

# THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
Registered charity number 1088830

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GOS WEB SITE: [www.gwentbirds.org.uk](http://www.gwentbirds.org.uk)

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### NOTICE OF Annual General Meeting 2014

**The Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday, January 18th, 2014, in the Village Hall, Goytre, starting at 7:30pm**

To accommodate and facilitate the running of the Committee it is proposed to modify part of Item 7 (2) of the Constitution from:

*“The Executive committee may, in addition, appoint not more than 3 co-opted members but so that no one may be appointed as a co-opted member if, as a result, more than one third of the members of the Executive Committee would be co-opted members”*,

To the following:

*“The Executive committee may, in addition, appoint co-opted members, as required, for specific purposes, tasks or expertise, though they will not have voting rights.”*

Rules concerning the numbers of Honorary Officers, Executive Committee Members and Committee Members will remain unchanged and they will continue to be subject to their existing election rules.

This Constitutional change will be put to a vote.

There are several changes to the Committee from 2014: **Keith Roylance** will step down as **Treasurer**, to be succeeded by **Andrew Cormack** **Chris Jones** will step down as **County Recorder**; Tom Chinnick has been nominated to take on the role.

**Mark Stevens** will step down as **Publicity Officer**, to be replaced by a **team of contributors led by John Coleman**.

The role of **Vice Chairman** will no longer carry the informal expectation that he or she will succeed the outgoing Chairman. Instead the Vice Chairman's role will be limited to deputising for the Chairman when necessary. As such this will be a Co-opted role. Given this new requirement, **Al Venables volunteered to stand as Vice Chairman**.

These changes will require a vote of acceptance.

Nominated to join the Committee as **Committee Members** are: Dave Brassey, Keith Trott, Roo Perkins.

These nominations will require a vote of acceptance

Further nominations are invited and both the Proposer and Seconder should sign the nomination with the agreement of the nominee, or e-mail me with details. (see Contacts list for details)

**Nominations must be received by January 1<sup>st</sup> 2014**

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

The AGM will be followed by a **Finger Buffet** where the trick is to bring some finger food to be shared by everyone but then select something that looks far more appetising than your own offering!

**Following the buffet, Arthur Ball will be taking us to the Galapagos Islands to view the wildlife as seen through the eyes of Charles Darwin – and assess the consequences of his trip.**

**Trevor Russell, Secretary**

## **COMMITTEE COMMENTARY**

The highlight of the month, of course, was the **GOS/WOS Conference** held in Monmouth to celebrate the GOS 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (see article elsewhere in this edition). Alan Williams was congratulated for organising such a successful, sell-out event and the three GOS speakers, Al Venables, Jerry Lewis and Steve Roberts were highly praised for their compelling, informative and amusing presentations. Al Venables also marked the occasion by launching our new book, "Birdwatching Walks in Gwent", which sold well.

Steph Tyler reported that Natural Resources Wales had granted licences for fishermen to kill 6 Goosanders and 18 Cormorants on the River Usk, going against the recommendation that the cull should be limited to 6 Goosanders and 6 Cormorants. We are still trying to understand why the advice was ignored and how the numbers killed were limited and controlled, given that all of the shooting took

place in one, simultaneous shoot-out along the entire length of the river. One begins to understand some of the reasons for Iolo Williams' tirade at the Conference against the indifference to the environment by the Welsh Government and NRW.

We had written to the CEO of Welsh Water to complain about the deteriorating conditions at **Llandegfedd Reservoir** for both birds and birdwatchers. Their reply blamed lack of money and indicated little urgency, by stating that improvements would not be seen until 2015. This is still a Work In Progress.

As we approach the **AGM (January 18<sup>th</sup>)** we discussed next years' Committee format. Several Committee members have decided to stand-down: Chris Jones, County Recorder; Keith Roylance, Treasurer; Rob Parsons, Indoor Secretary and Mark Stevens, Publicity Officer. Some candidates are already being considered as replacements, but if you would like to be nominated, or just learn more about any of the jobs, please contact me on 01600 716266.

