

THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Registered charity number 1088830

GOS WEB SITE: www.gwentbirds.org.uk

Newsletter No. 166

Spring 2023

Spring is in the air

Welcome to the Spring edition of the Dipper. We hope you enjoy this first edition of 2023, which brings together news and information about the Society's activities. Inside you'll find lots about the local bird survey opportunities where you can become a citizen scientist. Also, we hear from our new Chairman and have a GOS "who's who", following the new appointments at the AGM and EGM.

The Dipper is your Newsletter and we are always looking for articles about what's going on locally with our birdlife. If you have a short story you think others would enjoy, please get in touch as we would in the future like to include a Membership Bird Snippets section in the Dipper.

Janet & the Editorial Team - Dipper@gwentbirds.org.uk

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Message from the Chairman

Richard M. Clarke chairman@gwentbirds.org.uk

Dear Members,

Let me start by saying thank you for the opportunity to serve the Society as its chairman - I consider this to be a great privilege and I look forward to the challenge over the next couple of years.

For those of you who don't know me, I have been interested in wildlife and in particular birds, since I was a young boy. In my early teens, I undertook nest recording and common bird survey work and although the amount of time I could commit to birding subsequently peaked and troughed through various life-stages, my passion has never diminished.

Currently, I co-ordinate and participate in many bird surveys across the county through my role as the British Trust for Ornithology's Regional Representative for Gwent. I am a keen bird ringer, being a founding member and the secretary of the Goldcliff Ringing Group and I lead on the Greater Gwent Barn Owl Initiative that supports this iconic species through the provision of nest boxes – some 120 to date. I have had a long association with the Society, having served on its executive committee and rarities sub-committee for many years. I was one of the editorial team of the Birds of Gwent. I'm a past editor of the Gwent Bird Report and continue to help write some of the species' accounts for the report.

The Society has given me immense personal pleasure over the years, be it through indoor talks, walks or being involved in atlas survey work. My aim therefore is to ensure that membership of the Society continues to give pleasure to its members through its various activities.

I see the Society as being a broad church open to people following various fields of interest, whether that be through photography, general bird watching, garden bird feeding, survey work, chasing after rarities or even bird ringing. Whatever your specific field(s) of interest, we still all share a common interest in birds and I want the Society to continue with its long and proud tradition of bringing people together so that they might collectively enjoy the wider benefits of bird watching.

These are of course challenging times for us all in so many ways. Not least the impact of the pandemic which has changed things immeasurably and left a legacy of uncertainty. The Society, like so many other small charities and voluntary bodies is not immune from such uncertainty and finds itself at a crossroads. However, some of the greatest challenges that we still must face concerns threats to our environment and our depleted biodiversity. I therefore believe that there has never been a more important time for a small organisation such as ours. Through our survey work and bird recording we can provide evidence to help inform local decisions concerning our birdlife and let's not lose sight of the personal health benefits that birdwatching can deliver to us.

In looking to the future, I want to see the Society continuing to help support an active community of birdwatchers. In considering how best this can be achieved, I will work with the executive committee to actively engage with you to understand what your expectations of the Society are. I'll say more about this in the next edition of the Dipper, but in the meantime feel free to drop me a line. I very much look forward to hearing your thoughts about the Society.

As I bring this short message to a close, I can hear singing Dunnock and Mistle Thrush nearby and a neighbour has told me that they found a Robin's nest with eggs in their garden – in February. Spring is pushing her head through the frosty grass so there is never a better time to get outdoors. Enjoy your birdwatching.

