

# 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)

**Newsletter No. 133**

**December 2014**

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## NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2015

**The Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday, January 17th, 2015,  
in the Village Hall, Goytre, starting at 7:30pm**

The only change to the Committee from 2015 will be caused by the regrettable resignation of **Steve Butler** as **Field Secretary**. No nominations have yet been received to replace Steve, though he will prepare the 2015 Outdoor programme to hand over to his successor, and will provide any training and support as necessary.

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

All nominations should be signed by both the Proposer and Secunder with the agreement of the nominee, or e-mail me with details. (see Contacts list for details) A

**Nominations must be received by January 1<sup>st</sup> 2015**

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

The AGM will be followed by a **Finger Buffet** where the trick 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 Al Venables will lead a Members Evening, where members will be invited to show some of their own slides. If there are insufficient volunteers Al threatens to fill-in with some of his own legendary "Birds I Nearly Missed" pictures, a controversial I.D. nightmare and an art-form that few have had the courage to emulate, far less show publicly. Come along and join in the fun!**

Trevor Russell  
Secretary

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## COMMITTEE COMMENTARY

Trevor Russell

President, Steve Roberts, dropped in to the November Committee meeting to explain some of the consequences of our complaint to NRW concerning the flailing activity at Trellech and the scarification at Wentwood, carried out during the last avian breeding season. As is sometimes the case with these matters, the wrong personalities became inadvertently involved in the "blame cascade" because we were unaware of the background. The problem boiled down to a lack of communication and understanding and Steve, because of his close links with the Forestry Commission, has offered to be a conduit in the future should we witness, or hear of any activity which we feel could be detrimental to ornithological interest in the area. We were assured that any similar activity would only be conducted outside the breeding season, but Steve's take home message was that if any GOS member sees or hears of any inappropriate environmental practice, to get in touch, in the first instance, with any Committee member.

NRW is still under the cosh regarding their licences to shoot fish-eating birds – Goosanders and Cormorants on the Usk plus Herons and Mergansers elsewhere - on 18 other rivers across Wales. Such is the dismay within ornithological groups across the Principality that the Welsh Ornithological Society (WOS) has become involved and will be meeting with NRW in early December to try to understand how NRW calculated the number of birds they allowed to be killed and how it was monitored and controlled. In the meantime, given all this uncertainty, GOS will ask NRW to impose an embargo on any Usk shooting licences until clarity and understanding has been reached.

At the recent Severn Estuary Partnership Forum the Tidal Power Company gave an overview of its application to gain approval to construct a tidal barrage in Swansea Bay. The TPC has plans to build up to four barrages along the Bristol Channel coast, from the Severn Crossing to Cardiff Bay, plus one (100 sq.kms enclosed area) in Colwyn Bay. This is a controversial subject and there is much debate about the benefits and costs of such developments but, along with other organisations, GOS is worried about the use of inappropriate data in the decision making process. After discussion, the GOS committee felt that the best approach was to closely monitor developments and to seek advice on how to proceed, and so we will be contacting more weighty and experienced organisations, e.g. RSPB, WWT and GWT to lend its support to demand greater rigour when assessing the various stages in the forthcoming applications.

The Annual Report is being printed as we go to press and will be distributed in the next few weeks.

The AGM will be held on January 17th, and promises to be a relatively brief affair because there are no items demanding discussion and votes. We learned with regret that Steve Butler wishes to stand-down due to pressure of work, so we will need to find a replacement Field Secretary.

After the finger buffet Al Venables has planned a Members Evening where members will be invited to show their own favourite slides. He will doubtless also show some of his own legendary “Birds I Nearly Missed” slides, which traditionally degenerates into an ID free-for-all. Great fun, don’t miss it.

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## **NEW, EASY WAY TO SUBMIT YOUR 2014 RECORDS!**

### **Tom Chinnock**

Accurately recording our bird observations has arguably never been so important, given the pressures that our birdlife faces both nationally and locally. As increasingly impressive optical and camera equipment make identifications easier, improved recording techniques are needed to enable observers to submit records quickly and clearly.