**Trevor Russell**

**The GOS/WOS Conference, November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013, Monmouth**  
**Celebrating 50 years of Birdwatching in Gwent**

In recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the founding of GOS, the annual Welsh Ornithological Society conference was held in Monmouth at the Bridges Community Centre. It proved to be a sell-out 120-ticket event despite dark mutterings that "it'll never beat last year's Conference in Llandovery". Well, we showed 'em!

The conference traditionally starts with the WOS AGM and this proved as mundane as a GOS AGM, until WOS President, Iolo Williams, enlivened proceedings. He gave us a heartfelt tirade about the indifference and lack of vision for bird conservation by the Welsh Government and the total failure of Natural Resources Wales (a Welsh Govt. amalgamation of CCW, Environment Agency Wales and the Forestry Commission Wales in April 2013) to deliver on their conservation objectives. Iolo called upon campaigning NGOs to make political capital out of the government's failure.

Many of the speakers were GOS members and it was fitting that the first speaker was Al Venables, who gave a brief history of GOS: how it was created by Bert Hamar and Betty Morgan, both beginner birdwatchers, who initially called their small group the Pontypool Ornithological Society. After expansion, by embracing a wider membership, this morphed into the Monmouthshire Ornithological Society and now, due to political boundary changes, is known as the Gwent Ornithological Society. Al's talk was punctuated with pictures of days of yore, starring luminaries such as Bert, Helen Robbins, Phil Warwick, Steve Roberts as a schoolboy, Percy Playford and Patrick Humphries. Also pictured were Al's selection of the new birders to appear in the 1970s who made the biggest impact on recording in the county, notably Steve Howell and Chris Jones (though Al is too modest to include himself in the same august company). There were also photos of some of those members (past and present) who have made big contributions to the running of indoor meetings and social activities, including Mary Beard, Dave Wood and Cathy Leyshon. The GOS members' nostalgia was politely tolerated by the wider WOS audience.

As one of the editors, it was also fitting that Al should announce the launch of the new GOS book, "Birdwatching Walks in Gwent"; he thanked all those who had contributed so much to such a useful volume (we later sold 80 copies on this first day!).

Mark Avery's aim was to work us all up into an indignant frenzy and write to our MPs about, well, almost anything we had a gripe about concerning conservation and the environment! Six letters on the same topic is certain to provoke a response, he assured us. We were soon whipped up into rebellious exasperation as he reminded us of the species that have even been *hunted* to extinction, for example, the Passenger Pigeon, and the Dodo. When we see declining abundance we should reflect that we are presiding over a less healthy environment and he was encouraged that around half of the audience had already protested to their MPs, because there are far too many opponents of nature conservation making their voices heard in the name of "progress".

BTO's Nigel Clarke highlighted the importance of the River Severn as a source of energy potential which means that energy-capture proposals will not go away despite the recent 'victory' over the barrage. 20 million tonnes of sediment are moved on each tide and birds have to follow it to find their food. He stressed the importance of good, long-term quality data, e.g. the low-tide WeBS counts and cited the cynical interpretation of data used during the construction of the Cardiff Bay barrage, when it was claimed that waders would simply move to new feeding grounds. It was later shown that one-third of the Redshank died.

Although the River Severn is internationally important for seven fish and eight bird species, the proposals for under-water turbines could cause huge death rates in fish (e.g. 100% of Shad) killed by the pressurised 'cavitation' effect as they pass through the turbines (pressurisation followed by sudden decompression causes them to explode). Over the last twenty years our ability to understand and defend special places for birds has become increasingly sophisticated but, sadly, the engineering design of turbines hasn't kept pace.

The afternoon session started with presentations by RSPB Cymru's Daniel Jenkins-Jones and Arfon Williams on the status of birds in Wales. Chough & Lapwings had a good year on the RSPB's Welsh reserves though Black Grouse leks were smaller after the bad weather in 2012. We heard that the latest agri-environmental scheme, Glastir, was being praised for its design but, despite the money being available, the process of delivering the scheme is not working.

