

THE DIPPER

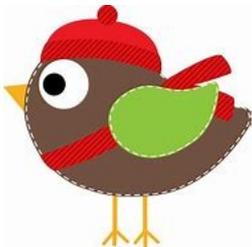


THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
Registered charity number 1088830

GOS WEB SITE: www.gwentbirds.org.uk

Newsletter No. 156

Winter 2020



**With best wishes for a Happy Christmas
and a peaceful and healthy New Year**



Annual General Meeting

Notice is hereby given that
since the pandemic makes it impossible to hold the
**2021 Annual General Meeting of the
Gwent Ornithological Society**
in person, it will instead take place
via Zoom video meeting
on the previously announced time and date:
Saturday 23rd January 2021 commencing at 7:30 pm

CONTENTS

| | | |
|--|----------------------------|---------|
| Notice of Annual General Meeting | | Page 3 |
| Minutes of 2019 Annual General Meeting | | Page 4 |
| 46 Years of WeBS counting: a few notable recollections | Al Venables | Page 10 |
| BTO Winter Update for Gwent | Richard M Clarke | Page 11 |
| Gwent Goosander and Cormorant River & Roost Survey | Steph Tyler | Page 12 |
| Sandmartins to get 5 Star Treatment | Richard M Clarke | Page 15 |
| Threat to rare bats at Ruperra Castle | Ruperra Conservation Trust | Page 15 |
| Gwent UKBS Report | Chris Hatch | Page 16 |
| Talks and Walks 2021 | Keith Roylance | Page 19 |
| Indoor Programme | | Page 20 |
| Outdoor Programme | | Page 21 |
| Membership Renewal | | Page 22 |



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
Registered Charity No: 108830

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2021

Since the pandemic makes it impossible to hold the 2021 Annual General Meeting of the Gwent Ornithological Society in person, it will instead be held via Zoom on the previously announced time and date:

The Annual General Meeting of the Gwent Ornithological Society will be held via Zoom at 7.30pm on Saturday, 23rd January 2021.

A link to the meeting will be sent to all e-mail members 7 – 10 days prior to the day.

AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the meeting held on January 25th, 2020
3. Treasurer's Report (to be circulated to the e-mail membership)
4. Chairman's Report (to be circulated to the e-mail membership)
5. Election of Officers

All current Officers have agreed to stand for a further year and need to be re-elected for 2021, (Vote)

6. Election of Committee Members

6.1 To consider any nominations for committee members

- a) Indoor Programme Secretary : Robin Hall is proposed by committee. (Vote)
- b) Treasurer: Marie Rose Pugh is proposed by committee (Vote)
- c) Webmaster: to confirm Andrew Cormack as webmaster. (Vote)

6.2 All other Committee members have agreed to stand for a further year and need to be re-elected for 2021. (Vote)

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

The AGM will be followed by a series of photo presentations via zoom by members* showing their memorable birding highlights from this Covid dominated year.

* presenters to be confirmed.



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Registered Charity No: 1088830

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2020

GOYTRE VILLAGE HALL 25TH JANUARY 2020

Those present: President Steve Roberts and 32 members

The Agenda for the meeting, The Treasurer's Accounts for 2019 and the Minutes of the 2019 AGM were distributed to each attendee at the meeting.

The President, Steve Roberts, opened the meeting by thanking everyone for coming and thanking everyone for the work in organising Iolo's talk, noting that "Keith and his good lady" had done a tremendous amount to get Iolo; "a big feather in the cap of the society .. to get him speaking to a small organisation such as ourselves, which he doesn't often do. So, it was a fantastic promotional thing for our society".

Secondly Steve asked everyone to get their record cards to the county recorder for our annual report, saying "I've got mine here ready so I'm always in a good position to say that. But what I will say is that I've been writing some of the species accounts, I did mention this last year that the new Birds in Wales is in the pipeline at the moment and species accounts are being written. I've had to write a few myself and I was surprised how much I relied upon County Bird reports to get that information ... and pleasantly surprised how often the Gwent Bird Report usually had, in many instances, the most comprehensive data about particular species ... so our county does do particularly well. ... your records ... no matter how insignificant you may think they are, when added to everybody else's ... can make a big difference".

APOLOGIES:

John Coleman, Janet Cormack, Simon James Bedford, Jerry Lewis, Stephanie Tyler, Gavin Vella

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS AGM:

The Minutes of the AGM held on January 26th, 2019 were distributed at the meeting. Acceptance of the report was proposed by Richard Clarke, seconded by Darryl Spittle and carried unanimously.

TREASURER'S REPORT by ANDREW CORMACK

The Society continues to be financially stable, with a slight surplus of income over running expenses. There has been a further welcome increase in income from both subscriptions and events: some of this has been retained in our Paypal account, since some donations are most easily made from that balance.

In 2019 our total expenditure on the annual report returned to normal, as the 2017 report was paid for within the financial year but the 2018 report will be invoiced in 2020

Ticket sales and refunds for the cancelled talk by Iolo Williams in 2019 are shown as Miscellaneous income and expenditure, respectively. Thanks to the generosity of those who attended the replacement talk by our president, no overall financial loss was incurred. Sales for Iolo's rescheduled talk in January 2020 are shown as Sales.

Our new website was completed and the final payment of £1350 made (included in miscellaneous expenditure above).

