

THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
Registered charity number 1088830

GOS WEB SITE: www.gwentbirds.org.uk

Newsletter No. 156

Autumn 2020

CONTENTS

A note from the Chairman	Keith Roylance	Page 2
Goosander and Cormorant River Roost Survey	Richard M Clarke	Page 3
Nestbox Bonanza: Goldcliff Ringing Group	Richard M Clarke	Page 4
Mynydd Llangatwg, A patch within a patch	Nicholas Beswick	Page 5
Out of the ashes	Richard Clarke	Page 7
Lockdown Highlights	Ian Walker	Page 8
Swallows, Swifts and Martins: An appreciation	James Graham	Page 9
Bittern breeds at Newport Wetlands	NRW	Page 12
Gwent UKBS Report	Chris Hatch	Page 13
Wales Eagle dies	BBC Wales report	Page 14

A Note from the Chairman

Dear Member,

Welcome to the autumn edition of the Dipper and the first to be printed and circulated this year. We hope it finds you well.

If you are one of the 20% of the membership for whom we do not have email details this will probably be the first contact you have had with the society since the beginning of the year. We were unable to have the spring & summer editions of the Dipper printed. They were sent by email to members and were published at the same time on the GOS website (www.gwentbirds.org.uk).

We would really like to maintain contact with you all on a regular basis, so if you do have an email address but are not yet on the GOS circulation list please let Gill Jones know by emailing her at: membership@gwentbirds.org.uk Thank you.

For those of you who have been emailed during the year we hope you enjoyed the 10 weekly quizzes that were prepared for us by Mike Pointon to whom we are very grateful.

Outdoor meetings have not taken place since March due to lockdown and the requirement for social distancing. Unfortunately, this is likely to continue for the remainder of the year. We will plan outdoor meetings for 2021 and sincerely hope these will be able to take place. The website will give the latest information regarding any changes to our published programme.

The **indoor** meetings have also had to be cancelled and the committee has taken the decision to cancel all indoor meetings until the end of the year. We would hope to be able to resume meetings in 2021 subject to any restrictions imposed. Goytre village hall is open, but capacity is limited to 30 people at present. Therefore we do not believe it is practical to offer meetings there under the current circumstances.

We have investigated the potential use of 'ZOOM' for virtual meetings, but no decision has yet been made. We would like to hear your views on whether you would 'attend' a meeting if it were zoomed. Please let us know by sending your views to chairman@gwentbirds.org.uk One of the benefits may be that we could hold zoom meetings on different days or at different times. We would have to get speakers' confirmation that they were willing to zoom their presentation. However some we know are reluctant to do so.

You will find in this edition of the Dipper four articles from members who have birded during lockdown. We would love to hear if you have been birding during these strange times. Please send any comments, short pieces or longer articles to newsletter@gwentbirds.org.uk and we will endeavour to include them in future editions of the Dipper. We are always keen to include articles from members.

We hope you find this edition of the Dipper interesting and we look forward to restarting our programmes when circumstances allow.

Take care, keep safe.

Keith
Chairman.

Goosander & Cormorant River and Roost Survey – calling all volunteers

This winter we are planning to re-run the surveys we last undertook in 2011 to 2013. Previously coordinated visits were made to potential Goosander evening roost sites across the County and a survey for Goosander and Cormorant on the River Usk from Glangrwyne to Newport was undertaken. The success of the previous surveys was wholly down to the people who took part in them and their efforts helped us to gain a better understanding of these much-maligned species in Gwent.

Why a survey?

It's simple – we need good data about the species. Licences to cull fish-eating bird species have previously been issued by the authorities in England and Wales, but have been done so on very little, possibly only anecdotal evidence. Having accurate information available will enable fully informed decisions to be made that take proper account of the species' conservation needs.

Who can take part?

Most people should be able to take on a roll in the survey. The good news is that these are not difficult species to identify and therefore you don't need a great deal of birding experience. Furthermore, you don't necessarily need to spend considerable time in the field. For example, the Goosander evening roost project might only require 1 1/2 hours of your time per monthly visit. With this survey it's also great to be out birding at a different time of the day.

