

# Curlews, Lapwings and Other Birds Survey

## Objectives

Bird Group members were asked to find out where Curlew and Lapwing occur in the breeding season, record behaviour indicative of breeding, and record other species, most of which are of nature conservation importance (i.e. they are Target Species for Government Agri-environment Schemes operated by Natural England or the Welsh Government, or they are on the *Red List* or *Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern* in England or Wales because they have suffered large declines in the last 25 or 50 years, and / or are Target Species in one of the national Biodiversity Action Plans).

In addition to Lapwing and Curlew, the target species were:-

- Kestrel
- Red Kite
- Barn Owl
- Grey Partridge
- Snipe
- Skylark
- Meadow Pipit
- Cuckoo
- Dipper
- Swift (nest sites only)
- Yellow Wagtail
- Dunnock
- Wheatear
- Stonechat
- Spotted Flycatcher
- Tree Sparrow
- Linnet
- Bullfinch
- Yellowhammer
- Reed Bunting

A bird survey was carried out in this area for four years as part of the Stiperstones-Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) area, but from 2018 onwards the responsibility fell to the newly-formed Camlad Valley Community Wildlife Group. It complements surveys carried out by the Upper Onny Wildlife Group since 2004, and it is intended to repeat it annually, to monitor long-term population trends for key species, as well as establish the current population and distribution.

## Methodology

The area has been divided up into 20 tetrads (2x2 kilometre squares, each made up of four of the one-kilometre squares shown on Ordnance Survey maps). A map showing these tetrads, and the reference code, is attached (Appendix 1).

People who agreed to help were allocated a square / tetrad, and requested to survey it once during each of three specified two week periods, around 1 April, 1 May and 15 June.

- The first period follows the arrival of Lapwing and Curlew back on the breeding grounds. This is the best time to find breeding Lapwing (first egg date is usually around 1<sup>st</sup> April).
- The second period is the best time to find breeding Curlew (first egg date is usually around 30<sup>th</sup> April).
- The third period is timed to find any Curlews that have successfully hatched and still have chicks. It is also the best time to find the Other Target Species.

Participants were provided with detailed survey instructions, and a large scale map of the tetrad (the map filled an A4 sheet of paper) for each survey. The methodology has been unchanged since 2014.

A training meeting was arranged for those that wanted one, in the early evening on 11 April. Members felt that a feedback meeting during the survey period was unnecessary, so this report is the first summary of 2018 results.

It was hoped that all 20 survey squares were going to be covered, but unfortunately the personal circumstances of some group members changed in the course of the season, so six of the 20 squares were not surveyed. Even so, members spent more than 87 hours on the surveys.

## Curlew

The map on page # has been compiled from the survey maps, and other reports received of Curlews in the area. It summarises the estimated number and location of territories.

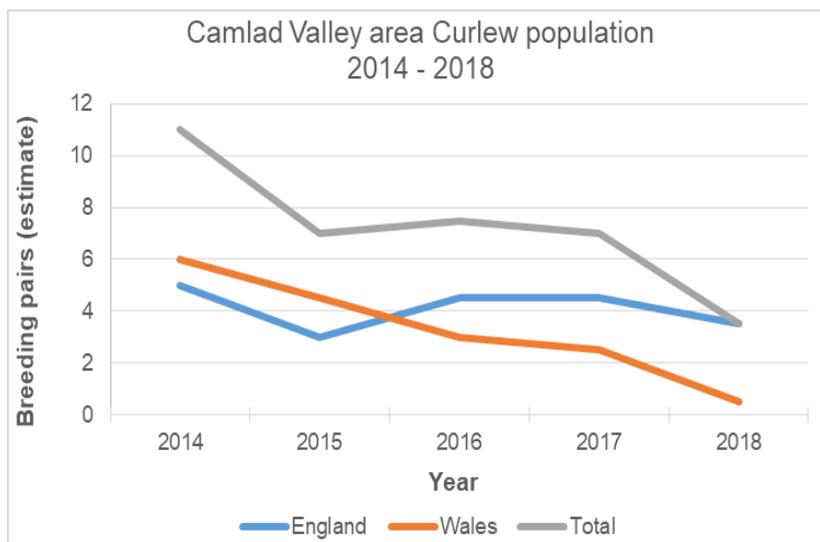
The methodology requires observations of a pair together, or a single bird on two of the three surveys, to confirm a territory. However, Curlews often have large territories, and may be seen a kilometre or more from their nest site, so interpretation of the observations is sometimes difficult, unless singing birds are seen or heard concurrently. If that does not happen, the methodology requires the analysis to produce the lowest population estimate consistent with the records, in this case 3 pairs, (3 in England, and 0 in Wales).

