

# 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)

**Newsletter No. 151**

**Spring 2019**

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## **Committee Summary April**

**Cathy Gregory**

Notably the talk by Iolo Williams was cancelled in March due to illness, thankfully he is well now.

The committee continue to support worthy causes and decided to make donations to various appeals: (£500 for GWT Bridewell Common; £100 for BTO Spotted Flycatcher; £100 for RSPB Ring Ouzel).

The new GOS website is still a work in progress due to the intricacies of coding 'plugins' to suit our needs. A number of committee members have volunteered to help with running the site eventually. It was noted that we could do with some photographs of people enjoying GOS related activities! (There are plenty of photographs showing birds).

The merits of swift towers were discussed with a view to finding a suitable location in/near a town, with a river/water (a source of insects for food).

The Living Levels Project (Gwent Levels) has assembled approximately 100 bird boxes from locally sourced materials, with more to follow. The first batch will be put up with the aim of encouraging tree sparrows.

## **Committee Summary February**

**Cathy Gregory**

Our new Indoor Secretary Hannah Daniels attended her first GOS committee meeting and is a welcome addition to the committee.

The committee received news and updates on local planning applications good and adverse and has responded against an application which included outdoor music events at Llandegfedd. CALM (M4 relief road) are continuing preparation in case a judicial review is granted.

Web site progress was reported, including suggestions for bird images in the main banner and a two-tier system for submitting member and non-member sightings, and the long term possibility archiving of records and publications. It is hoped that this future website will be safer from hacking and inappropriate posts.

Proposals for Young People Involvement were discussed, such as the possibility of placing bird books or bird boxes in Gwent schools, or even subsidising membership. Suggestions are welcome.

Goldcliff Ringing Group has been asked to help with wader tagging again this year. Please keep an eye out for any predation as evidence needed of which predator is responsible. Also, with the new year well under way, there will be opportunities to get involved with BTO surveys (e.g. BBS online) and with the Living Levels Project. Mike Dilger's energetic talk went well recently and we now have Iolo Williams' talk to look forward to on 25th March; volunteers are still needed to help with ushering, car parking and the like.

## Heard a Curlew this spring?

If you have, or if you've been lucky enough to see one in breeding habitat (moorland or lowland pasture), please let us know as soon as possible. Between 1995 and 2016 the population of breeding curlews in Wales declined by a horrendous 63% and it is feared that there are now fewer than 400 breeding pairs in the country.

If we're to do anything to prevent their extinction as a breeding species we need all the information we can get - hence this appeal.

Please email Darryl Spittle at [countyrecorder.org.uk](mailto:countyrecorder.org.uk) giving the location (with grid reference if possible) and any details.

### Reporting rare and/or Schedule 1 breeding birds

Gwent has many sites of ornithological interest which hold rare breeding bird species. The Newport Wetlands Reserve (including Goldcliff lagoons, Uskmouth reedbeds and Saltmarsh grasslands) is a wardened site and relatively secure for breeding birds but many sites elsewhere in the county are unprotected and the species present could be vulnerable to accidental disturbance or worse (e.g. poisoning, egg collecting, etc.)

For this reason, we ask observers to please **AVOID PUBLICLY POSTING SIGHTINGS WHICH INCLUDE SPECIFIC LOCATIONS** for any rare and/or Schedule 1 species (see list below) that are showing signs of breeding or are resident in suitable habitat during the breeding season. If you discover any of these species, please report your sighting directly to the county recorder at [countyrecorder@gwentbirds.org.uk](mailto:countyrecorder@gwentbirds.org.uk) but **please avoid putting the information on the sightings page or on any of the various social media platforms**. Some of these species are present in Gwent as passage migrants in the spring and autumn and can be reported but, if in any doubt as to whether they might be breeding, please contact the county recorder before reporting their whereabouts.]

