

THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Registered charity number 1088830

GOS WEB SITE: www.gwentbirds.org.uk

Newsletter No. 153

Winter 2019

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All photographs provided by Keith Roylance

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2020

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday, January 25th, 2020, in the Village Hall, Goytre, starting at 7:30pm

All current Officers and Committee Members have indicated their willingness to stand for re-election and can be elected en bloc.

We currently have vacancies for the Annual Report Editor and the Outdoor Programme Secretary – nominations for either or both positions are invited from the membership.

Nominations should be signed by both the Proposer and Seconder with the agreement of the nominee, or e-mail Catherine Gregory with details.

(Secretary@gwentbirds.org.uk)

Nominations must be received by January 4th 2020

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

The formalities of the AGM will be followed by a Finger Buffet where you are invited to bring a plate of finger food to be shared by everyone.

Following the buffet the Members Evening will conclude with short presentations by our own members.

Catherine Gregory

Secretary

Summary of the GOS Committee meeting, November 26th 2019.

As the year comes full circle we have a couple of "goodbyes" from the committee. Chris Field has stepped down from the committee after a great deal of hard work for the society especially on the new website which is running smoothly. Also after much hard work, John Coleman will be stepping down as editor of after the immanent annual report.

Our indoor programme secretary, Hannah Daniels has done an excellent job of the indoor programme and there are still tickets to be sold for Iolo William's talk (January 22nd). We still need an outdoor programme secretary besides a new editor for the annual report.

Although the society is solvent, there is a decline in membership numbers, so please encourage people to (re)join.

The possibility of afternoon meetings was discussed as some members are no longer comfortable with driving at night, suggestions are welcome.

Nest boxes with cameras for schools were discussed again but would require committed staff within the school to be successful. Other ideas to engage young people are welcome.

A good number of nest boxes have been put up in Goytre House Wood and tree surgery is being discussed for the public footpath through the wood. GOS is also in contact with Goytre Scouts who would like an owl box.

GOS has been offered a book collection but is not able to accommodate all the books; the intention is to take the books that GOS wants then offer second choice to Fair Isle Bird Observatory as they lost their library to the fire earlier this year; any remaining may be offered to the GOS membership in return for a small donation to a charity of the former owner's choice.

IOLO IS BACK – BUT TICKETS ARE LIMITED.

After the disappointment of Iolo having to cancel his visit to GOS earlier this year due to illness, we are pleased to report that he has agreed to return to Gwent for GOS.

He will be presenting his illustrated talk 'Wildlife in Wales' on Wednesday January 22nd 2020 at 7:30 pm.

The venue will be The Lysaght Institute, Orb Road, Off Corporation Road, Newport, NP19 0RA.

The GOS committee agreed that for members this should be priced as a normal evening meeting at £2.00. This entry fee will also apply to anyone under 16 or in full time education.

Non-members' tickets will be £10.00.

Entry on the night will be by **ticket only**.

**Tickets will be available at indoor meetings or by post from:
GOS Tickets, 2, Gwern Ddu Farm, Llantrisant, Usk, NP15 1LS.**

THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY WOS CONFERENCE

This year the Welsh Ornithological Society (WOS) celebrated its thirtieth anniversary with a special conference in Aberystwyth. Speakers took the long view, both into the past and the future.

First was the WOS President, Iolo Williams, who looked at the changes in Welsh breeding birds since 1989. Although there have been sad losses, including turtle dove and corn bunting, and declines in other species, particularly those of farmland, there are also positives to celebrate. In 1989 drivers stopped their cars to watch a red kite and six little egrets at the Burry Inlet were part of an “unprecedented influx”: now both are common breeders in suitable habitat across the country. The first confirmed honey buzzard nested in Wales in 1992; ospreys have gone from rare passage migrants to tourist attractions; dartford warblers, eider, avocet, marsh harrier, bitter, bearded tit and even cranes have all (re-)joined the Welsh list in the past thirty years. So what might the next thirty years bring? Iolo suggested looking out for mediterranean gull, more herons – great white egret, cattle egret and little bittern are already breeding across the Severn – our long-staying glossy ibis may find a mate, perhaps even two-barred crossbill might be one for the specialists to keep an ear out for.