In 2017, 7 breeding pairs were found, 2 – 3 in Wales, and 4 – 5 in England. However, in 2018 three of these pairs were re-found (in SJ20Q & W, and SO29Y), three were not found, although the usual level of survey work was carried out, in SO29R and S, and SO39A, and but the tetrad containing the seventh, SO29W, was not surveyed at all. The maps show the results for 2017 and 2018, to allow a direct comparison.

The weather in 2018 was not helpful to Curlew. Strong winds and wet weather (“the beast from the east”) restricted the availability of invertebrate food, and delayed the growth of grass to provide cover for nest sites, so it is possible that some pairs delayed nesting, never tried, or moved on. Hopefully some of the “lost” pairs may be re-found in 2019.

Table 1 shows the estimated number of pairs found in each year since 2014, and the chart shows the annual trends. In most years the number of pairs has not been established precisely, so a range has been given, and the pair in SO29S nested right on the border, so it has been

counted as possibly breeding in both countries. The chart is based on the mid-point of each range, so the total population shown is not necessarily the sum of the English and Welsh populations.



**Table 1. Curlew population 2014 - 18**

Year	Number of Curlew pairs		
	England	Wales	Total
2014	4 - 6	5 - 7	9 - 13
2015	2 - 3	4 - 5	6 - 8
2016	4 - 5	2 - 4	7 - 8
2017	4 - 5	2 - 3	7
2018	3	0 - 1	3 - 4

Not surprisingly, it takes a few years to build up a complete picture of the Curlews in the area. In addition, establishing accurate estimates and trends is made more difficult as some squares have not been surveyed every year. Even so, it appears that the population is declining, and that most of the decline is occurring in Wales.

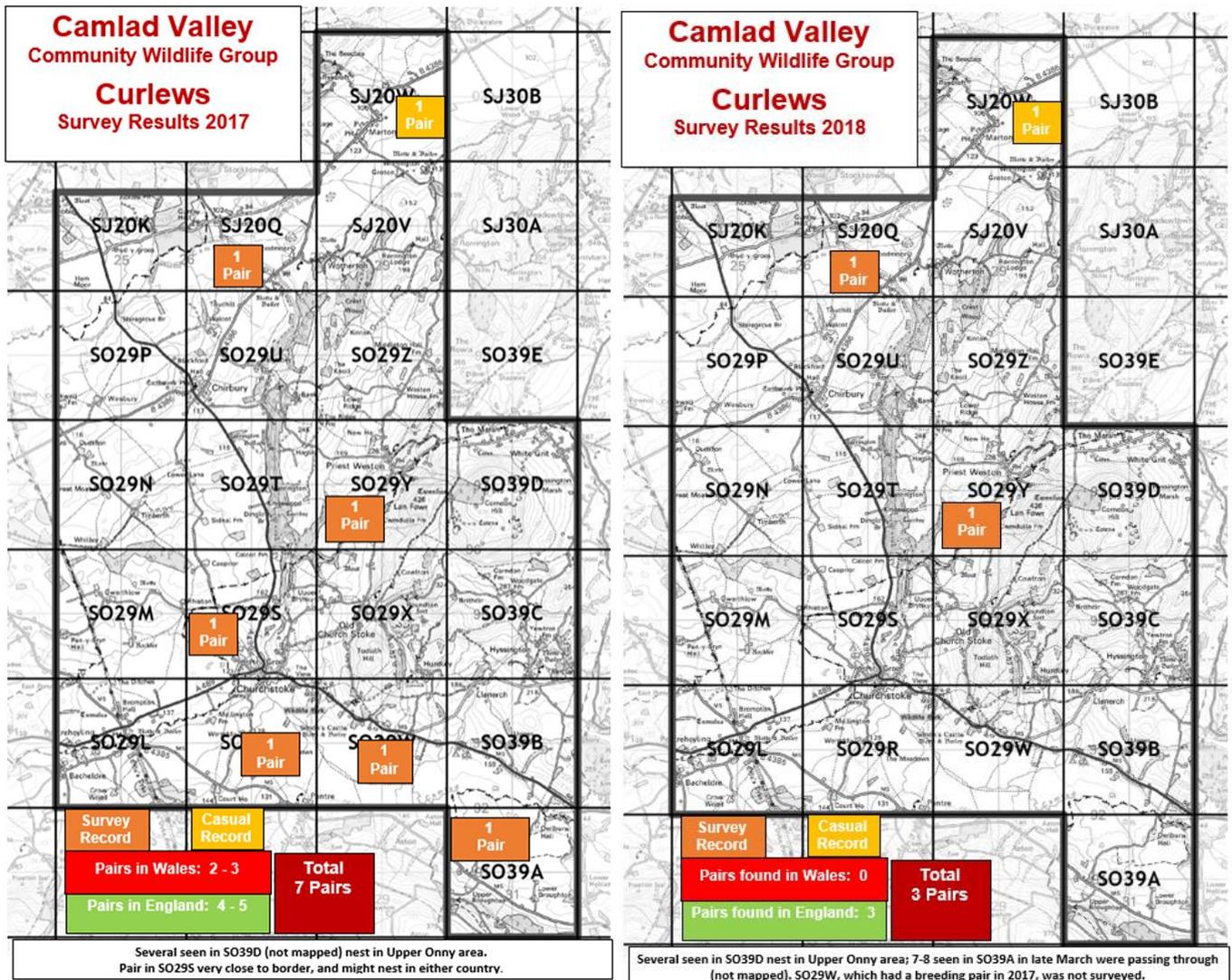
It is intended to repeat the survey in 2019 to continue to establish the trends.

