

THE DIPPER



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Registered charity number 1088830

GOS WEB SITE: www.gwentbirds.org.uk

Newsletter No. 165

Winter 2022



With best wishes for Christmas and the New Year

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2023

The Annual General Meeting of the Gwent Ornithological Society will be held via Zoom at 7.30pm on Saturday, 21st January 2023.
A link to the meeting will be sent to all e-mail members 5 – 10 days prior to the day.

AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the meeting held on January 22nd, 2022 (VOTE 1 to approve the minutes)
3. Treasurer's Report (to be circulated to the e-mail membership) (Vote 2 to approve treasurers report)
4. Chairman's Report (to be circulated to the e-mail membership after the AGM)
5. Election of Officers:

The committee propose:

To confirm Iestyn Harrigan as Chairman for his second year, Proposed Keith Roylance, Seconded Trevor Russell (Vote 3)

Leesha Salamon has indicated she wishes to step down as Treasurer to the Society, and Gill Wall wishes to step down as Membership Secretary. Proposed to appoint Billy & Sharon Harris as joint Treasurer and Membership Secretary. Proposed Iestyn Harrigan, Seconded Keith Roylance (Vote 4)

Cath Gregory is standing down as Secretary to the Society, Blair Jones has agreed to take on the role. Proposed Iestyn Harrigan, Seconded Robin Hall (Vote 5)

6. Election of Committee Members

6.1 To consider any nominations for committee members

a) Indoor Programme Secretary: Robin Hall is prepared to continue.

b) Webmaster: Andrew Cormack is prepared to continue as webmaster.

6.2 All other Committee members except for Keith Roylance have agreed to stand for a further year and need to be re-elected for 2022. (Vote 8 to approve all current committee members except Keith Roylance be re-elected for 2023)

7. To consider any motions received by the secretary prior to the meeting.

The AGM will be followed by photo presentations via zoom by members* showing their memorable birding highlights from the year.

* Presenters are Blair Jones and [TBC].



THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2022

VIRTUAL MEETING VIA "ZOOM" 22ND JANUARY 2022

Those present: President Steve Roberts and 35 members

The Agenda for the meeting, The Treasurer's Accounts for 2021 and the Minutes of the 2021 AGM were distributed to each attendee via e-mail prior to the meeting.

The President, Steve Roberts, opened the meeting by extending a warm welcome to everyone and thanking them for attending.

APOLOGIES:

Richard Clarke, John Coleman, Jeff Davies, Leesha Salamon

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS AGM:

The Minutes of the AGM held on January 23rd, 2021 were distributed prior to the meeting via email.

Acceptance of the report was carried by a majority via a Zoom poll.

TREASURER'S REPORT by ANDREW CORMACK

Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2020

Income receipts	2021	2020
Subscriptions	3,640.00	3,230.00
Indoor meeting door takings	0	111
Raffles	0	24.5
Sales	287.31	1,311.53
Survey work	896.5	0
Donations	258.5	45
Grants	0	0
Interest	162.8	163.79
Gift aid refunds	493.1	534.59
Misc	0	0
Wood	2,650.00	0

Total receipts	8,388.21	5,420.41
Direct charitable expenditure		
Printing	2,381.21	2,224.78
Hall hire	0	865.4
Speakers	625	150
Survey work	796.5	0
Postage	709.6	693.82
Grants + Bursary	500	650
Goytre wood 2,662.38 0.00	0	2,662.38
Total charitable expenditure	5,012.31	7,246.38
Other expenditure		
Refreshments	0	0
Insurance	102.2	0
Library	29.5	25.42
Miscellaneous	365.21	476.37
Memberships	136	134
Equipment	0	0
PayPal charges 30.41 22.03	47.22	30.41
Total other expenditure	680.13	666.2
Total expenditure	5,692.44	7,912.58
Net receipts for year	2,695.77	-2,492.17

Statement of assets and liabilities as at 31 December 2020

	2021	2020
Monetary assets		
Current account	4,550.33	2,054.54
Building society account	34,154.69	36,641.89
PayPal account	719.04	681.86
Total	39,424.06	39,378.29
Property		
Goytre wood	15,300.00	15,300.00

Liabilities

Uncashed cheques

Despite the unusual circumstances of 2021, with all indoor meetings cancelled, the Society's accounts remained in balance, with income covering our operational expenses. Compared to 2019, the loss of door takings was largely compensated by savings on venue hire and speaker expenses. Zoom videoconferencing for which we bought an annual licence - has been used for both member talks and committee meetings.

