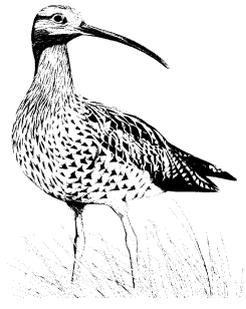




# THE UPPER ONNY WILDLIFE GROUP



## Report 2016

The Group was formed in 2003, to work within the local community to find out more about the local populations of Lapwings, Curlews, Skylarks and other wildlife, and to help in their conservation.

Members all live or work in the area. New members are welcome, and we need new people to help.

We cover a total area of about 125 square kilometres, between the Long Mynd and the Welsh Border (from just north of Bridges, Pennerley and Shelve, as far south as Horderley and Bishops Castle). Most of this area is within the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

We have carried out a Breeding Bird Survey each year since 2004, concentrating on Curlew and Lapwing.

Farmers with nests on their land are advised of their presence, and encouraged to take appropriate conservation measures. This includes joining one of Natural England's farm payment schemes, so farmers are rewarded financially for conservation.

We worked with the Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) Ground-nesting Bird Recovery Project to try and reverse this decline, and we launched an Appeal to raise funds to monitor nests and chicks, to find out the reasons why there are so few young (see page 3).

We have carried out plant surveys, and we are identifying potential Wildlife Sites. Events are held to involve more people in this work (see back page). The project to clear invasive species continued in 2016.

### *Curlew – Still Disappearing Fast*



The bubbling call of Curlews is one of the first welcome signs of spring, and in 2004 we found close to 40 pairs. However, very few young birds fledge, and the older ones are dying off, so now there are only around 27 – almost

one third (29%) have gone in only 13 years. The slight recovery in 2016 was expected, as several young that fledged in 2014 will have returned to their natal area to breed. As we think no young fledged in 2015, the recovery is not expected to continue.

Curlews are declining everywhere, and they were added to the *Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern in 2015*, but our area is still very important for them – it holds perhaps one-fifth of the Shropshire population. Here they inhabit wet grassland, rushy pasture hay meadows, and hay and silage crops. We worked closely with the LPS Project, and our surveys identified the areas where Curlews nest, and helped it to find over 30 nests in 2015 and 2016.

Although land management has played a part in the long-term decline, in the last two years almost all the nests found were predated. Monitoring of many more nests is needed before an Action Plan can be developed to reverse the decline.

We are continuing our Appeal to help fund the necessary research work in future.  
Please Contribute

### *Lapwing – Still on the Slippery Slope?*



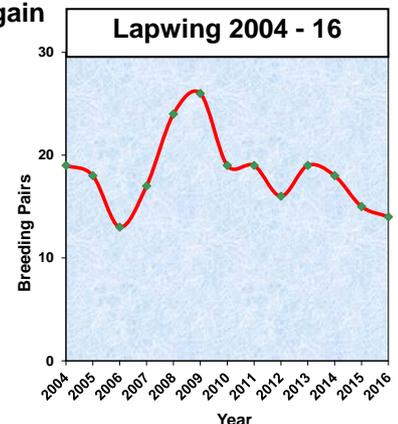
In our first three years 2004 - 06, the breeding population declined from 19 to 13 pairs. If that rate of decline had continued, Lapwings would have been lost within two more years.

We launched a Lapwing Recovery

Project, and worked with several individual farmers and Natural England to reverse the decline. We were successful initially, and the population increased to 26 pairs by 2009, but loss of important habitat on a single farm led to a further decline, and by 2010 the

population was down again to when we started. It had been stable at 17-19 pairs for five years, but two more pairs were lost in 2015, and another in 2016.

Lapwings are now restricted to only a few farms, and we are working with the farmers and Natural England to improve habitat and breeding success, to reverse the long-term decline.



