Upper Clun

Community Wildlife Group

Report 2013

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INTRODUCTION

The *Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group* was formed in 2007, following extensive promotion and development work in the area initiated by 'Down to Earth in the Clun Forest' as part of the Shropshire Hills AONB's Blue Remembered Hills Project. This process was described in the Group's 2007 report. The first Annual Public Meeting in November 2007 agreed the Aims and Objectives, and its area of operation, and elected a Committee.

The Group was set up to contribute to local knowledge and conservation of popular "flagship" wildlife species, by undertaking surveys to establish their status, and promoting conservation by working with farmers and landowners to safeguard and increase important habitats. It complements but does not duplicate the work of either *Land, Life and Livelihoods,* or the Clun and Bishop's Castle branch of the Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT). Both Groups have worked closely with, and actively supported, the Wildlife Group.

The Group has carried out Bird and Plant surveys each year since 2007, and Butterfly surveys since 2010, and well over 100 different people have been involved. This Report presents the results for the current year, and updates our knowledge of wildlife in the area.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The Group will

- Undertake survey work to establish the status of key bird, plant and butterfly species and habitats
- Encourage and enhance local interest in wildlife
- Actively promote conservation.

AREA & MEMBERSHIP

The Group covers the catchment area of the River Clun west of Clun, including the River Unk and the Folly Brook, plus the part of the Bettws-y-Crwyn parish that is outside the River Clun catchment area. It includes the whole of the parishes of Newcastle, Bettws-y-Crwyn & Mainstone, and parts of the parishes of Clun, Colebatch and Llanfair Waterdine.

The Group is open to anyone who lives or works in the area, and who wants to actively contribute to local knowledge and conservation. It is for everyone in the community, not just experts. Interest in the area, and enthusiasm, are far more important than detailed knowledge. The target birds and plants are important and easy to recognise and search for. Initial training on identification and simple survey methods, and regular support and advice, is provided, so members learn a lot, and the work is very enjoyable.

To help recruit and involve new members, a series of Bird Walks and Plant Walks have been organised since 2009. Butterfly events started in 2011.

The mailing list has grown each year, and now includes over 220 local people at more than 170 addresses, plus representatives of various organisations.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Role of the Committee is to

- organise survey work
- involve more local people
- work with local people and other groups to develop a policy for Conservation Action
- seek to influence other organisations
- obtain and manage funds to continue existing work and develop new projects.

The membership, and details of meetings in 2013, are set out in the Annexe to the Report.

PUBLICITY

The Group's activities have been well publicised in the area, through posters and press releases, and articles in the *Clun Chronicle.*

WEBSITE

There is a website for all the Community Wildlife Groups, with separate pages for the Upper Clun Group www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk. Future events and news will be listed. Members are requested to check the website periodically, particularly before events.

CO-OPERATION WITH FARMERS, LANDOWNERS & OTHER ORGANISATIONS

The vast majority of the area is farmland, and almost all of the birds, plants and butterflies that the Group wishes to conserve live on it. Close co-operation with farmers is therefore crucial to our success.

We will work closely with individual farmers and landowners. We have the support of Land, Life and Livelihoods, the Clun & Bishop's Castle Branch of the Wildlife Trust, and the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership. We will also work closely with Government Agencies, and try to influence them too.

The Group has continued to actively promote conservation of popular "flagship" wildlife species by working with farmers, landowners, Government Agencies and the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership to protect and restore important habitats.

In 2010, we brought together the results of four years' survey work to identify some of the best sites for birds, plants & butterflies in the Upper Clun. These sites have survived thanks to the way they have been managed, and we have subsequently worked with some of the land owners to help ensure that they continue to be managed in the same way. We have now made personal contact with almost all the farmers who own one of these high-quality sites, and we hope the information we have collected is useful to them. We have worked with both farmers and Natural England to ensure that the best wildlife sites are incorporated into Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (HLS) agreements.

This work is described in the Chapter on Conservation Action later in this Report.

ACTIVITIES & SURVEYS

Since its launch in 2007, the Group has set out to find all breeding pairs of Lapwing and Curlew, monitor other important farmland birds and their habitats, and promote the conservation of Barn Owls, Dippers and woodland birds through provision of nest boxes. This will build on local knowledge of Lapwing and Curlew gained since 2004.

In 2007, a dozen different wild flowers were also located, and a further 12 plants indicative of woodland, and 12 indicative of grassland, were included in the 2008 surveys. These results were used to highlight the most important sites, and these sites have been the subject of detailed Plant surveys in subsequent years since 2009, with the aim of getting the best sites adopted as County Wildlife Sites.

The three Nature Reserves in the Upper Clun area, Rhos Fiddle, Lower Shortditch and Mason's Bank, have also been surveyed in some years.

The area was initially divided into 31 squares, 2x2 kilometre squares on the Ordnance Survey National Grid. A map showing these squares has been included in previous Annual Reports. The Group recruited a local member to survey each of these squares for birds and/or plants each year, and well over 100 people have either undertaken surveys, or provided additional useful information, since 2007. However, since 2009, only the best sites have been selected for further survey work, and many of them do not fall into single squares, so this division of the area into squares is no longer important. The map of the area, divided up into these squares, can be viewed on the website.

Butterfly surveys, supported by Butterfly Conservation and concentrating on Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, were started in 2010.

The aims and results of these surveys are described elsewhere in this Report.

COVERING OTHER TYPES OF WILDLIFE

The Group wants to expand its activities, and survey and promote conservation of other types of wildlife. These activities will be shaped by the interests of all the people who join.

PREVIOUS FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY WILDLIFE GROUPS

Funding was secured, from October 2011 until June 2013, to support three existing Community Wildlife Groups, and develop three new ones, in the Shropshire Hills AONB. The funding was part of the “LEADER in the Shropshire Hills” programme, co-ordinated by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership with Defra as the Managing Authority.

The aim was to enable and encourage local people to survey and record local wildlife of conservation concern, and participate in action to protect and enhance species and habitats through the appropriate BAP Priority Areas for Action.

The Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group is one of the original three CWGs that received financial support from the project, and all activities up until June 2013 were financed by LEADER. The National Trust was the lead organisation and banker

Thanks to the SHAONB LEADER Local Action Group for approving the project. This support is hereby gratefully acknowledged:-
“LEADER in the Shropshire Hills: Project part financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development 2007-2013: Europe investing in rural areas”.

FUTURE FUNDING

The Group is not currently in receipt of any grants. Efforts will therefore be made to raise funds by asking people attending meetings and events to make donations, and support raffles. Members have not been asked to contribute since the Group started, and the Committee hopes to avoid having to charge a membership subscription, but hopefully members will now support the Group financially, as well as through voluntary activity.

Grant Applications will be made when the opportunity arises.

CONSTITUTION

To make Grant Applications, it is necessary to have written Constitution. The Committee proposes the adoption of the Constitution set out in Annexe 2, which is similar to those adopted by other Community Wildlife Groups, and which in practice reflects the way the Upper Clun CWG has operated since its foundation.

THE BIRD GROUP

BIRD SURVEYS

Introduction

The primary aim of the Bird Group is to establish the population and distribution of Lapwing and Curlew, and begin to map the distribution of other species of conservation interest. The Target Species have varied from year to year; there were 13 in 2011.

The habitats used in the area by five target species (hedgerow and farmland birds) were recorded in 2008 and 2009, and led to the production of the leaflet *Please Help Hedgerow Birds.* This work was judged to be complete, and was discontinued in 2010.

Results from surveys in the early years highlighted the importance of "wetlands" and the 2009 Report identified a number of such sites that have been targeted from 2010 onwards.

Up until 2011, the Group attempted to survey all 31 of the 2x2 kilometre squares in the area, focusing increasingly on Curlew (as Lapwings steadily disappeared from the area). However, by 2010 it was already clear that Curlew was becoming increasingly difficult to record. As the population declines, and becomes more fragmented, the interactions between pairs reduces. There is less flight and less vocalisation, making it harder to locate and count the birds. Therefore a growing proportion of the Curlew data has come from a network of resident recorders, who, living in the area, are much better placed to observe what Curlew activity there is. In recognition of these difficulties, and to ensure that the data gathered on Curlew, and their interpretation, were as robust as possible, it was decided that the map survey of all 31 squares in the Upper Clun should be replaced in 2011 by an intensive survey of the Curlew strongholds. This was continued in 2012 and 2013.

Survey Design

The new survey regime introduced in 2011 proved popular with surveyors, and generated more records than had been the case in the preceding couple of years, so it was continued in 2012 and this year. Resident recorders, or any other member, can email Curlew observations as they occur, and the result has been a greater volume of information.

Operation Curlew again enlisted a group of volunteers to carry out map-based surveys of agreed target areas. These were sites where Curlew had been recorded regularly over the years, and the objective was to determine as far as possible how many territories were occupied. Search areas were deliberately drawn across apparent territory boundaries, based on previous fieldwork, so that any territorial behaviour might be captured.

Resident recorders monitored their home areas, sending in their records by email.

Each new surveyor was briefed on the history of Curlew activity in their area, and on the outcomes hoped for in terms of distinguishing pairs of Curlew in adjacent territories.

The Methodology and Recording Instructions for the Bird Surveys were described fully in the 2011 Report (Appendix 1), and can be found on the website.

An email group comprising both sets of observers received regular alerts at key points throughout the season, from first arrival of Curlew, to post-hatching activity that continued into July. This has been effective in prompting members to send in their observations.

All members of the whole Wildlife Group were asked to send in additional "casual" records of Lapwing and Curlew.

Participation and Coverage

A reasonably good volume of Curlew records was received this year, although fewer than in 2012, probably reflecting the exceptionally difficult conditions during parts of the season. There is still a valuable core of members willing to carry out map-based surveys; many observers, however, especially those who live in the area, now send in their records as they occur during the breeding season, rather than participating in formal surveys.

Seven members carried out a total of 28 map-based surveys; 30 others, including resident recorders and "casual" observers, contributed records by phone, email or personal contact, a total of 37 participants. At least 56 hours were spent, excluding the unquantifiable time spent by resident recorders, and during Atlas fieldwork.

In all, 55 Curlew records were received, considerably fewer than the 75 in 2012, but still higher than the 2011 total of 46. Seven records were submitted on maps, some sent electronically, 29 in 48 emails (the remaining emails containing negative returns), and the rest by phone or personal contact. However, it is important to be aware that this creates a bias in the distribution of records. The bulk of observations now come from areas in which members live, or which are visited regularly, so there is a real possibility of Curlew pairs at more remote sites remaining undetected. In addition, weather conditions in recent years have made the already thin population even more difficult to monitor.

Perhaps surprisingly, in view of the exceptionally cold, late spring, the proportion of Curlew records received during the early part of the season, up to mid-April, was only slightly lower in 2013 than 2012. In both years, roughly half of all observations were made during this period. Later in the season, there was a slight decline in the numbers of records submitted in June & July, which may suggest that there were nest failures.

Out of the 16 observers who undertook tetrad surveys or continuous recording (several of whom are local farmers), all except one live within the survey area. Several other local farmers provided valuable information.

In addition to the survey workers, there are now 18 Nest Box hosts

BIRD GROUP RESULTS - SUMMARY

No breeding Lapwings were found and few young have fledged in recent years. The population has been in steep decline for many years.

Curlews declined from 20 - 22 pairs in 2007 by around 50% in only three years, but the population has been stable since 2009, at around 10 – 12 pairs. However, since Curlews are long-lived, and may return to their breeding territories for many years without producing enough fledged young to sustain the population, this may be a temporary respite. Monitoring is still needed to assess whether the population is in long-term decline.

Also, 15 Dipper nests were found, but no nesting Barn Owls. Four Red Kite nests were also found, but none were successful – no young fledged.

Details of the surveys looking for Curlews and the Other Target Species, and the results, are more fully described below.

LAPWINGS

Fieldwork Results

Lapwing was recorded in three locations, at different points in the season. The most promising report, a pair of Lapwing near a scrape at Black Mountain, was followed up the same day and subsequently, but the birds were not found again. Lapwing calls were heard in the Riddings area, and a pair was seen on a single occasion in May on a field they used to frequent in the Clun Valley.

Interpretation of such fleeting records is difficult. Some may have been birds moving through the area, or searching for new sites after failed breeding attempts. Lapwing, like other birds, suffered disruption to their breeding season with the severe weather in March and April. Alternatively, some may have been first-year non-breeding birds forming a temporary pair-bond.

In the last seven years, Lapwing has been reported breeding, displaying or visiting several different sites, rarely in the same place more than once. This indicates that Lapwings continue to be attracted to the Upper Clun generally, but the pattern of breeding failure and unsettled behaviour suggests that there are no particularly suitable sites, and they view the habitat, with its potential threat of agricultural operations and predation, as poor.

Map 1 shows the approximate location of all breeding Lapwings found by the Group since 2007, together with the nests found previously in 2004 – 06 (Smith 2006). No breeding Lapwings were found in the area in 2009, 2011 or 2013.

Towards Local Extinction?

If any population is to be stable, then the number of young birds that reach breeding age must be equal to the number of older birds dying off. Research elsewhere shows that, based on the known survival rates of first year and adult birds, Lapwings must produce around 0.7 fledged young per pair per year in order to sustain current population levels.

As far as we are aware, no young Lapwing have been produced in the Upper Clun area since 2008. In that year the two breeding pairs produced an unknown number of fledged young, but, in the previous three years, only two young Lapwings are known to have fledged in the whole area, in 2005. Thus the productivity has not been enough to sustain the current (extremely low) population.

Not surprisingly, in view of the poor productivity, the adult breeding population has declined by around a pair a year since 2004, as shown in Figure 1.

The conclusion to be drawn is the same as for some years past: Lapwings continue to return each year, and could become re-established as a successful breeding bird if their habitat requirements were better met. Therefore, to have any chance of avoiding local extinction, action is still vital to recreate suitable habitat. If they do return, action will also be needed to protect nests from risk from agricultural activities, and predation.

The Habitat Requirements of Lapwing, and the reasons for the Population Decline, were described in the Group's 2010 (and previous) Report, and are not reproduced here. Full details are provided in Shrub's book *The Lapwing*, and papers by Sheldon, listed in the References.