Although the lack of in-person meetings meant that the 2019 Annual Report had to be posted to all members, this increased postage cost was largely compensated by savings on printing and postage earlier in the year. Thanks to our Membership Secretary and Newsletter Editor for their efforts.

A transfer of funds (£2650) from savings to current account to cover costs of works in 2020 on our Goytre House Wood appears in the 2021 accounts, due to the need to give notice to avoid loss of income.

Finally, for the first time for several years, the Society's membership has increased. We are very grateful to both new and renewing members for their support.

Andrew Cormack, Hon. Treasurer

Acceptance of the report was carried by a majority via a Zoom poll.

Steve Roberts thanked Andrew Cormack.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT for GOS AGM 22nd January 2022 via Zoom by KEITH ROYLANCE:

This is my final Chairman's report as I come to the end of my five-year term. I look back on a mixed bag of a society running smoothly for three years with all events and activities proceeding according to plan, then Covid raised problems for all of us. The society reacted promptly to all the restrictions and curtailed both the indoor and outdoor programmes from early 2020 which I reported on at last year's AGM.

Reviewing this last year, 2021. With the help of Zoom we managed to hold a full 'indoor' programme ably put together by Robin Hall. Robin has put together another full programme for 2022 which is planned to be split between Zoom meetings in the darker months and face to face meetings at Goytre Village Hall in spring and autumn. As for the outdoor programme, Dave Brassey came out of retirement, AGAIN, and organised a reduced programme, which commenced in April, due to Covid restrictions, and ran almost trouble free for the remainder of the year. We look forward to participating in a full programme of walks in 2022 that Dave has once again put together.

You will have noted from the treasurer's report that the society remains in a healthy financial state to continue to offer the membership a variety of birding activities and services.

Membership increased during the year with a final membership figure of 308. I thank Janet Cormack for once again compiling the quarterly newsletter 'The Dipper' which hopefully all of you will have read and enjoyed. If you are still receiving the printed copy yet have an email address, please consider receiving it electronically via email. Let Gill Jones know your email address and she will do the rest.

One result of the Covid restrictions and the 'work from home' and 'home schooling' actions was a delay in producing and finalising the 2019 Annual Report, which was circulated to all members during December 2021. It is the first report under the editorship of Darryl Spittle and he certainly had a baptism of fire in having to collect, collate and prepare all the sightings submitted under severe restrictions. Thank you, Darryl. We look forward to a 2020 Report during the coming year and progress with the 2021 data.

The National and local surveys continued in a restricted way during the year. Richard Clarke has kept us all up to date with the latest information via summaries in the Dipper. Over 50% of the BBS survey sites have had their results uploaded. The Ringing and Nest Record scheme preliminary results show a delayed breeding season for many species and high failure rates in

several cases due to the very varied weather during spring and early summer. Verity Picken was at the heart of a Gwent wide survey into breeding Curlew. Significant data was collected which has been fed into a WOS Wales wide survey.

Andrew Baker has once again kept abreast of planning issues. The ongoing application at Llandegfedd Reservoir was submitted to the Monmouthshire Planning Authority but was suddenly withdrawn from the meeting of the planning committee due to a complaint of incomplete data, which was highlighted by GWT and endorsed by GOS. We continue to monitor the situation. The large Solar Farm proposed at Wentlooge went through a Public Enquiry, the outcome of which was that the environment minister in the Welsh Assembly rejected the application. An appeal is pending. We raised objections to the Hendre Lakes / Cardiff Parkway development because of the significant adverse impacts on the interest features of the Rhymney and Peterstone Site of Special Scientific Interest. We objected to Network rail cutting back vegetation during the bird breeding season.