Distribution Maps for Lapwing and Curlew can be found on our website.  
Rapid and Effective Action is Needed if they are not to Disappear Forever

## Nest Box Schemes

The Group operates three nest box schemes, for Dippers, Barn Owls and small woodland birds. Breeding success in all three nest box schemes was much better in 2014 than in 2013, as weather conditions were more favourable, and the improvement continued in 2015 and 2016.

### Barn Owls



The Group has provided special Nest Boxes to Farmers and Landowners with suitable habitat, and 31 have been installed altogether.

In 2013, Barn Owls had their worst breeding season for many years, but a slow recovery started, and in 2014 at least 3 young fledged, while four boxes were occupied in 2015. 2016 was better still: 25 boxes were checked, and there were Barn Owl nests in 6 of them, 5 were successful, and 15 young and a pair of adults were ringed. Most, if not all, the ringed young will have fledged.

If you think you have a suitable site for a box, or if you see a Barn Owl, we'd like to know, please.

### Small Woodland Birds

We provide up to 10 small nest boxes to people in our area who have a suitable site, and who agree to maintain them, provide us with a report on the birds that use them, and the outcome. Five members reported on 62 nest boxes. Occupancy rate was low, but 3 were occupied by Great Tit, 12 by Blue Tit, and 1 by Redstart. All 7 Redstart chicks fledged, and there were at least 17 Great Tit and 42 Blue Tit chicks, but the number that fledged is unknown. No other species were recorded.

In addition, boxes have been installed at prime locations, including the banks of the East and West Onny. Redstart and Pied Flycatcher chicks in these boxes have been ringed as part of the BTO scheme. By 2016, 465 boxes had been put up, and nine species have nested in them altogether. 46% were occupied, and Pied Flycatcher (right), a summer visitor from Africa, occupied 44 boxes, almost 10%, and 236 chicks were ringed, considerably more than in 2015. 52 adults were also caught, and 17 (33%) had already been ringed in previous years, at different sites (3) or the same site (14). The remaining 35 were ringed for the first time. Redstarts occupied 6 boxes, and 3 adults and 15 chicks were ringed. Great Tit (24), Blue Tit (59) and Nuthatch (5) also nested in these boxes,



*If you would like to participate, please let us know.*

### Dippers



Dippers feed almost exclusively on larvae that live on the stony beds of fast flowing streams, and the Upper Onny is one of their strongholds in Shropshire. Some build nests on ledges on bridges, and they take readily to nest boxes. Each box must be located directly above the water, in a position where predators are unable to reach it. Since 2005, over 50 boxes have been installed, under most bridges.

Upstream from Horderley, in 2016, 24 sites were checked, 17 sites were occupied, and 12 of them were in boxes/pipes. 27 separate nesting attempts resulted in 10 broods ringed (totalling 34 young). It is thought that no broods were missed. Conditions were better this year, and more young fledged than for many years.

Over several years, we have shown that the nest box scheme has increased the population – there are more potential nest sites, and the pairs that nest in boxes produce more fledged young. This work is part of a wider project, *Dippers in the Teme Catchment*. A report for 2011 – 12 can be found on the website. The 2013-16 Dipper report will be on the website later in 2017.

## Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS)

The LPS is funded by the Heritage Lottery, and includes most of the Upper Onny area. It involves several partner organisations, and is delivering 15 local heritage, wildlife and education projects up until spring 2018. At the outset we proposed that the LPS should promote the conservation of Ground-nesting Birds, particularly Curlews, and should set up new Community Wildlife Groups to find them, and involve more people in finding and recording all wildlife. This was agreed, and two new groups have been established, to cover plants as well as birds. The LPS also now funds the Upper Onny Wildlife Group. The two new Community Wildlife Groups, covering the Rea Valley and the Camlad Valley, have been operational for two years. To see their results, and for more information, visit [www.stiperstonesandcorndon.co.uk](http://www.stiperstonesandcorndon.co.uk)



# Conservation Work

## Curlews



We have promoted the conservation of Curlews since our monitoring showed they were disappearing, 10 years ago. We have worked with individual farmers, and with Natural England, to try and ensure that the best habitats are included in Environmental

Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (HLS) and Environmental Stewardship Agreements, so farmers receive payments to manage their land sympathetically. However, a greater understanding is needed of the reasons why the population continues to fall. Therefore when the LPS started, we proposed that it should include a Ground-nesting Bird Recovery Project. The LPS has engaged farmers in this work, initially for permission for monitoring on their land. Almost all value the Curlews, and want to help. If action to reverse the decline is to be successful, farmers need to be actively involved, and we welcome their support.

