



NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2017

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Nest Box Making - Sat 18th Feb
Big Birding Day - Sun 30th Apr



Grey Phalarope at Aberthaw © Andy Burns



Goosander in Cardiff Bay © John Wilson



Also in Cardiff Bay - Rock Pipit © Rob Mitchell



Chough at Southerndown © Paul Denning

SUBMISSION DEADLINE for the next newsletter is **Friday 24th March**

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EDITORIAL NOTES

Welcome to a bumper edition of the GBC Newsletter. Happy New Year to you all. Many of us make New Year resolutions. Do you make any bird related resolutions? e.g. to see a particular species/to visit a new reserve/to participate in more surveys/to beat last year's species total/to attend more GBC events ☺ etc. Anyway, here's one for all of you – **send in your 2016 records** (page 5).

I've got lots of acknowledgements to give in this edition. Apart from 'my' regulars; Paul Roberts and Amanda Skull (our foreign correspondent) and the BTO, I have several others to thank. Thanks go to Hilary Perry for her article on the WOS Conference (Welsh Ornithological Society), held in November (page 13). Once again, this proved a very successful event. There is also a report on the SLN Meeting (Swift Local Network), held in Bristol (page 8). Thanks are also due to Paul Seligman for addressing a "techy" issue with his article on RSS (page 6). Mike Pointon also e-mailed me with an interesting observation about Black-headed Gulls. (page 7). Daniel Jenkins-Jones provided us with a fascinating article on his nest box scheme in Cardiff. (More below) I'm very grateful to have received so much copy for this edition. Indeed, I had to really shoe-horn in some articles. Sorry if it appears a little cluttered but personally, I think it's better than having insufficient articles. Keep them coming folks.

A major focus in this issue is nesting. Dan Jenkins-Jones's article on the nest box scheme that he and son, Gethin, have been running in North Cardiff (page 15 & below) should inspire you to get out nest box monitoring. Another nest box scheme in Coed Craig Ruperra is being revived by Andrew Bevan, no doubt his enthusiasm was ignited by attending the BTO Nest Recorders Day last May. Thanks must go to Lyn Evans and the students at the Pencoed campus of Bridgend College. Having helped us last year, building Swift boxes, they have come up trumps again, promising to build a Tawny Owl box for Ruperra. All this ties in neatly with National Nest Box Week (14th - 21st February). We shall be holding a **Nest Box Workshop at Kenfig on Saturday 18th February at 9 a.m.** If you have a nest box scheme or just want to build a box for your back garden, why not come along? Also, if you can source some wood, we'd be very grateful.



Left: Gethin Jenkins-Jones putting up one of the GBC boxes in North Cardiff
Right: a box full of Great Tits about to fledge © Dan Jenkins-Jones

Here's another date for your diary. We'll be holding our annual **Big Birding Day on Sunday 30th April**. It's always a good event with bird walks, ringing demonstrations, bird quizzes etc. etc. Can you help out on the day? We're always looking for volunteers. Please come along and support your club.

Congratulations to Cardiff birder, Judd Hunt, (along with ex Cardiff birder, Hugh Harrop) on finding a first for Britain – a Siberian Accentor in Shetland. This proved to be the first in a series of records for this species this autumn. Also congrats to our secretary, Ceri Jones, who once again topped the Bird-Track "completed lists" monthly submissions.

Before publication I always run a spell checker through the newsletter. I'm concerned that fish take precedence over birds in spell checker world. It keeps wanting to replace Pochard with Pilchard.



RECENT BIRD SIGHTINGS

October 2016

Highlights : A Baird's Sandpiper at Kenfig Pool was the first in our area since 1972. This site also held Firecrest, Garganey and Marsh Harrier. A Dotterel in a ploughed coastal field near Cwm Nash was an unusual autumn occurrence. A Wryneck was found at Aberthaw. Sightings at Lavernock included Great White Egret, Firecrest and three Hawfinches (over). A Great Grey Shrike returned at Garwnant and a male Hen Harrier was also seen at this site. A Bittern seen in flight over Bridgend was a surprise. Our best ever arrival of Yellow-browed Warblers saw approximately 20 birds recorded from 16 sites, including an estimated five at Kenfig.

Other Sites: Six Dark-bellied Brent Geese, two Merlins and a Short-eared Owl were noted at Sker, with further 'shorties' logged at Cwm Nash and Rumney Great Wharf (2). A Hen Harrier flew in off the sea at Dunraven, with another seen at Nash Point. A series of late Hobby records were received from Parc Slip, Kenfig, Dunraven and Cwm Nash. A Jack Snipe was at Kenfig, while up to 60 Common Snipe were at the Watermill, Ogmor. Grey Partridges were observed at Llanmaes. Ring Ouzels were at Kenfig, Cwm Nash and Cwm Mawr. Black Redstarts at Cardiff Bay comprised two at the barrage and one at Penarth Marina. Five Choughs frequented the cliffs at Southerndown. Visible migration at Lavernock saw 3,000 Chaffinches, 2,000 Goldfinches and five Bramblings (30th), with 135 Redpolls over Rudry on the same date.

November 2016

Highlights: Aberthaw/Gileston: A productive day on the 8th saw Grey Phalarope, Snow Bunting and a flock of 11 Whooper Swans flying east. A Water Pipit, two Black Redstarts and 12 Grey Partridges were noted. Hundreds of auks were reported on the sea, with three Pale-bellied Brent Geese, seven Red-throated Divers, 134 Wigeon and an Arctic Skua also offshore.

Other sites: Cardiff: The best at Cardiff Bay were Long-tailed Duck (8th onward), Red-breasted Merganser, six Scaup, three Black Redstarts and a late Wheatear (3rd). Rumney Great Wharf held Water Pipit, Short-eared Owl, Jack Snipe, Little Egret and a Red-throated Diver on the sea, the latter unusual this far up the channel. Further Black Redstarts were at the Heliport (2) and the University. A Siberian Chiffchaff was at Forest Farm. A small flock of Waxwings were briefly sighted in north Cardiff, hopefully a sign of more to come. A Pintail was good bird for Roath Park Lake. At Grangemoor a remarkable count of 129,900 Woodpigeons was made in four hours (2nd).

