

# THE DIPPER



## THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Registered charity number 1088830

GOS WEB SITE: [www.gwentbirds.org.uk](http://www.gwentbirds.org.uk)

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## **CHANGE OF SPEAKER DATE IN OCTOBER 2017**

To accommodate a late change of date to the annual GOS trip to the Portland Observatory, Tom Dalrymple has kindly agreed to pull his date forward to Saturday, October 21st, instead of October 28th. Tom will still be revealing his secrets on Managing the Newport Wetlands Reserve, so would you please amend your Indoor Programme.

## **COMMITTEE COMMENTARY, FEBRUARY MEETING**

**TREVOR RUSSELL**

This was the first meeting led by new Chairman, Keith Roylance - and what an impressive start it was – we continued the tradition, introduced by Verity, of finishing punctually at 9:30!! Let's hope this sets the pattern for the rest of his tenure! Newcomers welcomed to the committee included Dan Webb, recently elected, Mike Pointon, who came as an Observer but left as a seconded Committee member until election at the next AGM. We will value the contributions that both Dan's and Mike's experiences will bring to the committee. Sadly Lesley Watson felt that she no longer had the available time to conduct her role as Membership Secretary in the way she wanted and should step down. Her role has been filled by Gill Jones who volunteered to step onto a steep learning curve with significant help from Lesley. We thank Lesley very much for all her hard work for the Society and send her our appreciation and best wishes.

The topic which dominated the meeting was the website and how to make it more informative, attractive and inviting for users. Gavin Vella has been using a possibly suitable package which he will discuss in detail with Chris Field and others.

The footpaths and access tracks in Goytre House Wood have been cleared of bramble, thanks to David Hathaway and his invincible Tuareg brush-cutter, which will enable new nest boxes to be installed, replacing those lost to storm damage and fallen trees. This will restore the approx. 40 nest boxes distributed throughout the wood.

GOS is protesting against the M4 Black Route Relief Road because it will cut a swathe across the Gwent Levels SSSI and be an ecological disaster, not only for birdlife. A Public Enquiry on Feb 28<sup>th</sup> is publicised on the GOS website and members are invited to make their personal comments known to their AM's and MP's on the accompanying links. GOS members are also invited to attend at the Llysaght Institute at 08:30 for a public demonstration against the proposed plan.

A date for your diary: A Go Wild! Event is planned for Sunday, June 11<sup>th</sup> at Parc Penallta, Ystrad Mynach, CF82 7GL, 11am – 4pm. If you would like to assist at the GOS stand for a couple of hours, please contact Trevor Russell.

## AGM COMMENTARY 2017

The President, Steve Roberts, warmly welcomed those present and reflected on the long and sobering list of birds that are now missing from his local area: yellow hammers, spotted flycatchers, grey partridge, lapwing, curlew, kestrel, skylark, lesser spotted woodpecker, house martins. But, he conceded, there have been gains too, including hobby, kites, goosanders, mandarin ducks and little ringed plovers, though these gains don't balance the losses. The reason he knows of these changes is because he has kept records, archived since 1963, and included in the Society Reports. He had thought that his records were only recorded by the Rare Birds Breeding Panel because he was and is a Schedule 1 ringer, and that they only accepted records from Schedule 1 licence holders. But no! He subsequently learned that 80% of records used by the R.B.B. Panel came from everyday birders like you and me, who report their sightings to their County Recorders who, in turn, forward them to the R.B.B. panel. It only serves to underline how important it is to submit sighting records to the County Recorder whose records will be used as a vital resource for bird conservation in the future. *The take-home message is to submit all of your Sighting Records to the County Recorder fully and promptly.*

Steve also noted that this AGM marked the day that Verity will leave her role as Chairman after five very busy and successful years. He remarked on her generous-hearted personality and acknowledged how much we will miss the sterling work she has contributed to the Society during her term of office. This was endorsed by the warm appreciation of the other members present.

The Treasurer stated that 2016 marked the Society's return to a "steady-state" financial situation, following the financially turbulent impacts of the Coastal Footpath Survey and the production and sale the "Birdwatching Walks in Gwent". The accounts now show a small surplus, allowing us to maintain the value of our capital reserves, including Goytre House Wood, and enables us respond to appeals from other local wildlife charities.

