CLEE HILL

Community Wildlife Group

Annual Report 2014

Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group

2014 REPORT CONTENTS:

INTRODUCTION

Community Wildlife Groups (CWG)

There are six Community Wildlife Groups in the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). These Groups involve local people in looking for wildlife which is declining, so existing populations and habitat can be conserved.

The Groups

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

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

Clee Hill

The Clee Hill Wildlife Group was launched in 2012 and is in its third year having completed three seasons of survey work. The area of concern includes Titterstone Clee and Clee Hill common, the surrounding land which provides the landscape and community setting of the Hill, extending approximately as far as Knowlegate and Knowbury to the south, Bitterley to the west, Cleedownton and Bromdon to the north, and Catherton Common and Doddington to the east". The hill itself is an important area for wildlife, which is valued by the local community clearly demonstrated by the number of local people who have participated in the projects that are reported on in this report.

The five projects which were commenced in 2012 and were continued through 2014 each led as in 2012 by an expert in the field, these were:-

- Clee Hill Big Butterfly Survey
- Peregrine Protection
- Bird Survey at The Novers
- County Wildlife Site Surveys
- Curlews, Lapwings And Other Birds Survey

This report describes their work, and highlights what they have achieved in this third year of operation.

Several of the projects have been monitoring species or habitats targeted by the Government's UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), which is designed to arrest their decline.

Following its creation in the Spring of 2013 the Management Committee has met on a regular basis to review progress on the projects and offer support where necessary, co-ordinate production of a newsletter, write and submit grant applications to the Shropshire Hills AONB Sustainable Development Fund and the Local Joint Committee awards, collate this Annual Report, and plan the first Public Annual General Meeting.

Community Wildlife Groups Website

The website set up in 2012 has continued to develop as has its partner Face Book site, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk, which provides information about each of the Community Wildlife Groups. Thanks are due to Andrew Heidemann and Clare Allaway for respectively maintaining these, Clare has had to resign from this position due to pressure of work in her professional practice but continues to support the group when and where she can. The CHCWG committee thanks Clare very much for her work with the FB pages.

Funding for Community Wildlife Groups

In 2013 bids were submitted to the AONB Sustainable Development Fund and Clee Hill LJC for grants to continue the programme and to purchase equipment . CHWG would like to thank the Shropshire Hills AONB Sustainable Development Fund and Local Joint Committee for the awards of these grants towards the continuing development of the group in 2013-2014.

CLEE HILL BIG BUTTERFLY AND MOTH SURVEY YEAR 3 FULL 2014 REPORT

Compiled by Mike Williams

Holly Blue Photo: Eric Davies

Introduction

The Clee Hill area had been long recognised by Butterfly Conservation as being important for its butterflies and moths. Regionally important and nationally declining species like Small Pearl-bordered and Dark Green Fritillary were known to occur but their current status outside well visited areas like Cramer Gutter was largely unknown. West Midlands Butterfly Conservation had few active recorders in the Clee Hill area and welcomed the opportunity to work with the newly established Community Wildlife Group to instigate a new and widescale butterfly survey . The aim of the Clee Hill Big Butterfly Survey therefore was:

- To increase public awareness and interest in the importance of Clee Hill for its butterflies
- To recruit and train volunteer recorders drawn from the local community
- To encourage wider recording of identified key species during the summer months
- To identify specific areas where key butterfly species occur and determine population strength
- To take appropriate conservation action to protect important populations as and when required

Because of the poor summer weather, 2012 was an extremely difficult year for butterfly recording but nevertheless some good progress was made and many new records were gathered including new sites for some of the more local and declining species. Weather in 2013 was generally better after a slow start and the group continued to accumulate interesting records as well as running a series of public events. A number of species were recorded that had not been seen the previous year including Marbled White, Silver-washed Fritillary and Holly Blue. At the end of the season some key recommendations were made which formed the basis of plans for 2014:

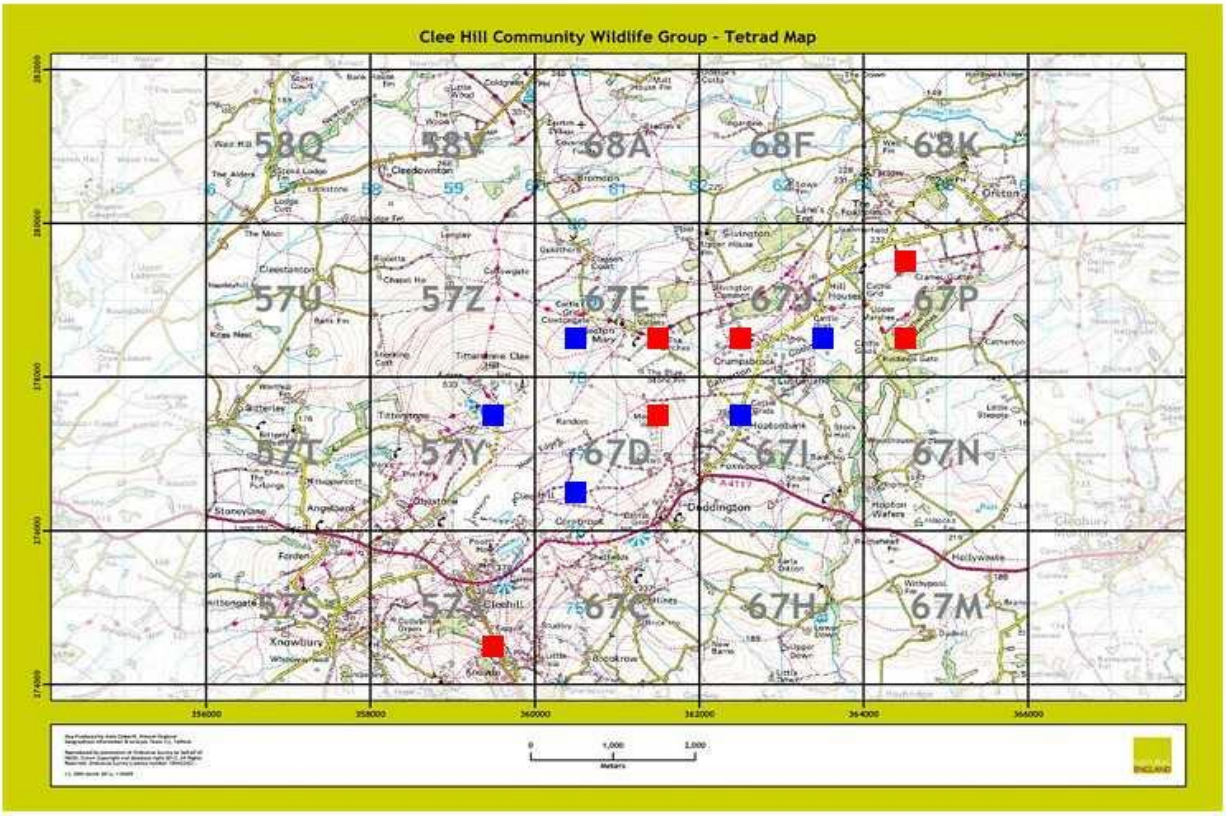
- The Big Butterfly survey should run again in 2014 focusing on the same five key species but paying particular attention to Wall Brown and Dark Green Fritillary.
- We would start a new survey of moths on Clee Hill through the purchase of a moth trap and by providing training in its use.
- A series of recording days and group activities would again be arranged over the summer open to all.
- We would produce a series of distribution maps showing where key butterfly species occurred.