We were pleased to be able to award the Hamar Bursary, for the first time for several years. One-off grants were made to the BTO for research on spotted flycatchers, the RSPB for ring ouzels, and GWT's successful Bridewell appeal. We continued to support the Goldcliff Ringing Group, and have sponsored the Dipper (of course!) in the new WOS Birds of Wales book.

ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2019

| Income Receipts | 2019 | 2018 |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Subscriptions | 3,589.50 | 2,942.50 |
| Indoor meeting door takings | 853.60 | 761.50 |
| Raffles | 196.58 | 166.15 |
| Sales | 1,711.51 | 177.00 |
| Survey Work | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Donations | 139.00 | 334.69 |
| Grants | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Interest | 117.64 | 50.64 |
| Gift aid refunds | 578.30 | 588.49 |
| Misc | 1,053.50 | 0.00 |
| Wood | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Total receipts | 8,239.63 | 5,020.97 |
| Direct charitable expenditure | | |
| Printing | 2,212.69 | 307.19 |
| Hall hire | 588.00 | 380.00 |
| Speakers | 885.00 | 862.00 |
| Survey Work | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Postage | 574.28 | 313.85 |
| Grants + Bursary | 1,370.00 | 350.00 |
| Goytre Wood | 0.00 | 60.00 |
| Total charitable expenditure | 5,629.97 | 2,273.04 |
| Other expenditure | | |
| Refreshments | 12.79 | 0.00 |
| Insurance | 113.00 | 113.00 |
| Library | 0.00 | 7.50 |
| Miscellaneous | 2,663.62 | 1,161.99 |
| Memberships | 132.00 | 130.00 |
| Equipment | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| PayPal charges | 22.03 | 12.85 |
| Total other expenditure | 2,943.44 | 1,425.34 |
| Total expenditure | 8,573.41 | 3,698.38 |

Net receipts for year -333.78 1,322.59

Statement of assets and liabilities as at 31 December 2019

| | 2019 | 2018 |
|--------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Monetary assets | | |
| Current account | 5,217.15 | 6,010.04 |
| Building society account | 36,392.60 | 35,987.96 |
| PayPal account | 265.21 | 478.24 |
| Total | 41,928.96 | 42,476.24 |
| Property | | |
| Goytre Wood | 15,300.00 | 15,300.00 |
| Liabilities | | |
| Uncashed cheques | | |

Acceptance of the report was proposed by Richard Clarke, seconded by Andrew Baker and carried unanimously.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by KEITH ROYLANCE:

We have continued to be an active and well-funded society during 2019. However membership declined by 28 during the year to 259 members.

We finally launched our new website on 16th August after Andrew Cormack took over the administration from the developer. Our thanks must go to Chris Field, Verity Picken and Andrew Cormack for a massive amount of work behind the scenes to get the website finalised and working as we intended. Security of the site is improved as sightings must be verified before they are published; exceptions are available to members who are given a password to allow their sightings to appear immediately. Additional benefits of the website include the ability to work on mobile devices, phones & tablets, as well as being far more modern looking than the previous site. It is also more easily maintained as it is on an up to date and active platform.

It was somewhat disappointing that after the launch, only four positive comments were received – three on the Gwent Birders Facebook page and one by email.

As you will see in the Treasurer's Report we awarded the Bert Hamar Bursary during the year. It was awarded to Richard Evans. He made more than 30 nest boxes and erected them in Goytre House Wood and has agreed to monitor them and the already existing boxes during 2020 and hopefully beyond. Goytre House Wood has been briefly surveyed as to tree safety and significant expenditure is likely to be needed over the next year or two.

We supported a number of appeals during the year involving Spotted Flycatchers (BTO), Ring Ouzel (RSPB) and GWT's Bridewell Common. We have also sponsored the entry for Dipper in the forthcoming Birds of Wales publication by WOS.

Our organised programme consisted of 13 indoor and 12 outdoor activities. Regrettably our major indoor talk by Iolo Williams was cancelled at the last minute due to illness but our President stepped in and presented an enthralling talk to those present. (Iolo returned earlier this week to GOS for his talk on the 'Wildlife of Wales').

Mike Dilger opened the year's programme with a talk on 'The trials & tribulations of a wildlife presenter'. During the rest of the year we were taken through Iceland, the Caucasus Mountains, The Gambia, Central Spain, Spitsbergen, Turkey and the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Closer to home we viewed Urban Peregrines, the wilds of

Scotland and a photographic essay of a year at Goldcliff. I won't attempt to identify a favourite as it is a personal and subjective choice. We thank all the presenters for their professionalism. I would point out that four of the speakers were GOS members which once again highlights the expertise we have in Gwent.

The annual trip to Portland Bird Observatory was again well supported with 16 members occupying the accommodation for two nights in early October. Other outdoor activities were supported in varying degrees, with the one scheduled for Mynydd Maen in June being called off due to persistent rain over many days making the proposed route unsafe.

Society members continue to take an active role in various surveys. They took an active part in the National Willow Tit survey organised by the RSPB – early results suggest that the species has declined drastically in the county.

Ongoing national surveys co-ordinated by the BTO continue to have our support, including Breeding Bird Survey, Waterways Breeding Survey, Wetland Bird Survey, Heronries Census, Garden Birdwatch and the Bird Ringing Scheme.

We continue to support Goldcliff Ringing Group with an annual grant.

The major news on proposed developments in the county was the announcement by Mark Drakeford, First Minister, that the proposed M4 Relief Road would NOT go ahead, the decision being made on environmental and cost grounds. We now hope that the Gwent Levels can continue to be an ongoing haven for wildlife.