There were no additions to the county bird list during 2021. The notable birds of the year included a Bean Goose at Goldcliff in April/May. An Ashy-headed Wagtail at Goldcliff in May. If accepted will be the first record for this subspecies in Gwent. Three Eider were also at Goldcliff the same month, the first record since 2011. Other notable birds were a Rose-coloured Starling at St. Brides in June, a Pectoral Sandpiper at Goldcliff in September/October, a Hooded Crow at Llansoy in November, a Cattle Egret at St. Brides in December with 15 Pink-footed Geese at Peterstone the same month. (The largest flock recorded in Gwent since 1935). A Pale-bellied Brent Goose was also at Peterstone and Goldcliff. A possible breeding attempt of Dartford Warbler was noted in the north of the county in April, whilst the same species was seen at Goldcliff in November.

The committee continued to meet remotely via zoom on five occasions during the year and summaries of our meetings are published in the Dipper.

During the year, Al Venables stood down from involvement in GOS and in organising the WeBS counts. We are pleased to note however that he was awarded a 'Lifetime Achievement Award' from WOS at their AGM in November.

In closing, I would like to thank ALL the committee members who have supported me and the society over the past five years for without them there wouldn't be a society so strong and active as we currently are. A particular thanks to Andrew Cormack who has continued to look after the finances as well as the website whilst not being in the best of health. Also, to you the membership who have continued with your memberships through what for many has been a dramatic period.

I am sure the society will be in capable hands as Iestyn takes the reigns for the coming years.

Keith Roylance, Chairman

January 2022

No vote on this item.

Election of Officers

Keith Roylance stands down from Chairman after 5 years in the role and Andrew Cormack is standing down from the Treasurer role after 10 years. The committee are therefore pleased to propose:

To elect Iestyn Harrigan as Chairman,

Proposed Keith Roylance, Seconded Trevor Russell: Proposal was carried by a majority via a Zoom poll.

To elect Leesha Salamon as Treasurer of the Society,

Proposed Andrew Cormack, Seconded Dave Brassey: Proposal was carried by a majority via a

Zoom poll.

Cath Gregory has agreed to continue as Secretary to the Society

Proposal was carried by a majority via a Zoom poll.

Election of Committee members

To consider any nominations for committee members

To elect James Graham as a committee member

Proposed Keith Roylance, Seconded Blair Jones: Proposal was carried by a majority via a Zoom poll.

Existing Committee Members

All existing committee members have agreed to stand for a further year and need to be re-elected. This was carried unanimously.

Any Other Business

Ian Walker asked if there was a way to honour Al Venables for his contribution to the society. Keith Roylance is looking into commissioning an artwork.

Dave Brassey asked what the view is in going forward with Zoom versus hall meetings. Keith Roylance answered that Zoom is planned in darker months and the hall in lighter months.

Dave Brassey suggested that using Zoom we could have presenters from all over the country. Iestyn Harrigan felt that the GVH computer facilities were not that good.

Steve Roberts felt that [the society] was founded on comradeship and was more human with [an actual] meeting.

Verity Picken suggested that Gwehelog village hall has technological facilities. Steve Roberts suggested New Inn.

Iestyn Harrigan pencilled in a discussion for February.

Ian Walker noted that moving around the county was tried in the past but was not successful.

SR suggested considering an alternative fixed location.

There being no further business the AGM was declared closed at 20.11

The AGM was followed by Zoom presentations by Mike Pointon (Trinidad and Tobago) and Blair Jones (Drone view around Gwent and birding picture).

Summary of Committee Meeting held on 6 December 2022

COMMITTEE POSITIONS:

Various committee will step down at the end of the year: Membership Secretary; Secretary (Secretary elect is Blair Jones), Treasurer (Treasure elect is Billy Harris) and Outdoor Secretary. Please consider volunteering for Membership Secretary or Outdoor Secretary.

INDOOR EVENTS: Robin Hall is planning next year's programme of indoor events and would like to plan more in-person meetings at Goytre Village Hall to improve the social aspect of the meetings and boost attendance. Any suggestions of local speakers (for whom travel to the hall is not an issue) would be welcome. Also, do you have any preferences for the day of the week on which we hold talks?

MARKETING

Marketing was discussed with regards to using some of the awesome pictures that people take. Maybe GOS could produce calendars? Or exhibitions (with an art club)? It's worth thinking about

GOYTRE HOUSE WOOD: Jubilee Tree planting project.