### **Rare, locally rare and/or Schedule 1 species that breed, or have bred in South Wales (or may potentially breed in the future)**

***Please avoid publicising their presence during the breeding season (March-August)***

Avocet (away from NWR)	Common Crossbill
Barn Owl	Common Quail
Bearded Tit (away from NWR)	Dartford Warbler
Bittern	Firecrest
Black Redstart	Garganey (away from NWR)
Cattle Egret	Goshawk
Cetti's Warbler (away from NWR)	Hen Harrier
Chough	Hobby
Common Crane	Honey Buzzard

Kingfisher  
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker  
Little Egret  
Little Ringed Plover (away from NWR)  
Marsh Harrier  
Mediterranean Gull  
Merlin  
Osprey  
Peregrine

Red Kite  
Red-backed Shrike  
Ring Ouzel  
Savi's Warbler  
Spoonbill  
Tree Sparrow  
Willow Tit  
Woodlark

### **Swift Tower Cardiff Bay**

**Mike Pointon**

The Swift nesting tower in Cardiff Bay mentioned in a previous GOS Newsletter has at last come to fruition. Swift numbers have fallen dramatically in the last few years and one of the factors for this is lack of nest sites due to modern buildings practises. A partnership between Glamorgan Bird Club, Cardiff Harbour Authority and RSPB agreed to apply to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant to purchase Swift nesting tower. This submission to the HLF was made by the Glamorgan Bird Club on behalf of the partners.

It was decided that a model made by Menthol Engineering of Poland would be the most appropriate for the site. For the grant to be successful the partners had to show how local community could be involved. One idea was to recruit local volunteers to survey Swifts in their area. The RSPB provided maps and with the help of GBC arranged training for participants. We were delighted to hear that our application to the HLF was successful. The tower was ordered and delivered in 2018, but the welding was deemed unsuitable for the environment the tower was to be erected. Fortunately, Centegreat, an engineering firm near the Cardiff Bay, agreed to store the tower and carry out the remedial work required. By this time the project was behind schedule the tower would not be in place until spring 2019. It was a great relief for all concerned to see the foundation base laid and our goal a step nearer realisation. And so, on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2019 the tower was erected in the bay. We just hope the Swifts take to their new home.

### **Newport Wetlands**

**Tom Dalrymple**

At Uskmouth there are 5 water rail breeding territories. We haven't started the bearded tit monitoring yet. Cetti's warbler numbers appear high and there have been regular sightings of marsh harrier and bittern.

Elsewhere on the reserve there appears to be about 13 skylark territories, 18 pairs of lapwing, 50 pairs of avocet, 19 pairs of redshank, 6 pairs of oystercatcher, 3 pairs of ringed plover and 1 pair of little ringed plover.

There have been some interesting sightings at Goldcliff lagoons, most notably black kite, red-necked phalarope and glossy ibis.

## **Living Levels Landscape Project – A Volunteering Opportunity**

You will recall in the Summer 2018 edition of the Dipper (No 148) Richard Clarke highlighted the work that Goldcliff Ringing Group were doing in conjunction with the Living Levels Landscape Partnership (LLLLP).

Funding has now been received for the creation of nest-boxes for Tree Sparrow, Kestrel, Barn Owl and Little Owl. Farms on the levels have also been identified and agreement with farmers have been made for the erection and monitoring of the nest-boxes.

Richard is actively looking for volunteers to survey sites, erect nest boxes and monitor the boxes.

This is a real opportunity to become involved in supporting threatened birds in Gwent.

To volunteer or to find out more email Richard at [Chykembro2@aol.com](mailto:Chykembro2@aol.com)

## **Gwent UKBS Report for January 2019**

**Chris Hatch**

### **Highlights**

A Glossy Ibis was reported from Newport Wetlands (11th to 26th). A Great White Egret was seen at Llanfoist (27th). The female Smew remained on the River Usk at Llanllywel (3rd to 23rd).

### **Newport Wetlands Reserve**

Five White-fronted Geese were reported (9th to 12), together with two Barnacle Geese (9th). Male and female Marsh Harriers were seen on several dates. The Black Redstart remained at Goldcliff Point (2nd to 11th).

### **Other sites**

Five Red Kites were recorded at Betws Newydd (1st). Seven Goldeneye were observed on the River Usk at Llanllywel (8th). A Hawfinch was reported from Llanbadoc (9th), with several birds also visiting the Dingestow area throughout the month. Three Whooper Swans were reported from Pantygoetre, with three birds also reported from Llangybi (20th). A Firecrest was seen at Parc Seymour (19th). Three Scaup were reported from Llandegfedd reservoir (21st), with two Yellow-legged Gulls also present there on the same date. Single Jack Snipes were reported from Peterstone (17th) and Sluice Farm (23rd). 17 Water Pipits were present at Peterstone (24th). A Short-eared Owl and a Barn Owl were seen at Sudbrook (31st).