Professor Tim Birkhead took an even longer (and now crowd-funded) view of guillemot populations on Skomer, going back to a large-format image taken eighty years ago by Ronald Lockley. Consistent annual monitoring over the past forty-seven years shows a steady increase of breeding birds since 1980, to a current population of about twenty thousand pairs. But Lockley’s photograph suggests that there were around a hundred thousand before World War II: it seems these birds are still recovering from losses sustained – probably to oil from sunken ships – more than half a century ago. The good news is that guillemot fledglings have a remarkably high survival rate: around half reach breeding age. The main cause of mortality is storms, which are likely to get more severe as the climate warms. We also learned that the most common explanation for guillemots’ pointed eggs – that they spin, rather than rolling off ledges – is wrong: most birds’ eggs do that. Instead it appears the trick is not to move at all: the flat side of a guillemot egg sticks to an outward-sloping ledge, whereas the more rounded egg of a razorbill slips off.

Mary Colwell then reported on a bird whose future looks less optimistic: the curlew. Although there are still plenty of these in Wales in winter, most of those are visitors from the continent. Our own breeding populations have declined catastrophically, principally due to changes in land use reducing chick survival rates to near zero. She suggested that this presents a rare opportunity to discuss conservation without confrontation. Unlike many other at-risk species, curlews, with their unforgettable song, are almost universally popular. But saving them challenges conservation assumptions: controlling generalist predators such as fox and carrion crow is good for curlews, planting trees in the marginal habitats where they breed is bad. Without action in the next five years, curlew is unlikely to be on the Welsh breeding list for the fiftieth WOS conference.

After lunch, a panel from BTO, RSPB Cymru and the Welsh Assembly debated how Wales might be made more wildlife-friendly in future. Two discussion points were

particularly striking: that Welsh children are less connected to wildlife than anywhere else in the UK and that, while Brexit may be an opportunity to create an agricultural policy and funding that support the environment, landowners cannot afford to wait years for a perfect scheme to be developed. Although we may desire an outcome where “you can’t distinguish a farmer from an environmentalist”, this will be little comfort if farms have gone out of business in the meantime. Although there were many compliments paid to young environmental campaigners, we can’t afford to wait for them to become political leaders.

Two awards celebrated people at the start and middle of their ornithological careers. Jack Devlin received the Derek Moore student award for his research on the effect of pheasants on invertebrates; Tony Cross received a lifetime achievement award for his work on ravens, nightjars, waders and coughts.

The final presentation by Steve Stansfield had many of us making plans to try to visit the island of Bardsey. Although its manx shearwater population may be less than those of the Pembrokeshire islands, there are still tens of thousands of breeding birds to create a sound spectacle. Migration can also be impressive for both quantity and rarity of birds: whether 365 grasshopper warblers in a day, over a thousand goldcrests packed into a tiny plantation, or individuals, far off course, such as bluethroat, crettschmar’s bunting and American robin. Excellent photographs of these, seals, risso’s dolphins, sea and skylscapes, and views from Snowdonia to the Wicklow mountains brought the day to an inspiring conclusion. We hope to see you in South-West Wales next year for the 31st Conference.

The Ynysyfro Reservoir Walk Saturday 19th October 2019

Ian Walker

The nine of us assembled at the 14 Locks car park at 8.00 were gratified to find clear skies and only a light wind, in complete contrast to the previous few days’ weather. During our descent past the locks staircase the birds were largely silent, though some in the group did see Nuthatch and Grey Wagtail here. Crossing the fields below the reservoir dam proved to be the hardest (and wettest) part of our walk – further hampered by half a dozen horses with a taste for nuzzling watchers’ ears or walking in front of their binoculars. In spite of this we did manage to find c. 20 Pied Wagtails and a few Meadow Pipits, while a male Blackcap perched on top of a hedge was, for many of us, the highlight of the whole walk. Up through the mini-jungle beside the dam to the easier stretch skirting the golf course, where the hawthorns, we were pleased to see, were loaded with berries, awaiting the arrival of Redwings or Fieldfares, we hoped, but sadly we saw neither. At this stage we had excellent views of a Buzzard, gliding past close by at eye level. From the golf course clubhouse we returned towards the reservoir via the old farmhouse track and the stables, where we found a few more Meadow Pipits. From the causeway between the reservoirs we had good views of the Coot, Tufted Duck and Little Grebes, while one sharp-eyed observer spotted two Pochard on the far side of the lower pool – the first here this autumn. By now we needed the thought of refreshment at the visitor centre café to spur us on up the final hill ...