Welsh Water (Dwr Cymru) eventually withdrew their application to develop the sailing club building at Llandegfedd Reservoir into an all-purpose events building. We understand however that another application for developments at Llandegfedd Reservoir is likely to be made early in 2020. We will continue to monitor the situation.

We surveyed Pen-Rhos Quarry, near Caerleon when we found that it was to be developed as a holiday camp. We offered comments, as the proposal was designed to be beneficial to the environment in some respects. We understand the proposal has been approved and will consist of 24 pods/log cabins.

There was also a proposal for a large housing development in fields directly adjacent to the Deri Nature Reserve in Abergavenny. GOS objected as it was felt the encroachment of housing and its associated activities were likely to cause the loss of species such as Pied Flycatcher, Redstart and Wood Warbler. As far as we know no decision has been made on the application to date.

We must thank Andrew Baker for all his efforts in analysing the planning applications.

There were no new species added to the County List during 2019. A Semi-palmated Sandpiper at NWR Goldcliff was only the 2nd record for the county whilst a Black Kite at Goldcliff in April and a Savi's Warbler at Uskmouth Reedbeds in May were the 3rd records for the county. Other species of note were a Glossy Ibis that took up residence at Goldcliff in January, and is still there, an adult Red-necked Phalarope at Goldcliff in April, whilst a Green Winged Teal was at Peterstone the same month. A Lapland Bunting, the first since 2004 was at Coldharbour Pill on 13th September. A Smew frequented both Llandegfedd Reservoir and the River Usk during December. Common Cranes continue to be seen on a fairly regular basis in the coastal area of the county. In October a Snow Bunting was a well watched bird on the Bloreng.

Our newsletter 'The Dipper' was published three times during 2019, not the usual

four issues due to lack of content. We intend publishing four times in 2020 irrespective of content, but please support our efforts by sending in news, articles, snippets gained from the press or anything bird or environment related. Our Annual Report edited by John Coleman continued its highly acclaimed status and was widely appreciated.

We continue to support local shows when invited – only two during the past year. The Garden Birdwatch event in January and GWT's Magor Marsh event in July.

Your committee continues to investigate ways of encouraging the younger generation to become interested and involved in birdwatching and the environment. We discussed at length a proposal to offer schools the opportunity to have a nest box with camera so that pupils could see the reality of nesting birds. Whilst schools showed a significant interest in such a project they didn't want to be involved themselves in the installation and maintenance needed. As we are a volunteer organisation with very limited human resources we cannot see a way forward at present.

During the year Chris Field stepped down from committee, although I know he is continuing to support us in a number of ways outside of the formal committee structure. Gavin Vella has also relinquished his committee role. John Coleman, after 10 years as Report Editor has retired from the role and David Brassey has stood down from outdoor programme secretary although both remain on the committee.

I would like to thank all the committee for their support during 2019, Andrew who has kept our finances in order, John for another excellent Report, Chris Field for his expertise on digital projection equipment. To Hannah Daniels who has embraced the position of Indoor programme secretary. Thanks also to Janet Cormack for putting together the Dipper, to Arthur Pitcher and his team of helpers in the kitchen that allow us to have tea & biscuits at indoor meetings and to Kathy Leyshon who has taken the money off you as you enter for many years now. Unfortunately she feels unable to continue to do so as she finds driving in the dark troublesome. Thanks therefore to Angela, my wife, who stepped in when Kathy wasn't here.

In conclusion and on a serious note, we are suffering like many societies with an ageing and reducing membership. Speaking from experience there are far too many tasks being undertaken by far too few individuals. This does not bode well for the long term future of this society. We therefore need more members to take an active role within the society. Without more support, particularly from a 'younger generation' (20 – 60 year olds are welcome), the society is likely to decline until it cannot function as it should. Please consider the possibility of your involvement in an active role in this society as **YOUR SOCIETY NEEDS YOU!**

Election of Officers

All officers have agreed to stand for a further year and need to be re-elected. This was proposed by Barbara Willis and seconded by Trevor Russell; carried unanimously.

Election of Committee members

- Indoor Secretary and Report Editor: No nominations received. {Members encouraged to think of someone/volunteer}
- Outdoor Events Secretary: No nominations received {ditto}
- First of two committee vacancies: Blair Jones was nominated for committee member; proposed by Keith Roylance and seconded by Cathy Gregory; carried unanimously.
- Second of two committee vacancies: No nominations received.

Existing Committee Members

All existing committee members (other than Chris Field and Gavin Vella who have stepped down) have agreed to stand for a further year and need to be re-elected. This was proposed by Darryl Spittle and seconded by Steve Carter; carried unanimously.

Any Other Business

Steve Roberts raised the subject of a Honey Buzzard Survey:

All county recorders received information from the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, asking if they would take part in a Honey Buzzard Survey (not very formal). Gwent should have an input as Gwent is likely to have Honey Buzzard in various places where they've been seen in the recent past. Darryl (county recorder) was asked to get some competent people together in July/August. The last survey, some 20 years ago, doubled the national breeding totals and made a significant impact.

There being no further business the AGM was declared closed at 20:00

The AGM was followed by a Member's Evening Finger Buffet which as always generous delicious and most convivial. Thanks to all who contributed. This was followed by a series of short presentations: Darryl Spittle gave a presentation on submitting bird records including descriptions; Richard Clarke gave a presentation on BTO surveys, and specifically the breeding bird survey; Richard Dowell gave a presentation on his birding experiences in Senegal, The Gambia and South Africa. Thanks to you all for your excellent presentations.