Map 1. Approximate location of Lapwing Breeding Sites 2004 - 13

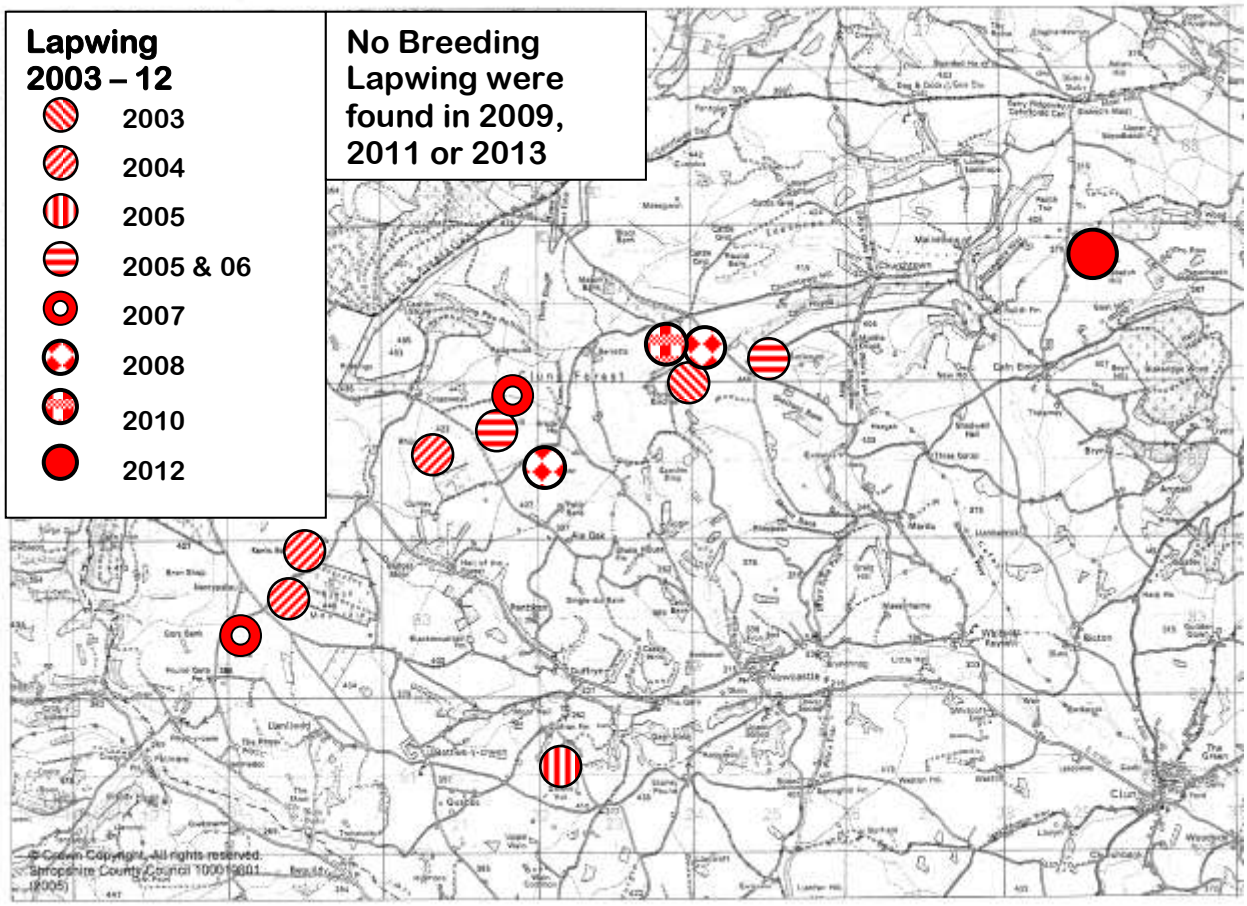
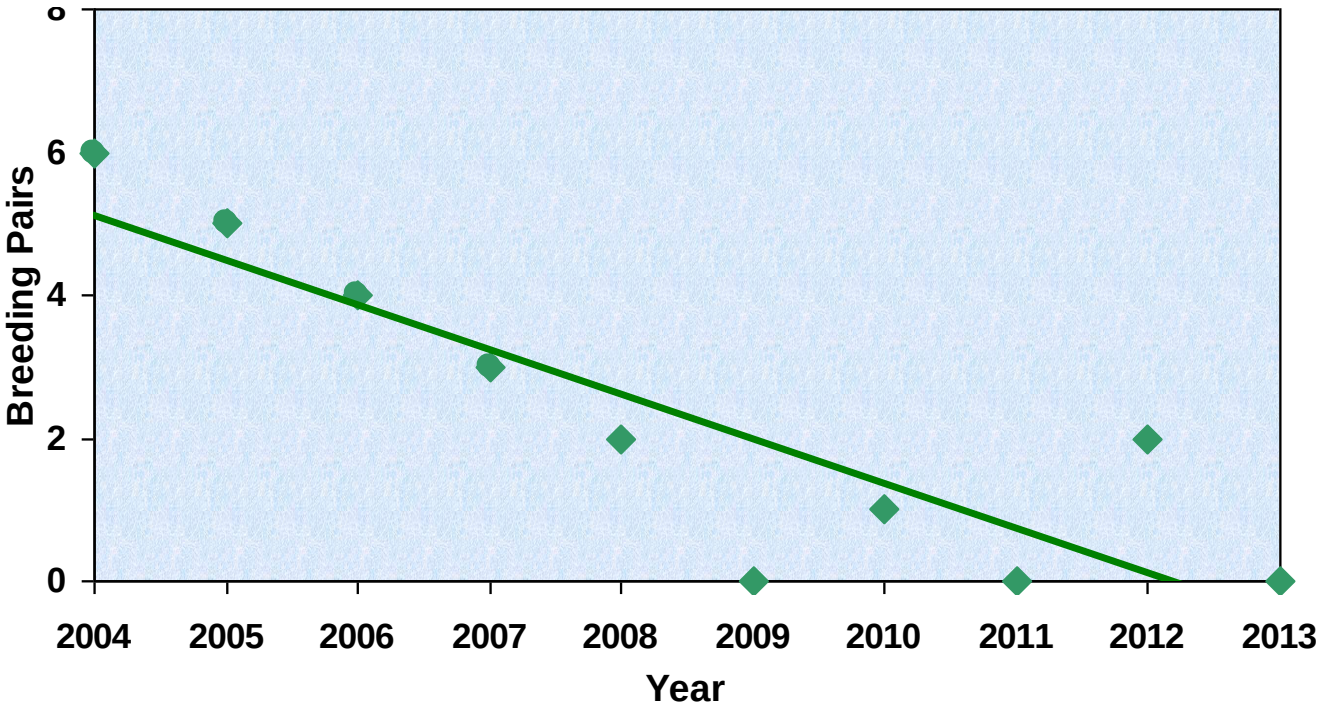


Figure 1. Decline of Lapwing in the Upper Clun 2004 – 2013



It is important that suitable habitat is retained, in the hope that any Lapwing returning to the area in future may stay and breed.

CURLEWS

Fieldwork Results

The full results of the Group's surveys for Curlew are set out in Appendix 2.

Most pairs were in approximately the same places as Curlews have been found in previous years (this is expected, as they are usually long-lived and return to the same general breeding area each year). However, one or two pairs which were not accurately located in previous years have been mapped in slightly different places, as our knowledge of preferred nesting areas builds up.

The distribution of territories in 2013 is shown in Map 3.

As the standard methodology requires, the estimated number and location of territories was based on the most parsimonious interpretation of the records, assuming that the great majority were attributable to known breeding pairs; observations over the years have demonstrated that Curlew are travelling considerable distances between nesting and feeding sites. Where Curlew was recorded in an established territory on a series of dates from the start of the breeding season, it was presumed that a breeding attempt had been made. If the birds were recorded in the same areas in late June and July, it was considered likely that they had produced hatched young, especially if observations included anti-predator behaviour.

Several pairs occupied the same sites as in previous years. Although no actual nests were found this year, the approximate location of some nest sites could be deduced from territorial behaviour by the adults. In areas where there was enough activity to form a judgement, the spacing between territories appeared to be one to two kilometres. As in previous years, there were a few isolated records which may not have been connected with any of the known territories.

In early June, when their eggs might have been hatching, groups of four Curlew were recorded calling and flying together in two separate locations. Curlews are known to indulge in post-hatching "celebrations" of this type, possibly as a show of solidarity against predators. In each case, two pairs may have been involved, but the possibility that some of the birds were members of different pairs may lend weight to the impression that there could be more pairs to find.

The estimated population found each year since 2007 is shown in Figure 2.

At first sight, the population appears to have stabilised, following many years of steep decline. This appearance may be deceptive, since Curlews are long-lived, and may return to their breeding territories for many years without producing any fledged young. Eventually the adults will die, and the breeding population will only be stable if there are enough young birds to replace them. Breeding success will fluctuate from year to year, so any long term decline is unlikely to be steady – it will go in fits and starts.

Map 2. Approximate location of Curlew Territories 2013

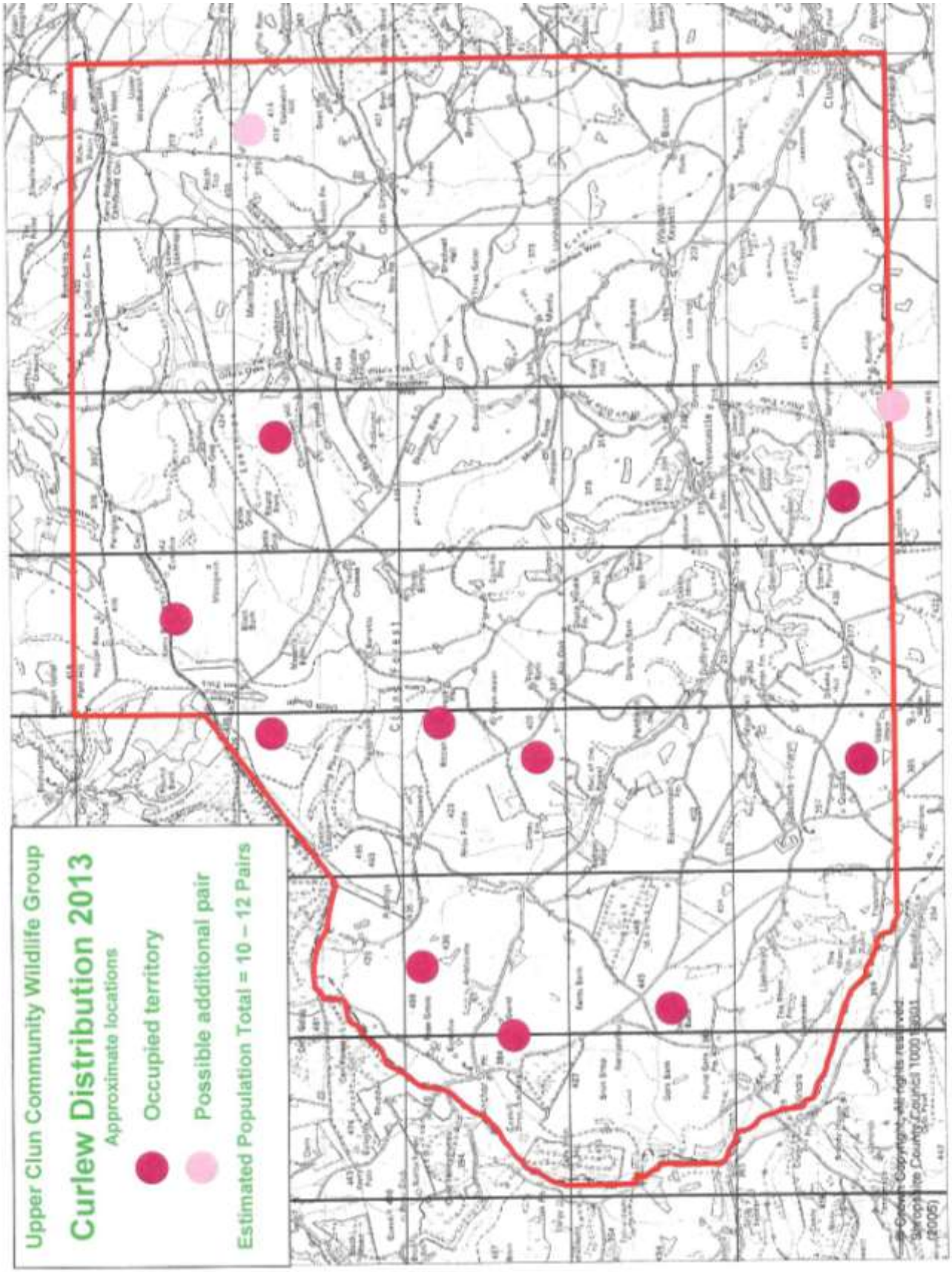
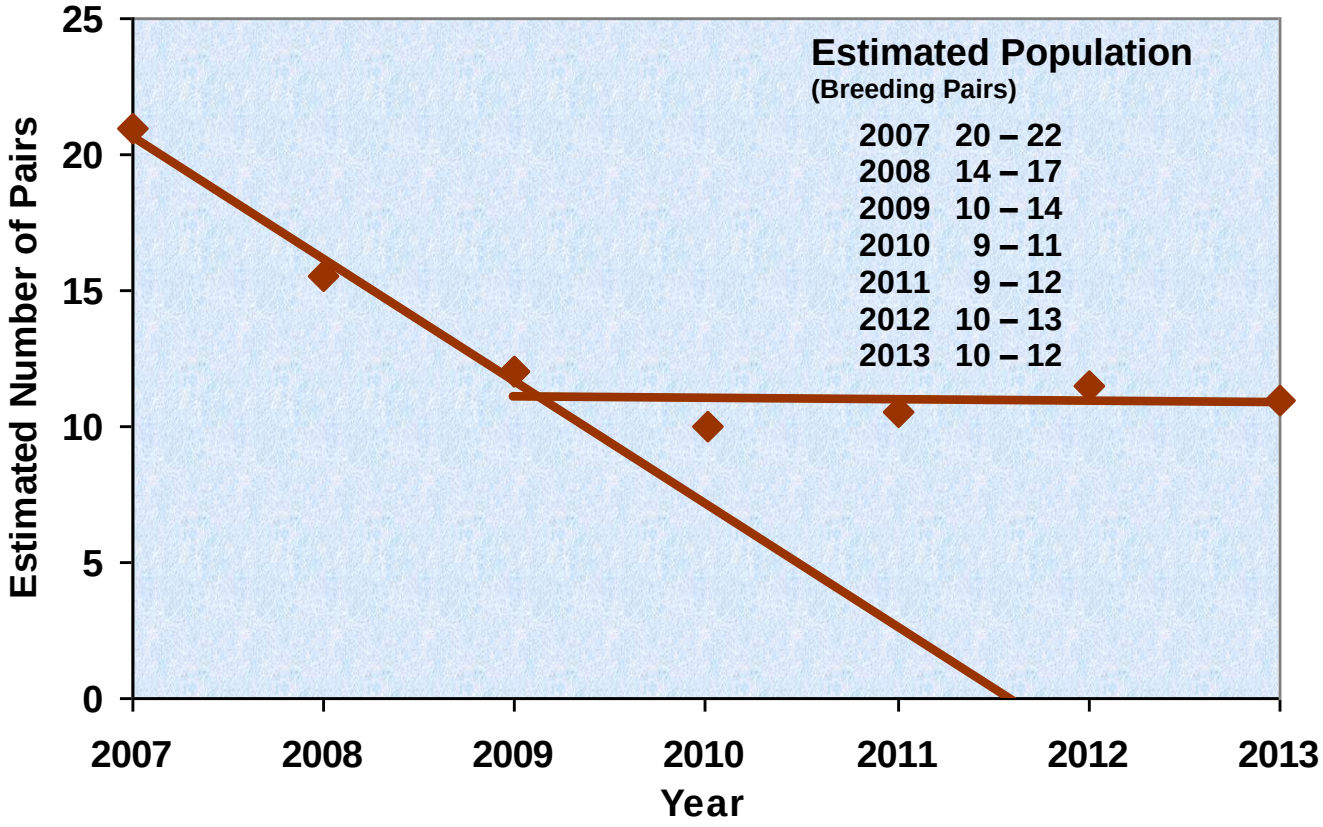