Well over 100 Curlews have been colour-ringed at the Dolydd Hafren Montgomery Wildlife Trust Reserve on the River Severn near Welshpool since March 2015, and four were found breeding in the area, one near Owlbury, one near Hockleton and two near Marton.

**From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Curlew population in the area in 2018 is 3 breeding pairs, all in England, but it is possible that there is a pair in Wales in a square that was not surveyed.**

It appears that three more pairs have been lost, one in England and two in Wales.

The survey should be repeated in 2018, to clarify the number of pairs actually present and the location of nest sites and foraging areas, and work towards regular monitoring to establish a population trend.



## Lapwing

Only one pair of Lapwing was found in the area, to the east of Corndon Hill near White Grit. They were seen on several occasions, but no evidence of nesting or successful breeding was observed. Another was heard early in the season in SO39B, but was probably passing through.

The weather in 2018 created poor conditions for Lapwing as well as Curlew. However, while Curlew are usually site-faithful, Lapwing are mobile, as they have to follow farm crop rotation to find bare earth or spring crops, so the annual population fluctuates. There have been previous years when few Lapwing were found, as low as two pairs in 2015, but only one in 2018 is the lowest so far. There were 10 -12 pairs in 2016.

It is therefore important to survey squares every year, even if no Lapwings were found in the previous year.

## Anecdotal Evidence for the Decline of Lapwing and Curlew

Members of the Bird Group who live in the area, and other local residents, say that Lapwings and Curlews are less common now than they used to be. Some members talked to local farmers in the course of their surveys, and they too said that Lapwings and Curlew are less

common now than they used to be. Lapwings have apparently declined much more than Curlews.

## Other Target Species

The other Target Species recorded during the surveys are summarised in Table 2 below.

The summary table shows the maximum count for each species on any one survey in each tetrad. This may under-record some species, but the alternative – adding all the counts together – would lead to considerable double or triple counting of some individual birds.

Note that members were asked to record individual birds, not pairs (so at some locations both the birds in the pair were recorded, and in the final survey some recently fledged juveniles may have been recorded as well).

**Table 2. Other Target Species - Summary**

Survey Square (Tetrad)	In Wales	Species								
		Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Dunnock	Tree Sparrow	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer
SJ20 K	Y		1	3						
SJ20 Q	Y		1						1	
SJ20 V	N		2	2						
SJ20 W	Y									
SO29 L	Y	(Square not surveyed)								
SO29 M	Y	(No target species recorded)								
SO29 N	Tiny Bit	(Square not surveyed)								
SO29 P	N	(Square not surveyed)								
SO29 R	Y			2						
SO29 S	Y		1				12	10		6
SO29 T	N		1	1			2			
SO29 U	N	(No target species recorded)								
SO29 W	ALL	(Square not surveyed)								
SO29 X	Y		2		2		3			
SO29 Y	Y						6			
SO29 Z	N		1							
SO39 A	Tiny Bit			2						
SO39 B	Y	(Square not surveyed)								
SO39 C	ALL	(No target species recorded)								
SO39 D	Y	1				1				
<b>Totals (20 Tetrads)</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>

As expected in a survey of this type, the expertise of members, and the time they had available to undertake the surveys, varied considerably. The survey squares also vary considerably, in accessibility and terrain. The “detectability” of the birds themselves also varies considerably, according to prevailing weather conditions, time of day, stage in the breeding cycle, and the normal behaviour of each species. Thus the survey results will give an indication of the species present, and perhaps their habitat preferences, but only a very small proportion will have been recorded.

