

THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Registered charity number 1088830

GOS WEB SITE: www.gwentbirds.org.uk

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Autumn 2021

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN

PLEASE HELP US FIND A CHAIRMAN SO THAT THE SOCIETY CAN CONTINUE AS IT HAS DONE FOR THE PAST 60 YEARS

Welcome to the Autumn edition of the Dipper. I hope you have been enjoying the increased freedom from lockdown and getting out and about in our wonderful County of Gwent. Whilst the birds may have become less obvious as the breeding season comes to an end, we continue to observe the Butterflies and Dragonflies amongst many other wildlife species.

Most of you will have received the e-mail communication (reproduced below) regarding our search for a successor as Chairman for when I step down after five years at the AGM in January 2022. Whilst the society had a very limited response to the appeal, I had hoped to bring you some positive news on the future Chairman, regrettably that is not the case as the respondents have, after some thought, decided not to progress to becoming Chairman Elect.

The committee continue to plan a full programme of events for 2022 even as the future of the Society is threatened by a lack of Chairman.

So please consider becoming our chairman. **YOUR SOCIETY NEEDS YOU.**

If you wish to discuss any aspect of the role of chairman, please contact me via chairman@gwentbirds.org.uk

Reproduced below is the text of an e-mail sent recently to all members for whom we have e-mail details

SOCIETY IN CRISIS

Will you volunteer to be the next Chairperson?

It is ironic that the Society, in its 60th Anniversary year, should find itself at serious risk of being wound up for want of a successor-Chairman.

The search for a chairman has been ongoing without success for some time. An Extraordinary Committee meeting held recently found no-one to succeed Keith, despite proposals to reduce the tenure to 2 years instead of 5, and to delegate many of the Chairman's roles to Committee members.

The purpose of this equally extraordinary statement is to ask if anyone would care to volunteer to the much-changed role of Chairman for the next 2 years otherwise the Society could cease to exist in the near future.

The revised role would appeal to anyone with leadership, administrative and organisational skills and who cares about nature conservation and wildlife biodiversity in the local area. A strong team of Committee members have specific areas of responsibility to support you in your role.

We are prepared to consider a degree of flexibility in the role and to the length of tenure. A detailed knowledge of birds is not essential.

Keith holds a comprehensive job description for this voluntary position so

please discuss it with him by emailing (chairman@gwentbirds.org.uk) in the first place or by calling him on 01633 868410 or leave a message with your name and contact number and he will get back to you.
Please indicate your interest as soon as possible, so that the society can look forward to a positive future.

This statement is authorised by the GOS Committee.

GOS Chairman - Job Description Summary.

The role gives the ability of making a difference to nature in your local area. It should appeal to someone who cares about nature conservation and wildlife biodiversity.

1. To call and chair all committee meetings and arrange with the secretary the agenda items and for the secretary to circulate the agenda to committee members.
2. Ensure the AGM is held annually and that the notification to members meet our legal requirements. Ensure the President is available and notified accordingly to chair the AGM.
3. Contact relevant committee members if items in the press or other media look relevant to GOS.
4. Circulate any correspondence received to the committee.
5. Maintain liaison with all officers to ensure compliance with Charity Commission requirements.
6. Maintain contact, as appropriate with the County Recorder/ Rarities Committee.
7. Write a Chairman's Report for presentation to the AGM.
8. Write a Chairman's Report for the Annual Report. (This is an updated version of the AGM report)
9. Ensure H&S aspects of Goytre Wood are considered regularly with regard to the public footpath through the wood. (Safety inspection every 3-5 years).
10. Maintain liaison with all committee members to ensure actions agreed are completed.

SUMMARY OF THE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 21ST, 2021 ONLINE VIA ZOOM

We are still looking for a new chairman to take over from Keith Roylance in the new year. Unfortunately one prospective candidate, no longer felt able to take on the role and another could not be contacted. We discussed ways that tasks could be delegated, such as contacting volunteers via Zoom.

Please get in touch if you or someone you know would be interested.

Also, it was sad to hear that Al Venables is no longer able to help with GOS activities and we thank him for all his hard work over the years.

The website seems to be working well thanks to Andrew Cormack's hard work; however, the back-ups are proving time consuming and GOS may consider paying for a back-up service.

GOS is solvent as usual. We expect to pay for the printing of the 2019 annual report in the near future.

We intend to pay a £100 donation to the BTO "Our Lost Seabirds" appeal, pending information on how to pay by BACS.

Bird book donations: Unfortunately there is not enough room in the GOS library to accept large donations of books. Anyone wishing to donate books could take them to a charity such as Oxfam who have a book expert.

2019 Annual Report: Everything is written and there are a couple of colour pages remaining which may be useful for habitat photos. People are always welcome to put photos in the Dipper; these could then be picked up for the report. The 2020 Report is likely to be a thin volume as many people were not active; more photos and more articles would be welcomed.