Printing and postage continue to be our major costs, consuming 90%, *yes, you read it correctly, NINETY PERCENT!!* of the income from membership subscriptions, so if you get paper copies of The Dipper posted to you *and* you have access to the Internet then we strongly encourage you (plead, even) to switch to the e-mail version. As well as saving the Society money, you will also see the wonderful photographs in full colour. Please contact the Membership Secretary to make the change.

In this, her final annual round-up as Chairman, Verity Picken appealed yet again for more members to put themselves forward to volunteer for Committee positions. Many current members have been long in post and are being stretched too thinly. Increasingly, ambitious projects in Gwent demand that birdlife interests are monitored and represented, proposals such as the Black Route M4 Relief Road, the development at The Hill, Abergavenny, the Circuit of Wales, the prototype Tidal Lagoon in Swansea Bay (and, if financially viable, subsequently in Cardiff Bay and Newport).

This is in addition to the routine survey work being carried out in the county: seven core BTO surveys (BBS, WeBS, Heronries Census etc) and nine completed surveys covering 17 species (fish-eating birds, winter thrushes, chats etc). No fewer than 28 individual species are currently being monitored.

Fewer summer shows in 2016 may have affected our ability to recruit new members and membership numbers dropped to 267 despite the fact that a growing number of GwentBirders use the GOS website. Surely it's not asking too much for them to pay the small annual subscription to join GOS and help us support the work done by the Goldcliff Ringing Group and contribute to the small grant, the Hamar Bursary Award, to assist with personal bird-related projects?

On a more upbeat note, over 200 species were recorded in Gwent in 2016 including a Lammergeier at Sudbrook, breeding Cranes to the Gwent Levels after an absence of 400 years, a second Savi's Warbler, a fourth Broad-billed Sandpiper and a Spotted Crake, last seen in the county in 1994.

Verity concluded by saying how much she had enjoyed her role as Chairman, the highlights of which included celebrating our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and publishing "Birdwatching Walks in Gwent" but she was confident that the Society would be in good hands under its new Chairman, Keith Roylance.

In the ensuing elections Keith Roylance was duly elected, unopposed, as the new Chairman, Trevor Russell replaced Alan Williams as Indoor Secretary, in addition to his role as General Secretary, Dan Webb was elected to the committee and Adrian Plant has sadly resigned as he will be leaving the area shortly. All other members of the committee were re-elected.

The AGM was followed by the traditional and mouth-watering Members Evening Buffet and a fascinating talk by Gavin Vella on how mimicry can affect breeding success in the avian world. From the number and nature of the subsequent questions it was obvious that the possibility of mimicry had badly shaken the confidence of birders who no longer felt they could rely on identifying even a blackbird just on call or song alone – could it have been a starling? All very unsettling! Another great evening, see you there next year!



## Goytre Wood Maintenance

February 1st saw GOS member David Hathaway volunteering to cut the brambles and invasive material from the paths in our Nature Reserve – Goytre Wood.

David had cleared the majority of brambles that needed clearing during autumn last year, but after a mild winter, growth was beginning to invade some of the pathways and starting to restrict access to the many bird boxes that we maintain within the wood.



The Tuareg brush cutter made light work of the invasive growth and after a couple of hours of work the job was done. Only one slight delay when the brush cutter sank into a very boggy part of the wood and had to be winched out.

We would like to thank David for the time and effort he has put in to assist us in maintaining Goytre Wood for all to enjoy when visiting.



Photos: Keith Roylance

## **New viewing Platform Goldcliff Lagoons.**

Following a site meeting with the Friends of Goldcliff Lagoons and Tom Dalrymple, Reserve Manager Natural Resources Wales, in late autumn 2016, it was agreed that a new viewing platform will be constructed on Priors Lagoon.

The platform will be built at the western edge of the lagoon towards the seawall end. This will allow us all to view between the reedbeds where birds often shelter unseen. It is hoped that work will commence at the end of the 2017 breeding season.

## **Friend of Goldcliff Lagoons Walk**

Members of FoGL will be leading an event organised by the RSPB

Breeding Waders Walk at Goldcliff

Saturday 29 April 9.30am - 11.30am

## **Gwent UKBS Report for December 2016**

### **Highlights**

Two Red-throated Divers were recorded at Llandegfedd reservoir (22nd to 29th). Two Black Redstarts were reported from Uskmouth Power Station (22nd), whilst a single bird was seen at Goldcliff point, Newport Wetlands (29th). A possible flock of Waxwings was reported from Usk (6th).

