

THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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GOS WEB SITE: www.gwentbirds.org.uk

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The recent shut-down of the GOS website was the main topic of discussion. Seems it was due to shenanigans between the joint owners of our server resulting in them switching it off completely - which caused them to lose our business as a consequence. We were innocent bystanders in all of this but have now signed with a new service provider who quickly got the website back online again.

An invitation from Fochriw Primary School led to Keith Roylance giving a talk on Red Kites to the little ones, their current school project. Little or not, they stumped our expert with two questions; How High do Kites fly and How Many Kite Species are there worldwide? (there are 6 species, Google it) But Keith was not alone, none of the Committee members knew either!

As reported earlier, British Birds magazine duly featured GOS as their Bird Club of the Month, in a recent edition. The payback was that GOS members could take up their offer of a reduced subscription rate. Did anyone take advantage?

Tom Dalrymple reported a Spring of heavy predation on the Newport Wetlands Reserve – only 2 fledged Avocet, no Lapwing survivors and a solitary booming Bittern who didn't seem to attract a mate. Tom's full report can be found elsewhere in this edition.

Some **SUMMER SHOW DATES FOR YOUR DIARY – Do please go or help out at our stand!**

- **Cefn Ila BioBlitz Day, Saturday, July 8th**, 11am – 11pm. GOS will be leading bird ID walks throughout the day and there are many other activities to get involved in.
- **Magor Marsh Summer Fun Day, July 15th**, 1 – 5pm. GOS will not only be manning the bird hide - and hoping for clear views through the reeds of birds on the huge lake - but conducting bird quizzes too.

Some trees in Goytre House Wood are in need of TLC. Some no-growth has been noted as have broken branches and fallen trees so a safety inspection by a qualified tree surgeon is being planned.

The M4 Relief Road enquiry is still underway and expected to continue into September with findings not published until early 2018. A meeting to hear a summary update will be held on July 28th at the Newport Civic Centre.

Meanwhile a planning application has been made to install a ZIP WIRE from the Celtic Manor Resort to Caerleon. Since this will cross the river Usk and potentially cause damage to flying waders and ducks, GOS is asking for a full Environmental Impact Assessment as part of the planning process.

MORE ITEMS FOR YOUR DIARY

- Richard Clarke is repeating his survey of breeding gulls in Gwent. If you know of *any* breeding gulls, anywhere but especially urban breeders in town centres, please let Richard know by emailing him: chykembro2@aol.com
- Mary Colwell is organising a CURLEW CONFERENCE in January 2018 with a view to setting up working groups to protect the diminishing numbers of Curlew. She hopes to attract farmers, landowners, conservationists, politicians and birdwatchers to try to halt the decline. More details will be published as they become available.

Website Issues

Members who use our website regularly will have noticed a few problems recently for which we apologise. The website has had to be moved from one server to a different one for reasons beyond our control.

Now that the site is back up and running correctly some users have still reported problems. If you are having problems please try clearing the cache from your computer, this is an area that retains information on the websites you have used so that it can direct you back to them quickly, however in the case of the GOS website it will be directing you back to the original server. In most cases you can locate the cache via the settings link on the computer.

If you have had the website listed as a 'Favourite' you will need to locate Gwent Ornithological Society via a search engine and log in via that route and then indicating you require the current site to be a 'Favourite'

Presentation on Red Kites to Fochriw Primary School Keith Roylance

GOS was approached in early April this year with a view to giving a presentation on Red Kites to years 5 & 6 at Fochriw Primary School. The pupils see Red Kites regularly above their school and with the encouragement of the Head Teacher and class teachers were undertaking a project on Red Kites prior to a visit to Gigrin Farm, Kite feeding station, Rhayader.

The school initially wanted the presentation immediately after the Easter holidays. However the collection of data, maps, photos and sound recordings of Kites and its subsequent organisation into a flowing presentation took some time to prepare! So on 23rd May, Chairman, Keith Roylance visited the school and gave a PowerPoint presentation on all aspects of Red Kites with particular reference to their presence in Gwent and South Wales. Facts and figures on nests, egg clutches, incubation time, time to fledge and feeding habits were provided along with a number of photos of nests, young in nests and flight shots.

The reason for wing tagging and how to read wing tags was also highlighted.

The presentation ended with a question and answer session which showed the interest the children have in the birds and the environment in which they live.