Kenfig: A flock of 11 Whooper Swans were presumably the same birds seen later the same morning at Aberthaw (8th). Observations in the vicinity of Sker included Snow Bunting (7th), Black-throated Diver, six Red-throated Divers, Brent Goose and Red-breasted Merganser. A Great White Egret was at the pool (27th), plus Bittern, three Scaup, Jack Snipe, three Firecrests and eight Chiffchaffs.

Porthcawl: A flock of up to eight Choughs was present; these included a bird ringed as a juvenile on Anglesey earlier in the year – a very impressive movement for this species. A Snow Bunting was on the seafront (8th). Sea watching produced two Black-throated Divers, up to seven Red-throats, Pomarine Skua, Manx Shearwater, 12 Mediterranean Gulls and 900 Kittiwakes (17th).



Vale of Glamorgan: Yellow-browed Warblers were at Dunraven (1st) and Cosmeston (23rd), with a Bittern also at the latter site. A Lapland Bunting was found at Nash Point (30th). Lavernock hosted a Wood Lark, three Brambling and 2,000 Redwings (25th). Great Crested Grebes were present in unusual numbers on coast between Ogmere and Southerndown, with seven Choughs, Black Redstart, Dark-bellied Brent Goose, two Pale-bellied Brent Geese, Water Pipit and four Little Egrets also observed in the locale. Three Purple Sandpipers were logged at Nell's Point, Barry Island



Some photos from Paul Roberts of the Richard's Pipit at Nash Point, Water Pipit and Pale-bellied Brent Goose on the Ogmere

December 2016

Highlights: A Cattle Egret turned up with Little Egrets at Wentloog, subsequently going to roost at Hendre Lake (21st). A Richard's Pipit was found at Nash Point (1st), remaining in the vicinity for a week. A juvenile Glaucous Gull was at Cardiff Bay (31st). Putative Siberian Chiffchaffs occurred at Kenfig and Cardiff Bay. Yellow-browed Warblers were located at Forest Farm (3rd), Brynna Woods (24th) and Bute Park (28th). Water Pipits were at Ogmere Estuary (2), Rumney Great Wharf and Llwyn-on Reservoir. A Dartford Warbler showed up at Dunraven.

Other sites: Unseasonal visitors arrived in the form of a Willow Warbler at Cardiff Bay, a Whinchat at Sker and a Lesser Whitethroat (race not established) coming to garden feeders at Ewenny. Cardiff Bay held seven Scaup and a long-staying Long-tailed Duck, the latter also briefly visiting Cosmeston. Counts of 110 Pintail and 75 Shoveler were made at the Heliport. Up to 13 Brent Geese were frequenting Aberthaw, the majority being Pale-bellied. A Great Northern Diver was tracked as it drifted along the coast between Nash Point and Porthcawl. Over 40 Red-throated Divers were off Aberthaw. A Hen Harrier was seen at Llanilid. Short-eared Owls were logged at Kenfig (2) and Rumney Great Wharf. Waders at Ogmere Estuary included Black-tailed Godwit, Common Sandpiper and up to 16 Purple Sandpipers. Black Redstarts were recorded from Nash Point (2), Sker, Cardiff Bay and Aberthaw.

Paul Roberts

GBC Merchandise

Don't forget we've got fleeces, hoodies, sweatshirts, polos and tees - dark green with a gold GBC badge. Contact Alan Rosney for details of sizes, prices etc.



CLUB NEWS

Members' News

Welcome to new members; Lianne Barham from Talbot Green and Amanda Brown from North Cornelly.

Committee Update

The committee has met four times since the last newsletter:

- The 2015 Bird Report has been published. You should have received your copy by now. If not, please contact John Wilson. Legal deposit copies have been sent to the National Library etc.
- Several meetings have taken place regarding the Swift project (RSPB, Welsh Water, SLN).
- Alan Rosney gave a talk to a church group in Pontypridd, the fee being donated to the club.
- Strinda Davies has continued to lead the popular Saturday morning walks at Kenfig.
- The GBC pop-up banner is still under discussion as is the purchase of a new notice board.
- The revised H & S policy was agreed.
- The club expenses policy was out of date. Revisions were agreed.
- The club has been approached by various organisations to promote tours, websites etc. It was decided that as a charity it would be inappropriate for us to accede to such requests.
- Ceri Jones has delved in to the working of BirdTrack, ascertaining its usefulness for the club.
- Ceri Jones has made enquiries about the proposal to develop an energy park in Wentloog, that featured on a BBC Wales news broadcast. To date there is little information available. The wakeboarding application for Cosmeston was also discussed.
- The disposal of surplus copies of past bird reports was decided.
- Arrangements for National Nest Box Week and the next Big Birding Day were made.
- The resumption of winter feeding at Ty'n-y-Caeau Farm was discussed.