Unsurprisingly, five of the more scarce Target Species were not recorded at all during the surveys – Barn Owl, Grey Partridge, Snipe Dipper or Yellow Wagtail - but, surprisingly, no Swift (nest sites), Wheatear, Stonechat, Linnet or Reed Bunting were recorded either.

It will be seen that Skylark, Dunnock and Yellowhammer are widespread and fairly numerous, and the remaining species that were found are present only in their specific habitats, and in small numbers. The 10 Tree Sparrows in SO29S were seen at a garden feeder.

Cuckoo has been a *Red List* species on the *Birds of Conservation Concern* in the UK since 2009, but it was again recorded in one tetrad, on Corndon Hill.

Red Kites were seen in seven tetrads, compared with five last year, seven in 2016, six in 2015 and two in 2014. No evidence of breeding was reported, but given the rapid spread and population increase (over 30 pairs in Shropshire now – the first successful breeding for 130 years occurred as recently as 2006), it is likely that breeding will become a regular occurrence in the near future.

## Decline of Lapwing and Curlew

Lapwing and Curlew are in decline, across the UK, in England and Wales, and in Shropshire. Objective evidence for this comes from Bird Atlas work. The distribution maps showing the results of the recent 2008-13 survey area can be compared with the same area on the maps shown in *An Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Shropshire*, based on six years fieldwork 1985-90, and published in 1992. Both sets of maps have been compiled on the same basis, with similar amounts of fieldwork effort, so the decline is undoubtedly real.

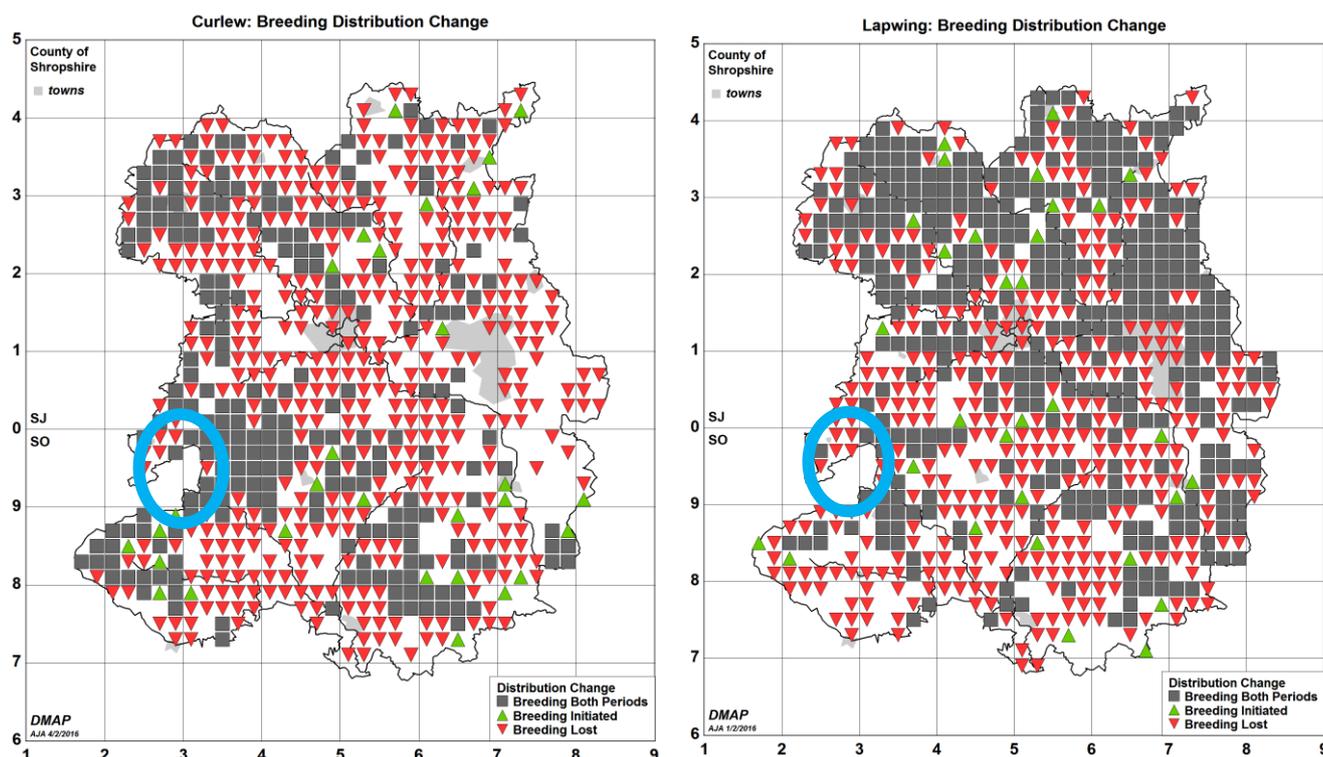
The maps show tetrads where each species was found in both Atlas surveys (grey squares) and tetrads where it was found in the earlier period, but not the more recent period (red downward triangles). The Camlad Valley CWG area is within the blue ovals.

