

# 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. 157**

**Spring 2021**

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Dear Member,

We hope this edition of the Dipper finds you well and looking forward to being able to get out more and see Gwent's wonderful scenery & wildlife.

As we come to the end of our Spring indoor programme I hope that those of you who have joined the Zoom presentations found them both interesting and enjoyable. Due to the uncertainty surrounding the restrictions (if any) we will be under as the year progresses, the arrangements for the Autumn indoor programme have been organised around the continuation of meetings via Zoom. Full details of the Autumn programme can be found elsewhere in the Dipper or on the GOS website. Your committee will continue to look at whether we can hold meetings at Goytre Village Hall in the future. The thinking at present is that 2022 will be a mixture of Zoom and physical meetings at the hall. The latter being in late Spring & early Autumn when the nights are not too dark.

Our outdoor programme is due to start on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> April and we are hopeful that this may go ahead. Up to date information will be provided on our website [www.gwentbirds.org.uk](http://www.gwentbirds.org.uk)

At present we think it unlikely that the weekend at Portland Bird Observatory will be possible. If restrictions continue to be eased, we may be able to visit later in the year in October. (See the outdoor programme for details).

We would like to hear of your thoughts and ideas as we go forward regarding the use of Zoom for meetings and how we should construct our programmes in future. Please do contact us, details on the website.

Thank you for continuing to support GOS during these strange and difficult times.

Keith

Keith Roylance,  
Chairman.

### **Summary: GOS Committee Meeting, Tuesday 23rd February 2021**

In keeping with the 'new normal', the committee met via Zoom. The intention is to return to Goytre Village Hall, when safe to do so; however, there are advantages to not travelling in the winter, so we may still use Zoom for some future committee meetings.

As usual the society accounts are running well and membership numbers are holding up. We still need a new Treasurer; volunteers please! The process of adding a new signatory may be delayed by Covid restrictions so it's possible that a new treasurer would be a shadow, initially. Andrew Cormack has also been hard at work oiling the cogs of the website.

It was not possible for postal copies of the Dipper to go out in December. It is hoped that the next postal copies would be sent to the now more limited postal list; the timing will be dependent on printing opportunities in lock down.

Robin Hall has been busy arranging the Indoor Programme and this is now fully booked for the rest of the year. We discussed inviting other societies' members to our indoor meetings and concluded that we should ask the permission of the individual speakers as this might affect their revenue. As we have less overheads at the moment, rather than charging for attendance, we are considering asking non-members to make a donation after the talk (possibly via a 'make-a-donation' button on the website).

The Outdoor Programme doesn't officially start until the 24th April; so, we'll have to see what we're allowed to do from 24th April onwards.

Darryl Spittle is working on editing the Annual Report and once it is sent to the publishers who are usually fairly quick turning this around; bearing in mind that life isn't entirely 'usual'.

A new Chairman is needed for 2022, when Keith Roylance will step down after several years of valuable work. If you want to put yourself forward or nominate someone else, then please get in contact.

It must be Spring! The first bittern has been booming down at Newport Wetlands; hopefully, we get to hear it soon. It appears that Water Rail numbers are down, possibly a consequence of a milder winter.

The Llandegfedd Reservoir planning application (rock concerts and such) seems to be going on for ever; every time the application is knocked back, Welsh Water reinvent it. NRW have attached a lot of conditions. On a positive note Welsh Water are proposing to divert the mown designated footpaths away from bank and are going to put up signs about the ground nesting birds on the banks which are disturbed by dogs and people.

With regard to BTO activities, this will also depend on covid restrictions. Richard Clarke has prepared for when these are lifted, and asks people to have a look on the website if you'd like to have a go at surveys. There's still an opportunity to feed data into the Willow tit survey.

We discussed alleged public usage of a SSSI during lockdown and are tentatively approaching NRW for information. Information about a development at Hendre Park Lake (towards Cardiff) has been forwarded to Glamorgan Bird Club. The Uskmouth Power Station (application to burn pellets), was given permission (certainly for coal) some time ago, so this didn't have to have further planning permission; this still needs planning permission from Newport for demolition and rebuild to facilitate the changes. According to The Argus, Welsh ministers have called in the planning (from the council) for consideration before sending this back to Newport council.

