

THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
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GOS WEB SITE: www.gwentbirds.org.uk

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The President, Steve Roberts, welcomed the 39 members present on a cold, wintery evening and opened the meeting by reflecting that 2017 had seen the WOS Conference once again hosted by GOS in the Bridges Community Centre, Monmouth. He considered this conference to be even better than the one held in Monmouth in 2013 and highlighted that Jerry Lewis was awarded the WOS Lifetime Achievement Award. Jerry is the third GOS member to be recognised in this way, joining Steph Tyler and Steve Roberts to be recognised nationally for their conservation work. Clearly GOS is punching well above its weight in this field. Steve then returned to a favourite theme, that of the importance of record-keeping. He stressed the importance of submitting records of even the most seemingly insignificant species. He was always surprised at the variety of birds that can be spotted in the most unpromising locations and habitats and encouraged members to explore more widely and visit new locations and submit sighting records. Such records are the bedrock of the Society.

The Treasurer, Andrew Cormack, reported that the Society continued to be financially stable, with a slight surplus of income over expenses in 2017. Both subscriptions and door takings at indoor meetings are slightly increased, showing that members continue to value the Society and participate in its activities.

Postage costs have been reduced, for which thanks are due to our Membership Secretary, though there is an outstanding bill (estimated £300) for postage of 2016 Annual Reports to members who have not collected them before the AGM.

We made a grant of €500 to the 2nd European Breeding Bird Atlas, to sponsor the entry for Dipper (*cinclus cinclus*).

Having commissioned a survey of trees in our Goytre House Wood reserve this year, we expect to incur significant expenses in 2018 on recommended safety and environmental work. Nevertheless, the Society maintains sufficient financial reserves to afford this type of expenditure.

Keith Roylance, reflected that 2017 had been a year of consolidation for the Society as he completed his first year as Chairmen. Membership levels were held at 274 after several years of decline and survey work for BBS & WeBS has continued unabated. Several members continue to monitor their own favourite species. The county list now stands at 308.

Environmental concerns still centre on major projects in the county, esp. the proposed M4 "Black" Relief Road and the Circuit of Wales (which is now unlikely to proceed) and we continue to monitor such developments.

Indoor meetings throughout 2017 showed us how to improve our photography of birds, took us to Morocco, the rain forests and the Seychelles to name just a few. Five of the twelve talks were given by GOS members indicating the depth and strength of the membership.

The walks programme covered the majority of habitat types that we enjoy in this wonderful county of Gwent.

Our presence at shows was limited to GWT Magor Marsh Open Day and the Garden Birdwatch event run by Caerphilly Council in January

The Bert Hamar Award, available annually for a bird related project, was not taken up again this year. If you have an idea for projects please approach us for details and potential financial support.

We are still investigating ways to improve and modernise the website without losing our easy to use sightings page which we consider to be a 'jewel in the crown'. Three Committee positions fell vacant this year, Trevor Russell stood down as Secretary after 25 years and also as Indoor Secretary. Neither position received a nominated replacement. Tom Chinnick stood down as County Recorder and Darryl Spittle was elected to replace him.

Richard Clarke, Verity Picken and Trevor Russell were elected as Committee members and all other Officers and Committee members were re-elected for 2018.

Use of the library reduced yet again in 2017 probably due to the ease of computer searches to find information online. Because of the reduced activity it had been decided that the role of LIBRARIAN should be discontinued since the reduced activity, both in borrowings and book purchases no longer justifies the role of a Committee position. Online information makes heavy, often outdated Field Guides almost redundant though it was explained that the Library and its books and CD's will still remain available to Members at the times of indoor meetings, as now. Despite the library being unmanned books & CD's etc. will be taken out and returned on an 'Honesty Box' principle requiring Members to sign items in and out in the Library Record book.

The AGM was followed by the traditional Member's Evening Finger Buffet which was, as always, generous, delicious and most convivial. This was followed by a series of four short presentations of Members' birding holiday experiences: Al Venables described Fair Isle in the Spring, Grant Robinson took us on a cool birding tour of Iceland (cool, even in August), Richard Dowle restored our circulation with much warmer trips to National Parks in Central India and Sri Lanka, and Dave Brassey concluded the evening with an amusing tale of his birding adventures in Slovakia with Arthur Pitcher.

Committee Summary – February 2018

The February meeting of the committee discussed a number of topics ranging from tree felling in the breeding season and the M4 Relief Road around Newport. Richard Clarke & Keith Roylance had been present at a meeting with Caerphilly Biodiversity group at which NRW (Natural Resources Wales) had indicated their need to continue felling diseased Larch trees during the breeding season of birds. However they will liaise more closely with environmental groups as to the felling locations so any known breeding locations with particular regard to Nightjars can be avoided. Digital maps of the locations should be available via Caerphilly Biodiversity Group.

The GOS website was discussed again and a focussed programme to update it is being prepared. The use of Social Media (Facebook, Twitter etc.) may be part of the updating process.