Surveys including counts complement these maps. The county Lapwing population has fallen from about 3000 pairs in 1990 to only about 800 now. The Curlew population has fallen from about 700 pairs in 1990 to about 160 pairs in 2010 (a 77% decline for both species).

Other evidence for the decline of Lapwing and Curlew can be found on the website of the British Trust for Ornithology [www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)

Such action is also being taken nationally. Both species have been designated as UK Biodiversity Priority Species by the Government, as part of its commitment to international biodiversity targets, precisely because of the rapid decline, and both species are now on the *Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern 4*, published in December 2015.

In England, both species nest on farmland, and recent and current agri-environment schemes (part of the system of payments to farmers through the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union) included rewards for farmers for sensitive management of habitat on their farms, and providing other environmental benefits. Farmers applying to join had to take into account the habitat requirements of a number of birds, including Lapwing and Curlew, if they



breed on or near the farm, or use land there for feeding. Many farms in the area will benefit from agreements for 10 years from the date of signing, the last in 2014.

In Wales, Lapwing and Curlew have both been designated as Principal Biodiversity Species in the Welsh Government's Biodiversity Action Plan. Bird Atlas work has been undertaken at the 10km square level, rather than the 25 times greater resolution at tetrad level, so no information is available about change in the Welsh part of the Camlad Valley CWG area. Population monitoring for the two species is carried out by specific surveys, but none have taken place in recent years.

The higher level farm payments scheme in Wales, Glastir, has been revised, as part of the new Common Agricultural Policy being implemented through the Rural Development Programme 2014-20.

In both countries, the funds available for current agri-environment schemes have been reduced, and the procedures are more bureaucratic, proving fewer benefits for birds. Future arrangements to protect birds and their habitats on farmland, when the EU programme ends in 2020, are not clear.

## ***Curlew Country***

The Stiperstones-Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) operated a Curlew Recovery Project in the area from 2014 to 2017. Fieldwork research established that most nests were predated (more than half by foxes), and when the nests were protected with electric fencing, most nests survived but almost all chicks were predated before fledging.

The LPS ended in March 2018, but the Curlew project has continued, under the name "Curlew Country". It has concentrated on the trialling of Headstarting. This involves removing eggs from Curlew nests, incubating them artificially, rearing chicks in captivity, and then releasing them into the wild after they fledge, at or near a potential breeding site. It is considered to be a short term measure to try to boost the Curlew population while discovering the appropriate measures to improve breeding success to the level needed for recovery. Under a Natural England licence, eggs were collected and 21 curlew chicks were raised, fledged and released. While this has been a successful technique for other species, it is not known whether our local Curlew chicks will survive and return to their natal area to breed; if they do it will probably not be until they are two years old. However, if it does work it will lead to a significant short-term increase in the local Curlew population and it is important to continue the trial.

The location of any pairs of Curlew found by the Bird Survey will be passed on to the Curlew Country fieldworkers.

## ***Use of CWG Survey Results***

In addition to helping the Curlew Country fieldworkers, the survey results are made available to Natural England, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the Welsh Government.

In England, they show the importance of particular areas for these species, which will hopefully encourage farmers to manage their land more sensitively, and provide Natural England with objective evidence to judge individual farm applications to join agri-environment schemes, enabling them to target the use of their limited resources more effectively.