An electronic recording spreadsheet with some exciting new features has been in development over the past few months – this will replace the previous spreadsheet used by some GOS members and Gwent birders.

The spreadsheet can be downloaded from the GOS website and used periodically, without internet access, to add records whenever it suits you. With help notes incorporated within the spreadsheet it could not be easier to use.

Included within the spreadsheet are a number of features:

- drop-down lists for species, locations and breeding codes;
- automatic insertion of BTO codes and Gwent Recording codes;
- automatic insertion of grid references;
- the county list, giving the status of all species recorded in the county to date;
- a link to the 'Rare species description form' for those species which call for a written description – an easy way to submit required details;
- a gazetteer of Gwent sites – more can be added on request;
- a list of all subspecies which have occurred in Gwent.

I urge all those who submit bird records to log their records using this method, not least for the ease of use for both the observer and Recorder, but also to allow the most accurate and appropriate way of logging your sightings.

Tom Chinnick  
Gwent County Recorder

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## **IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN – YOUR 2014 RECORDS ARE NEEDED!** **Tom Chinnick**

A reminder to all of you that **the deadline for submitting records is 31 January 2015**. So once you've recovered from Christmas please download the new Excel spreadsheet from the GOS website and start entering your sightings – better still, start doing this now and enter them a few at a time at your leisure!

Although we'd definitely prefer to receive records submitted using the new spreadsheet, records submitted via Word documents and paper slips will still be accepted. If you use Word, please make sure there is *a new line for each record* and that data is entered in the following order and separated by a Tab:

Species name, location/site, date of sighting, number of birds, comments  
(such as age/sex of birds, breeding notes etc), your name and initials.

But **please** try the new method – you'll find it easy and we'll find sorting and assessing your records much simpler. An efficient modern method is now essential as we receive roughly 35,000 records a year!

Please email your records to Tom Chinnick at [countyrecorder@gwentbirds.org.uk](mailto:countyrecorder@gwentbirds.org.uk) or post them to me at School House, Llandenny, Usk NP15 1DL.

## **BTO REPORT**

Jerry Lewis

### **Peregrine Survey 2014**

The Peregrine Survey has gone well this spring and summer, with a huge amount of volunteer effort going into the 'Random Square Survey' and the 'Known Sites Survey'. We had ten random squares allocated for Gwent, five of which were surveyed for potential nest sites. No new sites were found, which suggests we are "on top" of the species distribution in the county. Eight sites were successful in fledging chicks - two sites each with 1, 2 and 3 chicks, and two further sites with at least 1 chick, three other sites were occupied but outcome was not known. However three former sites (two having suffered from persecution in the past) were not occupied. Peregrine sites in the valleys of Gwent/Glamorgan are monitored annually by the South Wales Peregrine Monitoring Group, and a further five sites in this area have not yet been reported on.

### **International Swan Census 17–18 January 2015**

The International Swan Census is a survey designed to monitor the size and distribution of the Icelandic Whooper Swan and Northwest European Bewick's Swan populations. The census is undertaken every five years and consists of coordinated site based surveys on the WeBS Core Count weekend. However, counts of swans away from core areas, for example in fields, will be welcomed through BirdTrack ([www.birdtrack.net](http://www.birdtrack.net)).

### **House Martin Survey 2015**

There has been no previous national House Martin Survey, and previous population estimates have been derived from statistical methods applied to census information. A robust population estimate is needed, against which changes in the future can be measured, as we know that House Martins are in decline. Long-term monitoring has revealed a 65% population decline between 1966 and 2012, with a rapid decline noted since the early 1980s. Information from Bird Atlas 2007–11 and the Breeding Bird Survey show interesting geographical patterns with declines in abundance in the southern half of Britain, yet increases in the north, but the reasons for these changes are unknown. The aim of this survey is to produce a UK population estimate, and provide information on nest site choice and position. This survey will be based on a stratified random sample and it is hoped that between 2000–3000 1-km squares will be covered nationally by volunteers. Methodology is still being refined, but it is expected that it will involve two visits to the square to look for complete and active nests between early June and mid July, with reconnaissance visits in late May to look for suitable habitat and identify nesting areas. It will be an online survey, with allocation of squares managed on the BTO website; a list of random 1-km squares for Gwent should be available soon.