2014 Survey:

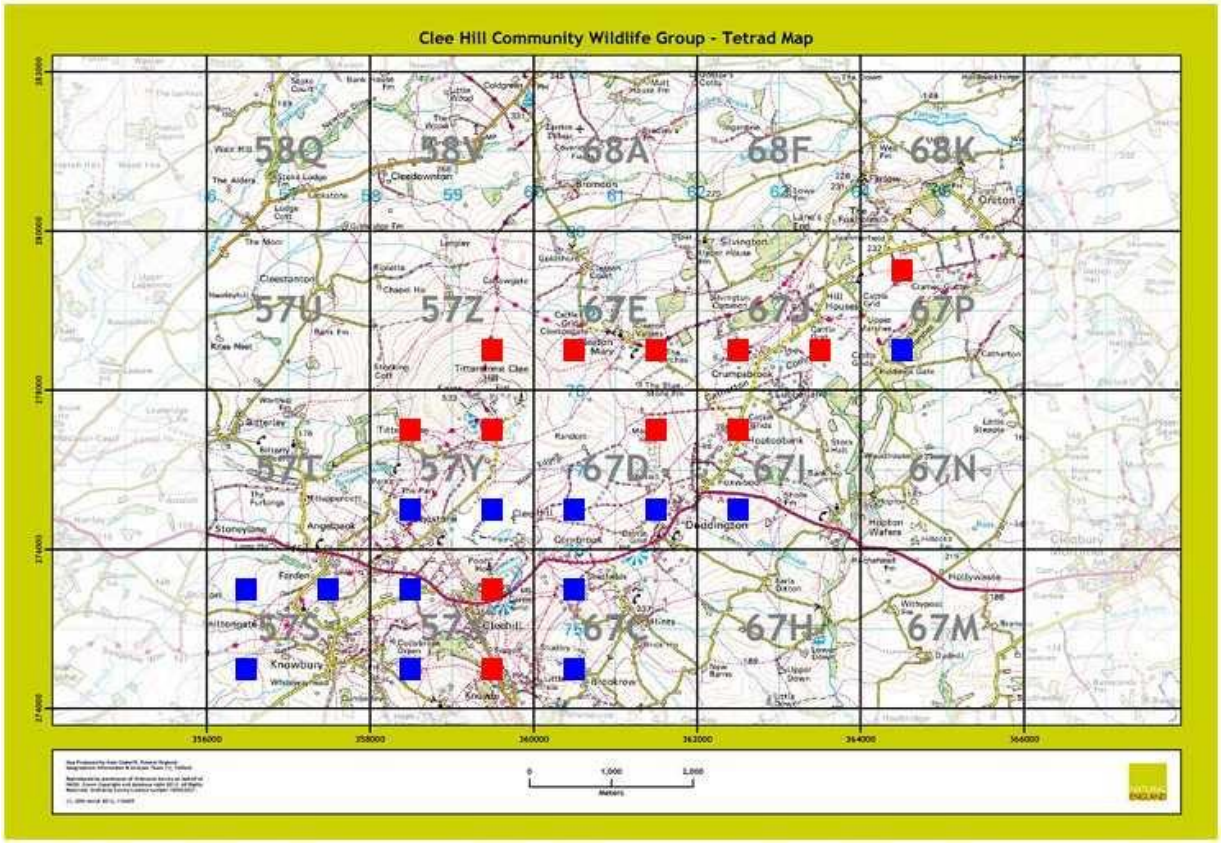
Butterflies:

The plan for 2014 was to build on the progress made over the two previous years, hopefully in rather better weather conditions. The initial results had demonstrated that the Clee Hill area remained an extremely important stronghold for butterflies and that there was much more to be discovered regarding the occurrence and distribution of the rarer species found. Further recording was still needed to ensure that we obtain all the information needed to develop a conservation strategy for Clee Hill to ensure that important butterfly populations are maintained and enhanced. Group members were asked to concentrate their recording efforts on the same squares as the previous year but to also try to fill in gaps where species had occurred in the past but where we had no recent records. A series of distribution maps were prepared for three of the key species found on Clee Hill.

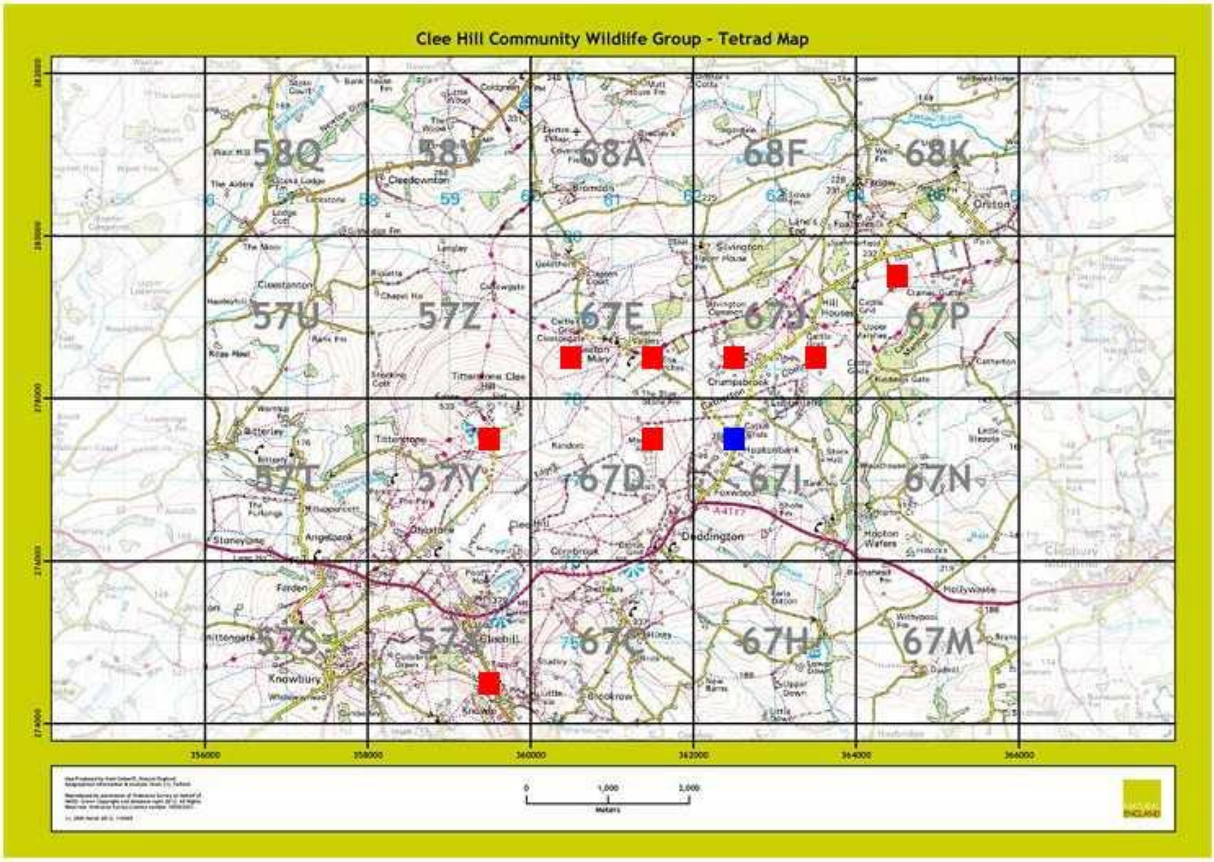
1555 Callophrys rubi (Green Hairstreak)



1627 Coenonympha pamphilus (Small Heath)



1600 Boloria selene (Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary)



The red squares indicate where the species has been recorded during the first two years of the Clee Hill Butterfly Survey and the blue squares where the butterfly has been historically recorded but not in 2012 or 2013. The distribution maps give a clear indication of the success of the butterfly recording project but also show where recording effort needs to be focused for the future. As in previous years recording forms were distributed to recorders and regular emails were sent out to advise on when particular species were on the wing and to share interesting sightings.

Moths:

2014 would be the first year of moth recording. With the aid of a grant received from the Shropshire Hills AONB Community Development Fund, a Skinner type moth trap was purchased for the use of members, together with a Moth ID guide, specimen pots, several butterfly nets and a GPS. It was decided to run a moth training event for those interested in taking part in survey work and this took place on 9th May at the home of Kay & Harry Downes . This event was supported by Tony Jacques, the Shropshire county moth recorder, and was attended by 8 people. An introduction was given to moth identification and the safe use of the equipment. As a result of the meeting, a rota was drawn up so that all those who had undertaken training could borrow the equipment over the summer months. A moth recording form was produced and circulated for people to enter their records

Public events:
Two guided walks were organised over the summer which were widely advertised and open to all:

Butterfly walk on Catherton Marshes on Sun, 20th July
Butterfly walk on Titterstone Clee on Sun, 17th August

Scaling the heights in search of the Wall Brown (photo Mike Wiliams)

Below, Green Hairstreak (photo Liz Smith)

Results

In contrast to 2013, emergence dates of species was slightly ahead of schedule. At the time of writing this report, not all records for the year have been received but there were new squares recorded for four out of five of our target species.

The one exception was Dark Green Fritillary which was not recorded for the second consecutive year and, after only a single sighting in 2012 may now be lost to the area. Much more encouraging was the report of Wall Brown at a second location near Whatsill and confirmation of a small population in the quarries at the top of Titterstone Clee on our butterfly walk in August.

Interestingly, Marbled White was recorded for the second year running in a different location and it may suggest that this species may eventually become a permanent resident. It is a species that has been spreading in neighbouring Worcs. in recent years probably in response to climate change and over the past couple of years we have seen the first records for Shropshire.

Marbled White, a species to look out for – a new butterfly for Clee Hill (photo Mike Williams)

Another potential species for colonisation is Essex Skipper which has been moving northwards and westwards since the turn of the century and has now been reported from several Shropshire localities.

