

THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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GOS WEB SITE: www.gwentbirds.org.uk

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Two topics dominated the committee meetings in May and July, tidal lagoons in the Severn estuary and Llandegfedd reservoir.

Sadly there was little to report at the July update on the tidal lagoons. We had hoped to hear that RSPB Cymru had been vociferous and assertive in their demands for a pause in further developments beyond the Swansea Bay scheme, arguing the lack of hard evidence of the environmental impacts of such a project, but we have not heard a word. Such a disappointment after we had anticipated, last May, that they would represent the smaller, less influential environmental groups, such as GOS. If the RSPB can't or won't speak out for improved measurement of the environmental impacts, who else has such an influential voice? The Cardiff Lagoon scheme seems to be racing ahead, still based on the dubious data from computer modelling. Do we have to simply roll over and accept that approval will be given for all the lagoons planned along the coast up to the Severn Bridges? We will be asking RSPB Cymru to take a much firmer and vocal stance until hard environmental evidence has been gathered from the Swansea scheme.

Better news from Llandegfedd reservoir in that GOS and GWT appear to have been given permission to undertake restoration work at the site. We are told that Welsh Water have no money to maintain the walkways, bird hides, and grazing margins for waders etc. but depending on what we want to do, we may be given permission to do it ourselves! Brings a whole new meaning to 'bailout'!

Have you had Swifts nesting in or on your property? If so please tell Steph Tyler (Monmouth), Andrew Baker (Abergavenny) or John Bennett (Usk). Surveys at selected sites have been conducted this year but we know there are hundreds more in the county, so please, let's hear from you, because we'd like to ask you to watch out for them next year too. Ask for details: Steph 01600 719890, Andrew 01873 830539 or John 01291 672054.

GOS transport to the Rutland Bird Fair?

GOS is thinking of organising a mini-bus to the Rutland Bird Fair in August if there is sufficient demand. It would, of course, involve an early start and late return but just think of all the driving, petrol and hassle you'll be saving yourself! Costs to be determined when numbers are known.

If interested, please contact Dave Brassey at outdoor@gwentbirds.org.uk or by phone on 01633 664212 or 07973734092, saying which day you'd prefer (Friday 21st, Saturday 22nd or Sunday 23rd).

Birding weekends away?

Our new Field Secretary, Dave Brassey, would like to hear any suggestions for out of county weekend trips. The annual trips to Portland have proved very popular but we'd like to try one or two new locations. Please send your ideas to Dave at outdoor@gwentbirds.org.uk.

Gwent Birders Facebook page

Good news! A Facebook group for anyone with an interest in birds and birding in Gwent is now up and running. Set up by Marcus John, it is intended to complement the GOS website and other internet resources. Birding news, photos and comments are welcomed on the Facebook page but sightings should continue to be posted on the GOS Sightings page <http://www.gwentbirds.org.uk/sightings>.

To find out more about Gwent Birders go to <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1402732016717810/>. If you don't yet have a Facebook account go to <https://www.facebook.com/> to open one.

An impressive county report



FOR many years the Gwent Ornithological Society has consistently produced an annual bird report that has ranked among the best in Wales, so when the 2013 edition landed on my desk I was keen to see how it measured up.

This 136-page report follows the traditional format of its

predecessors, with familiar features including a review of the birding highlights of the year, a ringing summary, a list of early and late dates for migrants, a gazetteer of all place names in the report and an annotated county bird list.

The bulk of the report is dedicated to the species accounts, and on the whole these are well-written, succinct summaries of the year's records. They chart some notable successes, such as Gwent's breeding Avocet population, which goes from strength to strength, but by the same token also reveal the continued demise of the county's dwindling Willow Tit and Tree Sparrow populations towards seemingly inexorable disappearance.

In addition to the regular features, the report includes several short articles on Gwent-related bird topics. One of these articles documents and offers an explanation of the annual autumn passage of Woodpigeon through south-east Wales, a peculiar phenomenon that will be familiar to local birders. This fascinating article stands out as fine example of the locally co-ordinated ornithological research occasionally to be found in county bird reports; it deserves to be widely read.

