



NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2016

www.glamorganbirds.org.uk

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Short-eared Owl at Steart Marshes © John Wilson



Chough at Ogmore © Gary Light



Green Woodpecker at Lavernock © Gary Light



Firecrest in Cardiff Bay © Pete Howlett

SUBMISSION DEADLINE for the next newsletter is **Saturday 19th March**

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EDITORIAL NOTES

Happy New Year to you all.

I hope that you have all received your 2014 Bird Report. Once again, many thanks must go to John Wilson and the team for all the hard work in putting this together. However the report is only as good as the data that goes into it. Have you submitted records? It's the time of year to submit your 2015 records (or older records, if you have them). They don't need to be records of rare birds. **All records are valuable**, particularly breeding records. Have Blackbirds nested in your garden? Have Blue Tits used your nest box?....then send in the records. A good starting point might be to take part in the RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch on the weekend of 30th/31st January.

Details on how to submit records can be found on the club web site. (Note that records from BirdTrack and SEWBReCORD do make their way into the database). Electronic submission is great but paper records are equally acceptable. Paul Seligman, who has recently been voted on the board of SEWBReC, has written an article on this topic on page 5.

Following the production of the State of Nature Report, the BTO National Atlas plus our own Local Atlas, it is clear that some species are struggling. The committee have discussed this matter and are determined to help in some way. I mentioned the Swift Project in the last issue. Further details can be found on page 16. The BTO are also concerned. See Dan Jenkins-Jones's article on the Curlew on page 17.

On a similar topic, it was interesting to read of a new partnership - the Partnership for Species Conservation – a coalition of seven of Britain's leading wildlife charities (Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, Bat Conservation Trust, Buglife, Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation, Plantlife, and the RSPB) aims to work together at sites across the country as part of the 'Back from the Brink' project. They hope to save 20 species from extinction, as well as helping another 118 species that are under threat have a more certain future. Let's hope for positive news.

As you may be aware, I'm a bit of a weather geek. I've been keeping records of the weather on my patch for many years, using the data generated for the annual summary in the Bird Report. I feel my report is a bit skewed towards the valleys. (I must thank Mark Evans from Aberdare and Kenfig NNR who allow me to use their data). Is there anyone else out there who keeps weather records? If so, please get in touch. I'd love to be able to make the summary even more representative of the region.

Alan Rosney

Footnotes

- Many thanks for the great response to the proposed Outer Hebrides trip. Fingers crossed for a good trip
- Note that there is a change to the trips programme. The Forest of Dean trip, planned for 19th March will now be on Saturday 26th March 2016
- Sorry if you've had further spurious e-mails purporting to come from me. I thought the problem was solved but apparently not. Just delete if you're suspicious.
- In a previous edition I picked out some amusing suggestions made by spell checker. The best suggestion this time was "Elysian" for "Eglwysilan" - possibly not!



RECENT BIRD SIGHTINGS

October 2015

Highlights: An immature male Ring-necked Duck was found at Cardiff Bay Wetlands Reserve, often keeping company with the returning Lesser Scaup. Kenfig hosted a Cattle Egret (found at the end of September and remaining until the 4th), three Avocets and two flyover Whooper Swans. A Great Grey Shrike alighted briefly at Rumney Great Wharf (28th). Several Woodlarks were recorded at Lavernock. Our best ever arrival of Yellow-browed Warblers saw birds at Kenfig (3+), at four Cardiff locations (Cardiff Bay barrage, Cathays Cemetery, Llandaff and Roath), Aberdare (Robertstown), Bridgend (Waterton), Lavernock and Rhose Pools. Firecrests graced Craig yr Aber, Dunraven, Kenfig, Lavernock, Ogmere Estuary (Norton Wood) and Radyr Floodplain. A Dusky Warbler was reported by a single observer at Cosmeston but sadly could not be relocated.

Other Sites: Three Eiders lingered off Sker. Counts from Rhymney Estuary included 220 Shelducks and 40 Pintails. Little Egrets were at Ogmere Estuary (4), Kenfig and Cardiff Bay. Hen Harriers were noted at Mynydd Eglwysilan, Kenfig and Ty'n-y-Caeau Farm, where 33 Buzzards congregated. Wandering Goshawks turned up at Cardiff Bay and Lavernock, with two together seen at both sites. Hobbies were seen at Kenfig, Cosmeston and Lavernock. Merlins passed through at five coastal locations, with at least three at Dunraven. The only Jack Snipe observation came from Cardiff Bay. Short-eared Owls appeared at Rumney Great Wharf (7+), Flat Holm, Lavernock and Kenfig. A Ring Ouzel at Ogmere-by-Sea was the only reported sighting of this species. A Dartford Warbler was in the Ogmere locale. Apparent 'Northern' Willow Warblers were at Flat Holm and Ogmere Estuary. Crossbill passage was still in evidence at Dunraven early in the month, while Bramblings began to appear at coastal locations towards the month end. Eleven Choughs were at Southerndown.

November 2015

Highlights: Seabirds featured, as a series of storm systems moved through. Most noteworthy were Leach's Petrels off Porthcawl, Lavernock and Cardiff Heliport; Pomarine (maximum three) and Great Skuas (maximum six) from Lavernock; plus an unusual record of a Black-necked Grebe passing Porthcawl. In addition, a number of Great Northern Divers were logged among the commoner species during these sessions. The drake Lesser Scaup was at Cardiff Bay early in the month. At least two Woodlarks were at Lavernock. Water Pipits were at Ogmere Estuary and Rumney Great Wharf. Firecrests occurred at Kenfig, Fforestganol and Newton Burrows.

Other Sites: Brent Geese were noted at Gileston, Lavernock and Ogmere Estuary. Hen Harriers were at Coity Common (two) and Mynydd Eglwysilan. Ogmere Estuary and Kenfig held Merlins. Up to eight Short-eared Owls frequented Rumney Great Wharf, with others at Heol-y-Cyw, Lavernock and Dunraven. A late Swallow was at Roath (26th). Black Redstarts arrived at Penarth Marina, Llancadle, Gileston, Nash Point and Southerndown. A Ring Ouzel was at Lavernock, while some impressive movements from this site saw maxima including 100,000 Woodpigeons, 4,500 Fieldfares, 3,500 Redwings, 700 Chaffinches and 50 Bramblings. Hawfinches were observed at Fforestganol and Cathays Cemetery. Eleven Little Egrets were seen coming in to roost at Hendre Lake.



