

Upper Clun

Community Wildlife Group Report 2015



Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group

Report 2015

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INTRODUCTION

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

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

The Group has carried out Bird and Plant surveys each year since 2007, and Butterfly surveys since 2010. Work on mammals started in 2014. Well over 100 different people have been involved in these surveys. This Report presents the results for the current year, and updates our knowledge of wildlife in the area.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The Group will

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

AREA & MEMBERSHIP

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

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

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

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

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Role of the Committee is to

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

The membership, and details of meetings in 2015, are set out in the Annexe to the Report.

PUBLICITY

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

WEBSITE

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

CO-OPERATION WITH FARMERS, LANDOWNERS & OTHER ORGANISATIONS

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

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

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

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

ACTIVITIES & SURVEYS

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

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

Three Nature Reserves in the Upper Clun area owned by Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Rhos Fiddle, Lower Shortditch and Mason's Bank, have also been surveyed in some years.

Our area was initially divided into 31 squares, 2x2 kilometre squares on the Ordnance Survey National Grid. A map showing these squares has been included in previous Annual Reports. The Group recruited a local member to survey each of these squares for birds and/or plants each year, and well over 100 people have either undertaken surveys, or provided additional useful information, since 2007. However, since 2009, only the best sites have been selected for further survey work, and many of them do not fall into single

squares, so this division of the area into squares is no longer important. The map of the area, divided up into these squares, can be viewed on the website.

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

Mammal surveys will also be organised, following the invitation to the Shropshire Mammal Group to speak at the 2014 Annual Public Meeting.

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

COVERING OTHER TYPES OF WILDLIFE

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

FUNDING

Initially the Group was funded by the AONBs Down to Earth programme, and then its Sustainable Development Fund.

From October 2011 until June 2013, funding came via the “LEADER in the Shropshire Hills” programme, “part financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development 2007-2013: Europe investing in rural areas”. This programme was co-ordinated by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership with Defra as the Managing Authority. The National Trust was the lead organisation and banker for the LEADER Project

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

Grant Applications will be made when the opportunity arises.

CONSTITUTION

To make Grant Applications, it is necessary to have a written Constitution, which was adopted at the Annual Public Meeting in November 2013. The Constitution can be viewed on the website.

OTHER COMMUNITY WILDLIFE GROUPS

The Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group was the second CWG to be formed, following the Upper Onny Wildlife Group, launched in 2003.

The Kemp Valley CWG started in 2011. The LEADER project funded these three Groups, and also three new groups, covering Cleve Hill, the Strettons, and Wenlock Edge.

The Stiperstones – Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme, financed by the Heritage Lottery Fund, is now supporting the development of two new CWGs, covering the Rea Valley and Camlad Valley.

These groups all survey important wildlife in their areas. but they are developing differently. All are monitoring birds and plants, but the species being searched for are different. Six of the groups are monitoring Lapwings, and five Curlews.

**The activities and results for each of the Groups can be found on the website
www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk**

THE BIRD GROUP

BIRD SURVEYS

Introduction

The primary aim of the Bird Group is to establish the population and distribution of Lapwing and Curlew, and to map the distribution of other species of conservation interest. The Target Species have varied from year to year; but they have not changed since 2011.

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

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

Up until 2011, the Group attempted to survey all 31 of the 2x2 kilometre squares, focusing increasingly on Curlew (as Lapwings steadily disappeared). However, by then it was already clear that Curlew was absent from many squares, and harder to find in the rest. As the population has declined, and become more fragmented, the interaction between pairs reduces. There is less flight and less vocalisation, making it harder to count the birds. Therefore, it was decided in 2011 that the survey of all 31 squares should be replaced by an intensive survey of the Curlew strongholds. This has been continued each year since.

Emphasis has been placed on developing a network of resident recorders. They, and any other member, can email Curlew observations as they occur, and the result has been a greater volume of information. This has been supplemented by map-based surveys of agreed target areas. These were sites where Curlew had been recorded regularly up until 2011, and the objective was to determine as far as possible how many territories were occupied. Search areas were deliberately drawn across apparent territory boundaries, based on previous fieldwork, so that any territorial behaviour might be captured.

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

Observers receive regular alerts by email at key points throughout the season, from first arrival of Curlew, to post-hatching activity that continues into July. This has been effective in prompting members to send in their observations.

All members of the Group were also asked to send in records of Lapwing and Curlew.

Participation and Coverage

Seven members carried out surveys of agreed geographic areas; 24 others, including resident recorders and “casual” observers, contributed records by phone, email or personal contact, a total of 31 participants, slightly up on last year. In all, 75 Curlew records were received, 23 more than in 2014. Although much of the rise is a result of enthusiastic new members joining the survey, there appeared to be an increase in Curlew activity as well, especially in the areas around Rhos Fiddle and Masons Bank.

All 17 observers who undertook geographic surveys or continuous recording for Curlew (several of whom are local farmers) live within the survey area. Other local farmers provided valuable information.

In addition to the survey fieldworkers, there are 15 Nest Box hosts.

The survey results are more fully described below.

LAPWINGS

Fieldwork Results

There was just one record of Lapwing this year, six birds seen by a farmer on a field in the Clun Valley on 23rd March. They were never seen again, and were almost certainly passing through to breeding sites, possibly in the Kemp or Camlad valleys.

The pattern of the last few years indicates that the Upper Clun continues to hold some attraction for Lapwing, but suggests that unless there are significant improvements in habitat, grazing regimes, and the timing and sensitivity of agricultural operations, the likelihood of Lapwing's re-establishment as a breeding species will continue to recede.



Map 1 shows the approximate location of all breeding Lapwings found by the Group since 2007, together with the nests found previously in 2004 – 06 (Smith 2006). No breeding Lapwings were found in the area in 2009, 2011, 2013 or 2014.

Local Extinction?

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

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

Not surprisingly, in view of the poor productivity, the adult breeding population declined by around a pair a year between 2004 and 2010, with breeding pairs being found in only one subsequent year as shown in Figure 1.