Richard



Richard leading the 2022 Goldcliff Ringing Group's expedition to Denny Island - photo. Richard Poole

Committee News

The committee met on 14th March and a summary of the key discussion points follows:

1. actions arising from the AGM had been completed, with a new insurance policy put in place by the Treasurer and an EGM held on 4th March to elect a new Chairman;
2. governance arrangements and the roll of Trustees was considered and it was confirmed that the Charity Commission website had been updated to reflect the current Trustees of the Society;
3. work concerning the transfer of bank accounts between the former and current Treasurer was ongoing, but Paypal access had already been secured;
4. a review of Gift Aid had identified the probable need to ask members to confirm their tax declarations;
5. the Treasurer/Membership Secretary reported progress on merging the former separate roles and gave details of the work underway to refine the membership list;
6. drafting of the 2020 Gwent Bird Report was in hand with the systematic list being part complete. The date of publication was not yet clear;
7. the Society had been invited to participate in two upcoming events: “Go Wild 2023” on 29th July at Bryn Bach Park, Tredegar and “Wildlife in the Castle” over 22nd and 23rd April at Chepstow. Members coming forward to assist with these events would be appreciated;
8. the indoor autumn and winter programme was near to being finalised with talks on both the seabird monitoring of the Shiant and Outer Hebrides and the Herons and Egrets of the Somerset Avalon Marshes having already been diarised. The full programme would be published on the website shortly. Committee Member, Marie Rose Pugh had agreed to in future take on the role of Indoor Programme Secretary;
9. latest updates from Llandegfedd Reservoir and the Newport Wetlands Reserve were given. In the latter, recent Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) counts had been the worst on record for ducks and waders with significant drops in the numbers of key species. The dry conditions in recent months were the likely cause and NRW were reviewing water retention at the reserve. The minimum winter water level was established, but there was seepage from the water management system and the aim is to replace old sluice boards in the summer.

All-Wales Rook Survey

Welsh Ornithological Society



Rooks are in trouble and are now Red-listed in Wales as shown in the *Birds of Conservation Concern Wales 4*.

An All-Wales Rook Survey is being undertaken to establish distribution maps and a robust breeding population estimate in Wales for this familiar, but declining, member of the crow family.

In 2022, thanks to the help of many volunteers, over 450 survey tetrads (2km x 2km) were covered. However, we need more squares surveyed in 2023 for a robust population estimate to be calculated.

If you've never taken part in a bird survey before, this is an excellent one to start with. You simply need to count the nests in any rookeries you may find on your single visit to your allocated tetrad (2km x 2km square) between 20 March and 20 April. Recording the tree species in which the rookery is located would be helpful. Also welcome are counts of individual rookeries not in designated tetrads. Birders of all abilities can participate in this important all-Wales survey and make a valuable, citizen science, contribution to the future conservation of this species. Further details can be found at the web links that follow, alternatively get in touch via bto@gwentbirds.org.uk

[Guidance-for-Surveyors-2023-FINAL-06Feb23.docx \(live.com\)](#)

[Welsh Ornithological Society \(WOS\) | Birds in Wales](#)

Why not treat yourself to a Rook pin badge?

WOS has produced a series of pin badges to help raise funds (Manx Shearwater, Redstart and now Rook). The monies raised from the limited-edition Rook pin badges will help with the costs of the final data analysis. Badges are available from Anne Brenchley at the cost of £4 (includes postage and packing).

The best way to pay is by Bank Transfer. Details below
Nat West plc
Dr A Brenchley
54-21-06
05037220



Badges will be posted promptly after monies have been received.



Spring 2023 Update

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

You don't need to be a professor to be a citizen scientist. Please consider taking part in one of the BTO's exciting surveys and make your birdwatching really count.



Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)

This important national survey is simple if you know your common birds. 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 play your part as a citizen scientist. There are 14 available squares in Gwent - see table below. 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.

Available BBS squares

SO2000	Trinant	SO3728	Ewyas Harold
SO2016	Llangattock	SO4202	Gwernesney
SO2106/07	Blaina	SO3613	Llanvapley
SO2303	Abertillery	SO4303	Kingcoed
SO2719	Sugar Loaf	SO4708	Cwmcarvan
SO3228	Longtown	SO4817	Welsh Newtown
SO3304	Penperlleni		

Heronries Census – Can you help find Gwent's lost heronries?