The results also reinforce and supplement the results from other Community Wildlife Groups operating in the Shropshire Hills, which together now cover well over 500 square kilometres, around two-thirds of the Shropshire Hills AONB. These results help inform the AONB Management Plan, which is now being revised to cover the five years 2019 – 24.

Coupled with the results of other surveys, the results may also contribute to the identification of potential new Local (County) Wildlife Sites. These sites are monitored by Shropshire Wildlife Trust, which encourages the landowners to manage them so they retain their value for wildlife.

In Wales, discussions will take place with Montgomery Wildlife Trust about the use of the results to identify potential local Wildlife Sites in Montgomeryshire, and how to use the results to promote conservation of the species.

### ***Other Community Wildlife Groups and the Save our Curlews Campaign***

Shropshire Wildlife Trust and Shropshire Ornithological Society are leading a “Save our Curlews” Campaign, funded by a joint Appeal. See [www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/](http://www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/) Members are encouraged to donate to the Appeal.

The campaign is encouraging a network of 11 Community Wildlife Groups across Shropshire, including ours, to monitor Curlews. The 11 Groups cover 137 tetrads where the vast majority of the County’s Curlew population was found in the recent 2008-13 Bird Atlas project. A map showing the area covered by each group, overlain on the Curlew distribution map, can be found on the website. Around 80-100 pairs were found altogether. Over 270 people participated, and put in nearly 2,300 hours, a clear indication of the commitment of local people to saving our Curlews.

### ***Recommendations***

*Natural England and the Welsh Government are recommended to encourage farmers with breeding Lapwing or Curlew on or near their land, to join the appropriate agri-environment scheme, utilising the appropriate options to maintain and enhance the habitat for these priority species*

### ***Acknowledgements***

Most importantly, thanks to the Group members who undertook the survey work, or sent in casual records:-

Hilary Berry, Ros Burns, Hazel Cribb, Sally Currin, Stuart Dickinson, Peter Fenner, Trevor Holden, Mary Napper White, Huw Prole, Chris Radford, Rob Rowe, Sandy Scott, Iain Smith, Jackie Thomas and Steve Wright.

Thanks also to:-

- Joe Penfold, LPS Community Officer, who organised all the Bird Group meetings, distributed information to members, and nurtured the Community Wildlife Group through to its launch as an independent constituted body in November 2017.

### ***Summary 2018***

*This report summarises the fifth year of bird surveys.*

*Fourteen of the 20 tetrads were surveyed, and we now have a better understanding of the population and distribution of Lapwing and Curlew, and the status of the Other Target Species. The surveys provide clear evidence of a continuing decline in the Curlew population.*

*The populations in the Camlad Valley area in 2018 are estimated at 1 pair of Lapwing (in Wales), and 3 - 4 pairs of Curlew (perhaps one pair in Wales).*

*This is valuable information for the conservation of these species. Further survey work in future years will add to this baseline, and establish population trends in the area.*

## ***Plans for 2019***

The Bird Group intends to repeat the Bird Survey next year. New participants are needed, so we hope to recruit new members.

The next Bird Group meeting will be held at 7.30pm on Monday 18 March at the Horse and Jockey, in Churchstoke, primarily to plan the bird survey. New members will be very welcome.

