

THE DIPPER



Registered charity

Number 1088830

Website: www.gwentbirds.org.uk

Newsletter No. 168

Autumn 2023

Chair's Introduction

Richard M. Clarke chairman@gwentbirds.org.uk

Contents	Page
GOS @ GoWild	2
Family Day	2
Bitterns Booming	3
Special Reserve	3
Recent sightings	4
Birds of yesteryear	5
Wetlands Bird Survey	7
Winter Gull Survey	7
Committee News	8
What's coming up	8
Bird Notes	9
Your chance to get involved	9

Welcome to the autumn edition of the *Dipper*.

I hope you have had a great summer and were able to get outdoors and enjoy some birdwatching. The Society has been busy over the last few months and a flavour of this is captured here.

Encouraging an interest in birds and raising awareness of GOS continues to be a high priority for us. After participating in an outreach event at Chepstow earlier in the year, we were pleased to join the *Go Wild* event at Bryn Bach Park in July where we had a good turnout, despite some mixed weather. We also held our first ever GOS Family Day in September at the Newport Wetlands Reserve and, given the positive response we had, plan to hold a similar event next year.

Our comprehensive outdoor programme, organised by Dave Brassey, has provided wonderful opportunities of seeing some terrific birds, whilst being in good company. This included the very popular weekend visit to the Portland bird observatory in Dorset. We have also started our autumn/winter indoor programme. Our next offering is being held on 15th November at Chepstow in conjunction with the Gwent Wildlife Trust when we will hear about the Egrets & Herons on the Somerset Avalon Marshes.

Delivering a busy programme of events and running the Society does draw on the goodwill of many GOS members and finding more people to help with the varied tasks is an ongoing goal. In the last *Dipper* we set out some of the exciting opportunities for people to take part/assist with various

roles. We are once again including details of the opportunities (page 9). Please consider these as we would very much like to hear from you. If you would first like to have a chat about what's involved then please feel free to get in touch - on a no obligation basis of course!

It's always a pleasure to hear some positive news about GOS members and therefore I was delighted to hear that this year's recipient of the BTO's Bernard Tucker Medal was Dr Stephanie Tyler MBE. Steph's contributions to BTO's mission are truly outstanding, her work stretching back over more than 50 years to her first paper on the breeding biology of Grey Wagtails in 1972. Many congratulations to Steph – very well deserved.

GOS @ "GoWild"

The society is a member of the Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Local Nature Partnership and we attended the partnership's GoWild event at Bryn Bach Park on 29 July. It was a well-attended and enjoyable day – despite the weather conditions changing every half an hour!



Feedback from the public has been positive and there was an estimated attendance of 1,700 people during the day.

Both the GOS and BTO stands had plenty of visitors and there were 24 entries to the society's bird quiz – including two attempts at the difficult level quiz.

Thanks to Keith Roylance, Alan Rosney and Richard M. Clarke for representing us on the day.

The society is invited to several events like this each year and we are always looking for help with running the stand and the quiz. If you could spare a couple of hours, why not join us – it's fun and a great way to meet people, chat about birds and let them know about GOS (contact: secretary@gwentbirds.org.uk).

Family Day

On 2nd September, GOS held its first ever Family Day at the RSPB centre at the Newport Wetlands Reserve. If you didn't attend, well you missed out on a real treat because we had a terrific day!

The event was packed with activities. Early doors we had Kevin Hewitt showing people moths from his overnight catch, before Dave gave his talk on local birdlife. Mike and Jackie's bird quiz opened for business and Darryl guided people on a bird walk. Janine and Trevor set out a fantastic display of "nature's treasures", including newts and other live creatures. As the day progressed, Marie and Jack (RSPB) had plenty of takers for the pond-dipping and families took part in the owl pellet dissection led by Josh, whilst Verity provided key front of house support to visitors.



Tara's craft wall soon started to fill with fanciful and brightly coloured bird art and Richard Evan's nest box production line got very busy in the afternoon, with at least



20 boxes rolling off to be installed in family gardens.