This year marks the 95th anniversary of the Heronries Census. The BTO has recently published the latest (2022) census results and you can read the findings at:

[bto_heronries_census_annual_summary_2022.pdf](https://www.bto.org.uk/HeronriesCensus/annual-summary-2022.pdf)

Gwent has 17 heronry sites recorded on the BTO database, but only nine of these have been surveyed recently. There are eight sites where it's not clear whether birds still use the historical location, have relocated nearby or have deserted the area altogether. We are therefore looking for help with revisiting old sites to check whether there are any signs of herons nesting.

Llanvihangel Crucorney
Llanellen
Llangwm

Llantarnam Hall
Llanwern
Pill Mawr, Caerleon

Llangibbi/Llanbadoc
Pant-y-goitre

The survey is suitable for beginners and requires a simple count of apparently occupied nests. Please help us to look for our lost heronries. Contact as above.

Recent Interesting Sightings in Gwent

Chris Hatch

December 2022 Highlights

A Spoonbill was present at Newport Wetlands on several dates. The Ring-necked Duck stayed at Ynysyfro reservoir throughout the month, The Dartford Warbler remained at Newport Wetlands for most of the month. Two Bitterns were seen at Newport Wetlands (20th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A female Hen Harrier, together with two male and one female Marsh Harriers were reported (28th). 815 Lapwing were recorded (24th).

Other sites

A female Red-breasted Merganser was seen at Llandegfedd reservoir (4th). 20+ Goosanders were present at Parc Bryn Bach (5th). A Barn Owl was seen at Goytre (8th). A Whooper Swan was recorded at Llangybi (17th). An Egyptian Goose was present at the Nedern (17th). A female Marsh Harrier was seen at Caldicot Pill (15th), whilst 129 Pintail were also recorded at this site (17th).

January 2023 Highlights

A Spoonbill was seen at Peterstone (1st), with another sighting of possibly the same bird reported from Newport Wetlands (9th). The Ring-necked Duck was again present at Ynysyfro reservoir all month. Black Redstarts were reported from two sites

in Newport (3rd and 16th). A Red-throated Diver flew past offshore at Newport Wetlands (11th). A male Smew was present on the River Usk at Llanllywel (22nd to 24th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A Short-eared Owl was seen (1st). A possible female Garganey was reported (6th). A Barn Owl was seen (14th). Four Bewick's Swans flew past offshore (28th). Marsh Harriers were reported on several dates.

Other sites

A Hawfinch was reported from Llangybi (1st). Three Jack Snipe were recorded in the Newport area (21st). Two Bewick's Swans were seen at Peterstone Gout (26th).

February 2023 Highlights

The Ring-necked Duck remained at Ynysfro reservoir (until 12th). The female Dartford Warbler was still present at Newport Wetlands (until 11th). A Spoonbill was seen at Peterstone Gout (16th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A Dark-bellied Brent Goose was seen (4th), whilst four additional Brent Geese were reported (12th). A Merlin was recorded (5th). Marsh Harrier sightings were reported throughout the month.

Other sites

A male Merlin was seen at Caldicot Pill (12th). A roost of 26 Goosanders were recorded at Bryn Bach Park lake (14th).

Dragonflies and Damselflies - your records wanted



Common Darter in silhouette:
Richard M. Clarke

The Monmouthshire Dragonfly Atlas Project aims to produce Monmouthshire's first dragonfly atlas by 2030. Survey work is already underway and the ambition is to extend this to every part of the county and for dragonflies present to be recorded.

The British Dragonfly Society (BDS) led project will produce a comprehensive and detailed set of distribution maps and

will help to identify and gather data about important

dragonfly sites. This vital information will then be available towards conservation efforts and when combined with national data, will help BDS to carry out its next national status assessment.