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

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

Map 1. Approximate location of Lapwing Breeding Sites 2004 - 15

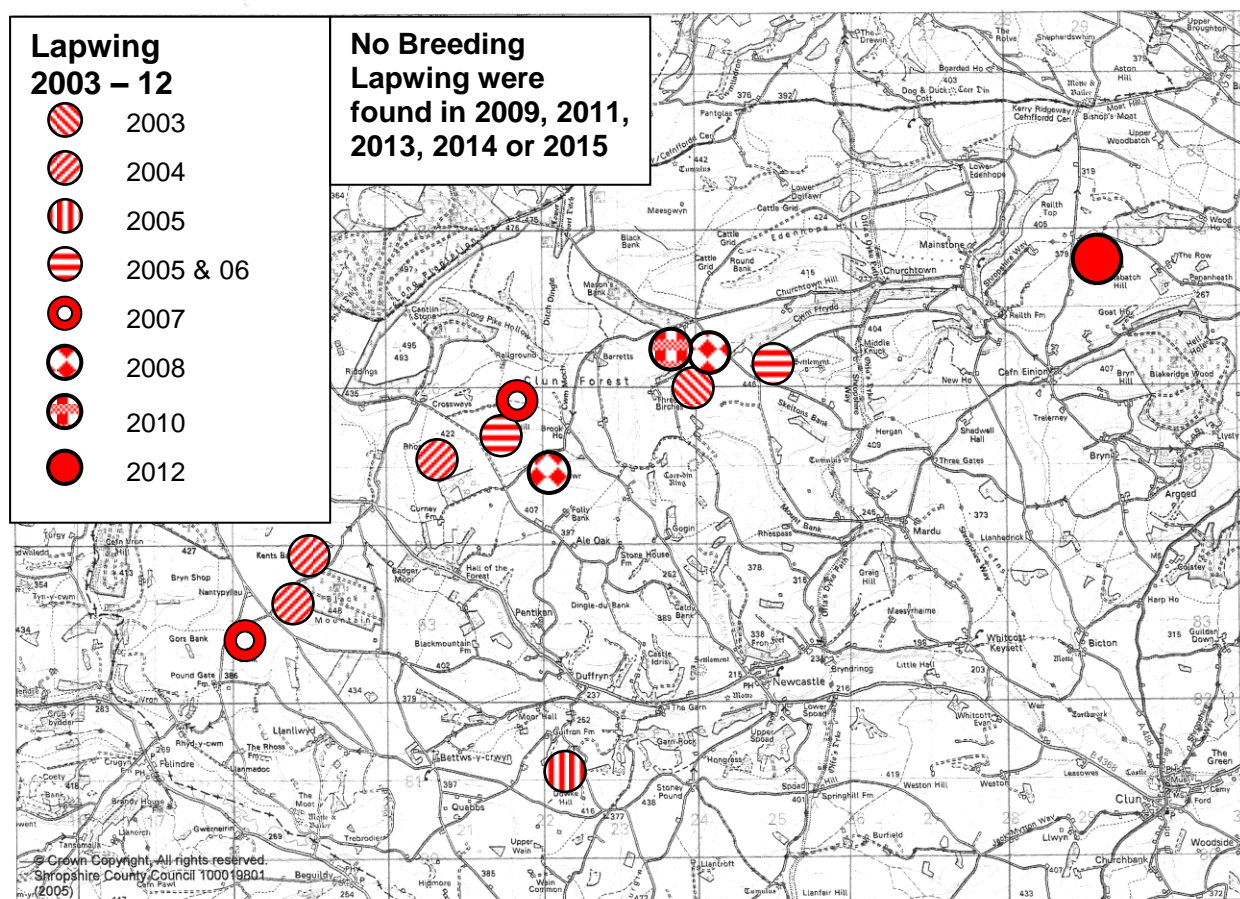
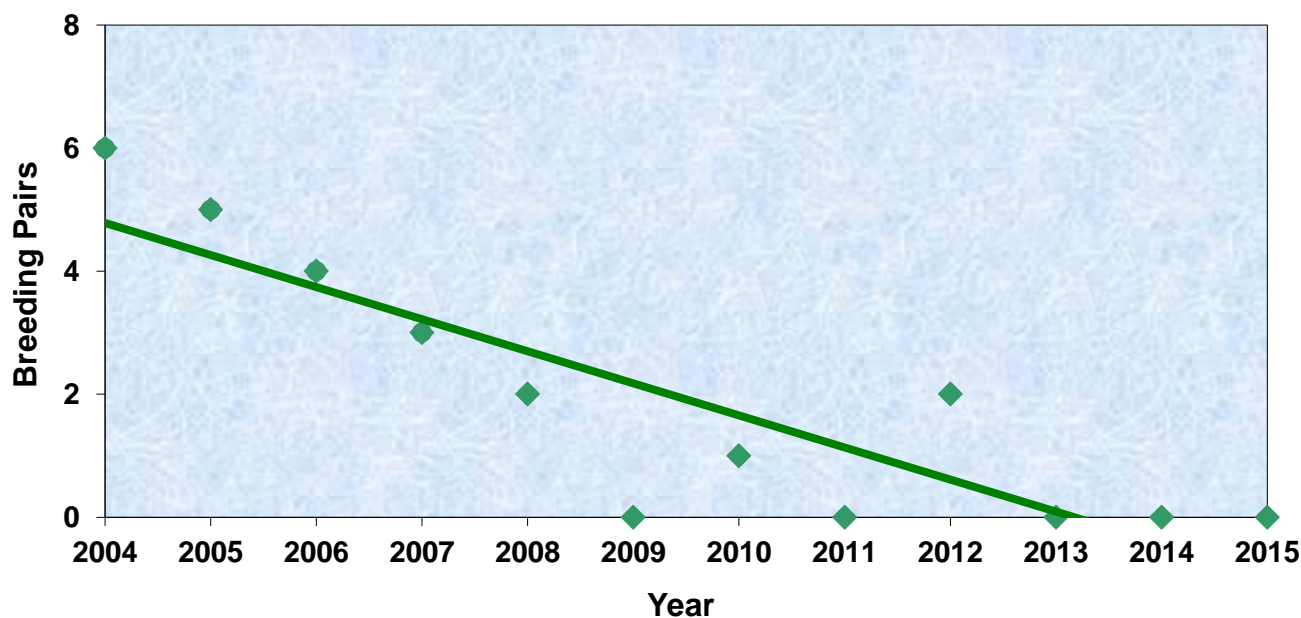


Figure 1. Decline of Lapwing in the Upper Clun 2004 – 2015



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

CURLEWS

Fieldwork Results

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

The first Curlews were observed in March, but as last year the main arrival took place in the first half of April. There was some evidence that they were slow to settle, possibly as a result of abnormally dry conditions for the time of year, and a check in vegetation growth when the weather turned cold and windy in late April and May.