The river survey will require more effort, but it will ensure that you have time to fully appreciate the fantastic waterways of our county. The rivers will be divided into sections of 3-5 km so you do not have to walk far.

When will survey work begin?

The roost visits will align with the WeBS count dates and get underway on 15 November. There will then be single monthly visits on 13 December, 17 January, 14 February and 14 March. The river survey work will involve a single visit in each month from November to February with the first visit on Saturday 14 November.

Where are the survey areas?

The river survey will prioritise the rivers Usk, Wye and Monnow and then depending on the number of volunteers, might also include sections of the valleys' rivers. All key reservoirs, pools and lakes will be included in the Goosander roost survey. Additionally, Cormorant night roost sites are being included.

What information needs to be collected?

All Cormorants and Goosanders should be counted, the sex ratio if possible of the Goosanders and the flight directions of disturbed birds and of Goosanders joining

roosts. All other river/water birds could be counted to provide more information on bird populations on the rivers/water bodies.

Why should I take part in the survey?

By taking part you will be contributing to an important survey, the results of which will help inform future policy decisions about fish-eating birds. These are great surveys to be involved in as they will get you outdoors in the fresh air.

Where can I find out more?

Steph Tyler (river survey) and Richard Clarke (roost survey) are co-ordinating the survey work, so why not get in touch to learn more about how you can help with this important survey.

Contact details:

Email:

Richard Clarke (roost survey) - surveys@GwentBirds.org.uk

Steph Tyler (river survey) - steph_tyler2001@hotmail.com

Nest box bonanza: Goldcliff Ringing Group

Richard M. Clarke

What do Barn Owl, Little Owl, Kestrel and Tree Sparrow all have in common? The answer is, they are the target species of the Goldcliff Ringing Group's nest box project which is benefiting from Heritage Lottery funding through the Living Levels Landscape Partnership.

The species were selected because of their status: Barn Owl being schedule 1 under the Wildlife and Countryside act, Tree Sparrow being Red Listed, Kestrel being Amber listed and Little Owl, although an introduced species, showing a very marked decline in its population in recent years.

These days there is a paucity of suitable nest sites on the levels. Previously, old orchards and pollarded willow provided ideal nest sites for Tree Sparrow and Little Owl, but there are fewer orchards these days and the regular and widespread practice of pollarding has diminished. By providing suitable nest sites in the right habitat we hope to see the species benefit.

Volunteers from the ringing group and society started work on the boxes at the end of last year, with NRW generously providing the use of their workshop. We were very pleased that youngsters being trained by Eli Training Ltd at Newport have also been involved by building some of the Barn Owl boxes. The first species to be targeted was Tree Sparrow and 200 new boxes have been built and most have been erected. Next up were Barn Owl and Kestrel with 10 boxes for each species having been

prepared. Finally, work is now well underway on the Little Boxes, with 24 under construction.



Some of the volunteer nest box builders – the fruits of their labours can be seen behind.

COVID-19 has had an impact on the project because it prevented us from completing some of the nest boxes, erecting those already built and of course from monitoring the boxes that had been put up. Nevertheless, we are slowly getting back on track and should have all boxes built and in situ by the end of the year. We also hope to visit all existing boxes to at least get an impression of what the 2020 breeding season had in store. And on that, we can already report some good news as we have had a Barn Owl take up residence in one of the new boxes.

If you would like to be involved in the project, why not get in touch via surveys@GwentBirds.org.uk.

You can find out more about the Living Levels Landscape Partnership at <https://www.livinglevels.org.uk/>.

Mynydd Llangatwg and a Patch within a Patch

Nicholas Beswick

We were extremely fortunate to get home from Australia two days before the lockdown started and equally fortunate to have a large garden with wildlife literally on our doorstep. My daily exercise from home allowed me to get on to the mountain and watch the progress of spring. Having lived here for sixteen years I thought that I knew my patch well. Not so, as I discovered new paths and habitats all within a couple of miles.