Llandegfedd Reservoir and its increasing focus as a 'tourist' attraction was briefly reviewed. The need for maintenance on the bird hides was highlighted. The reservoir management claim they do not have the resources to maintain them, so if we wish to have hide facilities it may be up to GOS to organise maintenance. This is of particular reference to the Bert Hamar Hide which although built by the Llandegfedd team

some years ago was paid for by GOS. WE are likely to write to Welsh Water asking for a high level meeting to discuss the ongoing issues with the birding environment around the reservoir.

M4 Relief Road – the public Inquiry is still ongoing. The changes to the proposal around the docks area could affect a breeding gull population. Richard Clarke to provide details and Keith Roylance will highlight the issue to the Inquiry. The CALM meetings continue on a regular basis and GOS is generally represented by Verity Picken, Tom Chinnick or Darryl Spittle.

There is a lottery funded project 'The Living Levels' focussed on improving the Gwent Levels from Rumney to Chepstow. Richard Clarke representing Goldcliff Ringing Group has met with Paul Thomas of the project to focus on Barn Owls, Tree Sparrows and similar. There will be lots of opportunities for volunteering / monitoring hopefully with a GOS – GRG collaboration.

Bird Watching Walks in Gwent Volume 2 – see more information in the Dipper.

BTO News

Jerry Lewis

More help is needed in 2018 for The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). This survey is still well supported in the county, but the last two years has seen an increased number of volunteers having to give up their squares (and some new squares were recently allocated to the county). The following information will be a bit familiar to regular readers, but I'm hoping there are a few members out there who have not yet discovered the joy of doing a BBS (and having their efforts contribute to bird conservation at the same time). The BBS is the main method of tracking the fortunes of our common breeding birds. It involves walking a 2km route (through a 1 km square), twice during the breeding season, and counting everything you see and hear. It would involve only about 2 hrs per visit. The majority of the birds that you will record will be common species (though there may be something more unusual - occasionally), so there should be no problems with identification (and I could let you have a cd of bird song, to refresh your memories, if necessary). As well as getting you out into some interesting, and little visited, parts of the county, the main benefits come from tracking the year to year changes, and maybe discovering a new species for your square. The list of available 1 km squares is much longer than usual, so I'm sure everyone will be able to find a square that is reasonably convenient for them. The squares are grouped around five general regions of the county, as follows -

Newport area - ST2689, ST2385, ST2283, ST2785, ST2097, ST2292, ST2396, ST2497, ST2693, ST3482, ST3491

Chepstow area - ST4592, ST4698, ST4896, ST4497, ST5194, ST5291

Monmouth area - SO4502, SO4708, SO5414

Abergavenny area - SO2719, SO3307, SO3504, SO3519, SO3613, SO3228, SO3621, SO3624, SO3728

Western Valleys - SO1402, SO1902, SO2000, SO2303, SO2604, SO2901

Existing routes have already been established through many of these squares, but they could be amended if you wish.

Please let me know if you think you might be able to help, or want some more information before deciding.

Jerry Lewis 01873 855091 or jmsl2587@yahoo.co.uk

Heron's at 90

The annual Heronry census is in its 90th year, and there is a push to try and get all breeding colonies counted this year. The survey involves visiting a heronry (before the leaves come out, when nest location becomes more difficult), to make a count of "apparently occupied nests".

Most of the well known sites are covered, but several that have apparently become deserted in the last few years. In this 90th year, the aim is to re-visit them to confirm whether they have, or haven't, been lost. Its always possible that the birds may have moved a short distance, so a general search of the immediate area is advisable.

There could always be some small colonies (two or three nests) yet to be discovered.

The recently "lost" sites, with last known grid reference, are - Llanvihangel Crucorney SO309205, Llanhennock/Llangibby ST377980, Llanfoist SO28_13_ and Llanarth Court SO380104.

If anyone would like to check out any of these, please let me know, and I'll let you have more details, and if anyone suspects they have found a new colony, please get in touch.

Jerry Lewis 01873 855091 or jmsl2587@yahoo.co.uk

BIRD WATCHING WALKS IN GWENT Volume 2?

Are we ready to update and expand our sell out book 'Bird Watching Walks in Gwent'?

We need your input as to whether we should undertake a second volume of the walks book. If your walk was included in the original book does it need alteration in any way, possibly due to tree felling, diversion of a specified footpath etc?

Does any member have a walk they believe should be highlighted in any new book that is published that is not included in the first volume?

[If you can help in either of the above please e-mail chairman@gwentbirds.org.uk with your comments and proposals. We will be discussing the potential for a second volume at our next committee meeting in April so please respond promptly.](mailto:chairman@gwentbirds.org.uk)

Gwent UKBS Report for December 2017

Highlights

A Bittern was reported from Newport Wetlands (13th and 18th). Sightings of Hawfinches were reported from Brynmawr, Usk, Cefn Ila, Chepstow and Newport.