Nine territories were identified, one more than last year, which may have been a re-occupation of a territory that had become vacant in recent years. There were three further 'possible' territories; in these cases either the status or the actual location was uncertain. Most pairs were in approximately the same places as Curlews have been found in previous years. This is as expected: they are usually long-lived and return to the same general breeding area each year.



Observations over the years have demonstrated that Curlew travel considerable distances between nesting and feeding sites, making any precise population assessment very difficult. As the standard methodology requires, the estimated number and location of territories has been based on the most parsimonious interpretation of the records. Where Curlew was recorded in an established territory on a series of dates from the start of the breeding season, it was presumed that a breeding attempt had been made. If the birds were recorded in the same areas in June and July, it was considered likely that they had produced hatched young, especially if the birds were very vocal, engaged in anti-predator behaviour, or both.

There was evidence that several nests failed. A farmer on whose land Curlews usually nest saw two pairs arrive and begin to settle, but did not believe that they bred successfully. Another pair seen consistently through the season by several observers almost certainly got as far as hatching chicks, but evidently failed shortly after. There were also sightings of pairs or groups of Curlews moving around freely at points in the season when successful breeders would have had eggs or dependent young. One closely-monitored pair did successfully hatch chicks, and when last seen in mid-July their behaviour suggested that the young were quite well-grown, with a reasonable probability of survival; the final outcome was not known, as is the case with four or five pairs where there was no clear evidence either of success or failure.

The current Curlew population is much smaller than the area might be expected to support, and needs to increase if it is to become more resilient. The failure rate this year has almost certainly been high, which does not bode well for recovery. On the other hand, the general impression was that Curlew were somewhat thicker on the ground, so there may have been some recruitment into the breeding population.

The distribution of territories in 2015 is shown in Map 2.