Tree planting went smoothly with help from the local scout group. The 110 pencil size trees were all planted very quickly while the adults watched; refreshments were provided.

Keith Roylance officially thanked the scouts and they all got certificates.

Going forward, GOS have to look after the trees and GOS has received advice from the Woodland Trust about how to look after the trees (cut grass around them so it doesn't compete with tree etc.). Does anyone owns a petrol strimmer?

The Woodland Trust were impressed by our efforts wanted to follow us up; they reserve the right to send people to check up on the trees.

It was suggested to have a sign about the "Plant a Tree for the Jubilee" and to take yearly photos of the trees' progress. Further conservation work may be possible.

CURLEWS

Verity Picken updated the committed on her work with curlews, including future cooperation with

Brecon Beacons National Park, which extends into Gwent and her work with student volunteers to identify potential curlew sites for monitoring in 2023.

LLANDEGFEDD RESERVOIR

The planning application by the reservoir, to turn the water sports centre into a general entertainments centre has been refused, although it had been watered down; if resubmitted, it is likely that the application would be acceptable to GOS. Welsh Water will allow four weeks in which GOS can check their SSSI plan when done.

BTO BUSINESS

The previous Dipper included opportunities to join in the Breeding Bird Survey -

plenty of spare squares for people to take on - roll-up, roll-up! There is also a WeBS section of the Severn estuary available at Chepstow if anyone fancies taking that on? BTO are looking for donations re research around avian influenza. it would be great if GOS could support this. BTO Avian Influenza Appeal | BTO - British Trust for Ornithology
<https://bto.org/how-you-can-help/help-fund-our-work/appeals/bto-avian-influenza-appeal>

WOS ROOK SURVEY

There's going to be a second year of survey work so a call again for volunteers.

SAND MARTIN HOTEL

Richard Clarke is keen to hear from anyone interested in helping with monitoring the sand martin hotel, going forward.

HAPPY CHRISTMAS EVERYONE!

Gwent's breeding Curlews (2022)

During this year's search 15, possibly 17, pairs of Curlew were found at roughly 25 sites in Gwent. As Curlews often feed quite far from their nest fields, it's difficult to be sure of the exact number of pairs or territories. Breeding was confirmed in four tetrads, was probable in 15 and possible in five – see map showing Breeding Curlew by tetrads. To my absolute delight chicks were seen at five different locations.

Unfortunately, lack of observers meant that not all sites where Curlews have bred in the past (even in recent years) could be visited. According to Gwent Breeding Atlas data in *The Birds of Gwent* (Venables *et al.* 2008) when 394 tetrads were analysed the breeding population comprised an estimated 70 pairs, found in a total of 133 tetrads – 15 Confirmed, 72 Probable and 46 Possible tetrads. Given that records were only received from 28 tetrads during the 2022 breeding season, no meaningful comparison can be drawn at the present time.

Records submitted to the Gwent Ornithological Society (GOS) show that in 2021 16-17 breeding pairs were found, mostly in the same locations as this year. Three nest fields were identified (one nest held two eggs) but all were believed to have failed; chicks were seen at two sites but it is not known if any fledged. The three previous years produced considerably fewer breeding records: 6-7 in 2020, 11-12 in 2019 and 6-7 in 2018. These figures are not surprising as the locations favoured by breeding Curlews are not commonly visited by birdwatchers; the higher numbers in 2021 and 2022 when targeted searching was undertaken cannot, therefore, be seen as an increase in the breeding population.

The purpose of the survey was to assess the number of breeding pairs, to locate nest fields and monitor breeding. No attempt was made to approach actual nests. Without the experience, manpower or funding to erect electric fencing around a nest to guard against foxes and badgers (as is done in some locations in the UK) this would have been unwarranted disturbance. With the help of several very willing local observers, four nest fields were identified, two other fields almost definitely held nests while a seventh nest was suspected in one of three fields. Agitated behaviour indicated eggs or chicks at a further three sites. Unfortunately, there simply wasn't the time or manpower to monitor all the pairs adequately so outcomes for most are unknown.

