

THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
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The Good News is that we have a new prospective Chairman!

Verity will be stepping down by rotation in January after 5 very productive years, and KEITH ROYLANCE has volunteered to take over at the 2017 AGM.

We would dearly like to see some fresh faces on the committee so if you think you have skills which would make a contribution to the running of the Society - YOUR Society, after all! - please get in touch with me.

The September meeting learned that [Hookpod](#), a company to whom GOS made a generous donation in 2014, is proving to be very successful. Hookpod make a device to attach to fish hooks on industrial long-line sea-fishing lines to prevent Albatross being lured to take the fishhooks. The device has been highly acclaimed and has been taken up by maritime nations including New Zealand, Japan and Brazil.

Closer to home, Goytre House Wood will shortly be assessed for fence repairs, hedgerow cutting and bramble clearance.

And now the Bad News:

We were dismayed, yet again, to learn that there are continuing disturbances at Llandegfedd Reservoir which are more likely to scare birds rather than encourage them. A footpath has been created which allows public access very close to the waters' edge. There appears to be little or no management control over what people do there now, so quad bikes, motorbikes and bicycles roam over the adjacent meadows, dogs run off-lead and jump into the water, dog-poo bags are left hanging on posts and even drones have been seen flying over the water! All this in addition to the continued neglect of the bird hides and birdwatching facilities. Our letter to the CEO of Welsh Water a year ago elicited a promise of co-operation, closer supervision and maintenance but that message has obviously not reached the reservoir management. We will write again asking how these activities support and justify the SSSI status of the reservoir.

A public meeting was held on Sept 19th to hear how protests against the M4 Relief Road route were being co-ordinated. GOS is against the proposed Black Route which will run across The Gwent Levels SSSI and we will add our voice to the more influential protests of GWT and/or RSPB.

We were also outraged to hear of raptor poisoning on the Glanus Estate to facilitate driven Red Grouse shooting. For more information please see the [WalesOnline newspaper article \(dated Sept 7th\)](#) .

Finally, a reminder. We really do need to have fresh faces on the Committee to help run the Society. You all have different skills and strengths and you definitely do not have to be a birdwatching expert – I'm not and I've been getting away with it for years!

Photographs in *The Dipper* – a good reason to receive your copy by email

The fabulous photographs in this issue have been provided by Steve Roberts, the Society's President. The photograph of the kingfisher brood really only works in colour so I apologise to those of you that receive a hard copy of *The Dipper*, that this image, in particular, will not be legible.

If there are any of you who would be happy to receive the electronic copy of *The Dipper*, please let Lesley Watson (membership@gwentbirds.org.uk) know.



Hobby chicks at Llangibby © Steve Roberts



Hobby chicks at Gobion © Steve Roberts

Newport Wetlands National Nature Reserve

Tom Dalrymple

Birds

Breeding Season

It's been a very exciting breeding season with a bittern booming for the first time in the reedbeds from mid-March until early May. Unfortunately he didn't manage to attract a mate, but it bodes well for the future. Bearded tit started off well with six pairs located on the first of the three monitoring sessions in May. However on the second session this had gone down to four pairs and on the third session this had gone down to just one pair. A survey to assess productivity from the first broods in July only located a couple of bearded tits. A further survey to assess total productivity will be conducted in September.

At Goldcliff Lagoons the waders did better than most years, although productivity was still not at sustainable levels: avocet fledged 10 chicks, lapwing fledged 8, redshank fledged 24, little ringed plover fledged 2, ringed plover fledged 2 and oyster catcher fledged none. Predation was the problem with buzzard and carrion crows the main culprits.