SUBMITTING YOUR RECORDS

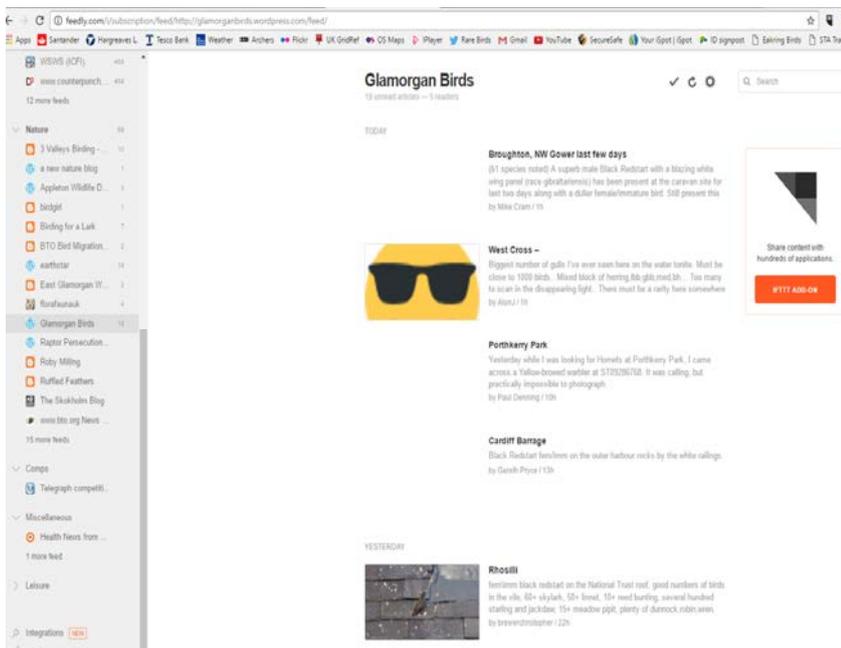
It's time to submit your 2016 records. There are several ways to do this; BirdTrack*, Mapmate, Excel spreadsheet (template on the GBC website) or on paper. Breeding records and species counts are particularly valuable. (Note to BirdTrack users, if possible, please include these details, rather than just ticking the "present" box). Mapmate users please make sure that you have sync'd with your hub. Ideally can we endeavour to get all records to John Wilson by the end of January. (*BirdTrack users please note. Below is a Facebook comment that John posted a few weeks ago).

** " A message for any club members who use the BTO's BirdTrack system/app to record their sightings. Some missing sightings from a club member has brought to my attention a feature of the system that can be missed or misread when you register. The default [I think] is that when you sign up your records are automatically shared with the local county recorder [and also me]. I think there's a 'tick box' when you register but it's a box to tick if you don't want your records shared. However this could be misread as the opposite. You can easily check to make sure you are set up to share them by going to your settings. Somewhere down the page it tells you what option you chose, although there appears to be no option to alter it without contacting the BTO."*



THE JOYS OF RSS

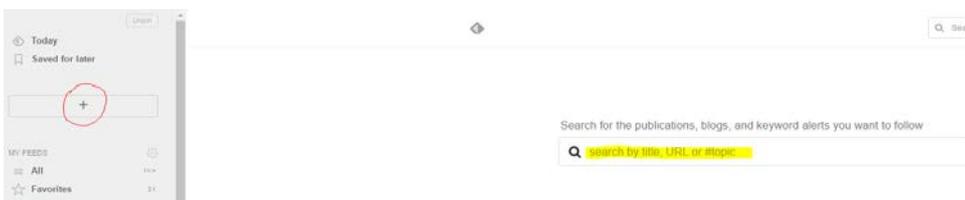
Do you find it hard to track all those interesting web sites and blogs? Some sites will allow an email subscription and I use that method for the ones I really want to see all the new posts. The answer is to use an “RSS feed consolidator”. It’s easier than it sounds – in fact RSS stands for *Really Simple Syndication*. It’s a means whereby a ‘reader’ can pull every new item that appears. I use a program and app called Feedly. Others are available, of course but Feedly does everything I want. Most web sites and blogs offer this facility, in fact, I only ever found one that didn’t. Sometimes they advertise it with the RSS symbol :



On the left are the names of some of the sites I follow. You can group them under your own headings and you can see the feeds I’ve added to my ‘Nature’ section and parts of some other sections. I’ve clicked on Glamorgan Birds, which is set up to read any new postings from the sightings blog page. The results are on the right. I can select the ‘Nature’ heading and get a consolidation of all the sub-sites.

If I want to see more than the first few lines, I can click on the story (or right-click for a new tab) and read the whole thing. You can mark a whole feed (or section) as ‘read’- handy when you’ve been away for a few weeks and don’t intend to catch up, or to clear the rest after reading the stories that interest you. You can still see the “read” stories if you want.

Once you’ve set up your Feedly account, you can log in on your PC, laptop, phone or tablet – handy when travelling – and the read/unread items are synchronised. The best way to add a new feed is to use the + button at the top of the page and paste in the URL (web address) of the site you want. This method always works. You can also search for content by topic. You may get offered more than one feed, usually it’s very obvious which you want. You can always try and delete if you get it wrong



That’s about it. The thing that I can’t help you with is finding the time to read all this interesting stuff!

Paul Seligman



PHOTO GALLERY



A couple of cracking shots from Haydn Lack. Jay in his garden in Barry and Stonechat in Aberthaw



A dog fight at Cosmeston captured by John Wilson

Long-tailed Duck in Cardiff Bay © Pete Howlett

BLACK-HEADED GULLS ASSOCIATING WITH COOT

Whilst walking around Roath Park Lake, Jackie, my wife, noticed that several Black-headed Gulls were associating with Coot. The gulls stayed close to the Coot and waited for them to dive for food, they then pecked at the surface to scavenge any food particles disturbed by the Coot. There were ten or more Black-headed Gulls using this strategy to obtain food at the time of our visit. The Coot did not display any aggressive reaction to the gulls' intrusive behavior. BWP cites Black-headed Gulls associating in this way with ducks such as Shoveler, Goldeneye, Long-tailed Duck and also Little and Great Crested Grebes but it does not mention Coot. We were surprised by the fact that the Coot tolerated the gulls being so close to them. Has anyone else noticed this behaviour?

Mike & Jackie Pinton



SWIFT PROJECT UPDATE

As it is only the second year of this project, we are naturally still planning but things are progressing.