Bitterns and marsh harriers have done well on the Gwent Levels but the little owl population has collapsed. Barn owls are doing well but breeding waders had a bad year due to predation. Please remember to look out for colour-ringed curlews along the Gwent shoreline. You may like to look at Blair Jones' blog which has examples of ringed birds <https://www.thewildlifeoculus.com/p/ringed-birds-observed-at-goldcliff.html>

At Llandegfedd Reservoir, the water levels are low and there are reports of disturbance to birds due to people using the water and shore for recreation.

All the indoor meeting dates are now filled and Robin Hall has successfully avoided the 6 nations dates.

Andrew Baker reported that Portland trip is on this year, with 9 people going as Portland had requested sensible numbers.

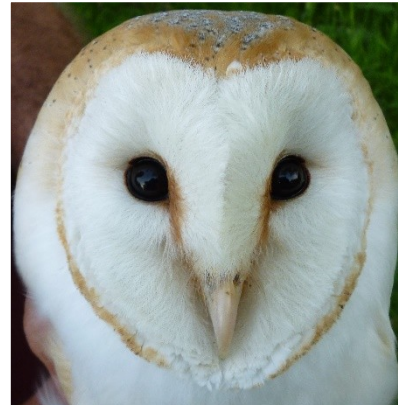
Hopefully, it's beginning to look a bit like 'normal', but for now, the indoor meetings will still be via Zoom.

Date of Next Committee Meeting: Tuesday, 23rd November @ 7.30 p.m. via Zoom

What's in the Belfry?

Usually the cry is of “*bats in the belfry*”, but at St Cadwaladr's at Bishton something else has been stirring upstairs – Barn Owls.

Earlier this year, members of the Goldcliff Ringing Group (the Group) helped confirm that not only have Barn Owls been roosting in the church tower, but that they have also bred - with at least one owlet having fledged successfully.



© Richard M. Clarke

Barn Owls have historically been associated with Churches and some people still refer to the species as the Church Owl. Perhaps surprisingly, given the high number of churches in south east Wales, there are very few records of Barn Owls associated with them. St Cadwaladr's is thought to be the only recent church breeding site in the Gwent area.

Birds at St Cadwaladr's nested on one of the high ledges in the tower. As noted previously, breeding was successful this year however the level of success might have been greater. The nesting ledge proved hazardous, with an egg being found below it smashed on the floor. To help improve matters the Group has built and installed a nest box, which will hopefully provide a safer nesting site if birds return to breed again.



The Barn Owl is an iconic species that has special protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. Nesting birds, their nests, eggs and young are fully protected at all times. The species has previously suffered significant population declines and in the last Century it was adversely affected by organochlorine pesticides such as DDT in the 1950s and 1960s. Today's main threats/limiting factors are a loss of suitable habitat, collision on busy roads, poisoning through the use of rodenticides and the loss (or absence) of available nest sites.

Owlet © Richard M. Clarke

St Cadwaladr's is part of a wider project being furthered by the Group which aims to help maintain and where possible, increase the population of barn owls by providing nest boxes. With the financial support of the Living Levels, Welsh Government and the Monmouthshire and Newport Local Nature Partnership the Group has been providing suitable/safe nesting sites in areas where there is

good habitat nearby. This has only been possible with the agreement and generous help of local landowners and other people, which is very much appreciated.

To date, some 60 nest boxes have been erected in southern Gwent. The benefits of this action are now beginning to show. In 2019, five breeding pairs occupied boxes and three other boxes were used by roosting birds. Last year there were six breeding pairs, four of which raised juveniles successfully and other boxes were being used by roosting birds. This year, ten breeding pairs used boxes and a further four were being used for roosting.

Most nest boxes have been put in barns or on free-standing trees with several at rural churches. In addition to St Cadwaladr's, customised nest boxes have been installed at St Peter's Newchurch, St Mary's Llanwern and St Peter's Henllys with discussions ongoing concerning other churches.

The Group is continuing to look for new sites in Gwent where Barn Owls might be encouraged to breed and would be happy to hear from anyone who would be interested in housing a nest box. Please contact Richard Clarke at chykembro2@aol.com or 07977 698255.

Do you bird Goldcliff at dusk?

If you do, and have seen fair numbers of Curlews arriving to roost, please let Mike Smart know if this was on an evening when a high tide pushed them off the saltmarsh or on an evening when the tide was not particularly high. Email smartmike143@gmail.com.

Colour-ringed Curlew sightings wanted

The group running a Curlew colour-ringing project under the auspices of the BTO are keen to learn of any sightings of colour-ringed Curlews at Goldcliff, West Usk Lighthouse, Peterstone or anywhere else on the Gwent coast this autumn/winter.