The meeting closed at 21:50

46 Years of WeBS counting: a few notable recollections

I write this while marooned in England, prevented by Covid regulations from crossing the border to reach my little flat in Cardiff, my base from where I keep in touch with family and friends, but most importantly carry out my WeBS counts!

Soon after I started counting the Peterstone-St Brides stretch of the Severn in 1974 I met a fellow birder named Bob who was keen to help. He was older than me, had learnt all the Latin names of the birds and wild flowers and couldn't resist using them all the time (in addition to the English names). Hence, he might actually say, "in my Garden, House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* nest in a box on the Oak tree *Quercus robur*." This amused me and fellow birders who (behind his back) referred to him as "Passer domesticus". He had an amazing talent for imitating bird calls and one foggy day we heard a distant Greenshank call. Bob immediately began calling back repeatedly and after a short while the bird emerged out of the thick fog flying straight towards us. Remarkable! Bob moved away from S Wales after a couple of years and I haven't heard of him since.

A few years later I met Mike Love who has shared the count with me ever since. Starting a count one morning in Spring 1987, as I passed alongside Peterstone Gout, a flock of 11 waders came from behind me flying rapidly over the Gout and out to sea. "They've got to be Ruffs?" I thought, but previously I'd never seen more than one Ruff at Peterstone. Could I be sure? Mike was no help because he was late arriving (not unusual). We continued to St Brides to complete the count and there on the expanse of saltmarsh turf was a flock of 26 Ruff, the largest number ever recorded in the county! Any doubt about the 11 at Peterstone dissipated immediately.

In the autumn of that year, we were counting at St Brides shortly after high tide. Mike was scanning the edge of the saltmarsh when he said "I think there's a body over there". And that's what it was – the bloated corpse of a man at the top of the rocks where it had been dropped by the last tide. Nearby the tide had deposited a white-painted internal door with which we covered the body and completed the count before using the phone at the local shop to report our discovery to the police (this was before the days of mobile phones). It turned out to have been the body of a rough-sleeper from Newport centre. My work colleagues were incredulous that we had prioritised completion of the count over reporting the body – I guess you have to be a birder to understand that.

In January 1990, on a low-tide count, we scanned the long rocky spit that covers the St Brides sewage outfall pipe, and as we could see no birds we allowed my dog to wander off exploring it with her nose as dogs do. To our surprise she disturbed a small dark wader that we hadn't previously noticed, which flew directly towards us, landing surprisingly close. It was a Purple Sandpiper! It stuck around for the next six weeks, allowing many local birders to see this very scarce visitor to the county.

This is intended as a short piece, so I will finish here with an amusing incident. One Autumn day we approached the Gout when workmen were carrying out extensive engineering work nearby. Seeing our binoculars, they called out, asking if we had seen the Grey Phalarope in the Gout. So we looked. There was only one bird on the Gout – an immature Long-tailed Duck that had been there for several days. We asked if that was the bird. "Yes" they replied – "it's definitely a Grey Phalarope because some bird-watchers with binoculars (and a bird book, they emphasised) had identified it as such the previous day". We failed to convince them it was a Long-tailed Duck. Obviously having a bird book swung it.

AI Venables



Winter update for Gwent

Richard M. Clarke
BTO Regional Representative
bto@gwentbirds.org.uk

Make your birding count - volunteer and support BTO surveys, schemes and projects

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)

I know that many of you who would normally take part in the survey were disappointed that this was not possible in 2020. There was similar disappointment for new volunteers who were all set to get underway for the first time, but then found that the pandemic curtailed survey work.

Given the pandemic and the lock-down, it will come as no surprise that in Gwent no Early Visits were made to survey squares. In the case of Late Visits, there was a very small window of opportunity when a few people did manage to get out and perhaps surprisingly, 11% of allocated squares in Gwent were surveyed.

At the National level, I understand that the BTO has some data, roughly half the sites covered for both BBS and WBBS and of those, the majority were Late Visits. Work is underway to try and figure out what will be possible, if anything, with regards to population trends. The good news of course, is that all these data will be used going forwards in research, studies, distribution work and anything else we can think of – volunteer efforts this year will not be wasted.

Whether you were or were not able to carry out survey work this year, I just wanted to say thank you for your continued support. I hope very much that 2021 will provide us with the opportunity to undertake fieldwork and that you will want to contribute to this important survey once more.

If you have not previously taken part in the survey, then I hope you will consider doing so. If you can identify birds by sight, song and call then please consider volunteering. All that is needed is three visits to a square between April and June (a recce and two morning visits) to record the birds you see and hear and to note the habitat. Go to <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/bbs> for further information about the survey or contact me direct on the e-mail address at the start of this article. The table that follows provides details of the squares in Gwent where a surveyor is needed – could you take one of these on? Other squares frequently come up and therefore if none listed here are convenient why not put your name forward and I'll keep you informed of other opportunities as they arise.