- A meeting was held with Carolyn Robertson of the RSPB. Also present was the national Swift Officer, Becky Pitman, who is based at the Lodge in Sandy but originally hails from South Wales. It was good to meet them both to discuss progress. A positive working relationship has been formed.
- Ceri Jones and I visited a Welsh Water site in November to discuss the possibility of erecting a Swift tower there.
- Julia Barrell, Linda Newton and I attended a Swift Local Network event in Bristol at the end of November. A lot of useful information was garnered. The meeting was well attended with delegates from right across the country. The speakers were excellent and much useful information was gleaned. Edward Mayer kicked off proceedings with his views on the importance of planning in the conservation of urban species, such as Swift. We were next treated to a talk from Stephen Fitt, who has been a leading light in the Exeter Swift Project. After lunch, Edward Jackson gave an interesting talk on the Suffolk Swift Project and provided us with plenty of ideas that would be easily transferrable to our scheme. Next were Dick Newell and Tim Collins, who took us through Swift boxes design, both external and internal. Dick has been instrumental in the design of the Manthorpe brick, which was illustrated in the last newsletter. (If you missed it, check out the Swift Conservation website). The day concluded with presentations from Jan Stannard (Using social media), Peta Sams (Caring for God's Acre), Chris Mason (The Oxford Swift City Project) and Steph Morren (The RSPB Swift Survey).
- Mike and Jackie Pointon have approached property owners in Bedwas, with a view to erecting more boxes there.
- Dave and Margaret Knight from Penarth contacted me. They were having some work done on their roof and thought, that while the scaffolding was up, they'd like to install some Swift boxes. As they live in a "Swifty" area, we have supplied them with a couple of boxes (see picture below).
- Also in Penarth, Ian Hartrey has been working hard, trying to get more boxes up, by approaching local developers.
- Swift boxes have been given a coat of water based preservative prior to erection in Parc Slip.
- You may be aware that Assembly Members in the Welsh Government have "adopted" certain species of plants and animals. Jenny Rathbone AM is the Swift Champion and RSPB Cymru have approached her to discuss various Swift projects.
- If you'd like to become one of our Swift Champions, please get in touch. Don't forget we've got a blog about the project at <http://glamorganswiftchampions.blogspot.co.uk>. If you can contribute to the blog, please get in touch. You'll need an invitation to be able to post.
- More information can be found on the Swift Conservation website.



Alan Rosney



WHERE CAN I SEE

A new feature for the newsletter to help you find those “tricky” birds. We’re hoping to keep in tune with the seasons, although sensitive species will not be included. Are there any species that you’d like featured?

Goldeneye

The main site to catch up with these enigmatic ducks is the Ogmor Estuary. They usually gather in winter, downstream of Portobello (SS870763). By the end of the winter, numbers can build up to 20 or 30. If you’re lucky you may see the males perform their courtship dance. The current mild spell has obviously had an effect on numbers. Paul Roberts only saw one in his December WeBS count at this site although numbers were building towards the end of the month. Other sites that you might encounter them are Kenfig Pool (SS807815), Lisvane Reservoir (ST190822) and Rhaslas Pond (ST095073).

Mediterranean Gull

By far the best location for this species is actually just outside our recording area - Bracelet Bay in Gower (SS630780). They are frequently seen in the car park there. It is a good place to test out your “ageing” of gulls. In *our* area they occur on the Ogmor. Try the area by the bridge (SS876766). I’ve also come across them in Limpert Bay (ST015660) and the Cardiff Bay Wetland Reserve (ST185740). On the GBC Portland trip we saw dozens at Ferrybridge.

Great Northern Diver

It is difficult to pin-point specific sites for Great Northern Diver. In the past couple of winters there have been reports from Llwyn-onn Reservoir (SO008120) of birds feeding on Red Signal Crayfish. (Indeed the wardens at the site didn’t realise they had these invasive crustaceans in the reservoir until these birds turned up). There are several good viewing spots from the reservoir car parks on either side of the lake or you could scan from the weir at the southern end. They may occur on any large water body however. We have encountered them on recent GBC trips to Gower - in Oxwich Bay (SS870510) and Crabart (SS405870), at the end of the Worm.

Yellowhammer

The range of the Yellowhammer has decreased dramatically in recent years. Nowadays they are almost exclusively found in the arable belt of the Vale of Glamorgan. A good starting point might be the sacrificial crop at Ty’-y-n-Caeau Farm (SS923697). View from the road only - don’t go in to the field. If you don’t have any luck there, try the lanes around Marcross (SS925693) and Nash Point (SS917682). There have been recent reports from slightly further north in Colwinston (SS940755) and St. Hilary (ST016733). Ceri Jones recently saw one in a hedgerow near Dyffryn Gardens



CONFUSION SPECIES - PEREGRINE & MERLIN

The most obvious difference between these two raptors is size. Peregrines are 38 - 45 cm in length, whilst Merlin is only 26 - 33 cm, about the same size as a Mistle Thrush. The Peregrine is also a much bulkier bird. (even with the sexual size differences displayed in birds of prey, the difference is usually obvious).

