

THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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Winter 2017

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GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

NOTICE OF

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2018

**The Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday, January 20th, 2018,
in the Village Hall, Goytre, starting at 7:30pm**

Secretary, TREVOR RUSSELL, is standing down but no nominations have been received to replace him.

Indoor Programme Secretary, TREVOR RUSSELL, is standing down but no nominations have been received to replace him.

County Recorder TOM CHINNICK is standing down and DARRYL SPITTLE has been nominated to replace him. Darryl will need to be formally nominated and seconded.

A nomination to appoint RICHARD CLARKE to re-join the committee as a Committee member has been made by Keith Roylance and seconded by Trevor Russell. Richard's election will need to be approved by the membership.

VERITY PICKEN has come to the end of her ex-officio year following her retirement as Chairman and needs to be elected onto the Committee as a Committee Member. Nominated by Keith Roylance and seconded by Trevor Russell, Verity's election needs to be approved by the membership

TREVOR RUSSELL has offered to join the committee as a Committee member. TREVOR needs to be formally nominated and seconded.

ROO PERKINS has resigned from the Committee but all other Officers and Committee Members have indicated their willingness to stand for re-election and can be elected en bloc.

It is proposed that the role of LIBRARIAN should be discontinued as a consequence of the reduced use of the Library. The library will remain operational, as now, but books will be signed in and out on an "Honesty Box" basis.

All nominations should be signed by both the Proposer and Secunder with the agreement of the nominee, or e-mail Trevor Russell with details. (see Contacts list for details)

Nominations must be received by January 1st 2017

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

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

Following the buffet the Members Evening will conclude with a five short presentations by our own members recounting their birding trips in countries around the world.

TREVOR RUSSELL
Secretary

COMMITTEE COMMENTARY, NOVEMBER 2018 **Trevor Russell**

The committee added their congratulations to JERRY LEWIS who had been awarded a LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD by the Welsh Ornithological Society at the WOS Conference held in Monmouth in November 2017. Jerry joins the annals of an illustrious group, the last three winners all coming from Gwent/GOS – Steph Tyler, in 2015, Steve Roberts, in 2016, and now Jerry, 2017. The committee was sure that all GOS members would join them in sending Jerry our huge congratulations. Read his citation elsewhere in this edition.

The Annual Report 2016, was planned for distribution at the indoor meeting on November 25th, but unfortunately the Printer had been delayed and it will not now be available until the December 9th meeting. We will aim to distribute as many Reports by hand as possible because the postal charge for such a large package is prohibitively expensive. If you can't make it to the meeting please ask a friend to collect one on your behalf. The final opportunity for collection will be the AGM on January 20th after which we will assess the numbers left to arrive at a solution. Emailing an electronic copy is not an option.

Like an itch that won't go away, Llandegfedd reservoir continues to irritate. Little attempt is made by Welsh Water to maintain the site for birding interest, and money-making ventures seem to be the main purpose of the management. Some bird hides have deteriorated almost beyond repair though the Hamar hide, which was paid for by GOS, is in the best condition though also in need of repair. Our offers of help are often thwarted by Welsh Water playing the Health and Safety card. Chris Hatch, former manager of the reservoir, has contacted Natural Resource Wales to enquire if they were aware of the deteriorating conditions that threaten the SSSI status and we await the outcome of their inspection.

We are trying to update our website and although it is recognised that our Sightings page is very good and user-friendly other aspects of the site are in need of improvement. We are liaising with other bird clubs who find themselves in a similar situation to see if we can identify and share technical expertise..

Indoor and Field meeting programmes have been drawn up for 2018 and the plan is

to distribute them with this edition of The Dipper.

Being the last meeting of the year our thoughts turned to the January 20th AGM when Trevor Russell will be standing down from two jobs, Secretary and Indoor Programme Secretary. *We have had no volunteers so far.* If you perhaps have had experience in a secretarial role and have computer skills sufficient to compile Minutes and send emails, you have the qualifications! Birding skills are not a requirement (I'm living proof of that) The committee meets just five times a year so the duties are not arduous.