Available BBS squares in Gwent

| | | | |
|--------|------------------------|--------|------------|
| SO2719 | Sugar Loaf | SO3613 | Llanvapley |
| SO3228 | Longtown | SO3624 | Llancillo |
| SO3307 | Llanfair Grange | SO3726 | Rowlstone |
| SO3504 | Kemeys Commander | SO4502 | Llansoy |
| SO3519 | Llangattock Lingoed | SO4708 | Cwmcarvan |
| ST2097 | Newbridge (Caerphilly) | | |

GWENT GOOSANDER & CORMORANT RIVER AND ROOST SURVEY 2020-21

Survey Report 1: November 2020

Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of the survey report and let us start by saying thank you all very much for taking part in the November surveys. You have all contributed greatly in getting the survey well and truly underway. Through your efforts we have managed to gather a fantastic amount of invaluable information. This really was a superb start and we hope that you enjoyed taking part and that you find this short report of results of interest.

Results of river surveys

In mid-November a grand total of 56 observers were out counting waterbirds on rivers and nearby waterbodies in Gwent. The Rivers Rhymney, Ebbw and Sirhowey, Usk, Monnow and Honddu and the Wye plus Afon Lwyd and adjacent Cwmbran Boating Lake were all surveyed as well as several reservoirs as Ynysfro.

A grand total of 3,181 birds were reported on the rivers of 30 species. Of the two target species, Goosanders were more numerous with 83 birds, mainly redheads, counted; these sawbills were present on every river from the Monnow to the Rhymney but most numerous on the Usk (32). A maximum of only 67 Cormorants (excluding numbers on waters covered in WeBS and the roost counts) were seen and apart from two small tree day roosts, no other



roosts were seen. That at Llancaut on the Wye appears to have been abandoned.

Redhead in the autumn rain at Cwmcarn. © Stephen Lyons

In addition to the 67 on rivers, three Cormorants were at a small lake, The Warrage near Raglan and six at Ynysfro Reservoir. By the evening roost counts, birds at The Warrage had gone and at Ynysfro had halved in numbers.

Of the other species, the most numerous were Mallard (1,269), Black-headed Gull (515) and Canada Goose (383). Mallard were frequent on all rivers but on the Usk and Monnow they were mainly in the lowermost sections. Most Canada Geese (280) were in the lower Usk Valley.

Fourth in the league table was Wigeon with 90 birds followed by Redshank (88) all seen on the tidal reaches of the Usk and Ebbw. Sixth was Mandarin Duck with 85 individuals seen, 76 of them on the rivers Wye and Monnow. Only 78 Mute Swan were noted including a flock of 32 on the Wye below Monmouth. Some 76 Dippers were noted especially on the Rhymney, Ebbw, Sirhowey and Monnow/Honddu.

Of interest too on the various rivers were 62 Teal (49 on the lower Rhymney and others on lower most estuarine Ebbw and Usk with just one on the lower Monnow), four Little Egrets, 17 Little Grebes, two Common Sandpipers (on the lower Wye), six Green Sandpipers, 30 Kingfishers, a White Wagtail (by the Wye at Wyesham (Monmouth sewage works)), 62 Grey Wagtails and two Reed Buntings on the lower Usk.

Results of the roosts survey

On the evening of 15th November, 31 observers visited reservoirs, lakes and ponds across the county from Butetown and Beaufort Hill Ponds in the north west, Ynysfro Reservoir in the south west, the Warrage in the north east and Llandegfedd Reservoir in mid county. This was a terrific turnout given that the weather conditions in the afternoon had been very wet. Fortunately, the weather did improve late on, which enabled people to do at least some of the survey in the dry.

Of the target species, the total count of Goosander was 73 comprising 59 redheads, 12 males and two other undetermined. Key roost sites were Ponthir, Garnlydan and Llandegfedd Reservoirs which accounted for 44 of the total birds seen. Although the number of Goosander was fewer than that recorded during the river surveys on Friday/Saturday, the total was nevertheless broadly compatible with the last November survey undertaken in 2012.



Panoramic view of Garnlydan Reservoir © Lee Gregory

Cormorants numbers were considerably fewer than those recorded during the river surveys, with just 40 birds including five sub-adults. Disappointingly the historical roosts at Piercefield did not hold any birds, Denny Island only had three individuals and Llandegfedd Reservoir had 22 – this was considerably fewer birds than recorded in past surveys.

The most numerous species of wildfowl recorded was Canada Goose with 816 in total and recorded in three figures at four sites, including 400 at Llandegfedd Reservoir. Second and third place went to Mallard at 421 and Tufted Duck at 165. There were also 70 Moorhen, 29 Great Crested Grebe and 27 Little Grebe. Other noteworthy records included some 6,000 gulls, eight Mandarin and a Red-breasted Merganser at Llandegfedd Reservoir and a Garganey and a Pochard at Ynysfro Reservoir.

Getting ready for the December survey

The next survey weekend will be 12/13 December. We very much hope that you will be able to take part again.

As part of the December and January still water (roost) surveys we would like to here from anyone who might also be interested in visiting a site during mid-day. Such visits would be additional to evening visits and they do not need to be undertaken by the same person. The additional visit would be to simply count target species on arrival and record what they are doing: feeding/loafing. If you think that you might be able to help please drop me (Richard) an e-mail.

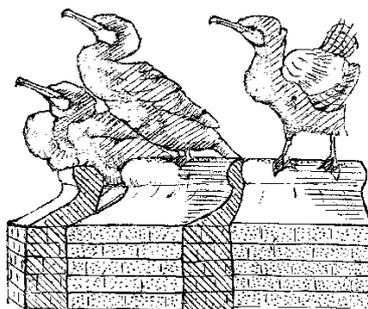
We have a few further opportunities for people to take part in the surveys. There are northern sections of the Ebbw and Sirhowey rivers that need cover and several ponds and reservoirs in the heads of the valleys. If you or someone you know might be able to either take on a river section or a still water, then we would be very pleased to hear from you.