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

Map 2. Approximate location of Curlew Territories 2015

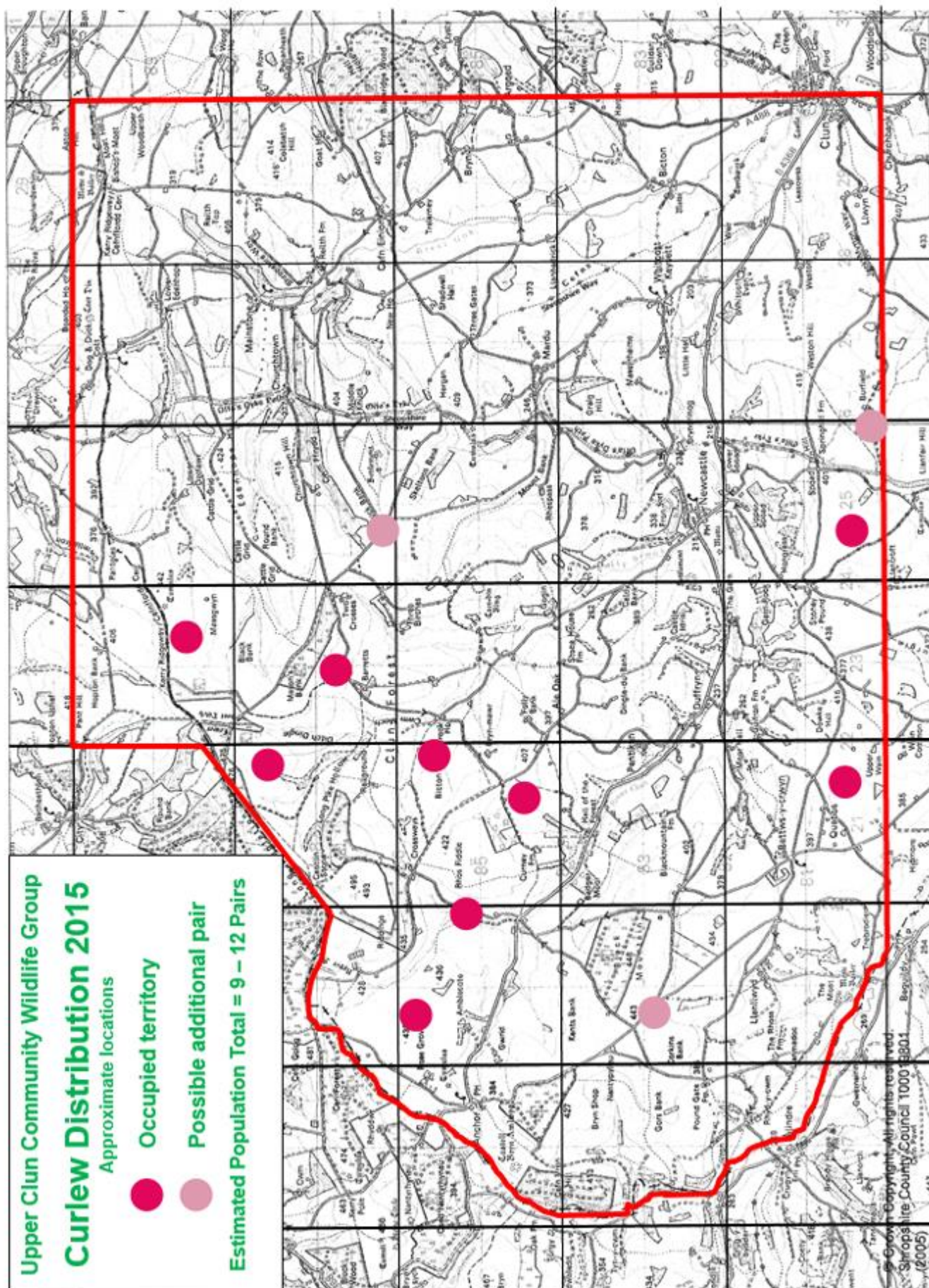
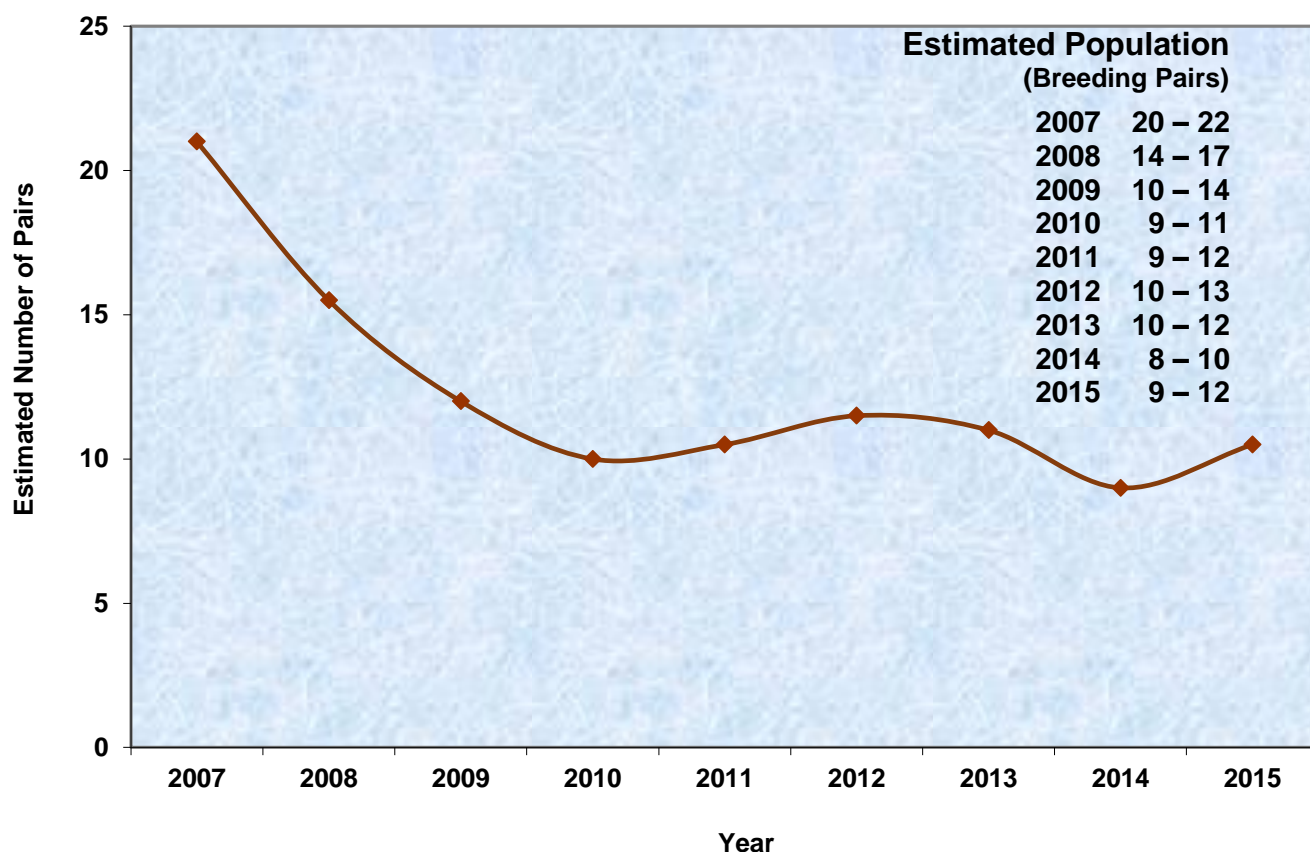


Figure 2. Decline of Curlew in the Upper Clun 2007 – 2015



The population appeared to have stabilised between 2010 and 2013, following many years of steep decline; the estimate for 2014 of 8 – 10 pairs was the lowest yet. In 2015, occupancy has been higher at 9 - 12 pairs, but may not have resulted in healthier productivity.

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

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

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

Breeding success is very difficult to assess, so the surveys need to continue for several years to gauge the underlying long term trend. If the decline in the number of Curlew territories resumes, the population is not producing enough young to be viable.

It is almost certain that the last pair of Curlew nesting in the “lowlands” of the Upper Clun has now been lost: they occupied a territory north-west of Clun, in the Unk valley, but they were last recorded there in 2010. The Curlew population appears now to be entirely confined to the very highest ground, with no known territory below around 375 metres.

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

Habitat Requirements and Population Decline

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

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

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

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

Please Conserve Our Curlews Campaign

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

**After a rapid initial decline,
the Curlew population appears to have stabilised,
and has fluctuated around 9 – 12 pairs for several years.
Further monitoring is essential, to check that the decline
does not resume, and target conservation effort.**

OTHER TARGET SPECIES

In previous years, members were also asked to record the appropriate Other Target Species shown in Table 1 below. Most of them have been selected because they were used to assess the merits of applications made by farmers to join the Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme, the top tier of Defra’s farm payments arrangements (now administered by Natural England). Many of them are also target species in the Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan, and are of general conservation interest (all except Dipper, Stonechat and Wheatear are on either the *Red List* or the *Amber list* of *Birds of Conservation Concern 3: 2009*). In addition, it was felt that their inclusion would add

interest to surveys during which most observers would not be likely to record either of the two main target species.

The habitats used by several “hedgerow & scrub” birds included in the Other Target Species were also recorded in 2008 and 2009. The surveys in those two years produced the necessary data to produce the “*Please Help Hedgerow Birds*” leaflet, and the habitat recording was discontinued in 2010. The leaflet outlines conservation measures for landowners and managers of all kinds, with emphasis on small-scale, incremental improvements which can be implemented without major changes in farming methods, and without heavy investment of time or money (see later Chapter on *Conservation Action*).

The Other Target Species list has continued to evolve, and from 2011 onwards only the birds associated with wetlands have been included.