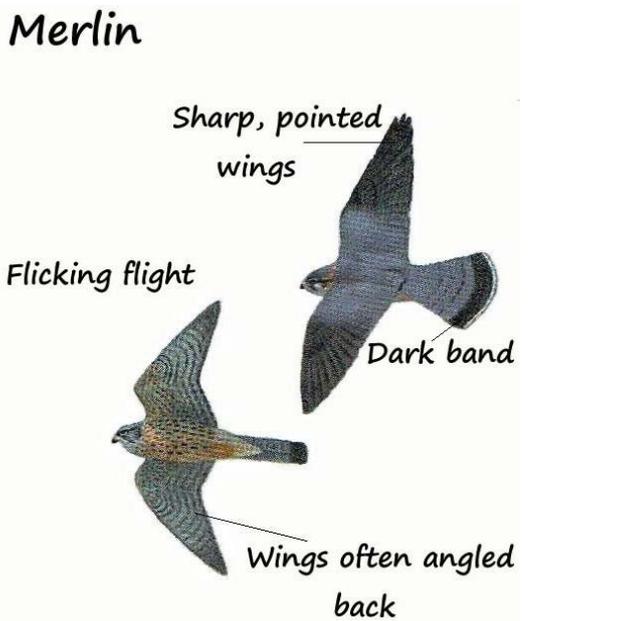
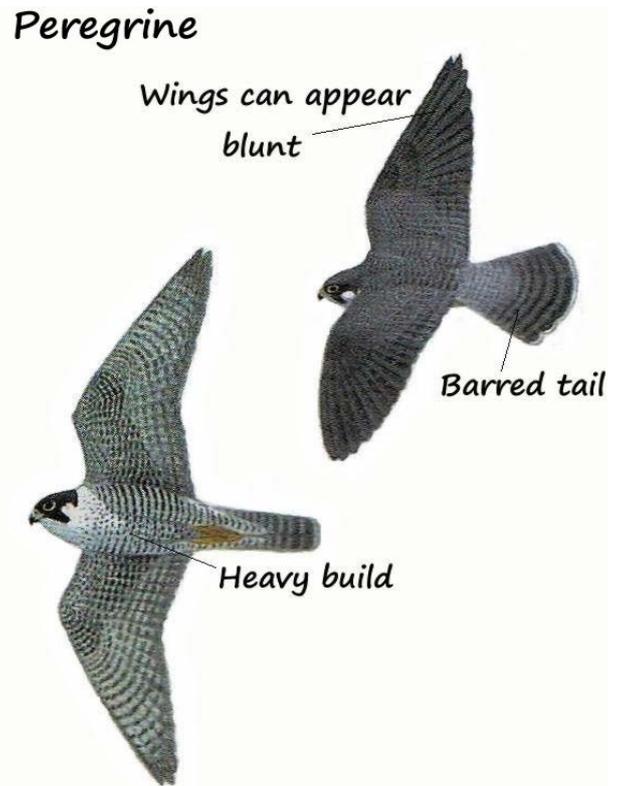
The Peregrine flies with rather stiff shallow wing-beats in which only the tips are obviously moved. The often fly higher than Merlins, in order to stoop on their prey. Merlins tend to fly low to the ground with sharply pointed wings, producing a "flicking" flight. However they will fly high in the sky, when in pursuit of prey, which is usually small passerines.

In adult plumage there are obvious differences. The heavily barred breast of the Peregrine contrasts with the streaked, buffy breast of the Merlin. Also look for the dark moustache of the Peregrine. The Merlin has a moustache but it is less obvious. The black terminal band on the tail of the Merlin is another diagnostic feature.

The main difficulty is likely to be with juvenile/female birds (not illustrated). Juv. Peregrines have streaked breasts and barred tails, not unlike the Merlin. It isn't easy to distinguish between juv. and fem. Merlins. According to BWP, the majority of Merlins in Britain are likely to be juvs. Both juv. and female Merlins are rather dark underneath.

Your best chance of seeing Peregrine is along the coast in winter. Try the cliffs along the Heritage Coast. Merlin is a bit trickier. There have been recent sightings at Goldcliff lagoons. Breeding sites for both species are sensitive, so aren't included here. (Are Merlin still breeding in our region?)

There are some other confusion species. Hobby is one possibility. Look for its sickle shaped wings and shortish/medium length tail, like a giant Swift. There have also been a number of falconers' escapes. Lanner, Saker and hybrids have all been reported. We came across a hybrid bird on a GBC trip to Chew Valley a couple of years ago.



Pictures adapted from the Collins Bird Guide

Alan Rosney



TRIP REPORTS

Cwm Nash - Wednesday 26th October

Eleven participants met in the car park below the Plough and Harrow in Monknash (apart from Rod who thought we were meeting in the P & H car park!). The day began rather drizzly with a stiff breeze but the forecast was for it to brighten up later on. We followed the Cwm Nash Valley, which was very quiet from a birding viewpoint. On the foreshore there were Rock Pipit, Grey Wagtail, Oystercatcher and four gull species. Overhead were Crows, Jackdaws and Raven but not the hoped for Chough.

We took the coastal path to Nash, seeing Stonechat, Rock Pipit, Kestrel, Skylark and Meadow Pipit en route. At our lunch stop at Nash Point, we were treated to a fly-past from a Peregrine, plus a couple more Kestrels. Following the path north, through the woods we saw plenty of Chaffinches plus three Goldcrests, a Chiffchaff and a Song Thrush. On the Marcross - Monknash road we were delighted to see a male Yellowhammer on the telegraph wire. A Buzzard caused some consternation amongst the resident corvids and the only birds in the sacrificial crop at Ty'n-y-Caeau farm were Wood Pigeons. In all, a very pleasant walk but not the number of birds that we had hoped to see - 37 species seen in all.

Goldcliff - Wednesday 9th November

A windy but bright day for this one. We gathered in the car park at Uskmouth prior to a stroll around the reserve. There were a few Wigeon, six Swans, two Gadwall, a Little Grebe, a Grey Heron and a Shoveler on the first lagoon. It proved too windy for Bearded Tits but we did hear Cetti's Warbler. At the foreshore we added Curlew, Shelduck and Dunlin to our list. Andrew Bevan and Trevor Fletcher saw a flock of Black-tailed Godwits flying over.

We then set off for Goldcliff to try and catch the high tide. We immediately saw a hunting Sparrowhawk and a Red Kite was briefly seen. The waders seen here were Dunlin, Curlew, Lapwing, Grey Plover, Knot, Greenshank, Redshank, Black-tailed Godwit, Snipe and Spotted Redshank. One of the Dunlins caused some discussion. It was much bigger than the others and was feeding differently and was possibly a northern race bird. By far the most numerous birds here were the Wigeon (Andrew Bevan came up with a figure of 500). Other duck sp. were Shoveler, Teal, Shelduck and Mallard. There was a steady stream of Fieldfares over the fields with a sprinkling of Redwing with them. As we returned to the cars we caught sight of a Buzzard mobbing a low flying raptor, which we think was a Short-eared Owl but it disappeared from view before we could clinch the ID.

Chew and Blagdon - Sunday 27th November

Surprisingly there were only nine participants. We gathered near the café at Walley Bank to obtain permits (A word of warning, if you're going to this site, they no longer sell permits here) Probably our first bird was a Kingfisher perched on the lakeside vegetation. John Wilson then picked out a Yellow-legged Gull amongst the other gulls.