A few areas were home to several territories in fairly close proximity: Trellech held two, perhaps three, pairs; Trefil four, possibly five; and Brynygwenin three. Pairs were also found at Llangybi, Newchurch, Llanwenarth, Blaengavenny, Llanvihangel Crucorney/Llangattock Lingoed and Markham.

I was lucky enough to find three sets of chicks in mid and late June, Gary Howells found a fourth set on 14th July and Andy Shipp saw a well-grown chick with a parent bird on 11th July.

The first chicks seen were in a hayfield below moorland; the incredibly caring farmer agreed to delay mowing until they'd left the field – if only we had more farmers like

him! We believe they moved into moorland where they are virtually impossible to follow so we don't know if they and another two, found nearby by Gary Howells, fledged – we can only hope they did. At this site they have to contend with Peregrines as well as gulls and crows; on several occasions we saw Red Kites being mobbed by the parent birds.

The two tiny chicks I came across in a newly-mown field near Brynygwenin were not seen again in spite of repeated searching so I suspect these were predated.

Two of the three chicks seen near Markham (in a hay field which is always cut late in the year) disappeared, presumably taken by gulls, crows or a mammalian predator. Happily, the lone remaining chick grew big enough to be ignored by, and ignore, avian predators and was seen wing-flapping and jumping off the ground by local observer, Simon Maggs, and myself; dates and field notes give every reason to suggest that this chick fledged successfully but not having seen it in flight we cannot be sure.

The last chick was seen on just one day near Llanvihangel Crucorney by Andy Shipp; it was well-grown but hadn't yet fledged.

No chicks were seen elsewhere so it's assumed these nests failed. A lone Curlew in a nest field at Brynygwenin indicated that the eggs or chicks were probably crushed when the field was cut. A pair was seen chasing off a Buzzard in a distant field in the same area but no follow-up was possible. Near Trellech a Curlew pair walking along rows of newly mown silage suggested that their nest had been mown while predation was the more likely cause of failure at another site in this area. Pairs in a hay field near Newchurch and in a rushy field near Blaengavenny disappeared in mid and late June, probably because any eggs or chicks had been predated. The regularly returning pair at Llanwenarth were thought to nest in one of three fields but access to a viewing point proved difficult and the outcome is unknown. Mating was observed in a field next to last year's nest field at Llangybi but lack of time to follow up means we don't know the outcome here either.

Several people became 'local observers', visiting a site near to them and reporting back regularly – the help given by Gary Howells, Simon Maggs, Chris Dyson, Duncan Powell and Mark Heffernan was invaluable. My thanks also go to those farmers who kindly allowed access to their land.

The dedicated email address curlew@gwentbirds.org.uk set up by the Gwent Ornithological Society attracted a wide response and I am extremely grateful to all who sent in sightings as well as to the organisations which publicised the address – Monmouthshire Meadows, Gwent Wildlife Trust and various websites.

My thanks go to Darry Spittle who supplied as yet unpublished records submitted to GOS and kindly produced the Breeding Curlew by Tetrad map.

Reference

Venables *et al.* 2008. *The Birds of Gwent*. Christopher Helm, London

Verity Picken

Gylfinir Cymru (Curlew Wales), supported by Natural Resources Wales, is increasing its efforts to find breeding Curlews in Wales. The Gwent survey will be repeated next year and if

we find more breeding pairs it's possible that we will be considered for funding. Help is sorely needed to locate singing birds in March and April when Curlews are most vocal. Please immediately report every single bird, whether seen or only heard, to the dedicated email address curlew@gwentbirds.org.uk so that follow-up monitoring can be arranged.



