

THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
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KEITH JONES, 1947 – 2016

Keith Jones, who has died aged 69, was the GOS Librarian from 2010 until illness forced him to step down in 2015. During that time he also doubled as Dipper Editor for a couple of years, ably supported by his wife, Gill.

For over forty years ornithology was a consistent thread in Keith's interests though early on it had to compete with an enthusiastic following of rock groups and blues music, seeing or even meeting most of the contemporary groups of the time (on congratulating B.B. King on a fine concert, B.B. King replied "that's the first time a white man has called me 'Sir'"). Caving and scuba diving filled any gaps in his busy life.

Keith was a mental health nurse and a tutor on mental health training courses.

Ill health caused him to take early retirement and Keith responded by picking up the threads of an ornithological interest which had started in the early 70's when he joined GOS (Monmouthshire Ornithological Society, MOS, in those days) and he and Al Venables became involved in the BTO's Birds of Estuaries Enquiry (BEE). Keith was recognised as a very enthusiastic birder and his passion for counting and recording - which became very much his watchword - was immediately apparent.

In 1976 Keith was the lead figure for Gwent in the compilation of the BTO's Ornithological Sites Register (OSR). In the following year he co-authored sections of the Birds of Gwent 1977 that dealt with both the OSR and the BEE.

He took over as GOS Librarian in 2010, a role he took on with relish given his love and knowledge of books. His expertise was particularly appreciated because it was necessary to reduce the number of books and his ability to distinguish those which had value and could be sold against others which were best offered to members free of charge was especially welcomed. Keith was a Committee member and he held the role of Librarian for five years until ill-health forced him to stand down. His legacy will be the comprehensive cataloguing system of books, CD's and videos that will enable us to manage the library in a professional manner for the foreseeable future. For a couple of years during this period he also managed to find time to edit The Dipper, and his innovative 'Snippets' section allowed fascinating articles to surface, when they might otherwise have been overlooked or forgotten.

The GOS Sightings page has not been the same without his meticulously compiled long lists of sightings (still that devotion to counting and recording!) when on his daily walks. He must have walked miles and had very sharp eyes and ears to identify so many species. His passion for birdwatching shone through.

Keith made an enthusiastic and significant contribution to the running of GOS and he will be sorely missed.

The sight and sound of Swifts flying over the village of Bedwas was one of the joys of summer. Sadly in recent years the numbers have diminished and last year only three pairs bred here. The birds nested on the eaves of older buildings, in particular the Junior School and Police Station. There were often more Swifts about in early May than actually stayed to breed so Jackie and I had the idea that nest boxes might boost the number breeding at the school.

Alison Jones, Caerphilly County Ecologist, was contacted and we met up at the school to view the site and discuss the idea with the headmaster Mr. Warren. Bedwas Junior School is a Green School and the idea of nest boxes was greeted with enthusiasm. Katie Hillier, a teacher at the school, agreed to coordinate activities. Alison suggested that Andy Wilkinson, Senior Environment Ranger for Caerphilly Borough Council, get involved and he came to the school to make nest boxes with the pupils. This activity was a great success and the pupils were very proud of their nest box building, making boxes for Blue Tits as well as Swifts. The school had by this time purchased three Swift nest boxes from the RSPB and it was time to get them installed. Kate Hillier managed to persuade Caerphilly County Borough Council maintenance department to carry out this work and on Friday 18th March five nest boxes for Swifts were erected. The nest holes were initially covered up and opened on 1st May.

Prior to housing development in the village Lesser Whitethroats were regular breeders. Since that time also the number of House Martins has reduced dramatically and there is no longer a local Sand Martin colony on the River Rhymney.

On 11th May BBC Radio Wales came to Bedwas Junior School having heard about the Swift nest box project via Alan Rosney, the Glamorgan Bird Club Swift Champion. (Alan not having a swift nest box site in Glamorgan asked Jackie and me if he could use the Bedwas Junior School project which, is actually in the Gwent recording area). Swift nest boxes San Frontiers!

On the day the Swifts must have been informed that the Beeb were in town as they put on a tremendous display, calling and flying low over the school. Pauline Smith of BBC Wales interviewed the pupils and their teacher Katie Hillier. The children were delighted to be involved and get their chance to be on the radio. Pauline then interviewed Alan and myself to give some background on the project and specific information on Swifts. The programme Country Focus was broadcast on Sunday 15th May at 07:03 and is available on BBC iplayer for a further month.

Currently there are eight Swift in Bedwas (last year there were six) and we have seen them using the traditional nest sites in the school, though none have yet been seen occupying the nest boxes.

On Thursday 19th May Jackie and I met up with Kerry Galey from Caerphilly County Borough Councils parks department. Kerry is the warden of the Rhymney River Walk which passes through Bedwas and Trethomas. We had suggested to Kerry that we should encourage Sand Martins back to nest in the area as they did at one time. We located a likely looking spot and plans are now afoot to create suitable nesting habitat ready for next year.