A big thank you to Kirsty and her team at RSPB Newport and to the RSPB for the use of the fabulous facilities at the centre. And of course, the Family Day would not have happened if it were not for all the hard work by those involved in setting it up and running the event on the day – thanks to everyone who contributed. (Photos © Kendra Stone & Tara Oken).

“I thought as a first family day event for GOS it went really well and the feedback from participants was excellent. A couple of families asked if it was something that GOS put on regularly.”

“I thought it was a really positive event for GOS and very well received by attendees.”

“Feedback was very positive, people enjoyed looking at the live creatures etc. and many of the visitors stayed quite a while doing a range of activities so that seems like a success to me.”

“...it was a lovely day, and everyone seemed to enjoy it.”

Bitterns Booming

Bitterns first bred at the Newport Wetlands National Nature Reserve (NWR) reedbeds in 2020 and it's great to be able to report that they are continuing to do very well. 2023 was the second consecutive year that from two nests at least six chicks fledged successfully.



One of this year's juveniles was however found in poor condition at the Goldcliff Lagoons in late August and a rescue was undertaken that involved the Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the RSPCA.

After first being checked over by local vets, the bird was taken to the Vale Wildlife Hospital in Tewkesbury to be cared for. It was found to be very emaciated, possibly due to a parasitic infection, but after being treated for this the bird quickly gained weight. On the 12th September it was returned to NWR and was released in the reedbeds at Uskmouth by Kevin Dupé of Natural Resources Wales



The Newport birds are the only known breeding Bitterns in South Wales and their presence is a great achievement of all those dedicated people and organisations involved in the habitat conservation of the site over many years. (Photos © Richard M. Clarke).

Special Reserve - Kevin Dupé

Next July will see Newport Wetlands National Nature Reserve (NWR) and Magor Marsh Nature



Reserve dedicated as “Dragonfly Hotspots” by the British Dragonfly Society. This is in recognition of the fact that both are excellent sites to watch dragonflies with good visitor facilities. July saw several events organised by the Living Levels at NWR to raise awareness of dragonflies and help prepare for next year's launch.

On 14th NWR was visited by Thangam Debonair MP, Shadow Leader of the House of Commons and Jessica Morden MP, Deputy Shadow Leader of the House of Commons. Thangam is Species Champion for the shrill-carder bee, which is one of the UK's rarest bumblebees. The visit was organised by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust because NWR is a stronghold for the species. Unfortunately, it poured with rain the whole day, so there was no chance of seeing any. The next week, I carried out our annual shrill-carder bee monitoring. This showed that the habitat was in good condition and I saw 81 shrill-carder bees.



Monitoring of the breeding marsh harriers and bitterns concluded with a “new” pair of marsh harriers fledging three chicks. The original pair had fledged 12 chicks in total over the previous seven years and the female must now be at least nine years old. They were still frequently seen over the eastern part of the reserve during the spring and summer. The bitterns fledged at least six chicks.



I submitted a planning application for the construction of six new ponds at the reserve, with the aim of providing increased habitat for great crested newts to breed. At present they only breed in a small pond at Goldcliff Lagoons. In the past two years, this pond had dried up too soon in the season for the newt larvae to grow big enough to leave the water. Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) renovated the pond in February and this year it held water throughout the spring and summer, enabling great crested newts to breed successfully.

In August the seawall was mown from Goldcliff Lagoons as far as the end of Saltmarsh Lane. Our tenant farmers also cut plenty of hay. Rob Parsons and Cardiff Conservation Volunteers kept on top of the brambles to keep our paths open. Three volunteers from RSPB, Kevin Hewitt, Jeremy White and Hannah Beynon took it in turns to walk our Butterfly Transect once a week from the beginning of April until the end of September. A total of 2,577 butterflies were recorded.

During September, I picked up the Truxor amphibious reed-cutting machine from Gower ready to start mowing the reeds at Uskmouth. Unfortunately, it broke down after 30 minutes and we are still waiting for parts for it to be repaired. I mowed the vegetation of Bec's Lagoon island, but heavy rain raised the water levels on Monk's Lagoon which prevented access to mow the island there.