Tony Fox has been studying Greenland White-fronted Geese for nearly 40 years and has witnessed a substantial decline in wintering numbers in Wales; the Dyfi population has dropped from 400 birds to 55 and none had arrived so far this autumn, while some Welsh sites no longer hold any wintering populations. Hunting in its wintering and breeding areas is a contributory factor, though where hunting bans have been imposed within its range, populations have shown a 6% growth each year thereafter. Astonishingly and embarrassingly, Wales and England are the only countries to have not imposed this ban! So, make Mark Avery proud! Take the revolution to the gates of the Senedd! (or, maybe more effectively, sign the e-petition set up by Aaron Davies).

Jerry Lewis gave a typically compelling presentation on his work with Hawfinches in the Forest of Dean and Lower Wye Valley. Since 2000 he has ringed over 800 Hawfinch, about 30% of the UK total! Measurements of wing-length show that many birds over-winter here from overseas, which led, unwittingly, to the quote of the day, perhaps of the Conference: "In 2012, I had a Swedish bird in the Forest of Dean"! He showed us some stunning photographs, too... Fascinating graphs showing recapture rates by year and location deserved longer attention and it was intriguing to hear how radio-tracking helped identify nest location and will in future determine

whether egg and/or chick predation is a factor in the increasing rarity of the Hawfinch. Radio-tracking has also revealed that Hawfinches travel up to 5km from nest-site to feeding areas, a very long distance for a passerine. I hope we can hear this talk again soon, in greater depth and with updates.

The final speaker was our President, Steve Roberts, who regaled us with side-splitting anecdotes as he gave a bravura presentation on Honey Buzzards. Readers who suffer with vertigo should stop here because we watched stomach-churning footage of Steve shinning up and abseiling down gigantic trees to photograph and ring chicks in nests built in those very, wobbly bits at the tops. Camcorders trained on the nests (Autumnwatch eat your heart out!) have shown that frogs constitute up to 50% of the chicks' diet when wasp and bee nests are scarce.

Given Steve's jokes and jibes about friends and colleagues in North Wales, I wonder if we will even be invited up there for next year's Conference, but if we are, I'm sure we will all be saying "It'll never beat this year's Conference in Monmouth!"

**Trevor Russell**

### **Gwent Ornithological Society Indoor Programme Season 2014**

**Wed 15<sup>th</sup> Jan.** *In association with Chepstow Branch of Gwent Wildlife Trust at Chepstow leisure Centre 7.30pm.*

**Ashley Grove- Birding from Shetland to the Scillies**

**Sat 18<sup>th</sup> Jan. AGM. Arthur Ball – Galapagos Wildlife.**

If you really want to step back in time, a visit to the Galapagos will really blow your mind. From the colourful and unique wildlife to the reality of Darwin's trip and the consequences of it. Arthur will sum up and explain this truly magnificent place – not to be missed.

**Sat 1<sup>st</sup> Feb. Pete Carty – Birding on Wenlock Edge and Long Mynd.**

With neighbouring habitats of upland moorland and deciduous woodland, Long Mynd and Wenlock edge in Shropshire are really Wales in miniature. This famous Landscape is nationally recognised as an AONB and has a wide range of birds from Ring Ouzel, Red Grouse and many of the warbler species.

**Sat 15<sup>th</sup> Feb. Paul Denning – Birding in the Canadian Rockies.**

Pauls talk will cover the flora, fauna and wonderful scenery of the region from the grassland Prairies around Calgary to the snow capped peaks and flower filled meadows of Banff, Jasper and the neighbouring National Parks.

**Sat 1<sup>st</sup> March. Roger White – Birds and landscape of East Germany.**

I will talk about the many thousands of wintering Geese and Migrating Cranes, the many Raptors (including White tailed and Lesser Spotted Eagles) Bustards a range of Birds on the Western Edge of their range. Apart from the forest and many wetlands, heaths resulting from Russian Army occupation and opencast mining both provide rich habitats.