### **Colonial Birds Recording Scheme Spring 2015**

BTO are working towards getting a 'Colonial Birds Recording Scheme' online in time for the breeding season in spring 2015. In the first instance, this will allow volunteers

taking part in the Heronries Census to enter their counts online for the first time (including counts for other nesting herons and egrets). It will also provide a mechanism for future expansion for the collection of data for other colonial nesting species such as Rook and Sand Martin, and potential longer-term monitoring of House Martins. This is an exciting step forward for the BTO's longest running survey. The number of nests in most of Gwent's Heronries seems to be in slow decline, and a few are not regularly counted - Aberbeeg, Llanfoist and Llanhennock. If anyone is able to visit any of these please let me know. Llanhennock is a difficult site to view, but using a telescope from the opposite side of the valley (near the exit to Celtic Manor golf course off the A449) before the leaves come out, should give a good enough view to assess numbers.

### **Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)**

This annual survey monitors the fortunes of our common and widespread species, and there are always some squares available. The survey involves two visits during the breeding season and walking a 2km route, counting everything you see or hear. At the time of writing there are a number of 1km squares available for 2015, most have been previously surveyed and convenient routes have been worked out, though these can be changed if need be. The available 1km squares are spread across the county, in the Newport area - ST2484, ST2385 and ST2097, north of Abergavenny - SO3228 and SO3929, near Monmouth - SO4502 and SO4817, Chepstow - ST4592 and ST5194 and in the middle of the County - SO3707. Other squares may also become available before the new season starts, so if none of these really suit you, please let me know about your interest, and I can keep you in mind when a more convenient square turns up.

If you want more information about any of the above surveys, or are interested in helping, keep an eye on the BTO website, or contact me on [jmsl2587@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jmsl2587@yahoo.co.uk) or 01873 855091. Jerry Lewis BTO Regional Rep - Gwent

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### **The Llandegfedd Reservoir: State of play** **Keith Jones**

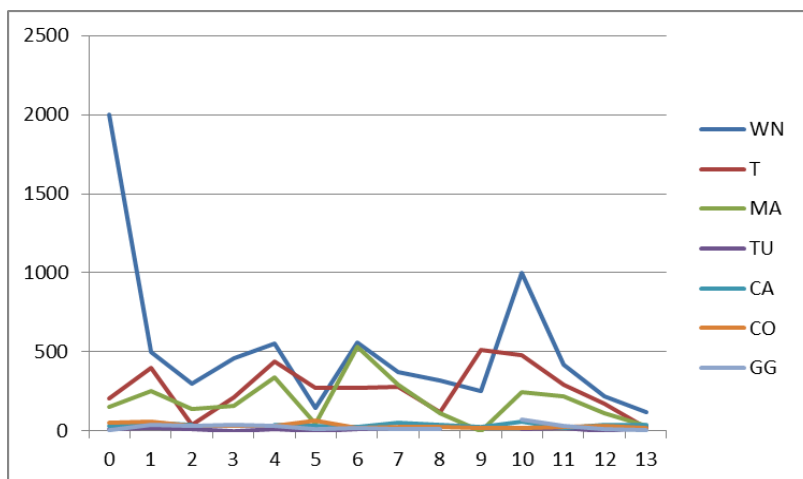
Llandegfedd Reservoir (LR) is a reservoir, covering about 200 hectares, completed in 1963 with access controlled by the then Welsh National Water Development Authority. Since its completion, the reservoir has become increasingly popular with bird watchers, with access details given in a variety of publications. Visits to the reservoir seemed to tail off however after the development of the Newport Wetlands complex and the numerous access problems at the reservoir over recent years. Although several birders and the writer completed regular counts, due to the deterioration of the reservoir some areas were deemed as too hazardous, and the writer reluctantly stopped during visiting in 2008. Some of the footpaths were no longer cut, leading to inability to see trailing bramble shoots and pot-holes. Also some of the public footpaths to various parts of the reservoir had been deliberately

blocked. In addition to the deterioration in upkeep, the water authority charged an annual entry fee from 2009. As a result there was a reduction in records received for the annual bird report. With concerns over how the birds were doing within the deteriorating nature at the reservoir a small team of birdwatchers composing Mike Bailey, Keith Jones, and Arthur Pitcher, Keith Roylance started coordinating a monthly visit from October 2010, when it was agreed to count the winter months of October to February. One group covered the main body of the reservoir from the North-East Inlet to the east mouth of Sor Bay, the other covered the dam end, the West Inlets and Sor Bay. These areas were alternated from month to month.