Figure 2. Decline of Curlew in the Upper Clun 2007 – 2013



After a rapid initial decline, the Curlew population has been stable for the last few years.
Further monitoring is essential, to assess whether this is a short-lived halt to a continuing long tem decline, or it provides hope for the future.

Most young Curlews go to the estuaries for the winter, and do not return to breed until they are two years old. It is possible that the very wet weather in 2007, which meant that grass cutting and other agricultural activity was curtailed until after the Curlew breeding season, allowed more young to fledge than usual, and they returned to breed in 2009, and each year subsequently.

Records late in the season in 2011 suggested that at least six of the breeding attempts may have succeeded. Silage and hay cutting was unusually late, so chicks that escaped predation may also have been able to evade these activities. If 2011 was indeed a good breeding season, more Curlews could have returned to the area to breed in 2013, or at least sufficient to replace older birds that died off.

Breeding success is very difficult to assess, so the surveys need to continue for several years to gauge the underlying long term trend. If the number of Curlew territories starts declining again, the population is not producing enough young to be viable. If, however, an increase in the number of occupied territories were to be observed, it could indicate that the breeding population was beginning to re-establish itself.

It is almost certain that the last pair of Curlew nesting in the “lowlands” of the Upper Clun has now been lost: they occupied a territory north-west of Clun, in the Unk valley, but they

were last recorded there in 2010. The Curlew population appears now to be entirely confined to the very highest ground, with no known territory below around 375 metres.

Future survey work will attempt to increase our knowledge of the Curlew population and distribution, and continue to identify the important farms in the area.

Habitat Requirements and Population Decline

Curlews nest in rank vegetation, such as unimproved grassland and heather moorland, or in rushes or tussocks on rough grazing, or in grass being grown for hay or silage, which provides cover for the sitting bird and eggs. They feed on open damp pasture and meadows - wet, boggy areas are necessary for the invertebrates that Curlews feed on. Curlews are ground nesting birds, and all-round visibility is important in avoiding predator attacks, so Curlews are only found in open landscapes.

Nationally, the population decline is attributed primarily to agricultural intensification, leading to changes in the breeding habitat (see *Birds of Wet Meadows Survey* 2002 (Wilson *et al., 2005*.) and the *Repeat Upland Bird Survey* 2002 (Sim *et al.,* 2005.):-

- Land drainage, leading to a reduction in the amount of rank vegetation for nest sites, and to reduction in the quality and quantity of invertebrate food supply in the ground
- Other practices used to “improve” grassland, including control of “weeds” such as rushes that are used as cover for nests, and rolling and chain harrowing that destroys nests and chicks.
- Increased use of fertilisers, which accelerates the transfer of the water in the ground into the growing grass, thereby reinforcing the effect of drainage.
- Production of silage, rather than hay, which is cut earlier and more often, thus increasing the destruction of eggs and chicks.
- More intensive grazing, and higher stocking levels, which reduces nest cover still further, and, in addition, increases the risk of nests being trampled.

Predation has also played a part in the decline (Grant *et al*, 1999) - the smaller number of Curlews, with the reduced amount of nesting cover, mean nests and chicks are ever more vulnerable to the increasing number of predators, particularly Corvids and foxes.

Please Conserve Our Curlews Campaign

The Group has initiated a campaign to try and reverse the decline of Curlew, and has produced an advice leaflet for farmers. This work is more fully described later in this Report, in the Chapter *Conservation Action*

OTHER TARGET SPECIES

In previous years, members were also asked to record the appropriate Other Target Species shown in Table 1 below. Most of them have been selected because they are used to assess the merits of applications made by farmers to join the Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme, the top tier of Defra’s farm payments arrangements (now administered by Natural England). Many of them are also target species in the Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan, and are of general conservation interest (all except Dipper, Stonechat and Wheatear are on either the *Red List* or the *Amber list* of *Birds of Conservation Concern 3: 2009*). In addition, it was felt that their inclusion would add interest to surveys during which most observers would not be likely to record either of the two main target species.

The habitats used by several “hedgerow & scrub” birds included in the Other Target Species (listed in Table 1) were also recorded in 2008 and 2009. The surveys in those two

years produced the necessary data to produce the "*Please Help Hedgerow Birds*" leaflet, and the habitat recording was discontinued in 2010.

Please Help Hedgerow Birds outlines habitat conservation measures for landowners and managers of all kinds, with emphasis on small-scale, incremental improvements which can be implemented without major changes in farming methods, and without heavy investment of time or money (see later Chapter on *Conservation Action*).

The Other Target Species list has continued to evolve, and in 2011, 2012 and 2013 only the birds associated with wetlands were included.

Requests were also made for Red Kite sightings to be sent to Leo Smith, or the Recorder.

BIRDS OF THE "WETLANDS"

The Wetlands Project, launched in 2010, aimed to identify and survey all bogs, mires, flushes, wet meadows and rush pasture in the Upper Clun area in order to assess their condition and census the species of birds, plants and butterflies they support. Several of the Other Target Species, particularly Reed Bunting, are good indicators of the Wetlands. This has been the priority for Bird Group survey work since 2010.

Table 1. Other Target Species 2013 (and earlier years)

Other Target Species 2007 - 13											
Red Kite	**KT**	#		###	**?**	**Dunnock**	**D.**		##	###	
Kestrel	**K.**			###	**?**	**Stonechat**	**SC**			###	**?**
Grey Partridge	**P.**	#		(no)		**Wheatear**	**W.**	#		(no)	
Barn Owl	**BO**	#		###	**?**	**Spotted Flycatcher**	**SF**			###	
Snipe	**SN**	#		###	**?**	**Tree Sparrow**	**TS**	#	##	###	
Cuckoo	**CK**	#		###	**?**	**Linnet**	**LI**		##	###	
Skylark	**S.**	#		###	**?**	**Bullfinch**	**BF**		##	###	
Meadow Pipit	**MP**			###	**?**	**Yellowhammer**	**Y.**	#	##	###	**?**
Yellow Wagtail	**YW**	#		(no)		**Corn Bunting**	**CB**	#		(no)	
Dipper	**DI**	#		###	**?**	**Reed Bunting**	**RB**	#		###	**?**

Column to the right of the species name is the standard abbreviation - the "Species Code"

? = Target Species 2011, 2012 & 2013

= Target Species 2007 ## = Hedgerow and scrub target species 2008 & 2009 ### = Target Species 2010

Where sites have been shown to support Lapwing, Curlew or Snipe, or a suite of at least four of the additional target species (Kestrel, Cuckoo, Barn Owl, Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Stonechat, Linnet, Yellowhammer & Reed Bunting), they qualify for adoption as County Wildlife Sites because of the importance of their bird communities.

All records for such sites collected between 2007 and 2011, and the maps based on them (Maps A2.1 and A2.2 in the 2011 Report, Appendix 2) have been submitted to Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS), so they are on the record as evidence to justify the selection of these sites as County Wildlife Sites. The report of SOS Conservation Sub-committee, *Adoption of "Wetland" Wildlife Sites in the Upper Clun for their Bird Communities,* was included in the 2011 Report as Appendix 3.

With the exception of the three SWT reserves, all such habitat is on agricultural land; its sympathetic management relies on co-operation between the conservation agencies and the farmers whose livelihoods depend on it. The work to achieve this sympathetic management is also described in the Chapter on *Conservation Action* later in this Report.

However, in 2013, our priority has been to monitor the Curlew population closely. As this is demanding, surveyors were not asked to record other target species this year, although some contributed records voluntarily. The Wildlife Group database now comprises over 600 records of the wetland target bird species, which are being used to identify potential Wildlife Sites, and to provide evidence of habitat value to birds of land that is the subject of Higher Level Stewardship applications.

It is anticipated that formal surveys of such sites will be repeated every five years or so to check on the population status of the target species, and try to assess whether changes in land management in the intervening years have had a positive or negative impact.

The major “wetland” sites already identified and surveyed in previous years were however visited informally in 2013. All the target species, with the exception of Barn Owl and Snipe, were found breeding or holding territory at sites where they had been recorded in previous years, but with some variations in numbers or distribution, probably resulting from the succession of severe winters. These records are shown on Map A2.1 on page 38.

Stonechat, a species particularly susceptible to cold weather, appeared to be absent from some sites where it had been regular, although it was confirmed breeding in a few places. Reed Bunting also proved difficult to find, but is in general a more inconspicuous species. The cold, late spring seems to have had less effect on Skylark and Meadow Pipit, especially the latter, which by autumn was present in very good numbers.

The importance of the wetland sites to the local Kestrel population was demonstrated again this year: two of the territories identified were in such areas, and a third pair may well have included one or more in its home range. Cuckoo was well recorded; in the Upper Clun, this species too is associated almost exclusively with such habitats. A female Cuckoo was recorded at Black Mountain perching above rough grassland, prospecting for Meadow Pipit nests in which to lay.

RED KITE

Following the difficult 2012 season, the extremely poor conditions of spring 2013 caused further setbacks for Red Kite. Two well-established nests were lost, one to heavy snowfall, the other to high winds. Another site was reoccupied, but the nest failed, probably at the egg stage. A further nest was refurbished, but either went unused or failed early. This is the first year since 2008 that none of the nests found here has been successful.

There were productive nests just outside the Upper Clun area, but while one of the pairs managed to rear two young, another two nests produced only one chick each. All four chicks were tagged. However, given the number of kites seen in late summer and early autumn, there is reason to hope that vacant territories will be occupied again soon.

In previous years, four pairs of Red Kite were found nesting in our area in 2012, but only two in 2011. Four pairs were found in 2009, double the number found in 2008 and 2007. The 2007 nests were the first in over 130 years. Altogether, 20 nests have been found in the Upper Clun since 2007. Eleven were successful, raising 15 young. As Red Kites usually start to breed at two or three years old, and they tend to breed close to where they were born, there is every likelihood that the local breeding population will continue to grow

The Red Kite breeding population elsewhere in Shropshire rose again this year, from 10 known nests in 2009 to 17 in 2010 to 20 in 2011 to 23 in 2012, all in the Shropshire Hills AONB. The number of nests found in 2013 declined to 21, but reports suggested that several more were not found, and the eastward spread continued. Breeding success was poor - only 10 of the known nests were successful, with 19 fledged young, but the outcome

of one nest is unknown. Since the first successful nest in 2006, 144 young are known to have fledged from nests in the Shropshire Hills.

There have been fewer casual records of Kites received for the last two or three years, though this may be for the welcome reason that Red Kite has become more commonplace and correspondingly less noteworthy.

Many local sightings of Kites are still of young single birds which forage over large distances. However, records of a Kite in the same vicinity on several occasions, or of two together, or of one going into a wood, between January and July, may indicate a nest site.

Such locations should be kept strictly confidential, as Kites are still persecuted, but should be reported immediately to Leo Smith or Michelle Frater (both of whom have a monitoring licence).

OTHER SPECIES

Activity during the breeding season was subdued, with the effects of the cold, late spring persisting for several weeks. Uncommon species such as Crossbill, Yellow Wagtail and Wood Warbler, found breeding locally in previous years, were not recorded in 2013. However, Mandarin Duck was confirmed breeding for the first time, after sightings of single birds in previous years. Goosanders were seen courting, and seem now to breed regularly.

The Yellowhammer and Linnet populations seemed to hold up: a number of remaining stubble fields may have helped support better overwinter survival. Tree Sparrow may also have benefited, with flocks of up to 30 recorded in favoured spots by late summer. Food sources such as this are particularly important in late winter and early spring: a good local example in March this year was a large, mixed flock of finches and buntings feeding on a stubble field at Burlow; it included dozens of Chaffinch, together with at least 20 Yellowhammer, and smaller numbers of Tree Sparrow and Brambling.

Both Kestrel and Hobby nests were found again this year. In contrast to earlier-breeding raptors such as Red Kite, their nests were successful, producing four and three young respectively. All seven chicks were ringed.

BIRD GROUP PROGRAMME

A Bird Group Programme was introduced in 2009, to try and involve new people, by running “Birding for Beginners” events, as well as build on the survey and project work we are already doing. Similar Programmes have been run annually since then

Leo Smith gave an illustrated talk, *Birds of Prey in the Shropshire Hills,* at Church Barn, Bishops Castle in January. This event, held jointly by UCCWG and Clun & Bishops Castle branch of Shropshire Wildlife Trust, drew a large and appreciative audience.