December 2015

Kenfig: Two Black-throated Divers were off Sker, with a Great Northern Diver at the pool, where Greater Scaup, Egyptian Goose and an unseasonal Sandwich Tern were also noted. A Grey Phalarope found a tiny pond at Sker to its liking. A Siberian Chiffchaff was discovered in poolside bushes.

Other Sites: Great Northern Divers were off Ogmere and Porthcawl, while thirty divers down channel at Breaksea Point (Aberthaw) were all thought to be Red-throated. Little Egrets were at Wentlooge Level (40+), Hendre Lake (34 at the roost), Gileston (8), Ogmere Estuary (3) and at three Barry locations. A Merlin was at Southerndown. Short-eared Owls were observed at Rumney Great Wharf (5+), Lamby Tip, Garwnant and Mynydd Eglwysilan, which also held a Hen Harrier. Two Little Gulls were off Gileston, with another from Lavernock, where Arctic and Great Skua also occurred. Yellow-legged Gulls were at Cardiff Bay and Lisvane Res. Firecrests were seen at Cardiff Bay and Newton Burrows.

Paul Roberts

CLUB NEWS

Members' News

We have two new members; Rob Thomas from Llanishen and Jane Williams from Pontcanna, both of whom were at the SEWBReC forum (see the article on page 12). Welcome to the Bird Club. Sadly we heard of the death of David Brett. He attended several of our field outings and was particularly keen on photography. Our thoughts are with Thomas and the rest of his family.

Committee Update

The Committee has met on three occasions since the last newsletter:

- Paul Roberts led a bird walk for the Coity Walia project in late October
- John Wilson has deputised as leader for our regular Saturday Kenfig walks
- The Club will be represented at the Caerphilly Biodiversity Partnership "Big Garden Birdwatch" on Saturday 30th January in Parc Penallta. (10 a.m. until 2 p.m.) Why not come along?
- David Carrington & the Kenfig Ringing Group would like more records from Ty'n-y-Caeau Farm to build up the data holding for the site. (Also, if you're passing, please top up the feeders from the bin)
- Alan Rosney reported on the Action for Swifts project. Grant applications were discussed
- The Club donated some nest boxes to a scheme in the Llynfi Valley. (Any donations of wood will be gratefully received)
- Ceri Jones has been monitoring developments with the proposed Severn Estuary tidal lagoons
- Ceri Jones and Alan Rosney plan to represent the Club at the Pen y Cwmoedd wind farm forum to discuss plans for the restoration of the surrounding upland bogs
- A planning application for a site near Cowbridge, which could affect a Lapwing breeding area, was discussed
- Alan Rosney has re-vamped the club notice boards



MAKING YOUR BIRD AND WILDLIFE RECORDS COUNT

You go to your favourite hide and you find that someone has left the windows open, the seats are now wet and their crisp packet and confectionery wrapper are on the floor. You probably think that the previous visitor was inconsiderate and should know better, but couldn't be bothered to do the right thing. I feel something similar when I hear that a keen birder keeps their records to themselves. That view might be a tad controversial but bear with me while I explain the benefits of keeping and sharing records and suggest some ways to do that.

As a member of Glamorgan Bird Club, you receive a copy of the Annual Bird Report for East Glamorgan. Let's be fair – no bird report is going to be a gripping page turner but it is an important record of the avifauna (bird species) in our area and it's compiled from the records that members and others submit directly to the club or via other channels. Missing records lower the value of the overall report. It's not just unusual species that we need to report, though I'm sure we are all more diligent at logging something rare or uncommon. Records of everyday species, particularly breeding records, or large flocks, can tell us a lot about populations.

Records that reach the BTO – the British Trust for Ornithology, to which the Club is affiliated – help inform overall population estimates and trends and thus can contribute to conservation. What the BTO calls 'complete lists' (everything seen in a defined time at one place or area) are particularly helpful. Breeding records and records of migrants – especially arrival and departure records – are useful, and complement the ringing and the formal surveys that some of us also undertake.

Any form of electronic recording is better than keeping bits of paper or notebooks that only you see. It's secured so you don't need to worry about physical loss or damage and the possibilities for searching, comparing, summarising and exploring your data are much greater. BTO has the free BirdTrack app (<http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdtrack/about>) which you can use on any PC or mobile device to log and explore your records. The "Explore My Records" facility is pretty good.

If you record other types of wildlife or perhaps plants or fungi, BirdTrack has its limitations, offering only birds and dragonflies. I'm probably more obsessive than most people, trying to record moths, butterflies, mammals, hoverflies, reptiles ... in fact, pretty much anything I can identify (sometimes with some expert help). But a lot of you will record one or more taxonomic groups other than birds, or might do so if it wasn't too much extra effort. I happen to have software that records some of these groups, the remainder being recorded till now in Excel. Getting that info to all the right organisations and recording schemes is tricky.

I recently opened an account with SEWBRReCORD (<http://www.sewbreCORD.org.uk/>) . As the name suggests, this is the recording tool provided by the South East Wales Biodiversity Record Centre. The system is based on the national iRecord software and you can log anything living. Setting up the account is not wholly intuitive as yet but help is available if you get stuck. Once the account is open, entering records is a breeze. There are several nice features: you can mark records as 'sensitive' (thus restricting access to an appropriate level which you choose – say 10km), or state the certainty of the identification. You can add photos as well, so that the County recorder or other verifier of the record can determine if it is correct.



Providing records to SEWBReC has several advantages. They will reach the club so they can be included in our Annual Report. They will be included in searches related to development plans (environmental impact assessments), which is a prime purpose of the SEWBReC database. They can be made available to many other schemes and organisations, which will maximise the value of your 'citizen science' effort.