The committee will support the Goldcliff Ringing Group as usual and will make a donation in due course.

Hopefully, they'll be ringing in the Spring.

## **Any nest will do?**

We are used to hearing of blue tits and great tits laying in the same nest box but a GOS member had a rather more extreme experience of an avian fostering service last year.

Kirsteen Atkinson recounts her experience below:

We live next to the Monnow in Rockfield and have a large willow tree in the garden. We had seen a goosander in a hole in the willow tree but then she was turfed out by a tawny owl. We were expecting to be able to see owlets in the future but were very surprised when two goosander chicks launched themselves out of the tree.

We managed to catch them before the dogs. Unfortunately we were in lockdown at the time and none of the wildlife agencies we contacted were in a position to take them at that time. Sadly one died the next day but the other continued to do well. We fed him whitebait from Morrisons (the only place that sells them unbreaded!) and caught minnows for him to practise his fishing skills on. Not that he needed practise he was adept at catching them from day one!

We contacted the RSPCA at the end of lockdown and West Hatch had a couple of groups of young goosanders in so we dropped him there so he could practise flying in a protected aviary with fellow goosanders.

Subsequently on checking the abandoned nest we found the tawny owl had abandoned her two eggs that she had laid, and there was a whole untouched mouse she must have bought for the goosander chicks.



# BTO Equipment Donation Scheme

The BTO Equipment Donation Scheme (EDS) supports young people across the UK by supplying them with equipment to make the most of their birdwatching experiences and enabling them to further develop the scheme. Do you have a pair of binoculars you no longer use, or a bird guide that is gathering dust? Donating them to EDS means we can pass them on to a young person, school, or university group who cannot afford to buy their own. This way, we can all pass on the passion for birdwatching to the next generation.

If you wish to get involved, please check out the BTO website where you can input details of what you wish to donate.

Many experienced wildlife watchers upgrade their binoculars and telescopes and other wildlife watching equipment as newer and better instruments are brought onto the market, and there will be lots of older pairs of binoculars, books and more languishing in cupboards across the UK. It is this kit that BTO wants to get into the hands of young wildlife watchers' in need.

Check out the link:

[BTO Equipment Donation Scheme | BTO - British Trust for Ornithology](#)

After nearly a year without GOS talks, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were delighted to resume our Saturday night talks programme, though on Zoom, rather than in Goytre Village Hall, for now. Many thanks to Robin Hall and Keith Roylance for making speaker and technical arrangements.

Our first talk, by Ralph Todd, focused on a bird whose cultural significance can be traced as far back as ancient Egypt and as far away as Japan: the crane. Gwent is, of course, one of the places where these have recently returned to nest, but place names and manuscripts suggest that they were once familiar and widespread in the UK: likely Cran- and Tran- prefixes exist from London to West Wales to north-east Scotland. In the UK it's exciting to see a handful of birds, whether in Norfolk, Somerset, Gloucestershire, Yorkshire or Aberdeenshire, but following their migration through the continent provides spectacles of a different order. Over a hundred thousand spend the winter in Extremadura, feeding on acorns, insects and frogs. As they travel north, these can be concentrated at suitable resting places: twenty thousand were seen on a single pond in northern Spain, waiting for suitable conditions to cross the Pyrenees. Humans can help: a new reservoir in Champagne had more than two hundred and fifty thousand in autumn, and the birds have inspired a cultural festival. There is a similar relationship in Sweden, where the arrival of the cranes is a sign of spring. At Lake Hornboga, between three and six tons of grain per day are donated by the municipality, so the birds don't need to feed on private farmland, and the full (visual and sonic) spectacle of pair (re)formation can be experienced by visitors. From there the birds disperse into the wetlands of northern Scandinavia, to nest and raise young, before heading back south again in the autumn.