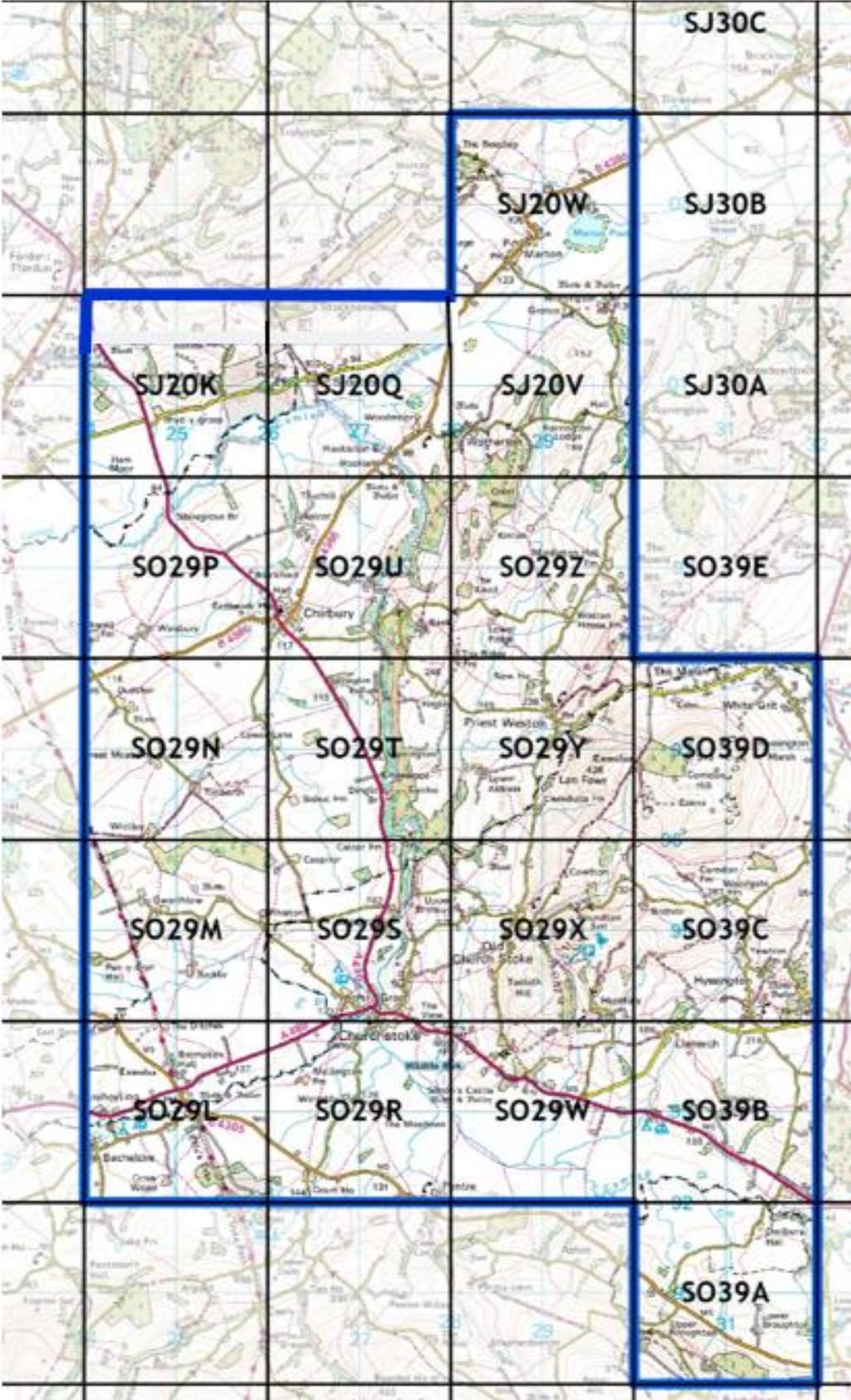
Consideration can also be given to developing other activities, similar to those operated by other Community Wildlife Groups. Nest box schemes for Woodland Birds, Barn Owls and Dippers may be developed, if there is sufficient support, and a programme of local bird walks and other events may be held.

Everyone interested in birds is welcome at all meetings and events.

Details can also be found and downloaded from the joint website for all the Community Wildlife Groups in the Shropshire Hills, [www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk),

Leo Smith  
February 2019

**Appendix 1. Map of the Camlad Valley Community Wildlife Group Survey Area, showing Square Boundaries and Tetrad Codes**



The Group’s area includes Churchstoke, Chirbury and Marton, and Corndon and Roundton Hills, and part of Offa’s Dyke, as shown on the map.

Each square (“tetrad”) on the map is 2x2 kilometres, using gridlines marked on Ordnance survey maps. Total area: 20 tetrads = 80 square kilometres.

# Appendix 2. Camlad Valley CWG Bird Survey Results 2017

## Survey Results: First Period 24 March - 8 April

Tetrad	L / CU	LPS	Wales	Surveyor(s)	Time Spent		Number of Each Species Recorded (Individual Birds)											
					Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Duncock	Tree Sparrow	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	
SJ20 K	YES	No	Y	Steve Wright	1	15		1				3						
SJ20 Q			Y	Sandy Scott	3	30		2										
SJ20 V			N	Steve Wright	1	50												
SJ20 W			Y	Iain Smith			(Unable to do survey)											
SO29 L		No	Y	Trevor Holden			(Unable to do survey)											
SO29 M		Tiny Bit	Y	Mary Napper White			(No target species recorded)											
SO29 N		No	Tiny Bit	Trevor Holden			(Unable to do survey)											
SO29 P	YES	Tiny Bit	N	Iain Smith			(Unable to do survey)											
SO29 R			Y	Peter Fenner	3	30	(No target species recorded)											
SO29 S	YES		Y	Ros Burns	3	0				1				12	10			6
SO29 T			N	Ros Burns	1	45				1								
SO29 U			N	Sally Currin	3	15	(No target species recorded)											
SO29 W	YES		ALL	Trevor Holden			(Unable to do survey)											
SO29 X			Y	Hazel Cribb	4	15				2				3				
SO29 Y	YES		Y	Chris Radford	3	0								6				
SO29 Z			N	Jackie Thomas	4	30		3		1								
SO39 A	YES		Tiny Bit	Huw Prole		45		7-8										
SO39 B	YES		Y	Trevor Holden			(Unable to do survey)											
SO39 C	YES		ALL	Stuart Dickinson	1	0	(No target species recorded)											
SO39 D	YES		Y	Hilary Berry	2	5	4	4		1	1							
<b>Totals (20 Tetrads)</b>					<b>33</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	