Our survey results have been a big help in locating nests. The LPS Project has monitored over 30 of them during the past two breeding seasons to discover why Curlews are failing to breed successfully. Over that time only 3 nests managed to get beyond egg stage each year. During the 2016 season the three nests that successfully hatched chicks were surrounded by protective electric fencing. No chicks survived from the nests monitored and the major cause of failure was predation. Foxes were found to be the main predator. More information can be found on the LPS website (see page 2).

The 3 Community Wildlife Groups covering the whole of the LPS area found an estimated 45 – 50 breeding pairs in 2016, over 25% of the County population, but found no evidence of any fledged young.

The decline of Curlews has taken place over many years, and finding the causes, and reversing it, will be an equally long-term process. The LPS finishes in March 2018, but we will need nest monitoring and

protection well beyond that. UOWG is therefore continuing our Appeal to help raise funds for this crucial work in future years, and we intend to be fully involved in the successor project. Details of our Appeal can be found on our website (see below).

## Invasive Species

Himalayan balsam and Japanese Knotweed are non-native invasive plants that are colonising many rivers and streams. The Group secured funding from the AONB Conservation Fund, LPS and Natural England for the second year of a two stage project: find where they occur along the Onny upstream from the confluence at Eaton, to Bridges on the East Onny and Onny Cottage on the West Onny, and then eradicate them where possible.

When approached, all landowners were sympathetic, and some had already been controlling the balsam.

Initial spot checks in 2015 found that the East Onny was free of Himalayan balsam whereas it was found right at the top of the West Onny just into Wales at White Grit, and also in a tributary near the Bog. Large amounts were also found along the Crifftin Brook.

This year we concentrated on the Himalayan balsam, eradicating it by pulling wherever possible. We covered the full length of the West Onny then moved to the Crifftin Brook and further downstream onto the main Onny as far as Plowden bridge. We also cleared a site at the headwaters of the Rea brook and at the Bog.

This year a source higher up on the west Onny was found and also another site at the Bog

Volunteers were recruited to help with clearance, through the LPS, NE and more publicity. Four local people helped, and a group from an American environmental college came for half a day, resulting in a total of 18 volunteer days.

Japanese knotweed was only located in a few places, and reported to NE. A flyer was produced for landowners on both species and how to control them.

The problem is being kept under control here with a reasonable input of time and money, unlike other river systems where it is totally out of control. The Group's project will hopefully continue in 2017. A full report can be found on the website.

---

## Annual Report

This short report summarises the results of our work in 2016. It will be widely distributed in the area. Previous Reports can be found on the website.

## Support

We have the active support of the Landscape Partnership Scheme, AONB Partnership, Natural England, RSPB, National Trust and the Shropshire Wildlife Trust, all of whom have funded our work in the past. The LPS has also funded our work in 2016.

## Website

UOWG was the first of eight Community Wildlife Groups in the south Shropshire Hills. A website has been set up to promote the work of all these groups.

[www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk)

The Upper Onny Programme, including Bird and Plant walks, and Notice of Events and Meetings, are posted on the website. Please look at it.

We want to involve more local people. Enthusiasm and interest in wildlife is more important than expertise. Training is provided for anyone that wants it. We have proved that local people can make a difference, and we can do even more with your support. Please help.

## ***Plants and Wild Flowers, and Wildlife Sites***

UOWG initially concentrated on Birds, but it has also carried out a considerable amount of survey work on Wild Flowers and plants. A separate Plant Group was established in 2013, to organise and develop this work.