Other birds seen here were Goldeneye, Goosander, Tufted Duck, Pochard, Gadwall, Mallard and Shoveler. Passerines included Reed Bunting and Goldcrest. Our next port of call was Villice Bay, where we added several “new” species including a raft of twelve Little Grebes plus both Great White and Little Egrets, the former being chased relentlessly by a Grey Heron. There were two Common Sandpipers here also. Waders were few and far between as the water levels were very high, meaning there was little exposed mud.

We had lunch at Herons Green, where a Water Rail made a brief appearance. There were also distant views of Egyptian Goose and another Great White Egret. At Moreton Point, we saw two or three Water Pipits from the hide. Ceri Jones then got us on to two Scaup. On to Herriots Bridge, where we saw Pintail and Shelduck, plus another Kingfisher. Our resident gull expert, John Wilson, then found us a Mediterranean Gull. (In all we saw seven species of gull on the day)

We decided to call in at Blagdon on our way home. The light was failing and we didn't really have time to fully explore this site but we did see both Sparrowhawk and Peregrine.

Labrador Bay & Dawlish - Sunday 11th December

Only seven participants for this one. We encountered thick fog on our journey to Devon but this quickly burnt off as the sun came out. Indeed it turned into a glorious day. At Labrador Bay we quickly got on the reserve's special bird - the Cirl Bunting. At least nine were seen with one male in full song. A flock of Common Scoter and a Red-throated Diver were seen from the cliff top.

We next went on to Dawlish. We had no luck finding the Siberian Chiffchaff that had been reported but we did see three “ordinary” Chiffchaffs near the reserve entrance. These dived for cover when a Sparrowhawk swept in. The pond behind the Reserve Centre held Teal, Shoveler and Reed Bunting. On the sea three more Red-throated Divers, a Great Crested Grebe and more Common Scoter were scanned. Dave Rich got us on to a couple of Velvet Scoters that were mixed in with the Commons. A Slavonian Grebe was briefly seen but couldn't be re-located.

As the tide was rising, we headed for the estuary. Here we saw plenty of Brent Geese, Shelduck, Curlew, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Dunlin, Turnstone, plus Grey and Ringed Plover. There were singles of Bar-tailed Godwit, Black-tailed Godwit, Knot and Greenshank. A couple of Red-breasted Mergansers were spotted further out in the estuary. Flocks of Linnets and Meadow Pipits were also seen on the foreshore. The fog returned as the sun went down, so we were forced to call it a day. A great day's birding nevertheless.

Field trip footnote:

We keep a database of all species seen on GBC trips. Remarkably we saw 187 species during 2016 (calendar year). Whilst the monthly walks at Kenfig are always well attended, sadly the numbers attending some of our other field outings have been dropping of late. Whatever your motivation, we'd like to see you on one of our outings. If you would like to see more birds, have help with your ID skills, visit new locations, get out more in the fresh air, enjoy the company of like-minded folk, then please come along.



INDOOR MEETINGS

Finland - Cate Barrow - Tuesday 1st November

Wow! Cate's photography is super. Having given a talk to us a couple of years ago, she made a return visit, this time concentrating on spring and summer in Finland. We were treated to some stunning shots of owls, woodpeckers, divers and grouse. She also showed us mammals - squirrels, bears, wolves and wolverines. (luckily we had a bit of time left at the end and she showed us some winter scenes too). The lengths to which Cate goes to get her shots is remarkable, often involving long treks through swampy ground, dodging the mosquitoes en route. She tends to "camp out" in the remote hides, hoping for that special shot. Many thanks, Cate.

Members' Own - Tuesday 6th December

This was a re-arranged meeting. Twenty club members attended. First to the post was Alan Rosney, who took us through some of the highlights of a recent trip to California. John Wilson then showcased some images of his local patch - Cosmeston. Next was Paul Denning who showed some of his highlights of 2016. Following a mince pie break, David Carrington took us on a virtual birding trip to North America. He had hooked up the centre's TV and linked to three live streams of bird table webcams in New York, Ontario and Texas. We were lucky enough to see Mourning Dove, Black-capped Chickadee, Cardinal, Blue and Grey Jays, American Goldfinch etc. A thoroughly enjoyable evening. Thanks to all who participated.

WOS CONFERENCE REPORT Sat 5 November 2016 in Myddfai Community Hall, Llandovery

As we arrived at Myddfai, the car park was filling rapidly. Inside, the hall was seething with participants and buzzing with ornithological conversations.

Taking my coffee to a far corner I settled down to enjoy my first WOS Conference. After some preliminaries, the first talk, Birds and Climate Change by Dr Rob Thomas from Cardiff University set the high standard for the day. His focus was on migratory behaviour. He showed us how different species respond differently to changing conditions by rapid evolution, by slow evolution or by rapid behavioural flexibility. He covered recent work on: the European Storm Petrel; Reed, Sedge and Cetti's Warblers; and the Northern Wheatear. Fat reserves can be built up in times of food shortage. Temperature and rainfall can affect food abundance and hence the timing of nest building, the timing of hatching of the chicks and hatchling survival.

After a short break, Steve Smith spoke about his work on Whinchats and the possible reasons for their 55% population decline. Emily Scragg (BTO) then showed how by combining traditional and novel field techniques light has been thrown on the behaviour of the waders and wetland species in the area of the proposed tidal lagoon in the Severn Estuary. The larger birds were ringed and fitted with radio trackers and Dunlin, being too small, were dye-marked along with Shelduck. The resulting data revealed wide differences in the behaviour of the different species. For example individual Redshank were found to fly as far as 16Km in a day, Wigeon more or less stayed within the Newport Wetlands area and Teal did not use the Estuary at night but flew inland to roost. All species stayed within the protected areas at all times.



Lunch was a scrumptious buffet which some ate outside as the weather was perfect. We were treated to the sight of a number of Red Kites soaring overhead: apparently there is a feeding station nearby. After updates on RSPB Cymru and BTO Cymru, Jon Cryer spoke of the importance of a bigger, better more joined up approach *outside* protected areas to save species such as Curlew, Golden Plover, Twite and the Greenland White-fronted Goose. Wayne Morris and Dan Jenkins-Jones then told us about their new passion for nest monitoring with some amusing anecdotes and sound advice.