The walk had taken exactly three hours, and the species list comprised: Mute Swan, Mallard, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Little Grebe, Cormorant, Buzzard, Moorhen, Coot, Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Feral Pigeon, Woodpigeon, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Jay, Long-tailed Tit, Blackcap, Goldcrest, Nuthatch, Starling, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Robin, House Sparrow, Dunnock, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Chaffinch, Goldfinch: 36 species in all.

Despite the disappointment of finding no Redwings or Fieldfares, I think the consensus of the walk was: "very enjoyable and worthwhile".

Gwent UKBS Report for October 2019

Chris Hatch

Highlights

A Snow Bunting was present on the Blorengge (from 22nd). A Whooper Swan was reported from Newport Wetlands (15th) and from St. Pierre Pill (23rd). An Osprey was seen at Llandegfedd reservoir (17th). A Black Redstart was recorded at Llanwern (23rd). A Smew was reported from the River Usk, south of Usk town (30th).



Snow bunting on the Blorengge: Keith Roylance

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A female Merlin was reported (19th). Good numbers of waders were present and Marsh Harriers were reported on several dates.

Other sites

Female Hen Harriers were recorded at Mynydd Ddu (2nd), Mynydd Llangatwg (3rd) and Brynmawr reservoir (8th). Nine Red Kites were reported from a site in south Gwent (7th). A Ring Ouzel was seen at Redwick (7th). Single Short-eared Owls were reported from Whitson Bog (8th) and Garn yr Erw (30th). Female Merlins were observed at Collister Pill (15th) and Pontypool (30th). Four Mediterranean Gulls were seen at Glebelands Park, Newport (12th) and a single bird was at Sudbrook (22nd). Single Barn Owls were seen at Newport (19th) and Blackrock (30th). A Common Sandpiper was reported from Gobion (22nd), together with five Green Sandpipers. A late Wheatear was seen at Magor Pill (29th). Good numbers of Bramblings, Redwings and Fieldfares were reported from several locations in the county.

Gwent UKBS Report for November 2019

Chris Hatch

Highlights

A Great White Egret was seen at Sudbrook (1st). Black Redstarts were seen at Big Pit, Blaenafon (2nd) and Newport Wetlands (16th). The long-staying Glossy Ibis was reported from Newport Wetlands (23rd). A Slavonian Grebe was seen at the Red Pools, Nash (25th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

22 Avocet were recorded (25th). A Merlin was reported (28th and 30th). Male and female Marsh Harriers were reported on several dates.

Other sites

Hen Harriers were recorded at Mynydd Maen (7th), Brynmawr (13th) and Mynydd Llanhilleth (two males on 23rd). A Merlin was seen at Rhyd y Blew (11th). A Short-eared Owl was reported from Mathern Pill (9th). Jack Snipes were seen at St. Pierre Pill (5th), Peterstone Gout (17th) and Marshfield (24th). 12 Water Pipits were reported from Peterstone (28th). A Whooper Swan was seen offshore at Magor Pill (21st).

Report of some recent indoor meetings

Andrew Cormack

Blair Jones set himself a tough task by talking about one of Gwent's best known (at least to birders) sites: Goldcliff lagoons. But having visited 118 times in a year and taken more than two hundred thousand photographs, he knows the place better than most of us. So we learned how the lagoons work: one is freshwater, supplied from Uskmouth, two are brackish with salinity maintained by Natural Resources Wales in just the right range for a rich population of invertebrates. Different species use the lagoons in different ways and at different times of year: avocet, redshank and both ringed plovers come to breed (though predation of chicks, mostly by crows, is a problem still to be resolved); passerines such as wheatear, yellow wagtail and ring ouzel rest on migration; white-fronted geese arrive for part of the winter, while some non-breeding waders such as godwits stay all year; common and arctic terns are blown in by bad weather; while a few birds such as phalaropes and baird's

sandpipers are just very lost. Those tend to be transient, but “our” glossy ibis has been resident for nearly a year: so unusual that when it first arrived other birds reacted as if it were a raptor! There are plenty of real raptors, too: marsh harrier, peregrine, the frequently mis-identified white buzzard and kestrel; at the right season merlin and short-eared owl can be found as well. All of these were superbly illustrated, despite Blair’s assurance that Goldcliff is actually quite a difficult place for photography as the fence keeps humans and birds well apart.