Two new methods were tried to reduce this predation. On RSPB recommendation, a special high powered laser was purchased and was used to scare off the buzzard and carrion crows without harming them. It shines a green disc near them which they react to by flying away because they don't know what it is and therefore think it is a potential threat to them. It was only effective when the bird was perched. It worked very well in the first few weeks of the breeding season, before there were any chicks about and the buzzard and crows were perching quite a lot around the lagoons. In fact the buzzard wasn't seen for several weeks after the first couple of days of using the laser. However, once a lot of chicks had hatched, the buzzard came back and wasn't perching, but was flying in quickly and attempting to take chicks, sometimes successfully. We also purchased a "Scary Man", which is a battery powered inflatable scarecrow. It self-inflates several times once every 18

minutes. Unfortunately, to prevent it scaring all the breeding waders, we had to screen it, so that it was only visible from above. This probably reduced its effectiveness.

Management

Goldcliff Lagoons became very low in late July due to the warm weather and lack of rain. Luckily we now have a large reservoir of water in Reedbed 11 and a pipe that connects it to our Transfer Ditch. We were able to transport water by gravity from Reedbed 11 to the eastern end of our Transfer Ditch, near Goldcliff Lagoons and then pump it the last few hundred meters into the lagoons. This undoubtedly saved a lot of invertebrates from dying off and therefore ensured more food for the passage and wintering birds that are now coming onto the lagoons. We are also using this time between the end of the breeding season and the bulk of wintering birds coming in, to de-silt parts of the lagoons and the ditches which connect them. A contractor is also replacing the remaining posts of the “Fox fence” that weren’t replaced last year. The 2 shingle islands have also had the vegetation growing on them cut. This is to stop bramble and shrubs becoming too established and to keep them as open as possible for roosting waders now and for breeding waders next spring.

Rush has been cut and baled across most of the lowland wet-grassland and we have now started to raise the water levels, again using water from our new reservoir in Reedbed 11.

Twelve new National Nature Reserve signs with information panels have been installed across the reserve. New directional signage is in the process of being ordered and will be installed in the next few months.

Other wildlife

30 reptile monitoring sheets were put out around Uskmouth with Mark Barber from ARC in March. So far only grass snakes have been recorded under them, plus a water shrew! Tara Okon, the RSPB Education Officer at Newport Wetlands, found an unusual looking weevil at Uskmouth whilst “bug-hunting” with a school group. She sent a photo to be identified and it turned out to be *Platyrhinus resinosus*. This is classified as Nationally Notable B and there are no records for it for SE Wales on the NBN Gateway. It feeds on the fungus King Alfred’s Cakes or Cramp-balls, *Daldinia concentrica*. Its common name is the cramp-ball fungus weevil.

Colour-ringed Great White Egrets

A Great White Egret ringing programme has been initiated this year in the Somerset Levels and the RSPB would like to hear from anyone seeing a colour-ringed bird, so they can understand more about the birds' post-breeding dispersal and movement around the country. Birds have a white three-letter code on a red ring on the left leg. Please report any sightings via the EURING website, www.cr-birding.org or directly to Amy or Alison at Amy.King@rspb.org.uk or ajm@alisonmorgan.co.uk.



Kingfisher brood at Gobion © Steve Roberts

BBS: My First Year

Andrew Cormack

I've contributed weekly records to the British Trust for Ornithology's Garden Bird Watch for many years, but had always been nervous of volunteering for their Breeding Bird Survey. BBS requires surveyors to be able to identify birds by sound as well as sight and I wasn't sure my skills were up to that. GOS walks are a great way to learn, though, and more experienced members were happy to help and reassure me that I could achieve the required standard. After a winter of studying the BTO's CDs of songs and calls a chat with Jerry Lewis, our local BBS organiser, resulted in me being allocated a survey route in the Golden Valley, just over the border in Herefordshire.

Most BBS routes consist of two separate tracks, each 1km long, within an Ordnance Survey grid square. However half of my square is military property so I just have one track. For surveying, birds are counted in each 200m segment so our first visit was to identify landmarks at the start and end of each segment. BBS also requires a summary of the habitats on each segment: my niece and nephew enjoyed pacing out the route and recording the presence of woods, scrub, hedges, meadows and other habitats that might be of interest to birds.