### **Newport Wetlands Reserve**

A female Hen Harrier was seen (3rd), whilst a female Marsh Harrier was reported on several dates. Female Merlins were also recorded (10th and 17th). Three Whooper Swans were recorded (11th). A Chiffchaff was reported (17th).

### **Other Sites**

Single Jack Snipe were recorded at Waunafon Bog (3rd) and Peterstone (17th). A female Hen Harrier was seen near Pontypool (13th). Two Common Scoter, together with several Goldeneye were present at Llandegfedd reservoir for most of the month. At least four Water Pipits were seen at Peterstone (16th). A Short-eared Owl was reported from Sluice Farm (15th), whilst a male Merlin was present at Gobion (25th).

## **Gwent UKBS Report for January 2017**

### **Highlights**

Waxwings were reported from Bulwark (10 from 7th to 8th), Cwmbran (6 from 16th to 25th), Monmouth (6 from 19th to 21st) and Griffithstown. Two Black Redstarts were reported from Newport Wetlands (2nd). A Great White Egret was seen at Newport Wetlands (13th). Bitterns were present at Newport Wetlands (23rd) and Betws ponds (30<sup>th</sup>)

### **Newport Wetlands Reserve**

Seven Bearded Tits were recorded (6th). Three Avocets were present (7th). Three Water Pipits were reported (14th). Other sightings of note included a Merlin (18th), a Dark-bellied Brent Goose (21st) and a juvenile Marsh Harrier (22nd).

### **Other Sites\_**

Single Lesser-spotted Woodpeckers were reported from Llandegfedd Reservoir (3rd), Llantilio Pertholey (3rd), and Llanelen (21st). Short-eared Owls were recorded at Waunafon Bog (7th and 28th), Sluice Farm (16th) and Rogiet (20th). A juvenile Marsh Harrier was seen at Redwick (22nd). Other sightings of note included a female Scaup at Peterstone Gout (4th), a Jack Snipe at Peterstone Gout (15th), two Bewick's Swans at Llangybi (20th) and a Barn Owl at Ebbw Vale (20th).





### **Who needs a reed bed?**

With its epic struggle with a mink and clear visibility, the Bettws Bittern has been the bird of the month for many members. Thanks to Newport Angling Association for allowing access (Photograph: Keith Roylance)



## **Ynysfro Reservoir Walk Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2016 – A report of a recent outdoor meeting by the walk leader, Ian Walker.**

Five intrepid GOS members gathered at Fourteen Locks Visitor Centre at 8.00 to follow the circular route described in *Birdwatching Walks in Gwent*, but in the reverse direction. This decision paid off almost immediately as we all had good views of a Kingfisher (and some of us saw a second bird). As we had seen long-tailed tits in the car park trees and a grey heron in the visitor centre pool, we felt it had been a good start. From the bottom of the hill we had to negotiate the rather muddy fields below the reservoir dam; in winter this is usually a good area for redwings, but we only found two there. Two of our group saw briefly a little egret flying towards the car park we had recently left – sadly, no sign of it when we returned.

Further highlights came in the form of a goldcrest, almost close enough to reach out and touch, had it not been in a thicket of thorns, and a peregrine which flew over us as we followed the path along the edge of the golf course. We had hoped for good views of the waterbirds when we reached the causeway between the two pools of the reservoir – but just as we arrived the rain started and set in fairly quickly. So we contented ourselves with a rapid survey, checking that the expected tufted duck, pochard, little grebes and the mute swan family (a pair and five well-grown cygnets) were all present, and then made for the shelter of the Visitor Centre café. After comparing notes over a protracted refreshment period, we agreed on a final tally of 37 species – at present above par for the round – and we all agreed that, in spite of the mud and the rain, it had been an enjoyable walk.

**CONGRATULATIONS** go to Cath Mendez and Lee Gregory, both GOS members, who have recently got engaged. We wish them all the best for the future.

### **2015 Gwent Bird Report**

For a review of our latest Bird Report please visit the Bird Guides Website at:  
<http://www.birdguides.com/webzine/article.asp?a=6224>

**GOS representation at shows:** GOS will be represented at the GO WILD event organised by Caerphilly Council. It is being held at Parc Penallta, Ystrad Mynach on Sunday June 11th between 11:00 am and 4:00 pm. Mike & Jackie Pointon will be manning our stand but additional help is always appreciated. If you can manage an hour or two it would be appreciated. Please contact either Keith Roylance ([chairman@gwentbirds.org.uk](mailto:chairman@gwentbirds.org.uk)) or Trevor Russell ([indoor@gwentbirds.org.uk](mailto:indoor@gwentbirds.org.uk)) in the first instance.