Early spring visitors were present from the outset: a male Wheatear on 22nd March and singing Chiffchaff the following day. The usual raptors were around but 31st March was a red letter day, with a sighting of a male Merlin on the moor. Also noteworthy was a Buzzard flying over carrying a Slow-worm (something I saw again some while later). The following week I ventured to the summit and was delighted to find a flock of fifty Golden Plovers coming into breeding plumage. Migrants were

rather slow to arrive locally, with just a single Swallow on 5th April, a Blackcap singing two days later and at last an influx of Willow Warblers on 8th April. At home, Tawny Owls courted and we were hopeful that we would have another family in our box. Sadly, it was not to be, as some weeks later we saw Grey Squirrels in the box. Further evictions happened later in the month as returning House Martins attempted to repossess their old nests from the House Sparrows. Our House Martins only arrived on 26th April, numbers are well down this year and, as they failed to reclaim their old homes, nesting has started very late.

As April progressed our other expected spring visitors arrived: Redstart on 15th, Cuckoo and Whinchat on 19th, Tree Pipit and Pied Flycatcher on 29th. Less expected was a mass arrival of Linnets on to the gorse patches on the mountain – I wonder if they spend the winter in lowland Gwent or travel further afield. Early May brought Swifts zooming over Clydach Gorge; there are still a few nesting in Brynmawr town. On 9th May I undertook the Big Bird Count and, walking and cycling, clocked up 55 species within two miles of home. Whitethroat, Garden Warbler and Hobby joined the growing two mile list during the month. It was frustrating that the BTO had suspended its Breeding Bird Survey as I could have walked from home to cover two of my allocated squares. At least the late visits went ahead though they are always less productive than the early ones. The sunny weather in May encouraged early butterflies including Green Hairstreaks and I became aware of day-flying moths on the moor, recording Common Heath and the lovely Speckled Yellow. A possible Mother Shipton got away!

A chance encounter in mid-May changed the focus of my attention dramatically. One of my regular walks includes a visit to the old Brynmawr reservoir on the mountain (grid reference SO202136). It has long been drained through an outflow at the bottom of the tower but enough water remains to keep a permanent bog. On this particular visit I met a Welsh Water engineer who told me that he was undertaking an inspection to check that the water was flowing out as normal. He added that they planned to breach the earth dam wall and demolish the tower to save the necessity for the inspections that are required under the Reservoirs Act. I was horrified as the reservoir is a distinct habitat and attracts a range of breeding birds. In some recent years Barn Owls have nested in the tower – at 440 metres above sea level this must be one of the highest altitude territories for what is often described as a lowland bird. Some enquiries revealed that the reservoir is covered by the National Park's planning authority and no application for work had been made – yet. It appears that an ecological assessment will be required. Previously I had never submitted records specific to the reservoir but now am doing so using the LERC Wales app, including old sightings of note. My dusk visits this year sadly yielded no owls but a half-heard snatch of reeling Grasshopper Warbler was tantalising. A few days later when the forecast was fine I deployed my AudioMoth recorder overnight. Sure enough, the Gropper was there and also drumming Snipe. Gavin Vella identified another unfamiliar call for me – a Coot flying over!

As the lockdown eased a little in June I was able to visit more of my regular birding sites and catch up with the progress of the breeding season locally. Despite the fine weather in April and May the birds using my nest boxes did not do particularly well. Tit broods were small and the Redstarts only fledged two chicks from six eggs. Only the Nuthatches bucked the trend with seven young fledged. One of my other

activities, moth trapping has continued unaffected throughout though my plans for running a couple of community evenings at local nature reserves obviously did not materialise. A dawn chorus walk and a Nightjar evening also went west. Disappointing as it has been to have holidays and events cancelled we have been most fortunate to have plenty to enjoy on our doorstep and to see the seasons unfold on a daily basis that our previously busy lives never allowed. And I now have a new challenge – to protect the old Brynmawr reservoir from destruction. Any support will be much appreciated and, of course, records submitted to LERC Wales to prove its value.