It has been rewarding for everyone concerned to attempt to boost the number of Swifts breeding in Bedwas. We must wait now to see if the project is a success. It has already been agreed, if things work out well, that a camera should be put in one of the boxes ready for next year so that the pupils can view the secret world of Swifts.

We would like to thank all those involved for their help, advice and enthusiasm.

Reports of Spring Indoor Meetings

Gulls are among our most familiar birds: as Luke Phillips pointed out they are easy to watch in supermarket car parks and town centres. And most of us can probably at least identify adult herring, lesser black-backed and black-headed gulls with reasonable confidence. But some species don't reach those familiar plumages for three years. Luke aimed to help us identify both the age and species of those missing birds. When young gulls moult, their new feathers follow a regular sequence of plumages from juvenile brown to adult grey and white. Body and wing patterns change at different rates, so a bird whose back and wings don't match should be obvious. Working out whether each "half" is closer to juvenile or adult plumage should let you work out the age. After the tea break, we moved on to less familiar gulls that may turn up in the UK. These tend to be similar to one of our native species, but with one or more key differences. For example once you've identified a gull as "like" a black-headed, check for the white wingtips and red bill that mean it's actually a mediterranean gull, increasingly common in the UK. By the end of the evening I wasn't the only one promising to take a closer look at gulls in future.

Ian Spence and Anne Brenchley discussed how to use the BTO's Birdtrack website to keep personal records of sightings and contribute to wider surveys. Data from Birdtrack is used in county reports, national atlases, and individual studies. For example records show that sand martins are now arriving in the UK twenty days earlier than forty years ago, while information on the prevalence of buzzards in Norfolk provided evidence for a successful wildlife crime prosecution. You can also examine your own records by species, time period or location - easier than a notebook - or list what species others have seen in a particular region or location. While Birdtrack can be used to enter individual sightings, complete lists of all species identified during a site visit or walk provide more information for researchers. The Birdtrack home page shows the percentage of lists that include a particular species, giving an immediate impression of how it varies through the year. The discipline of entering complete lists also means you are more likely to record (unknowingly, at the time!) the last date in autumn when a summer migrant was seen. The site is continually being improved to add new features. As well as the original method of identifying the OS Grid square where records were made it's now possible to define and save areas that you regularly visit. A recent update added the ability to enter overseas sightings, which will be forwarded to the relevant national birding society. Birdtrack is at <http://app.bto.org/birdtrack> or you can download a free app from the relevant smartphone store. Kelvin Jones described the work of the British Trust for Ornithology in Wales and across the UK. Rather than being a campaigning charity, the BTO concentrates on gathering information about birds so that conservation activities can be informed by the best possible data and science. Most of this data is gathered by volunteers - more than 40,000 people regularly count birds for the BTO. Long-term national datasets allow the identification and analysis of trends: the BTO has continuous records of heronries since 1920, and of other common birds since 1933. Any bird sighting can be submitted to the BTO, using Birdtrack. The Breeding Bird Survey ensures that records are obtained from across the country, not just birding hotspots, using a standard protocol to enable accurate comparisons between years. Having several major estuaries, Wales plays a significant part in the Wetland Bird Survey, which counts the internationally-significant populations of waders that spend the winter in the UK. Other surveys look at species or locations of particular concern: radio-tracking and other observations are currently being used to determine how birds use the Severn Estuary, to inform future tidal power

developments; bird health data suggests that greenfinches may be developing some immunity to trichomoniasis; a garden feeding survey shows goldfinch tastes changing from niger seed to sunflower hearts. As well as these population studies, the BTO tracks individual birds. More than a million birds were ringed in 2014 and a quarter of a million ringed birds re-identified. Thanks to ringing we know how long birds can live – a manx shearwater was found on

Bardsey 51 years after it had been ringed there – and how far they can travel – an arctic tern ringed on Anglesey was found in South Australia. Larger birds can now be tracked throughout their journeys, using geolocators or satellite tags. Thanks to these we now know that both cuckoos and swifts stop off in West Africa on their northern migrations, apparently feeding on swarms of termites in the rainy season. You can even track the daily progress of some cuckoos at <http://www.bto.org/science/migration/tracking-studies/cuckoo-tracking>