**Sat 15<sup>th</sup> March. Roger Dickey – Army Birding – more Birds than Bullets.**

The talk will be a series of anecdotes of those rare opportunities in my Army life when I have been able to combine soldiering at home and abroad and a need to pursue my love of birds through studies and surveys and sometimes plain Birdwatching. I will also include some anecdotes from "operational"

birding and how it produces conflicts of interest. The talk will include visits to Western Isles, The Falklands, Hong Kong, Diego Garcia, Afghanistan, Gibraltar and Ascension Island.

**Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> March.** *In association with Blaenavon World Heritage Centre at 6pm.* **Nick Beswick will talk on Upland Wildlife and Habitat Management.**

**Sat 29<sup>th</sup> March. Al Venables – The birds of Tierra del Fuego.**

This talk covers birds, seals, whales and spectacular scenery on an expedition cruise from Tierra del Fuego across the notorious Drake Passage to Antarctic Islands and the Peninsula. Al's personal quest for the private life of the Giant Petrel is an underlying theme.

**Sat 12<sup>th</sup> April. Carl Downing – Birding in Colombia.**

As a founder member of the Neotropical Bird Club, and a Council member and Chairman, Carl will lead us through five main regions of this newly evolving country.

**Sat 27<sup>th</sup> April. Andrew Ramsay – Shearwaters.**

Having studied Shearwaters for over forty years in the Scottish Islands, Andrew is an authority on this much enjoyed and intriguing bird.

**Sat 4<sup>th</sup> Oct. Mike Lane – A lane in a Midland Forest.**

A talk about the new and little known Heart of England Forest in Warwickshire where Mike has spent the last few years extensively photographing the wildlife. It is a new forest with many young trees, but also some well-established mature woodland, lakes, rivers and shallow scrapes. An exciting Midlands habitat that has Mike working on his favourites subjects: British Wildlife.

**Sat 25<sup>th</sup> Oct. Charles Martin – Puddocks and Poveys: the folklore of bird names.**

While looking at a variety of well-known upland birds (Hawks, owls and ravens) this talk covers them as birds of ill omen and corvid intelligence. The legends and stories may seem fanciful but they are in many ways the product of centuries of experience and accurate observation from which we have much to learn.

**Sat 8<sup>th</sup> Nov. Ian Butler – Birding in Costa Rica**

Spending three months in Costa Rica, Ian explores different species he observed and photographed. From White-necked Jacobins, Montezuma Oropendula to Strawberry Poison Dart Frogs and Tarantulas. Ian's images will leave you wanting to visit this exotic place of wildlife diversity.

**Sat 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov. Len Clarke – Birding in Spain.**

Covering an overview the range of habitats from the cork woodlands to the high mountain ranges and the wonderful sand dune system. Len as a leader for Spainbirds will bring a wealth of knowledge of birds to see and sites to see.

**Sat 6<sup>th</sup> Dec. John Gale – A trip to South Georgia.**

In January 2010 John and fellow artist Chris Rose travelled from the Falkland Islands to South Georgia on the yacht "Golden Fleece". They spent 6 weeks circumnavigating the island collecting material for an exhibition of paintings

to raise money and awareness of Albatross and seabird conservation. They painted and sketched the amazing wildlife and stunning scenery in very challenging conditions and on their return endured seven hours of hurricane conditions at sea. Their "Artists for Albatross" project and exhibition raised over £48,000 for seabird conservation.

17<sup>th</sup> Jan – GOS AGM.

**Rob Parsons**

### Learning Bird Songs and Calls

Most people would agree the sound of birds is a vital part of the natural scene during a walk in the countryside. Even for people who have no particular interest in birds, bird songs are one of the main joys of people who enjoy the country side.