After a tea break we were treated to a completely different type of talk: Gavin Vella, who trained as a musician, entertained us with the observation that mimicry in birds can affect their breeding success. He tested us with recordings of the songs of different birds until we grew wise and all chorused 'Reed Warbler' when asked to identify the species! The last talk was one of the most riveting. Tony Cross and Adrienne Stratford told us the rather moving story of their involvement in 25 years of the Welsh Chough Project. Their slides showing vertigo-inducing mine shafts and wave-bashed cliff faces had us all gasping in admiration for their dedication and determination. They insisted they followed H&S regulations.... Their reward was to create new nesting sites and reveal much that was unknown about the behaviour of these beautiful birds. An uplifting conclusion to the conference.

Next year's WOS Conference: Monmouth, 4 November, 2017

Hilary Perry

RINGING AT TY'N-Y-CAEAU FARM

As part of our farmland bird project we are very grateful to farmer, John Evans at Ty'n-y-Caeau Farm for sowing a sacrificial crop. However in winter we provide some supplementary feeding. The Kenfig Ringing Group have run a scheme here in the last few winters. The most recent results are shown below. (Data taken from the KRG blog). Our supplementary winter feeding has begun. We rely on volunteers to top up the feeders. Thanks to those who already help. If you are able to help top-up the feeders, please check the calendar on the KRG site.

Ty'n y Caeau 27/10/2016			
Species	Total	ReTraps	
Wren	4		
Chaffinch	1		
Goldfinch	2		
Reed Bunting	1		
4	<== Totals ==>	8	0

Ty'n y Caeau 30/11/2016			
Species	Total	ReTraps	
Wren	2		
Robin	1	1	
Redwing	1		
Chiffchaff	1		
Blue Tit	5		
Great Tit	1		
Chaffinch	1		
Greenfinch	7		
8	<== Totals ==>	19	1

Ty'n y Caeau 3/11/2016			
Species	Total	ReTraps	
Skylark	1		
Wren	3	1	
Dunnock	1		
Robin	1		
Blackbird	3		
Song Thrush	1		
Redwing	3		
Blue Tit	1		
Great Tit	1		
Goldfinch	3		
Yellowhammer	1		
Reed Bunting	1		
12	<== Totals ==>	20	1



BTO NEWS

NRS - MONITORING NEST BOXES IN NORTH CARDIFF

Many of us will have at least one nest box in our gardens and, if we're lucky enough to have it occupied, we delight in watching the adult birds tirelessly feeding their young. Best of all is seeing newly fledged chicks from the box and feeling that you have helped nature in some way. Thanks to the support of the GBC, I've been able to take this one step further and erect nest boxes in areas outside my own garden. A nest box making session is held at Kenfig every February, using timber kindly donated Topstak. The Club donates these boxes to various bodies including local schools, Tŷ Hafan and, since 2014, it has given me a number of boxes. These boxes, in addition to those donated by RSPB Cymru, have enabled me to establish a small 'nest box scheme' in Coryton and Radyr. I'm delighted to say that birds clearly admire the GBC's and RSPB's carpentry skills with the last three years having the following occupancy rates: 14 of 15 boxes (2014); 15 of 16 (2015) and 23 of 24 (2016).

All the boxes in the scheme are standard wooden 'tit boxes'. Near Radyr, they have been placed primarily in an area of open scrub, with some hedgerows and large trees. At Coryton, they have been placed in an area of woodland. As you'd expect, the occupants are almost always Blue or Great Tits, although a Nuthatch did fledge 6 young in Coryton in 2016. I monitor each box for the BTO Nest Record Scheme (NRS), always adhering to the Scheme's strict *Code of Conduct* to ensure that I do not affect the outcome of the nest. This means that I visit each box c.4-6 times a season to ascertain its history: whether it was successful or not (and, if it was unsuccessful, at what stage did it fail); the date on which the first egg was laid in each box; the maximum clutch size; the maximum number of chicks hatched and the number of chicks fledged.

Even though I've only been monitoring these boxes for three years, the data gathered is fascinating. I've extracted some of the headlines for both Blue Tit and Great Tit and placed them in the tables below. (*A "successful nest" is one which fledged at least on juvenile).

Blue Tit								
Year	Occu- pied boxes	Success- ful nests*	Earliest egg date	Total number of eggs	Av. no. of eggs per box	Total number of pulli	Total number fledged	Av. no. fledged per oc- cupied nest
2014	8	5	7 April	77	9.6	67	43	5.4
2015	9	6	10 April	76	8.4	65	50	5.6
2016	9	5	14 April	69	7.7	59	39	4.3

Even from such a small sample, it seems that Blue Tits have had some challenging breeding seasons locally between 2014-16. The species only has one brood a year (rarely 2) and lays on average 8-10 eggs. The totals in my boxes between 2014-15 are average but numbers in most nests were below average in 2016. What is worrying is that the fledging rate is so low: an average of only 4.3 juvs in 2016. There appears to be a very fine line between success and failure. A day or two of wet weather at the wrong time can lead to significant chick mortality and nest failure. This happened in 2014 and again in 2016. It's remarkable how my local records are replicated across the UK. The talk amongst nest recorders in the spring of 2016 suggested it was a poor season for Blue Tits. In December, this was confirmed when the BTO published



In December, this was confirmed when the BTO published its preliminary NRS results and announced that productivity was down 31% in 2016, relative to the 5 year average (2011–15).

Great Tit								
Year	Occupied boxes	Successful nests*	Earliest egg date	Total number of eggs	Av. no. of eggs per box	Total number of pulli	Total number fledged	Av. no. fledged per occupied nest
2014	6	5	7 April	43	7.2	31	24	4.0
2015	6	5	8 April	37	6.2	35	32	5.3
2016	13	8	6 April	85	6.5	73	48	3.7

Great Tits have been slightly more successful. Again, this species usually only has one brood a year (occasionally 2) and lays on average 6-9 eggs. Although towards the low end of that average number across all three years, you can see that 2015 was relatively successful in terms of average number of birds fledged. Could this, coupled with the lack of recent success for Blue Tits, account for the sudden jump in occupancy of my boxes by Great Tit in 2016? I was lucky enough to find a pair with a second brood in 2016, so if you've got a nest box which has been used by Great Tit earlier in the season, it's always worth going back to see whether it was used again by the same pair.