SEWBReCORD data entry is not restricted to South-East Wales, although this is the main purpose of the local system. Data is automatically shared with the other Welsh local environmental record centres, which means you don't have to worry about recording area boundaries.

There are many other recording options, of course. I know that many members use the MapMate system (which shares data with SEWBReC). But whatever tool best suits your needs, please do capture and share those records. And please remember to shut those windows and take your litter home!

Paul Seligman <https://twitter.com/PaulSeligNature>
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PHOTO GALLERY



A couple of cracking shots from Trevor Fletcher - Reed Bunting and Stonechat on Rudry Common



Dunlin on Sully Beach © Hayden Lack



RESERVE SPOTLIGHT - PARC SLIP WTSWW RESERVE



A guide to Parc Slip was included in “Birding in Glamorgan”, however there have been quite a few changes since that was published. The following article has been supplied by Lorna Baggett, People and Wildlife Officer at the reserve. Many thanks, Lorna.

With a rich coal mining history, Parc Slip Nature Reserve is an interesting and diverse wildlife hotspot. The 125 hectare reserve is a mix of broadleaved and coniferous woodlands, wetlands, wildflower meadows and lowland farmland. The reserve is home to many small mammal species, dragonflies, butterflies and several reptile and amphibian species, including Grass Snake, Adder, and Great Crested Newt. Whilst many of these creatures will be hibernating during the winter months, one faithful group remains ever-present: the birds. Parc Slip provides a range of habitats for birds and is consequently home to waders, birds of prey, farmland and woodland species alike. The reserve is also visited by migrants and some rarer species, such as Water Rail and Bittern.

There are five bird hides at Parc Slip, with the newest addition, the Mary Gillham hide, being elevated to overlook a large expanse of ponds and scrapes. This winter will be only the second year that these scrapes have been in place but they have already attracted Green Sandpiper, Little Ringed Plover and Lapwing. (Glamorgan Bird Club has sponsored two of the scrapes in memory of the late Steve Moon). The Northern Wetlands pond, adjoining our ‘Lapwing field’ is a fantastic habitat which attracts Teal, Tufted Ducks, Little Grebe, Kingfisher and many more. This winter we are working at Parc Slip to further improve the land for Lapwings. The field has been grazed by Highland cattle to keep the height of the grass down and an electric anti-predator fence was installed, along with the creation of shallow scrapes to provide food and shelter for the Lapwings. Also we have been carrying out scrub removal and habitat creation. A group of “Lapwing Champions” have spent Friday mornings during the autumn and winter, trying to help these charismatic waders establish a breeding population on the reserve.



In winter these damp fields can attract Snipe. You are likely to see a variety of passerines, such as Linnet, Goldfinch and Meadow Pipit. Green Woodpeckers can often be heard yaffling in this area. Keep your eyes to the skies as Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Red Kite and even Goshawk may be seen.

The Bittern hide, as the name suggests, is worth a visit this winter, if you want to be in with a chance of seeing *our* Bittern. The tall reeds make a good hiding place. Recent additions have been two artificial Sand Martin banks (one in the Scrapes Field, with another in the Northern Wetlands). These should be worth investigating in the spring.

To experience a slightly different habitat, take the Woodland Walk (over Fountain Road). A variety of woodland species can be encountered with Siskin and Redpoll being regular. Check out Fountain Pond, where more water birds are likely to be present.

If you don't want to venture out however, the coffee shop at the Visitor Centre has views across a pond, which joins the canal, where Water Rail may be seen and Kingfishers often visit (*and the cakes are good too - Ed*).

Getting there

Leave the M4 at junction 36. At the roundabout take the exit on to the A4063 towards Maesteg. Go through two sets of traffic lights, then at the roundabout, take the second exit on to the B4281 (signposted Aberkenfig and Pyle). Follow the brown duck tourist signs for Parc Slip. After a mile, turn right at the Fountain Restaurant, (over the railway line) on to Fountain Road, still following the brown duck signs. After about half a mile, you'll see the Visitor Centre on your left. Please be aware that sat nav systems may direct you on to New Road. The visitor centre is actually on Fountain Road.



The Visitor Centre and the elevated Mary Gillham hide at Parc Slip © Alan Rosney

Address

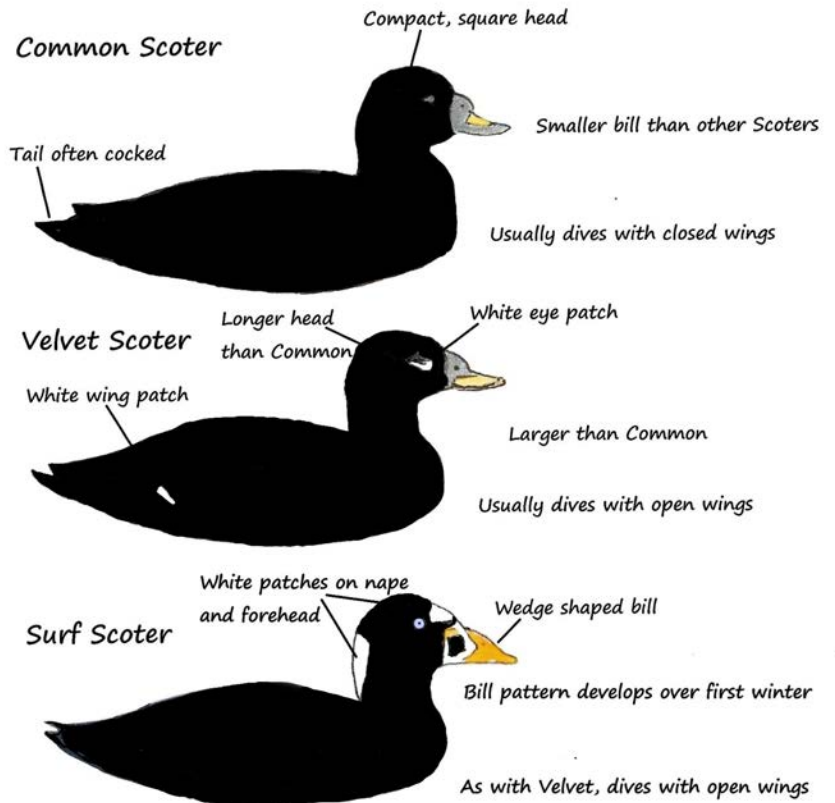
Parc Slip Nature Reserve, Fountain Road, Tondy, Bridgend, CF32 0EH Tel 01656 724100
<http://welshwildlife.org/visitor-centres/parc-slip-visitor-centre>



CONFUSION SPECIES - SCOTERS

OK, I've taken the easy way out by only looking at the male of the species. However, even these can be quite challenging, particularly when they are a long way out in a choppy sea. Realistically you're only likely to come across Common and Velvet Scoters in our area, although Surf Scoters have been recorded.