A meeting was held on 29th October to review the year and to assist in the identification of the more difficult moths. Those who had moth trapped were encouraged to bring along photos for ID with the help of the Worcs county moth recorder, Tony Simpson. This proved a useful and informative meeting and a number of additional species were identified as a result. Not all moth records have yet been received but this first year has

already thrown up a number of unusual and important records. It was nice to see moth species typical of open and moorland habitats such as Garden Tigers, Grass Emeralds, Antler moths, Broom moth larva, Fox moth larva and Map-winged Swifts which are scarce away from this habitat type.

Broom Moth larva (photo Jon Cartwright)

Looking forward to 2015

Plans for next year were discussed at a meeting of the CHCWG Butterfly Group in October. It was agreed that for next year we would focus on:

- Targeted recording of squares where we are lacking records – turning blue squares into red.
- Undertaking specific searches for Wall Brown in other likely areas especially around old quarries.
- Monitoring the spread of Marbled White and possibly Essex Skipper.
- Encouraging more people to become involved in moth recording.

Acknowledgements

The Butterfly Group would like to thank everyone who helped with the recording of butterflies during 2014 and submitted the records which form the basis of this report. As a result of everyone's efforts we now have a much better idea of where butterflies are found around Clee Hill and have been able to identify where the largest populations of some of the key species occur. With continuing support we look forward to adding to this knowledge base in 2015. Special thanks go to Kay & Harry Downes for hosting the moth training event and to those who made the first year of mothing on Clee Hill such a success.

CURLEWS, LAPWINGS & OTHER BIRDS SURVEY

Compiled by Leo Smith

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 Natural England's Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme, are on the *Red List* or *Amber List* of *Birds of Conservation Concern* because they have suffered large declines in the last 25 or 50 years, and are Target Species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan).

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

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

This repeated similar surveys undertaken in 2012 and 2013, to monitor long-term population trends for key species, as well as establish the current population and distribution.

Methodology

The area covered by the Clee Hill Partnership 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 1st April, 1st May and mid 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 1st April).
- The second period is the best time to find breeding Curlew (first egg date is usually around 30th 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.

The Methodology is described in full in the separate report on the bird survey: *Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group: Curlews, Lapwings & Other Birds Survey 2014.*

A feedback meeting was held on 30th May, to present the results of the first two surveys, discuss them, provide clarification where necessary, and iron out any difficulties experienced by the participants. Eleven survey participants attended.

For the first time, some survey work was carried out in all 20 tetrads, and members spent almost 190 hours on it (excluding the double time spent when couples or friends surveyed a square together). This represents an excellent effort, considerably better than 2013

A summary of the results was presented at a public meeting on 30th September, which also included a talk by Leo Smith on *The Return of the Red Kite to Shropshire*. Twenty-one people attended, and £81 was raised for Group funds.

Curlew

The location of Curlews found during the surveys, or reported on Casual Record maps, is shown on page 12. The observations are described in detail in the Bird Survey Report.

From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Curlew population in the area is currently 10 – 12 breeding pairs.

Last year's report estimated 12 – 14 breeding pairs in 2013, and 10 – 11 pairs in 2012.

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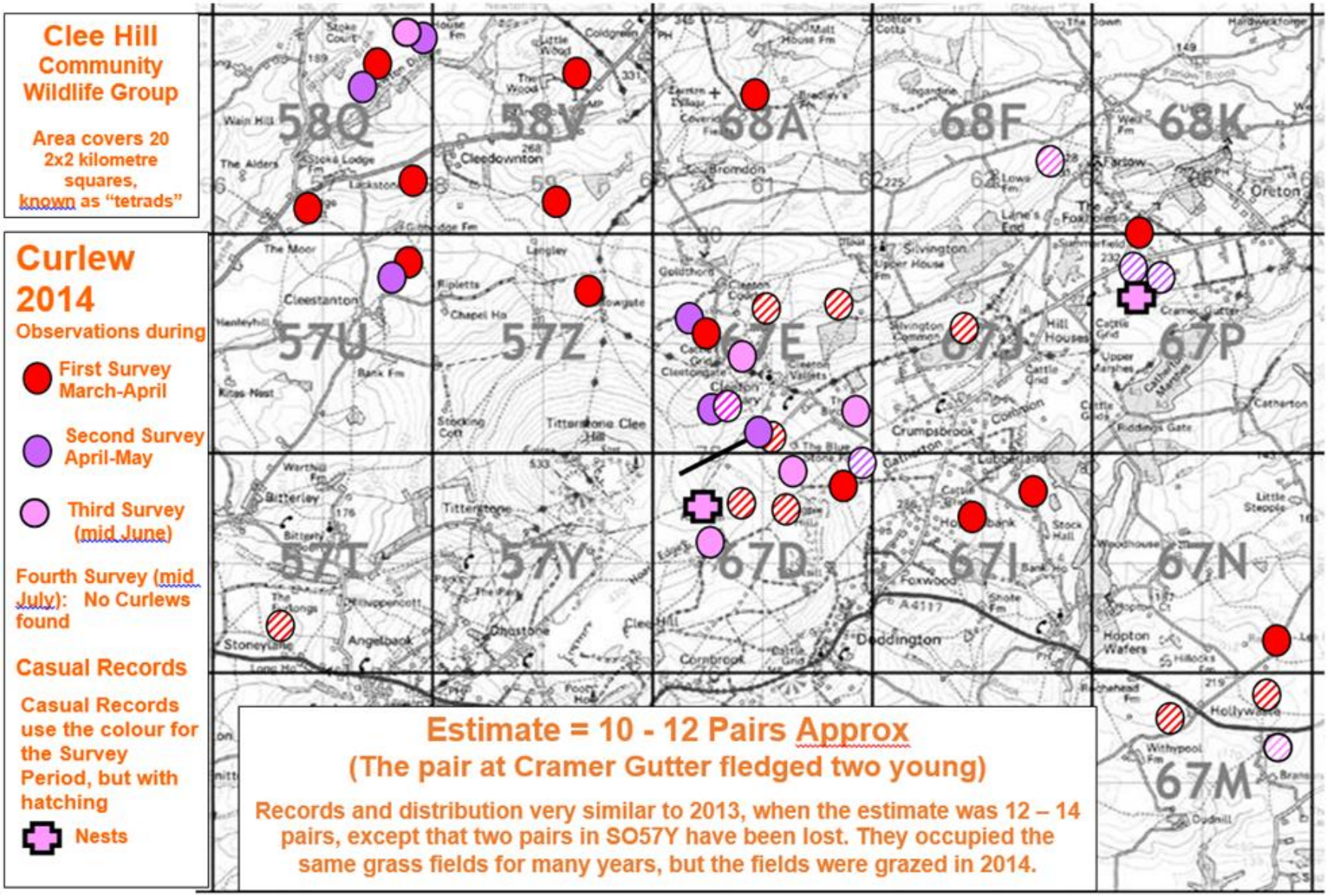
The 2014 records and distribution were very similar to those in 2013, except that two pairs in SO57Y have been lost. They occupied the same grass fields for many years, but the fields were grazed in 2014.

Little is known about the outcome of these breeding attempts, as the third survey, designed to see which Curlews have chicks, takes place around a month before any young birds are due to fledge. Breeding success was almost certainly very poor in 2012 and 2013 because of the bad weather during both breeding seasons (April – July). It is likely that breeding success was better this year, because of the warm spring. However, four pairs were still active during the third survey, indicating they had chicks, and it appears that the pair near Cramer Gutter (67P) fledged at least two young


Clee Hill
Community
Wildlife Group
Area covers 20
2x2 kilometre
squares,
known as "tetrads"
Curlew
2014
Observations during
First Survey
March-April
Second Survey
April-May
Third Survey
(mid June)
Fourth Survey (mid
July): No Curlews
found
Casual Records
Casual Records
use the colour for
the Survey
Period, but with
hatching
Nests
58Q
58V
68A
68F
68K
57U
57Z
67E
67J
67P
57T
57Y
67D
67I
67N
67M
Estimate = 10 - 12 Pairs Approx
(The pair at Cramer Gutter fledged two young)
Records and distribution very similar to 2013, when the estimate was 12 – 14
pairs, except that two pairs in SO57Y have been lost. They occupied the
same grass fields for many years, but the fields were grazed in 2014.

Lapwing

The location of Lapwings found during the surveys is shown on page #. Again, the observations are described in detail in the Bird Survey Report.

Only two pairs were found, both together in 67M, where a sitting bird was found last year.

From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Lapwing population in the area is currently only 2 breeding pairs. This compares with 1-2 pairs last year, and 3 pairs in 2012.

The outcome of the nests in 67M is not known.

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. This reinforces the similar anecdotal evidence collected in the previous two years.

Other Target Species

The other Target Species recorded during the surveys are summarised in Table 1 below.

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). Numbers of Meadow Pipit, Linnet and Yellowhammer may be exaggerated by the presence of winter flocks moving onto the breeding grounds, before dispersing to the individual breeding sites, during the first two surveys.