## Avian flu

The Welsh Government has announced a new Avian Influenza Prevention Zone, in place from 28 February until 30 April.

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, has also confirmed there will be some important changes to the measures that will apply within the new all-Wales Prevention Zone.

The current Prevention Zone requires all keepers of poultry and other captive birds to keep their birds indoors or take all appropriate steps to keep them separate from wild birds, and to enhance biosecurity.

This follows a number of confirmed cases of avian flu across the UK, including in a backyard flock of chicken and ducks near Pontyberem, Carmarthenshire.

The new Avian Influenza Prevention Zone requires all keepers to complete a self assessment of biosecurity measures on their premises. The objective being to keep domestic flocks totally separate from wild birds by continuing to keep birds housed or using other measures, which may include permitting controlled access to outside areas, subject to the introduction of additional risk mitigation measures.

### What you need to know and do

Defra and Welsh Government have issued the following guidance.

If you find dead wild waterfowl (swans, geese or ducks) or gulls, or five or more dead wild birds of other species in the same location, you should report them to the DEFRA helpline on: **03459 33 55 77** (preferred option), or email: [defra.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:defra.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk).

Further information can be found on the [Welsh Government](#) and [Defra websites](#).

## Submitting records

Please don't forget to submit any 2016 records as soon as possible.

The electronic forms are available at <http://www.gwentbirds.org.uk/county-list/records>

## Snippets

Media sources reported in December of the announcement by the US Fish and Wildlife Service that the world's oldest known breeding bird, a Laysan albatross known as Wisdom, was incubating an egg.

This



Dec. 3, 2016, photo provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shows the world's oldest known seabird, tending to an egg she laid, with her mate, at Midway Atoll, a wildlife refuge about 1,200 miles northwest of Honolulu. Biologists spotted the Laysan albatross called Wisdom at Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge earlier this month after she returned to the island to nest. She was incubating an egg at the same nest she uses each year with her mate. She's believed to be 66 years old. She's also the world's oldest known breeding bird in the wild. (Dan Clark/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service via AP)

Read more at: <https://phys.org/news/2016-12-world-oldest-seabird-expectingagain.html#jCp>

## Outdoor Meetings

<u>Date</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Speaker/Leader</u>
Sunday 19 March 2017	<a href="#">Bargoed Woodland park</a>	Lee Taswell
Sunday 09 April 2017	<a href="#">Blackrock &amp; Sudbrook</a>	Lyndon Waters
Saturday 22 April 2017	<a href="#">Llangybi Park Wood</a>	Verity Picken
Saturday 06 May 2017	<a href="#">Lower Monnow Valley</a>	John Coleman
Saturday 20 May 2017	<a href="#">Garn Lakes</a>	Nicholas Beswick
Saturday 10 June 2017	<a href="#">Blaen Bran Community Woodland</a>	Keith Roylance
Saturday 01 July 2017	<a href="#">Goytre House Wood</a>	Alan Williams
Saturday 12 August 2017	<a href="#">Mynydd Glanlochdy</a>	Richard Dowle

## Indoor Meetings

<u>Date</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Speaker/Leader</u>
Saturday 04 March	<a href="#">Beneath the dark canopy</a>	Mike Leach
Saturday 18 March	<a href="#">A sortie in Spain and Portugal</a>	Phil Mugridge
Saturday 01 April	<a href="#">Lifting the lid on Lundy</a>	Jackie Garner
Saturday 30 September	<a href="#">Geo-locating Greenshank</a>	Nick Christian
Saturday 14 October	<a href="#">Forest Eagles</a>	Steve Roberts
Saturday 21 October 2 (Change of date)	<a href="#">Managing the Newport Wetland Reserve</a>	Tom Dalrymple
Saturday 11 November	<a href="#">Saving near-extinct birds in the Seychelles</a>	Al Venables
Saturday 25 November	<a href="#">W Papua &amp; Halmahera - Painting Birds of Paradise in paradise</a>	John Gale
Saturday 09 December	<a href="#">The Denny - Gwent's Bird island</a>	Richard Clarke
Saturday 20 January 2018	<a href="#">AGM and Members' Evening</a>	GOS members

## GOS CONTACTS

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