Table 1. Other Target Species 2015 (and earlier years)

Other Target Species 2007 - 15											
Red Kite	KT	#		###	####	Dunnoch	D.		##	###	
Kestrel	K.			###	####	Stonechat	SC			###	####
Grey Partridge	P.	#		(no)		Wheatear	W.	#		(no)	
Barn Owl	BO	#		###	####	Spotted Flycatcher	SF			###	
Snipe	SN	#		###	####	Tree Sparrow	TS	#	##	###	
Cuckoo	CK	#		###	####	Linnet	LI		##	###	
Skylark	S.	#		###	####	Bullfinch	BF		##	###	
Meadow Pipit	MP			###	####	Yellowhammer	Y.	#	##	###	####
Yellow Wagtail	YW	#		(no)		Corn Bunting	CB	#		(no)	
Dipper	DI	#		###	####	Reed Bunting	RB	#		###	####
Column to the right of the species name is the standard abbreviation - the "Species Code"											
#### = Target Species 2011 onwards											
# = Target Species 2007 ## = Hedgerow and scrub target species 2008 & 2009 ### = Target Species 2010											

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

BIRDS OF THE “WETLANDS”

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

Most of the major “wetland” sites already identified and surveyed in previous years were visited informally in 2015. All the target species, with the exception of Snipe and Wheatear, were found breeding or holding territory at sites where they had been recorded in previous years (Map A2.1). Kestrels were present at Black Mountain and Masons Bank, and activity late in the breeding season suggested there was a nest in the latter area, although not necessarily on the Shropshire side of the border. There was intense Cuckoo activity around Lower Short Ditch, including a record of a male and two females present at the same time in mid-June. Stonechat appears to have recovered from its setback in severe winters, and bred at all the major “wetland” sites, including Llanfair Waterdine Turbary, where it had not previously been recorded. There were at least three distinct Reed Bunting territories on Rhos Fiddle.

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

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

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

SNIPE

The extremely important local Snipe population at Rhos Fiddle SWT Nature Reserve was surveyed as part of the Shropshire Snipe Survey 2009. This is part of the Shropshire *Biodiversity Action Plan* monitoring which is carried out every five years. In 2009 four pairs were found, including a new territory in the centre of the Reserve, compared to 3 – 4 pairs in 2004.

The survey was repeated in 2014, with three visits at dusk in April, May and June in apparently ideal conditions, but no Snipe were seen or heard.



Loss of breeding Snipe from Rhos Fiddle would be a major setback, so a check was necessary. Two members of the Group each undertook to make dusk visits in 2015, but only the April visits were carried out. One member reported a "possible" drumming. "It was brief, was not repeated and it was hard to discern through the cacophony of sheep and lambs from all directions". This inconclusive result is insufficient to establish whether or not Snipe still breed at Rhos Fiddle, so further checks will be made in 2016.

Snipe have apparently disappeared as breeding birds in the rest of the area, including a site on Black Mountain which was occupied in 2004. This site was surveyed in 2009, but no Snipe were seen or heard, so it was revisited twice at dusk in late April and early May 2010, as part of the follow-up to the 2009 Shropshire Snipe Survey, but again no Snipe were seen or heard. The site had become overgrown, and needed rush management, which group members carried out in 2013. This site should be revisited, but the prognosis is poor if there are none in the much better and more extensive habitat at Rhos Fiddle.

RED KITE

The growth of the local Red Kite population was checked by hard winters and poor spring weather in recent years. In 2015, several pairs showed interest in breeding, five got at least as far as building or refurbishing nests, and two of those were successful, producing three young between them. All the young were tagged. One of these nests had been used successfully, though not found, in 2014; its presence was suggested by information received in the post-fledging period last year. At one of the failed sites, the skeletal remains of a kite, presumably one of the pair, were found, but the cause of death was not apparent.

After 2007, when the first nests in over 130 years were found, the local population reached its highest point in 2012, when there were four nests. After falling back in the intervening years, the breeding population appears to be re-establishing itself: although only two nests were successful, the high failure rate of the others, several of which involved young birds,

is not unexpected. Altogether, 26 active nests have been found in the Upper Clun since 2007; fourteen were successful, raising 18 young. As Red Kites usually start to breed at two or three years old, and they tend to breed close to where they were reared, there is every likelihood that the local breeding population will continue to grow.

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

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

OTHER SPECIES

A regular Kestrel nest produced five young again this year, and there was probable breeding at another site. No Hobby nests were found, although the pattern of observations in the breeding season suggested that there probably was a nest, but that it failed. Yellow Wagtail bred in the Clun and Unk Valleys, though in lower numbers than last year. Mandarin Duck and Goosander bred on the Clun near Whitcott Keysett. A Quail was singing in early July in fields south-east of Rhos Fiddle, where one was heard last year. A flock of at least 50 Tree Sparrows, with Yellowhammer and other species in varying numbers, stayed for over six weeks in late summer on arable fields in the Clun Valley

BIRD GROUP PROGRAMME

Over the years, efforts to involve new people, through indoor Group meetings and outdoor training sessions and Bird Walks, have not generally been well supported. Such activities will be organized in future on an *ad hoc* basis, where there is a demand, and where members will undertake to come along to the event.

OVERVIEW

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

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

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

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

There has been a natural shift in the composition of the group over the period: the number of members carrying out map-based surveys has diminished, but those who do so are reliable, conscientious and increasingly knowledgeable. At the same time, the network of

resident recorders, and the number of local people who send in casual records of the bird activity they see around them, have grown.

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

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

The Bird Group will continue to develop this work, and, if there is a demand, organise events to attract new members.

NEST BOXES FOR WOODLAND BIRDS

The Nestbox Scheme aims to increase the number of suitable nest sites for hole-nesting woodland birds, and to collect data on their breeding success. Members who live in the Group's area with suitable gardens or access to woodland are invited to host up to 10 boxes, undertaking to monitor and maintain them. Currently there are 15 hosts; 7 of them provided records, 2 fewer than last year.