**Highlights**

Around 30 Waxwings were seen flying over Tintern (1st). A Glossy Ibis was present at Newport Wetlands (2nd until end of month). Bittern was heard at Newport Wetlands (22nd).

**Newport Wetlands Reserve**

The Black Redstart remained (until 21st). Five White-fronted Gees were present (6th until 27th). Two Common Cranes were reported (10th to 14th). Male and female Marsh Harriers were reported on several occasions. Up to 89 Avocets were recorded (27th), with good numbers of other wader species also present. Two Dark-bellied Brent Geese were seen (28th).

**Other sites**

The female Smew remained on the River Usk at Llanllywel (until 6th). Short-eared Owls were seen on Coity mountain (one on 4th) and Mynydd Llangatwg (two on 22nd). Barn Owls were reported from Beaufort (11th) and Black Rock (16th). A Water Rail was seen at Cwmbran Boating Lake (18th). Two Bewick's Swans were reported from the Nedern (20th to 21st). Two Pink-footed Geese were present at Parc Bryn Bach (21st). 45 Water Pipits were recorded at Sluice Farm (22nd). A Ring-necked Parakeet flew over Newport (24th).

**Gwent UKBS Report for March 2019**

**Highlights**

A Glossy Ibis was present at Newport Wetlands (2nd to 13th). Over 40 Water Pipits were recorded in the Sluice Farm/ Peterstone area (25th).

**Newport Wetlands Reserve**

The five White-fronted Geese were still present (2nd to 17th, as were the two Barnacle Geese (13th). Marsh Harriers were reported throughout the month. A hen Harrier was seen (24th). Up to 70 Avocets were reported (8th). A Bearded Tit was seen (8th). Passage waders were recorded in good numbers.

**Other sites**

A Short-eared Owl was recorded at Caldicot Pill (5th to 18th). The same species was reported from Brynmawr (11th) and Blackrock (14th). A Barn Owl was also seen at Blackrock (14th). Two Mediterranean Gulls were seen at Sluice Farm (14th), whilst over 30 Snipe were recorded at Peterstone (23rd). A Hawfinch was reported from Mathern (22nd). Reports of incoming migrants such as Common Sandpipers, Swallows, Sand Martins, Wheatears, Ring Ouzels, Chiff-Chaffs and Blackcaps were received from a number of locations.

## **Highlights**

The Glossy Ibis remained at Newport Wetlands (6<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>). A male Garganey was also present at this reserve (7<sup>th</sup>), as was a Spoonbill (13<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup>), but a Red-necked Phalarope (22<sup>nd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>) and an overflying Black Kite (23<sup>rd</sup>) were the month's real highlights at this site. A Green-winged Teal was recorded at Peterstone Gout (24<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>). Two Great White Egrets were present at Newport Wetlands (28<sup>th</sup>).

## **Newport Wetlands Reserve**

A Bittern was seen (11<sup>th</sup>). Marsh Harriers were seen on several occasions, as were Bearded Tits.

## **Other sites**

Ring Ouzels were reported from the Bloreng (4<sup>th</sup>), Trefil (seven on 10<sup>th</sup>), Silent Valley (four on 18<sup>th</sup>) and Mynydd Maen (two on 19<sup>th</sup>). Ospreys were recorded at Llandegfedd reservoir (17<sup>th</sup>), Monmouth (17<sup>th</sup>) and Portskewett (19<sup>th</sup>). Two Pink-footed Geese were seen at Parc Bryn Bach (13<sup>th</sup>).

## **Walk Report Llandegfedd Reservoir – November 24<sup>th</sup> 2018      Keith Roylance**

On a damp and overcast day six members met at the north end of Llandegfedd Reservoir for a short walk from the car park to Green Pool and on towards East Bank, returning by retracing our steps. Two and a half hours later after a quiet start we had noted 32 species. These were: Canada Geese, Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Great-crested Grebe, Cormorant, Buzzard, Coot, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Woodpigeon, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Pied Wagtail, wren, Blackbird, Robin, Fieldfare, Long-tailed Tit, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Magpie, Carrion Crow, Raven, Chaffinch, and Linnet.

## **Tregaron & Aberystwyth – Sunday January 20<sup>th</sup> 2019      Keith Roylance**

An early start from the meeting point at Abergavenny bus station saw just two cars with six members head towards Tregaron. Arriving shortly before 9:00 am at the bridge over the River Teifi with un-forecasted rain falling our first sighting was of a weasel running across the pathway. Birds were limited in number but corvids and Snipe were active for a short time. Scope views of Wigeon, Teal, Mute Swan and Little Grebe were achieved. A distant view of a Hen Harrier raised our spirits as the rain finally eased.