As its name suggests, Common Scoter is the commonest Scoter in British waters. A few breed in northern Scotland but they are most likely to be seen off our coast in the winter. They are the smallest of the Scoters, often cocking their tails, especially when asleep. The wings are all dark, although the undersides can appear grey. When wing-flapping, they move their heads in a downward S movement. When diving, they do so with closed wings. Flocks have the habit of all diving together.



Velvet Scoters are scarce off our coast. The long head shape is characteristic. The tail is shorter than on Common. The main diagnostic features, especially when in flight, are the bright white secondary feathers. However, when at rest, they may not be visible or may appear only as a small white triangle (as in my illustration). Adult males also show a white eye crescent. When diving they open their wings. They often associate with Common Scoter.

Surf Scoters are from North America and are extremely rare in our waters. Given good views, their wedge shaped bills and white nape patch are quite obvious. (I've never seen one in Wales, my only sighting being two, off the east coast of Scotland).

Where can you see them? They can occasionally be seen from headlands in Cardiff, Lavernock, Porthcawl etc. They are uncommon away from their core area in Carmarthen Bay. A large flock over-winters in the bay. Probably the best place to see them is to scan the flock from Worms Head on Gower. On a recent club trip we saw four Velvet Scoters, quite close to the shore, in Blue Pool, Broughton.

* There have been recent British records of Black Scoter (*Melanitta americana*) - the north American/Siberian race of Common Scoter - The base of the bill has less swelling and is extensively yellow-orange.

Alan Rosney



CONFERENCE SEASON (No, thankfully not the Tories, Labour, Lib Dems etc.)

There have been a series wildlife conferences this autumn. Before the reports, it might be worthwhile to include a glossary of acronyms. Too often we use these, assuming others know their meanings :

WOS (Welsh Ornithologists' Society), SEWBReC (South East Wales Biological Records Centre), OPAL (Open Air Laboratories), COFNOD (Gwasanaeth Gwybodaeth Amgylcheddol Gogledd Cymru or North Wales Environmental Information Service).

The 2015 WOS Conference

Inspiring the Next Generation - Carno, Powys, 7 November 2015.

The conference was billed as "*the* gathering of birdwatchers in Wales" and had an impressive turnout. Roughly 80 Welsh birders braved the inclement weather and resisted the lure of local birding attractions such as Lake Vyrnwy and Llyn Hir.

A welcome by the acting Chair Julian Hughes was followed by the Annual General Meeting the highlights of which were the presentations of the first Derek Moore Student Research Award to Emma Louise Cole of Swansea University for her work on the breeding of Honey Buzzards (see below) and a WOS Lifetime Achievement Award to Steph Tyler (RSPB, BTO, researcher, author, retiring editor of *Birds in Wales* etc. and probably best known for her work in Gwent with Dippers and acid rain). Mick Green was elected as the new Chair of WOS in his absence, chasing a Ring Ouzel in Morocco.

President of WOS, Iolo Williams, then gave a round-up of news on birds in Wales in his usual inimitable style: a good year for Hen Harriers, Ospreys & Terns, not good for Honey Buzzards (only one breeding pair), Curlew, Hobby, Kestrel, Merlin, Woodcock and Gull species.

The conference then lived up to its billing with excellent presenters and presentations focussed on inspiring the next generation. This year there was no shortage of young adults in the audience and at a time of promoting gender equality, it was encouraging that four of the five presentations were given by the "fairer sex".

First up was Lucy McRobert, Creative Director of Focus on Nature, a network for young nature conservationists and their Vision for Nature, an on-line wish-list generated by the young students via their website - 1,400 members on www.afocusonnature.org - & social media (Facebook & Twitter). Lucy was assisted by Emma Louise Cole, who talked about her work with the Honey Buzzard – male and female parents predate different habitats, only the males will bring back frogs for its young – and birding on Swansea University properties; 125 bird species recorded up to now). This was followed by Holly Kirk of Oxford University and her insight of almost 10 years of seabird tracking by the Oxford Navigation Group (<http://oxnav.zoo.ox.ac.uk/>) in Wales: including Skomer & Ramsey Island, Manx Shearwater & Puffin foraging and migration (Manxies as far away as Argentina).

The morning was completed with a talk by Viola Ross-Smith, who has researched Gulls and in particular Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Herring Gulls on Skokholm & Flat Holm. This Summer she had the difficult job of improving gulls' public image for the BTO at a time when they were front page news for their anti-social behaviour.



In the afternoon we had updates on RSPB and BTO activities in Wales from Dan Jenkins-Jones and Kelvin Jones respectively, before a talk by Carolyn Robertson on the Giving Nature a Home Cardiff project delivered by RSPB Cymru and Cardiff Council helping 14,500 children and their families connect with nature. She also briefly described the highly successful operation TAPE in Bute Park.

The last presentation was by James Vafidis of Cardiff University on Reed Warblers and a personal account of his research with these LBJs, before and after construction of the Cardiff Bay barrage.

The conference ended with Iolo "Spreading the Gospel", challenging the audience including the RSPB, BTO and Natural Resources Wales to do much more for conservation and for everyone to contribute, by setting an example and inspiring a child. He also had a message for local bird clubs to attract youngsters to their meetings : don't be satisfied with slide shows of local birder holiday "snaps", invite inspiring, entertaining speakers and topics with youth in mind.