### ***Plants & Wild Flowers***

A series of outings and training days started in 2014, with backing from Natural England. Members of the new Rea Valley and Camlad Valley Community Wildlife Groups were encouraged to participate, and several visits were made to sites in the wider LPS area. The outings were designed to record the plants at each site, and provide informal training for participants to improve their knowledge and identification skills, and then, if they wish, carry out their own survey work. There were 11 events and outings in 2016:-

13 March: met at the Gleanings for a social event to discuss last year's work and 2016 plans. 20 people present.

7 April: Lichens training day. Bob Kemp gave a very clear introduction. 12 present.

29 April 29: Dan Wrench led, teaching the basics of mosses and liverworts [bryophytes]. 14 present

10 April: Ancient trees. Visit to an unusual area of old wood pasture near Lydham. Returned two weeks later to study lichens with Bob Kemp.

14 May: Snead churchyard and the surrounding fields and woodland, with Early purple orchids. 9 present.

29 May: Minsterley meadows SSSI. Traditionally managed, with a lot of Green Winged orchids. 12 present

16 June: Hope Common. Grazed meadows, old coppice oak woodland and stream, with Wood horsetail. 7 present

5 July: White Grit Meadows. Two adjacent SSSIs, and another new species rich hay meadow, with Greater Burnet, Dyers Greenweed and Southern marsh orchid. 12 present

7 July: Hogstow hayfields. We were shown around these species rich meadows by the owner. 8 present

17 July: Stapeley Common, a large and varied area with some particularly good wet flushes. 7 present

4 August: Corndon Hill SSSI. The wet flushes around the base of the hill had marsh violet, the small carnivorous plant sundew and a bright yellow-green fungi Citrine waxcap, only the second record for Montgomeryshire. The base-rich volcanic rock gives rise to some unusual ferns, including Parsley fern. 4 present

18 October: Fungi Foray at the Bog and Pennerly Meadows, led by Jo Weightman. 59 species recorded at the former and 24 species at latter, including 8 waxcaps. Blushing waxcap, a first record for Shropshire, and the rare Olive earthtongue were both found at Pennerley. 11 present.

We continue looking for unimproved meadows and working with the Marches meadow Group.

### ***Roadside Verges Surveys***

On 8 April we met for an afternoon training session at the Gleanings. 8 people came. By the end of 2016, the majority of the area had been surveyed and we aim to finish it in 2017. 20 people have taken part. We have covered approximately 150 kilometres of verges in the Upper Onny area, 100 km in the Rea valley area and 50 km in the Camlad valley area. Shropshire Council has this information, and the 2017 results will be added.

Hopefully the remaining species rich verges will be managed in a more sympathetic way by Shropshire Council, with the help of local Parish Councils [some of whom have already expressed interest].

### ***Recording for the Shropshire Wildlife Trust***

In addition to the above outings and surveys Shropshire Wildlife Trust arranged for the group to monitor 9 Local Wildlife Sites and 4 potential Wildlife Sites. At each site:-

- The different habitats were mapped (with reference to plant communities where possible)
- The condition of each habitat was assessed
- A full plant list was produced, other species of interest were noted, and a photographic record was made.

We visited wetland, grassland and woodland sites and mostly they were in good condition.

Many thanks to everybody that came on the outings and especially to those who contributed as surveyors, tutors, owners and managers of the sites we visited. Amore detailed report can be found on the website.

Bird Walks and Plant Outings were organised in 2016, to introduce new people to the fascinating wildlife of our spectacular area. More will be organised in 2017. All welcome.

If you want any further information about these events, or about the Group, or a copy of the Group's previous Annual Reports, look on the website [www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk)

You can contact us, or join, through the website or via the Secretary,  
Alyson Small, Hill Cottage, The Bog, Minsterley, SY5 0NL  
01743 791476 [alyflo@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:alyflo@yahoo.co.uk)