The summary table shows the maximum count for each species 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.

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, but only a very small proportion will have been recorded.

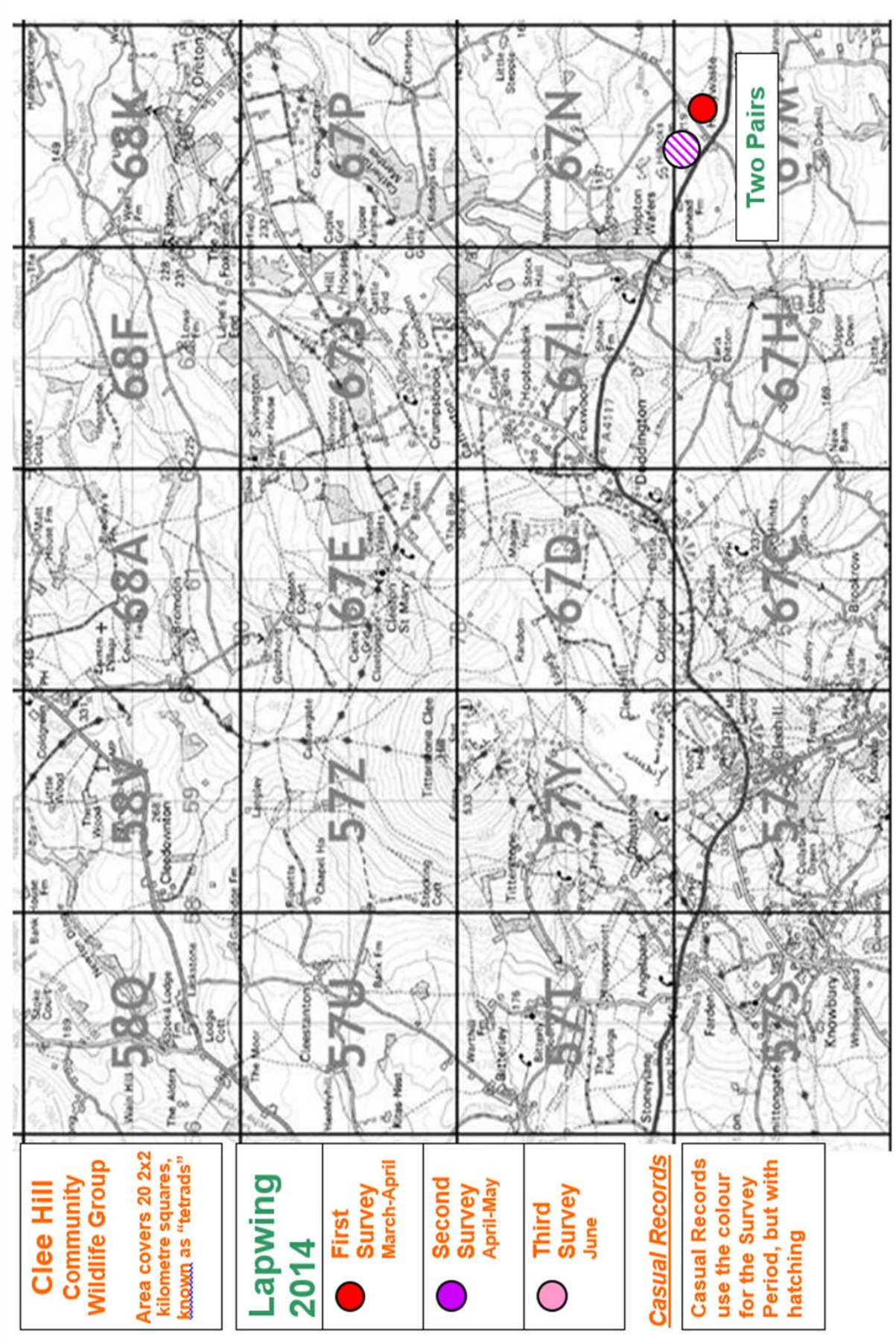


Table 1. Other Target Species – Summary

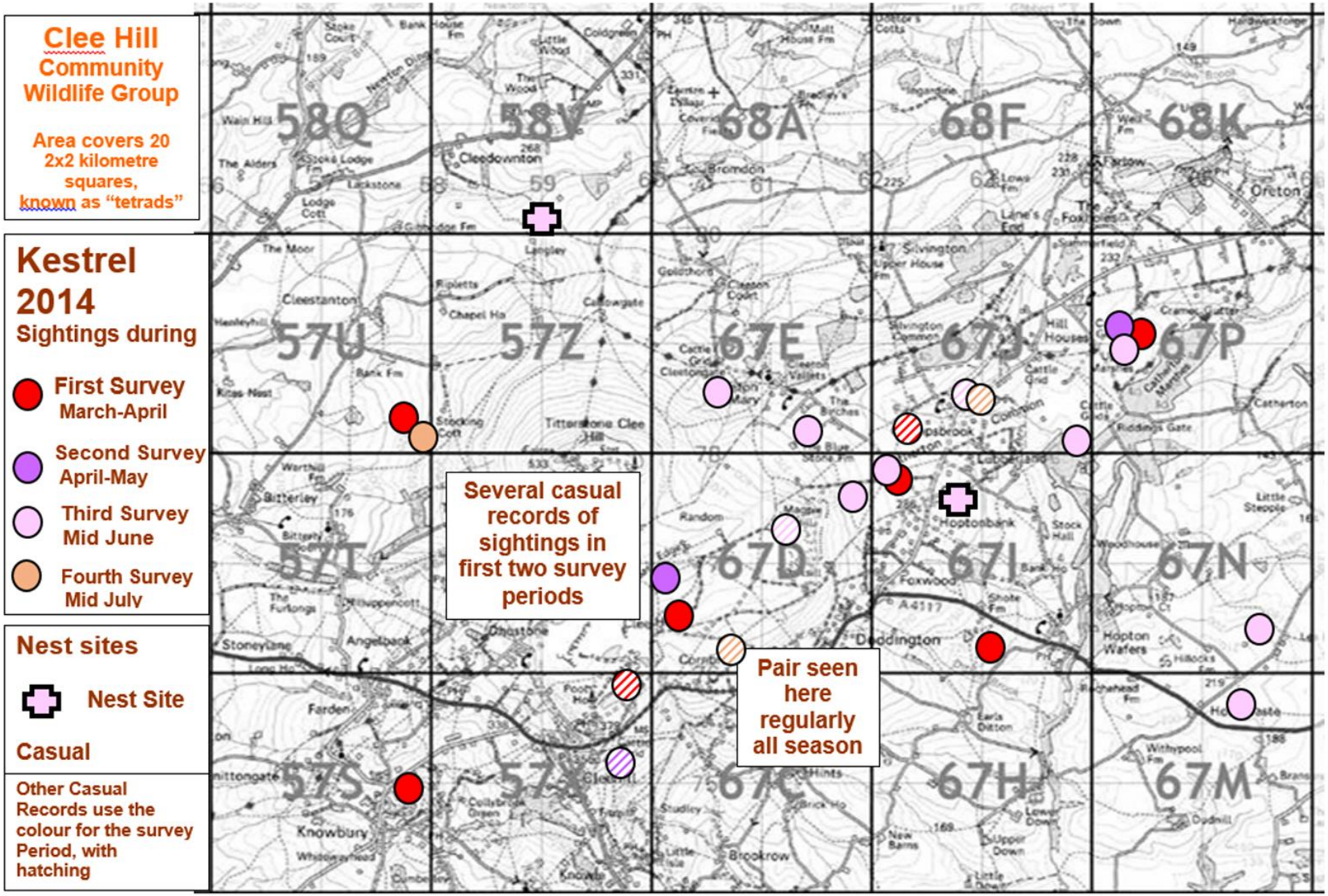
Square (Tetrad)	Maximum Number of Each Species Recorded														
	Kestrel	Red Kite	Grey Partridge	Snipe	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Dunnock	Wheatear	Stone-chat	Spotted Flycatcher	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
57S	1		2					8					1	1	
57T			2		2			4				2		3	
57U	1				7			7			1			11	
57X	(No target species recorded)														
57Y	(No target species recorded)														
57Z	2				4										
58Q					2			3						3	
58V		1			3								2	1	
67C						12		7		1		5	3	4	1
67D	1			1	24	84	1	3		4		17		1	4
67E		1		2	4	35	1	12	5	2	1	12		5	6
67I	4				2	4	3	1		2		5		6	
67J	2	5		5	4	5			2	4		3		1	
67M	1	1			3	7	1	3		6		10		2	
67N	1				4			6				1		7	
67P	1				6	14	2	6	1	3		10	2	8	
68A					1			2						3	
68F		1			2			7			2	1	4	14	2
68K								2			2	2		1	
TOTALS	16	10	4	8	72	165	10	82	8	23	6	74	13	83	14

It will be seen that Skylark, Dunnock and Yellowhammer are widespread and numerous, Meadow Pipit are numerous in restricted parts of the area where suitable habitat still exists (the Commons), and the remaining species that were found are present only in their specific habitats, and in small numbers.