BBS involves two morning survey visits during the breeding season. On each occasion you walk the designated route noting all birds seen or heard and how far from the track they are. Unlike Garden Bird Watch, where you just record the largest number seen at one time, on BBS the aim is to count every individual. On my first visit I noted 149 birds in 45 minutes and may well have missed some while scribbling notes. Thinking "blue tit", "great tit", "wren"... at that rate required a surprising level of concentration.

On both visits I recorded 29 species, though differences between the two lists produced a year total of 38. Five of those – marsh tit, skylark, song thrush, spotted flycatcher and house sparrow – are on the UK's red list because of severe population declines, identified from BBS data over many years. Even once familiar birds may be in urgent need of monitoring to determine what is going wrong. The highlight, though, was discovering that I have all three UK woodpeckers in my square. From the habitat survey I'd expected green and great spotted but my first sighting of a lesser spotted woodpecker – on a garden bird-feeder – was a very pleasant surprise.

Although the number of BBS squares in Wales has increased over recent years, more volunteers are always welcome. Getting to know an area in detail is fascinating: I wouldn't have expected to hear fourteen chiffchaffs in only a kilometre. And don't be put off, as I was, by the need to identify birds by sound. Some species are actually easier that way: even though my marsh tit was clearly visible only a few feet away I was only confident of the identification when it called. I'm slowly getting the hang of distinguishing chiffchaff and willow warbler by sight, but by voice it's easy. In any case, BBS is about trends: whether bird populations are stable, increasing or decreasing. For that it's more important to have a consistent observer than an expert one. Though looking back at the records from when my square was last surveyed, from 2005 to 2009, species and numbers do look reasonably comparable with my 2016 results.

Information about BBS results, and how to join, is at <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs>

Gwent UKBS Report for June 2016

Chris Hatch

Highlights

The Savi's Warbler was still present at Newport Wetlands (1st). A Broad-billed Sandpiper was seen at Newport Wetlands (18th-19th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A Curlew Sandpiper was present (9th-11th). A female Marsh Harrier was seen on several occasions during the month.

Other sites

Two Nightjars were heard churring at Wentwood (4th), with at least three also present at Beacon Hill (9th) and one at Trelech (21st). A Kittiwake was reported from Llandegfedd reservoir (24th).



Goosander on nest at Gobion © Steve Roberts

Gwent UKBS Report for July 2016

Chris Hatch

Highlights

A Spoonbill was present at Newport Wetlands (from 12th). Up to two Ospreys were reported from Llandegfedd Reservoir (12th to 26th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

Waders dominated the month's sightings, with birds of note amongst large numbers of other species including two Curlew Sandpipers (21st), a Little Stint (21st), and a Spotted Redshank (from 8th). Other sightings included male and female Marsh Harriers (from 8th), a female Garganey (21st), a Mediterranean Gull (23rd) and nine Yellow Wagtails (28th).

Other sites

A Common Scoter was seen at Peterstone Gout (7th), with two birds of the same species at Llandegfedd reservoir (21st) and four at Collister Pill (22nd). A Nightjar was heard at St. James, Tredegar (23rd) and A Grasshopper Warbler was present at Waunafon Bog (26th).



Long eared owl chick on the Blorenge © Steve Roberts

Highlights

A Wryneck was seen at Porton (30th). Single Ospreys were reported from Llandegfedd reservoir (4th and 16th). Single Wood Sandpipers were recorded at Newport Wetlands (5th, 17th to 18th and 26th). A Spoonbill was seen flying over Pontypool (12th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

28 Yellow Wagtails were observed (3rd). Six Little Stints were recorded (20th), together with a Spotted Redshank. Up to nine Curlew Sandpipers were reported (31st). A female Marsh Harrier was seen (31st). Good numbers of waders on passage were reported.

Other sites

A Gannet was seen offshore at Sudbrook (21st). Around 40 Red Grouse were reported from the Blorenge (29th). Large numbers of waders were reported along the estuary together with a significant visible migration of passerines.

