

THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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CONTENTS

Committee Commentary	Trevor Russell	page 2
Newport Wetlands June 2014	Tom Dalrymple	page 3
Surveys on the River Usk, River Wye and River Monnow	Steph Tyler	page 5
Goytre Wood: The best laid plans	Andrew Cormack	page 7
Snippets	Keith Roylance	page 8
Future Contributions for <i>The Dipper</i>		page 8
Future Events		page 8

COMMITTEE COMMENTARY

Trevor Russell

The June meeting was dominated by our ongoing dispute with the NRW (Natural Resources Wales) because NRW had granted the Usk Fishing Association a licence to shoot six Goosanders and 12 Cormorants between January 29th and March 31st – during the breeding season for both species.

The UFA claims that the birds eat too many salmon, which are already in decline across the country, whilst anglers bring much-needed money into the area with their licence fees, accommodation and retail spending. NRW claim that scaring techniques are ineffectual because the birds become quickly habituated to the noise of, e.g. blanks, and that the only effective way of scaring them off is to let them witness their colleagues being shot dead. Culling 18 birds seems unlikely to have a significant effect on fish stocks: granting the licence suggests appeasement rather than a decision based on hard evidence. We will respond, and the case continues.

Another puzzling decision by NRW has allowed the felled-larch areas of Wentwood - felled due to the *Phytophthora ramorum* disease - to be scarified during this, the breeding season for Tree pipit and Nightjar. Scarifying at this time of year will guarantee the total destruction of their nests, so it is difficult to understand their timing. Similar activity has also been carried out over a large area near Trellech. We look forward to receiving their explanation.

Other topics discussed included: **Membership**, which shows a small increase over this time last year.

Now that leaves are back on the trees in **Goytre House Wood**, a safety survey has been carried out looking for dead/dangerous branches etc. that may have been missed in the January survey, after the damaging storms. Repair of the field fence is also currently underway.

We have sold nearly all (1000) of the **Birdwatching Walks in Gwent** books so we are closely monitoring the sales of the dwindling stock to assess whether to order a re-print. To be cost-effective, large numbers would have to be ordered; but would we sell them all? In the meantime, we will be asking all walk-authors to check the details of their walk descriptions because we are aware of habitat changes in some areas. Any revisions would be incorporated in a new print run - if we decide to have one.

Sadly, there were no applications for the **Hamar Bursary** for 2014.

GOS has been well-supported at the recent **Summer Shows**, both at NWR and Parc Bryn Bach and we plan to attend at **Magor Marsh on July 19th**, **GWT Dingestow on August 12th** and **Blaen Bran on September 6th**.

See you there!

Newport Wetlands by Tom Dalrymple June 2014

Saline lagoon news

The majority of the work this spring has been focused on breeding waders on the lagoons and specifically Avocet. The ratio of fledged chicks to adult pairs has been unsustainably low for all wader species for some time. Avocet have been a particular problem since 2008.

Previous breeding wader studies at Newport Wetlands have focused on nest monitoring of species nesting on the grassland rather than the islands. These studies have shown that hatch

success is very high and that most of the problem is chick mortality. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most chicks are lost in the first week or two. Despite hundreds of hours of observation less than 1% of chick predation has been witnessed and dead chicks found are even rarer.

With the help of RSPB research scientists we devised a method for monitoring predators, Avocet nests and Avocet chicks and then acquired the necessary licences from NRW and BTO.



Avocet chick showing colour flag and radio tag, later found beneath a plucking post.

Mammalian predators were monitored by placing tubes on the islands with ink pads inside them, any mammal that walked through the tube would leave prints. Other predators would be observed by 4 trail cameras placed around the islands over looking nests/ These cameras had infra red lights and therefore operated by night as well as day. In addition to this we searched for Otter, Mink, Rat, Stoat, Weasel and Fox faeces when checking water levels or salinities. We also did timed watches of between 2 to 3 hours a day on average.

Nests were monitored by placing data loggers in the nests. The data loggers are about the size of 3 one pence coins stuck together. The data loggers record the temperature of the nest every 10 minutes, in this way we can tell if the Avocet stopped incubating prematurely. When the nest was due to hatch, we physically inspected the nest to see how many eggs were hatching. Not all the eggs have hatched yet but nest success is over 90% and no predators were identified via the mammal tubes, or the cameras, but rats prints were discovered on the lagoon "coast".