Gary Howells



Gary Howells

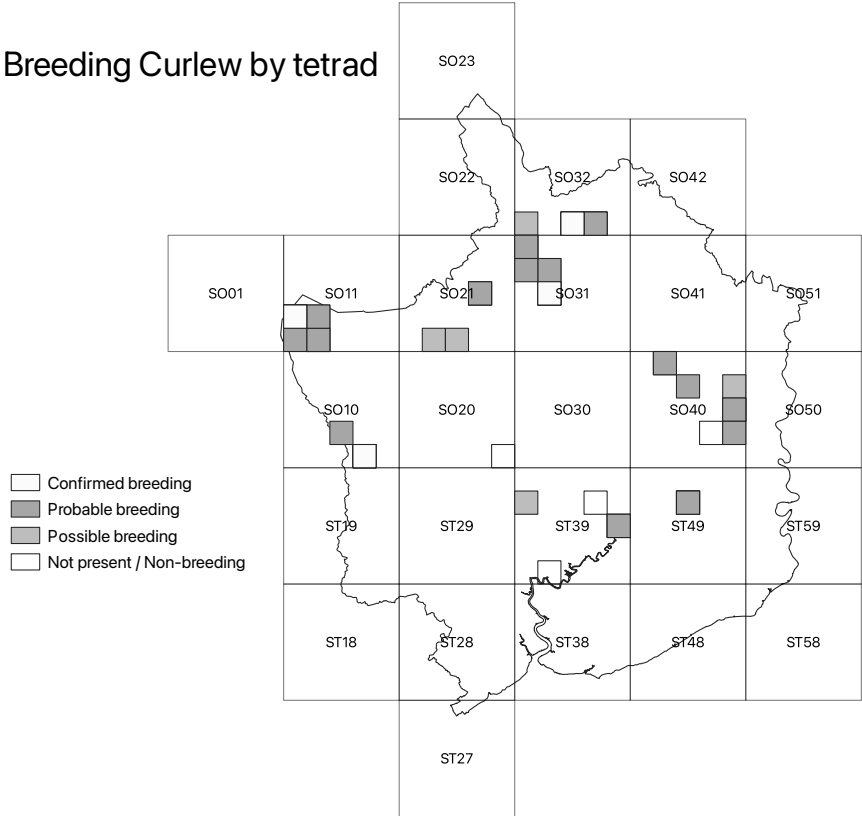


Gary Howells



Verity Picken

Breeding Curlew by tetrad



TREE PLANTING AT GOYTRE HOUSE WOOD

November 19th was scheduled for the planting of 110 tree whips at Goytre House Wood, our own local nature reserve.

The trees had been supplied by the Woodland Trust as part of their support for charities and local groups. A mixture of native species were supplied which contained: Hawthorn, Dogwood, Rowan, Hazel, Wild Cherry and Silver Birch. Fortunately, after a period of prolonged rain Saturday 19th dawned clear and dry. GOS members met at the wood at 9:30 and set out the support canes to mark the location for the trees. At 10:30 we were joined by a small group from the 1st Goytre Cub/Scout pack who had volunteered to help. After a short introduction as to how to plant the tree whips, the cub/scouts got into it with fantastic enthusiasm. They had limited assistance from GOS members and within 30 minutes all 110 trees were planted, secured, and protected with spiral protection collars.

The volunteers were offered squash and biscuits for their efforts and whilst some biscuits were consumed there were some left for the more mature volunteers!

Thank you to all those who assisted in any way with this scheme and a particular thanks to Tessa Lama and her incredible group of cub / scouts from 1st Goytre Scout Group.

A few photos of the day courtesy of Blair Jones and Paul Joy



The tree whips as supplied



GOS Members prepared for the job in hand



1st Goytre Cub / Scouts well prepared for planting.



Tree planting in progress.



The full group after planting.

Photos of the cub / scouts group reproduced by kind permission of the Scout Leader.

GOYTRE HOUSE WOOD AS YOU'VE NEVER SEEN IT BEFORE

With thanks to Blair Jones a selection of drone shots of Goytre House Wood.



The location of the field where the trees are being planted



A shot of the whole wood showing its T shape.



Autumn Colours. The public footpath that goes through the wood can be seen.



Mixed Woodland

Highlights

A Dartford Warbler was present at Newport Wetlands (4th to end of month). A late juvenile Osprey was reported from Monmouth (19th). A Ring-necked Duck was present at Ynysfro reservoir (24th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A Short-eared Owl was seen (11th and 20th). Marsh Harriers were reported on several dates throughout the month. Two Common Scoters were seen offshore (25th).

Other sites

Hawfinches were present at Cefn Ila (several dates). A female Merlin was seen near Brynmawr (4th). Two Short-eared Owls were reported from Waunafon Bog (18th). A Ring Ouzel was seen near Magor (21st). Six Chiff Chaffs were recorded at Magor Marsh (4th to 22nd).