In contrast to a journey in search of a single species, Biking Birder Gary Prescott described an expedition in search of as many as possible. Having taken the UK record for number of bird species seen on a single eco-journey (no fossil fuel consumption) he decided to try to break the world record. That was 618 in a year's cycle journey around the USA: could Gary do better in a six-month crossing of Peru, from the Pacific to Amazonia? His distance was considerably less: around 1100 miles by bicycle, 100 in an inflatable canoe, and about 50 walking the trail to Machu Picchu. Though, since the first 100 miles involved 16000 feet of climbing, quite a lot of that was actually walking, pushing the bike, as well. Highlights included tens of thousands of seabirds – including pelicans, boobies, gulls, terns and skimmers – feeding just outside Lima; torrent ducks, flamingoes and condors on the climb up the Andes; hummingbirds, tanagers, and cock-of-the-rock on the Machu Picchu trail; 138 new species on the 11000 foot descent of the Manu Road into Amazonia; hoatzin, toucan, macaw, and potoo in the rain forest. Animals included wild vicuna, capybara, three-toed sloth and a tapir; assorted biting insects; black cayman, which were not dangerous, and a bull that was, resulting in the loss of the pannier containing all the bicycle spares. After all this excitement, did he break the record? Yes: it's now 634 species. His post-lockdown ambition is to repeat the trip, more slowly, to identify more!

Our recent indoor meeting via Zoom presented by Mary Colwell on 'Saving Britain's Curlews' was well received by many of you present. Details of the new organisation that Mary referred to was formally announced via the press release reproduced below.

## New partnership formed to save England's threatened curlews

A wealth of conservation organisations, in conjunction with land managers, farmers and gamekeepers, have come together to launch the [Curlew Recovery Partnership](#) – a new initiative which aims to secure the future of England's [Eurasian Curlews](#).

Urgent action is needed. Eurasian Curlew is one of the most pressing bird conservation priorities in the UK, where nearly half the breeding population has been lost over the last 25 years and where range contraction has seen curlews disappear from many traditional sites.

The partnership is the outcome of Curlew Recovery Summits hosted by His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales on Dartmoor in March 2018 and at Highgrove in February 2020. It will provide co-ordination and support to those engaged in curlew conservation, while also providing benefits for other threatened species and habitats, as well as helping people to connect with nature.

Prince Charles explained: "The hauntingly evocative cry of the curlew is now all too seldom heard. This most wonderful bird needs urgent support and I am delighted that following meetings on Dartmoor in March 2018 and at Highgrove in February 2020, the England Curlew Recovery Partnership has been formed to bring together all those who can help provide such support and, indeed, promote this crucial cause to the public; many of whom, I am sure, are unaware of quite how special the curlew is and the part that they can play in helping to save it for the benefit of current and future generations."

Mary Colwell is a name [synonymous with curlew conservation](#), and the Partnership has recently appointed her as Chair, with Professor Russell Wynn named as Manager. Supported by a Steering Group, they will drive the Partnership forward, drawing upon the Partnership's extensive combined experience of curlew conservation, research and public engagement.

Mary Colwell commented: "The disappearance of curlews from across the open landscapes of England is deeply sad and a very tangible reminder of the crisis facing our wildlife. The Curlew Recovery Partnership is determined to work together to find solutions to reverse its decline and to help transform our relationship with nature. It is an honour to be part of this initiative."



The Partnership's Steering Group comprises nine organisations: Bolton Castle Estate, British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Curlew Action, Curlew Country, Duchy of Cornwall, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT), Natural England, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), and Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT).

The Partnership has been set up with financial support from Defra and will explore opportunities to embed curlew recovery within Defra's new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) and the Nature Recovery Network.

Chair of Natural England, Tony Juniper, said: "Sadly, Eurasian Curlew is very scarce in many parts of England – if this decline continues there is a significant risk that future generations will not be able to enjoy these wonderful birds. We look forward to working as part of the Partnership's Steering Group, which brings together those who are equally passionate about the recovery of these iconic birds. The partnership launched today is an example of the kind of positive collaboration that we know is needed if we are to reverse the declining fortunes of many of our wildlife species."