Kestrels are conspicuous, and forage over large areas, so an assessment can be made of their population. The records from 2014 are shown in the map on page 16. Again, the observations are described in detail in the Bird Survey Report.

There were more sightings this year, as the weather was considerably warmer. The analysis last year gave an estimate of seven pairs of Kestrel. This year birds were seen at the same places, but also at some new locations, suggesting perhaps nine pairs in 2014.

Cuckoo was recorded more this year than last year, but in similar locations. They range far and wide, but they were heard persistently on Magpie Hill and Catherton Common, so there might be two breeding pairs, rather than one pair, believed to be the number in 2012 & 2013.


Clee Hill
Community
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Area covers 20
2x2 kilometre
squares,
known as "tetrads"
Kestrel
2014
Sightings during
First Survey
March-April
Second Survey
April-May
Third Survey
Mid June
Fourth Survey
Mid July
Nest sites
Nest Site
Casual
Other Casual
Records use the
colour for the survey
Period, with
hatching
Several casual
records of
sightings in
first two survey
periods
Pair seen
here
regularly
all season
58Q
58V
68A
68F
68K
57U
57Z
67E
67S
67P
57T
67D
67I
67N
57S
67C
67H
67M

Red Kites were seen in five tetrads, one more than last year, including two young birds together on the first Bird Walk. There was no evidence of breeding.

There was a report of a pair of Kites going in and out of a wood throughout the 2013 breeding season, suggesting an active nest in the area, but it was received too late to check. Such a nest would be the most easterly found in Shropshire since successful breeding recommenced in 2006 following a gap of 130 years. However, the pair did not return to this site in 2014.

Not surprisingly, three of the more scarce Target Species were not recorded at all during the surveys – Barn Owl, Yellow Wagtail, or Tree Sparrow. However, a Barn Owl was reported in 68K.

Two other Target Species are not shown in the Table. A pair of Dippers was seen 67C, and Swift nest sites were found in 68A and 68K.

Snipe were seen in three tetrads on the first survey in early April, and were almost certainly passage birds. It is unlikely any still breed in the area. Grey Partridge were unexpected, but they have been seen in all three years in different tetrads, but it is believed that captive bred birds have been released in the area by the Burwarton shoot (Eric Davis, *pers.comm*.).

A used Dipper nest was subsequently found in SO67C, and another pair raised young near Silvington (67J) (Jon Lingard, *pers.comm*.).

Decline of Lapwing and Curlew

Lapwing and Curlew are in decline, nationally, here, and elsewhere in Shropshire. Objective evidence for this comes from Bird Atlas work. The distribution maps showing the results of the recent 2008-13 survey in the 20 tetrads monitored by the Group 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, and it is likely that more fieldwork has taken place in the current period, so the decline is undoubtedly real. These maps were published in last year's Report, and are reproduced in the full Bird Survey 2014 report.

It is clear from these comparisons that both species are much less widespread here than they were 20 – 25 years ago.

Other evidence for the decline of Lapwing and Curlew, nationally and elsewhere in Shropshire, is also set out in the Bird Survey report.

Action to attempt to reverse these declines is being taken. 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.

Both species nest on farmland, and the Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (part of the system of payments to farmers through the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union) includes provision to reward farmers for sensitive management of habitat on their farms, and providing other environmental benefits. Farmers applying to join the scheme had to take into account the breeding 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. HLS includes specific prescriptions, and payments, for Lapwing and Curlew habitat, if the farmer wants to take them up.

The data provided by Community Wildlife Groups, on the location and habitat of these priority species, helped Natural England (the Government Agency responsible both for achieving the

Biodiversity targets, and administering the Environmental Stewardship Scheme) to target its limited resources more effectively to achieve this objective.

HLS has now come to an end, and is being replaced by a new Environmental Land Management Scheme (NELMS), with similar objectives and targeting. The details are still being worked out, and new applications will be invited during 2015.

Use of Clee Hill CWG Survey Results

Most importantly, the Clee Hill CWG survey results are made available to Natural 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 NELMS, and information 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 has recently been revised to cover the five years 2014 – 19.

The records at tetrad level have also been supplied to Shropshire Ornithological Society for incorporation into the Shropshire Bird Atlas. The Atlas project has now completed its six years fieldwork 2008-13, and results should be published in a new county Avifauna, *The Birds of Shropshire*, around the end of 2015.

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

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Natural England is recommended to encourage farmers with breeding Lapwing or Curlew on or near their land, to join the new 'Environmental Land Management Scheme'. Utilising the appropriate options to maintain and enhance the habitat of these priority species.

Bird Survey Report

A full report on the Bird Survey *Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group: Curlews, Lapwings & Other Birds Survey 2014,* has been prepared. This includes a full description of the methodology and the detailed observations that have fed into the distribution maps, population estimates and Table of Other Species. It also includes more information on the decline of Lapwings and Curlews, and their habitat requirements.

A copy of this full report has been supplied to all people who contributed to the surveys, or supplied additional records, and to Natural England.

The full report can also be found and downloaded from the Clee Hill part of the joint website for all the Community Wildlife Groups in the Shropshire Hills, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

Barn Owl Nest Box Scheme

The Bird Group initiated a Barn Owl nest box scheme in the area in 2013.

Barn Owl is on the *Amber List* of *Birds of Conservation Concern 3 (2009),* because of a long term population decline caused by loss of foraging habitat and nest sites.

Provision of nest boxes will help reverse this decline locally. Nest boxes are more likely to be used, and help increase the population, if they are put near to existing Barn Owl territories and foraging areas.

These specially designed nest boxes can be provided free of charge to farmers and landowners with suitable habitat in the Clee Hill area. This requires-

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

A poster advertising the scheme has been put up around the area. Several landowners have responded and potential sites have been assessed by Chris Bargman and Anton Schooley, together with John Lightfoot from the Shropshire Barn Owl Group. Four or five boxes should be put up in the near future, in time for potential use in 2015.

If you see a Barn Owl, we'd like to know, please

For further information, or to report a Barn Owl sighting in the Clee Hill area, please contact Chris Bargman 01299 270514 helpbarnowls@gmail.com

Bird Walks

Three walks were held, for members and the general public

1. Sunday 30 March, starting at Cleeton St Mary, and visiting the Common up to Magpie Hill. This walk also provided practical training for people who wanted to help with the Bird Survey
2. Saturday 10 May at The Novers woodland, specifically to learn about identifying birds by their song (Joint Meeting with Clee Hill Heritage Trust)
3. Sunday 8 June starting at the Quarry Tea Rooms, and visiting the other side of the Common up to Magpie Hill

A wide variety of birds were seen, and the walks averaged around 8 participants each.

Acknowledgements

Most importantly, thanks to the Group members who undertook the survey work:-

Chris Bargman
Hazel Bows
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Eric Evans
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Jane Foster
Andrew Heideman
John & Pauline MacIntosh
Kirsty & Angela Mackirdy
Jim Martin
Nina Mills
Chris Neal
Julie Price
Peta Sams
Gareth Thomas
Margaret & Graham Thompson
Marian Wootton

Thanks also to:-

- Chris Bargman and Anton Schooley, for organising the Barn Owl nest box scheme
- John Lightfoot, of the Shropshire Barn Owl Group, for help and advice
- Tim Lee and Jonathon Lingard for additional records and information.
- John Tucker, for leading the Bird Walk at The Novers
- Matt Cotterill of Natural England, who provided the survey maps.
- Allan Dawes (BTO Regional Representative for Shropshire), who provided the Breeding Bird Survey figures

Summary 2014

This report summarises a successful third year for the Bird Group. Members showed a high level of commitment in carrying out the surveys.

For the first time all 20 tetrads were surveyed to some extent, and we now have an even better understanding of the population and distribution of Lapwing and Curlew, and the status of the Other Target Species. This is valuable information for the conservation of these birds. Further survey work in future years will add to this baseline, and establish population trends in the area.

Three Bird Walks were held, 21 people came to a talk on "Return of the Red Kite to Shropshire", and the Barn Owl nest box scheme was developed.

Plans for 2015

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

The Barn Owl nest box scheme will be developed, and a programme of local bird walks and other activities will be held.

Further consideration will be given to these plans, and any other proposals people want to make, at the Group public meeting on 25th November,

A Bird Group meeting will be held prior to the next breeding season, to plan the survey, allocate survey squares to participants, and arrange and publicise the other activities.