The conference, by general consensus, had been a great success, setting a "high bar" for the future.

Alan Woodward

SEWBReC Wildlife Recorders' Forum

Park Inn, Cardiff, 21st November 2015

The format of the day was similar to past years, except that the AGM was shoe-horned into the programme. Naturally, not all the talks were bird related. We began with a fascinating talk from Dr. Rob Thomas of Cardiff University, who gave a presentation on long-term monitoring projects (in particular a study of Cetti's, Reed and Sedge Warblers in Cardiff Bay). Whilst long-term trends for Cetti's and Reed Warbler have been generally favourable, Sedge Warbler has not been faring as well. The impact of climate change has been investigated. An interesting part of the research has been on their "poo", which has had DNA analysis, giving valuable information on the diet of each species. Surprisingly, they don't target the same insects.

Linda Nottage then gave a talk on "square bashing". Linda and husband Rob have been recording in 1km squares, particularly in the Vale of Glamorgan. She picked out many of the highlights of the past year.

Other speakers gave presentations on plants and fungi. George Tordoff gave a talk on bryophytes in Glamorgan. Brian Douglas took us through an exciting project based in Kew Gardens, called "The lost and found fungi project" and Colin Cheeseman focussed on invasive plants on Gower. Neil Price gave us a very interesting talk on the Margam Park Bat Project, where 14 bat species have been recorded.

Sandwiched between these talks were the AGM and "Soapbox Corner", where speakers were given 5 minutes each to "entertain/inform" us. Amongst these was GBC's Paul Seligman, who spoke on rewarding recorders, Steph Tyler on her botanical highlights in Gwent, Michelle Bales from Buglife on the Urban Buzz project, Tim Rich on his new book on the flowers of Dare Valley and Adam Rowe on the Mary Gillham Archive Project. We also had an "extra" speaker on a recent Australian immigrant - the landhopper. It was very remiss of me but I forgot to note down her name. Many apologies.



SEWBRcC extra

I picked up a couple of leaflets at the forum, that may be of interest to other wildlife enthusiasts:

- The four Welsh Environmental Record Centres now offer access to the Wildlife Sightings Data of Wales via the Data Access Tool (DAT) www.lrcwalesdat.org
- SEWBRcC has equipment that recorders (particularly entomologists) might want to borrow – two stereo microscopes, dissection kit, bat detector, sweep nets, beating trays, moth trap and ID guides. The microscopes can be used at SEWBRcC's office in Cardiff and the other equipment can be borrowed for fieldwork.

All in all it was a very enjoyable event with plenty of interesting speakers and a chance to meet up with fellow wildlife recorders (*and a free lunch!*)

OPAL/COFNOD Citizen Science Conference

National Museum of Wales, 1st December 2015

A thought provoking conference, examining the growing field of citizen science. The use of digital systems and social media has meant that many organisations now have access to vast amounts of data contributed by recorders from all walks of life.

After an introduction from Madeleine Havard, the new deputy chair of Natural Resources Wales, we were addressed by Poppy Lakeman-Fraser and David Slawson from Imperial College, who put the case for and against citizen science. Next Michael Pocock, from the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, gave an excellent talk about enthusing recorders to contribute to the topic.

The bulk of the day was taken up with workshops on a variety of wide ranging topics. This gave the delegates the chance to contribute their thoughts and ideas.

In the afternoon session, Rachel Taylor, from BTO Cymru, gave us some insight in to long-running studies, such as the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and the usefulness of the data generated.

The conference was quite academic in nature but we did have the opportunity to do some fieldwork by examining lichens in central Cardiff and the role that they play in highlighting pollution levels in urban areas. The day ended with an interactive Q & A session, led by Roy Tapping of COFNOD.

It was good that so many policy makers were in attendance and heartening to see the value that they place upon the data generated by Joe Public. In my opinion, it highlighted the fact that “we’re all in this together”. If we don’t stand up for the environment, who will? With the environmental departments of government being particularly hard hit in the era of austerity, we all have a role to play. I have no doubt that citizen science is here to stay.

Alan Rosney

P.S. I found OPAL's ID guides very useful. They are downloadable from the OPAL website.



TRIP REPORTS (All reports by Alan Rosney, unless stated otherwise)

Mewslade - October 10th 2015

There were 15 participants for this trip. We gathered in the car park in Mewslade. At the head of the valley we searched in vain for the Yellow-browed Warbler that had been seen there a few days earlier. It was very disappointing on the migrant front, despite conditions being favourable. We headed down towards the sea, past Nitten Field, which held large numbers of Goldfinches and Linnets. En route we saw both Kestrel and Green Woodpecker. On the cliffs we then spotted the hunched shape of a bird of prey. Scope views confirmed that it was a Peregrine. In Fall Bay we were delighted to see a party of Choughs (probably 8 in total), riding the up-currents along the cliffs. As we cut across the fields to Middleton, a Red Kite appeared, flying low over the fields, giving us all excellent views. As we walked along the road to Pitton, we noticed a large gathering of birds on the telegraph wires, which turned out to be Linnets, probably 500 strong. Tim Adcock briefly saw a bird of prey dash through the flock, which he thought was a Merlin. Back at the car park, we had another look for the YBW. No luck, but a roving flock included Treecreeper, Goldcrest, Long-tailed Tit, Coal Tit and Chiffchaff. A pleasant day in a beautiful spot with a group day list of 49 species.

Ogmore - October 21st 2015

The dry autumn weather unfortunately broke down on the morning of this trip. Nevertheless ten club members attended. It was nice to see Gareth Pryce on a trip after a long absence. Our first port of call was Portobello. On the river there were two Gadwall amongst the Mallards. Waders seen were Curlew and Redshank. From here we headed up Pant Norton in search of migrant passerines. It was relatively quiet, although a couple of Stonechats showed well. The main activity was on the Hawthorn bushes where Blackbirds, Redwings and Song Thrushes were stripping the berries.