The Partnership is now keen to engage with anyone interested in saving England's curlews, and will provide a conduit for information flow and future funding to support those working on the ground. To get involved, please

email [hello@curlewrecovery.org](mailto:hello@curlewrecovery.org) or visit the website at [www.curlewrecovery.org](http://www.curlewrecovery.org).



## **PROJECT CamTag®**

3<sup>rd</sup> Eye Technology (3ET) launched to invent Camera Satellite Tags – **CamTag®**

Birds of Prey in the UK have been incessantly persecuted for decades if not centuries. For Raptors, the fear of being poisoned, trapped or shot has become a part of their daily lives. But now, 3ET is attempting to invent a long-awaited solution, using state of the art technology. 3ET has been spearheaded by a member of the birding community. Peter Howe is doing this for the whole national community, giving his time for free, 3ET has no staff so all donations will go towards the project, less reasonable office/travel expenses and banking fees.

Fed up with years of inaction and failures by cross party governments to uphold the law, a different approach needs to be considered, one that might help single out those that feel they are above that law. Maybe those same people are the ones donating large sums of money to Party coffers when it comes to election time? Failures also by the game shooting organisations to clean up their act and to curtail their members, seemingly many, many bad apples, from committing these illegal acts, although to be honest they haven't really tried very hard, have they?

This will be welcome news to species like Hen Harriers, Red Kites and Golden Eagles,



in fact all Raptors, as none of them seem to escape this blight. One of the most persecuted Raptor species in the UK in correlation to its population density, the Hen Harrier, faces becoming extinct in England once again, due to prolonged illegal persecution on and around Driven Grouse Moors, their favourite breeding habitat. They are illegally persecuted because Red Grouse, predominantly the chicks, form part of their staple diet during the breeding season. Red Grouse are intensively managed on Driven Grouse Moors so that they will yield a surplus of birds to be shot for fun between August 10<sup>th</sup> – December 12<sup>th</sup> each year.

3ET (a not-for-profit company) intends to produce **CamTag®** a satellite tag with a camera, to work in conjunction with existing satellite tags, which are giving excellent data detailing persecution hotspots. By adding another string to the bow, the chances of collecting photographic evidence to help with future investigations seems a logical next step. How many times have you heard the cry “when will these tags have cameras on them”? It will also be useful to use such technology to capture images of their day to day lives.

The project will be in two stages. First of all, a Proof of Concept-POC (commonly known as a Feasibility Study-FS) needs to be concluded over an approximate 6-month period. Crowdfunding, Grants and Match Funding are being sought to allow this first phase, Stage 1, to be implemented. If the target sum can be successfully raised, it will mean an immediate start of the POC. The study’s criteria has been assessed and went out to tender to find a suitable company to conduct it, the cost will be £12000. A UK based microchip company has been chosen that will give the answers to the challenges faced to produce a fully functional CAMERA satellite tag, (although many answers were forthcoming in a recently commissioned university report for 3ET). It will also give a larger than life working prototype, and a budget forecast, which will then allow 3ET to plan and advance to Stage 2, the development, manufacturing and testing phase. The intention is to fund Stage 2 with further crowd-funding, grants & match-funding.

This is an ambitious challenge, with no quick fix way of getting to the end result and 3ET is under no illusions of the difficulties ahead, but science is now enabling us to at least try and attempt to safeguard our precious wildlife. The University of Washington has just managed to fit a video camera on a beetle, so don’t think for one minute that the technology isn’t available, it ‘just’ needs adjusting to suit the requirements needed to get it all into a compact lightweight backpack for our BoP!

**If you feel you would like to pledge a donation to help the POC, you can donate online through JustGiving.com**

**<https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/project-camtag> on our website [www.Raptor3ET.com](http://www.Raptor3ET.com) Further details for alternative payments are also on the website. You can follow 3ET on Twitter: @Raptor3ET, if you are commenting please use hashtags #PROJECTCamTag #CamTag or #R3ET in mentions. You can contact 3ET by email: [Project\\_CamTag@raptor3ET.com](mailto:Project_CamTag@raptor3ET.com)**

**Highlights**

Two Glossy Ibis were present at Newport Wetlands (2nd). A Tundra Bean Goose was reported from the Nedern (23rd).