Two guided Bird Walks were offered. A morning one at Lower Short Ditch in April was attended by eight people, and although the high wind kept bird activity low, a reasonable bird list, including Curlew, was compiled. Peter Carty of the National Trust led the second walk at Clun Castle in May. An evening event focusing on bird songs and calls, this too suffered from the vagaries of the weather, but was rescued by Peter’s expertise, and selective use of recordings. Sixteen people took part, the highest number of participants in a Bird Walk for some years.

However, efforts to involve new people, through indoor Group meetings and outdoor training sessions and Bird Walks, have not generally been well supported.

OVERVIEW, AND BIRD GROUP PROGRAMME 2014

The intensive work carried out since 2007 has achieved our main objective of forming an accurate assessment of the bird populations of the Upper Clun, and their distribution and breeding success. Predictably, the results suggest very mixed fortunes for the target species: the rate of decline of the primary targets, Lapwing and Curlew, has been confirmed as very serious, and requiring urgent action.

The work has therefore contributed a solid body of data to identify key sites, which are vital habitat for Lapwing & Curlew, and, through the Wetlands survey, helped identify new potential County Wildlife Sites. We've supported several farmers in applications to join Environmental Stewardship HLS, and the data will help future applications. More importantly, Natural England has used the data to identify priorities for new Agreements.

Future surveys will continue to monitor these populations, together with the results of the anticipated changes in land management, since the fortunes of the target species will be an important indicator of the success or otherwise of the Environmental Stewardship Scheme in first halting their decline, then rebuilding their population levels.

Next year's Curlew surveys should address two factors that are hindering an accurate estimate of the Curlew population: poorly-surveyed areas need more attention, especially where the distances between known territories, or observations of group interaction, suggest that there may be undiscovered pairs; and the collection of evidence of successful breeding from the latter part of the season should also be given priority.

Thanks to our large initial membership, and small but steady stream of new members, the Bird Group has other achievements too - we've got people into birdwatching for the first time, organized nestbox schemes, collected valuable data for local and national conservation bodies, and published advice leaflets on land management for wildlife.

There has been a natural shift in the composition of the group over the period: the number of members carrying out map-based surveys has diminished, but those who do so are reliable, conscientious and increasingly knowledgeable. At the same time, the network of resident recorders has increased, as has the number of local people who send in casual records of the bird activity they see around them.

More extensive use of email has been developed since 2011: email groups were formed for Operation Curlew volunteers and Nestbox Scheme hosts, through which they were contacted regularly through the season. This produced regular responses containing records which might never have found their way onto paper and into the post and it helps bind the group closer together through the season.

These more informal types of engagement are becoming one of the main strengths of the group: its future direction will take account of the needs and opportunities of what is now a more diverse membership, contributing in a whole range of different ways.

The Bird Group will continue to develop this work, and organise BirdWalks to attract new members.

DIPPERS

Dippers feed almost exclusively on the stony beds of rapids and fast flowing streams, and are never far from such waters. The headwaters of the River Clun, along with the River Unk and the Folly Brook, are one of the County strongholds. Dippers stay here throughout the year, and might be seen at any time bobbing up and down on the rocks in the streams, or flying low over the water.

They are very territorial, so nests are evenly spaced on each stretch of river. In this part of the south Shropshire Hills, the average spacing is just over one kilometre. As they are restricted to, and dependent on, food from the river, the average size of the territory, and breeding success, productivity and survival rates, are all good indicators of the water quality. Monitoring nest sites, coupled with monitoring the overall population and survival rates by catching birds at night-time roosts during the winter, therefore provides the necessary information to assess the water quality of the rivers and streams.

Breeding usually starts early, in late March or early April, sometimes earlier, and nesting pairs may attempt to raise two broods. However, in 2013 the breeding season was delayed by the very cold spring. Though some Dippers nest in natural cavities along the riverbank, others build nests on ledges under bridges, and they take readily to nest boxes located directly above the flowing water, where predators are unable to reach them.

With landowners' permission, specially designed nest boxes have been installed under bridges and other suitable structures in the Upper Clun area (some with more than one box), to improve breeding success, and monitor the population and productivity.

In 2013

- 20 potential nest sites were monitored (mostly bridges with nest boxes, but including two other regularly used bridges)
- 15 nests were found (compared with 14 last year, 20 in 2011 and 14 in 2010) – 7 on the Clun itself, 6 on the Folly Brook, 1 on the Unk and 1 on Mardu Brook
- all of these nests except one were in boxes
- 16 of the breeding adults had colour-rings, which were read
- 10 chicks in 3 nests were ringed. It is likely that all these chicks fledged.
- no monitoring was carried out of possible second clutches.

Tony Cross has been monitoring Dippers in the Teme catchment since 1987, by ringing chicks at nest sites, and counting birds at winter roost sites. Colour-ringing of adults started in 2011. Annual reports of this project, *Dippers in the River Teme Catchment,* have been produced since 2007, and the report for 2013 will be available shortly.

This work suggests that the local population declined in the 20 years prior to the nest box scheme starting in 2006, but it then increased up until 2010, as the nest boxes create additional nest sites and therefore allow more pairs to breed. Also, productivity is higher in boxes, as they are less vulnerable to predation than those in some of the natural sites.
However, low water levels in 2011, and high water levels with the rivers flowing too fast in 2012, appear to have reversed the growth.

Anyone who sees Dippers regularly, or knows of an existing nest site, or owns a stretch of fast-flowing shallow water where it would be possible to install a nest box, is requested to please contact Michelle Frater 01588 640909

NEST BOXES FOR WOODLAND BIRDS


Photo ©John Swift

The Nestbox Scheme aims to increase the number of suitable nest sites for hole-nesting woodland birds, and to collect data on their breeding success. Members who live in the Group's area with suitable gardens or access to woodland are invited to host up to 10 boxes. They have been supplied free of charge; in return, hosts are asked to maintain and monitor their boxes, record the results and provide a short annual summary. Guidance is provided, including information on the likely nesting species, advice on maximising data while minimising disturbance to the birds, and a form on which to record observations.

The current number of hosts is 18, and the total number of boxes is over 270, with a wide geographic spread. There are now schemes all over the area, from Pant Glas in the north to Bettws-y-crwyn, and from Clun to near the Anchor. The variations in habitat and altitude should provide data for useful comparisons of breeding success for the target species.

Hosts are encouraged to keep their records electronically on the form provided, and email them in at the end of the season. An email group is used to keep members abreast of developments throughout the season, with additional advice available on request.

However, results were sent in by only nine hosts, half of the total. The overall occupancy rate at the sites for which returns were received was 40%, the same as last year, with a range of 20% – 65% for individual sites. At least 54 Blue Tit, 29 Great Tit, 60 Pied Flycatcher and 7 House Sparrow fledged, but given unevenness in monitoring, and difficulties in counting eggs or nestlings, these figures should be regarded as minima. One site near Bettws-y-Crwyn was occupied by a small colony of Tree Sparrows, using six boxes. Since this species constructs covered nests even within boxes, the contents cannot be seen, so no details of brood size or success were obtained.

The most striking feature of this year's results was the laying date of first eggs. Great Tit is often the first species to lay, and in 2009, 2010 & 2011 first eggs were recorded on 27th, 26th & 24th April respectively. In last year's poor breeding season, the date slipped to 6th May, and this year was a week later than that, 13th May. This is almost three weeks later than the earliest laying date previously recorded here.

Previously, the quantity and quality of data has been underpinned by the sites monitored by the founder of the scheme, John Swift. Sadly, he was unable to contribute this year owing to illness in the family, and the absence of his records exposes weaknesses in data provided by other members. The number of detailed nest records was so low that a table of results, as published in previous years, would not serve any meaningful purpose.

The birds benefit from the increased supply of nest sites whether or not they are monitored, but nest records make a big contribution to conservation. Useful data is forwarded to the British Trust for Ornithology, so it is disappointing that so many of our schemes provide no information for conservation.

Unfortunately, lack of funding will make it necessary to make a modest charge for any boxes supplied in future, although support and advice will continue to be freely available.

If you live in the Upper Clun area,
and are interested in having nest boxes on your land,
please ring Jacky Harrison on 01588 630666

BARN OWLS

Barn Owls control pests such as rats and mice, but the population has declined in Shropshire and elsewhere. Loss of habitat - rough grassland for hunting prey - is the major factor, but loss of suitable nest sites has also contributed. Traditional open barns have been enclosed, replaced by different types of barn, or converted into houses. Other suitable nest sites – holes in large isolated trees – have also disappeared in recent times, as trees have died off or been removed.

Barn Owl is on the *Amber List* of *Birds of Conservation Concern 3: 2009*. Increasing the population, partly through nest boxes, is part of the Shropshire *Biodiversity Action Plan*.

Barn Owls need

- an isolated farm building, or large isolated tree or pole more than 400 metres from the nearest woodland, for a nest site
- 4 hectares (10 acres) of permanent rough grassland nearby, several inches tall to provide cover for voles and other prey

Nest boxes help replace lost breeding sites, and The Shropshire Barn Owl Group (SBOG) have shown that breeding success is actually better in boxes than in natural sites.

SBOG installed a few nest boxes in the area prior to the Group becoming established, and the Group has installed many more, so there are now over 20. Only two have been used so far. These boxes are at potentially the best sites, so there is little point in putting up any more until the population increases, unless new exceptionally favourable sites are found.

Eighteen Barn Owl boxes were inspected this year; a couple more on land that had changed hands had to be omitted. No active Barn Owl nests were found at all. The only nest site used regularly over the last few years had been taken over by Stock Dove; other sites were vacant, or had been occupied by Tawny Owl, or Grey Squirrel.

One pair was found last year, none in 2011, only one in 2010, two in 2009, and a further site was used in 2008, when the population was believed to be at least three pairs. Nest sites are confidential at the request of Landowners.

The population was already suffering the effects of two particularly severe winters, in which mortality was high, and breeding success subsequently reduced. The long-lying snow in spring 2013 meant that just when birds that had survived the winter should have found it easier to feed, their food supply was cut off again, and Barn Owl mortality soared. BTO recorded a 280% increase in reports of dead Barn Owls, many of which had starved.

Barn Owl conservationists are describing 2013 as “the worst Barn Owl breeding season for over thirty years” *(Barn Owl Trust)*. SBOG finds 36 active nests in a typical year; this year it found only four. Since breeding failure was so widespread, and followed a succession of poor years, the chances of a rapid recovery in Barn Owl populations look slim.

If you know of any Barn Owl territories, or know of a suitable location for a nest box, please tell Michelle Frater on 01588 640909.

THE PLANT GROUP

INTRODUCTION

The Plant Group has now completed its seventh year of collecting data. 2013 has again seen a great deal of activity from a dedicated core of surveyors carrying out “condition assessments”, including mapping and recording of species. Existing County Wildlife Sites (CWS), sites of ecological significance which have yet to be adopted as Wildlife Sites (known as “Potential Sites”), and new areas were all included in the programme. Acid grassland and rush pasture were the main habitats surveyed although woodlands and meadows were visited too.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The Plant Group is now well established, with a core of six volunteers and with occasional others joining in. All of the group are proficient now in botany and so a leader or tutor is not necessary. Other members of the Community Wildlife Group were encouraged to come along but did not take up this opportunity.

Sixteen sites were surveyed over a 15 week period. The sites visited and number of axiophytes (indicator species) recorded at each are listed in Appendix 3.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) supported the group, providing maps, survey cards and risk assessments. Four guided botanical walks on farmed Wildlife Sites took place as a means of training in botanical ID and to show well managed sites. Additional training courses were arranged by SWT on Bryophytes, Sedges and Grasses.

SWT also provided the group with landowner details and access permission.

All surveyors used recommended floras (listed under References). The axiophyte lists, the target species for the area covering the three key habitats (Rush Pasture and Mire, Blanket Bog, and Meadows) were used for guidance. These three lists are reproduced in Appendix 4.

The Wildlife Site Condition Form for Grassland, which gives an idea of the data collected, was included in last year’s report and can be found on the website.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Eight people participated in the plant recording this year collecting valuable information on both CWSs and Potential Sites. Thirteen attended the Sedge course at Cefn Hepraes wildlife site. Excellent species lists were compiled along with in-depth information about site condition on all sites surveyed.

Smooth-stalked Sedge, Cefn Hepraes wildlife site

In summary, eleven

CWSs were visited, with full surveys carried out on six. An additional ten other areas, some of them already identified as sites of ecological significance, the Potential Sites, were also surveyed and four will be put forward at the 'Local Sites Partnership' for consideration as new CWSs. The sites visited are listed in Appendix 3.

Once again over 100 target species were recorded in 2013, similar to the number recorded last year; these plants are the Shropshire 'axiophytes', the species which are good habitat indicators because they are relatively uncommon and indicate an unimproved and relatively unspoilt habitat. The higher the number recorded, the better the site (usually).

Species of interest recorded included: Adder's Tongue, Betony, Smooth-stalked Sedge, Heath Spotted-orchid, Lousewort and Marsh Violet.


White form of Lousewort

The cumulative result of the Plant Group's work (together with the complementary work of the Bird and Butterfly Groups) is shown in Map 3 "Sites of Wildlife Interest in the Upper Clun" in the Chapter on Conservation Action on page 26.

DISCUSSION

Although fewer people took part in the surveys this year with fewer sites visited overall, new good quality data was again collected in 2013.

There are now fewer new sites coming forward as potential CWS, not surprisingly since much of the Upper Clun has now been surveyed. Three new areas of land were adopted as CWS, part of Knuck Bank, Myndtown and Wern Tanglas.

Virtually all of the 47 CWSs in the Upper Clun and surrounding areas have now been surveyed (at least within the last five years), and 61% are in a reasonably good condition. This compares well with the 38% for the rest of the County. Since the start of the Community Wildlife Group, 22 CWS are either completely new or are extensions of existing sites.

Poor condition of some sites is attributed to a variety of factors including over-grazing (or under-grazing) of grassland, scrub encroachment, grazing of woodland and planting of conifers on rush pasture.

