



Time for Wildlife in North-west Shropshire

**Opportunities to volunteer for wildlife in our area
and learn about natural history through talks and field trips**

**Version 1
September 2018**



INTRODUCTION

This document originates from a meeting of the Tanat to Perry Community Wildlife Group, where members expressed an interest in knowing about other wildlife surveys and activities in our area.

As members of a group which formed to carry out a Curlew and Lapwing survey, we clearly share an interest in birds; from feedback during the survey, it is equally clear that most of us enjoy other forms of wildlife too! So, although this document focuses on birds, a broad range of other taxa has been included.

In terms of geographical coverage, the aim is to highlight opportunities accessible to members of the three community wildlife groups in north-west Shropshire: Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence, Tanat to Perry, and Three Parishes.

If you're not familiar with north-west Shropshire's community wildlife groups and would like to know more about our ongoing Curlew and Lapwing project, you'll find information and contact details on the following page. New volunteers are always welcome: please join in!

Time for Wildlife in North-west Shropshire is divided into four sections:

- **Wildlife Surveys**
Local and national recording schemes requiring volunteer fieldworkers
- **Other Opportunities for Volunteers**
Wildlife organisations looking for practical help
- **Talks and Trips**
Groups offering speaker programmes, outdoor sessions and field trips
- **Development**
Resources to help improve identification skills, knowledge and survey techniques

Entries are listed alphabetically by the name of the organising body.

I am grateful for the support of Warwick Davies and Leo Smith, who contributed contact information and ideas for the structure and format of this document. I will be updating the content periodically: your comments and suggestions for improvement or additional entries will be most welcome, and please tell me if you spot any errors!

Finally, I hope that you find this document useful. Maybe it will help you develop a latent interest or perhaps take you in a completely new direction; there are certainly plenty of opportunities to choose from.

Claire Backshall
Tanat to Perry Community Wildlife Group
c_backshall@hotmail.com

Cover pictures: Lapwing by John Harding; Curlew by Leo Smith; all others by Claire Backshall.

North-west Shropshire's Community Wildlife Groups

The breeding populations of Lapwing and Curlew have suffered massive declines in range and abundance in the last 20 years or so, both nationally and in Shropshire.

The **Curlew and Lapwing Survey** seeks to establish how many remain, where they are, and to monitor the population; this is essential before attempting any conservation measures to try to reverse the decline.

The survey is organised locally by three Community Wildlife Groups (CWGs):

- **Three Parishes CWG** covers St Martins, Selattyn & Gobowen and Weston Rhyn
Contact Polly Smith 01691 239087 polly.j.smith@hotmail.co.uk
- **Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence CWG** centres around Alberbury
Contact Michael Wallace 01743 369035 michaelwallace47@gmail.com
- **Tanat to Perry CWG** extends south from Oswestry
Contact Claire Backshall 01691 830691 c_backshall@hotmail.com

Participants make three visits to an allocated survey square between April and June, each visit typically taking around three hours. You don't have to be an expert birdwatcher to take part: you simply need to be able to recognise Curlews and Lapwings by sight and call. As an option, volunteers can also record sightings of 20 other species of local interest which are red or amber listed on the List of Birds of Conservation Concern.

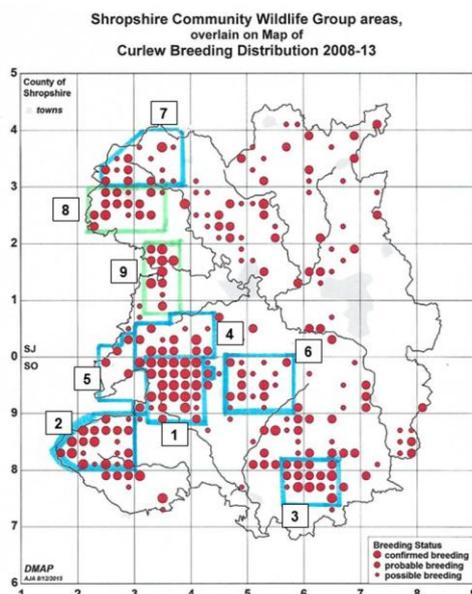
A field training session is held every spring covering identification and survey method.