## Second Period 21 April - 6 May

Tetrad	L / CU	LPS	Wales	Surveyor(s)	Time Spent		Number of Each Species Recorded (Individual Birds)											
					Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Duncock	Tree Sparrow	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	
SJ20 K	YES	No	Y	Steve Wright	1	50					1							
SJ20 Q			Y	Sandy Scott	3	30				1							1	
SJ20 V			N	Steve Wright	1	10					1							
SJ20 W			Y	Iain Smith	2	5		1										
SO29 L		No	Y	Trevor Holden			(Unable to do survey)											
SO29 M		Tiny Bit	Y	Mary Napper White			(Unable to do survey)											
SO29 N		No	Tiny Bit	Trevor Holden			(Unable to do survey)											
SO29 P	YES	Tiny Bit	N	Iain Smith			(Unable to do survey)											
SO29 R			Y	Peter Fenner	2	15	(No target species recorded)											
SO29 S	YES		Y	Ros Burns						1				3	10			
SO29 T			N	Ros Burns	1	0				1				2				
SO29 U			N	Sally Currin	2	45	(No target species recorded)											
SO29 W	YES		ALL	Trevor Holden			(Unable to do survey)											
SO29 X			Y	Hazel Cribb	3	15				1		2		2				
SO29 Y	YES		Y	Chris Radford	3	0		2										
SO29 Z			N	Jackie Thomas	3	0				1								
SO39 A	YES		Tiny Bit	Huw Prole	1	30	(No target species recorded)											
SO39 B	YES		Y	Trevor Holden			(Unable to do survey)											
SO39 C	YES		ALL	Stuart Dickinson		45	(No target species recorded)											
SO39 D	YES		Y	Hilary Berry	2	30		2	1				1					
<b>Totals (20 Tetrads)</b>					<b>28</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	

## Survey Results: Third Period 9 - 24 June

Tetrad	L / CU	LPS	Wales	Surveyor(s)	Time Spent		Number of Each Species Recorded (Individual Birds)											
					Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Duncock	Tree Sparrow	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	
SJ20 K	YES	No	Y	Steve Wright	1	30				1	1							
SJ20 Q			Y	Sandy Scott	2	30												
SJ20 V			N	Steve Wright	1	45					1							
SJ20 W			Y	Iain Smith			(No target species recorded)											
SO29 L		No	Y	Trevor Holden			(Unable to do survey)											
SO29 M		Tiny Bit	Y	Mary Napper White			(Unable to do survey)											
SO29 N		No	Tiny Bit	Trevor Holden			(Unable to do survey)											
SO29 P	YES	Tiny Bit	N	Iain Smith			(No target species recorded)											
SO29 R			Y	Peter Fenner	2	15					2							
SO29 S	YES		Y	Ros Burns	2	50								4	4			3
SO29 T			N	Ros Burns	1	0				1	1							
SO29 U			N	Sally Currin			(Survey not undertaken)											
SO29 W	YES		ALL	Trevor Holden			(Unable to do survey)											
SO29 X			Y	Hazel Cribb	2	20				1				2				
SO29 Y	YES		Y	Chris Radford	3	0	(No target species recorded)											
SO29 Z			N	Jackie Thomas	3	10				1								
SO39 A	YES		Tiny Bit	Huw Prole	1	15					2							
SO39 B	YES		Y	Trevor Holden			(Unable to do survey)											
SO39 C	YES		ALL	Stuart Dickinson	1	30	(No target species recorded)											
SO39 D	YES		Y	Hilary Berry	2	15	(No target species recorded)											
<b>Totals (20 Tetrads)</b>					<b>25</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	