Much of the work in the three groups: Bird, Butterfly and Plant focuses on rush pasture, mire and species-rich grassland habitats of the Clun Forest. There are fifteen or more such sites in this landscape where conservation work needs to continue to be focused for key threatened species like the Lapwing, Curlew and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary.

Conservation work, namely scrub removal with a volunteer team, again took place on one of these sites in the winter.

The Plant Group continued to work closely with landowners this year which was again rewarding. One again, a substantial amount of data collected was passed to Natural England for the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS), Farm Environment Plans. The data has helped farmers and advisers to choose the most appropriate options for HLS (see Chapter on “Conservation Action”).

PLANT WALKS

Four Plant Walks (joint events with Land Life & Livelihoods and also the Llanfairwaterdine Parish Charities) were organised to involve new people and provide training in botanical identification.


Getting down to sedges at Cefn Hepraes

All four walks visited farmed CWSs; Llanfairwaterdine Turbary, Mount Valley, Cwm Frydd and Pant y Lidan. A thank you once more to the farmers who gave permission for access.

CONCLUSION

The botanical recorders again worked very hard in 2013 and covered an area of the Upper Clun amounting to 177 hectares. The landowner involvement, interest and cooperation continue to grow. Much of the data collected has been extremely useful already. Partnership working with the AONB, Land Life and Livelihoods, Natural England and Shropshire Wildlife Trust continues to strengthen too.

FURTHER WORK

Botanical surveys and mapping will take place both on old and newly identified sites - 17 are already listed for next year. New and returning surveyors will again be encouraged to join in. Five training courses have been planned by SWT for 2014 to include: Ferns, the Top Ten Plant Families and National Vegetation Classification.

Four events are planned for 2014:

1. Scrub clearance on a local CWS in January
2. A Foraging Foray in May
3. ‘Gardening for Wildlife’ (a joint venture with *Land, Life and Livelihoods*)
4. Bilberry picking (+ pancakes) on Lower Shortditch Turbary in August.

Details will be included in the 2014 Programme.

THE BUTTERFLY GROUP

INTRODUCTION

Butterfly Surveys were introduced into the Wildlife Group's programme for the first time in 2010, starting with Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (*Boloria selene)* a nationally threatened, UKBAP Priority Species.

Previous records supplied by Butterfly Conservation and by Shropshire Wildlife Trust formed the initial list of target sites, together with sites identified by the plant recorders (where the butterfly's food plants, Marsh Violet (*Viola palustris*) in Rush Pastures or Dog Violet (*Viola riviniana*) underneath Bracken, are found), and additional sites were identified by Group surveys.

This work was continued in 2011, and the recording period was extended to cover the flight period of Dark Green Fritillary *(Argynnis aglaja)* into July. Detailed results of that Butterfly Survey were set out in Table 3 and Appendix 6 in the 2011 Report.

The numbers found at Barretts West and nearby in Ditch Dingle in 2010 and 2011 make this a regionally significant site, and the Mount Bank/Foxholes/ Hergan area was found to be the second most important site in the area

Appendix 5 shows the Butterfly records received in 2013, principally from the two key butterfly recorders, Rob Rowe and Dennis Twist, to whom the Group would like to express thanks for their continuing support.

SMALL PEARL-BORDERED FRITILLARY

The table in Appendix 5 shows how late the Fritillary flight season was in 2013, with Small Pearls recorded for the first time only on 9 June, and Dark Greens only on 7 July, in both cases probably a fortnight or so later than in a normal year.

However, by comparison with the very poor butterfly year of 2012, this summer the weather eventually picked up, and it is hoped that the warmer weather of late June and July allowed good numbers of eggs to be laid and that good numbers of caterpillars will emerge next spring.

Unfortunately, the first planned Butterfly Walk on 8 June had to be cancelled as there had still been no records of Fritillaries on the wing as that date approached.

On the second Butterfly Walk, participants got good views of a couple of dozen Small Pearls at their main location to the west of Barretts farmhouse, with half a dozen seen well across towards Ditch Dingle.

This was probably still a week or more before the peak of adult emergence and indicates that there is still a strong population at this key location, and 18 SPBFs recorded at Corkins Bank on 7 July confirms the importance of that site too. The four seen at Black

Mountain nearby ten days later shows that the work put in by volunteers cutting and clearing rushes has not been in vain, as the Fritillaries are perfectly capable of finding this site and its strong Marsh Violet population.

Hopefully the new owner(s) of Corkins Bank will be favourably inclined towards the butterflies and will not radically change the management there.

DARK GREEN FRITILLARY

The southern part of the butterfly recording area was again searched for the other, much larger, target fritillary, the dark green fritillary.

Appendix 5 shows that it was found at three sites in July, with "very good numbers" at Pant-y-lidan on 7th July.

SAFEGUARDING HABITAT

Rush Pasture is an important habitat for these butterflies, and the food plants they need, and it is also an important habitat for wetland birds. Therefore a leaflet has been produced, in consultation with Partner organisations, on the management of Rush Pasture for its characteristic wildlife. This is attached as Appendix 7.

A similar document, funded by West Midlands Branch of Butterfly Conservation but concentrating solely on the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and its needs, has also been produced for use with farmers going into HLS agreements. This is available on the West Midlands Branch website www.westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk

More records and advice have been provided to the Natural England staff who are in the process of assessing applications for entry into HLS, which hopefully will encourage implementation of the advice in the leaflet, and help secure the future survival of these threatened butterflies in the Upper Clun.

FUTURE PLANS

It is intended to build on, and extend, this work in 2014.

As well as survey work, two work parties to improve habitat are being arranged during the winter, and more Butterfly Walks, with training, may be held in the spring. Details will be published in the Group programme for 2014, and on the Group's website.

More surveyors would be most welcome

CO-OPERATION WITH FARMERS

The Wildlife Group needs, and wants, to work closely with the farmers in the area. The vast majority of land in the Upper Clun area is farmland. Therefore, if we are to gather a worthwhile picture of wildlife in the area, and then undertake effective action to increase populations and habitat, we need the active cooperation of local farmers. We will therefore continue to work with farmers, individually and generally, on conservation issues in future.

We also encourage members of the Group who are not farmers to do whatever they can to develop good relations with individual farmers in their squares while carrying out surveys. This often includes discussion while seeking permission to carry out surveys on farmland.

There are now many examples of where this co-operation has produced results, for the benefit of wildlife and farmers, as we have helped farmers with good wildlife habitat to secure an Environmental Stewardship HLS Agreement with Natural England, so they are rewarded for managing these habitats sensitively and effectively. More details are given in the next Chapter.

CONSERVATION ACTION

The Group was set up to undertake survey work to establish the status of key species, and to encourage an interest in, and actively promote, conservation in the area.

The 2007 - 13 Reports have documented the results of survey work on birds, plants and butterflies, and their habitats, most of which are nationally or locally threatened, and are Priority Species in the UK and Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plans. Farmers have to take their habitat requirements into account if they apply to join Natural England's farm payments Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (HLS).

The Group has successfully

- Established a good estimate of the breeding population, distribution and habitats of Lapwing, Curlew and many of the Other Target Bird Species.
- Identified the most important plant sites, which are indicators of important habitats, and produced complete species lists so they can be considered as County Wildlife Sites.
- Identified important Butterfly sites, two of which are regionally important.

Based on the results of all these surveys, the Group has been promoting Conservation Action, particularly for the Target Birds for several years. We are particularly concerned about Curlews, which have declined by about 50% since 2007.

We have found that the same "wetland" sites are important for the target birds plants and butterflies. Details have been included earlier, and in previous reports. We therefore collated our data across the three survey groups, and proposed that the sites are added to the list of County Wildlife Sites. These *Sites of Wildlife Interest, including Existing and Proposed County Wildlife Sites*, are shown in the Map on page 26. All the proposals have been accepted in principle by the CWS Committee, but formal adoption requires landowners consent, and this is still being sought in some cases.

The national and local strategies to reverse the declines of these species and habitats, and meet Government Biodiversity targets, are based on using Environmental Stewardship (particularly Higher Level Scheme) agreements between Natural England and landowners to safeguard and enhance the habitats. Such agreements aim to mitigate the long-term agricultural changes which have led to the decline of many bird, plant and

butterfly species, including “improvement“ of grassland by ploughing, reseeding and / or draining.

We have therefore discussed with Natural England over several years the importance of our findings for targeting HLS agreements in the area, initially reflected in the Joint Statement with Natural England “*Farmland of High Conservation Value, Wildlife Sites and Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme Agreements*”, which confirmed that farms that cater for important species, and manage Wildlife Sites sympathetically, have a better chance of securing HLS agreements. The Joint Statement was published in the 2010 Report..

It is vital that all farms with the appropriate habitats, and the Wildlife Sites, are incorporated into new HLS Agreements when their ESA Agreements end, with the appropriate options and prescriptions to safeguard and enhance these habitats.

We have therefore already made our survey data available on request to the land owners, and to the people preparing their Farm Environment Plans as part of the HLS process, and we have supplied it all to Natural England, to take into account when HLS applications are being considered.

Last year we proposed that land which meets the following criteria should be incorporated into HLS Agreements, provided that the farmer / landowner selects the appropriate options to benefit Wildlife

1. **Breeding and foraging habitat for Curlews**
2. **Wetland Sites (upland mires & flushes, wet meadows, rush pasture and wet rough grazing)**
3. **Current and Proposed Wildlife Sites**

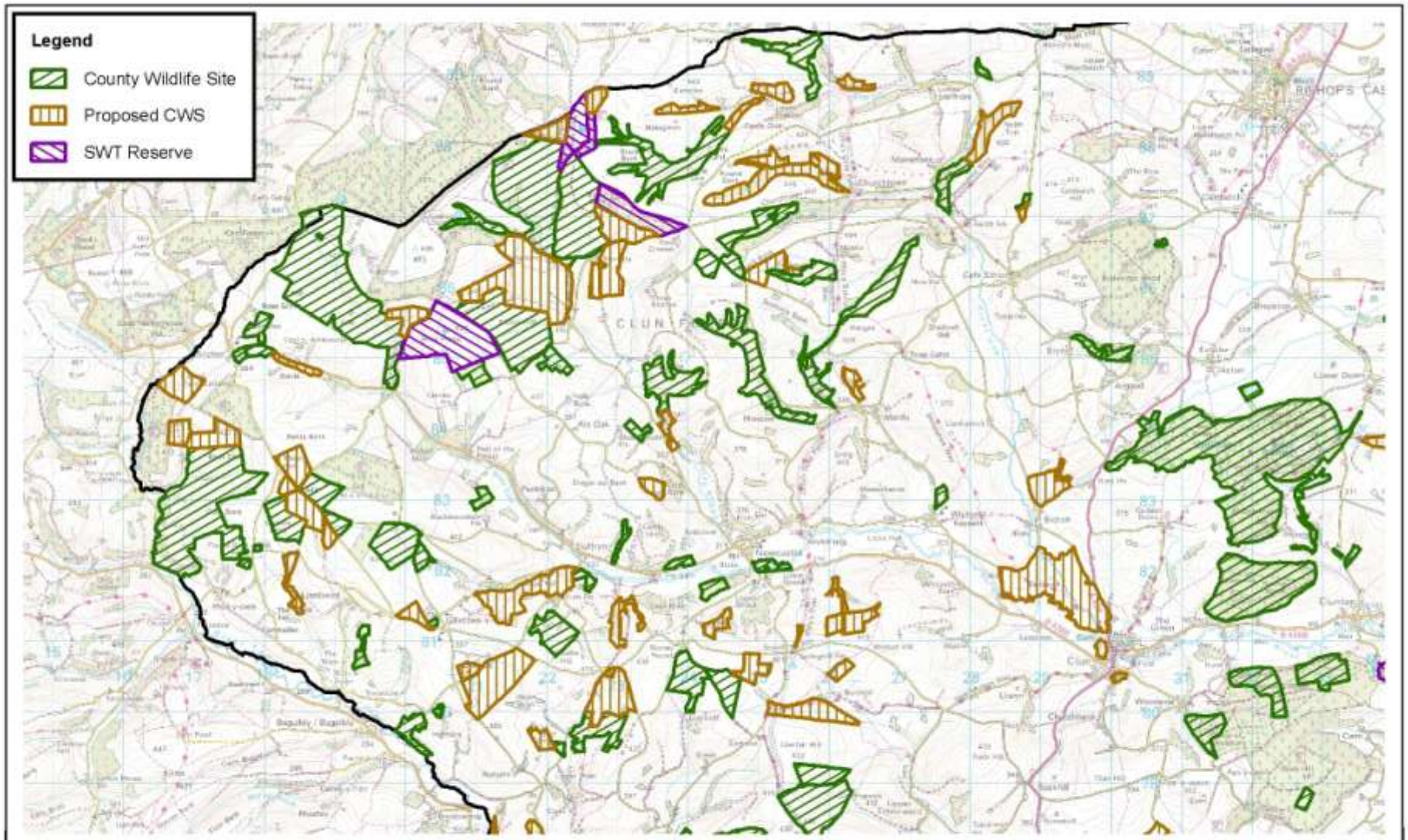
Since then we have been discussing these proposals with Natural England. We have surveyed sites as wildlife habitats. However, single “sites” are often owned by several different people. The sites need a consistent, joined-up approach to management and conservation, and we have stressed the need for Natural England to take this into account in negotiating new Agreements. HLS prescriptions must also take account of the presence, or potential presence, of Red Data Book butterfly species in addressing the management of Rush Pastures.

Separately, the Group, together with other Community Wildlife Groups in the Upper Onny, the Kemp Valley and Clee Hill, have been sharing the results of bird survey work with Natural England, and lobbying to get the farms with breeding Target Bird Species and the best habitat into HLS. Several such meetings were held with Natural England between June 2011and November 2012.

The data supplied to Natural England included several maps:-

1. Curlew Nest Sites and Foraging Areas 2007 -11
2. All UCCWG Curlew records between 2007 and 2012
3. Curlew Foraging Areas
4. Wildlife Sites

The first of these maps was shown in the 2011 Report, numbers 2 and 3 appeared in 2012, and the Wildlife Sites map has been updated annually, with the most recent being published in this Report.