Deciding to move on to the visitor centre car park on the road to Pontrhydfendigaid, we were disappointed to find the car park full and that the walkways from the car park were being used for a 5km & 10 km race. After a hurried discussion we headed off to Ynys Las SSSI where earlier in the week a King Eider had been reported together with Common Scoters. A walk around the area and sea watching from the beach failed to find the King Eider but rafts of Common Scoter with at least one Velvet Scoter were visible.

From Ynys Las it is only a short distance to the RSPB Reserve at Ynys-Hir. A walk around the reserve gives access to varied habitat of wetland and woodland. A mix of species were noted before we headed back towards Aberystwyth for the evening spectacle of the Starling roost at the pier.

From the promenade Turnstone and Kingfisher were noted together with gull species before the arrival of the Starlings. Whilst they did not perform a great murmuration the numbers coming in to roost both under the pier and on the pier railings were extraordinary. Estimates varied from 50,000 to in excess of 100,000. How can you count such numbers?

As darkness fell and the fish & chips were consumed we made our way back to Gwent after a varied and enjoyable day. Having seen or heard 56 species

Sightings: Mute Swan, Greylag, Canada & Barnacle Geese, Shelduck, Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, Shoveler, Common & Velvet Scoter, Pheasant, Little Grebe, Cormorant, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Hen Harrier, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Sanderling, Snipe, Curlew, Redshank, Turnstone, Black-headed, Common, Lesser Black-backed, Herring & Great Black-backed Gulls, Woodpigeon, Kingfisher, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Meadow Pipit, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Stonechat, Blackbird, Fieldfare, Mistle Thrush, Blue & Great Tits, Treecreeper, Magpie, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Raven, Starling, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch & Bullfinch.

## **Rhymney River Walk – Sunday March 24<sup>th</sup> 2019**

**Keith Roylance**

Only two birders met up with walk leader Lee Taswell on this dry, warm sunlit morning. The walk takes one from the car park at Bargoed Woodland along tarmaced paths alongside the River Rhymney. Travelling upstream for a mile or two before crossing the river and returning to the car park. A leisurely 3 hour walk.

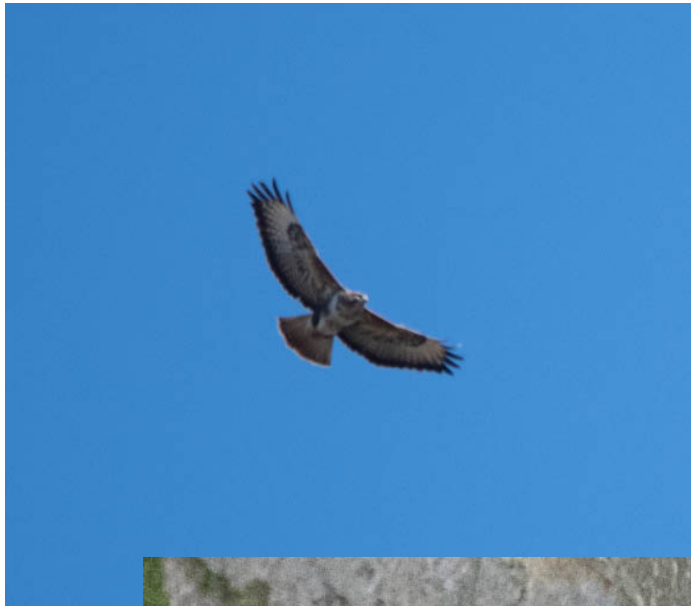
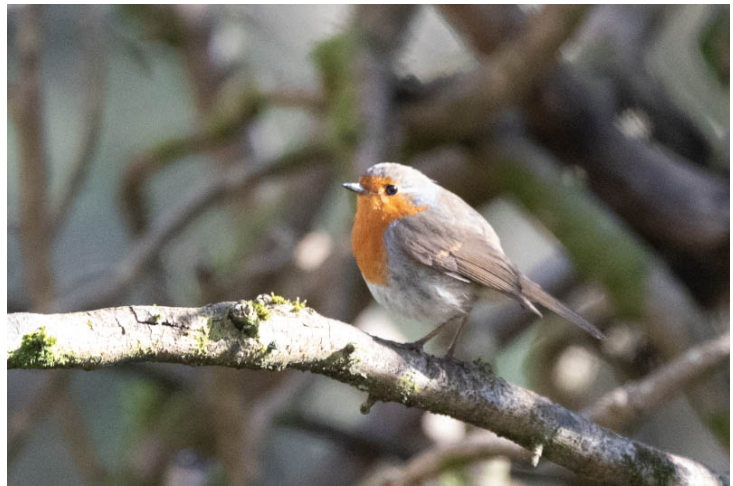
Travelling upstream you are in the Glamorgan recording area as the river at this point marks the boundary between the Glamorgan & Gwent vice county recording areas. It is only as you cross the river and head downstream back to the car park are you recording 'Gwent birds'