Complete nest records (a minimum of egg-laying and final outcome) were available for 5 schemes, a total of 35 boxes. The occupancy rate at these sites was 64%, even higher than the 57% last year, with a range of 40% – 92% for individual sites; the highest occupancy was in a woodland scheme, with around 50% more typical of gardens. At least 61 Blue Tit, 35 Pied Flycatcher, 26 Great Tit, 5 Marsh Tit, 4 Nuthatch and 2 House Sparrow fledged, although these figures are certainly minima. In spite of the high occupancy rate, productivity was considerably lower than last year, with a significant number of abandoned clutches, brood predation and nestling deaths. This is not unexpected, as last year was an exceptionally successful nesting season, and there would have been intense competition for resources, and possibly greater pressure from predators, as a result.

The laying date of first eggs returned to the date recorded in 2009, 27th April, eleven days later than last year, but still earlier than the very late dates in 2012 and 2013. The laying date is determined by the weight of the female, and hence by the availability of food in late winter and early spring, and may have been influenced by the dry conditions this year.

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

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

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



DIPPERS

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

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



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

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

In 2015

- 27 potential nest sites were monitored (mostly bridges with nest boxes, but including three other regularly used bridges)
- 18 nests were found (three of which had two breeding attempts) – 11 on the Clun itself, 5 on the Folly Brook, 3 on the Unk and 2 on Mardu Brook
- all of these nests except five were in boxes
- 24 of the breeding adults had colour-rings, which were read
- 61 chicks in 11 nests were ringed. It is likely that all these chicks fledged.
- all known broods were ringed
- The outcome is not known for two nests with eggs at one site

Tony Cross has been monitoring Dippers in the Teme catchment since 1987, by ringing chicks at nest sites, and counting birds at winter roost sites. Colour-ringing of adults started in 2011. Annual reports of this project, *Dippers in the River Teme Catchment*, have been produced since 2007, and the report for 2013-15 will be available next year.

This work suggests that the local population declined in the 20 years prior to the nest box scheme starting in 2006, but it then increased up until 2010, as the nest boxes create additional nest sites and therefore allow more pairs to breed. Also, productivity is slightly higher in boxes, as nests are less vulnerable to predation than those in some natural sites. However, low water levels in 2011, and high water levels with the rivers flowing too fast in 2012, appear to have reversed the growth. Some recovery occurred in 2013 and 2014, and results in 2015 appear excellent, but the analysis has not yet been completed.

Anyone who sees Dippers regularly, or knows of an existing nest site, is requested to please contact Michelle Frater 01588 640909

BARN OWLS

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

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

Barn Owls need

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



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

SBOG installed a few nest boxes in the area prior to the Group becoming established, and the Group has installed many more, so there are now over 20. Only two had been used before 2014. These boxes are at potentially the best sites, so there is little point in putting up any more until the population increases, unless new exceptionally favourable sites are found.

2013 was the “worst Barn Owl breeding season for over thirty years” (Barn Owl Trust), and no pairs were found here that year. Last year, Barn Owl bred successfully in the Upper Clun, and two broods were raised at one site, with the help of an excellent supply of voles. They bred again at the same site this year, fledging a brood of four young. Although they were almost certainly less productive than last year, it is encouraging that they seem to be settling again at an established site that had become vacant. Barn Owl was recorded at another site during the season but it is not known whether there was a breeding attempt.

Twelve boxes were inspected, and no other Barn Owl nests were found. Six of the boxes were occupied by other species, including Grey Squirrel, Jackdaw, Tawny Owl and pigeon species. Some of the boxes are no longer in suitable locations, as a result of recent changes in land use, and may have to be relocated.

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

THE PLANT GROUP

INTRODUCTION

This will be our ninth year of survey work in the Upper Clun (and Teme). The core group of around five volunteers continues to carry out much of the work which involves site condition assessments, mapping and recording of all higher plant species. The resurveying of the Local (County) Wildlife Sites (LWS) is the main focus but a number of new or 'candidate' sites are also always included in each year's programme. Rush pasture and purple moorgrass was the main habitat assessed in 2015 but species-rich and acid grasslands were high on the survey list too.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

A core group of six skilled volunteers carries out the site surveys. Training of the group in methodologies takes place each winter and the group is fully involved in decision making. Other people in the wider community group are always encouraged to take part.

Twelve sites were selected and surveyed over a 15 week period in 2015 (see Appendix 3#) but the group also carried out surveys out of the area, in the Teme catchment.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) supported the group, providing maps, condition survey cards, species cards and risk assessments. SWT also provided the group with landowner details and access permissions. Surveyors covered the whole of each site where possible and National Vegetation Classification (NVC) quadrats were done on most sites.

Training courses supported the surveys and were arranged by SWT with expert tuition on: Grasses, Sedges and Rushes, Bryophytes and 'Dandelion-look-alikes'.

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

The Wildlife Site Condition Form for Grassland, and the species recording card, published in a previous report, gives an idea of the data collected. Condition forms for Woodland were used too. The surveyors were also supplied with NVC recording cards and 'Invertebrate habitat' assessment lists.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Eight people participated in the site surveys in 2015 collecting valuable information on both LWS and new sites. Again, excellent species lists were compiled along with good quadrat data and in-depth information about site condition.

In summary, six LWS were visited and fully surveyed. An additional six other areas, some of them already identified as sites of ecological significance, were also surveyed and five will be put forward at the Local Sites Partnership meeting for consideration as new LWS. All sites visited are listed in Appendix 3#.

Once again around 100 target species were recorded in 2015 in line with previous years' recording; these plants are the Shropshire 'axiophytes', the species which are good habitat indicators because they are relatively uncommon and indicate an unimproved and relatively unspoilt habitat. Normally, the higher the number recorded, the better the site but haymeadows have few axiophytes although they are extremely important habitats.



Species-rich grassland at Three Gates which will be put forward as a new LWS

Species of interest recorded in 2015 include: Ivy-leaved Bellflower, Northern Marsh-orchid, Intermediate Lady's-mantle, Smooth-stalked Sedge, Corn Spurrey, Hare's-tail Cottongrass, Sheep's-bit Scabious, Moonwort, Yellow Mountain Pansy and Marsh Violet.