Similarly, the work of the Indoor Secretary reaches a peak for just about one week a year when compiling the Indoor programme in the autumn, and that's it! The programme for 2018 is already done and you'll be given a list of prospective speakers to get you going. Neither of these roles carries a long-standing commitment and indeed, the last three Indoor Secretaries have served for one, one and two years! Please give these roles some thought, we really cannot pile these duties onto the shoulders of the existing Committee members, it would be so unfair. If you would like more information, please contact me by phone or email.

Tom Chinnick will be standing down as County Recorder at the AGM and Darryl Spittle has volunteered to replace him. Heartfelt thanks go to Tom for his enthusiastic efforts and we all wish Darryl well in his new role.

Richard Clarke has been nominated to make a welcome return to the Committee and we look forward to his valued contributions from next year.

VACANCY

With the imminent retirement of Trevor Russell from his position as GOS Secretary we are in urgent need of a volunteer to come forward and fill this position.

Their role is to take the minutes of Committee Meetings (Five a year) and issue the minutes to the committee members. They would also liaise with the chairman to draw up the agenda for committee meetings and circulate these a few weeks in advance of the committee meetings.

Occasional correspondence would have to be dealt with as appropriate.

For any additional information please contact Trevor at indoor@gwentbirds.org.uk or telephone 01600 716266

VACANCY 2

The Indoor Programme Secretary role has been undertaken by a number of committee members over the past few years. The 2018 programme has been organised by Trevor Russell as was the 2017 programme. We now need to appoint a new Indoor Programme Secretary to monitor the 2018 arrangements and plan for the 2019 session. Are you able to volunteer your time to carry out this important function. Further details can be obtained by contacting Trevor Russell as indicated in the above.

Report on Recent Indoor Meetings

We're familiar with the small number of greenshanks that spend the winter in Gwent and elsewhere in southern Britain. In summer greenshanks can be found – with difficulty – at their nests in the far north of Scotland. But are these the same birds? In the northern winter the species is also present in Africa, India and even Australia. Nick Christian gave us a beautifully illustrated introduction to their northern habitat and the work he has done over the past forty years to learn more about the birds and their migrations.

The greenshanks' nesting habitat is typical of the far north – large areas of blanket bogs, with lochans, pools and drier knolls and rocky outcrops. Greenshanks nest on these drier areas, using the wet land for feeding and as protection from predators. It seems even birds may find this a tricky landscape to navigate: nests are typically located close to stones or pieces of wood. It's even possible to persuade a pair to nest by leaving a suitable arrangement of stones or fence slats: the greenshank equivalent of a nestbox.

To investigate the movements of individuals away from the nest colour rings and geolocators need to be fitted. Early in the season it's possible to attract greenshanks using a plastic model bird with a sound recording. With luck a spring-loaded net can be triggered to catch birds that land to investigate. Once they have laid eggs and started incubating them it's more successful to walk up to the nest and drop a mist-net over the sitting bird. Colour rings can be observed using a telescope, confirming that breeding greenshanks feed both around the bog pools and on the nearby coast.

Geolocators should capture a daily record of where the birds have been, but need to be recovered to extract this data. Even with birds that habitually return to the same nest area every year, re-capturing the tagged birds has proved difficult. However the geolocator data that has been retrieved matches the winter sightings of the colour rings: in Essex, Anglesey, Lancashire, Ireland and Western France (not yet in Gwent, but keep looking). It seems that Scottish greenshanks don't, after all, travel particularly far for the winter. This can be contrasted with the smaller common and wood sandpipers, which nest in the same area but whose geolocators reveal winters spent in West Africa.

John Gale's talk was in two parts: first a photographic account of a recent four-week trip to see birds, butterflies and moths in Indonesia, then a description of how the sketches and photographs are used to create oil paintings of the birds in their environment. Keeping these depictions true to nature is particularly important, so watching and videoing the birds behaving naturally is essential to ensure they are shown in the right habitat, right poses and right groupings. Highlight of the trip was seeing the display and mating of a black sickle-bill: a jackdaw-sized bird of paradise with tail feathers nearly a metre in length. Although these birds have been described and illustrated for more than a century, these fail to record that the display takes place on top of a vertical pole, not a horizontal branch. This kind of precise observation means John's paintings (several of which he brought along to the talk) not only look superb, they are scientifically accurate as well.