Out of the ashes

Richard M. Clarke

When the hills above Risca were ablaze in mid-July 2018 for the best part of a week, it was both dramatic and heart-breaking. The scale and intensity of the fires was difficult to comprehend with Twmbarlwm and Medart mountains both being engulfed in flames and thick black smoke. The fires burnt deep into the ground, fanned by winds and fuelled by the extensive brash-wood, the legacy of larch felling undertaken previously.

The night sky brought the drama even more to the fore. Pine trees exploding in the heat pierced the sky while all the while the white heat and orange glow lit up the darkness of the hills. Visually it was spectacular and in the cooler air of the night you could taste the acrid smoke that hung heavy in the valley.

In the wake of the fires, when the fire and helicopter crews had retired, there remained just charred tree stumps, blacked earth and a deathly silence. No living thing could have possibly survived the intensity of the heat and the severity of the fires. The hillside habitat of some 100 hectares had been completely annihilated. As is however so often the case, the environment is a great healer and even after such merciless flames, the bare hills started to show signs of rebirth in the following year. It was however not before another year had passed that things really showed signs of recovery and something of a remarkable change.

I walked the hills in the evenings during COVID-19 lock-down and perhaps surprisingly, took great pleasure from what I saw. Noticeable, was the fact that the flanks of Twmbarlwm and Medart took on a pinkish hue in June 2020. This was not a return to a fiery past but instead a dense carpet of foxgloves that meant you could see the shade some considerable distance off, not unlike when there is a good season of heather on the hills.

Below Twmbarlwm's iron-age hillfort and perched sentinel atop the foxgloves I watched Stonechat. A family party moved about the vegetation noisily chatting amongst themselves. The striking male, with pied, orange and brown plumage and the brown and orange female were constantly bringing food to the speckled juveniles, fresh from the nest and clumsily navigating the bracken and foxgloves. Trees that had previously been tall vantage points from which to sing had, as a consequence of the fires, become vertically challenged. Only where they were still higher than most other vegetation did they continue to afford a suitable post for songsters, including Willow Warblers. Noticeably however were the Tree Pipits that took advantage of these posts to issue their plaintive songs and from which to climb

heady heights before parachuting open-winged back to earth in a spiralling crescendo of sound.

With dusk falling, the last gasp of the Song Thrush heralded the start of nature's next shift. First were the hungry squeaks of Tawny owlets – three in all – from an old beech tree in the hedge line which had escaped the ravages of the fire. Next was an occasional call from an adult owl.

A male Badger suddenly appeared from the shadows no more than three metres away. It hurried itself away from me along the path offering a couple of grunts in pure indignation by my untimely arrival during its early evening forage. Badgers are not built for speed and although its pace was steady it was also very laboured and as soon as suitable cover was upon it the animal disappeared.

Before I left the hillside, there was one final surprise. Phoenix like from the fire burnt ground and charred ashes something caught my eye. Long wings, then clapping and distinctive white flashes on both wings and tail feathers before alighting and delivering a pitch changing churring. I've never seen Nightjar at this particular location previously, but the habitat afforded post fire was clearly now ideal as not just one, but two males started to churr from the hillside. The wing clapping was again given, presumably from along a territorial boundary where both males patrolled for a short period of time before returning to their perches to churr once again. I watched and listened to the birds for a good 15 minutes before leaving the hillside to reflect on what had proved to be a thoroughly enjoyable and wholly mentally restorative walk.

Sadly, hill fires, especially in the valleys, are not uncommon. From Easter time onwards each year the fires begin with, most being attributed to arsonists. I will never be able to understand the mentality of those that commit such cynical acts of destruction and who put the lives of our emergency service personnel at significant risk. Thankfully the Risca fires did not result in serious injury.

Lockdown Highlights from Ian Walker

The highlight: definitely the Red Kite that flew right over our garden - as I was doing a Garden Birdwatch session! Sadly, it did not stop to catch anything so I couldn't count it for GBW.

Also **two amusing episodes:**

(1) In a recent newsletter, a misprint referred to the virus as "Corvid -19".... Fair enough, I thought, this virus is at least as obnoxious as any Crow....