At Newton Farm we saw the unusual sight of 35 Collared Doves sitting on the telegraph wires, however there was little else here apart from a couple of Pied Wagtails and a Nuthatch. After lunch, we had a brief look along the rocky seafront at Ogmore in the hope of seeing Purple Sandpiper but with no luck. The afternoon was spent walking through the walled garden in Dunraven. It was eerily quiet. As we emerged on to the cliff top we saw a Green Woodpecker "anting" and later a Peregrine flew over us. A rather quiet day with 44 species logged.

Stuart Marshes - November 4th 2015

A poor forecast may have been the reason for the low turnout for the visit to this fantastic "new" reserve in Somerset. As it happens we dodged all the showers and had a brilliant day's birding. On arrival, we were delighted to see a Short-eared Owl hunting over a roadside field. Little did we know this was just the start. Another three owls joined it, giving great views. One then perched on a post next to the car, some six to eight feet away. You may have seen John Wilson's stunning video of this bird (a video grab can be found on the front cover of the newsletter). I estimate we saw at least eight owls in total. (A couple of days earlier there were reports of eighteen on the reserve). I must admit this was one of the highlights of my birding life (and I've been birding a long time!)



Eventually we had to drag ourselves away from the owl watching. On the foreshore there were plenty of waders, including Dunlin, Grey Plover, Knot, Redshank, Curlew and Oystercatcher. On the sea were both Pintail and Shelduck.

From one of the hides we saw Lapwings, Teal, Wigeon and Shoveler. A Peregrine was spotted sitting on top of a pylon and a Kestrel was seen hovering over the marsh. Our final bird was also a bit special - a Spoonbill. What a day!

Slimbridge - November 22nd 2015

A good turn out for this one - 22 participants, I believe. After a run of wet, drizzly days we were greeted with a cold, crisp morning, ideal for birding. The usual fare was on offer with White-fronted, Barnacle, Greylag and Canada Geese observed from the Holden Tower. Unfortunately the reported Brent Goose wasn't found. There weren't many Bewick's around, although seven Cranes were a welcome sight. Despite a thorough search we couldn't locate the Semi-palmated Sandpiper that had been on site for a few weeks, although there were a couple of Little Stints amongst the Dunlin. A juvenile Marsh Harrier flapped slowly across the Dumbles and a Peregrine caused panic amongst the waders occasionally.

A juvenile female Scaup was seen on the Eider Pool (erm...), ostensibly a wild bird. The best of the action was from the Zeiss and Finger hides. Good views of Ruff and Black-tailed Godwits were obtained. Some of the group had brilliant views of a Cetti's Warbler sitting right out in the open. Good numbers of Fieldfares and Redwings were working their way along the hedgerows. The trip list was 66 species. not a bad day total

Dryslwyn, Cilsarn Bridge & Tregaron - December 13th 2015

The Scots would have described it as a *dreich* day. Nevertheless, nine hardy souls gathered in the car park below Dryslwyn Castle. The river below had burst its banks and occupied the flood plain. From the car park we saw Teal, Wigeon, Shoveler, Curlew and Greylag Geese. We next scrambled up to the castle, where we obtained a wonderful view of the valley below. (see John Duffy's photo on the next page). At least 15 Whooper Swans were gathered on a meander in the river, together with plenty of Lapwing. Paul Seligman then got us all on to an Otter that was hunting in mid stream.

Following a tip off, we next walked in to the village in search of Tree Sparrows. We weren't disappointed, as there were a couple visiting a garden feeder. Also here we saw a male Brambling, plus a couple of Goldcrests. John Wilson and John Duffy caught sight of a Marsh Tit too.

We gave Cilsarn a miss and went straight on to Tregaron. Luckily the rain held off as we took the footpath across the bog. It was rather disappointing. A couple of Red Kites were seen in the distance plus Buzzard, Cormorant, 3 more Whoopers, Stonechat, Long-tailed Tit, Grey Wagtail, Reed Bunting and Bullfinch. The highlight here was undoubtedly the party of Willow Tits that were in the path side scrub. At least three were seen. Unfortunately no harriers were seen.

On our way home we stopped at Pont Einon. Here we picked up a very unexpected sighting - a Grey Plover (third ever site record).



The view from Dryslwyn Castle, overlooking the flooded Twyi Valley ©John Duffy

INDOOR MEETINGS

Sri Lanka - October 6th 2015 (John Wilson)

John kicked off the indoor season with an interesting account of his 2014 trip to Sri Lanka. We saw both still photos and video clips of the islands' spectacular wildlife. Not only did we see birds but also elephants, leopards, crocodiles, lizards and snakes. The colourful temples in Kandy were also highlighted. Many thanks to John for all his hard work putting this presentation together.

Queensland - November 4th 2015 (Paul Bowden)

Paul is a regular contributor to our indoor meetings programme. In 2010 he was lucky enough to travel to Queensland with work and managed to tag some bird watching on to the end of his trip. Paul showed us some excellent pictures of both habitat and bird species. He visited Brisbane and Cairns. We were treated to photos of a variety of colourful birds, including lorikeets, honeyeaters, cranes, doves, riflebirds etc. Perhaps the most spectacular were the close up shots of Cassowaries. The second half of his presentation was some stunning HD video footage. Many thanks, Paul.

India - December 1st 2015 (Richard Smith)

A slight change to the advertised talk. I gather Richard had so much "stuff" from his recent trip to India he found it hard to cut things out. He guided us through visits to reserves in the central Indian region of Nagpur. Apart from photos of the spectacular birdlife, we were treated to some brilliant shots of tigers, leopards and bears. (To paraphrase Richard "I knew it was good shot of a tiger because the whiskers were in focus.") Richard has been lucky enough to visit this area twice, once in the wet season and again in the dry season. The contrast was remarkable. Yet another great talk, Thanks Richard.