Newport Wetlands Reserve

Wader sightings included 14 Avocets (12th) and 90 Golden Plovers (14th). A Merlin was seen (12th) and single male and female Marsh Harriers were recorded on several dates throughout the month.

Other sites

Over 100 Crossbills were reported from Wentwood (2nd). A Barn Owl was seen at Black Rock (3rd). Five Red Kites were present at Tregaer (6th). Four Bewick's Swans were seen at Llanybi (14th). Single Yellow-legged Gulls were recorded at Newport and Caerleon (both 31st) and a Mediterranean Gull was also seen at Newport (31st). Reports of small numbers of Bramblings were received from several sites during the month.

Chris Hatch

Gwent UKBS Report for January 2018

Highlights

A Cattle Egret was reported from Sluice Farm (5th). A Great White Egret was seen at Newport Wetlands (7th). Three European White-fronted Geese were present at Wentlooge (8th)

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A Merlin was recorded (19th). A number of Marsh Harrier sightings were reported throughout the month.

Other sites

A Mediterranean Gull was seen at Black Rock (3rd). Four Kittiwakes were seen at Sudbrook (4th). Jack Snipe were reported from Sudbrook (two on 3rd) and Peterstone (6th). Four Bewick's Swans were present at Llandegfedd reservoir (10th). A Barn Owl was seen at Llanover (12th). A Merlin was reported from The Bryn (19th). Two Short-eared Owls were seen at Waunafon Bog (22nd). Hawfinches continued to be reported from a number of sites within the County.

Chris Hatch

Gwent UKBS Report for February 2018

Highlights

A Great White Egret was reported from Peterstone (2nd). A Common Crane was seen at Newport Wetlands (6th). A Black Redstart was present at Monmouth (7th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A Jack Snipe was reported (16th). A Chiff Chaff was recorded (16th). A Merlin was present (10th). Up to 20 Avocets were present (20th). An Egyptian Goose was recorded (24th)

Other sites

Over 40 Hawfinches were present at Dingestow (from 1st) . Hawfinches were also reported from Monmouth (1st), Pontypool (3rd), and Brynmawr (25th). Ten Water Pipits were seen at Peterstone (2nd). Single Barn Owls were reported from Treowen (13th), Clytha (13th) and Newport (21st).

Chris Hatch

BTO Garden Birdwatch Scheme

Mick Bailey is S.E. Wales Ambassador for the BTO Garden Birdwatch Scheme. He is holding an information and discussion meeting in Cwmbran on 14th July. It is open to anyone interested or active in the scheme. Pre booking is essential. For further information e-mail Mick at mickbail250@gmail.com

Keith Roylance has provided the following quote:

Gore Vidal (1925 - 2012), American writer and critic. :

'To a man, ornithologists are tall, slender and bearded so that they can stand motionless for hours, imitating kindly trees, as they watch for birds.'

Although the majority of us will probably not recognise the description of the twentieth century ornithologist, may you feel kindly as you go into the country this year.

Amendment to Indoor Programme 14 April 2018

The Indoor programme has been extended due to having to cancel the talk due to take place on 4th March. The talk 'Romania in the Spring' will now take place on Saturday April 14th at 7:30 pm in Goytre Village Hall. Keith Roylance will present a range of photos taken during a 10 day visit to Romania in 2015 accompanied by three GOS friends. Birds, Bears, Dazzling Deltas and wonderful scenery.

Indoor Programme from September 2018

Saturday 22 September	Birding Tours in Africa	Marcus John
Saturday 06 October	Cuba - a Flicker of Interest	Oliver Smart
Saturday 20 October	Dippers on the Honda, Wye and Olchon	Mick Jenner
Saturday 03 November	Birds of Majorca	Len Clarke
Saturday 17 November	Changing Landscapes on the South Wales Coast	David Broadbent
Saturday 01 December	Finland through the Seasons	Phil Mugridge
Saturday 15 December	Focus on Wildlife - a Nature Photographer's Year	Chris Hatch

Outdoor Programme

Sunday 25 March	Afon Honddu	Steph Tyler
Saturday 31 March	Bargoed Country Park	Lee Taswell
Saturday 21 April	Slade/Minnets Wood	Clive Rutter
Saturday 28 April	Beacon Common	Simon Bedford
Saturday 05 May	Lower Monnow Valley	John Coleman
Saturday 12 May	Mynydd Llangatwg	Nicholas Beswick
Sunday 20 May	Wentwood	Barry Embling
Saturday 26 May	Blaen Bran Community Woodland	Keith Roylance
Friday 01 June	Wentwood	Barry Embling
Sunday 03 June	Strawberry Cottage Wood	Andrew Cormack
Sunday 01 July	Goytre House Wood	Alan Williams
Friday 12 October	Portland Observatory	Dave Brassey
Saturday 20 October	Ynys-y-fro Reservoir	Ian Walker
Saturday 24 November	Llandegfedd Reservoir	Keith Roylance

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