To monitor chicks we were heavily reliant on Dr Jennifer Smart from RSPB, Richard Clarke, Vaughan Thomas, Jerry Lewis and Darryl Spittle from Goldcliff Ringers, Richard Facey from NRW and Roy Bamford. I'm grateful to all of them.

Chicks were caught when at least 10 days old, we discovered that their knee joints were not sufficiently large to take a ring before that age. One or two chicks in a brood were rung above the knee with a coloured tag over a BTO ring. A radio tag about the size of a pea was then glued to the chicks back, see attached photo, courtesy of Richard Clarke. 10 chicks were radio tagged, 2 were found under plucking posts thought to be used by a Buzzard, 1 was found in a Buzzard pellet, see photo below (Richard Clarke), 1 chick fledged and the other 6 are still wearing theirs. The remaining radio tagged birds are due to fledge and shed their tags by the third week of June.

Next year I hope to radio tag chicks in the first days of life, to discover what the main causes of mortality are during the first 10 days of life.



Buzzard pellet with radio tag antennae sticking out of it

The March to June surveys on the River Usk, River Wye and River Monnow

Steph Tyler

The prime purpose of the surveys was to gather information on the number of breeding Goosanders and Common Sandpipers on our rivers but data on other species was collected too.

Thanks to the efforts of many volunteers (acknowledged at the end of this note) most of the River Usk from Newbridge on Usk upriver to the county border has been surveyed three times as too the whole of the River Monnow from Clodock (just into Herefordshire) down to its confluence with the Wye at Monmouth and the River Wye from Biblins to Brockweir. The tidal sections of the river were not covered because it was felt that no Goosanders nor Common Sandpipers would be breeding in these sections. Please let me know if you have however, seen any of these two species on the tidal sections or on Bulmore Pools.

River Usk

In March/early April 60-62 Goosanders were counted, with birds seen in most sections. The highest counts were between Llantrissant and Usk town and from Gobion to The Bryn. Possibly some Goosanders may have been winter visitors still to depart for further north but it was thought that there may have been at least 13 pairs. In the survey later in April into early May there were still 57 to 61 birds, 32-33 males and 23-26 females with almost half the Goosanders still on the section from Llantrissant to Usk. Three broods were been noted by mid May – near Clytha, near Chain Bridge and a single well-grown young bird upriver of Llanwenarth.

Only 7-8 Cormorants were noted in the first survey and 8-9 in the second. Mallard numbers were 79 in the first

survey and 89 in the second, many of them males so most females were presumed still sitting. A single Egyptian Goose in the lowest section surveyed was exciting in the first survey, when just four Canada Geese, 32 Mute Swans and 7 Green Sandpipers were seen; in the second survey there were fewer swans and Canada Geese, no Green Sandpipers but 35 Common Sandpipers (some undoubtedly on passage) and over 300 Sand Martins. The May/June survey picked up more Goosander broods and in all at least seven broods have been detected on the river this spring/early summer. Some 22 Common Sandpipers were reported and from their locations it is likely that there were 12 to 14 territories.

River Monnow

Goosanders were fewer on the Monnow than on the Usk but 17, ten of these being males, representing an estimated 7-10 pairs, were seen on the first survey and on the second, 16 but then just one male and up to 15 females, two with broods, were noted. Only three Cormorants were seen in the early survey but none in the later one. Some 95 Mallard were noted in the first survey and 101 in the second with a few broods evident by then. The interesting result on the Monnow was the number of Mandarin Duck. In the early survey 22 were seen with an estimated nine to 14 pairs and in the later survey some 18 to 20 were found with 13-14 being males; two broods were seen. More Canada Geese were on the Monnow than the Usk with 15 in the early survey and 16 in the later one. Only five Mute Swans were noted on both the first and second surveys,

representing three pairs; one pair had cygnets by the second survey. Two Green Sandpipers were seen in the first survey and none in the second when just two single Common Sandpipers were noted (one near Pandy and one at Monmouth) despite much suitable habitat being available. Further surveys in June showed just four Goosander broods and the only Common Sandpiper territory was upriver at Oldcastle. A Green Sandpiper was here too on 17 June.

River Wye

There were 10 Goosanders on the Wye in the earlier survey but apart from one injured female none were evident a month later. Only two Cormorants were evident on the first survey and five on the second. Three Mandarin Ducks were present on the first survey and six on the second. Mute Swans were numerous with 32 in the earlier survey and 39 in the second when at least five pairs were on nests. On the first survey about 100 Mallard and six Canada Geese were seen and on the second over 90 Mallard with 75 of these being males and three Canada Geese.