Using the two GOS publications 'The Birds of Gwent' 1977 and 2008, and recent Gwent annual bird reports, this short report will attempt to gauge the winter population of a selected group of birds over the last few years up to 2013. Although I thought to include Canada Geese with its obvious increase, I thought better of it. As a result the seven birds selected are frequent residents winters at LR: Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Cormorant, Great Crested Grebe, and Coot. There will be a summary of the history of each bird at the reservoir, while the table below will include the monthly maximum winter count from 2000 to 2013.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>WN</b>	2000	500	300	460	555	148	560	375	316	250	1000	416	216	122
<b>T</b>	208	400	39	209	440	270	270	280	116	515	480	290	171	16
<b>MA</b>	150	250	138	157	342	48	530	290	113	Nil	244	220	110	34
<b>TU</b>	10	20	9	Nil	9	Nil	10	19	12	NC	9	18	2	24
<b>CA</b>	33	49	36	NC	39	33	24	50	40	25	56	18	42	37
<b>CO</b>	50	56	34	34	30	63	22	25	25	20	20	25	31	16
<b>GG</b>	3	40	35	41	32	9	22	10	11	NC	70	35	11	8

WN Wigeon; T Teal; MA Mallard; TU Tufted Duck; CA Cormorant; CO Coot; GG Great Crested Grebe. Nil No birds present during count; NC No details of a winter count given that year.



**WIGEON:** 'The Birds of Gwent' published 1977 concluded that the number of Wigeon at LR, have increased steadily since 1967, the usual winter range has been from 250 to 700, with exceptionally counts of 1,000 in January 1974 and 1,300 on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1975. The GOS publication of 2008 suggest that the Newport Wetland Reserve has replaced LR as the major wintering site, and maximum number at LR since the new millennium numbers were generally into three figures, the largest 560 in 2006 and the exceptional 1000 in 2010. These high figures contrasted with 16 in 2013. The conflicting counts of 16 – 1000 may reflect Wigeon commuting between the reservoir, and the adjacent River Usk just 4 kilometres to the east. Following the reduction due to the Wetlands influence, the numbers at LR at least seems to be stable since.

**TEAL:** The 1977 GOS publication concluded largest numbers of Teal are found at LR, where counts usually range from 100 to 200. The 2008 publication claimed numbers at LR reach a maximum during December – February and the average peak counts in the last 30 years has been about 300. Since the new millennium the figures are vary from a maximum of 515 in 2009, and 16 during 2013. Like Wigeon, the contrasting counts may reflect birds commuting between LR and the River Usk. Although a little early to draw any conclusions, it seems the number at LR are stable.

**MALLARD:** The 1977 publication suggest that largest winter gatherings of Mallard occurred at LR with totals up to 1200 and 1300 since 1969 when the numbers suddenly doubled over those of previous winters. Peak counts exceeded 1,000 birds in seven of the ten winters from 1969/70 to 1978/79. During and after the 1980s however winter numbers at LR declined steadily no doubt as a result of the Newport Wetlands, and winter peak counts have ranged from 105 to 300. Since 2000 winter maximums varied from a maximum of 530 in 2006, varying to 32 in 2013, 48 in 2005, and none during the 2009 count. 2013. Accepting the average three figures as norm, and the three low figures as a blip, the figures seem to be unchanged at LR.