Sheep's-bit Scabious

The cumulative result of the Plant Group's work (together with the complementary work of the Bird and Butterfly Groups) is shown in Map 4 "Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife and Candidate Sites in the Upper Clun" in the Chapter on Conservation Action on page #

DISCUSSION

It is encouraging that we are still able to find and put forward new sites for LWS adoption i.e. that there are still semi-natural areas out there which are 'unknown' and of good

quality. Also encouraging is that a further four prospective sites were adopted during 2015 as LWS: Long Wood, Llanfair Hill (extension), Bryn Wood (extension) and Long Leasowe, Lower Knuck.

Virtually all of the 45 (57)* LWS in the Upper Clun (and Teme) areas have been surveyed within the last five years, and 71% are in a reasonably good condition, which appears to be a relatively consistent figure over the last nine years of survey work.

Where sites were found to be in a poor condition this was attributed to a variety of factors including: over-grazing leading to loss of species-richness, artificial fertiliser use and run-off onto unimproved grassland and creation of a 'garden' on one LWS.

However, since the start of the Community Wildlife Group in 2007, 22 (29)* LWS are either completely new or are extensions to existing sites.

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

The Plant group continues to work closely with landowners who's support is essential if the project is to be successful. The group also works closely with farm advisers from Natural England (NE) to ensure that the most appropriate options are chosen for the farm stewardship schemes





CONCLUSION

The Plant Group surveyors again worked very hard in 2015 and covered a wide area of the Upper Clun (and Teme) amounting to 269 hectares (comparable to 2014). The landowner involvement, interest and cooperation is still good and much of the data collected has been put to good use. Partnership working with the AONB, Land Life and Livelihoods, Natural England and SWT continues.

FURTHER WORK

Plant surveys and mapping will continue to take place on LWS in 2016 and 15 of these sites are already listed. New or returning surveyors will once more be encouraged to join in. Training courses, run through SWT in 2016 will probably include: 'The more difficult' grasses, using a Flora and the Apiaceae.

Scrub management will take place on Cwm Frydd LWS in December 2015 and a scrape for waders will be dug out on an area of species-poor rush on Blackmountain LWS.

()* = figures where Teme valley local wildlife sites are included

THE BUTTERFLY GROUP

INTRODUCTION

Butterfly Surveys were introduced in 2010, starting with Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (*Boloria selene*) a nationally threatened, UKBAP Priority Species.

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



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

The numbers found at Barretts West and nearby in Ditch Dingle in 2010 and 2011 make this a regionally significant site.

FRITILLARY SIGHTINGS

Appendix 5 shows the 2015 Fritillary records, principally from Dennis Twist

- **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries**

Barretts West continues to be the best site, with Ditch Dingle and Panty-y-Lidan runners-up. More site visits would probably have yielded additional sightings elsewhere.

- **Dark Green Fritillaries**

Two definite and two probably sightings, all in July

SAFEGUARDING HABITAT

Rush Pasture is an important habitat for Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries, and the food plants they need, and it is also an important habitat for wetland birds. A UCCWG leaflet on the management of Rush Pasture for its characteristic wildlife was included in the 2013 Report (Appendix 7), and can be found on the website www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

A similar document, but concentrating on the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and its needs, has also been produced. This is available on the website of the West Midlands Branch of Butterfly Conservation www.westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk

FUTURE PLANS

It is hoped to build on, and extend, this work in 2016. Details will be published in the Group programme for 2016, and on the website. More surveyors would be most welcome

**If you want to get involved, or want more information,
please contact Dennis Twist 01588 640629 dandmtwist@googlemail.com**

MAMMALS

The Group decided at its 2014 Annual Meeting to expand its interests in birds, butterflies and plant life to mammals (and reptiles and amphibians) and John Mackintosh of the Shropshire Mammal Group made a presentation.

The aims are

- Try to understand better the diversity and geographical spread of mammals, reptiles and amphibians in the Upper Clun area
- Promote recording and study of mammals and reptiles in our area.
- Provide a forum for those interested in wild mammals and reptiles within the wider community and those recording other species in UCCWG.

However, for a number of reasons the intention to get a new Mammal Group up and running in 2015 didn't happen, but we'll try again for 2016. A few interested people made themselves known during the 2014 Annual meeting and any others who would like to participate in a small training and identification session and / or take part in recording should make themselves known to Rob Harris (wilksharris@hotmail.com).

Anyone can submit a record of a mammal. You don't have to be an expert, if you are just out walking and see a mammal or one of their field signs you can submit that record. Don't worry if you are not 100% sure about which species you have seen, as long as you provide as much information as you can.

For those out surveying for plants, birds or butterflies, it would be useful if you could record incidental sightings or signs of mammals. Any estimate of the numbers of a particular species you see on your survey visits (no matter how rough) is more useful than recording 'too many to count', 'present', etc. There will be a recording sheet to download from the UCCWG website: (http://www.shropscwgs.org.uk/?page_id=86) or you can just send details to Rob Harris.

The first confirmed sighting of a wild pine marten in England for over a century was made in woodland in the Clun valley between Purslow and Clun. Dave Pearce, a keen wildlife watcher and contributor to Community Wildlife Group bird surveys, spotted the mammal in mid-July, and passed photographic proof to the Shropshire Wildlife Trust. One of the original photos is reproduced below. It can be enlarged in the computer, leaving no doubt. There are at least two individuals. It has been suggested that they may have been living in that area for some time. The Shropshire Mammal Group are now looking for volunteers to assist with the installation of camera traps, following up reported sightings with site visits and in conducting scat surveys, just one aspect of mammal recording that the UCCWG can assist with. If you think you might have seen a Pine Marten, or want to help, please tell Rob Harris, phone 01588 640234, email wilksharris@hotmail.com