Shropshire Wildlife Trust
193 Abbey Foregate
Shrewsbury SY2 6AH

Tel: 01743 284280
www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk

Nature Reserves, Wildlife Sites and Potential Sites of the Upper Clun (2013)

Date: 13/11/2013

N

NEW HLS AGREEMENTS

The Clun ESA covers a wider area than the UCCWG area. Most Clun ESA Agreements expired earlier in 2013. About half those farms were offered HLS agreements, and in the end 51 new HLS agreements between Natural England and Individual Landowners in the Clun ESA were entered into in 2013, of which 21 are in the Upper Clun.

The Wildlife Group's data was taken into account by NE when deciding which farmers to offer agreements to, and the proposed content of the agreement. However, HLS promotes other environmental benefits as well as wildlife habitats, and each agreement is voluntary – i.e. the farmer decides what he wants to do, and NE decides if that qualifies for payment. Therefore it is likely that some farms with good wildlife habitat have entered into agreements that do little or nothing to actually safeguard that habitat, and others have declined the opportunity.

Also, because of funding constraints, it is unlikely that any agreements will create significant amounts of new habitat.

Around half the farms in the Upper Clun have not been able to make a strong enough case that their farm provides wider environmental benefits, and others have decided that they do not want to enter into such agreements. Some of these have entered into Upland Entry Level Environmental Stewardship agreements, if they qualify (i.e. they have an upland farm which cannot produce extensive arable crops and is therefore in a designated Severely Disadvantaged Area). Many farms that received ESA payments up to 2013 will receive only Entry Level funding in future, considerably less than the ESA payments. This is likely to have an effect on grassland management in the area, as the farmers affected may need to increase production to make up for the shortfall in income, and this may further disadvantage wildlife.

A smaller number of ESA agreements end in 2014. However, NE is unable to offer these farmers long term HLS agreements, because the Common Agricultural Policy that governed them ends in 2013, and the details of the new scheme have still not been decided. The Wildlife Group was concerned about the impact of this uncertainty so we wrote to NE requesting that transitional arrangements are agreed. Now around half a dozen of those in the Upper Clun that might qualify for HLS are being offered two-year transitional agreements, pending introduction of the new scheme. Some of these farms too have important wildlife, and again the Wildlife Group's data has been important in deciding which farms to offer these agreements too.

Natural England has provided the group with a considerable amount of data on the 21 new HLS agreements in the Upper Clun, and the small number of HLS agreements that were entered into in previous years. This being analysed, and NE will attend the Annual Public Meeting to explain in more detail how the Group's data has been used to benefit wildlife through these HLS agreements. However, Chris Hogarth, the Leader of the Shropshire Land Management Team, has already confirmed that:

> *The information the group provided was invaluable in helping us to decide where to renew expiring ESA agreements into HLS and we used your data together with information on local sites from SWT and information from the AONB to decide if ELS or HLS was the most appropriate replacement scheme. However, the voluntary nature of the scheme does mean that there will have been cases where agreement holders did not want to enter into HLS or where we were unable to get them to agree to the options we would have preferred.*

Further information will be sent out in due course.

HABITAT REQUIREMENTS FOR TARGET SPECIES

If the various threatened species are to be saved from local extinction, it is necessary to protect them where they breed now, and improve breeding success so their populations can increase and spread. The habitat requirements for Curlew, Lapwing, Snipe, the other Target Bird Species and Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary have been included in previous reports.

Unfortunately, little management work has been carried out recently to ensure that sites retain their value for wildlife, but farms moving into HLS have the opportunity to be paid for carrying out such work.

Hopefully this will lead to changes in farming practice that will benefit our target birds, plants and butterflies (e.g. rush management, transferring fields into haymaking, creating shallow pools and muddy patches, and managing livestock in the vicinity of nest sites).

The Group will continue to monitor these species and sites, particularly the wetlands and Wildlife Sites, to see if our aspirations are bourn out in the future.

BIRD GROUP HABITAT MANAGEMENT LEAFLETS

Based on the results of our local surveys, three leaflets have been published

1. *Please Conserve our Curlews*, requesting farmers to make changes in the way in which grassland is managed and grazed. This is based on a similar leaflet produced by the Upper Onny Wildlife Group,
2. *Please Help Hedgerow Birds*, requesting all landowners to make small scale changes to the management of hedges, verges, field margins and scrub, in 2008.
3. *Managing Wetlands for Wildlife* (also including the requirements of plants and butterflies), in 2009.

All these leaflets have been endorsed by the AONB, Natural England, RSPB, Shropshire Wildlife Trust and, when it still existed, Shropshire FWAG.

Each leaflet was published in the appropriate Annual Report, and further copies are available on request

MANAGEMENT OF RUSH PASTURE LEAFLET

Previous reports have highlighted the deterioration of some sites as they become dominated by Soft Rush and the need for rush management.

An advice leaflet has therefore been produced. This is attached as Appendix 7.

WILDLIFE SITES

All survey work associated with current or potential Wildlife Sites has been done in consultation with landowners, whose permission has been sought both for the survey, and for any subsequent adoption of the sites. All survey results, and information about any rare or unusual plants found, are sent to the landowner.

Wildlife Sites are not statutory designations and do not limit landowner activity in such areas. They are a way of recognising wildlife value of a piece of land and highlighting which plants and animals are found there.

Sites have to meet published criteria drawn up by Shropshire Wildlife Trust, in consultation with Statutory Bodies such as Natural England, Environment Agency and Forestry Commission, and other Wildlife Organisations such as Shropshire Ornithological Society

and Butterfly Conservation. Individual applications have to be approved by a committee including most of these bodies. Adoption needs land owner consent.

RIVER CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

Increasing attention is being paid by statutory organisations to water quality in the River Clun and its tributaries.

Part of the lower Clun is designated a Special Area of Conservation by the European Union, because it contains a threatened population of Fresh-water Pearl Mussels, one of only three such designations in England. The decline is due to many factors, including silting up of the river bed and pollution from people, transport and farming practice. The designation requires the statutory organisations to protect the mussel population. Action is urgent – monitoring suggests that, if the current rate of decline continues, the population will be extinct within 14 years.

The Environment Agency, the statutory body responsible for rivers, has been charged with getting all rivers into "good ecological condition" by the "Water Framework Directive" issued by the European Union. Rob Harris made a presentation about this, and the potential benefits for wildlife, at the Group's Annual Public Meeting last year.

Natural England funds some work on farms specifically to reduce run-off into the rivers through the Catchment Sensitive Farming project.

The Government has invited local communities to put forward proposals for managing whole catchments, and the Severn Rivers Trust submitted proposals for a "Teme Pilot Project" at the end of 2012. This will be sent out to members who have supplied email addresses.

Land, Life and Livelihoods, a community initiative in the three parishes of the Clun Forest, are developing a community – led Catchment Management Plan.

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership has set up a Working Group to co-ordinate these various initiatives, and to also co-ordinate the production of a Clun Catchment Management Plan. Mike Kelly, the AONB Rivers Officer, spoke about these initiatives at the Group's Annual Public Meeting in 2011.

The Wildlife Group is represented on the Working Group, and has appealed in the mailing for volunteers to help monitor different aspects of the river. We also made a submission to Consultants who produced a consultation document on a *River Clun Restoration Plan*. The thrust of our submission was that most of the rainwater that ends up in the rivers lands a long way from it, and flows across farmland, down roads and through drains before it gets to the river. The increasing rapid fluctuations in water height and flow rate, and pollution, both of which are highly damaging to wildlife, must therefore be tackled across the whole catchment, not just in the immediate vicinity of the watercourses.

The Dippers in the Teme Catchment project, which the Group is involved in, is providing monitoring information on a species which is a good indicator of water quality in the river, and whose habitat requirements are similar to those of the Mussel.

The Wildlife Group is likely to become more involved in these initiatives.

SHROPSHIRE HILLS AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN

The AONB has a statutory obligation to produce a Management Plan every five years.

Comments have been made on behalf of the Group on various drafts. Conservation and enhancing Biodiversity are important elements of the Plan

CONSERVATION ACTION

Underpinning all our Conservation Action work will be the recognition that almost all the land in the area is privately owned, and most of that is farmland, and therefore the Group needs to work closely with landowners to achieve our objectives. We also recognise that the declines we are recording now have occurred slowly over many years, and it will take many more years of sustained incremental improvements in habitats to restore the populations of the "flagship" species to their former levels.

Safeguarding wildlife also needs to involve the landowners that don't farm, householders with gardens, the County Council (responsible for verges and public open space), Welsh Forestry, the Wildlife Trust, and possibly a whole range of other landowners as well.

The Group will continue to outline the type of wildlife-rich landscape that we as a Wildlife Group want to see, and we will seek to influence the other policies that shape the area, as the opportunity arises. These include Parish Plans, the AONB Policy and Management Plan, Natural England's targeting policy for HLS, the Environment Agency's work on river habitats, the targeting of priority areas for biodiversity through the Statutory Planning Process, and the policies of other statutory organisations. Such influence is necessary if we are to help make a difference to the quality and diversity of wildlife habitats, attract additional resources into the area, and help farmers with applications to join HLS.

Natural England have previously confirmed the value of the important sites being adopted as Wildlife Sites, and our survey data being made available to the land owners, and to them, when HLS applications are being considered.

We have done this, and our results have influenced the HLS agreements that have now been entered into, for the benefit of wildlife in our area

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & DISTRIBUTION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most importantly, thanks to all the people who undertook the Survey work, and contributed additional information. None of the work would have been possible without their effort and commitment. Their names are listed below

Bird Surveyors
Richard & Nancy Adams (r)
Liz & Steve Blackman (s)
Barney Britnell (s)
Anne Cummings (s)
Colin Davies (r)
Chris Evans (s)
Michelle Frater
Anne Lewis (r)
John & Marian Haslam (r)
Cath Landles (r)
Giorgio Landon(s)
Tim Lewis (r)
Mervin Mullard (r)
Richard Whately (r)

(r) = Resident (Continuous) Recorder
(s)= Map Surveys

Plant Recorders
John Clayfield
Susan Gardener
Ros Gillard
Fiona Gomersall
Patricia Mullard
Tess Pearson
Rob Rowe
Janet Watkin

Butterfly Recorders
Rob Rowe
Dennis Twist
Nick Williams

Casual records of Curlew and other Target Species were provided by Joan Baker, Andrew Beavan, Gill Binks, Elizabeth Blackman, Mary Bufton, Ros Gillard, Joyce Gittins, Fiona Gomersall, Tony Haighway, John Hall, Jacky Harrison, Graham Lewis, Diana Mackintosh, Derek Matthews, Mark Measures, Nick & Fenella Monk, Peter Morris, Tim Phillips, Jude Powell, Rob Rowe, Leo Smith, Robin & Polly Smith, James Thomas, Janet Watkin, Tony & Marilyn Weston, Trevor Wheeler, Nick Williams, Roger Williams, Mark Wilson and Marie Zenick.

Additional Bird Survey work, particularly to help determine the Curlew population, was carried out by Michelle Frater. She also visited the Wetland sites, an excellent contribution to the Group's work.

The Small Woodland Birds Nestbox Scheme was administered by Jackie Harrison. Michelle Frater provided the guidance to the hosts, and collected and collated the information for that Chapter in the Report. The National Trust provided the nest box and camera for Newcastle school.

The Small Woodland Birds Nestbox Scheme hosts who provided information for the Report were Gill Binks, Mary Bufton, Michelle Frater, Michael Green, John & Ginny Hall, Jacky Harrison, Wendy Lambourne, Mervin Mullard, Jude Powell, Marilyn Weston and Marie Zenick, ,

The Chapters on the work and results of the Bird Group have been compiled and written by Michelle Frater and Leo Smith. Michelle Frater organised the surveys and led the Bird Walks.

Ross Jones monitored the Barn Owl nest boxes, and provided the information for the Barn Owl Chapter in the report.

John Swift made and installed the Dipper and Woodland Bird nest boxes up until 2011. Vince Downs has made the nest boxes since then

Peter Carty monitored the Dipper nest boxes, and provided the information for the Dipper Chapter in the report. He also led the Bird Walk listening for bird song.

Michelle Frater produced and distributed the Bird Group newsletter

Fiona Gomersall compiled and drafted the Chapters and sections on the work and results of the Plant Group, and she also organised the surveys and the training.

Ros Gillard and Rob Rowe led the Plant Walks.

Nick Williams, formerly the Midlands Fritillary Project Officer with Butterfly Conservation, drafted the Chapter on the work and results of the Butterfly Group. Nick also drafted the leaflet on Rush Pasture Management for the Group.

John Arnfield, who set up the website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk, and trained the members of the Group who manage the UCCWG pages: and Jacky Harrison and Rob Harris, who posted material on the website

Thanks to Rory McCann for the Lapwing, Curlew and Snipe drawings

Support from the following individuals and organisations is gratefully acknowledged:-

- Cath Landles (Community Officer at the AONB), for continued support of the Group's work
- Shropshire Hills AONB LEADER Local Action Group, and Pete Banford, the LEADER Co-ordinator in the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Team, for financial support from October 2011 to June 2013.
- Shropshire Wildlife Trust, for financial support for the LEADER Project, and for the input of Fiona Gomersall, the Trust's Conservation Officer, and Robin Mager, the Planning & Data Systems Officer (who provided the map of *Sites of Wildlife Interest*)
- Jenny Joy, Senior Regional Officer for Butterfly Conservation, who provided encouragement and support for the Butterfly Survey throughout the year.
- Fiona Gomersall, for also helping with advice for the Butterfly Surveys.
- The farmers and landowners who helped facilitate the survey work, and provided information about land ownership, particularly Nancy and Richard Adams, Brenda Deakin, Joy Greenall, Edward Hamer, David and Frances Morris, Mervin Mullard, Janet Watkin and Trevor Wheeler.
- Farmers and landowners who accepted nest-boxes on their land, for their cooperation and hospitality

- The members of the *Down To Earth In The Clun Forest Land, Life and Livelihoods* Project Steering Group, for support and information
- Rob Rowe, for publicising the Group's work, particularly via Clun Chronicle and posters
- Clun Chronicle, for publicising the Group's work
- The National Trust, for admin support.