Thank you all very much again for your support to date. We'll be in touch again nearer the next survey date.

Contact details:

Richard Clarke (roost survey) - surveys@GwentBirds.org.uk or Tel: 01633 615581

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



AEDH '90

Sand Martins to get 5-star treatment

Richard M. Clarke

An exciting project is being planned at the old golf course site at Tredegar Park, Newport which will see a hotel being provided for Sand Martins. Newport City Council is looking to build the hotel early next year on the west bank of the river Ebbw, close to an area where Sand Martins have nested previously.

The aim is to provide 100 nesting chambers in a purpose-built structure, which will be designed to blend into the local surroundings and include a green roof. Its design will provide the opportunity to monitor nesting birds closely. The Society/Goldcliff Ringing Group are in close discussion with Newport City Council about the design of building and future arrangements for monitoring. It's hoped that the hotel will be fully open for business in time for the return of Sand Martins in Spring 2021.

Threat to rare bats at Ruperra Castle

Although this site is just out of county, members may be interested in supporting this campaign

Briefing note by Ruperra Conservation Trust (ruperra@gmail.com) November 2020

The greater horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum* is one of the rarest species of bats in the UK and is restricted to South West England and South Wales. In Wales there are only five main maternity roosts, and one of these is located between Caerphilly and Newport in a derelict outbuilding in the grounds of Ruperra castle. Although greater horseshoe bats have declined in number by more than 90% over the last century, the breeding population at Ruperra is actually now increasing slightly each year despite the ongoing lack of work to repair the roostbuilding. The neighbouring woodland and the building where they breed have been declared a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) due to the presence of the bats. The owner of the castle, property developer Mr. Hydar Al-Khafaji, has recently applied for planning permission to convert an adjacent old stable block, which is sometimes also used by a few of the bats, into a number of residential apartments. This would mean that the breeding colony, which for many years has been undisturbed, will have multiple households living a few metres away, with all the associated noise, light disturbance, cars and potential predators such as domestic cats. Horseshoe bats are known to be particularly sensitive to noise and light pollution, and there is a significant risk that this important maternity colony will not survive the disturbance. This colony of greater horseshoes, which is a species of principal importance for maintaining biodiversity in Wales, is too important to risk any possibility that there may be a negative impact upon it. Although the planning application also includes plans for a nearby purpose built bat house, there is no certainty that the bats would use it, as it is not on the flight route to their foraging areas. Work to create this building would cause additional disturbance and destruction of essential habitat outside the current roost exit. We believe that the precautionary principle should be applied and this planning application should be rejected. We hope that Natural Resources Wales, who are

responsible for the SSSI, will also recommend that the application is rejected. However, we are worried that planning approval may still be granted.

If you too are concerned about the fate of this nationally important breeding colony of greater horseshoe bats and think that our wildlife is worth more than a quick profit for a developer, please object to this planning application quoting the references 19/0787/COU and 19/0789/COU. Write to: Caerphilly Planning Division Tredomen House, Tredomen Park Ystrad Mynach Hengoed CF82 7WF or email: planning@caerphilly.gov.uk You can view the applications on the Caerphilly Council Planning Portal using the following link: <https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/Services/Planning-and-building-control>

Gwent UKBS Report for August 2020

Chris Hatch

Highlights

A Pectoral Sandpiper was present at Newport Wetlands (20th-21st). The Great White stayed at Garn Lakes, Blaenafon for most of the month. A Great White Egret was also reported from Beaufort (10th). A Wood Sandpiper was reported from Newport Wetlands (8th to 16th). An Osprey was present at Llandegfedd reservoir (27th to 28th). Two Great Skuas were seen at Sudbrook (16th to 17th). An Arctic Skua was seen at Newport Wetlands (21st).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

The Glossy Ibis was again present all month. Wader numbers continued to build, with sightings of note being five Little Stints (15th) and three Curlew Sandpipers (23rd). Four Garganey were recorded (10th). A number of Marsh Harrier sightings were reported throughout the month. A Storm Petrel was seen offshore (22nd). A Short-eared Owl was reported from Goldcliff (22nd).

Other sites

Four Common Scoters were seen off Sudbrook (7th). A Mediterranean Gull was also reported from this site (7th). Two Green Sandpipers, together with ten Common Sandpipers were recorded at Pant y Goetre (13th), whilst nine Common Sandpipers were seen at Black Rock (24th). Around 100 'Commic' Terns were recorded off Sudbrook (8th). A Firecrest was also reported from Sudbrook (27th). A roosting Long-eared Owl was seen at Black Rock (28th). Three Yellow-legged Gulls were present at Llandegfedd reservoir (28th).

Gwent UKBS Report for September 2020

Chris Hatch

Highlights

A Lesser Yellowlegs was present at Newport Wetlands (21st). Three Great White Egrets were also reported from this site (12th). A Osprey was seen offshore at Magor Pill (15th). Two Glossy Ibis were present at Newport Wetlands (17th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A male Hen Harrier was reported, as was a Hobby (both on 14th). Up to four Curlew Sandpipers (5th) were seen. Two Little Stints and seven Ruff (19th). A Bittern was recorded (29th). Marsh Harriers were seen on several occasions and wader and wildfowl numbers continued to build.