Raptor poisoning case in neighbouring county

An article which appeared in Wales Online on 7 September 2016 detailed an inquiry into poisoned birds on the Glanusk estate, owned by the Legge-Bourke family.

Eight Buzzards, five Red Kites, two Ravens and five Pheasants (used as bait for the other birds) were discovered on the estate in 2013. A spokesman for the estate said: 'This was an abhorrent incident at the time and deeply upsetting for the owners and trustees of the estate who were disappointed there was not enough evidence for the CPS to prosecute.'

TV wildlife expert, Iolo Williams, was quoted in the Wales Online Article as saying 'It is the second worst incident of bird of prey poisoning in the UK in the last 40 years. It's horrific, disgusting, absolutely disgusting. This is something that belongs in Victorian times.'

A Dyfed-Powys Police spokeswoman said 'Dyfed-Powys Police take allegations of wildlife crime very seriously and investigates all incidents reported to us. Following information received in 2012 and 2013, relating to the deaths of raptors in Powys, a full investigation was carried out in partnership with the RSPB, the National Wildlife Crime Unit and the wildlife management team in the Welsh Government. During the investigation a number of search warrants under the Wildlife and Countryside Act were executed. Plastic feed bags containing the corpses of seven Buzzards and three Red Kites were found inside some vehicle tyres stacked beside a pheasant pen. The poison bendiocarb was present in all the birds. A search of the remaining land found a Red Kite, a Common Buzzard, two Ravens and a Pheasant carcass all of which tested positive for bendiocarb. Two people were arrested in connection with the incidents. A file of evidence was subsequently submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service who advised that there was insufficient evidence to proceed with a prosecution.



Long eared owls on the Blorenges © Steve Roberts

CALM objections to the proposed M4 relief road

Alan Williams

Verity and Alan attended the CALM (Campaign Against the Levels Motorway) meeting on 21 September. The meeting was to co-ordinate the presentation of objections at the upcoming Public Inquiry on the proposal to develop the M4 relief road at a cost of over £1 billion which is projected to take 7-10 minutes off the current time to traverse Newport. The primary objection of the environmental groups to this is that the habitat to be destroyed by the development is designated as SSSI status and as such should be protected. The mitigation measures will not be able to replace the unique reed environment, the ancient woodland and other special habitat features to be affected. In addition CALM believes that air pollution including CO² and NO_x will increase due to the extra traffic generated. The cost is out of proportion to the time saved and the environmental costs are unacceptable. Local representatives also object on the noise, effects on local businesses and general inconvenience the development will cause.

At the meeting the composition of the team to present the objections was outlined: it will be led by a group of barristers who are giving their time free of charge and who will be advised by an impressive list of specialists, mainly professors in their subjects. The chairman of CALM, James Byrne from the Welsh Wildlife Trust, was confident that we have a good chance of persuading the Public Inquiry Inspector to rule against the road development. CALM will need to raise some money to pay the expenses of the people giving their evidence and details of how you will be able to contribute will be posted on the GOS and CALM websites.

There is more information on the GWT website: <http://www.gwentwildlife.org/how-you-can-help/m4-relief-road-help-us-protect-gwent-levels> .



Long eared owls on the Blorenge © Steve Roberts

Future Indoor Meetings

Date	Title	Speaker/Leader
Saturday 01 October 2016	Texas birds	Mark Hebden
Saturday 15 October 2016	Birds and climate change	Rob Thomas
Saturday 29 October 2016	Bird migration - why and how	Alan Williams
Saturday 12 November 2016	Birds and other wildlife of Namibia	Al Venables
Saturday 26 November 2016	Morocco: the coast, mountains and desert	Tom Chinnick
Saturday 10 December 2016	Ring reading: an exercise in citizen science	Steve Williams
Saturday 21 January 2017	AGM	GOS members

Future Outdoor Meetings

Date	Title	Speaker/Leader
Saturday 19 November 2016	Ynysfro Reservoirs	Ian Walker

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