We opened the valve from our reservoir reedbed to allow water to feed by gravity along our transfer ditch, along Level Court Reen and into fieldblock 03. Once it had reached a certain level, we began to pump it into fieldblock 03 to flood it ready for the winter wildfowl and waders.

Natural Resources Wales, Land Management Team (SE Wales) came to the Wetlands on 13th to do a foreshore clean-up of Goldcliff Pill and the following day Vinci Facilities Management and RSPB carried out another clean-up at Uskmouth. Finally for the month, the RSPB hosted nearly 400 Girl Guides on 23rd. (Photos © broad-bodied chaser, RM Clarke, shrill-carder/great-crested, K Dupé).

Recent Interesting Sightings in Gwent – Chris Hatch

July

Highlights: a Pectoral Sandpiper was at Newport Wetlands (17th). Four Great White Egrets, together with two Spoonbills were also recorded at the Wetlands (21st). An Osprey was seen at Llandegfedd reservoir (27th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve: Nine Yellow Wagtails were recorded (25th). A Barn Owl was present (5th).

Other sites: Between 100 and 200 Manx Shearwaters were seen offshore at Sudbrook (3rd). A Short-eared Owl was recorded at Peterstone (23rd).

August

Highlights: two Spoonbills were at Newport Wetlands (4th). Thirteen Black Terns were reported from Llandegfedd reservoir (18th). A Hoopoe was present at Bishton (20th). A Wryneck was seen at Pantygasseg (28th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve: a Little Stint was present (19th). Two Bitterns were seen (22nd). Two Curlew Sandpipers and over 400 Curlew were reported (31st).

Other sites: a Mediterranean Gull was at Peterstone Gout (28th). An Osprey was seen over Sebastopol (17th), with another bird at Llandegfedd reservoir (29th).

September

Highlights: a juvenile Pectoral Sandpiper was at Newport Wetlands (from 7th). A Lesser Yellowlegs was also present at the same site (from 15th), as was a Grey Phalarope (from 28th) and five Spoonbills (30th).

Newport Wetlands Reserve: Bitterns were reported on several occasions. Four Little Stints were seen (19th). A Short-eared Owl was present (16th). A Mediterranean Gull was recorded (17th). Two Manx Shearwaters and an Arctic Skua were seen offshore (19th). A Rock Pipit was reported (29th). Two Garganey were present (30th).

Other sites: up to three Ospreys were present at Llandegfedd reservoir (from 2nd). Manx Shearwaters and Kittiwakes were seen offshore at Sudbrook (20th). Two Egyptian Geese were present near Bishton (29th).

Birds of yesteryear – Chris Jones

This is the second in a series of articles that looks at what was recorded in Gwent's birding past - a seasonal look back at what was happening locally 10/25 and 40-years-ago.

10-years ago	Autumn 2013
<p>September began with summery weather, but cooler temperatures took hold from the second week. The month then became very changeable with several low-pressure systems moving through. It proved to be a very exciting month. At Goldcliff there was a very good variety of waders, the maxima being seven Ruff on 23rd, eight Curlew Sandpiper on 23rd and three Little Stint on 14th. A Wryneck was at Uskmouth for the first few days of the month and passerines such as Whinchat, Redstart and Tree Pipit were on the move, as were Common Crossbill. An Osprey at Llandegfedd Reservoir (LR) remained for several weeks, and a pair of Common Scoter was there on the 11th. Marsh Harriers are rare away from coastal Gwent, so a female-type on the Powys border at Garnlydan Res. was well received by local birders. Known from only a few scattered sites in upland Gwent, Red Grouse seemed to have a good year, with 12 on The Blorenge on 4th. The only seabird of note was a Razorbill seen close inshore off Goldcliff Point on 15th.</p> <p>October was generally very wet having well above average rainfall, with warm and unsettled Atlantic weather bringing a string of storms. At the end of the month, parts of the country experienced severe gale force winds. Unlike some years when bird interest tails off, 2013 kept on producing birds, with some of the most interesting</p>	