The school has an eco-group and prior to the talk they had held a plant pot sale and raised £58 which they presented to GOS as a donation towards our work in helping the environment for which we are very grateful.

GOS presented a copy of 'Birds of Gwent' and a few copies of our annual report to the school for inclusion in their library.



We would like to thank Mrs Sharon Pascoe, Head Teacher, for the opportunity to give the talk and the welcome we received at the school.

Thanks should also go to our President Steve Roberts for supplying the nest and young bird photos and to Chris Field for supplying a map for inclusion in the presentation.

Newport Wetlands National Nature Reserve

Tom Dalrymple

Birds

Lots of activity on the saline lagoons as usual this spring. The maximum count for lapwing for the whole site was 35, the maximum number of nests was 11. All of these nests were inside the fox fence area, of the 11 nests, 5 hatched, but so far we haven't found any fledged young. The maximum count for avocet was 93 and 34 nests, although there were several later nests possibly as a result of failing the first time. Of these nests the vast majority appeared to be incubated for the full period, suggesting a low egg predation rate. However despite this only 2 chicks have survived to fledge.

Redshank fared much better 55 chicks fledged from 30 pairs. 2 pairs of ringed plover fledged 6 chicks, 2 pairs of little ringed plover fledged 2 chicks and still have 1 half-grown chick. There have been a maximum of 12 oystercatchers but only 1 chick fledged.

Skylark numbers were down on previous years with a maximum of 10 territories. The Bittern boomed throughout the spring, but no sign of a mate was witnessed. Marsh Harriers did better, successfully breeding and fledging 1 chick.

Unusual sightings for this period include a 2 cattle egrets that hung around the central grasslands from the end of March until the 18th of April. A drake garganey was seen in the central grasslands on the 29th of March and up to 3 were seen in the Lagoons throughout May. A red-rumped swallow seen on the 30th March. A Temminck's stint hung around the lagoons in early May. Curlew sandpiper and spoonbill were seen several times towards the end of the month.

Management

The reedbeds at Newport Wetlands are growing in a series of man-made bunded lagoons, due to their size these lagoons have to be inspected under the Reservoir Act by a qualified engineer. In the beginning of March the engineer organised an aerial survey of the reservoir bunds by drone survey.

Professor Martin Bell from Reading University met up with Kevin in March to discuss how drones might be used to map sediment layers on an important Mesolithic site in the Severn Estuary that is also part of the NNR.

A film company were also interested in using drones to film part of an archaeological television programme in the same area. All of these activities we felt we were able to accommodate without affecting the birds by restricting how and when the drones were flown. There have been several reports of members of the public flying drones, this unauthorised flying could well become a problem if drones continue to be popular.

Steve Chamberlain from Keep Wales Tidy organised another foreshore clear up in March, assisted by RSPB, NRW and Newport City Council volunteers. Rob Magee and Tom Dalrymple gave a group of biology and environmental science A-level students from Gloucestershire college a guided tour in March.

Water voles seemed to have made it across the Gwent Levels from Magor, we have had several confirmed sightings now.

We have fitted little watersheds to the hide shutters that face south or west. We found that rain was running down the shutters soaking into the ply and starting to delaminate it.

Kev trapped a Blair's mocha, the first for Wales ever!!!



I tagged along with the Special Area Conservation team to carry out saltmarsh monitoring on the foreshore. When the data for the whole of the Severn Estuary is collated it will help inform management, (particularly grazing) here on the reserve. The biggest challenge in recent weeks has been preventing the lagoons from drying out completely. We have used our abstraction licence to pump from Monk's ditch when there has been water to pump! Last week we had to resort to pumping from the grasslands.

Fox fence maintenance this time of year involves cutting back vegetation from the electric lines, whilst doing this last weekend we discovered that a badger had managed to dig under the fence, breaking through the underground netting. How many wader chicks were eaten by the badger this year is not clear.



Events

- Darryl Spittle led a very well received dawn chorus walk on the 7th of May.
- Roger James led the Wetlands in bloom walk on the 17th of June for 27 people.

Highlights

Two Temminck's Stints were present at Newport Wetlands (2nd to 9th). Single Spoonbills were also seen at Newport Wetlands (2nd and 30th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

Three drake Garganey were reported (12th). Several Curlew Sandpipers were recorded during the month. An Arctic Skua was seen offshore (5th).