A great deal of work has gone into the *Gwent Bird Report 2013*, which is pleasingly designed and lavishly illustrated with numerous locally taken photographs, including a splendid cover portrait of a much-admired male Penduline Tit from Newport Wetlands. All in all, the Gwent Ornithological Society can justifiably be proud of its latest offering, which will attract admiration and envy in equal measure from neighbouring counties in Wales. **Phil Bristow**

More info

- *Gwent Bird Report 2013* edited by John Coleman (Gwent Ornithological Society, Gwent, 2015).
- 136 pages, several colour and black-and-white photos.
- Pbk, £10 plus £2 p&p, available from Andrew Cormack, 29 Chestnut Drive, Abergavenny NP7 5JZ.

An afternoon meeting new birders ...

Four members of Gwent Ornithological Society (Andrew and Janet Cormack, Keith Roylance and Chris Field) spent the afternoon of Saturday 11th July in the bird hide at Magor Marsh, as part of the Wildlife Trust's Family Fun day. Though a hot afternoon isn't the best time for birds, we saw or heard fifteen different species – mostly the commoner waterbirds but four Little Egrets gave excellent views while Cetti's Warblers and Chiffchaffs called throughout the afternoon. The visitors thoroughly enjoyed comparing the various species through our telescopes.

Thanks to everyone who made it to the hide for a look at the wildlife and a chat. And apologies to the translator who had to struggle with "Ornithological" for a keen school party from Russia!

Review of Recent Indoor Meetings

Andrew Cormack

Dave Richards described the Pantanal area on the borders of Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay. Covering fifty-five thousand square miles, the wetlands are larger than Ireland; despite being 1300 miles from the sea the land is as little as 80 metres above sea level. With up to 1400mm of rain a year the rise and fall of the annual floods produce a particularly rich area for wildlife, with up to 1000 bird species (and 9000 insects!) recorded. To some extent this variety has been encouraged by limited human activity, since most of the birds and other wildlife live close to ecotones, where two different habitats meet (e.g. forest/lake). By creating patches of grazing and arable land in blocks of forests, humans have created more edges, and thus more opportunities for wildlife. However the wetlands are now at risk of over-exploitation by grazing and fishing, and from pollution by mining activities further upstream. Not surprisingly most of Dave's photographs featured waterbirds, including herons, ibis, storks, terns and kingfishers.

Surprisingly, however, no ducks or geese were seen. In the trees were parrots and hawks, though the highlights of the trip were nightjars: a potoo spending a day asleep in a tree outside the lodge, and a flock of smaller nightjars following the boat home in the evening, eating the insects disturbed by its passage.

Edward Mayer gave us an insight into just how special our familiar swifts are, and why they are increasingly urgent need of our help. Swifts may well be the most aerial of all our birds: eating, drinking, sleeping and mating on the wing, and only landing to nest. The first flight of a swift fledgling when it leaves the nest doesn't take it to a nearby branch, but to Africa; a swift returning from migration travelled from Morocco to Cambridge in only two days! Their aerodynamic efficiency is still being studied by aircraft engineers. A swift can eat twenty thousand insects in a day, and in areas where mosquitoes carry malaria they may well make a significant contribution to human health. However, although swifts originally nested in holes in mature trees (and still do in the natural forests in Poland) across most of Europe forest trees are cut down before they reach maturity. So swifts are now largely dependent on holes in man-made structures, which were plentiful when natural ventilation of lofts was the norm. However air conditioning, grilles and badly fitted loft insulation now make

access much more difficult, and swifts are so faithful to their nest sites that many die trying to reach them through barriers we have created. They will take readily to nest boxes or hollow bricks inserted into walls; something known for five hundred years in Italy where aristocrats had swift towers as ours had dovecots. Since loss of nest sites appears to be a major cause of swifts declining by 3% a year, we need to ensure that colonies are protected and new sites made available if we want to keep that most evocative sound of summer evenings: swifts screaming round our buildings as they head to their nests.

[Last June and July a highly successful survey by GOS members identified a number of swift nest sites in Usk. In the next edition of *The Dipper*, we will report on this year survey.]