Everyone interested in birds is welcome at all meetings and events. A Programme will be published after the public meeting. Details can also be found and downloaded from the Clee Hill part of the joint website for all the Community Wildlife Groups in the Shropshire Hills, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

Leo Smith
November 2014

CLEE HILL BOTANICAL GROUP- COUNTY WILDLIFE SITE SURVEYS 2014

Compiled by Andrew Heideman

Introduction

This is the third year in which the Clee Hill Botanical Group has been undertaking surveys of County Wildlife Sites (CWS) in the Clee Hill area. It has been another successful year and valuable ecological data has been generated from the surveys. Undertaking botanical surveys is the primary means of assessing the health of a CWS. CWS are adopted as such because of their botanical interest and ecological diversity. They provide important refuges for flora and fauna, and aid species reproduction and dispersal in an often fragmented landscape. Since they were adopted, mostly in the 1970s, many CWS have declined in conservation value.

Alongside the survey work volunteers receive training on plant identification and botanical recording methodology in the hope that they will increase their knowledge and maintain their participation with the Clee Hill Botanical Group.

In the past three years the Clee Hill botanical group has surveyed 32 wildlife sites and has provided the Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) with valuable data. This has led to: follow up visits being made to sites, management advice being distributed to landowners, practical management work being carried out on sites, and previously unknown sites being identified and subsequently adopted as new CWS. Additionally volunteers with the group have gained useful skills and experience in plant identification and surveying methodology. Based on the past success of the Clee Hill Botanical Group's work it was agreed that the surveys, funded by 'Leader' and the SWT, would continue in 2014.

Objectives

To survey ten CWS; collect good quality and accurate botanical data; conduct a thorough survey of each site; assess the condition of each site; record all relevant information about a site and annotate maps; check site boundaries; re-establish contact with landowners and update landowner details where necessary; continue training volunteers; and attempt to recruit new volunteers.

Methodology

This year Andrew Heideman and Kirsty Mackirdy took over responsibility for leading the Clee Hill Botanical Group. Andrew and Kirsty received training from John Handley - the previous group leader - during 2012/2013, and were considered eligible to take over leadership of the group. Their role was to lead

the CWS surveys and to train a group of volunteers in plant identification and surveying methodology. Shropshire Wildlife Trust arranged for access to the various sites and provided site boundary maps, condition assessment cards and botanical recording sheets.
The sites chosen to survey included: those that had limited existing data and/or had not been surveyed for many years, and previously unknown sites that had been discovered recently (site alerts). During the survey period some changes had to be made to the original list of sites selected for surveying. This was due to permissions for access not being granted and other inconveniences.

The surveyors attempted to survey the whole of each site as thoroughly as possible. All the vascular plant species observed would be recorded using a Shropshire Botanical Society recording card (see Appendix) and this would form a species list for the site. Some bryophytes that could be identified were also recorded.

In addition 'site visit cards' provided by SWT (see Appendix) were also completed to make an assessment of the habitats and the condition of a site. Any other relevant information was also noted and photos of the site were taken. The maps provided by SWT enabled surveyors to check site boundaries and indicate the extent of each habitat by annotating maps. The group leaders used a GPS to take precise grid references for specific sites and rare species.

Other species data was collected where possible, for example butterfly and bird records were taken at most sites.

The data gathered from each survey was sent to SWT for processing. The species list for each site was also sent to the county recorder.

Efforts were made to recruit new volunteers at a 'Spring Event' held by Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group in March 2014. Andrew Heideman and Kirsty Mackirdy gave a short presentation to try and encourage new people to join the Clee Hill Botanical Group.

Results

Clee Hill Botanical Group Site Visits 2014

Site Name	Location	Habitat(s)	No. of axiophytes	Condition
Abdon Bank Site Alert	Abdon, Brown Clee	Species-rich, mesotrophic pasture and scrub.	15	Declining
Botany Bay (1) Wildlife Site	Farlow/New Road	Species-rich, mesotrophic/acidic grassland with damp flushes.	18	
Botany Bay (2) (Harman) Wildlife Site	Farlow/New Road	Species-rich, mesotrophic/acidic grassland and boggy	13	Generally in good condition

		flush.		
Clee St Margaret (1) (Watson Jones) Wildlife Site	Clee St Margaret	Species-rich, mesotrophic hay meadows.	8	Good condition
Clee St Margaret (2) Wildlife Site	Clee St Margaret	Species-rich, mesotrophic hay meadows.	6	Good condition
Coreley Mill Wildlife Site	Coreley	Mesotrophic pasture. Woody brook.	1 8	Declining Good condition
Crumpsbrook Wildlife Site and Site Alert	Crumpsbrook, Catherton Common	Species-rich mesotrophic pasture and woody brook. Species-rich lawn.	10 12	Declining Good condition
Dhustone Site Alert	Dhustone	Damp mesotrophic pasture. Acidic grassland. (Mount)	1 2	Declining Good condition
Farden (1) Site Alert	Farden	Species-rich mesotrophic and acidic pasture.	12	Declining
Farden (2) Site Alert	Farden	Species-rich mesotrophic pasture.	10	Declining
Cramer Gutter Meadows (1) Wildlife Site	Cramer Gutter	Species-rich, damp mesotrophic pasture.	6	Declining
Cramer Gutter Meadows (2) Wildlife Site	Cramer Gutter	Species-rich, damp mesotrophic pasture.	15	Generally in good condition.
New House, Clee St Margaret Wildlife Site	Clee St Margaret	Species-rich mesotrophic pasture.	6	Declining
The Bogs Site Alert	Catherton Common	Species-rich mesotrophic/acidic pasture, with boggy flushes and small streams.	33	Generally in good condition.
The Gore Site Alert	The Gore, Wheathill	Mesotrophic pasture. Woody brook.	11 10	Declining Good condition
The Speller Wildlife Site	Hopedale, Hungerford	Natural oak woodland and Poplar plantations, with a brook and pond.	13	Declining
Whatsill and Magpie Hill (2 monads) Wildlife Site	Whatsill, Clee Hill	Acidic grassland, heathland and mire.	28	Generally in good condition.

17 individual sites were visited in 2014 and full surveys of each were carried out. The majority of the sites visited were grassland habitats, these included acidic and mesoptrophic (neutral) grasslands, and both pasture and hay meadow. Other habitats surveyed included mire and woodland. 7 of the 17 sites surveyed were found to be in 'good' condition and 12 of the 17 sites

were found to have 'declining' conditions. Two of the sites were found to have both 'good' and 'declining' conditions.

A total of 2113 plant records were made during the surveys (including bryophytes) and 69 Shropshire axiophytes were recorded (see appendix). Axiophytes are the uncommon species and indicators of good habitat; they are important in determining the condition of a site.
8 volunteers attended surveys in 2014 with 3 volunteers attending on a regular basis. 5 new volunteers were recruited this year and they all attended at least one survey. A number of new people also expressed an interest in the group and have been added to the emailing list.

During the survey season a previously unknown site near Cleeton St Mary, that appears to be botanically-rich, was discovered. Permission from the landowners has now been given for this site to be surveyed in 2015.

Discussion and interpretation

Grassland sites that are judged to be in 'good' condition will have high numbers and frequencies of positive indicator species (see appendix, grassland axiophytes) and low frequencies of negative indicator species such as thistles, nettles and docks. Good grasslands are managed with moderate levels of regular grazing and annual hay cutting if appropriate. This helps to maintain a rich diversity by preventing the more coarse grassland species from becoming dominant. Woodland sites that are in 'good' condition must show good variation in age structure of trees and shrubs, good regeneration potential should exist, there should be few invasive and negative indicator species, and the ground flora should be diverse, with high frequencies of woodland axiophytes (see appendix).

Some of the reasons why 12 of the sites surveyed were found to be in declining condition include: neglect and lack of management on grassland sites - leading to grass-dominant swards, reduced plant diversity and scrub encroachment; agricultural improvement of grassland sites with fertilizer and/or manure, causing a reduction in plant diversity; overgrazing and excessive poaching by ponies; and installation of drainage channels causing damp grasslands to dry out.

Decline of Wildlife Sites

Since their adoption in the 1970s, wildlife sites have been in decline all over Shropshire but also nationally. There are many reasons for this, though agricultural improvement is one of the main factors. Neglect of sites, leading to scrub encroachment and a decline in conservation value is another major factor. Other reasons include: horse grazing - which can be very detrimental, building development, forestry, infilling of ponds, recreation, and invasive species introduction. The root cause of the problem is poor protection; however lack of awareness, lack of responsibility, lack of incentives,

inappropriate incentives, lack of equipment, non-farmer ownership, and lack of conservation staff time are all contributory factors.

Highlights of the 2014 surveys

A botanically-rich, grassland site on Catherton Common called 'The Bogs' was surveyed. The site had not previously been surveyed and 33 axiophytes were recorded there, as well as a Marbled White butterfly, *Melanargia galathea*. Two monads (1x1km²) of the Whatsill and Magpie Hill CWS were surveyed and found to be very botanically-rich. The scarce plant *Viola lutea*, Mountain Pansy, was recorded in one of the monads and this is possibly a new location for this plant.