There was a wide variety of woodland species noted during the walk. Jays were in evidence at the start of the walk with five forming a small flock in one of the trees adjacent to the car park. Dippers were seen regularly throughout the walk, probably 4 or 5 pairs being noted. A singing Blackcap and a number of Chiffchaff indicated spring was in the air.

Twenty eight species were recorded. Thanks to Lee for leading an easy and rewarding walk.

**Species List: Mallard, Buzzard, Herring Gull, Woodpigeon, Green Woodpecker, Great-spotted Woodpecker, Grey Wagtail, Dipper, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Mistle Thrush, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Long-tailed Tit, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Jay, Magpie, Jackdaw, Crow, Raven, Bullfinch.**





## **Walk Around Goldcliff**

**Andrew Cormack**

Four of us joined Mike and Jackie Pointon at Goldcliff on a grey and chilly April morning. A careful alternation of hides and platforms kept the wind at bay; as the morning passed, so did the murk, and by the end of the walk sunny platforms were warmer than the hides. The birds seen were a nice mixture of those that spend the winter here; those that breed at Goldcliff; and those just resting on their way further north. We presume the long-staying glossy ibis, which was eventually tracked down from the final hide is in the first category. Avocets, ringed plovers and lapwings were already settling down on what passes for nests among these waders. Black-tailed godwits, a single dunlin, and a golden plover that gave excellent views while we drank tea, will presumably be moving on before long. Perhaps the biggest (mutual) surprise was a sparrowhawk that engaged in its typical hedgehopping hunting technique along the brushwood fence, only to find a party of birdwatchers where it had hoped for something more edible. A final total of fifty-three species was an excellent return.

## **Walk from Garn Lakes, Sunday April 28<sup>th</sup>. Led by Nicholas Beswick.**

A select handful of GOS members joined the Blaenavon World Heritage Environment Group and a visitor from Ottawa for the walk round the Garn Lakes nature reserve on 28 April. Thankfully, Storm Hannah had passed, leaving a fresh, breezy morning. A fly-over male Goosander was an early surprise as they are usually seen only outside the breeding season. On the lakes one female Mallard had a party of tiny ducklings in tow but there was little else of note. Around the reserve, Willow Warblers were singing everywhere, Lesser Redpolls flew over and a keen-eared birder heard a distant Cuckoo.

The walk continued up the cycle path towards Brynmawr in order to observe Waunavon Bog. Here the surprise was two Jays flying over, a long way from their normal habitat. We returned to Garn Lakes along the old railway cutting which provided welcome cover from the wind and habitat for Stonechats, Reed Buntings and a Wheatear. Sadly, we did not find the Grasshopper Warbler reported in the area.

Our walk notched up a tally of 37 species around Garn Lakes with a further eight on Waunavon Bog. And, while there was nothing mega for the local birders, a good proportion of the list were lifers for our Canadian guest.

## **Garn Lakes**

Blackbird, Blackcap, Bullfinch, Buzzard, Canada Goose, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, Collared Dove, Coot, Cuckoo, Domestic Mallard, Dunnock, Feral Pigeon, Goldfinch, Goosander, Great Tit, Green Woodpecker, Grey Heron, Herring Gull, House Sparrow, Jackdaw, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Lesser Redpoll, Linnet, Magpie,

Mallard, Moorhen, Reed Bunting, Robin, Skylark, Song Thrush, Starling, Swallow, Tufted Duck, Willow Warbler, Woodpigeon, Wren

### **Waunavon Bog**

Blackbird, Buzzard, Carrion Crow, Goldfinch, Jackdaw, Jay, Kestrel, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Magpie, Meadow Pipit, Pheasant, Raven, Reed Bunting, Skylark, Starling, Stonechat, Swallow, Wheatear, Willow Warbler.