GOS walk to Mynydd Llangatwg on 12 March 2016

Nicholas Beswick

Ten GOS members met for the Mynydd Llangatwg walk in near perfect conditions: fine and little wind. Our route did not follow the walks described in the book as we took advantage of the weather to go to the summit (no passport control on the Brecknock border, thankfully). After logging a Jay and a Goldcrest near Ty-yn-y-Coed, the walk proceeded up the mountain to be greeted by a profusion of singing Skylarks but little else. A single Red Grouse was flushed. We were rewarded by spectacular if hazy views on reaching the site of the Duke of Beaufort's bird house on the summit but just a distant sighting of a Golden Plover, a passing Kestrel and more Skylarks. Our return route via the old Brynmawr reservoir (sadly drained) and Hafod Farm was more rewarding, with Red Kite and Buzzard circling over. Proceeding along Hafod Road brought Fieldfares, a Mistle Thrush and an overflying Curlew. Distant raptors over the Clydach Gorge posed ID challenges, with at least five species present, though no sign of Iolo Williams' Hen Harrier. A total of 34 species was perhaps a little disappointing, with no early spring migrants, but the walk showed the potential of the area for providing good birds throughout the year.

Goytre House Wood Walk on 28th May

Alan Williams

It was good to see 10 stalwarts turn up for this annual walk around Goytre (Penperlleni). The Society's wood is the first port of call, but first we checked the pond below the lane for the Little Grebe. The birds were seen but as in past years the breeding attempt has failed due to predation by Grey Heron it is likely to be unsuccessful again this year.

The wood turned up a few species including one of the two pairs of Spotted Flycatcher present this year. Other woodland birds were seen here but only Great Spotted Woodpecker. Along the canal we saw Mallard and Moorhen.

The walk takes us to Goytre Wharf and where stopped in the cafe for a welcome coffee and cake. We then continue through Goytre Hall Wood (not to be confused with Goytre House) where the introduced Redwood Pines were noted. The return journey turned up the day's raptors of Sparrowhawk, Buzzard and Red Kite.

Everybody seemed to enjoy a straightforward walk in pleasant weather with a good selection of birds.

Species seen/heard: House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Swallow, Bullfinch, Nuthatch, Little Grebe, Song Thrush, Willow Warbler, Wood Pigeon, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Robin, Blackcap,

Spotted Flycatcher, Mistle Thrush, Treecreeper, Carrion Crow, Chiffchaff, Mallard, House Martin, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Red Kite, Coal Tit, Green Finch, Moorhen, Dunnock, Raven, Goldfinch, Goldcrest, Spotted Flycatcher, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Magpie and Grey Heron.

Białowieża Forest under threat - sign to save it

The Białowieża Forest in Poland is the only remaining primeval forest in Europe. Five species of owl, ten species of woodpecker, six species of tit and four species of flycatcher are found there. A three-fold increase in the amount of logging has been bulldozed through by the new Polish Minister of the Environment, under the pretext of 'combating' the Spruce Bark Beetle. The Minister has dismissed 32 of the 39 members of the State Council for the Conservation of Nature, the vast majority of whom are outstanding scientific authorities, who have protested loudly against an increase in logging in Białowieża. Now, more than half of the SCCN consists of foresters and representatives of forestry institutions...

Please help protect this magical forest by signing the petition on [http://kochampuszcze.pl/ilovebialowieza/?ct=t\(Subscribers_Issue_15_15_2015\)&mc_cid=5c92e21815&mc_eid=6f0aac5284](http://kochampuszcze.pl/ilovebialowieza/?ct=t(Subscribers_Issue_15_15_2015)&mc_cid=5c92e21815&mc_eid=6f0aac5284) .

Petition for the Ban on Driven Grouse Shooting:

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/125003>

There are currently just over 40000 signatures and there needs to be 100000 by September for Parliament to debate the issue. Driven Grouse Shooting is the major factor of the decline in Hen Harrier numbers in Scotland and elsewhere.

Interesting Times

For those of us that thought a glossy ibis was exciting enough, May has bought a succession of surprises: the lammergeier in Sudbrook [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-south-east-wales-36315534>] putting the Cwmbran hoopoe some what in the shade, a golden pheasant in Rogerstone to the Savi's warbler at the end of the month. As always the [website](#) keeps you up to date on the latest news.



Photographs: Keith Roylance

Snippets

This year has been no exception for tits finding receptacles for nests with one in the letter box at Magor Marsh and [Cwmbran Life](#) has been reporting on a blue tits nest outside a local pub.

New post on Cwmbran Life

Seven blue tits have been born in the cigarette butt bin at a Cwmbran pub

by [admin](#)

Smokers at a Cwmbran have had to be extra careful when stubbing out their cigarettes since Sunday. A [blue tit](#) decided to make the cigarette butt bin on the wall outside the [Dorallt](#) her home and today she gave birth.

[Read more of this post](#)

[admin](#) | May 24, 2016 at 6:32 pm | Categories: [News](#) | URL: <http://wp.me/p3XvLS-2hP>

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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 17 September 2016	Llanthony Wood and Valley	Keith Trott
Saturday 19 November 2016	Ynysfro Reservoirs	Ian Walker

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