(Species-rich grassland with ant hills at The Bogs)

(Mountain Pansy at Whatsill)

Other Survey Work in the Clee Hills

Other botanical survey work carried out in the Clee Hill area this year included surveys of 3 sites: Bennett's End Bridge, NW of the Gore, and an NVC (National Vegetation Classification) survey of Clee Liberty.

Practical Management Work in the Clee Hills

During the past year SWT have carried out practical management work with contractors, such as scrub clearance and meadow cutting, on 8 Clee Hill wildlife sites.

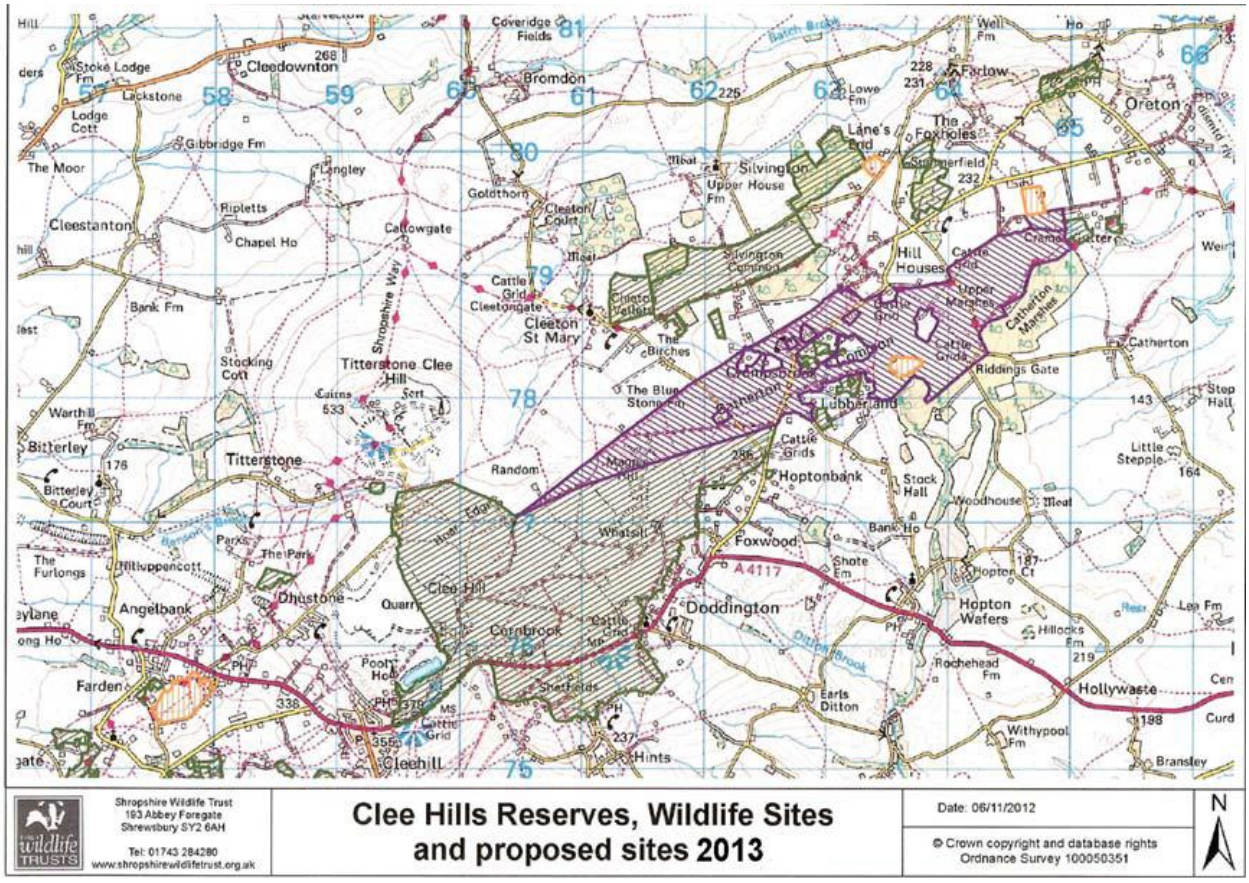
Use of the Clee Hill Botanical Group's Survey Results

The survey results are used by the SWT to update the records on their CWS database. Analysis of the survey data on individual sites assists conservation staff in making decisions as to what further action, if necessary, should be

taken. Subsequent action may include: revisiting a site, having discussions with landowners and providing advice, writing a management plan for a site, undertaking practical management work on site, removal of CWS status if a site is seriously degraded, and adoption of new CWS.

Having reviewed the survey data generated by the Clee Hill Botanical Group this year SWT plans to adopt two new sites and to extend one.
The species lists that are sent to the county recorder will be incorporated into the Shropshire Botanical Society's database of species distribution in the county.

Landowners can potentially use the survey results to help them apply for funding through the Natural England 'Environmental Stewardship' schemes.



Summary for 2014

This has been another successful year for the Clee Hill Botanical Group; 13 CWS and site alerts were surveyed (the highest number so far!), a good number of volunteers participated in the surveys, and a high standard of botanical recording was achieved. Although 12 sub-sites were found to be in declining condition, two sites with limited historical records (The Bogs and Whatsill and Magpie Hill) turned out to be surprisingly botanically-rich. An interesting local site was discovered and permission has been granted for it to

be surveyed in 2015. The training was also successful with both the group leaders and volunteers increasing their plant identification skills and knowledge of survey and recording methodology.

Plans for 2015

The Clee Hill Botanical Group intends to carry out more surveys of CWS next year and this will again be organised and supported by SWT. The group also aims to continue improving the skills and knowledge of its surveyors, and maintain high standards of botanical recording.

The Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group are planning to hold a volunteer recruitment event in spring 2015 and the botanical group will attempt to recruit more members at this event.

SWT will be offering more training courses in 2015 (Possibly on: grasses, sedges and Asteraceae) for surveyors who are interested.

Acknowledgements

The Clee Hill Botanical Group would like to thank all of the volunteers who participated in surveys this year:

Loli Ruiz, John Lyden, Sandra Webb, Lionel Bridge, Beth Bridge, Ann Hadfield, John handley and Julia Hilton.

Andrew Heideman

Co-leader of the Clee Hill Botanical Group

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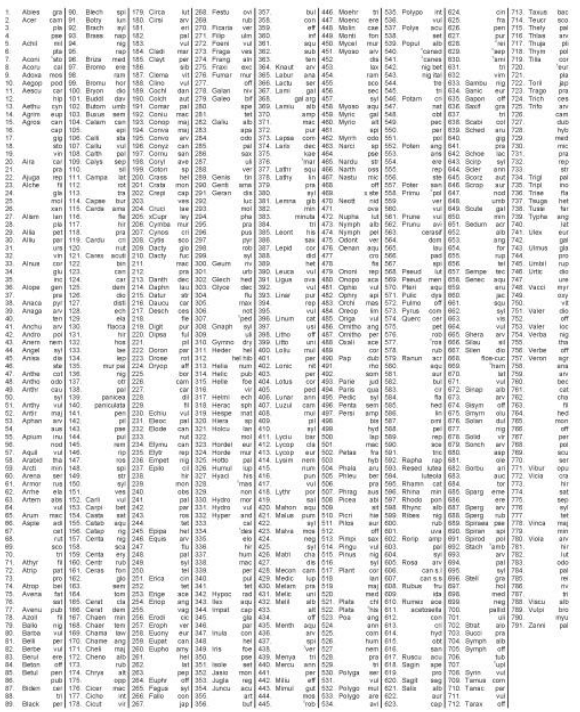
Appendix: Clee Hill Botanical Group

Shropshire Botanical Society Recording Card 2010

Site: GR: VC:

Recorder: Date:



(Shropshire Botanical Society Recording Card)

Grassland Wildlife Site visit card 2014

Visit details

Site Name & Location:	
Site Code:	
Surveyor/Officer name(s):	
Landowner name:	**Landowner address:**
Tel no:	**e mail:**
Site centroid, 6 Fig. Grid ref:	**Date:**

DETAILED description of site:

BAP/Priority Habitat present (please state which):

NVC communities (if known):

Notable species: (and please indicate FREQUENCIES of axiophytes recorded).