**TUFTED DUCK:** Although it has always been regular at the reservoir, it was not very numerous, and between 1965 to 1968 annual maximums varied between 30 to 180. A similar increase in numbers at Ynysyfro Reservoir dates from about the same period. Since 1969 it was concluded that between them the two reservoirs held about 90% of the county total with maximum of 100-150 at Llandegfedd and 45-200 at Ynysyfro. From 1985/86 however lower numbers became the norm, and continued so during the new millennium. Counts since 2000 varied from none or 2 to a maximum of 24. With seven years totalling 10 or below numbers seem to be on the decline at LR.

**CORMORANT:** The 1977 publication reported that the inland numbers have increasing markedly, for example the maxima at LR have been 4 in Winter 1971, nine in 1972, and 24 1974. By the 2008 GOS publication that the wintering population of Cormorant in the county has been increasing and during all the months of 1975 – 1997 number had doubled. Since 2000 although just 4 were recorded during 2001, the rest of the winters were in double figures, with a maximum of 75 in 2011. Such numbers would suggest the number of Cormorants using LR seem to be stable.

**COOT:** The 1977 'The Birds of Gwent' concluded 'In recent years LR has become an important winter site for Coot, where they now occur annually in very large numbers'.



From a maximum of 100 there early in 1964 the winter population has steadily increased to a maximum of about 1,100 in the winter of 1973-74. Since the 1980s winter numbers at LR declined while the breeding population increased. At Ynys y Fro Reservoir however, winter counts had by contrast increased. In addition Coot may have also favoured the expanded Newport Wetlands Reserve. Since the year 2000 peak winters numbers at the reservoir has continued to decline, with a maximum of 63 in 2005. Considering previous high counts, and the reduction this decade, numbers at the reservoir have declined.

**GREAT CRESTED GREBE:** The GOS 1977 Publication reported 'Most records in recent years are from LR where birds have been seen through most of each year from 1964 and throughout each year since then'. According to the 2008 edition of 'The Birds of Gwent', LR is the stronghold for breeding while peak winter numbers include 57 in 1976 and 52 in 1998. A total of 99 were recorded there in July-August 2002 and August 2004. The winter population since the new millennium seem to be decreasing, although 70 were present in 2010, just 3 were recorded in 2000 and 2013. Although it maybe a little early to draw any conclusion just yet, this limited data would suggest the winter population at the reservoir appears to be on the decline.

## Conclusion

Accepting the limited scope and time scale of this study, of the 7 birds selected, four of the birds, Wigeon, Teal, Mallard and Cormorant, seem to be stable over the recent years, while Tufted Duck, Coot, and Great Crested Grebe have seen a decline in winter numbers. Although it is guess work to try and rationalise the reason for the decline, it seems likely that the development of the Newport Wetland Reserve may be an important contributory factor.



Photograph: Keith Roylance

***If you want to visit Llandegfedd Reservoir for yourselves,  
read on for the current access information.***

## Llandegfedd Reservoir permit and keys

A permit is required to access the north end of the reservoir. This, and a key to the gate (which is kept locked), may be bought at the Welsh Water Sluvad Works office on Sluvad Road, Pontypool (ST321992, post code NP4 0TA). An annual permit costs in the region of £8 and the key is approximately £5. The office is open from 9.30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday.

Directions are as follows:

Turn off Sluvad Road into the Sluvad Works, then turn immediately right into the car park. Walk up towards the green metal gates, turn left and go to the office building ahead. The entrance is beside the sign which reads 'Llandegfedd Reservoir Fisheries and Recreation Office'.



Photograph: Keith Roylance

Don't forget to buy Birdwatching Walks in Gwent to find out what birds you may find when! A map shows the routes and hides. The book can be ordered on the GOS website – click on Publications.