Other sites

Two Arctic Skuas were observed offshore at Peterstone Gout (6th). Single Merlins were reported from Peterstone Gout (6th), Mynydd Maen (7th) and The Bloreng (7th). A Turtle Dove was seen at Nash (9th). A pair of Red-breasted Mergansers were seen briefly at Llandegfedd Reservoir (18th) and a male Scaup was also present at this site (20th). Two Nightjars were reported from Lasgarn Woods (26th). Two Manx Shearwaters were seen offshore at Peterstone Gout (27th).

Highlights

An Osprey was present at Llandegfedd reservoir (25th to 29th). A Quail was reported from Cross Ash (25th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A White Wagtail was recorded (10th). A Fulmar was seen offshore (12th).

Other sites

The male Scaup remained at Llandegfedd reservoir (1st), with two Sandwich Terns also reported from this site (20th) and six Common Scoters present (29th). At Peterstone Gout, birds seen offshore included three Kittiwakes (6th) a single Storm Petrel (9th), a Gannet (9th) and 475 Manx Shearwaters (11th): five Avocets were also present at this location (30th) . Three Nightjars were reported from Wentwood (22nd).

Eight hardy GOS members risked the Bank Holiday weather to tour the Garn Lakes local nature reserve near Blaenavon with Nicholas Beswick. In the event, we were lucky, missing the overnight storms and the persistent mizzle later in the day. Our route took a tour round the lakes, up to the Whistle Inn and back along the footpath south of the railway to Coity Tip where we ventured into the mist to see an elusive Little Grebe on Coity Pond. Then it was back past Big Pit to see the site prepared in the hope of attracting Lapwings to breed, round the fishing pond and the reedbed area, and return to the start. The walk started with a snatch of unfamiliar song – perhaps a Wood Warbler – but not repeated; it wasn't really the weather for singing. A juvenile Dipper on the bottom lake and a juvenile Grey Wagtail nearby were welcome evidence of local breeding but the families of Canada Geese on the top lake were less so. Highlight of the day, though, was a pair of Cuckoos in flight, with the female performing her bubbling song. Stonechat, Redstart and Lesser Redpoll were also good finds. Our species tally of 41 confirmed the value and diversity of the area – and that was without Blue Tit or Feral Pigeon!

GOS Walk: Blaen Bran Community Woodland, Upper Cwmbran

Ten GOS members braved a drizzly start on 10th June for a walk through Blaen Bran Community Woodland. Unfortunately the weather forecast had got it wrong and the 'short shower' forecast turned in to non-stop rain for the two and a half hour walk.

After an initial climb from the car park where Willow Warbler, Blackcap, Linnets and Bullfinch were noted we entered into a more sheltered wooded area. Chaffinch, Greenfinch and Chiffchaff were heard whilst Blue & Great Tit were also present along with Dunnock & Robin. Pied Wagtail and a lone Mallard were at the disused reservoir whilst large Carp were also visible in the water.

Whilst Swallows were evident in the area, at least one Cuckoo was heard on a regular basis and the yaffle of Green Woodpecker was heard. The bird sounds lessened as we walked through the clear fell area which is being re-planted with native deciduous trees. Stonechat, Tree Pipit and Goldcrest were additions to the list as we made our way back to the start.

It took a little time to dry out but a total of 31 species on such a damp day was some consolation.

Species:

Mallard, Woodpigeon, Cuckoo, Green Woodpecker, Swallow, House Martin, Tree Pipit, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Stonechat, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Goldcrest, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Jay, Magpie, Carrion Crow, Raven, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnets, Bullfinch.

Outdoor Meetings

<u>Date</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Leader</u>
Saturday 12 August 2017	Mynydd Glanlochdy	Richard Dowle

Indoor Meetings

<u>Date</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Speaker</u>
Saturday 30 September	Geo-locating Greenshank	Nick Christian
Saturday 14 October	Forest Eagles	Steve Roberts
Saturday 21 October (Change of date)	Managing the Newport Wetland Reserve	Tom Dalrymple
Saturday 11 November	Saving near-extinct birds in the Seychelles	Al Venables
Saturday 25 November	W Papua & Halmahera - Painting Birds of Paradise in paradise	John Gale
Saturday 09 December	The Denny - Gwent's Bird island	Richard Clarke
Saturday 20 January 2018	AGM and Members' Evening	GOS members

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