In 2015/16 41 Curlews were caught on the Usk Estuary and fitted with colour rings; although there have been several sightings in the intervening years more information on these birds is needed. It is also hoped that one of the Slimbridge head-started birds, released in 2019, might be found here – a very exciting prospect. One has been seen at a distance, but the numbers on the ring not yet read.

Colour rings on the left tarsus (below the 'knee') indicate where the bird was ringed – the combination of Orange over White denotes those ringed on the Usk Estuary but other colours are used for birds ringed elsewhere. For example, Curlews colour-ringed on the Severn in Gloucestershire have Yellow over White.

Colour rings on the tibiae (above the 'knee') indicate the individual: all were given a single colour ring on the left tibia and two colour rings on the right tibia. These rings could be a combination of Blue, Green, Black, Orange, Red or White. There's also a metal ring on the right tarsus.

When reporting a sighting please note whether the rings are on the left or right leg and also give the order of the colour rings e.g. Left above: Black; Left below: Orange over White; Right above: Blue over Blue. Right below: metal.

Although seeing the colour ring combinations can be tricky (water levels at Goldcliff Lagoons may be high or birds on the foreshore may be distant) all reports are important so please get those scopes out. Curlew numbers are in rapid decline; knowing the movements and locations of wintering birds will help in working out how best to conserve them.

Please send all sightings (or photos) to Mike Smart at smartmike143@gmail.com and include the location, date and, if possible, the time.

For background information on colour rings, see the Curlewcall website at www.curlewcall.org

Have you seen a colour-ringed curlew?



We need your help to look out for colour-ringed curlew. All the birds are colour-ringed with a **yellow ring on the right leg** and **white ring with a number on the left leg**.

We'd love to know where these birds go, so please report any sightings to curlew@wwt.org.uk. Please include the date, time, location and ring number.



Birds ringed with support from



Gloucestershire Naturalists'
Society

Autumn 2021 Update



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

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)

Make your birdwatching count and take part in this important national survey. A number of exciting opportunities have come up in Gwent so please consider volunteering.

It's a simple survey. Just three visits to a 1km square between April and June – a recce visit to check the route and habitat and then two morning visits to record birds. GOS members already contribute greatly to this survey. If you haven't signed up already, why not claim your patch and help reveal important changes in bird numbers. See the table that follows for available squares in Gwent. For further information about the survey, have a look at <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/bbs> or contact me on the e-mail address at the start of this article and we can have a chat about the survey.

Available BBS squares in Gwent

SO1902	Mynydd Pen-y- fan	SO3613	Llanvapley
SO2609/1	Blaenavon	SO3624	Llancillo
0			
SO2719	Sugar Loaf	SO3707	Clytha Hill
SO2800	Pontypool	SO4502	Llansoy
SO3228	Longtown	SO4708	Cwmcarvan
SO3307	Llanfair Grange	ST2097	Newbridge
SO3504	Kemeys Commander	ST2385	Michaelston-y-Fedw
SO3728	Ewyas Harold	ST4896	Pitton Common
ST2785	Gwern-y-cleppa	ST3495	Llandegfedd

Bird Ringing

The [2020 Online Ringing Report](#) is now live. As expected, Covid restrictions resulted in the number of birds ringed in 2020 being slightly lower than normal, at 930,088. The impact on nest recording was far more severe, particularly at the start of the season; as a result, this year's report does not include any NRS summaries. Four White Stork chicks were ringed last year, a first for this species in Britain & Ireland. A total of 14 [longevity records](#) were broken in 2020, including those for White-tailed eagle, Chiffchaff and Twite, while longevity records for Great White Egret and Crane were set for the first time.

BREAKING NEWS

A joint BTO Gwent/Glamorgan BBS training course is being planned for the New Year, which will combine indoor and outdoor sessions and provide:

- ❑ guidance on carrying out the BBS from experienced surveyors;
- ❑ confidence in planning a visit to a survey square;
- ❑ experience of recording very basic habitat types;
- ❑ an opportunity to practice the BBS to improve observation and recording skills.

The date for the training day has yet to be set, but I am taking expressions of interest now as places will be limited. If you are interested in taking on a BBS square in 2022 and would first like to undertake the training please get in touch with me ASAP.

Warbler Ringing at NWR with the Goldcliff Ringing Group – 1st August 2021

On arrival at the RSPB centre carpark at Uskmouth, the morning looked as though it was going to be a wash-out but fortunately the rain held off and the dry, overcast and calm conditions were perfect for the demonstration of bird ringing.

Three members of the Society and four team members of the RSPB centre attended the event during which the Goldcliff Ringing Group explained the purpose and value to conservation of bird ringing and demonstrated the technique on a variety of mostly reedbed warbler species.