Nicholas Beswick

### **Report on Spring Indoor Meetings**

**Andrew Cormack**

Mike Dilger set a record for distance travelled to speak at GOS, by starting in Argentina! Despite the overnight flight, his energy and enthusiasm for wildlife were very clear, as he explained the different types of wildlife films that he makes for TV. A four-and-a-half minute segment for The One Show is typically filmed in a day. In ten years he has made about 450 of these, on a wide range of species, including basking sharks, humpbacked whales and golden eagles. Popular species may appear more than once – peregrines six times, water voles five – bringing wildlife to a very wide audience: a segment on barnacle geese at Caerlaverock got more viewers than the Royal Wedding. Working for BBC World offers the luxury of 30 minute programmes, including on the endemic spiders, centipedes, birds and crocodiles of the Philippines.

A change of climate and scenery was provided by Helen Mugridge's travels around Iceland at different times of year. Although the country has less than a hundred breeding species, more than three times that number pass through on migration. Confusingly, redwings are a summer visitor, fieldfares arrive for the winter, and Iceland Gulls don't breed there at all. Three North American species have their only European breeding locations in Iceland – great northern diver, barrow's goldeneye and the spectacular harlequin duck. For other birds Iceland may be the most convenient European location though, while red-necked phalarope are common, gyrfalcon are much less so.

Paul Bowden continued our world tour, reporting on two trips to the Caucasus. This area, bounded by the Black and Caspian Seas, Russia to the north and Iran to the south, features mountains over 5000m high, and an intriguing mix of familiar and unfamiliar species. Hoopoe, Bee-eater, Egyptian and Lammergeier Vultures are available in Mediterranean lands closer to home; but these live alongside species of partridge, bunting, finch and wheatear that are much more exotic. In the high mountains, humans seem to act as habitat creators, with rock nuthatches nesting in monasteries and many passerines coming to an irrigated fruit farm and fish ponds. The talk was unusual in combining both still and video images (a 4K camera attached to a telescope producing excellent results at long range); the audience also welcomed the frequent inclusion of maps to help us understand the unfamiliar geography.

## SWIFT APPEAL

**Every summer, Swifts travel thousands of miles to Britain.** Since the Roman era they've found homes in nooks and crannies of British buildings. **But the design of new buildings means these homes are rapidly disappearing** - and so are the Swifts. **In the past 20 years, the number of swifts has halved.**

But there's a simple and easy solution. **By adding special "Swift bricks" into new build houses, we can make sure Swifts have somewhere to nest.** Germany and Poland have already changed the law to make sure every new house has one of these bird nest bricks - there's no reason we couldn't do the same.

**So 38 Degrees member and bird-lover Norman has set up a petition** calling on the minister for housing to make sure Swift bricks are in new homes across Britain. **But the minister will only listen if he knows the public are behind Norman.**

Members, all it takes is a stroke of a pen from the minister to help save our Swifts. **Will you sign the petition today to show him the public want him to do more to help our special summer visitors?**

You can sign the petition at:

[https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/save-our-swifts?bucket=email-blast-20\\_2\\_2019\\_swiftbricks\\_40ktest&utm\\_campaign=blast2019-02-23&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=](https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/save-our-swifts?bucket=email-blast-20_2_2019_swiftbricks_40ktest&utm_campaign=blast2019-02-23&utm_medium=email&utm_source=)

### Your Indoor Programme:

All meetings will be held at Goytre Village Hall, commencing at 7:30 pm unless indicated \*otherwise

Sat Sept 28 <sup>th</sup>	Al Venables	Wildlife in Spitsbergen – Revisited
Sat Oct 12 <sup>th</sup>	Blair Jones	A year in the life of Goldcliff – a photographic study
Sat Oct 26 <sup>th</sup>	Ed Drewitt	Urban Peregrines
Sat Nov 9 <sup>th</sup>	Dave Brassey	Scotland 2018
Sat Nov 23 <sup>rd</sup>	John Coleman	Turkey
Sat Dec 7 <sup>th</sup>	Neil Glenn	Valley Parade – Wildlife of the Lower Rio Grande Valley
2020		
Sat Jan 25 <sup>th</sup>	AGM	Members photos 4 x 15 min