After a talk with over a hundred species, Ed Drewitt concentrated on just one: the peregrine falcon. Persecution and agricultural chemicals reduced their UK population to just over 350 pairs in the 1960s, but their continuing recovery (to 1769 pairs at the last census) has seen them expand beyond traditional cliff and coastal sites into cities: a trend common across much of western Europe. This has been accompanied by a greatly increased tolerance of humans: a bird that used to have to be watched at long distance through telescopes to avoid nest disturbance now nests happily, and very successfully, on churches, city halls, universities and pylons. Not only can we watch them from ground level, but improvements in remote camera technology over the past 30 years has allowed very detailed study of their behaviour and feeding at nests. Though feral pigeons would seem an obvious food source, these only to make up around a third of the birds brought back to urban nests. Thrushes and starlings are also significant contributions: in London ring-necked parakeets, too. But more puzzling are water birds: teal, golden plover and lapwing in the centre of Bristol; knot and whimbrel in Coventry. Infra-red cameras explained what was going on: street and building lighting allows peregrines to be awake and hunting at night, when these birds are migrating over the city. The counter-shading that helps protect them from predators on water may even make them more vulnerable in night flight as their pale bellies reflect the city light. Whereas peregrines hunt during the day by stooping on prey from above, at night they appear to fly upwards from perches. Colour-ringing studies are starting reveal dispersal patterns: young males typically stay near their nests, and may even try to help their parents in their first year; females disperse further, from south-west England to Hertfordshire and Tamworth. UK birds are generally resident, but other populations migrate: from Russia to Iraq or Canada to Peru!

John Coleman described a bird-packed four-day trip to Southern Turkey. The Taurus mountains east of the resort of Antalya offer a wide range of habitats and a mix of Mediterranean and more exotic birds. The limestone foothills offer black-headed, ortolan and crettschmar’s buntings, white-throated robin, graceful prinnia, masked shrike, kruiper’s nuthatch and black kite. Although the Sultan Marshes looked unpromising on arrival they delivered moustached warbler, purple heron, yellow wagtails and many grass snakes hunting for frogs. White stork nests offered a safe space for spanish sparrows to raise their own young deep in the piles of sticks. In between birding, one of the party managed to find 120 species of butterfly. At higher altitude, traditional meadows full of flowers were also good birding locations, with hoopoe surprisingly well-camouflaged on stony soil. Red-backed shrike, rock bunting, shore lark, both choughs, sombre tit, long-legged buzzard and rock nuthatch were seen here. A hair-raising tractor ride brought the party close to 3750m peaks with black redstart, ibex, blue rock thrush, crimson-winged finch, radde’s accentor, finch’s wheatear, Egyptian vulture and red-fronted serin. The target bird – the caspian snowcock – eventually became visible at a distance, though its calls had

been audible for most of the time. The final bird of the trip – the brown fish owl – used to require an expedition-style walk into even more remote mountain areas of Turkey, but has now been discovered nesting above a reservoir, so can be viewed from the comfort of a tour boat!

For our final talk of the year Neil Glenn took us to the southernmost point of the continental USA: the Rio Grande valley. This area 150 miles by 50 has species lists of 550 birds and 340 butterflies: with the river forming the border with Mexico thirty-nine of these birds only make it to the US list by flying across to nest or feed. The funnel shape of the North American continent also makes it an excellent place to see migrants, especially in spring when passerines make landfall here after cutting across the Gulf of Mexico. Flocks of thousands of raptors, which prefer not to make the sea crossing, are not unusual. This final stretch of the river's course from Colorado contains a wide variety of habitats, from desert, through semi-desert with cattle ranches, agriculture, city parks and gardens, coastal lagoons and a hundred-mile sandbar. The desert provides two rare examples of birds collaborating to hunt: harris hawks are well-known from falconry displays, but roadrunners will also work together to kill full-grown rattlesnakes. The semi-desert has scaled quail, scissor-tailed flycatcher and loggerhead shrike. Farms have one of the more identifiable American sparrows: the lark sparrow. On the river itself there are huge kingfishers (belted and ringed) and tiny grebes (least, half the size of a dabchick); near the coast egrets, herons, bitterns and night herons appear, along with the striking wilson's phalarope. The sandbar has been largely developed for resorts but some of these include gardens for migrants and local birders have managed to preserve some undeveloped lots. Here the spring migration can give excellent views of many American warblers – many more distinctly coloured than ours – while on the sea itself there are brown pelicans, skimmers and roseate spoonbills.