Nest construction and egg laying dates

I've watched pairs from both species gathering nest material from early March but they will suddenly stop if the weather turns against them. Nests which are fully lined and ready to go can remain without eggs for a fortnight or more during periods of cold or wet weather. On the whole, both pairs from species lay their first eggs within a few days of each other, usually by the second week in April. Even then, some pairs hang on a bit longer and delay laying their first eggs until the first week of May. To date, these have tended to be slightly less productive nests than those who've laid in mid-April in the same year. I need to dig around the data, and those years' weather patterns, to discover why.

Coryton vs Radyr

One thing that has struck me in each of the three years is that the boxes occupied by both species in the more open, scrubby area at Radyr are almost always more productive than the boxes placed in woodland at Coryton. For example, in 2015, the Blue Tits at Radyr fledged on average around 9 chicks per nest, whereas those at Coryton fledged an average of only 3. There is only about 1.5km between each site so weather can't be a factor. The boxes are all built to roughly the same standards, they are orientated away from the prevailing wind and so it's clearly going to be down to food availability/competition for food but I haven't delved any deeper than that yet!

Monitoring these nest boxes has been absolutely fascinating. It has added a new dimension to my birding and given a real insight into the lives of these birds. Fingers crossed, I'll be able to do it for many years and can learn much more by comparing my records over a longer period of time. I'd recommend erecting a nest box or two and monitoring them. The BTO needs the records from your boxes. You don't have to visit them 4-6 times in a season. Even records from 2 visits provides useful data. If you're interested, visit www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs or email me at the address below.

Daniel Jenkins-Jones eastglamwebs@gmail.com

*** A couple more diary dates. The BTO shall be holding a local BTO Members' Day on 30th April 2017 and a Nest Recording Taster Day on 14th May 2017 - venues to be announced.**



BTO GARDEN BIRDWATCH

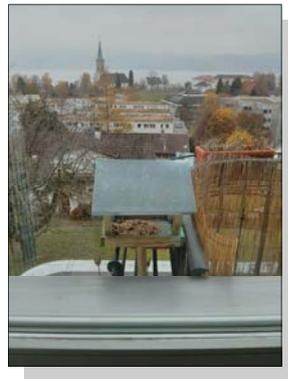
New Year – No Garden!

We have recently moved. Whilst we were sad to say goodbye to our garden and all its visitors, we were excited to see what birds would visit us in our new home. Unfortunately, there is no garden, which somewhat restricts the birds that come to the bird table and windowsill. In the past week, I've not recorded any visitors, which is more than a little frustrating. However, in the previous five weeks, I recorded three familiar species Magpie, Great Tit and House Sparrow (in fact more commonly seen than in our Swansea garden).

From my home-office window I regularly see the elegant Red Kite, Grey Heron, Green Woodpecker, Carrion Crow, Blue Tit, Marsh/Willow Tit (haven't worked out which it is yet!), Woodpigeon and Collared Dove. Nearby there is a large lake and areas of woodland, which expands my list to include Coot, Mallard, Black-headed Gull, Great Crested Grebe, Little Grebe, Mute Swan, Coal Tit, Goldcrest, Buzzard and Kestrel. But the highlights so far have been Red-crested Pochard and Red Squirrel!

With colder weather around the corner, and hopefully snow, I'm looking forward to seeing how my list will grow and to continuing to explore the local area. Whilst I can't submit my sightings to Garden Bird-Watch, I will be regularly using BirdTrack instead.

Have you worked out from my species list where our new home is? Switzerland! Our apartment looks out over Lake Zurich and today I can see some fresh snow on the neighbouring hills. Hopefully, with a drop in temperature, I might again see birds on our windowsill!



Our bird table

Make Your Garden Count

If, unlike me, you have a garden and enjoy watching the birds and other creatures that come to it, the BTO Garden BirdWatch survey could be perfect for you. If your New Year's Resolution is to do more for British wildlife, then join! Please visit www.bto.org/gbw for more information.

Amanda Skull (Follow me on Twitter @amanda_skull)

Best wishes to Amanda in her new home Ed



FUTURE EVENTS

Field trips Contact John Wilson at least 7 days before the due date.

Sunday 29th January	- Slimbridge
Wednesday 8th February	- Garwnant Forestry Centre
Sunday 19th February	- Bridgwater Bay & Steart Marshes
Sunday 5th March	- Forest of Dean
Wednesday 22nd March	- Cwm Colhuw

Indoor meetings Held at the Kenfig Reserve Centre at 7.45 p.m.

Tuesday 10th January	- Travel in the South Atlantic - Paul Seligman
Tuesday 7th February	- South Africa (Jo'burg to Kruger) - Richard Smith
Tuesday 7th March	- Long term monitoring projects - Dr. Rob Thomas

Monthly walk - Kenfig NNR

This takes place on the third Saturday of each month. Meet at the Reserve Centre at 9 a.m. For details please contact David Carrington.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE for the next newsletter is **Friday 24th March**

CONTACT DETAILS

See the GBC website for further details—email addresses etc

Chair	Secretary	Treasurer	Bird Report Editor/Field Trips
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Membership Sec/Newsletter	Indoor Meetings Organiser	Publicity Officer	Mapmate Hub
Alan Rosney 10, Parc-y-Nant, Nantgarw, RCT CF15 7TJ 01443 841555/07906558489	Paul Denning 17, Maes Maelwg, Beddau, RCT CF38 2LD 01443 202607	Position currently vacant	David Carrington Kenfig National Nature Reserve Tonkenfig, Bridgend CF33 4PT 01656 743386/07779978738
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