New volunteers are always welcome; choose your area and get in touch! You can also help by reporting 'casual sightings' of Lapwing or Curlew during the breeding season.

Our cluster of CWGs - formed in 2017/2018 - complements the efforts of established groups in the south of the county as shown on the map below. Further information about Shropshire's CWGs can be found at www.shropscwgs.org.uk.

Results from all CWGs feed into the county-wide 'Save Our Curlews' campaign, led jointly by Shropshire Wildlife Trust and Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS).

Background to the project and updates on progress can be found at the SOS website: www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews. To donate to the campaign and help fund the recovery of these species visit www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/shropshire-curlew-appeal.



Community Wildlife Groups contributing to the 'Save Our Curlews' campaign

North-west Shropshire

7. Three Parishes (2017)
8. Tanat to Perry (2018)
9. Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence (2018)

South Shropshire

1. Upper Onny (2004)
2. Upper Clun (2007)
3. Clee Hill (2012)
4. Rea Valley (2014)
5. Camlad Valley (2014)
6. Strettons (2017)

WILDLIFE SURVEYS

Caution! Wildlife surveying can become compelling, if not addictive. In addition to the satisfaction of contributing to a worthwhile project, participating in a survey can improve identification and fieldwork skills, add purpose and value to an existing hobby, develop new areas of interest and reveal previously untrodden paths.

Many of us compile lists, formal or otherwise, of our observations while out in the countryside or gazing into the garden. Don't keep these records to yourself! You may find that, with just a little extra effort, they could add valuable data to an existing survey.

Finally, volunteer surveyors are vital to monitoring the status of our fauna and flora: most wildlife organisations cannot afford to employ large numbers of professional fieldworkers.

This section lists surveys which may be of interest; some are purely local projects but the majority contribute (directly or indirectly) to national studies. The following designations are appended to the organising body's title:

- L: local recording scheme
- LN: local scheme feeding into national database
- N: national recording scheme

Birds

British Trust for Ornithology (N)

www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys

Eight long-term 'core surveys' requiring varying levels of expertise and commitment:

Breeding Season

Heronries Census

Breeding Bird Survey

Waterways Breeding Bird Survey

Nest Record Scheme

Year-round

Garden BirdWatch*

BirdTrack

Wetland Bird Survey

Ringing Scheme

* Garden BirdWatch levies an annual subscription fee.

BirdTrack is highly recommended: BTO encourages users to contribute complete lists wherever possible but also welcomes casual records, and it is possible to enter records from anywhere in the world! BirdTrack app available for use in the field.

The core surveys are supplemented by occasional projects: it's worth checking the BTO website regularly to see what's new. You can also contact BTO Regional Representative for Shropshire, Jonathan Groom (bto.shropshire@gmail.com), and ask to be included on the mailing list for his occasional email updates.

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (N)

Big Garden Birdwatch: a well-established and popular annual snapshot of the UK's garden bird population. Record for one hour during the last weekend in January. Open to all; an ideal 'taster' survey and a great way to encourage younger birders.

Details at www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch

Shropshire Barn Owl Group (L)

www.shropshirebarnowlgroup.org.uk

Welcomes records of Barn Owls seen hunting during the breeding season (March to August); also road casualties at any time.

Shropshire Ornithological Society (L)

www.shropshirebirds.com

Shropshire Willow Tit Survey uses playback to find breeding pairs in early spring.

Shropshire Swift Group (L)

www.shropshireswifts.org.uk

Aims to survey and record Shropshire's Swift population, focusing initially on the market towns, and to encourage interest in Swifts and their conservation.

Report nest sites to shropshireswifts@gmail.com

Mammals

Shropshire Badger Group (L)

www.shropshirebadgergroup.co.uk

Organises surveys and sett monitoring. Sett records can be submitted via the Group's website or by telephone.