Learning the calls and songs of birds has been discussed many times in the past, and by authorities much more skilled than myself. But rather than writing yet another, it is hoped there are a few ideas given which I at least have not seen in print before. But having said that, I am sure birders have tried similar ideas. This then is not a discussion on theories of bird song, rather how I tackled the problem, and if I'm honest, still learning, this is how I am trying to tackle the problem.

Most beginners to birding inform me that learning birds sounds is not easy. Inevitably it takes time and, more than anything else, experience in the field, the rewards for a little perseverance are immense. But from the outset, think for a moment and you maybe surprised how much you already know.

Song and call can be vital in telling you that a particular species are around. Cetti's Warblers for example skulking are very difficult to see but usually heard. The 'pinging' call of the Bearded Tit will tell you they are about, others ways we may walk pass them.

The ability to identify an individual species by its song and then to count

how many of that species are singing in a particular area can provide vital information on distribution and population density that can be difficult to get in other ways.

From my experience during my early years of birding surprisingly I learned most rapidly when seeing a particular species for the first time, and when mixed with the excitement of that discovery, I have noticed when hearing the song or call that becomes fixed and never forgotten. I writing this I can recall the excitement of my first Manx Shearwater, Nightjar, Grasshopper Warbler, and Bearded Tit for the first time; these calls have never left me.

For me at least the commoner birds Blue Tits, Dunnock, warblers etc seem to take a little more time, but be patient it will come. I quickly learned the commoner birds by completing a Common Bird Survey. I'm not saying to start a CBC but to adopt some technique from such a method. Select an area very close to you home, somewhere you can visit often, and can cover in a reasonable short amount of time. Being close to your home and covered fairly quickly you can visit the area often. After several visits a pattern will emerge where the same bird will sing in roughly the same area, it becomes predictable, and with this familiarity you will see the birding singing. Familiarity breeds contempt.

Having mastered some of the commoner songs and calls, novices

could create a series of songs and calls of unfamiliar birds and play as background music when engaged with some other activity. I often do so when working on my PC, and have found this technique very useful. Similarly transferring the same series to a portable playback system can be very useful to carry in the field. When using a play back system in the field do not use the recordings to attract or stimulate a response from birds in the field, rather use an ear-piece.

Using play back systems then can be effective with very similar songs and calls for example Blackcap and Garden Warbler, or Reed and Sedge Warbler. I have used records of each played one after the other playing for several minutes. Alternatively, using two separate playback systems playing simultaneously in different corners of the room, one playing Blackcap song, the other Garden Warbler.

Every British bird has its very own song that once learned can be used to help birdwatchers identify it without actually having to see it. Most of my birding is done by ear; indeed Richard Fitter claimed most experienced bird watchers identify as many birds by sound as by sight. As an example, while writing this account, I counted all birds identified by sound and sight during a 2 and a half hour 6 kilometres walk along of Wentwood during August 2013. Of the 135 birds noted during the walk counted, 43 were noted by sight and 92 by sound.

Recently Paul Stancliffe reminded us of another trusted method in issue July-August 2013 'BTONews':

'I learn my songs and calls by having an internal aide memoir – the song of Cetti's Warbler always reminds me of Beethoven's 1812 Overture, and the song of the Garden Warbler always of a babbling brook. Many will know that little 'little bit of bread and no cheese' is sung by the Yellowhammer and

easier still, a small number sing their own – Chiffchaff and Cuckoo being the most obvious.' There are several others which can be useful, many for example would be familiar with the Great Tit song of 'teacher, teacher, teacher,' or the Collard Doves repeated song 'I don't know', or alternatively with the Collard Dove, a rather dishearten miserable football supporter chanting 'united, united, united.'

Other wader mnemonics which I've read over the years which some may find useful include Grey Plover: Who are you? Curlew: Curlee; Greenshanks: Toy toy toy; Redshanks: Pee poopoo; Spotted Redshanks: Chewill; Little Ringed Plover: Peeoo; Lapwing: Pewit; Common Snipe: Electronic sheep 'drumming'; creaky bicycle wheel display call.