records of the year. Best bird of the month was a one-day juvenile Rose-coloured Starling at Uskmouth on the 2nd, associating with Starlings near the visitors' centre. This was the first modern day record in Gwent. A Purple Heron spent possibly as long as a week on a rural garden pond near Abergavenny. More was to come mid-month with a Glossy Ibis, though perhaps even rarer in recent years was at least one Turtle Dove at Peterstone Gout. What may well have been the same bird was seen a few days later near Peterstone church. Peterstone's purple patch continued with a Jack Snipe on the 5th, 19 Common Scoter and a Jack Snipe on the 20th and a Little Gull and seven Common Scoter on the 27th. Passerine interest included a showy Dartford Warbler on the 24th at Goldcliff, departing Ring Ouzels at Tranch on 20th and two on Ysgyryd Fawr on 27th. Whilst many scarce birds were found in October, the first Redwings and Fieldfares were arriving in numbers and the last records of most of our common migrants occurred during the first two weeks.

November began with storms, high winds and fierce gusts. The month was mostly dry, with only 70% of the average rainfall. Like October, it was remarkable for birds with a surprising continuation of good finds. The highlight was an adult Penduline Tit that provided much entertainment for admirers at Uskmouth from the 7th. Two Great Grey Shrikes were seen, one at the traditional location of Wentwood on 12th, where the finder also located two Hawfinch; while the other was at Brynithel moorland on the 10th. Peak Wood Pigeon passage was estimated at 63,800 birds through Peterstone on the 4th, while five Common Scoter and a late Sanderling were at Sluice Farm on 15th. The last two Ring Ouzel of the year were on the Blorenge on the 10th. The end of the month produced two Red-throated Divers off Goldcliff Point on the 26th, while a Pink-footed Goose was found on the same morning at Goldcliff.

25-years ago

Autumn 1998

September began unsettled though it soon became very warm mid-month with several fine autumn days before returning unsettled though temperatures remained well above the seasonal average. Inland wader passage was quite eventful during this period with Spotted Redshank and Ruff noted at Garnlydan Res., up to 4 curlew Sandpipers at both LR and the new (at that time) Celtic Manor golf course pools at Bulmore. Also at LR there were Black-necked Grebes at either end of the month and at least 2 Black Terns and a juvenile Mediterranean Gull. Along the coast an early Brent Goose was at Goldcliff at the start of the month, where up to 21 Little Stints and 20+ Curlew Sandpipers (in the days before the lagoons) could be found. 10+ Curlew Sandpipers were also noted on the foreshore at St Brides and 41 Black-tailed Godwits (a large count for the County in 1998) were present at PW. As the month ended, there were some notable hirundine movements with 1,000 House Martin at the Nedern and 7,000 Swallows and 2,000 House Martins in 90 mins over Abergavenny, a late Hobby over Dingestow, a Grey Phalarope was present all too briefly at West Pill and at Goldcliff Black Terns, a Skua species and a ringtail Harrier were noted.

October was wet (wettest since 1987) and windy with a series of depressions moving in off the Atlantic. A single Turtle Dove at Trellech on 5th and 2 Tree Pipits over Goldcliff on 7th were late dates for these migrants. Two Sandwich Terns and an Arctic Skua were exceptional finds inland at LR, especially considering the date. A party of 9 Avocet was a nice find on the foreshore at Goldcliff with other waders of note being 13 Golden Plover at Uskmouth, 2 Ruff at Llanwern steelworks, single Jack Snipe and Spotted Redshank at Peterstone Wentlooge, a late Whimbrel at West Pill, a Little Egret at Collister Pill and Common Greenshank at several different coastal locations. At LR, the Black-necked Grebe remained throughout the month with a second there on 29th. Ruddy Ducks were present at both LR and Ynysfro reservoirs. A Snow Bunting spent just a day at West Pill and a Wood Lark passed over Uskmouth. A party of 32 Red Grouse on the hill tops at Waen Wen was the largest number recorded in the County for several years. As the month ended a Razorbill flew down channel past Sluice Farm.