Nets had been set previously by the Group in the reedbeds and in a small shelter belt at Uskmouth, where key passage warbler species were targeted. There was a steady catch during the morning with a final tally of 87 individual birds being trapped and ringed. Reed and Sedge Warblers were the mainstay of the passage catch, but Blackcap and Chiffchaff also put in an appearance. Resident birds caught included Wren, Dunnock, Cetti's Warbler, Great Tit, Blue Tit. Great Spotted Woodpecker and Reed Bunting.

Everyone who attended was able to have close views of what are often elusive species. Key features of birds were shown by the ringers including feather wear and moult, which helped age individual birds. Also, birds with fat deposits that would fuel their migration to winter quarters.

Thanks go to the RSPB team for opening the carpark early for us and to NRW for allowing the event to take place on the reserve.

Llandegfedd Reservoir Birdwatching arrangements – Winter 2021/2022

From 1st October to 1st March to gain access to the Fisherman's Car Park at the North End of the reservoir you will need a Birdwatching Permit which comes as part of your GOS Membership. There are no additional fees to pay.

The gate will have a combination lock, to apply for the combination please e-mail chairman@gwentbirds.org.uk and it will be sent to you. On no account should you divulge this combination code to anyone else as Llandegfedd management are trying to restrict access to genuine birdwatchers through the winter season.

On accessing the car park, please ensure you lock it behind you so that no one can gain access whilst you are there without knowing the combination. On leaving the car park, again, please ensure the gates are securely locked.

Thank you for your co-operation in maintaining security at Llandegfedd reservoir.

Gwent UKBS Report for June 2021

Chris Hatch

Highlights

Rosy Starlings were seen at St. Brides (19th to 20th) and Sudbrook (21st). Three Wood Sandpipers were reported from Newport Wetlands (21st). A Spoonbill was present at Newport Wetlands (24th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A Curlew Sandpiper was reported (2nd). A male Garganey was seen 12th to 25th). Three Ruddy Shelduck were present (8th).

Other sites

Five Woodcock were roding at Beacon Hill (10th). Firecrests had a good breeding year, whilst Nightjars were reported from several sites.

Gwent UKBS Report for August 2021

Chris Hatch

Highlights

A Wood Sandpiper was present at Newport Wetlands (28th/29th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

Single Little Stints were seen on several dates. Other wader sightings included a Curlew Sandpiper and a Spotted Redshank (both 28th). Two Garganey were seen (12th). A Bittern was reported (21st). Marsh Harriers were recorded on a number of occasions.

Other sites

Two Mediterranean Gulls were seen at Sudbrook (22nd).

Field Studies Council Courses

FSC has recently introduced a new approach to its Natural History courses, and we are now offering both online virtual classes, as well as place-based courses within cities. This is to connect as many people as possible with the positives achieved from increased nature based learning.

One of their first two urban locations is Bristol, the other Manchester.

We will be looking to extend our catalogue of natural history courses in Bristol, but the ones we are starting with in October are beginner bird courses:

[Biology, Ecology and Drawing Urban Birds Weekend in Bristol](#)

Learn about the Biology and Ecology of Birds and How to Draw them on a 2 day Bristol Based Course

[Introduction to Urban Birds – Bristol](#)

Learn about the Biology and Ecology of Birds on this 1 Day Course in Bristol

[Sketching of Urban Birds in Bristol](#)

Learn to Draw Birds on this introductory art course covering technical elements of texture, tone and water washes on this Bristol Based 1 Day Course

For GOS members they are offering a code to offer the weekend at the price for 1 day, using code 2FOR1BIRDS and for Young People aged 18-25 the [Generation Green Project](#) means our Bristol Birds Weekend is available at £20. (Many of our online courses can be booked for £5 using the relevant code found [here](#))



Caerphilly Bird Rescue

It is with sadness that the Society notes that Ray from Caerphilly Bird Rescue died while returning from releasing a shearwater. Condolences are sent to his family and colleagues.

Autumn 2021 Indoor Programme.

All presentations will be via Zoom. Details and the link to join will be sent to those members for whom we have e-mail addresses approximately seven days before the meeting.

Autumn Season – confirmed speakers.

Oct 16th	Nigel Redman	Birds of the Horn of Africa	Author, editor and tour leader
Oct 30th	Mike Reid	Travels with a camera	Photographer, tour leader and writer
Nov 13th	James Lowen Wildlife	Britain's Top Wildlife weekends	Award winning author of 11 nature and travel books
Nov 27th	Keith Offord	Aristocrats of the Air	Raptor specialist, lecturer and tour guide
Dec 11th	John Miles	The Solway – The whole of Cumbria	Former RSPB warden and tour guide

OUTDOOR PROGRAMME 2020

Information on our website: www.gwentbirds.org.uk

Date	Time	Walk Area	Description	Meeting Place	Leader
Sun. 17th Oct		Steart	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
			Hopefully booking restrictions lifted		