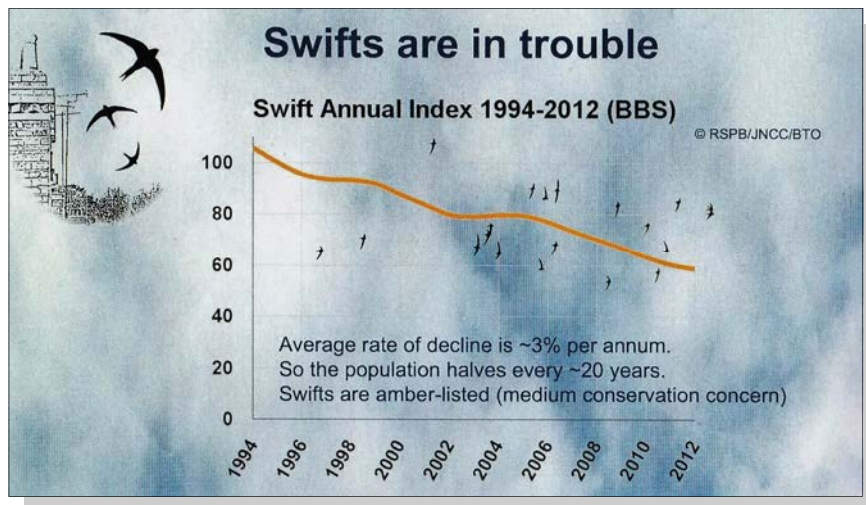
Unfortunately the Members' Own scheduled for January 5th 2016 was cancelled



SWIFTS UPDATE

In the last issue, Julia Barrell and Linda Newton supplied an article on Swifts. Swifts are truly remarkable birds, living life in the fast lane. One Swift was recorded flying at 70 m.p.h., the fastest flyer in level flight. They spend the first 2 or 3 years, prior to breeding, in the air, never landing. They eat, sleep and mate in the air. Recent studies show that they can shut down half of their brain, enabling them to sleep whilst on the wing but they are in trouble.

There is no doubt that Swift numbers are plummeting, as is shown in the following graph. A look at the East Glamorgan Bird Atlas (<http://www.eastglamorganbirdatlas.org.uk>) also shows dramatic declines in our region.



What can we do about it? The reasons for the decline are not fully understood. One possible reason is likely to be loss of nesting sites. They usually return to traditional nest sites, nesting in loose colonies. The provision of nest boxes or nest bricks may be helpful. If there are Swifts nesting nearby, there is more likelihood of successfully attracting birds to use boxes. To attract birds to “new” sites, calls need to be played to attract them.

Can you help?

We are looking for volunteers to act as local Swift Champions. What will this will involve?

- Undertaking a survey of your neighbourhood to ascertain whether there are Swifts nesting (and submitting records of course ☺)
- Talking to neighbours to point out that they have “special” birds nesting nearby
- Ascertaining whether there is potential for a nest box scheme in your locality

If you think you can help, please contact Julia, Linda or Alan

Julia - jsbarrell@hotmail.com
Linda - wyverne.lin@gmail.com
Alan - alanrosney@gmail.com



BTO NEWS

NEWS III



Good numbers of volunteers are helping us cover our coastline for the latest Non-Estuarine Waterbird Survey (NEWS III). The survey involves making a single low-tide count of all birds along a stretch of our coastline, usually no more than 2km in length. In particular, the survey will help understand population sizes of species that are not well covered by other surveys, e.g., Purple Sandpiper and Turnstone.

The survey closes on 31 January 2016, so there's still time to get involved. In particular, a number of sectors are vacant around Barry and Gileston. Please get in touch if you'd like to take part.

NEWS III <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/webs/taking-part/non-estuarine-waterbird-survey-iii>

Preliminary Report on the 2015 Breeding Season

The initial findings of the last breeding season have recently been made available from data gathered by 3 key schemes - the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), Ringing and the Nest Recording Scheme. Long-term trends in abundance, survival and breeding success generated by these schemes are presented on the BirdTrends pages.

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs>

Ringing, <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing>

Nest Recording Scheme, <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs>

BirdTrends, <http://www.bto.org/about-birds/birdtrends/2015>

Preliminary Report on the 2015 Breeding Season, <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs/results/nrs-preliminary-results-2015>

Curlew Appeal

We looked at the Curlew in the "Confusion Species" section of the newsletter in the last edition. This article concerns an appeal launched by the BTO (*Ed*).

The long, decurved bill, reminiscent of a crescent moon, and its evocative bubbling call are distinctive characteristics that make the Curlew so easily identifiable. Yet it is in real danger of becoming a thing of the past as it has just become one of the newest additions to the *British Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern* and deemed to be of the highest conservation priority.

At the end of the Second World War, pairs of breeding Curlew could be found in Glamorgan from the Rhymney Valley to west Gower (*Hurford & Lansdown, 1995*). The *East Glamorgan 2007-11 Atlas* however, shows that breeding was only confirmed from one 10km square around Merthyr. Our local decline is mirrored across the UK. The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) shows a 46% decline across the UK in the last two decades, with this figure exceeding 50% in Wales and Scotland.



Critically, the UK holds 28% of Europe's breeding Curlew, meaning that declines here represent the loss of a substantial portion of Europe's total breeding Curlew population.

The UK's population of wintering Curlew is also of global importance, representing nearly one-fifth of the world population. Resident breeding Curlew are joined in winter by birds from the Continent and Scandinavia. The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) however, estimates about a 20% decline in Curlew numbers over the last 15 years.

To unpick the causes of Curlew population decline the BTO is planning a ground-breaking programme of research, analysing existing datasets to investigate patterns of extinction and colonisation and utilising revolutionary new technology to track wintering Curlew. The sooner we can start on this research, the sooner we can understand the conservation actions needed to help Curlew recover.

Our target for the first year is **£100,000** to begin this vitally important research.

Find out more about the appeal and some of the questions BTO wants to investigate or make a donation to help reverse the fortunes of this beautiful bird.

British Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern, <http://www.bto.org/science/monitoring/psob>

Hurford, C. & Lansdowne, P. (1995) *Birds of Glamorgan*, Cardiff : D. Brown & Sons Ltd.