Speaking personally although I have found bird mnemonics effective, I have found the writing description of bird's songs and call offered in field guides of little use at all. I cannot imagine how 'tsee-tsee trrrrr' becomes a bird sound in this case a Blue Tit. There is no substitute for actually hearing the song/call, thus you may find a set of bird records useful during these early years, and indeed much later. There are a number of recordings on the market either on CDs, cassette tapes, DVDs, and on the internet. A set of such recordings is most useful in early spring for reminding you of the songs and calls of the summer visitors particularly the ones which are so difficult to differentiate, like the Garden Warbler and Blackcap or the Sedge and Reed Warblers. The first 3 of the following titles are available for loan in the GOS library, and for those who wish to buy they own I have included the current asking price offered by Amazon:

'Collins Field Guide to Bird Songs and Calls of Britain and Northern Europe' by Geoff Sample. A 119 page book with two CDs (£12.10)



Paul Doherty's 'British Bird Song', DVD 1hour 27 minutes featuring 43 species of the commoner birds. (£15.50)

Paul Doherty's 3 DVD set 'British Birds' 6 hours 30 minutes featuring a more adventurous 280 species, most feature examples their songs and calls (£25.49)

'British Birds Sound on CD: The definitive audio guide to birds in Britain'. Recording from the National Sound Archive on 2 CDs; Disc 1 Non Passerines 96 recordings, Disc 2 Passerines 79 recordings. (£11.20)

'DK RSPB Complete Birds of Britain and Europe', by Rob Hume. With 70 minute CD (£19.20)

Even after 51 years of birding, there are still times when I cannot recognise some songs and calls. For some reason I still struggle with some of our

commoner tits. Ageing can also produces its own sets of problems when birding, an example occurred recently. While walking around Wentwood I encounter an other birder, very rare in Wentwood. While walking towards him I noticed he was not moving, he informed me he was listening to a reeling Grasshopper Warbler. Listening with him I heard nothing. Another untimely reminder of my age, indeed older folk have difficulty hearing high pitch sound. Although on this occasion eventually when no doubt singing in a particular direction I did eventually pick the occasions reeling from the bird. I was wondering the population of Goldcrest had collapsed at Wentwood. The Goldcrest population of Wentwood has not reduced rather I cannot hearing them singing anymore!

**Keith Jones**

### **Recent Gwent Sightings for September 2013**

#### **Highlights**

The Wryneck was still present at Newport Wetlands (until 4<sup>th</sup>). Single Ospreys were reported from the Clydach Gorge (1<sup>st</sup>), Llandegfedd Reservoir (9<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>), and Newport Wetlands (19<sup>th</sup>). A Wood Sandpiper was present at Newport Wetlands (23<sup>rd</sup>).

#### **Newport Wetlands Reserve**

A Marsh Harrier was reported (16<sup>th</sup>). Two female Garganey were present (21<sup>st</sup>). Good numbers of passage waders were present throughout the month, whilst visible migration of passerines was very evident.

#### **Other sites**

A Marsh Harrier was reported from Garnlydan reservoir (7<sup>th</sup>). A Common Scoter was recorded at Llandegfedd reservoir (9<sup>th</sup>). The Lesser Scaup was still present at Parc Bryn Bach (21<sup>st</sup>). Red Kites and Hobbies were reported from a number of locations. Waders were present in good numbers at the coast and good movements of hirundines were noted.

### **Recent Gwent Sightings for October 2013**

#### **Highlights**

A juvenile Rose-coloured Starling was present at Newport Wetlands (2<sup>nd</sup>). A Turtle Dove was reported from Peterstone (5<sup>th</sup>). A Glossy Ibis was seen at Newport Wetlands (11<sup>th</sup>), with an unconfirmed report of a Long-billed Dowitcher from the same site (15<sup>th</sup>). A Firecrest was recorded at Highmoor Hill (23<sup>rd</sup>). A Dartford Warbler was reported from Newport Wetlands (24<sup>th</sup>).

