it is still of interest to birders on the Welsh side of the river. Originally released as four separate DVDs we have placed all four on one DVD for convenience. GOS number 838.

'*Birding Sweden – Take 1*.' This two DVD set, both 2 hour long created by Malcolm Rymer. The first DVD gives a general overview of Sweden and its wildlife looking at winter birding, and early summer introducing birdlife which has adapted to cope of eagles, the grey-headed and white-backed woodpeckers, nutcracker and more. Also includes butterflies, dragonflies, mammals, and flowers. Areas covered include Svartadalen, Fulufjallets, Flatruet Plateau, and the Storsjon Reservoir. (GOS number 841).

'*Birding Sweden – Take 2*.' Malcolm Rymer's second 2 hour DVD covering such as birds as Slavonian grebes, long and short-eared, tengmalm's, hawk, and great-grey owls, bluethroats, Lapland bunting, old squaws, velvet and common scoters, geese, waterfowl and cranes. The areas explored include: Vindelfjalien Nature Reserve, of central Lapland, Sami, and the Black River Valley in Vastmanland of Central Sweden. (GOS number 842).

Although DVDs take a little less space than book, once again, no items were removed from the library, so with our still chronic lack of space in the library, just four books was add to the library this year, the 1992 edition of '*Bird Census Techniques*' by C.J.Biddy, N.D.B, Burgess, David A Hill, Simon Mustoe and Sandra Lambton, donated by the librarian. Published by Academic Press, 257 pages. A concise guide to the various census techniques and their opportunities and pitfalls. According to British Birds "... an extremely valuable book. It is a 'must' for any bird surveyors, volunteer and professional alike". (GOS number 839).

'*A Field Guide to the Bird Songs and Calls of Britain and Northern Europe*,' by Dave Farrow. Donated by the librarian, as our other book of a similar nature 'Bird Songs and Calls' has been missing since October 2011, and has been requested several times since. Published in 2008 by Carlton Books, a 226 page book including two CDs. Disc 1 contains 99 birds from Bewick's Swan to House Martin, and Disc 2 with another 99 birds features Tree Pipit to Corn Bunting. (GOS Number 840).

The other book '*Bird Watching in Mallorca*' (GOS Number 839) which was kindly donated by new member Neville Davies. This book which was written by Neville is a complete guide covering the main sites and any others including maps and directions. Landscape and colour bird images, full species check list and year round guide to residents and migrants. Also includes tips on vehicle hire, local flora and

fauna and much more. This will be a useful addition to the library as the two such similar books on Mallorca published in 1983 and 1999 are both out of print and not in our library.

In addition the following reports were also received by the society:

*Birds in Wales* Vol. 9 No. 2: *Welsh Bird Report* no. 25 for 2011 (2 copies).

Finally the various magazines received by the society including 'Y Barcud', 'BTO News', 'Birds RSPB' Waterlife (WWT), World Birdwatch, are checked by the librarian to select suitable snippets of information to include in the Dipper. These magazines are then offered free to society members from time to time during indoor meetings. Any remaining magazines are left at hospital, surgery, dentist waiting rooms.

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### **On the Feeder This Month**

We are well used to successive generations of robins demonstrating that, whatever the feeder manufacturers say about them being ground feeding birds, they are capable of mastering most types of feeders. A new addition to our feeder species list is one of a family of four jays, which decided to take advantage of where the squirrels have widened the mesh size on a peanut feeder. The magpie is still eyeing up how to get into the Perspex feeder holding the suet pellets!



Photograph: Andrew Cormack

## LEGACIES – DON'T FORGET GOS!

It has been suggested by some members that, in addition to the various projects we already support, we should be more actively involved in the conservation of bird habitat in Gwent. We have, in recent years, made generous donations to GWT to help buy land on the Gwent Levels; however, although our modest subscriptions cover our membership services, there is little left over to do more.

Those of you who have been members of the society for a number of years will recall that we were able to purchase Goytre House Wood and pay for its maintenance using money that was bequeathed to us. If you would like to help towards ensuring that future generations will still be able to enjoy Gwent's birdlife to the full please consider making a bequest to The Gwent Ornithological Society. The RSPB (which receives about 25% of its income by virtue of legacies) undertakes conservation work nationally – a legacy would mean GOS could do more for conservation in Gwent.

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### Contributions for Future Issues of *The Dipper*

Please send to [newsletter@gwentbirds.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@gwentbirds.org.uk)

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### Indoor Meetings

<b>Saturday 27 September</b>	<a href="#">Shearwaters</a>	Andrew Ramsay
<b>Saturday 04 October</b>	<a href="#">A lane in a Midland Forest</a>	Mike Lane
<b>Saturday 25 October</b>	<a href="#">Puddocks and Poveys: the folklore of bird names</a>	Charles Martin
<b>Saturday 08 November</b>	<a href="#">Birding in Costa Rica</a>	Ian Butler
<b>Saturday 22 November</b>	<a href="#">Birding in Spain</a>	Len Clarke
<b>Saturday 06 December</b>	<a href="#">A trip to South Georgia</a>	John Gale
<b>Saturday 17 January</b>	<a href="#">AGM</a>	

### Outdoor Events

<b>Sunday 05 October</b>	<a href="#">Minnets Wood</a>	Lyndon Waters
<b>17 October - 19 October</b>	<a href="#">Portland Bill Observatory</a>	Steve Butler
<b>Saturday 15 November</b>	<a href="#">Reedbeds in Winter</a>	Newport Wetlands
<b>Saturday 22 November</b>	<a href="#">Wildlife in Welsh</a>	Newport Wetlands
<b>Monday 02 February 2015</b>	<a href="#">World Wetlands Day</a>	Newport Wetlands

For full details see <http://www.gwentbirds.org.uk>

## Raffle tickets

We're looking for someone to offer just 30 minutes of their time to sell raffle tickets at our indoor meetings. If you fancy helping GOS while sitting down and chatting to people as they arrive, this is the job for you!

Please phone Trevor Russell on 01600 716266 or email him on [secretary@gwentbirds.org.uk](mailto:secretary@gwentbirds.org.uk) if you'd like to give it a try.

### GOS CONTACTS

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