ITEMS FOR SALE

The following items are offered for sale, unless previously sold, by Jane Mitchell. For details of prices and delivery options please contact Jane by email at: jane_madrid@hotmail.com

Jane has been very generous to GOS for donating a large quantity of books which the committee is cataloguing and will be offering to Fair Isle Observatory (when rebuilt after the devastating fire earlier this year) and to our members.

Binocular / Monocular

Nikon 10x32 6.5 7007H AG (with Nikon case and instructions)

Nikon 10x42 6 008667 (with original box, Nikon case and instructions)

Opticron 8x40 8.2 Aspheric wide angle (with black Opticron case)

Minolta Classic Sport 8x42 WP 8.2 (with black Minolta case)

Opticron WP Monocular 8x32 7.5 (with Opticron case and original box)

Fieldscope

Nikon ED 75 X 60 X 40 25 X 20 X 13 082 060 050 Green/Black body (with Green Nikon case and instructions)

Nikon 38 X WF 30XWF 20XWF 082 060 050 off Pink body (with black In focus case and instructions)

X2 Nikon protective scope cases black

Tripod / Unipod / Mount

Cullman combined shoulder / table pod (in original box)

Manfrotto tripod O55XV 701 RC2 KIT (in original box)

Velbon UP 4DX II unipod (in original box)

Velbon CX 660 tripod (in black Jessop case)

Optricon universal II hide mount 40503 (in original box)

Optricon car window mount green (in original box)

Mr Hughes (Tel: 01495 448059) is also offering for sale a Swarovski telescope (original cost £6000) for £3500.



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY Registered Charity Number 1088830

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2020

The Annual General Meeting of the Gwent Ornithological Society will be held at Goytre Village Hall at 7.30pm on Saturday, 25th January 2019

AGENDA

- 1 Apologies for absence.
- 2 Minutes of the meeting held on January 26th 2019, (to be distributed at the AGM).
- 3 Treasurer's Report
- 4 Chairman's Report
- 5 Election of Officers
- 6 Election of Committee Members:
 - 6.1 To consider any nominations for (a) Outdoor programme secretary and (b) Report Editor
 - 6.2 All other Committee members have agreed to stand for a further year and need to be re-elected for 2020. Vote.

- 7 To consider any motions received by the secretary prior to the meeting

The end of the AGM will be followed by a Members' Finger Buffet (approx.30mins) and then a series of short talks by members.

Your Indoor Programme:

All meetings will be held at Goytre Village Hall, commencing at 7:30 pm unless indicated *otherwise

January 22nd*	Iolo Williams	The Wildlife of Wales, The Lysaght Institute, Newport
January 25th	AGM	AGM
February 15th	Rob Thomas	Eagles in Wales: past, present and future?
March 7th	Peter Rock	Urban Gulls!
March 21st	Gary Prescott 'The Biking Birder'	There's a Tapir at the Door!
April 4th	Baz Embling	Following in the Footsteps of Darwin – A Modern Naturalist in Chile
September 26th	Simon Bedford	A Peregrine Obsession
October 10th	Al Venables	Vultures and other Wildlife of Extremadura
October 24th	Steve Roberts	Breeding Northern Owls - Snowys to Pygmys
November 7th	John Wilson	Uganda - Birds, Primates and other animals
November 21st	Roger Dickey	Cape Wrath - the brink of conservation
December 5th	Mary Colwell	Saving Britain's Curlews



Snow bunting on the Bloreng: Keith Roylance

Membership Renewal

Your membership subscription is due on January 1st for 2020. If you pay by Standing Order you do not need to do anything, your bank will transfer the amount due to us on or shortly after 1st January 2020.

If you still pay your subscriptions by cash or cheque please complete the form below and send it with your payment to: Gill Jones, Membership Secretary, 11, Llewellyn Walk, Newport, NP20 6LY or you can pay at an indoor meeting during January. Membership Fees remain as £15.00 for Individual Membership or £18.00 for Joint/Family Membership.

I wish to renew my membership of Gwent Ornithological Society for 2020

Name

.....

Address.....

.....

Post Code.....

E-mail.....

Telephone:.....

Membership No. (if known).....

Membership Grade: Individual @ £15..... Or Joint/Family @ £18

.....

I enclose cheque to the value of £..... Payable to Gwent
Ornithological Society

Send payment to: Gill Jones, Membership Secretary, 11, Llewellyn Walk,
Newport, NP20 6LY

DO NOT SEND CASH THROUGH THE POST.