Notes: Indicate photos taken/meeting with landowner/other observations. Please survey each field separately & incl.grid. refs.). Also include **MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Invasive species (Percentage of the site)

Invasive sp.	<5%	5-25%	25-50%	>50%
Scrub (sp)				
Bramble				
Bracken				
Nettles				
Thistles				
Docks				
Other (specify)				

Social issues

Issue	Details
Fly-tipping/Pollution	
Heavy recreational use	

Grassland

Feature	Details
Grassland type i.e. acid etc.	
Grazing (animal spp.)	
Mowing	
Anthills	
Ridge & furrow	
Poaching/bare ground	
% Rye grass & white clover	
Fertiliser application	
Average height (approx.)	
Grass/herb ratio (%)	

Habitat (please mark these habitats on maps provided with the optional abbreviations)

Habitat Type	Present	Area if known
Acid Grassland (AG)		
Mesotrophic Grassland (MG)		
Calcareous Grassland (CG)		
Improved Grassland (IG)		
Arable (A)		
Scrub (specify) (GS) (HS) (BS)		
Wet Heath (WH)		
Dry Heath (DH)		
Rush Pasture/Mire (M)		
Pond/River/Stream (P)(St)(Rv)		
Bare rock (Rk)		

Condition of site

Condition category	Select most appropriate	Any comments?
Good condition		
Recovered		
Recovering in condition		
No change in condition		
Declining condition		
Destroyed (or partially)		

Shropshire Axiophytes recorded by Clee Hill Botanical Group in 2014

Grassland Axiophytes

Scientific Name	Common Name
Aira caryophyllea	Silver Hairgrass
Aira praecox	Early Hairgrass
Alchemilla filicaulis	Hairy Lady's-mantle
Anacamptis morio	Green-winged Orchid
Aphanes australis	Slender Parsley-piert
Betonica officinalis	Betony
Briza media	Quaking-grass
Carex caryophyllea	Spring Sedge
Carex muricata	Prickly Sedge
Carex pallescens	Pale Sedge
Carex spicata	Spiked Sedge
Danthonia decumbens	Heath Grass
Deschampsia flexuosa	Wavy Hair-grass
Euphrasia officinalis	Eyebright
Hypericum humifusum	Trailing St John's Wort
Hypericum pulchrum	Slender St John's Wort
Linum catharticum	Fairy Flax
Moenchia erecta	Upright Chickweed
Myosotis discolour	Changing Forget-me-not
Myosotis ramosissima	Early Forget-me-not
Nardus stricta	Matgrass
Ophioglossum vulgatum	Adder's-tongue
Pimpinella saxifrage	Burnet-saxifrage
Plantago coronopus	Buck's-horn Plantain
Polygala serpyllifolia	Heath Milkwort
Rhinanthus minor	Yellow Rattle
Succisa pratensis	Devil's-bit Scabious
Trisetum flavescens	Yellow Oat Grass
Veronica officinalis	Heath Speedwell
Viola lutea	Mountain Pansy

Mire and Damp Grassland Axiophytes

Achillea ptarmica	Sneezewort
Anagallis tenella	Bog Pimpernel
Carex demissa	Common Yellow Sedge
Carex echinata	Star Sedge
Carex hostiana	Tawny Sedge
Carex nigra	Black Sedge
Carex panicea	Carnation Sedge
Carex pulicaris	Flea Sedge
Equisetum fluviatile	Water Horsetail
Erica tetralix	Cross-leaved Heath
Hydrocotyle vulgaris	Marsh Pennywort
Isolepis setacea	Bristle Club-rush
Juncus bulbosus	Bulbous Rush
Luzula multiflora	Heath Wood-rush
Molinia caerulea	Purple Moor-grass
Myosotis secunda	Creeping Forget-me-not
Scutellaria minor	Lesser Scullcap
Typha angustifolia	Lesser Bullrush
Valeriana dioica	Marsh Valerian
Veronica scutellata	Marsh Speedwell

Viola palustris	Marsh Violet

Woodland Axiophytes

Allium ursinum	Ramsons
Anemone nemorosa	Wood Anemone
Blechnum spicant	Hard Fern
Bromopsis ramose	Hairy Brome
Carex sylvatica	Wood Sedge
Dryopteris affinis	Scaly Male Fern
Epipactis helleborine	Broad-leaved Helleborine
Galium odoratum	Sweet Woodruff
Hyacinthoides non-scripta	Bluebell
Lamiastrum galeobdolon	Yellow Archangel
Lathyrus linifolius	Bitter Vetch
Oxalis acetosella	Wood Sorrel
Polystichum aculeatum	Hard Shield Fern
Polystichum setiferum	Soft Shield Fern
Sanicula europaea	Sanicle
Veronica montana	Wood Speedwell

Heathland Axiophytes

Calluna vulgaris	Common Heather
Vaccinium myrtillus	Bilberry

SHROPSHIRE PEREGRINE GROUP

Anton Schooley

Owing to a rather imprecise start to spring this year our birds did not appear to settle until the second half of April. They choose a scrape more secluded than last year and impossible to observe with clarity. Although flying activity was observed, it never seemed to be frenetic and with usual breeding activity.

However, the birds' behaviour indicated that it was possible that perhaps one egg was laid. But after several weeks of uncertainty, increasing muted behaviour and any evidence to the contrary by early July it had to be concluded that the nest had failed and any young had probably succumbed to illness or disease.

Whilst this is not unusual it was a great disappointment for our record number (of recent years) thirty five plus volunteers who with very little to see still loyally patrolled the site to ensure that the peregrines survived without human interference.

The SPG is very grateful for all the support and interest that it receives from local residents and many from further field, and the local police and hopes that all will be able to continue their concern and generosity of time for the 2015 spring season. The site is important and is included within the National Peregrine Survey which is organised by the British Trust for Ornithology.

Anton Schooley, SPG - Clee Hill Volunteer Coordinator

BIRD SURVEY IN THE NOVERS

John Tucker

Spring 2014 saw the third year of gathering data on the birds of The Novers, as a 'canary in the cage' approach to monitoring change. The anticipated variations will be affected by management and, less understood, environmental change including climate change and perhaps Ash Dieback disease among the site's commonest tree species.

The data are starting to be more revealing. The first year's work gave us a species list, their numbers and the distribution of breeding territories. The second year's survey revealed substantial losses after a hard winter. This year's survey gives us the first population trend graphs – even if each has only three points on it – and the first suggestions of short-terms trends. The really interesting graphs will however take years to appear – which may be dramatic if Ash Dieback does start to attack the trees on site. Whatever changes do occur the birds will among the first to give us clues and they and the continuing survey will help understand them.

A young robin joining Novers volunteers for lunch in Spring 2014

If anyone would like help with the work into the future – I don't expect to be able to do it in 15 years time – do contact me.

John Tucker 2014

NOVERS MAMMAL SURVEY

Glynn Barratt

Over the last two years two camera trap surveys and three live trip-trap surveys have been undertaken within the Novers woodland by TCHT in collaboration with The Shropshire Mammal Group, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, and Hawkeye Wildlife Surveillance. These have demonstrated an active and varied population of small mammals domicile within the woodland. In 2014 as a part of the SDF grant CHCWG has been able to purchase equipment comprising a camera trap, several trip-trap units, bat detector and GPS. These will be employed in 2015 to launch a small mammal monitoring survey in association with the Shropshire Mammal Group. This programme will run in parallel with the Novers Bird Survey.

CONCLUSION

The Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group (CHCWG) has been running since February 2012 and has now completed its 3rd successful year of activities with the aim of bringing together people interested in wildlife to do something positive for local species. The groups activity is centred on the open hill land of Titterstone Clee and Clee Hill Common, and includes the surrounding land which provides the landscape and community setting of the Hill, extending approximately as far as Knowlegate and Knowbury to the south, Bitterley to the west, Cleedownton and Bromdon to the north, and Catherton Common and Doddington to the east. Seasons 2013 & 2014 have been part funded by the Shropshire Hills AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF).

The 2013 season ended in November with the annual public AGM where the committee for the coming year was elected. The guest speaker was writer and broadcaster Mr Paul Evans who treated the group to a series of readings from his past works. Refreshments were provided, including excellent local cakes supplied by Anji Felstead. Seventy two people attended this event.

The writer and broadcaster Paul Evans delivering a reading

The 2014 season was commenced on March 25th with a free social evening hosted by the CHCWG committee. Presentations from each of the groups, birds, butterflies and flowers were delivered, followed by a short film on the mammalsof the hill. A tea and coffee break with excellent locally made cakes was followed by an end of evening presentation from Hawkeye Falconry, 'Meet The Owls'. This excellent demonstration of indoor falconry was both entertaining and informative, The evening ended with a meeting of volunteers for the Peregrine Protection Group and a final prize draw.

Hawkeye Falconry giving an indoor display March 2014

The last three years have been a success do to the dedication of the mentors of each of the survey groups and the work of the small management committee. This year has seen two members of the latter leave due to other commitments. So a heartfelt thank you to Peta and Clare for all their work in 2013 & 2014. The management committee would like to say that you will always be welcome at any event CHCWG hosts in the future and we hope that we will meet again on the Clee.