Richard Clarke introduced us to an island much closer to home. Denny Island is the only off-shore part of Gwent, in the Bristol Channel half way between Magor and Portishead. Despite being only the size of a couple of tennis courts it has nesting colonies of cormorant and great black-backed gull, plus individuals of several other species. The Goldcliff Ringing Group have paid annual visits since 2000 to ring juvenile birds. Fish remains around the nests indicate that young cormorants are fed largely on fresh water species. After fledging they move around the Severn estuary – with sightings from Llanelli to Slimbridge and Hayle – as well as to nearby fresh water – the Usk, Wye and Somerset reservoirs in particular. More surprising sightings suggest long overland journeys, to Surrey, Hampshire and Oxfordshire. Whereas the 50-60 cormorant nests are large piles of sticks, gulls' are much less obvious, making them harder to count. There are thought to be 20-30 pairs, with young birds again travelling widely: to Cornwall, but also Leicester and London.

Newport Wetland Reserve Winter Work Schedule

This is Tom Dalrymple's winter work schedule to maximise our birding interest on the Reserve. It looks like a very busy season!

This winter the planned work is as follows:

Saline lagoons

- Winch open the tidal flap to increase the salinity.
- Get contractors to replace the flow meter and one way valves for the fresh water pump
- Fit water sheds to the 2nd hide shutters.
- Replace the first Mireland pill bridge.
- Regularly check fox fence and operate pumps to prevent seizing.
- Carry out fencing repairs within fox fence at the end of the winter.

Wet grassland

- Raise water levels to reach peak in January
- Repair access tracks on the grasslands
- Regularly check sluice function

Dry grassland

- Flail blackthorn on ditch banks if ground conditions allow

Saltmarsh

- Review botanical survey data and evaluate grazing strategy

Reedbed

- Collect Truxor (amphibious mowing machine) mow deep water channels and keep last year's cut areas open.
- Cut back poplar re-growth in the copse
- Reduce the area of woody scrub in the reedbed
- Repair paths and viewing screens

Monitoring

- WeBS and high tide counts
- Fixed point photography
- Water levels
- Water quality (chemical analysis)
- Otter, mink and water vole monitoring
- Water rail monitoring
- Plan 2018 breeding season monitoring and apply for appropriate licences

Gwent UKBS Report for October 2017

Chris Hatch

Highlights

The find of the month was a male Rock Thrush at Pwll Du (13th). The bird was still present at the end of October. A Glossy Ibis was seen at Newport Wetlands (9th) with a Great White Egret also reported from this site (16th-17th). A Bluethroat was caught and ringed at the same site (14th), whilst other notable sightings at the Wetlands included a Leach's Petrel offshore (17th), a Snow Bunting (22nd to 28th) and three Common Cranes (29th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A Bittern was reported (6th). A male Scaup was recorded (8th), with an Egyptian Goose present (11th). Both male and female Marsh Harriers were seen on several dates throughout the month. The wader flock included two Little Stints (18th).

Other Sites

Single Mediterranean Gulls were reported from Black Rock (8th) and Peterstone (30th). A Short-eared Owl was seen at Waunafon Bog (14th). Three Bramblings were recorded at Llanybi (23rd), with 87 Crossbills seen at Wentwood (31st) and five Hawfinches observed near Blaenserchan (31st), part of a major influx to the U.K. Other sightings of note included a Barn Owl at Chepstow(23rd) and two Merlins at

Pwll Du (31st).



Rock thrush (Keith Roylance)

Gwent UKBS Report for November 2017

Chris Hatch

Highlights

The male Rock Thrush was still present at Pwll Du (until 3rd). The influx of Hawfinches to the county included a flock of 38 at The Folly, Pontypool (1st).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

Up to three Marsh Harriers were seen on several occasions during the month. Single Merlins were reported (11th and 16th). 99 Snipe were present (4th). A short-eared Owl was recorded (8th).

Other sites

A Merlin was reported from the Bloreng (2nd). Large numbers of Crossbills were reported from several sites during the month. Small numbers of Bramblings were recorded at a number of sites. 8 Mandarin ducks were seen on the river Wye at Llandogo.

CURLEW CONFERENCE, BUILTH WELLS

Trevor Russell

In order to review the situation in Wales, where a decline in breeding Curlews has occurred, a one-day workshop is to be held at Hafod a Hendre, the Royal Welsh Showground Conference Centre, Builth Wells, on 24 January 2018, with the support of Natural Resources Wales, the Welsh Ornithological Society, the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and RSPB Wales. The workshop will be opened by conservationist and TV presenter Iolo Williams. Please contact Mary Colwell – Curlew Media, mary@curlewmedia.com or Mike Smart smartmike143@gmail.com with any queries.