Shropshire Bat Group (N)

Local branch of the Bat Conservation Trust. Monitors winter hibernation sites and runs a programme of bat box surveys in summer. Also offers talks, walks and training to become a licensed bat roost visitor.

Details at www.bats.org.uk/pages/shropshire_bat_group.html

Butterflies and Moths

Butterfly Conservation (N)

Big Butterfly Count is a simple annual survey running for three weeks from mid-July. Another excellent survey to help enthuse younger naturalists.

Details at www.bigbutterflycount.org

Garden Butterfly Survey: record the number of each species seen in your garden, with observations made monthly (as a minimum) throughout the year.

Migrant Watch: record sightings of key migratory species.

First Sightings: record the first date that you see each species throughout the butterfly season.

Butterflies for the New Millennium: record and map butterfly colonies by repeat tetrad surveys plus casual sightings.

Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey requires 2 – 4 visits each summer to survey a 1km square based on the BTO's Breeding Bird Survey method.

Details at www.butterfly-conservation.org/butterflies/recording-and-monitoring

National Moth Recording Scheme: online database operated by Butterfly Conservation

Details at www.mothrecording.org

Butterfly Conservation West Midlands (N)

The local group for Butterfly Conservation. News, events and recording opportunities at www.westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk

Casual Records using iRecord or spreadsheets.

Weekly Fixed-route Transect delivers high-quality data but demands the commitment to walk a fixed route weekly between April and September for a minimum of five years.

Reduced Effort Survey (Timed and GPS Counts) targets particular species or locations.

Data from these surveys feeds into the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme www.ukbms.org

Moths – County Recorders (LN)

If you regularly record moths or have lots of sightings, it may be preferable to submit your records to the relevant County Recorder– please contact them to check:

Shropshire (VC40)

- Macro moths: Tony Jacques rec-vc40@vc40tj.plus.com
- Micro moths: Mike Shurmer mpshurmer@gmail.com

Montgomeryshire (VC47)

- Macro and micro moths: Peter Williams peterwilliams526@btinternet.com
-

Shropshire Wildlife Trust (L)

Oswestry Hills Butterfly Project is a survey based around SWT's local reserves.

Contact Gareth Egarr, North Reserves Officer on 01743 284281 or 07432 455011 or email garethe@shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk

Dragonflies

British Dragonfly Society (N)

www.british-dragonflies.org.uk

DragonflyWatch provides a progressive framework for recording odonata, from casual records to systematic site visits.

Dragonfly Challenge: annual search for six species in July, ideal for beginners.

Shropshire Dragonflies (LN)

www.shropshiredragonflies.co.uk

Comprehensive guidance on getting started – and progressing – with recording odonata, plus identification help, photographs, local events and a sightings blog. Records are submitted to the County Recorder for Shropshire and thence to the national database.

Bumblebees and Pollinators

Bumblebee Conservation Trust (N)

www.bumblebeeconservation.org

BeeWalk: national recording scheme to monitor the abundance of bumblebees. A fixed transect, approximately one mile, walked monthly from March to October.

Details at www.beewalk.org.uk

Blooms for Bees aims to discover which bees are visiting gardens and allotments, and their flowers of choice.

Details at www.bloomsforbees.co.uk

UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme (N)

Flower-Insect Timed Count: a simple survey collecting data on abundance and flower visitation of pollinators to target flower species; ideal for beginners.

1km Square Survey: systematic survey of pollinators and floral resources based on a core set of 75 randomly-selected squares nationwide, focusing on bees and hoverflies.

Details at www.ceh.ac.uk/our-science/projects/pollinator-monitoring

Plants and Fungi

National Plant Monitoring Scheme (N)

www.npms.org.uk

Collects data to provide an annual indication of changes in plant abundance and diversity. Volunteers monitor a 1km square and can participate at different levels according to their expertise, ensuring that everyone who is keen can join in!