And (

2) A close encounter of the Mallard kind: along a straight stretch of canal towpath, three birds flew directly towards me at head height - well spaced out (they clearly know about social distancing). They changed course only slightly to pass within a yard at head height - that was when I realised very clearly why these birds are called DUCK.... fortunately, I didn't have to.

Ian also has some helpful comments for those who have found lockdown difficult:

More seriously - I have been very fortunate in having several good birding spots (Ynysyfro reservoir, two stretches of canal towpath, Alltyryn nature reserve, and two Swift and three House Martin colonies) all within walking distance, so have been able to visit these on the pretext of taking exercise.... trying to cover all of these on foot (as we have no car), as well as the weekly discipline of the Garden Birdwatch, has been a colossal help in keeping me as “compos mentis” as Anno Domini will allow. I very much hope that other GOS members will have had at least some similarly rewarding (but no doubt completely different) experiences.

Swallows, Swifts and Martins: An appreciation by James Graham

The sighting of the first swallow to arrive in your area is always reason for excitement for it signals that Spring is firmly underway bringing with it the promise of new life and growth for plants and animals. In retrospect, that excitement and hope can never have been needed more by people than in this year with the coronavirus pandemic casting a heavy shadow over us all. The arrival and annual stay of the hirundines and swifts is more of a reason for joy for those interested in the natural world than ever before, with declining numbers meaning that birds whose appearance might have been taken for granted a generation ago now being more cherished than ever. This most unusual of years has seen these species experience mixed fortunes on our shores, though in my experience there is at least reason for cautious optimism locally about the swifts and house martins.

The first swallow that I saw in my area, at the foot of the valley near the River Rhymney, arrived on the evening of 28th March, a small dark crescent scything through the cloudy sky with its shape and joyous flight making it unmistakable. Within a week a swallow was conducting a thorough inspection of the stable behind the house, the venue for nests for most of the last thirty years. The male would be joined by his exhausted mate a fortnight later, their joy at reuniting evident and their clicks to one another and to other returning swallows seeming like the laughter of old friends. There's little to rival the agility of the swallows as they career at breakneck speeds through the corridors of the old stable with nesting materials, but, as ever in nature, what is a spectacle for the birdwatcher is the business of survival for the bird. Despite several weeks of industry no nest materialised. One swallow doesn't make a summer as Aristotle is reputed to have said – yet in 2020 the baking hot Spring made life extremely challenging for so many breeding birds, with swallows especially impacted. It may well be that this weather made building or patching up swallows' nests nigh on impossible in those areas where mud was in short supply.

Swallows of course have the advantage of being able to have several clutches of chicks and the second efforts appear to have been more successful. By early July, the pair that had abandoned the stable were busy ferrying supplies to expectant young who, unusually, were raised in the hollow of an oak tree. Most of these young would appear to have evaded the interests of the local sparrowhawk and goshawk; by late July, if one was lucky, it would be possible to see groups of thirty swallows congregating on the power lines in the vicinity of Mynydd Machen. With the sight of swallows hunting flies among the pink plastic-wrapped round bales there comes at

least a semblance of order, of peace restored, in a year in which disorder is seemingly the norm for people and animals alike.

One of the added bonuses of this corner of Gwent is that is a place where swallows, swifts, house martins and sand martins occasionally and briefly converge together. For me, the sight of the four species preying on flies and small whites over maize ears and crop stubble in the farmland next to the river is in its own way just as awe inspiring as any seabird colony or crowded wetland lagoon. You almost want to tell the next person who walks past on the footpath that follows the riverbank just how amazing it is to see birds who will soon scatter to all corners of the African continent but you don't do so for fear of receiving some very odd looks indeed. When the birds are flying together above the farmers' fields surfing invisible waves you see how their likenesses converge and diverge as they go about their shared purpose of collecting insects. In between hunting swoops they are strikingly social - a reminder that swallows and martins are reported to sometimes migrate in mixed parties. The house martins appear to have had a good year to judge from the number of birds I regularly see performing barrels rolls above the fields adjacent to the villages of Draethen and Lower Machen. The confident calling of these airborne mini killer whales is a stark contrast to the manner of the smaller sand martins who fly frantically, nervously waiting for an opportunity to dive into their burrows dug into the riverbanks.