Other than a few sharp frosts mid-month November was uneventful weather wise. The month was very productive with LR, Peterstone Wentlooge and Goldcliff generally sharing the spoils. Exceptionally late Swallows and a Wheatear remained just into the beginning of the month at Newport and Undy respectively. At LR, a Black-necked Grebe remained until mid-month, being joined for a day by a Slavonian Grebe before then sharing the reservoir with single Black-throated and Great Northern Divers and where also a late

Greenshank and a Grey Plover were noted. A Pink-footed Goose spent a week in a muddy field near Coedkernew, 2 Brent Geese were at Collister Pill and Common Shelduck peaked at 1,050 between Peterstone Wentlooge and Sluice Farm. Black Redstarts were noted at both Goldcliff and Peterstone Wentlooge during a brief 5-day period, with a Snow Bunting and a Rough-legged Buzzard at the same sites respectively. Finally, a movement of 1,000 Fieldfare over Goldcliff was impressive and a Little Egret (still a rarity in 1998) began a stay between Peterstone Wentlooge, Sluice Farm lasting well into 1999.

40-years ago

Autumn 1983

The period started with Westerly gales during early September bringing an unprecedented number of sea birds for the County into the Severn estuary. Sabine's Gull was a notable addition to the County list and was supported by Gannet, Manx Shearwater, Shag, Grey Phalarope, Great Skua and a minimum of 13 Storm Petrels.

A September record of Firecrest was noteworthy at Mynydd Garn-wen and towards month's end there was an unusual movement of Jays at several sites across the County, with a peak of 45 passing over Monmouth. Similarly, at the end of October a passage of c4,000 Wood Pigeon was seen moving SW over Goldcliff.

Another addition to the county list was a Woodchat Shrike at Peterstone, which remained in the area for a month. Other notable occurrences during this period included a Little Gull at Ynysfro Reservoir and 8 past Peterstone, a Snow Bunting at St Brides, the first ever inland records for the County of Mediterranean Gull and Purple Sandpiper both at LR where 5 Black Terns, a Little Gull and a Long-tailed Duck were also noted, 2 Whooper Swans and a Smew at Brynmawr, up to 2 White-fronted Geese along the Wentlooge Levels, and a flock of Twite, which took up a winter residence on the foreshore at Sluice Farm. There were several records of Bewick's Swan from LR and at Peterstone, with the largest number being 16 seen flying over Raglan. Late migrants noted during November included Wheatear on 5th, Willow Warbler on 11th, House Martin on 13th. Crossbill numbers began building with 50 seen in Wentwood during the month.



BTO Wetlands Bird Survey

CAN YOU HELP? An opportunity has come up to take part in the WeBS survey on the Gwent coast at Redwick. Please contact kevin.dupe@btinternet.com for details.

BTO Winter Gull Survey

The BTO is organising the Winter Gull Survey (WinGS) for 2023/24–2024/25. The last survey took place from 2003/04–2005/06 and concluded that the UK and near-shore coastal waters supported over 3.8 million wintering gulls at that time.



Population trends from the BTO/RSPB/JNCC Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) for gull species present in the UK in winter are variable and updated information is necessary to identify potential Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for gulls. The primary goal of the survey is to produce new population estimates for wintering gulls in the UK and assess how populations have changed since the last survey in 2003/04–2005/06. The results of this survey will also aid us in assessing the impact of the ongoing outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) on gull populations.

CAN YOU HELP? The BTO is looking for volunteers to visit gull roost sites, counting five key species: Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull.