Shropshire Botanical Society (L)

www.facebook.com/ShropshireBotanicalSociety

Field trips to sites across the county to identify and record plants.

Shropshire Ecological Data Network (LN)

Experienced botanists can submit records to SEDN using the spreadsheet or Shropshire Recording Card available at www.shropshireecology.co.uk/contribute.html

Shropshire Fungus Group (L)

www.shropshirefungusgroup.org

Organises regular forays throughout Shropshire to find, identify and record fungi. Records are forwarded to the British Myological Society's national database and shared with the Shropshire Ecological Data Network.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust (L)

Oswestry Botanical Survey is carried out by a self-led group with guidance from SWT's Fiona Gomersall.

Contact fionag@shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk

Multi-taxa

British Trust for Ornithology (N) www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/gbw

Garden BirdWatch: although primarily for recording garden birds, this survey offers the option to record mammals, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies, dragonflies and a number of other easily-recognised insects. Records are shared with the respective specialist conservation organisations.

Garden Wildlife Health (N) www.gardenwildlifehealth.org

Garden Wildlife Health: observers can report sick or dead garden birds, amphibians, reptiles or hedgehogs found in their garden and submit suitable samples for analysis.

The project team responds to each report.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOLUNTEERS

Volunteer effort is priceless: it enables groups and charities with limited financial resources to tackle projects that would otherwise be impossible. In return, volunteers can learn new skills or apply existing expertise to new situations, gain knowledge and experience, and enjoy contributing to a worthwhile project.

Volunteering for wildlife can take many forms and this section lists local groups seeking assistance with anything from scrub-bashing to stuffing envelopes.

Butterfly Conservation West Midlands (Local Group)

Work parties at Prees Heath Common Reserve. For dates and details, visit the 'Events' section at www.westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk

Caring for God's Acre

www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk

A year-round programme of practical work to help conserve the nature and heritage within churchyards across Shropshire. Non-religious, open to all; sign up at the website.

Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust

Wednesday work parties at local reserves; there are also opportunities to assist at events, help at the Trust's Welshpool office and contribute to species or habitat surveys.

Check vacancies and enrol at www.montwt.co.uk/how-you-can-help/volunteering

Oswestry Heritage Gateway

www.oldswestryhillfort.co.uk

Conservation group for Old Oswestry Hillfort, always looking for volunteers.

Contact Kate Clarke at ohgateway@gmail.com

Shropshire Barn Owl Group

www.shropshirebarnowlgroup.org.uk

The Group installs and monitors Barn Owl nest boxes in Shropshire and works with landowners to improve and conserve their habitat. Enquire via their website.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust

Oswestry Local Branch runs work parties on the first and third Saturdays of the month covering sites in Pant, Llyncllys, Llanymynech and the surrounding area.

Contact David Hardwick 01691 828617 or thehardwicks@btinternet.com

SWT also welcomes volunteers for visitor centre services at its Shrewsbury HQ and to support educational and community projects: check the website for current vacancies.

See www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/volunteer

Shropshire's Great Outdoors

Shropshire Council's portal for enjoying outdoor activities includes a wealth of volunteer opportunities, from surveying veteran trees to leading Walking for Health groups. Follow links from the Volunteer Rangers, Shropshire Wild Teams and Parish Paths Partnership sections for activities and groups in our area.

Details at www.shropshiresgreatoutdoors.co.uk/volunteering-outdoors

Welsh Borders Wildlife Group

Opportunities to install, monitor and maintain bird boxes or help nurture next-generation naturalists at events such as nest-box building at schools and youth clubs.

Contact Paul Roughley 07568 372019 or paul@hillfarmabermule.co.uk

TALKS AND TRIPS

Local wildlife groups are generally friendly, welcoming and keen to recruit new participants!

Field trips are arguably the best way to improve skills such as identifying birds by sight and sound, and offer the pleasure of learning from others and sharing knowledge and experience.

Speaker programmes often focus on the winter months when outdoor options are limited; talks are almost inevitably followed by refreshments and the opportunity to socialise.