The speed and size of the swifts immediately marks them out from the hirundines in such gatherings. At times they alternate between moments when one feels they might career out of control making it difficult to travel more than a few hundred metres and at other times they have an ease of flight far beyond any fighter jet and it is easy to believe that they travel vast distances each day, apparently up to 500 miles a day. Perhaps it is this contrast between one minute seeming like a Frank Spencer of the avian world and the next minute a rockstar of the sky, paired with the knowledge that they spend life on the wing, that makes them such an engrossing spectacle. Anecdotally, I would suggest that the local swift population had a relatively successful season. A small group would fly over my village at midday most days, always travelling east to west and enlivening a day of homeworking while under lockdown. By late midsummer the group had swollen in numbers; buoyed by this year's young and joined by swifts from other villages there were large gatherings over Machen and Caerphilly mountains that probably reached 100 birds – a terrific and uplifting spectacle for someone who is relatively new to the world of birdwatching. The last significant gathering of swifts in the locality occurred on 5th August: around 60 birds having a last-minute prospect for next year's nesting site and a final feed before the journey to Sub-Saharan Africa. That swifts appear to have had a reasonable year in 2020 obviously should not distract from their overall alarming decline though it provokes speculation as to if and why this might be the case. With falling numbers of swifts linked to the global decline in insect populations (a 2017 German study found a 76% decline in flying insects since 1989) did they do better because there were more insects owing to less air pollution during lockdown or perhaps there were fewer or different pesticides being used? (I would suggest that winged insect populations, especially bumblebees, have fared better in this area since the ban on certain neonicotinoid pesticides in 2018) Or is the picture less rosy and have the swifts simply moved from a different area owing to habitat loss? Clearly, these are the type of questions best addressed by experts and one hopes that the global slowdown

owing to the pandemic might yield some datasets that will be useful in the fight to conserve and boost the populations of these wonderful species.

As I write, in mid-August, there is a pair of swallows skimming a nearby meadow, weaving in and out of grazing ewes hunting for flies to take back to their young. They will be here for roughly another month. Last year they left on 14th September to commence their precarious journey to their wintering grounds. Their mass departure from our shores is a spectacle itself and I recall seeing thousands of them passing through Newport Wetlands last year, some presumably roosting in the reedbeds before starting their long journey. No doubt, even if local numbers appear depleted, there will be many swallows and martins there this year, too. On their journey they will face all the hazards of migration: predators (including man), extremities of weather and uncertain food sources and habitats. It's always a privilege to see the migratory birds from flycatchers to warblers and everything in between, and I like to imagine that some of the people who witness the swallows during and at the end of their journey to Africa derive that same sense of being lucky to see them and that action will be taken to protect and assist them. Hopefully, there is a community in Africa eager to see the swallows return as a distraction from the pandemic and life's other concerns. There will never be another year like 2020 and it is to be hoped that one positive that will be that more people continue to be as engaged with nature as they were during lockdown and that they will value it to ensure it is preserved and enhanced. Much of this responsibility falls to government and policymakers obviously, but anyone can make a contribution in this cause: having a wild part of the garden or local park; having a nest box; or even just communicating how great that even relatively common animals like swallows are. The swifts have gone and the swallows will soon join them. They leave a void when they go but go they must and their return next year will be as eagerly anticipated and hoped for as ever.

Bittern breeds at Newport Wetlands Reserve.

(Information provided by Natural Resources Wales newsfeed.)

One of the UK's most rare and threatened bird species has successfully bred on the Gwent Levels for the first time in over 200 years.

Bittern chicks have fledged from two separate nests at the Newport Wetlands nature reserve which is managed by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) in partnership with RSPB Cymru and Newport City Council.

The sighting was first recorded by NRW team member Kevin Dupé who has worked at the reserve for over 19 years, and later confirmed by local county bird recorder and ornithologist Darryl Spittle.

Bitterns are a type of heron which live exclusively in reedbeds. The species was once thought to be extinct in the UK following years of persecution and a dramatic loss of habitat, but populations have since returned to areas where high quality reedbed habitat still exists.