### **Newport Wetlands Reserve**

A male Marsh Harrier was seen on two separate dates (1<sup>st</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>). A female Hen Harrier was reported on three occasions (18<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>). A female Merlin was recorded (6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>). 15 Bearded Tits were observed (6<sup>th</sup>).

### **Other sites**

A juvenile Hen Harrier was reported from Waunafon Bog (13<sup>th</sup>). Single Ring Ouzels were recorded at Abergavenny (17<sup>th</sup>), Pontypool (20<sup>th</sup>) and Skirrid Fawr (27<sup>th</sup>). Single Bramblings were reported from Wentwood (23<sup>rd</sup>) and Peterstone Gout (24<sup>th</sup>). 19 Common Scoters were seen offshore at Peterstone (20<sup>th</sup>). A Jack Snipe was also present at Peterstone on the same date. A Mediterranean Gull was reported from Tredegar House Lake (26<sup>th</sup>), whilst a Little Gull was seen at Sluice Farm (28<sup>th</sup>).

## **Recent Gwent Sightings for November 2013**

### **Highlights**

A Penduline Tit was present at Newport Wetlands (7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>). Single Great Grey Shrikes were reported from Wentwood (12<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>) and Brynmawr (18<sup>th</sup>). A Pink-footed Goose was recorded at Newport Wetlands (26<sup>th</sup>), whilst two Red-throated Divers were observed offshore at the same site on the same date. A probable Great White Egret was also recorded at Newport Wetlands (30<sup>th</sup>).

### **Newport Wetlands Reserve**

A Merlin was reported (2<sup>nd</sup>), whilst a female Hen Harrier was recorded (20<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>).

### **Other sites**

Two Mediterranean Gulls were present at Tredegar House Lake Newport (3<sup>rd</sup>). Two Ring Ouzels were reported from the Blorenge (10<sup>th</sup>), whilst two Hawfinches were recorded at Wentwood (12<sup>th</sup>). Five Common Scoters were seen offshore at Sluice Farm (15<sup>th</sup>). A Short-eared Owl was recorded at Peterstone (23<sup>rd</sup>). A Merlin was reported from Brynithel (24<sup>th</sup>).

**Chris Hatch**

## **BTO NEWS**

We are well into the second (and final) winter for the **Winter Thrush Survey**. Last winter's surveys covered the majority of the core squares and there were several additional counts. This winter, with a much more abundant berry crop, are likely to give quite different results. Although we are well into the survey period, there is still time to become involved. If you participated last winter, please revisit your same squares, and repeat walks along the same routes will be especially valuable. Even if you didn't participate last time, you can visit your regular birding site and do a winter walk, or select somewhere new, as coverage of new squares will be just as valuable. Counts can be done in any month, but in particular, midwinter counts are needed (between Dec 27 and Jan 10) at one of the randomly selected core squares. The core squares are listed on the website, and it doesn't matter if more than one person visits, so you really have a free choice of where to do your count. Please first have a look at [www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/winter-thrushes](http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/winter-thrushes) to refresh your knowledge of the survey, and register your square.

Mid November saw the publication of the much awaited **Bird Atlas 2007-11**. Many members will have been involved in the survey work, which took five years; with a further two years to analyse the data and write up the species accounts, it really is a splendid publication, and has been well worth the wait. This is the first time that detailed breeding and wintering distributions have been combined in a single publication. There are short species accounts, and the bulk of the book comprises detailed maps of the breeding and wintering distributions. There are also comparisons with the previous breeding Atlas (1988-91) and wintering Atlas (1981-84), and changes in distributions detailed. For those that overlooked the pre-publication offer, it now costs £69.99. Have a look at [www.bto.org/shop](http://www.bto.org/shop) and follow the links there to the Atlas,

where you can view some sample pages from the new publication – and order your copy as a special Christmas treat!