**Newport Wetlands Reserve**

A Black Redstart was seen (3rd).

**Other sites**

Single Merlins were reported from Waunafon (6th) and the Blaenafon area (16th). Black Redstarts were observed at Pontypool (8th to 10th) and Abergavenny (31st). Two Jack Snipe were recorded at the River Usk, Newport (8th). A Willow Tit was seen in Wentwood (12th). A male Hen Harrier was recorded over the Clydach Gorge (13th). A Bewick's Swan was present at Sudbrook (15th). A Short-eared Owl and a Barn Owl were seen hunting near Blaenafon (16th). 40 Greylag Geese were present at the Nedern (31st).

**Gwent UKBS Report for February 2021**

**Chris Hatch**

**Highlights**

A male Smew was seen on the River Usk south of Usk town (9th)

**Other sightings**

240 Curlew were present at Peterstone (2nd). A Short-eared Owl was seen at Waunafon Bog (15th). Three Goshawks were seen displaying over Blaenafon (26th). Singing Chiff-Chaffs were reported from several sites. Red Kites were reported from a number of locations.

**Available to a good home – 35mm Slides of birds**

A past member of GOS, Mr Warwick, has a quantity of 35mm slides of birds which he wishes to dispose of.

If anyone is interested, please e-mail [chairman@gwentbirds.org.uk](mailto:chairman@gwentbirds.org.uk) and details of how to contact Mr Warwick will be provided. The slides would have to be collected from an address in Newport.

## Autumn 2021 Indoor Programme.

All presentations will be via Zoom. Details and the link to join will be sent to those members for whom we have e-mail addresses approximately seven days before the meeting.

Autumn Season – confirmed speakers.

Sept 18 <sup>th</sup>	Stephen Lovell	The Somerset Levels	All round Naturalist
Oct 2nd	Graham Lenton	Wildlife of Madagascar	PhD in Ecology, avid traveller and photographer
Oct 16th	Nigel Redman	Birds of the Horn of Africa	Author, editor and tour leader
Oct 30th	Mike Reid	Travels with a camera	Photographer, tour leader and writer
Nov 13th	James Lowen Wildlife	Britain's Top Wildlife weekends	Award winning author of 11 nature and travel books
Nov 27th	Keith Offord	Aristocrats of the Air	Raptor specialist, lecturer and tour guide
Dec 11th	John Miles	The Solway – The whole of Cumbria	Former RSPB warden and tour guide

### *Snippet from Daily Mail – Keith Roylance*

## Really wild... Albatross has chick at 70!

LIVING in the Pacific, sun on your back and qualified for a well-earned retirement.

It might seem that Wisdom, the 70-year-old albatross, is on easy street. But not any more. The oldest known wild bird in the world has just become a new mother... for the 40th time. Wisdom was first tagged in 1956 when she was believed to be just five years old.

Her lifespan has proved that seabirds can live far longer than the 40 years that most scientists believed. Wisdom, pictured, lives on Midway Atoll, a tiny island in the Pacific around 1,300 miles from Hawaii, with her partner Akeakamai with whom she has been raising chicks since 2010.

Experts say the fact that she has reached such an age is impressive considering the threats that albatrosses face such as worsening weather and plastic pollution. The seabirds typically lay one egg each year.