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

Please send to [newsletter@gwentbirds.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@gwentbirds.org.uk) or let us know the type of articles you would like to see in future editions

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### Autumn Talks 2014 Andrew Cormack

***For those of you are unable to come to the indoor meetings, here is a summary of where we have been travelling to in the talks so far, with a tour around the UK in the first three talks and then venturing further afield as the nights have drawn in.***

Our winter season of indoor talks got off to an excellent start with Andrew Ramsay describing the results of four decades studying the UK's other major manx shearwater colony, high on the mountains of Rum in Scotland's Inner Hebrides. This has included fitting tiny geolocators to adult birds, revealing that to obtain food for their single chick they may range far into the Atlantic or south to Anglesey. This is still a short journey compared with the annual migration to Brazil, which the fledglings do unassisted after being abandoned by their parents. Worryingly, measurements of breeding success indicate that unless there is significant winter snowfall around the nesting burrows, predation by rats is likely to reduce productivity below the level required to sustain the colony. Eradicating rats from islands has variable results – on Lundy shearwater numbers have increased dramatically after rats were removed but on Canna the recovery has been much slower.

Mike Lane revealed some of the secrets of professional wildlife photography including the different stages that need to be prepared to attract herons, dippers and thrushes to perform in front of the camera. The resulting photographs are magnificent: those taken on Warwickshire evenings no less so than the sequence of a black grouse lek on a frozen lake in Finland. Camera technology and bribery alone wouldn't be sufficient: the really impressive thing was his detailed knowledge of the landscape and how animals and birds use it. Few of us would have the patience to study a kingfisher's daily routine for more than a fortnight in order to learn the exact time and place where its image could best be captured.

Charles Martin introduced us to three groups of birds whose reputation, at least in folklore, isn't all that good: falcons, ravens and owls. Comparing modern scientific observation with some of the behaviours in the stories suggests that birdwatching must go back a long time: ravens do, indeed, have a gruesome attraction to the eyes of their prey. In the middle ages strict rules, based on your rank in society, regulated which hawk or falcon you could use for hunting; having a bird above your station could result in severe punishment. In those days the kestrel was the lowest status bird, though its recent decline may mean that nowadays for city-dwellers at least the princely peregrine is more familiar.

As Gwent's winter drew in, two talks reminded us of warm places and exotic birds. Ian Butler took us across Costa Rica, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, with dazzling hummingbirds, toucans, quetzals and tiny frogs. Len Clarke travelled from north to south of Spain through a remarkable variety of habitats and birds from wallcreepers and lammergeiers in the Pyrenees; hoopoes, bustards and sandgrouse on the high central plains; to bee-eaters, eagles and vultures along and across the Straits of Gibraltar. After that, the final talk of 2014 will take us to a very different place: South Georgia!

A similarly varied and interesting programme of fortnightly talks is planned for next year: details will be available from the GOS website at <http://www.gwentbirds.org.uk/indoor> but a preview is given below:

**Saturday 06 December**    [A trip to South Georgia](#)

John Gale

17-Jan	AGM Members' evening	
31-Jan	The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail	Andrew Baker
14-Feb	The Rise and Fall of the Barn Owl	Chris Sperring
28-Feb	A Life (& Death) on the Ocean Wave: the Remarkable Life of the Storm Petrel	Rob Thomas
14-Mar	Birds of the Northern Pantanal, Brazil.	Dave Richards
28-Mar	Saving our Swifts - Helping Swifts survive the 21st Century	Edward Mayer
11-Apr	Gull migration research (exact title to be confirmed)	Viola Ross-Smith (BTO)

26-Sep	Birding Down Under - 7 visits to Australia	Steph Tyler
10-Oct	Wild Birds and Disease	Daria Dadam (BTO)
24-Oct	Birding in Madagascar	John Clarke
07-Nov	Shropshire Wildlife	Jim Almond
21-Nov	The High Arctic: Birds and other wildlife in N Spitsbergen	Al Venables
05-Dec	Re-establishing Britain's First Bird Observatory	Richard Brown & Giselle Eagle

## Outdoor Events

**Monday 02 February 2015** [World Wetlands Day](#)

Newport Wetlands

## SITUATIONS VACANT

### FIELD SECRETARY

Outdoor meetings are part of the social 'glue' of the Society. Approx. 14 meetings are held annually though Steve Butler has already prepared the programme for 2015. This means there is plenty of time for any help and advice to be given. Please email or call me for further information: Trevor Russell, at [tjruss2010@gmail.com](mailto:tjruss2010@gmail.com), or telephone 01600 716266.

## GOS CONTACTS

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