Other sites

A male Hen Harrier was seen near Brynmawr (2nd). A Hobby was present at Monmouth (2nd). A Wheatear of the Greenland race was recorded on the coast at Redwick (10th). 13 Little egrets were reported from Undy (24th). Three Ring Ouzels were seen at Garnddyrys (28th). A juvenile Shag was present on the canal near Pontypool (29th).

Gwent UKBS Report for October 2020

Chris Hatch

Highlights

A Red-throated Diver, together with a Red-breasted Merganser were present at Llandegfedd reservoir (4th). Single Yellow-browed Warblers were seen at the Deri, Abergavenny and at Newport (both 11th). Up to 13 Ring Ouzels were reported from the east side of the Blorenge (13th). A Great Grey Shrike was recorded at Redwick (16th). Two Glossy Ibises were seen at Newport Wetlands (23rd). A Snow Bunting was present at Mynydd Llanhilleth (29th onwards).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A Curlew Sandpiper was reported (14th). Both male and female Merlins were seen (23rd) A juvenile European White-fronted Goose was present (23rd). Two Marsh Harriers were reported (23rd).

Other sites

A Merlin was seen on the foreshore at Undy (1st). A number of Hen Harriers were reported, with a male and female at Mynydd Llanhilleth (4th), a male at Mynydd Llangatwg (11th), a female at the same site (29th), and a male at Mynydd y Gaer (31st). Approximately 1,250 Pied Wagtails were recorded at a Newport roost (9th). Eleven Turnstones were seen at Peterstone (11th). Two Hawfinches were present at Dingestow (17th). 10 Little Grebes were seen at Tredegar Park Lake, Newport (18th). 12 Little Egrets were recorded at Redwick (19th). A Dark-bellied Brent Goose was seen at Magor Pill (27th). A small number of Bramblings were reported from various sites, whilst numbers of Fieldfares and Redwings began to build. A number of migrating Wheatears were also recorded.

Highlights

A White-fronted Goose was present at Ponthir (from 9th). A sighting of this species was also reported from Llandegfedd reservoir (29th). A Pink-footed Goose was reported from the Nedern (15th), whilst a Tundra Bean Goose was seen near Caldicot (from 21st). A Yellow-browed Warbler was recorded at Monmouth (14th to 18th). A Great Northern Diver was seen at Llandegfedd reservoir, whilst a Red-throated Diver was present at the same site (28th). A Snow Bunting was reported from Mynydd Llanhilleth (7th to 9th). A Leach's Petrel was observed at the second Severn crossing (17th). Two Black Redstarts were seen at Newport Wetlands (28th-29th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A Barn Owl was reported (9th). The two Glossy Ibis remained throughout the month. Male and female Marsh Harriers were seen (9th), with two female Hen Harriers reported on the same date and another female later reported (13th). Four Barnacle Geese were seen (10th). A Ring-necked Parakeet was reported (10th). Five Common Scoters were recorded (17th). A Merlin was present (22nd). A Brent Goose was reported (28th) and two Whooper Swans were seen (29th).

Other sites

A mixed flock of 40+ Hawfinches and Crossbills were reported from Llandogo (2nd). A Firecrest was seen at Sudbrook (3rd). A late Wheatear was recorded on the Sugar Loaf (4th). A male Hen Harrier was reported from Mynydd Henllys (7th), with a male also recorded at Mynydd Llangatwg (29th). A Barn Owl was seen at Llanwern (10th), with another recorded near Clytha (12th). A Red-breasted Merganser was reported from Llandegfedd Reservoir (13th to 26th). 23 Mandarin Ducks were present on the River Usk, south of Usk town (16th). A Garganey was seen at Ynysyfro Reservoir (17th). A Jack Snipe was recorded at Mynydd Llangatwg (23rd). A juvenile Scaup was reported from Parc Bryn Bach (28th). A Barnacle Goose was seen at Llandegfedd Reservoir (29th).

TALKS & WALKS 2021

Indoor talks programme

We aim to re-start our indoor programme at the AGM on Saturday 23rd January 2021 at 7.30pm. Our usual indoor talks programme will continue as per the programme schedule available elsewhere in the Dipper.

However, it is not possible under the current circumstances for the talk to be given live at our usual venue, Goytre Village Hall. We plan to make the AGM and talks available remotely, using the Zoom video-conferencing software. We have been using Zoom successfully to hold our recent Committee meetings. Initially there will be no charge for attending the talks.

We appreciate that not all Club members will have used either Zoom or any other video-conferencing software in the past, and that some members do not have internet access.

For those members with access to internet, the Zoom software can be easily downloaded at no cost from <https://zoom.us/download>. You will need to download Zoom Client for Meetings. The software runs on all standard browsers and can be used on PCs, laptops, tablets and all mobile devices. It is not necessary to set up an account with Zoom. You can find user guides at <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/204772869-Zoom-Rooms-User-Guide>

If there is a demand, we may provide short training sessions.

Longer-term future of indoor talks and field meetings

We have considered the future of both indoor & outdoor activities due to falling numbers of attendees at both activities. We are hoping that by zooming indoor meetings and thus reducing the need for travel in the winter evenings an increase in participation will occur. The outdoor programme has been put together by Dave Brassey again for 2021 so please support it whenever you can. Any changes to the published programme will be shown on our website. www.gwentbirds.org.uk

Finally, thank you all for continuing to support the Club during difficult times. We only survive because of your interest and commitment.