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Smith, L. *Lapwing & Curlew in the Clun Environmentally Area* Survey Report *2006.*

Smith, L*. Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group Report* Annually since 2007

Smith, L. *Dippers in the River Teme Catchment* Annually since 2007

References and fieldguides used by the Plant Group for survey work include:-
- *The Wildflower Key* (second edition): Francis Rose & Clare O' Reilly
- *Wildflowers of Britain and Ireland*: Marjorie Blamey, Richard Fitter and Alastair Fitter
- *The Vegetative Key to the British Flora*: John Poland and Eric Clement
- *New Flora of the British Isles*: Third Edition Clive Stace
- *Sedges of the British Isles* Jermy, A.C., Simpson D.A., Foley M.J.Y., Porter M.S.
- *Guide to Grassland Plants 1*: FSC (Field Studies Council) publications
- *Guide to Moorland Plants FSC* Publications
- *Guide to Woodland Plants* FSC publications
- *Guide to* Orchids FSC publications

The Natural Shropshire website www.naturalshropshire.org includes information on axiophytes.

DISTRIBUTION

Paper copies of this Report are being distributed to the people listed above in the acknowledgements, and to the following individuals and organisations:-

Natural England

- Chris Hogarth & Lucy Roberts (joint Team Leaders, Shropshire Land Management, Parkside Court, Telford)
- Harley Goodwin (Natural England Lead Adviser responsible for the Clun area)
- Phil Grice (Senior Specialist, Ornithology, Peterborough)

Environment Agency

- Stuart Gamble, Environment Management Team Leader (Land and Water)

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership

- Phil Holden (AONB Manager)

Land, Life and Livelihoods in the Clun Forest

- Sarah Jameson, Secretary of the Steering Group

Shropshire Wildlife Trust

- Colin Preston (Director)

Shropshire Council

- Dan Wrench (Biodiversity Officer, Natural Environment Team, Shirehall)

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

- Frank Lucas (Conservation Manager, Central England Regional Office, Banbury)

British Trust for Ornithology

- Rob Fuller (Director of Habitats Research, Thetford)
- Allan Dawes (Shropshire Regional Representative)

Shropshire Ornithological Society

- Graham Walker (Chair, Conservation Sub-committee)
- Geoff Holmes (County Bird Recorder)

Severn Rivers Trust

- Mike Morris (Teme Catchment Pilot Project Officer)

Birds in Counties

- David Balance (Minehead, Somerset)

Electronic Versions (in .pdf format) of this Report will be distributed to the following individuals and organisations

Natural England

- Roger Owen (Area Manager, West Midlands)
- Robert Duff (Lead Adviser, Landscape & Biodiversity, and NE representative on the Shropshire *Biodiversity Partnership Steering Group*)
- Jeff Edwards (Senior Adviser, Landscape & Biodiversity Delivery, Parkside Court, Telford)
- Frances McCullagh (Ecologist, Midlands Land Management Team, Parkside Court, Telford)

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership

- Cath Landles (Community Officer)
- Pete Banford (LEADER Co-ordinator)

Shropshire Wildlife Trust

- Jan Mckelvey (Conservation Manager)
- Tim Ashley (Ruralscapes Project)

Shropshire Council

- Sue Swales (Team Leader, Natural Environment)

THE REPORT

The Group's Report is printed on re-cycled paper.

Copies can be downloaded from the website www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

Additional Copies (either paper or electronic .pdf files), or copies of any of the Reports since 2007, can be obtained from Leo Smith *Ornithological Surveys & Consultancy;* The Bryn, Castle Hill, All Stretton SY6 6JP (tel: 01694 720296, email leo@leosmith.org.uk)

The Group has covered the whole Upper Clun area with Bird and Plant Surveys since 2007, and knowledge of the numbers and distribution of target species is increasing. This has been supplemented by a Butterfly Survey since 2010.

Some of the best wetland sites in the area, which contain good habitat for scarce Birds, Plants and Butterflies, have been identified. The Group has now started working with land owners to safeguard these sites. The information we have collected has helped land owners apply for Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme agreements, and helped Natural England target these agreements for maximum benefit for wildlife in our area.

We have also started work with the local community, land owners, and the relevant Statutory and Voluntary Organisations, to raise awareness of conservation issues and influence decision-making bodies.

We have become increasingly involved in the land management issues which affect the water quality in the River Clun and its tributaries.

Planned survey work in 2014 will build on this knowledge, particularly in the wetlands, and enable us to extend the action to promote conservation of our target species and their habitats.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Bird Survey Recording Instructions 2013

(Operation Curlew Briefing)

The maps and recording instructions for the "2013 Survey: Operation Curlew, plus Lapwing & Other Target Species" were the same as 2011 and 2012, and are not reproduced here.

The first period of recording, particularly for Curlew, was 16th March – 5th May. Surveyors were requested to "Do two surveys, the second as close as possible to 1st May"

Appendix 2: Bird Survey Results

i) Curlew and Lapwing

Observations of Lapwings at three locations are described in the main body of the Report (page 6). Observations were so few that there is no Table of Lapwing Survey Results.

The Curlew Results in Table A2.1, together with the results of follow-up fieldwork and visits to local farmers and residents, and a few casual records, have been used to produce Map 2 (the approximate location of Curlew Territories) in the main body of the Report.

ii) Other Target Bird Species, and Wetland Surveys

The list of Other Target Species which members have been asked to record since 2007 are listed in Table 1 in the Bird Surveys Chapter in the main body of the Report.

By the end of 2009 it became apparent that many of the Target Species were restricted to "wetlands" (mires, flushes and damp pasture) in the area. The best wetland sites were therefore targeted in 2010 and 2011, and were revisited in 2012 (together with some new, less important, sites) only where incidental to other fieldwork. The results were shown on the *Curlew, Reed Bunting, & Other Target Species* maps for 2007-10, and for 2011, reproduced in the 2011 Report, while the similar map for 2012 is in last year's report.

Because priority was given to recording Curlew, surveyors were not asked to record Other Target Species this year, although some contributed records voluntarily. This year's records are shown on Map A2.1. *Curlew, Reed Bunting, & Other Target Species 2013.* The map has been produced on the same basis as those in previous reports.

iii) Curlew, Reed Bunting, & Other Target Species: Explanatory Note to the Maps

The "Other Species" are Snipe, Cuckoo, Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Stonechat, Linnet and Yellowhammer

Curlew, Reed Bunting and Kestrel are represented by one lozenge per record. The presence of the other species is marked by a single lozenge which may represent multiple records.

At sites where Curlew records came mainly from local residents, no attempt may have been made to record the Other Target Species. These species may therefore be under-represented on the Map.

Fewer visits were made to some sites than others; this too will have affected the relative volume of records.

Table A2. 1. Results of Curlew Survey

UPPER CLUN CURLEW SURVEYS 2013

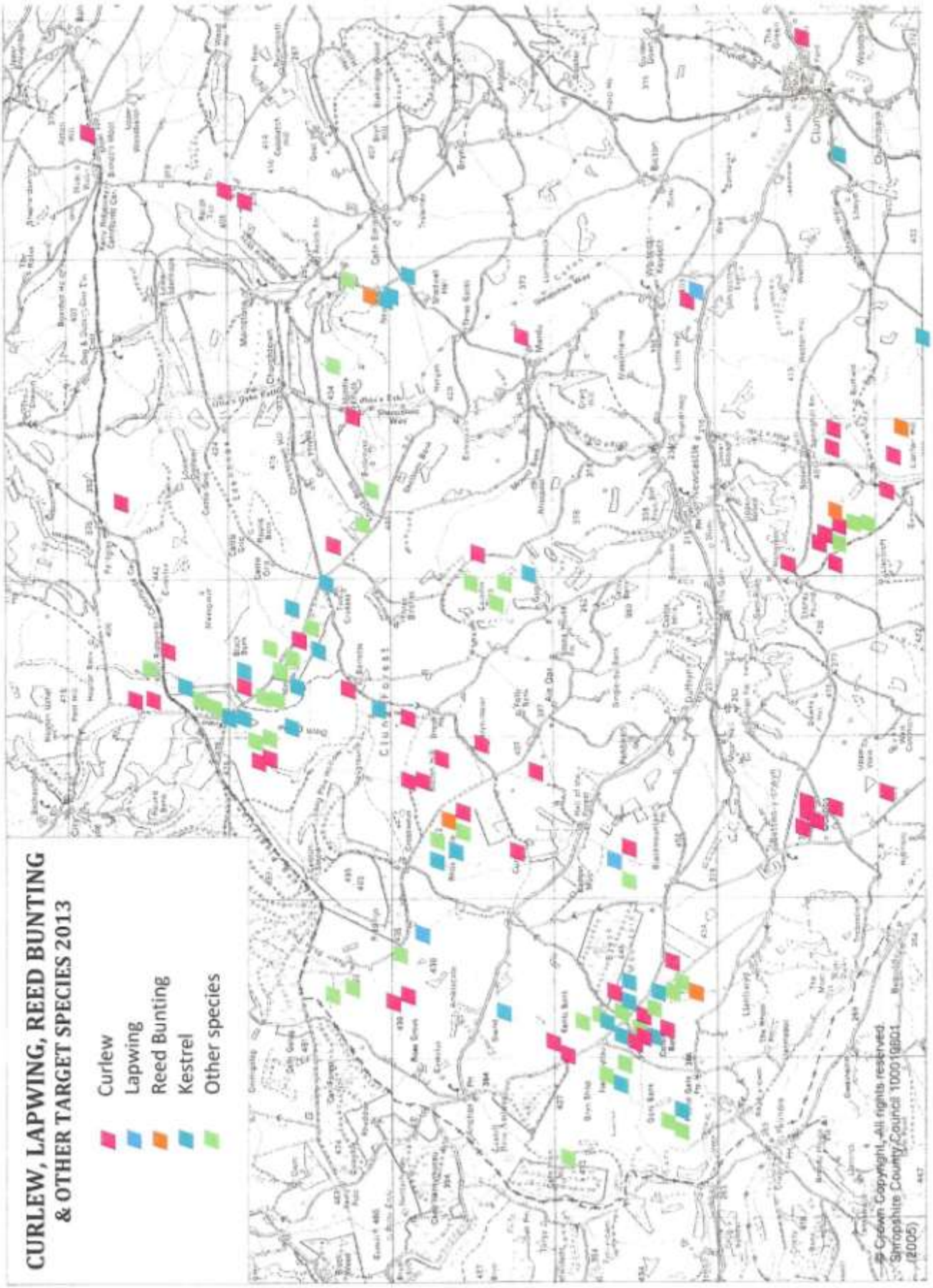
Site name	Square	Observer	Curlew	Breeding status	Comment
Maesgwyn	1	Michelle Frater (s)	2	Probable	Pair present early in season; records continued into July
Pantglas	2	Anne Lewis (r)	4	Possible	Group recorded early April, probably en route to breeding sites
Colebatch Hill	4S & 10N	Cath Landles (r)	U	Possible	Calls early in season and mid-June
Riddings	5S & 12N	Colin Davies (r)	U	Probable	Regular territorial activity until mid-May or later
Bicton Hill	6SE & 13NW	Giorgio Landon(s)	2	Probable	Pair from early April; interaction with 2nd pair (probably Masons Bank West) early June may have indicated hatching
"	"	John & Marian Haslam (r)			
Masons Bank West	6NE & 7W	Michelle Frater (s)	2	Probable	Pair present, territorial behaviour until early June (see above)
Cwm Ffrydd, Knuck Bank	8S & 9S	Mervin Mullard (r)	1+	Probable	Present from early April
Anchor	11E & 12S	Richard & Nancy Adams (r)	1+	Probable	Present from April; territorial interaction with BM bird end May
Ale Oak Cottage	13S & 20NW	Chris Evans (s)	2	Probable	Nesting pair displaced by farming activity; observations of nest preparations nearby suggest 2nd attempt made
"	"	Tim Lewis (r)			
Black Mountain	18SE & 19	Michelle Frater (s) &	2	Probable	Pair present to end June or later; probable nest site identified
"	20	Barney Britnell (s)	1+	Possible	Curlew present early April
Quabbs	27	Richard Whately (r)	2+	Probable	Regular territorial activity until mid-June or later
Spoad Hill	29	Liz & Steve Blackman (s),	2	Probable	Activity to early July or later; aggression against Buzzard
Llanfair Hill	29	several other observers	2	Probable	Records to late June indicating territory N flank of hill*
Clun	31	Anne Cummings (s)	1	Unlikely	Single record March; no evidence of occupation

(s) map surveys
(r) resident recorder

U Uncounted

*possibly outside UCCWG survey area

Map A2. 1. Approximate location of Other Target Bird Species 2013



Appendix 3 Plant Group – Sites Surveyed 2013

Site Name	Site Code	Habitats	No.of axiophytes*	Condition of site
Dingle-below Ale Oak & The Vron	n/a	Wooded dingle Semi-natural woodland	13 5	n/a
Graig Hill	n/a	Acid grassland & scrub	9	n/a
Cefn Vron Hill	n/a	Mesotrophic grassland &	17	n/a
Wells Farm	n/a	Mesotrophic grassland & scrub	9	n/a
Gravel Field, Monaughty	n/a	Mesotrophic grassland	1	n/a
Maes y Garn	n/a	Rush pasture & Mesotrophic grassland	6	n/a
Stone House Farm	n/a	Rush pasture & Mesotrophic grassland	13	n/a
Bettws Pool Meadows	**SASO28.43	Species-rich grassland	9	Good
Myndtown	SO28.54	Acid & species-rich grassland	18	Good
Bryn Bedw 1 **Bryn Bedw 2**	**SASO28.56	Acid & species-rich grassland & woodland	30 + 7	Good
Anchor (north)	SO18.02	Rush pasture & species-rich grassland	24	Declining?
Pound Gate Farm	SO18.08	Species-rich grassland	5	Good?
Llanfair Hall Wood	SO27.03	Semi-natural woodland	18	Declining?
Cwm Collo	SO27.04	Acid grassland & scrub	17	Declining
Cefn Hepraes- Sedge ID training	SO27.14	Rush pasture & mire	47	Good
Coed y Hendre	**SASO27.18	Semi- natural woodland Mesotrophic grassland	13	Good n/a
Pant y Lidan- guided walk	SO28.13	Wooded dingle & Acid grassland	52	Good
Mount Valley- guided walk	SO28.16	Wooded dingle & Species-rich grassland	41	Good
Cwm Frydd- guided walk	SO28.33	Wooded dingle & species-rich grassland	36	Good
Wern Tanglas	SO28.51	Rush pasture & species-rich grassland	27	Good
Grasses ID training Worsley (Stretton Hills)	SO49.27	Acid & mesotrophic grassland &woodland	n/a	Good