I hope everyone has a good Xmas break, and remember to make that resolution to become more involved with survey work in 2014. If anyone has any queries, about BTO issues, please contact me on [jmsl2587@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jmsl2587@yahoo.co.uk)

**Jerry Lewis**

## **SNIPPETS**

### **Kite Bloggers**

Rob Parson located this snippet, 'Bloggers with a Bird's-eye View of the World' in the Daily Telegraph on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2013. The story has a coloured photo of a red kite in flight with the caption "We know what you're up to...." The story reads:

'Birds started tweeting 1500 million years before Jack Dorsey and friends came up with the 140 character message - and now, scientists report, they have taken up blogging, too. Researchers at Aberdeen University have set up four red kites to describe their days without any human intervention.

The birds trying to re-establish themselves in Scotland after being driven to extinction have been fitted out with satellite tags reporting their movements up to six times a day. These are then automatically linked to information on local habitats, geography and weather, and turned into reports using sophisticated software.

Thus, the one-year-old Millie, recounts having had "a social week" with two other kites around Errogie, near Loch Ness. Moray, one of her companions, spent most of her time on farmland "feasting on worms and insects" but made "odd journeys to heather".

Meanwhile, Ussie, a two-year-old male rescued after being caught in a fence, roosted in woodlands near the Dornoch Firth, while Wyvis frequented "acid grassland" near Wanlockhead, Scotland's highest village, in Dumfries and Galloway.

Bloggers, of course, are always winging it and flying kites. So it makes a nice change to get a real bird's eye view'.

*(For the computer jargon-challenged, which includes the editor, a **blog** is a contraction of the words **web log**) and is a discussion or informational site published on the [World Wide Web](#) and consisting of discrete entries, known as "posts")*

### **US Wind Turbine deaths of Golden Eagles.**

Keith Roylance located this item on the internet BBC News on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2013 entitled: 'US firm Duke Energy pays out over wind farm eagles deaths'. It reads:

'A huge us energy supplier has agreed to pay out \$1m (£630, 000) over the deaths of golden eagles at two wind farms'.

Duke Energy Renewables agreed to the sum after pleading guilty to charges of 14 eagle deaths in the past three years at the Wyoming sites. It is the first time the Obama administration has taken action against a wind energy company in such a case. The AP news agency report that the fines will go to wildlife and wetlands conservation bodies.

The charges were brought under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which protects Golden Eagles as well as other species. According to one study by biologists in 2013, wind energy facilities in 10 US states have killed at least 67 Golden and Bald Eagles since 2008, AP said. The eagles often fail to look up as they search for pray until it is too late, slamming into the turbines. They can also be sucked in by the tornado-like vortex created by the fast-moving blades.

Duke Energy Renewables Greg Wolf said the company “deeply regretted” the impact on Golden Eagles at two of its wind facilities and had been working closely with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to “take proactive steps to correct the problem”.

These have included installing radar technology to help detect eagles in flight nearby and further curbing turbines at times of high eagle flight activity.

### Donation to the RSPB

Every year, for the past few years we have donated £100 to RSPB Wales to be spent on their Welsh projects. From next year (2014) we will donate it directly to the RSPB at Newport Wetlands Reserve where we hope to see direct results from our gift.

Normally this is our only donation to the RSPB and a reason to fend off other RSPB appeals to fund projects elsewhere in the UK and abroad. At our November Committee meeting however, we agreed to give an additional £100 in response to their (RSPB) UK Overseas Territories Appeal.

The UK Overseas Territories are as British as the Isle of Wight and are home to some of the rarest species in the world. In fact 90% of the UK’s threatened wildlife lives in the UK Overseas Territories.

Examples given by the RSPB are:

100 northern rockhopper penguins are lost daily around Tristan da Cunha.

On Gough Island, Tristan Albatross chicks are devoured by house mice every day.

Green turtles’ eggs and young are being eaten by feral pigs on Montserrat.

We hope that our donation will help our threatened wildlife in those areas.

If you want more information visit

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/supporting/campaigns/ukot/index.aspx>

Keith Roylance



*Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year*