With kindest regards

Keith Roylance (Chairman)

Provisional Indoor Meeting Programme

| Date | Speaker | Topic | Comments |
|----------|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Jan 23rd | AGM | Members photos 3 x 15 mins | |
| Feb 6th | Ralph Todd | On the trail of the Crane, part one | Wildlife Photographer |
| Feb 20th | Gary Prescott aka The Biking Birder | There's a Tapir at the door | Gary will introduce the birds, reserves and people he met during his three-year adventure cycling around the UK plus seven months in Peru. |
| Mar 6th | Mary Colwell | Saving Britain's Curlews | In 2016 Mary walked 500 miles across Ireland and the UK to find out why the numbers of this iconic bird have plummeted. What followed was a nationwide movement to save the Eurasian Curlew. |
| Mar 27th | John Wilson | Uganda – Birds, Primates and other animals | Join John on a tour of the birds and wildlife of Uganda's Wildlife Reserves. |

Autumn Season – some speakers yet to be confirmed. The dates of meetings are given below.

| | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Sept 18 th | Stephen Lovell | The Somerset Levels |
| Oct 2nd | Graham Lenton | Wildlife of Madagascar |
| Oct 16th | | |
| Oct 30th | | |
| Nov 13th | | |
| Nov 27th | | |
| Dec 11th | | |

| | | | |
|---------------|-----|--------------------------|------------------|
| Jan 22nd 2022 | AGM | Members photos x 15 mins | Provisional date |
|---------------|-----|--------------------------|------------------|

All meetings will commence at 7:30 pm unless otherwise stated. Any amendments to the programme will be published on our website.

NOTE: Due to the continuing restrictions for Covid the spring season meetings will be held via ZOOM. All members for whom we have an e-mail address will be sent a link some 7-10 days prior to the meeting allowing them to attend the meeting if they so wish. There will be no entry charge for the Spring meetings, the speaker's fees will be paid from our reserves.

The style or location of meetings for the Autumn 2021 season will be dependent upon the regulations in place at the time and who we have booked as speakers. Details will be published in the Dipper and on our website at www.gwentbirds.org.uk

OUTDOOR PROGRAMME 2020

Due to the current Covid restrictions we have delayed the start of the outdoor programme until April. If the situation allows earlier walks may take place. Information on our website: www.gwentbirds.org.uk

| Date | Time | Walk Area | Description | Meeting Place | Leader |
|-----------------------|-------|---|--|--|----------------|
| Sat. 24th April | 9.00 | Brynmawr, Beaufort and Garnlydan | Moderate walk 2 – 3 hours | Asda Brynmawr car park | Nick Beswick |
| Fri - Sun. 7-9 May | | Portland | £17pn - bookings taken from 1st January- take sleeping bag and food To book - email Dave Brassey david.brassey@ntlworld.com | Observatory | Dave Brassey |
| Sat. 15th May | 8.30 | Blaen Bran Woodland | Moderate walk 2 – 3 hours | Blaen Bran Woodland car park | Keith Roylance |
| Sat. 22nd May | 8.30 | Lower Monnow | Easy walk 3 hours | On road by Osbaston School SO507137 - NP25 3PU | John Coleman |
| Sun. 30th May | 9.00 | Strawberry Cottage Wood | Woodland walk for Redstart and Flycatchers (some steep parts) | Queens Head Pub nr Cwmyoy SO311221 | Andrew Cormack |
| Fri. 4th June | 20.00 | Wentwood Forest | Easy walk to look for Nightjar | Cadira Beeches | Gavin Vella |
| Sat. 12th Jun | 8.30 | Broadmeend, Beacon Hill and Cleddon Bog | Moderate Walk 3 hrs | Beacon View car park, SO515054. | Steph Tyler |
| Sat. 17th July | 9.00 | Ham Wall | Easy Walk | Ham Wall Car Park ST 449 396 (Charge for Non-RSPB members) | Dave Brassey |
| Sun.1st Aug | 7.30 | Uskmouth | Warbler ringing with Goldcliffe Ringing Group Booking essential (surveys@gwentbirds.org.uk). Weather dependent. | NWR Uskmouth car park | Richard Clarke |
| Fri - Sun. 20-22Aug | | Birdfair | Fantastic three-day event | Rutland - Unofficial - just for your diary | |
| Fri - Sun. 8 - 10 Oct | | Portland | £17pn - bookings taken from 1st July - take sleeping bag and food To book - email Dave Brassey david.brassey@ntlworld.com | Observatory | Dave Brassey |
| Sun. 17th Oct | | Stearth | Moderate walk 2 – 3 hours | Car Park ST 25208 44210 | Blair Jones |
| Sat. 23rd Oct | 8.00 | Allt-yr yn NR | 2-3 hours walk - | Fourteen Locks Car Park (£1 charge) | Ian Walker |
| Sun. 28th Nov | 9.15 | Slimbridge | Full day - Winter visitors inc Bewicks and Whoopers | Slimbridge Car Park | Dave Brassey |
| Page 21 | | | Hopefully booking restrictions lifted | | |

Membership Renewal

Your membership subscription is due on January 1st for 2021. 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 2021.

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 via PayPal on the Society's website.
www.gwentbirds.org.uk

**Membership Fees remain at £15.00 for Individual Membership
or £18.00 for Joint/Family Membership.**

I wish to renew my membership of Gwent Ornithological Society for 2021

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.