Here is a link to further details about the Conference

More links and information can be found by Googling Curlew Conference, Builth.

www.curlewcall.org/conferences/wales-january-2018/

Volunteers Needed

GOS will be at the Big Garden Birdwatch Event run by Caerphilly CBC to be held at Riverside Park, Nr Trethomas on January 27th between 10:00 am and 2:00 pm.

We are in need of a few more volunteers to man our stand and encourage people to become GOS members.

Can you help for an hour or two?

Please contact Keith Roylance at chairman@gwentbirds.org.uk with your contact details and more information can be provided.

Winter birdwatching at Llandegfedd Reservoir

From 1st October to 1st March a permit is required to birdwatch at Llandegfedd Reservoir. If access is required at the north end of the reservoir (Fishermans Car Park) a key is required to be purchased along with the permit. Key access is available from 8:30am to 4:00 pm Monday to Friday. At weekends the 'birdwatching lock' should be in place on the gate so that access is available throughout the day.

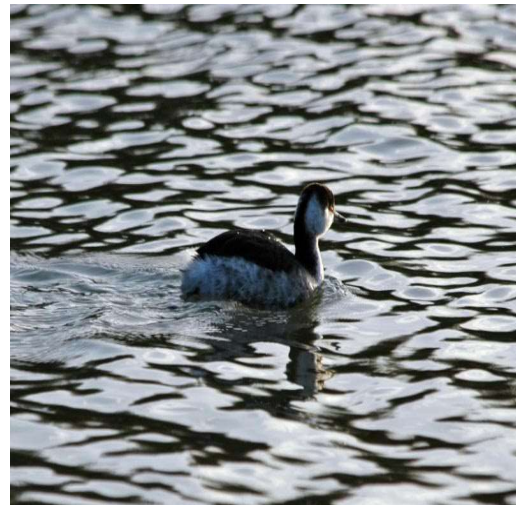
Please ensure that all gates are closed and/or locked to prevent livestock from escaping or unauthorised access being available.

If you are in possession of a key from the previous year only a permit is required.

If you only intend to birdwatch from the public areas e.g. Dam or the visitor centre during the winter period there is no requirement for a permit.

Permits cost £8 and are available from the visitor centre located at the dam end.

Please ensure you have a permit before entering the site.



Northern Diver and Slavonian Grebe (Keith Roylance)



Red necked Grebe (Keith Roylance)

Muriel Hamar

It was with great sadness that I learned of the death of Muriel Hamar in the Royal Gwent Hospital aged 95 on Thursday 14th December. Muriel was the younger sister of Bert Hamar the founder of the Society. When she retired to Llanellen in 1983 after a lifetime of teaching in London and Germany she became a regular attender at the Society's events and was a member of the Committee for a number of years from 1998. She was an active traveller going on a number of foreign trips with other Society members. Although fit and sprightly Muriel suffered with failing eyesight in recent years but this did not prevent her coming to indoor meetings on a regular basis. She told me that she preferred the talks that told a good story which was reasonable given her poor vision.

When I last visited her in hospital after suffering a devastating stroke she could barely speak and you were unsure if she was able to understand what she was being told. I said I had seen a merlin at the Newport reserve that morning. She managed to say 'small'. She understood what I had said and showed that she knew a merlin was our smallest falcon. A birder right to the end.

Alan Williams

GOS CONTACTS

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Membership Renewal

Your membership subscription is due on January 1st for 2018. If you pay by Standing Order you do not need to do anything, your bank will transfer the amount due to us on or shortly after 1st January 2018.

If you still pay your subscriptions by cash or cheque please complete the form below and send it with your payment to: Gill Jones, Membership Secretary, 11, Llewellyn Walk, Newport, NP20 6LY or you can pay at an indoor meeting during January. Membership Fees remain as £15.00 for Individual Membership or £18.00 for Joint/Family Membership.

I wish to renew my membership of Gwent Ornithological Society for 2018

Name:.....

Address.....
.....

Post Code.....

E-mail.....

Telephone:.....

Membership No. (if known).....