**OUTDOOR PROGRAMME 2020**

*Due to the current Covid restrictions we have delayed the start of the outdoor programme until April. If the situation allows earlier walks may take place. Information on our website: [www.gwentbirds.org.uk](http://www.gwentbirds.org.uk)*

Date	Time	Walk Area	Description	Meeting Place	Leader
Sat. 24th April	9.00	Brynmawr, Beaufort and Garnlydan	Moderate walk 2 – 3 hours	Asda Brynmawr car park	Nick Beswick
Fri - Sun. 7-9 May		Portland	£17pn - bookings taken from 1st January- take sleeping bag and food	Observatory	Dave Brassey
			To book - email Dave Brassey <a href="mailto:david.brassey@ntlworld.com">david.brassey@ntlworld.com</a>		
Sat. 15th May	8.30	Blaen Bran Woodland	Moderate walk 2 – 3 hours	Blaen Bran Woodland car park	Keith Roylance
Sat. 22nd May	8.30	Lower Monnow	Easy walk 3 hours	On road by Osbaston School SO507137 - NP25 3PU	John Coleman
Sun. 30th May	9.00	Strawberry Cottage Wood	Woodland walk for Redstart and Flycatchers (some steep parts)	Queens Head Pub nr Cwmyoy SO311221	Andrew Cormack
Fri. 4th June	20.00	Wentwood Forest	Easy walk to look for Nightjar	Cadira Beeches	Gavin Vella
Sat. 12th Jun	8.30	Broadmeend, Beacon Hill and Cleddon Bog	Moderate Walk 3 hrs	Beacon View car park, SO515054.	Steph Tyler
Sat. 17th July	9.00	Ham Wall	Easy Walk	Ham Wall Car Park ST 449 396 (Charge for Non-RSPB members)	Dave Brassey
Sun.1st Aug	7.30	Uskmouth	Warbler ringing with Goldcliffe Ringing Group	NWR Uskmouth car park	Richard Clarke
			Booking essential ( <a href="mailto:surveys@gwentbirds.org.uk">surveys@gwentbirds.org.uk</a> ). Weather dependent.		
Fri - Sun. 20-22Aug		Birdfair	Fantastic three-day event	Rutland - Unofficial - just for your diary	
Fri - Sun. 8 - 10 Oct		Portland	£17pn - bookings taken from 1st July - take sleeping bag and food	Observatory	Dave Brassey
			To book - email Dave Brassey <a href="mailto:david.brassey@ntlworld.com">david.brassey@ntlworld.com</a>		
Sun. 17th Oct		Stearth	Moderate walk 2 – 3 hours	Car Park ST 25208 44210	Blair Jones
Sat. 23rd Oct	8.00	Allt-yr yn NR	2-3 hours walk -	Fourteen Locks Car Park (£1 charge)	Ian Walker
Sun. 28th Nov	9.15	Slimbridge	Full day - Winter visitors inc Bewicks and Whoopers	Slimbridge Car Park	Dave Brassey
Page 12			Hopefully booking restrictions lifted		



PUBLISHED ON BEHALF OF THE WELSH ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

# The Birds of Wales Adar Cymru

EDITED BY Rhion Pritchard,  
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**PRE-PUBLICATION OFFER**

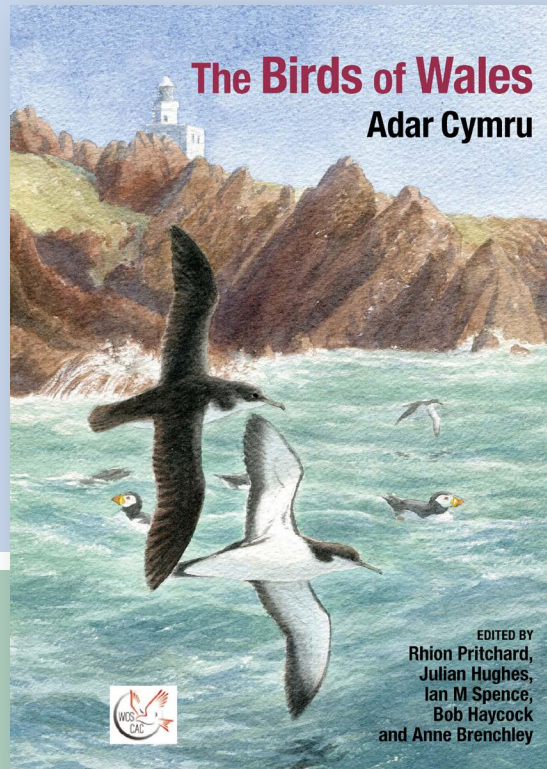
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