There are several identified sites in Gwent including Llandegfedd Reservoir and sections along the Gwent coastline. Further details of the survey can be found on the BTO's website at: [Taking part | BTO - British Trust for Ornithology](#)

Committee News

The committee met on 11th October and a summary of the key discussion points follows:

1. Consideration was given to the final report by Steve Roderick following his independent review of the GOS 2022 financial accounts. Recommendations were accepted and it was agreed that the draft accounts could now be submitted to the Charity Commission.
2. Work continued on submissions to claim Gift Aid from HMRC.
3. GOS had been invited to be a formal member of the Local Nature Partnership with the Brecon Beacons National Park. Andrew Baker (Conservation Officer) would take on the role.
4. The impact of proposed solar farms on the Gwent Levels was discussed at length. The committee agreed to develop a GOS Solar Farm Policy.
5. The committee was exploring the opportunity of funding from Caerphilly CBC Local Nature Partnership towards work on upland birds – including curlew.
6. Proposals were discussed about GOS holding a photo exhibition (in April 2024) at the Riverfront Theatre at Newport.
7. The committee reviewed the outcome of the Family Day event and concluded that it had been a success and that GOS should hold another such event in 2024, with Mike Pointon leading.
8. Next steps to get the 2020 Gwent Bird Report to early publication were discussed.
9. There was an urgent need to find an editor for the Dipper newsletter.
10. Planning of the 2024 outdoor programme was underway. Dave Brassey (Outdoor Programme Secretary) was looking for people to lead walks.

What's Coming Up



Gwent Ornithological Society & Gwent Wildlife Trust present

The Egrets & Herons on the Somerset Avalon Marshes
- an illustrated talk by Alison Morgan

Hear about the new colonists including Great White Egret, Cattle Egret, Little Bittern, Purple Heron and Night Heron as stone's throw away on the Avalon Marshes

15th November, 7:30pm, Chepstow Leisure Centre, NP16 5LR
Admission £3, payable (cash) at door (includes refreshments)

Everyone welcome



Wednesday, 7:30pm, 15th November
Chepstow Leisure Centre

Saturday, 7:30pm, 9th December,
Goytre Village Hall



Gwent Ornithological Society presents:

Seabirds of the Shiant Sand Outer Hebrides - an illustrated talk
by Bob Medland

Hear about seabird monitoring at these spectacular Scottish islands, home to over 75,000 pairs of birds, including Puffins, Guillemots and Razorbills.

9th December, 7:30pm, Goytre Village Hall, NP4 0AR
Admission £2, payable at door (includes refreshments)

Everyone welcome



Saturday, 7:30pm, 20th January 2024
Goytre Village Hall
 GOS: AGM - followed by finger buffet & illustrated talk (tbc)

April 2024 (TBC)
Riverfront Theatre, Newport
 "Pictures @ an Exhibition"
 Exhibition of GOS Members' photographs of Gwent birdlife. Further details to follow.

Bird Notes

Looking after your nest box. It's a good idea to clean out your nest boxes annually, preferably between 1 September and 31 January. Removing old nests can reduce the number of parasites (such as fleas) avoiding them being present the following breeding season. Now is also a good time to carry out any necessary repairs including coating them externally with a water-based preservative to extend their lives.

Your chance to get involved – can you take up the challenge?

<i>Dipper</i> editor	We are looking for someone to take on the role of editor of the quarterly <i>Dipper</i> .	Richard M. Clarke Dipper@gwentbirds.org.uk
Website management	Could you be our next webmaster or someone who can help with updating and maintaining the GOS website?	Blair Jones secretary@gwentbirds.org.uk
Committee Member/Trustee	Could you help manage the Society and/or take on a trustee role?	Blair Jones secretary@gwentbirds.org.uk
Librarian	Manage the GOS library at indoor meetings.	feedback@gwentbirds.org.uk
Lead a walk	We are always looking for new people to lead a walk and share their bird knowledge.	Dave Brassey outdoor@gwentbirds.org.uk
Give a talk	We are always looking for new speakers to share their bird experiences.	Marie Rose Pugh indoor@gwentbirds.org.uk
Goytre House Wood	Practical tasks at our nature reserve: nest box checking, scrub bashing, surveying etc	Andrew Baker feedback@gwentbirds.org.uk

Steph Tyler MBE on the occasion of receiving the BTO's Bernard Tucker Medal.