3 Parishes Community Wildlife Group

Year-round programme of talks and outdoor sessions at local sites. Monthly meetings, usually on a Thursday, are held at Gobowen, St Martins or Weston Rhyn. All welcome.

Contact Polly Smith, Chair on 01691 239087 or polly.j.smith@hotmail.co.uk to be added to the 3P mailing list.

Border Field Club (Oswestry)

A long-established group which meets monthly to study the flora and fauna within a 30-mile radius of Oswestry, with occasional coach trips further afield.

Contact Jonathan Abbatt, Secretary on 01691 778071 or jonathan.abbatt@gmail.com

Montgomeryshire Field Society www.montgomeryshirefieldsociety.yolasite.com

Talks during the winter months on Saturday afternoons at Welshpool Methodist Hall. During the summer, there are field trips to sites around the county to survey flora and fauna. New members and visitors welcome.

Montgomeryshire Moth Group www.montgomeryshiremoths.org.uk

A friendly group of enthusiasts running monthly mothing sessions at sites throughout the county, using a variety of trapping techniques, between spring and autumn.

Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust Bird Group

Talks on a wide range of bird-related topics, from local to global. Monthly meetings, except during the summer, on Wednesday evenings at Welshpool Methodist Hall. All welcome.

Details at http://montgomerybirdblog.blogspot.com/p/blog-page_12.html

RSPB Shropshire Local Group <http://ww2.rspb.org.uk/groups/shropshire/>

A year-round programme of talks (at Bayston Hill Memorial Hall) and excursions to regional reserves and birding hotspots. The majority of events are open to non-members.

Shropshire Botanical Society www.facebook.com/ShropshireBotanicalSociety

Organises field outings and indoor events throughout the year, with the aim of improving knowledge of the botany of Shropshire while having fun in the process!

Shropshire Ornithological Society www.shropshirebirds.com

Field trips and talks (at Bayston Hill Memorial Hall) all year except July/August. All welcome.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust

Oswestry Local Branch holds its meetings, with speakers, on the third Wednesday of the month at Oswestry Methodist Church Hall. All welcome.

Contact David Hardwick 01691 828617 or thehardwicks@btinternet.com

In addition, SWT runs events throughout the county, many at its Shrewsbury HQ; most are open to non-members. Details at www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/events

U3A Oswestry <https://u3asites.org.uk/oswestry/welcome>

Birdwatching Group meets on the first Wednesday of the month for half or full day visits to various sites. Membership details at website.

DEVELOPMENT

This section lists a selection of online resources – focusing on birds – to help develop identification skills and provide information on individual species. There are also pointers to practical training courses for those requiring more in-depth knowledge or seeking to develop expertise in other fields.

Online Resources

British Trust for Ornithology www.bto.org/about-birds

Bird ID Workshops: video guides including advice on separating similar species.

BirdFacts: in-depth information for all 580 species of wild bird recorded in the UK.

The BTO website is somewhat labyrinthine but rewards exploration. For example, there's a wealth of information about garden wildlife and gardening in the Garden BirdWatch section at www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/gbw/gardens-wildlife

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife

Birds A-Z: key information for over 260 species with video clips and links to related articles.

Identify a Bird: interactive bird identifier.

This section of the RSPB website also has identification guides for other taxa - especially those found in domestic gardens - and advice on wildlife gardening and wildlife and the law.

xeno-canto www.xeno-canto.org

Recordings of bird song and calls from around the world.

Training

British Trust for Ornithology www.bto.org/news-events/training

Annual programme of residential courses and one-day workshops at venues around the UK, covering bird identification and training for BTO surveys. Some courses are delivered in partnership with the Field Studies Council (below).

Field Studies Council www.field-studies-council.org

Practical training courses covering a wide range of taxa – and including wildlife recording techniques – from its network of field centres around the country and head office at Preston Montford near Shrewsbury. Course length can vary from one-day workshops to week-long residential stays.