***Axiophyte = good habitat indicator species**
****SA = Site Alert (Potential Wildlife Sites)**

Appendix 4. Target Plant Indicator Species in the Upper Clun (The "Axiophytes")

Rush Pastures

Scientific name	Common name
Achillea ptarmica	Sneezewort
Anagallis tenella	Bog Pimpernel
Briza media	Quaking Grass
Carex curta	White Sedge
Carex demissa	Common Yellow Sedge
Carex echinata	Star Sedge
Carex hostiana	Tawny Sedge
Carex panicea	Carnation Sedge
Carex pilulifera	Pill Sedge
Carex pulicaris	Flea Sedge
Comarum palustre	Marsh Cinquefoil
Dactylorhiza incarnata	Early Marsh-orchid
Dactylorhiza maculata	Heath Spotted-orchid
Dactylorhiza purpurella	Northern Marsh-orchid
Dryopteris carthusiana	Narrow Buckler-fern
Epilobium palustre	Marsh Willowherb
Equisetum sylvaticum	Wood Horsetail
Erica tetralix	Cross-leaved Heath
Eriophorum angustifolium	Common Cottongrass
Eriophorum vaginatum	Hare's-tail Cottongrass
Galium uliginosum	Fen Bedstraw
Isolepis setacea	Bristle Club-rush
Juncus foliosus	Leafy Rush
Menyanthes trifoliata	Bogbean
Molinea caerulea	Purple Moor-grass
Myosotis secunda	Creeping Forget-me-not
Narthecium ossifragum	Bog Asphodel
Pedicularis sylvatica	Lousewort
Pinguicula vulgaris	Common Butterwort
Polygala serpyllifolia	Heath Milkwort
Pulicaria dysenterica	Common Fleabane
Scutellaria minor	Lesser Skullcap
Succisa pratensis	Devil's-bit Scabious
Trichophorum cespitosum	Deergrass
Triglochin palustre	Marsh Arrowgrass
Valeriana dioica	Marsh Valerian
Veronica catenata	Pink Water-speedwell
Veronica scutellata	Marsh Speedwell
Viola palustris	Marsh Violet

Blanket Bog

Scientific name	Common name
Anagallis tenella	Bog Pimpernel
Apium inundatum	Lesser Marshwort
Calluna vulgaris	Heather
Carex demissa	Common Yellow Sedge
Carex dioica	Dioecious Sedge
Carex echinata	Star Sedge
Carex laevigata	Smooth-stalked Sedge
Carex pilulifera	Pill Sedge
Carex pulicaris	Flea Sedge
Dactylorhiza incarnata	Early Marsh-orchid
Dactylorhiza purpurella	Northern Marsh-orchid
Drosera rotundifolia	Round-leaved Sundew
Eleocharis multicaulis	Many-stalked Spike-rush
Eleocharis quinqueflora	Few-flowered Spike-rush
Erica tetralix	Cross-leaved Heath
Eriophorum angustifolium	Common Cottongrass
Eriophorum vaginatum	Hare's-tail Cottongrass
Hypericum elodes	Marsh St. John's-wort
Isolepis setacea	Bristle Club-rush
Juncus bulbosus	Bulbous Rush
Juncus foliosus	Leafy Rush
Lythrum portula	Water Purslane
Melampyrum pratense	Common Cow-wheat
Menyanthes trifoliata	Bogbean
Molinea caerulea	Purple Moor-grass
Myosotis secunda	Creeping Forget-me-not
Narthecium ossifragum	Bog Asphodel
Pedicularis palustris	Marsh Lousewort
Pedicularis sylvatica	Lousewort
Pinguicula vulgaris	Common Butterwort
Potamogeton polygonifolius	Bog Pondweed
Ranunculus omiophyllus	Round-leaved Crowfoot
Scutellaria minor	Lesser Skullcap
Trichophorum cespitosum	Deergrass
Valeriana dioica	Marsh Valerian
Veronica scutellata	Marsh Speedwell
Viola palustris	Marsh Violet

Species-rich Meadows

Scientific name	Common name
Alchemilla filicaulis	a lady's-mantle
Anancamptis morio	Green-winged Orchid
Betonica officinalis	Betony
Botrychium lunaria	Moonwort
Briza media	Quaking-grass
Carex caryophyllea	Spring Sedge
Carex pallescens	Pale Sedge
Carex panicea	Carnation Sedge
Carex spicata	Spiked Sedge
Colchicum autumnale	Meadow Saffron
Euphrasia officinalis agg.	Eyebright
Filipendula vulgaris	Dropwort
Genista tinctoria	Dyer's Greenweed
Linum catharticum	Fairy Flax
Myosotis discolor	Changing Forget-me-not
Myosotis ramosissima	Early Forget-me-not
Neottia ovata	Common Twayblade
Ophioglossum vulgatum	Adder's-tongue
Pimpinella saxifraga	Burnet-saxifrage
Rhinanthus minor	Yellow-rattle
Serratula tinctoria	Saw-wort
Silaum silaus	Pepper-saxifrage
Succisa pratensis	Devil's-bit-Scabious
Trisetum flavescens	Yellow Oat-grass

Appendix 5: Butterfly Records 2013

Species	Date	Location	Number	Recorder
Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	25.5.13	Pant-y-lidan	0	Rob Rowe
	26.5.13	Barretts West	0	Dennis Twist
	02.6.13	Barretts West	0	DT
	09.6.13	Barretts West	2	DT
	09.6.13	Cwm Moch	0	DT
	18.6.13	Barretts West	7	DT
	21.6.13	Barretts West	9	DT
	29.6.13	Barretts West	26 (20 in 14 mins)	Nick Williams
	29.6.13	Pant-y-lidan	0	NW
	07.7.13	Pant-y-lidan	'small nos'	RR
	07.7.13	Black Mountain	0	RR
	07.7.13	Corkins Bank	18 in 10 mins	RR
	17.7.13	Black Mountain	4	RR
	17.7.13	Gors Bank	1	RR
	17.7.13	Bryn Shop south	'good nos'	RR
Dark Green Fritillary	07.7.13	Pant-y-lidan	'very good nos'	RR
	13.7.13	Cefn Hepreas	'Several'	RR
	17.7.13	Bryn Shop south	2	RR

Appendix 6. Index of Maps, Tables and Figures

Maps

Tables

Figures

Annexe 1

The Management Committee

Membership
The following people were elected at the Annual Meeting in November 2012

- Leo Smith (Chair)
- Jacky Harrison (Secretary)
- Mervin Mullard (Treasurer)
- Michelle Frater (Bird Recorder)
- Fiona Gomersall (Plant Recorder)
- Rob Rowe (Publicity Officer)
- Joy Greenall
- Rob Harris
- John Swift
- Trevor Wheeler

Fiona Gomersall also represents the local Branch of the Shropshire Wildlife Trust, and Trevor Wheeler also represents the Clun Forest *Land, Life and Livelihoods* project Steering Group.

The Committee, and the Bird and Plant Group, have the support of Professional Advisers

- Fiona Gomersall (Shropshire Wildlife Trust) actively supports and co-ordinates the Plant Group
- Leo Smith actively supports and helps co-ordinate the Management Committee and the Bird Group

Meetings
The Committee has met once since the last Annual Public Meeting, on 10 October 2013. Most of the practical work of the Group is carried out by the Bird and Plant Groups, and the organisers report to, and are overseen by, the Management Committee. In practice this means that it is not necessary to have frequent meetings of the Committee.

Most of the issues discussed at the Committee meetings relate to the conduct and results of surveys, mailings to members, publicity and getting more people involved, engaging with farmers and landowners, relations with Land Life and Livelihoods and the Clun & Bishop's Castle SWT branch, Conservation Action & *Wildlife Habitats & Landscape* Policy, the increasing attention being paid to land management issues in the whole catchment, as they affect the water quality in the river, and other matters which are fully described in this Report.

The Committee believes that social events are very important, and a successful barbeque was held on Saturday 10th August, at the Straw Bale building on Brynmawr Farm. Over 50 people attended.

Minutes of Committee meetings have been kept, and can be obtained from the Secretary.

Funding and Bank Account
The Group has a Bank Account at the Co-operative Bank. Each cheque requires two signatures. Signatories are the Officers and John Swift.

Up until 2011, all the costs of the Group were met through various grants to Leo Smith. From October 2011 to June 2013, all costs have been met by the LEADER Project. These grants are listed in the Acknowledgements in the various Reports, and all of them have been accounted for to the funding body.

The Committee agreed that the BBQ 2013 would be self – financing, and all receipts were banked and then were paid out to the organisers for food and expenses.

Most grants are for the financial year ending 31st March, so the committee has agreed that the financial year will be 1st April – 31st March, and accounts will be audited accordingly.

Financial Report
The last Annual Report included an Income and Expenditure account for the whole period since the Group's Bank Account was opened.

Since then there have been no transactions on the Groups Bank Account, apart from the income and expenditure for the BBQ, and £65.29 for Secretary's expenses which was reimbursed from the LEADER funding. The balance on the bank account is now the same as it was in November 2011 i.e. £437.93.

The Income and Expenditure Account has been independently verified for the Group by Cath Landles, the Community Officer for the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Team.

Constitution
As the Group needs a Constitution to apply for funds, the Committee recommends the adoption of the draft set out in Annexe 2 below.

New Members
Volunteers for membership of the Committee will be very welcome.

The current Committee members are all willing to stand for re-election.

Leo Smith (Chair)
Mervin Mullard (Treasurer)
November 2013

Annexe 2

Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group

Constitution

1. Name

The Group will be known as the Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group

2. Area

The Group will operate largely in the catchment area of the River Clun west of Clun, including the valleys of the River Unk and the Folly Brook, plus the part of the Bettws y Crwyn parish that is outside the River Clun catchment area. This is around 120 square kilometres, shown on the attached map *.

3. Aims & Objectives

The Group will

- Bring together people interested in wildlife
- Undertake survey work to establish the status of key bird and plant species, and other wildlife and habitats
- Encourage and enhance local interest in wildlife
- Actively promote conservation.

4. Membership

Membership is open to anyone who lives or works in the area, or who has an interest in its wildlife, and who wants to actively contribute to local knowledge and conservation.

Members are people who have paid the appropriate subscription (if any), and have completed a membership application form or supplied contact details. The Secretary will maintain a register of members.

5. Annual Subscriptions

The Annual Subscription (if any) will be set by the Management Committee, and confirmed by the Annual General Meeting.

6. Committee

The Officers of the Management Committee shall be

i. Chair
ii. Secretary
iii. Treasurer
iv. Publicity Officer
v. Bird Recorder
vi. Plant Recorder

The Management Committee will include up to five other Members.

The Officers and Other Committee Members shall be elected by the Annual General Meeting (AGM), and serve for one year.

The Committee may co-opt upto three additional members. All co-opted committee members serve until the next AGM, when they may stand for election.

The Committee will meet as required, but at least once per year prior to the Annual General Meeting. The Secretary, Chair, or any other two members of the Committee can require the Secretary to call a meeting to discuss specific items of business.

The Committee will delegate the organisation of wildlife surveys to Survey Groups, or co-ordinators. The Committee may set terms of reference for each Survey, otherwise the Survey Group or co-ordinator can determine its own objectives and procedures. Each Survey Group or co-ordinator will report on progress and activity to the Management Committee at each meeting, and produce the relevant section of the Group's Annual Report.

The Committee is responsible for all activities of the Group, and its finances. Decisions will be made by a majority of Committee Members present and voting. Every member (including the Chair, and co-opted members) will have one vote. In the case of a tie, the Chair will have the casting vote.

Decisions of General Meetings are binding on the Committee, provided the appropriate resolution was included in the Notice of the Meeting sent to all members.

7. Finances

The financial year shall be 1 April – 31 March

All funds of will be paid into a bank account in the name of the *Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group*

The Committee will appoint four cheque signatories. All cheques and transactions must be signed by at least two of the signatories.

The Committee will receive a Financial Report from the Treasurer at each meeting, and present annual accounts to the AGM. Such Accounts must be independently reviewed,

either by two members of the Group who are not Officers, or by two independent individuals nominated by the Committee.

8. Annual General Meeting (AGM)

There shall be an AGM to be held within 12 months of the end of each Financial Year

All Members will be given at least three weeks written notice of the time, date and place of the AGM, and the Agenda. Notice will be posted or emailed to each member at the current address held by the Secretary.

The Management Committee will present the report and accounts for the preceding year at the AGM.

The Agenda for the AGM must include notice of election to the Management Committee.

All members may attend and vote at the AGM.

9. Special General Meetings

Special General Meetings can be called by resolution of the Management Committee, or by any 10 members submitting a written request to the Secretary. Any such resolution or request must include notice of the business to be discussed. Such meetings must be convened by the Secretary within 3 weeks of the resolution or request being made. All Members will be given at least three, but no more than four, weeks written notice of the time, date and place of the SGM, and the business to be discussed.

10. Co-operation with Other Community Wildlife Groups

The Group will work with other Community Wildlife Groups, in the Shropshire Hills AONB and elsewhere, to develop joint initiatives, share good practice and contribute to a joint web-site, and, when appropriate, establish a Federation of Community Wildlife Groups.

11. Affiliation to Other Organisations

The Group may apply to be affiliated to such other organisations that the Management Committee considers appropriate.

12. Alterations to the constitution

Alterations to this Constitution can only be made at a General Meeting, and if the proposed amendment is included in the written Notice of the meeting. Alterations to the constitution will require approval of two thirds of members present and voting at the meeting.

13. Winding up

The Group can only be wound up at a Special General Meeting called specifically for that purpose.

The decision to wind up will require the approval of two thirds of members present and voting at the meeting.

After all liabilities have been discharged, any surplus funds will be donated to an organisation determined by the Management Committee, or, if the Management Committee is unable to reach a decision, for whatever reason, by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership..

14. Constitution adopted

This constitution was adopted by the members of the *Group* at a meeting held on *[Insert the date of the first General meeting.]*

* Note

The Map of the Area, attached to this constitution, has been reproduced in previous Annual Reports, and can be found on the website.