Our season of indoor talks reached a grand finale with Viola Ross-Smith's talk on her BTO research on gulls. Although a very familiar and well-researched species, new tracking devices are revealing how much more there is to know about their behaviour. In particular it turns out that individual gulls vary dramatically in their habits: some from the Orfordness colony in Suffolk migrate to Morocco for the winter, others travel no further than Hampshire. Food preferences are equally varied: early results from the Welney colony in Cumbria show that some gulls forage almost exclusively in cities, some in the Lake District, some in Morecambe Bay and others in the Irish Sea. In Suffolk one bird of a pair made daily trips to the Cambridge rubbish dump to feed: her partner foraged for himself in Aldeborough until their chicks hatched when he headed out to the North Sea to bring them fresh, rather than fried, fish. This faithfulness to a single food source creates unexpected interactions with humans. The BTO research was concerned with wind farms - one tracked bird regularly and safely flew over, under and around the turbines - but research in the Netherlands suggests that dependence on fishing fleets may also be an issue, with chicks losing weight at weekends when the boats were not at sea. The solar-powered GPS transmitters used to obtain these results now weigh less than half an ounce (11g), last many years and download data as soon as the bird comes within range of an aerial at the colony. The potential is clear from the remarkable fly-through of a day in the life of a St.Ives gull - no tourists were harmed in the making of this movie! - that can be found at <http://www.doarama.com/view/5612>.

GOS LIBRARY

Sadly, due to illness, Keith Jones has felt it necessary to step down as librarian. He will be sorely missed because, over more than five years, he used his enthusiasm for books to great effect by cataloguing all the books, videos and CDs and getting rid of old, unused material in order to make space to replace them with his own more enticing recommendations! His wife, Gill, kindly helped with the reorganisation.

Happily we will be able to keep the library open and available to members, thanks to Cathy Mendez and Sue Parsons, who have volunteered to administer the library when we have indoor meetings.

Forthcoming Indoor Meetings

Saturday 26 September 2015	<u>Birding Down Under - seven visits to Australia</u>	Steph Tyler
Saturday 10 October 2015	<u>Wild Birds and Disease</u>	Daria Dadam
Saturday 24 October 2015	<u>Birding in Madagascar</u>	John Clarke
Saturday 07 November 2015	<u>Shropshire Wildlife</u>	Jim Almond
Saturday 21 November 2015	<u>The High Arctic: birds and other wildlife in N Spitsbergen</u>	Al Venables
Saturday 05 December 2015	<u>Re-establishing Britain's first bird observatory</u>	Richard Brown & Giselle Eagle

Forthcoming Outdoor Meetings

Friday 14 August 2015 [St Brides Wentlooge](#) Al Venables

Sunday 04 October 2015	<u>MinnettsWood</u>	Lyndon Waters
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A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

APPLE DAY AT CEFN ILA, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18TH

The Woodland Trust has invited GOS to attend their Apple Day at Cefn Ila, near Usk, on Sunday October 18th, from 10 – 5pm. Shuttle buses will run from Usk throughout the day.

Other attendees/activities will include the Monmouthshire Bat Group, Scouts (be prepared to build a den) and apple pressing.

GOS would like to attend with our stand and Bird Quiz provided there are sufficient volunteers to man the stand – it's a long day and we would not intend that anyone should be on the stand for more than an hour or two, so we will need lots of volunteers throughout the day. Please let me know ASAP if you would like to help out and when, so that I can confirm whether we can attend.

Trevor Russell

01600 716266

tjrus2010@gmail.com

Save Kingcoed Meadows

Monmouthshire Meadows Group is inviting everyone to at Open Garden at Veddw House, Devauden, Monmouthshire NP16 6PH on Saturday 8th August from 2 to 5 pm by kind permission of Anne Wareham and Charles Hawes.

Entry £7.00 with all proceeds going to the Monmouthshire Meadows Group towards the purchase of Kingcoed Wildflower Meadows, Raglan

<http://www.monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk/>

GOS CONTACTS

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