East Glamorgan 2007-11 Atlas, <http://www.eastglamorganbirdatlas.org.uk>

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs>

Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS), <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/webs>

BTO Curlew Appeal, <http://www.bto.org/support-us/appeals/bto-curlew-appeal>

Wayne Morris

BTO Regional Representative in East Glamorgan, eastglambto@gmail.com

Dan Jenkins-Jones

Local WeBS Organiser in East Glamorgan, eastglamwebs@gmail.com

<http://eastglambto.wordpress.com>

2014 Eastern Glamorgan Bird Report - errata

By now everyone should have received his or her 2014 Bird Report. It seems almost inevitable that one or two errors slip through the net. First, I have apologised by letter to the photographer concerned, but this is a public apology for the wrong caption under the photograph of two Black-throated Divers in Barry harbour, which was taken by Hayden Lack, and not Paul Denning. Apologies also to Paul whose photo of a single Black-throated Diver was above. Second, re the Hooded Crow seen at Sker - this bird was found by Dean Bolt on 30th April. The reported observation and discovery on 29th is incorrect and was due to an error in the data received.

John Wilson



CELEBRATING TWENTY YEARS OF GARDEN BIRDWATCH

Garden BirdWatch is the largest year-round survey of garden birds in the world. Through simple weekly observations we can learn how, when and why birds and other wildlife use our gardens (a habitat that can't be studied without the help of citizen scientists). When the survey began in 1995 people were less aware of the significance of gardens as habitats for our wildlife and funding was hard to come by for garden surveys. Fortunately Garden BirdWatchers believed in such surveys and it's with thanks to our supporters that we reached our 20th anniversary in 2015.

Over 7.3 million weekly submissions have been made in the past twenty years. There has been at least one week's data submitted from an impressive 30,271 gardens. Many participants have said that the survey enables them to contribute to an important scientific survey, whilst they engage in one of their favourite pastimes of watching garden birds. An amazing 708 people have taken part for the duration of the survey, including one member in Monmouthshire who has only missed 4 weeks in all that time! 5% of Garden BirdWatchers live in Wales (86.5% in England, 7% in Scotland and 1% in Northern Ireland).

On average 29 different bird species have been recorded per garden (our Swansea garden attracts an average of 15 per week). Other wildlife, such as mammals and a range of insects, can also be noted (data which is then shared with relevant organisations) and a staggering 481 different species have now been recorded. The average number of species per garden is 34.9 but, whilst we have a respectable garden list of 65, one Cumbrian garden has recorded 167!

Participants typically see three more bird species in their garden now than they would have done in 1995. Blackbird, Blue Tit and Robin are still among the top five species seen in gardens, but who would have envisaged that the House Sparrow would drop out of this five and that Woodpigeon would creep up? By studying garden birds over a long period of time we have seen once rare garden visitors, such as Goldfinch and Great Spotted Woodpecker, become more familiar as they are increasingly attracted to the food we provide. In recent years, milder winters are bringing fewer migrant thrushes, such as Redwing and Fieldfare, in to gardens.

Garden BirdWatch data is helping the BTO and its partners to understand the role that disease can play in garden wildlife populations. We have witnessed a dramatic 35% decline in the population of Greenfinch since trichomonosis began affecting this species in 2005. This decline has been very evident in our garden as back in 2005 we regularly counted 20 to 50 Greenfinches but over the past few years we've rarely counted more than three.

Make Your Garden Count – There's Still a Lot to Learn

If you already spend a few minutes per week watching the birds in your garden, please consider joining Garden BirdWatch and help contribute records towards the next twenty years. For more information, please visit the website or give me a call. Please also get in touch if you'd like to book a talk (Swansea and surrounding areas).

Amanda Skull, Garden BirdWatch Ambassador
07952 758293 (evenings & weekends only)

gbw@hafi.co.uk www.bto.org/gbw
Follow me on Twitter @amanda_skull



FUTURE EVENTS

Field trips

Sunday 17th January - Whiteford Point (to be led by Alan Rosney)
 Wednesday 27th January - Rhossili & Worms Head
 Sunday 14th February - Rhymney Great Wharf & environs
 Wednesday 24th February - Cosmeston & Cardiff Bay
 Saturday 26th March - Forest of Dean (N.B. change of date from original programme)

Contact John Wilson at least 7 days before the due date. Departure times will vary. Details will be posted on the club website. John will be able to give more information. Don't forget the walk at Kenfig on the third Saturday of the month. Meet at the Reserve Centre at 9 a.m.

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

Tuesday 2nd February - Alaska with Dave Rich
 Tuesday 1st March - Oriental night

SUBMISSION DEADLINE for the next newsletter is **Saturday 19th March**

CONTACT DETAILS

See the GBC website for further details - e-mail addresses etc.

Chair	Secretary	Treasurer	Bird Report Editor/Field Trips
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Membership Sec/Newsletter	Indoor Meetings Organiser	Publicity Officer	Mapmate Hub
<p>Alan Rosney 10, Parc-y-Nant, Nantgarw, RCT CF15 7TJ 01443 841555/07906558489</p>	<p>Paul Denning 17, Maes Maelwg, Beddau, RCT CF38 2LD 01443 202607</p>	<p>Position currently vacant</p>	<p>David Carrington Kenfig National Nature Reserve Tonkenfig, Bridgend CF33 4PT 01656 743386 07779978738</p>
BTO Representative	BTO WeBS Organiser	Bird Recorder (East)/Chair of GRC	Bird Recorder (West)
<p>Wayne Morris, 8, Hughes Street, Pen-y-Graig, RCT CF40 1LX 01443 430284 eastglambto@gmail.com</p>	<p>Daniel-Jenkins Jones 18, St. Margaret's Road, Whitchurch, Cardiff CF14 7AA 02920 621394 eastglamwebs@gmail.com</p>	<p>David Gilmore 116, Donald Street Cardiff CF24 4TN d.gilmore2@ntlworld.com</p>	<p>Mark Hipkin 6, Holly Road, Neath 01639 638475/07875431917 markhipkin1@gmail.com</p>