Kevin Dupé, from Natural Resources Wales said:

“To see bitterns nesting at Newport Wetlands is a truly wonderful sight, and a real achievement for those of us who have been involved in habitat conservation at the site for a long time.

“In the last few years bitterns have been nesting and breeding in areas of north Wales where there has been extensive reedbed restoration, and we had only hoped to see the same success here.

“Wetlands are an important habitat in need of our help. As well as allowing species like the bittern to come back from the brink, they can also help us in the battle against climate change by storing harmful carbon and holding back flood water.”

RSPB Cymru South Wales Area Manager, Cellan Michael, said:

“Newport Wetlands is an important home for wildlife and a valuable source of nature to the large urban population living in nearby towns and cities. We’re delighted that bitterns are nesting here, and they’re joining a suite of rare wildlife that thrives on the reserve.

“The last record of bitterns nesting in south Wales was over 200 years ago, so the fact that this iconic bird is nesting at Newport Wetlands goes to show how the creation and management of reedbeds at this site has paid off. We hope that this nesting will be a sign of what’s to come, and that more rare wildlife will settle at this site and across the Gwent Levels in the future.”

Darryl Spittle, County Bird Recorder from the Gwent Ornithological Society said:

“It was great to hear that Bitterns had bred successfully at the Newport Wetlands, another notable achievement for the NRW management team and an exciting addition to Gwent’s current breeding avifauna. Whilst Bitterns possibly nested on the Gwent Levels in the past, the relentless drainage of wetlands in the 18th century mean it may have been the best part of 250 years since Bittern last fledged youngsters in the county!”

Newport Wetlands is a unique site made up of wet grasslands, reedbeds, saltmarsh and saline lagoons. An ongoing programme of conservation by NRW and RSPB Cymru helps to keep the habitat in good condition for the rare species which thrive in it.

In recent years the reserve has also benefited from the [Living Levels Programme](#)—a Heritage Lottery funded partnership seeking to reconnect people to the heritage and wildlife of the historic landscape of the Gwent Levels.

The car park at Newport Wetlands has now reopened to visitors following closure due to covid-19. NRW reminds visitors to take precautions and adhere to social distancing guidance at all times.

Gwent UKBS Report for May 2020

Chris Hatch

Highlights

An Osprey was reported from Gobion (7th). A Turtle Dove was present at Llandenny (8th). Two Hawfinches were seen at Llanwenarth (30th).

Other sightings

Single Hobbies were reported from Sebastopol (2nd), New Inn (5th), Peterstone Gout (28th) and Blaenserchan (31st). A flock of Whimbrel was present at Peterstone Gout (2nd), whilst five Whimbrel were also seen at Sudbrook (8th). 50 Kittiwakes and three Fulmars were seen offshore at Sudbrook (3rd). Ten Wood Warblers were present along the cycle track between Talywaun and Blaenafon (5th). Nightjars were reported from The Narth (6th), Mynydd Dimlaith (19th), and Lasgarn Woods (24th). 14 Little Egrets were present at the Nedern (7th). Grasshopper Warblers were reported from Cwmsychan (8th) and Rhyd y Blew (28th). Two Greenshanks were seen at Peterstone Gout (17th). Two Yellow Wagtails were reported from Coed Morgan (18th). Eight Sandwich Terns were recorded at Sudbrook (22nd). A Cetti's Warbler was present at Abergavenny (30th)

Gwent UKBS Report for June 2020

Chris Hatch

Highlights

A Great White Egret was reported from Magor (3rd). A male Garganey was seen at Newport Wetlands (9th). A Mediterranean Gull was recorded at Sudbrook (16th). A Quail was heard at Grosmont (25th).