On all river surveys Kingfishers were surprisingly few and far between in the two early surveys with four seen on the River Usk and three on the Monnow (a territory on the lower Monnow, one near Skenfrith and one near Llangua). In June other nesting locations were found on the Monnow at Oldcastle and at Altyrynys rail bridge. Also in June at least five, possibly seven Mandarin broods were present on the river. Two canoeists noted a brood of Mandarins too on the Wye below The Biblins during early June. High flood water had destroyed all the Mute Swan nests on the Wye.

My grateful thanks to Verity Picken, Roger Belle, Trevor Russell, Steve Roberts, Al Venables, Alan Williams,

Nicholas Beswick, Jerry Lewis, Chris Dyson, Ruth Brown, Peter Brown, Rob Parsons and Andrew Baker for their work on the River Usk. On the Rivers Monnow and Wye, Steph Tyler, John Coleman, John Duffy, Roger Ruston and Trevor Russell carried out the counts. The canoeists were Olly and Petra Mitchard.

The best laid plans...

Gwent Ornithological Society has owned Goytre House Wood since 2001 and manages it as a reserve for birds and other wildlife. In 2013 the wood was designated a Local Wildlife Site (an area of high conservation importance in Monmouthshire) for its range of flora and fauna. The site is a mixed deciduous woodland consisting mainly of Oak, Beech, Ash, Sycamore and Silver Birch. In spring the woodland floor is carpeted with bluebells and wild daffodil are also present. Nesting birds are encouraged by the erection of nest boxes that are used by Blue and Great Tit, Nuthatch and Pied Flycatcher. Spotted Flycatcher return every year with one or occasionally two pairs usually present. All three woodpeckers are present most years with Great Spotted Woodpeckers using the old trees with holes for nesting but Lesser Spotted Woodpecker preferring to nest in the alders along the canal. Raven and Buzzard are seen and heard in the area and Tawny Owl has bred there in the past. Mallard and Moorhen use the pond. Other birds include: Bullfinch, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Treecreeper, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Wren, and Jackdaw. The Gwent Bat Group has put up bat boxes, which have been used by both common pipistrelle and noctule bats. Wood mice use the nest boxes to hibernate in winter.

Following a survey last year we planned this winter to prune two of the old beech trees to reduce the weight of branches stressing their increasingly fragile trunks. That way we intended to keep the trees alive and standing as good sites for bird nests and bat roosts, while leaving the cut branches on the ground as a habitat for fungi, insects and mammals.

We were awarded a grant from Monmouthshire County Council under the Monmouthshire Natural Assets scheme (administered by Gwent Wildlife Trust) to support the project.



The first tree was completed in late January as planned, but the second had to be postponed due to forecast bad weather making it unsafe to work. That weather turned out to be February's gales, which blew down the beech tree that was awaiting pruning, blocking the footpath, and snapped much of the top off another. After the storm, we modified our work plans to make the best wildlife opportunities out of the damage. So we've now ended up with one reduced beech tree and the other left safely lying on the ground as an insect hotel. A neighbouring oak suffered a similar fate leaving us with rather more decaying wood habitat on the ground than we intended. Given the severity of the storm, we will conduct another safety survey this summer when lack of re-growth may reveal any further damage. Working with nature isn't always straightforward, but compared with some of the county's woods we escaped from the storms quite lightly.

Snippets

News From Tesco – contributed by Keith Roylance



Contributions for Future Issues of *The Dipper*

Please send to dipper@gwentbirds.org.uk

Contributions for *The Dipper* are always gratefully received. It doesn't matter how short they are and it could take you less than three minutes to appear in print. Send an email to dipper@gwentbirds.org.uk (or a postcard to *The Dipper*, 29 Chestnut Drive, Abergavenny, NP7 5JZ) giving the location of one of your favourite hides (in or out of county) and why or your favourite seasonal bird sighting for the current month.

Next Indoor Meetings

Saturday 27 September 2014

[Shearwaters](#)

Andrew Ramsay

Saturday 04 October 2014

[A lane in a Midland Forest](#)

Mike Lane

Next Outdoor Events

Sunday 24 August 2014

[Llangorse Lake](#)

Steve Butler

Sunday 05 October 2014

[Minnets Wood](#)

Lyndon Waters

For full details see <http://www.gwentbirds.org.uk>