More recorders are needed to help with the atlas survey work. All records of dragonflies in the county are welcome, so please consider submitting them. The simplest and most problem-free way to contribute your records is to enter them directly through [SEWBRc](#) or [iRecord](#), but if you'd prefer a different method, please get in touch with Steve Preddy, Monmouthshire County Dragonfly Recorder, British Dragonfly Society.

W: <https://british-dragonflies.org.uk/monmouthshire-dragonflies/>
e: Steve.Preddy@me.com

They're back!

Verity Picken

They're back! Gwent's breeding Curlews! We know some of their traditional breeding sites but are there more? The answer is almost definitely Yes. But where? We're on a mission to find as many sites as we can because unless we know where they are we can't take steps to conserve them. And as you probably all know Curlews are likely to become extinct as a breeding species in Wales within the next decade if we can't reverse the decline.

So we really do need your help. Please **submit every single record, whether seen or heard, to the dedicated email address**

Curlew@gwentbirds.org.uk

As before, please give the date, location (a grid reference is a *huge* help), number and, if possible, the habitat (pasture, silage, hay, moorland, marshy area etc) and whether there are sheep or cattle present. Signs of display are particularly important.



Photo: Tom Streeter

Curlew Recovery Partnership

One more thing: if you're lucky enough to find Curlews it would be great if you could make a repeat visit (or visits), sending an email on each occasion to say if Curlews are present or absent – negative reports are also helpful.

Thanks to the records you've submitted in the past two years, Curlew Wales

(Gylfinir Cymru)* has recognised our breeding Curlews as ‘**an important isolated population**’ and is supporting Gwent Ornithological Society in our attempts to locate all Gwent’s breeding pairs.

Please revisit the areas where you’ve previously seen Curlews but we would very much appreciate help to follow up on a number of areas – some of these have held breeding Curlews in recent years whereas others (which may not have been visited by birders recently) held birds a few years ago and we’d like to know if they’re still there:



1. *Northwest Gwent*: Trefil, Tredegar, Cefn Golau, Cefn Manmoel, Garnlydan Reservoir, Garn-yr-Erw and other areas;
2. *West Gwent*: Markham and northwards;
3. *North Gwent*: Llanwenarth and several areas north of Abergavenny, including Blaengavenny, Llanvihangel Crucorney and Llangattock Lingoed reaching up towards Grosmont;
4. *East Gwent*: Llanishen, Trellech, Cwmcarvan;
5. *Mid Gwent* (more or less): Pontypool, Green Meadow Golf Course, Llanover, north of Raglan, Llandenny, Gwernesney, Llansoy, Newchurch, Llangybi, Llanllowell.
- 6.

If you are able to visit a new area please get in touch (on the email address above) – I can provide you with details of the fields to be covered.

* Curlew Wales is a joint working group of organisations which are committed to Curlew recovery in Wales; it includes representatives from the government, conservation, farming and game management sectors – NRW, WOS, RSPB Cymru, BTO, Curlew Country, Wildlife Trusts Wales, Brecon Beacons National Park, the GWCT, NFU Cymru are just a few of its members.

What's On

Indoor Programme




Focus on Nature:
A Wildlife Photographer's Year
Illustrated talk by Chris Hatch

Join the Gwent Ornithological Society for an evening of superb photography, featuring wildlife at its very best throughout the seasons.

1st April, 7:30pm
Goytre Village Hall, NP4 0AR
Admission £2 (includes refreshments)

Everyone welcome.



Details of the Autumn/Winter programme will be published on the website shortly and will be included in the Summer Dipper.

GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY: OUTDOOR PROGRAMME 2023



Date	Time	Walk Area	Description	Meeting Place	Leader				
22/01/2023	7.00	Tregaron & Aberystwyth	Full day - Raptors and Starling murmuration	Abergavenny Bus Station	Dave Brassey	david.brassey@ntlworld.com		07804038170	
29/01/2023	9.00	NWR Uskmouth	Bird ringing with Goldcliff Ringing Group as part of the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch weekend. Weather dependent.	NWR Uskmouth RSPB centre	Richard Clarke	chykembro2@aol.com		01633615581	
05/02/2023	9.15	Slimbridge	Full day - Winter visitors inc Bewicks and Whoopers	Slimbridge Car Park	Dave Brassey	david.brassey@ntlworld.com		07804038170	
22/04/2023	9.00	Garn Lakes	2-3 hour easy walk on paths/tracks	Main Garn Lakes car park	Nick Beswick	bezzes@btinternet.com			
14-16/04/2023		Portland (Fully Booked)	Weekend - Bookings taken from 1st Feb - take sleeping bag and food To book - email Dave Brassey david.brassey@ntlworld.com	Observatory	Dave Brassey	david.brassey@ntlworld.com		07804038170	
29/04/2023	9.00	Goytre House Wood	Easy walk through our own wood and environs	Goytre Car Park	Andrew Baker	andrew.baker234@gmail.com		07870975894	
06/05/2023	9.30	RSPB Carngafallt, Elan Valley	Full day with RSPB staff guide-Jon Cryer	Car Park at Gargaffalt Car-sharing may be arranged	Dave Brassey	david.brassey@ntlworld.com		07804038170	
13/05/2023	8.30	Blaen Bran Woodland	Moderate walk 2 – 3 hours	Blaen Bran Woodland car park	Keith Roylance	k.roylance@ntlworld.com		07718315910	
20/05/2023	9.00	Collister Pill	Easy walk 3 hours	Undy Church	Lyndon Waters	lynchris30@yahoo.co.uk		07506060939	
28/05/2023	8.30	Lower Monnow	Easy walk 3 hours	On road by Osbaston School SO507137 - NP25 3PU	John Coleman	monmouthjohn@icloud.com		07768762522	
02/06/2023	20.00	Wentwood Forest	Easy evening walk to look for Nightjar and Firecrest	Cadira Beeches	Gavin Vella	gavinvella@me.com			
09/06/2023	20.00	Blaenavon	Easy walk to look for Swift nests, Nightjar and Long-eared Owl	Blaenavon World Heritage Centre car park	Nick Beswick	bezzes@btinternet.com			
17/06/2023	8.30	Trellech Heaths	Moderate walk 2/3 hrs	Ninewells Car Park	Steph Tyler	steph_tyler2001@hotmail.com			
15/07/2023	9.00	Ham Wall	Easy walk Full day	Ham Wall Car Park ST 449 396 (Charge for Non-RSPB members)	Dave Brassey	david.brassey@ntlworld.com		07804038170	
23/09/2023	9.00	Stewart	Full Day in this large improving reserve	Stewart Car Park ST 25208 44210	Blair Jones	blairjones@icloud.com			
14/10/2023	9.00	Pwll Du	3 hour walk, some rough ground and steep slopes. Winter thrushes, Ring Ouzel, Barrier on Pwll Du road		Nick Beswick	bezzes@btinternet.com			
20-22/10/2023		Portland	Weekend - Bookings taken from 1st July - take sleeping bag and food To book - email Dave Brassey david.brassey@ntlworld.com	Observatory	Dave Brassey	david.brassey@ntlworld.com		07804038170	
04/11/2023	8.30	Allt-yr yn NR & Ynys-y-Fro Res.	3 hours walk - some gradients and steep steps	Fourteen Locks Car Park (possible £1 charge)	Dave Brassey	david.brassey@ntlworld.com		07804038170	

Who's Who in the Society

President
Steve Roberts

Vice-President
Alan Williams



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**Committee Member
Swift Ambassador**
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Committee Member
John Coleman

Committee Member
James Graham

Committee Member
Mike Pointon

Committee Member
Chris Jones

Co-opted Committee Member
Steph Tyler

Co-opted Committee Member
Chris Hatch

Co-opted Committee Member
Steve Williams

Webmaster
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