Other sightings

Hobbies were reported from Mynydd Maen (1st), Coed Morgan (8th), and Llanwenarth (22nd). 17 Mandarin ducks were seen on the River Monnow at Llangua (3rd). A Kittiwake was recorded at Sudbrook (5th). A Firecrest was present at Grosmont (7th). A Willow Tit was reported from Wentwood (14th). Nightjars were reported from Lasgarn Woods on several dates. There were several reports of Marsh Harriers from Newport Wetlands during the month

Gwent UKBS Report for July 2020

Chris Hatch

Highlights

A Little Gull was reported from Llandegfedd Reservoir (7th). A Spoonbill was present at Newport Wetlands (7th to 9th). A Great White Egret was seen at Garn Lakes, Garn yr Erw (15th to 31st).

Other sightings

A Spotted Redshank was recorded at Newport Wetlands (1st and 2nd). Mediterranean Gulls were reported from Sudbrook (2nd and 15th) and Newport Wetlands (7th). A Quail was heard calling at Grosmont (2nd). Hobbies were reported from Penyfan Pond (2nd) and Newport Wetlands (25th). Three Sandwich Terns were seen at Newport Wetlands (7th), whilst a single bird was at Llandegfedd Reservoir (7th). A Merlin was reported from Gobion (9th). 19 Common Scoters were present at Sudbrook (13th). A Yellow-legged Gull was seen at Newport Wetlands (19th). Marsh Harriers were reported on several dates from Newport Wetlands. Wader numbers built throughout the month on the coast.

Tregaron Eagle – The end of an era (See BBC report below)

While we are looking forward to the resumption of outdoor meetings, the BBC reported on 17th August that the Tregaron golden eagle has been found dead, bringing to an end the years that a spotting from the bridge has added that little extra to the raptor list for the day. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-53784288>

Virtual Bird Fair

Like a number of other events the Bird Fair has been presented digitally this year. The talks are being made available for three months after initial broadcast. The list of events is available at <https://virtual.birdfair.org.uk/index.php/marquees/events-and-lectures-marquee/all-events-and-lectures/> Most of the pre-recorded talks last for about 15 minutes.

BBC Springwatch presenter Iolo Williams's sorrow at golden eagle death

Springwatch presenter Iolo Williams has described the death of Wales' last golden eagle as "more than the death of just an eagle".

He tracked the movements of the originally captive bird in the remote valleys of the Cambrian Mountains for his latest series **Iolo: The Last Wilderness of Wales**.

But the eagle has been found dead by a walker in the Abergwesyn Valley, Powys.

"Wales has lost one of its greatest characters," he said.

The bird was already something of a local celebrity in the area between Tregaron and Llanwrtyd Wells, with a dedicated Facebook fan page detailing sightings and renown among local bird watchers, but often going unseen for months at a time.

With a wingspan of up to 2.2 metres (7ft), the formidable creature has been largely extinct from England and Wales since 1850 with the only UK stronghold remaining in Scotland. Talks of the species being reintroduced into Wales are in progress.

On hearing the news of the death of the golden eagle, TV naturalist Iolo said: "The demise of this magnificent bird is more than just the death of an eagle."

"The Tregaron area has lost one of its great characters and Wales has lost a palpable link to its distant past. We are a poorer country without her."

The eagle was collected by a fellow member of Iolo's television crew who has ensured its registration in the Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme run by the Welsh Government.

Describing the news as "tragic", Mr Williams said the eagle had become "something of a local celebrity".

"It was always a joy to catch up with her," he added.

"I remember watching as red kites and buzzards flew over and I thought 'wow those are big birds', and then all of a sudden this huge, seven-foot golden eagle came over.

"It really was quite a magical moment when you first saw her."

While the cause of its death is unknown, Mr Williams said it was "quite an old bird", around 16, and he did not think there was any foul play.

Mr Williams said having a golden eagle in the area brought trade for cafes and hotels, and has "raised the tempo" of discussions around whether they can be reintroduced in Wales.

The eagle can be seen in the final episode of Iolo: The Last Wilderness of Wales on BBC One Wales on Thursday, 27 August, at 19:30 BST or on the BBC iPlayer

blob:<https://www.facebook.com/56f66f7c-7ff2-4009-b7db-23651bac09c5>

Reproduced from BBC Wales website.

Don't forget the talks from the Virtual Birdfair are available for three months after initial showing

<https://virtual.birdfair.org.uk/>