CO-OPERATION WITH FARMERS

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

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

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

CONSERVATION ACTION

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

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

The Group has successfully

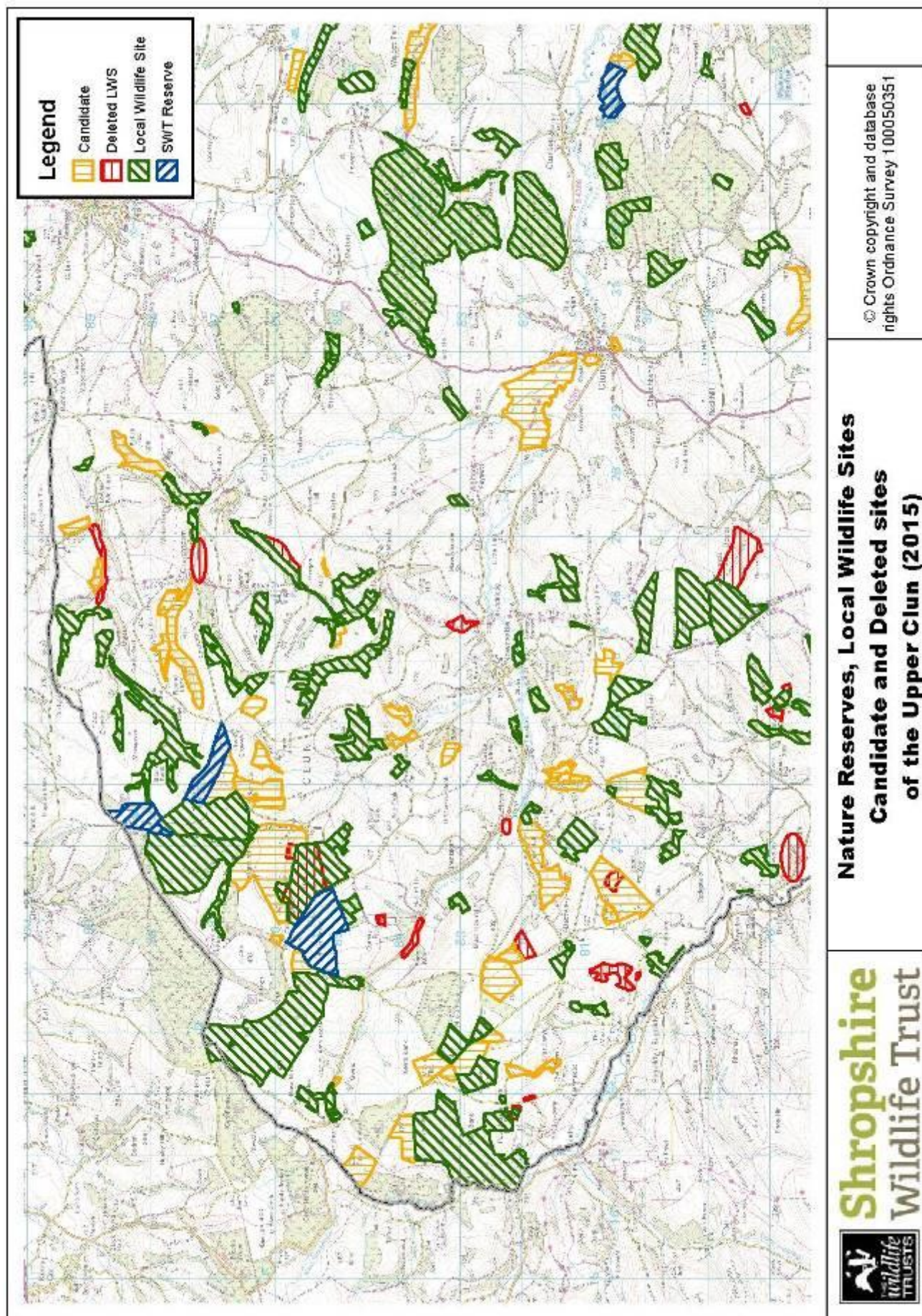
- Established a good estimate of the breeding population, distribution and habitats of Lapwing, Curlew and many of the Other Target Bird Species.
- Identified the most important plant sites, which are indicators of important habitats, and produced complete species lists so they can be considered as Local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

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

We have found that the same "wetland" sites are important for the target birds, plants and butterflies. Details have been included earlier, and in previous reports. We therefore collated our data across the three survey groups, and proposed that the sites are added to the list of Local (County) Wildlife Sites. These sites of wildlife interest, *Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Site, Candidate Sites and Deleted Sites in the Upper Clun 2015* are shown in the Map on page 24#. All the proposals have been accepted in principle by the LWS Committee, but formal adoption requires landowners consent, and this is still being sought in some cases, shown as "Candidate Sites" on the map.

Maps in previous reports have not shown the deleted (red) sites. The wildlife attributes of these sites were lost when they were ploughed, fertilised, built on, planted on, felled or destroyed in some other way, usually more than 10 years ago.

Until recently, the national and local strategies to reverse the declines of these species and habitats, and meet Government Biodiversity targets, were based on using Environmental Stewardship (particularly Higher Level Scheme - HLS) agreements between Natural England and landowners to safeguard and enhance the habitats. Such



agreements aimed to mitigate the long-term agricultural changes which have led to the decline of many bird, plant and butterfly species, including “improvement” of grassland by ploughing, reseeded and / or draining.

Most farmland in the Upper Clun was covered by Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) agreements, but these all expired in 2014 or earlier. Natural England had to consider which of the land covered by ESA Agreements should be incorporated into HLS Agreements. The Group’s strategy was therefore to identify the best wildlife sites, provide survey information to the land owners and to Natural England, and ask for it to be taken into account when HLS applications were being considered.

Our detailed proposals to Natural England have been described in previous Reports.

NEW HLS AGREEMENTS

New HLS agreements between Natural England and Individual Landowners in the Upper Clun were entered into in 2013 (21) and 2014 (a further 11), covering more than 10 sq. km altogether.

Our strategy was successful, and last year’s report included comments from Lucy Roberts and Chris Hogarth, the Joint Shropshire Land Management Team Leaders at NE, about how valuable the data we provided was in helping NE decide which land should be covered by Agreements.

Maps showing the location of holdings which include HLS agreements that started in 2013 or earlier, and in 2014, were published on pages 26 and 27 of our report for 2014

These agreements are scheduled to last for 10 years, so they should bring substantial benefits to local wildlife for many years to come.

However, each agreement is voluntary, so it may not protect the best habitats: funding constraints mean that it is unlikely that any agreements will create significant amounts of new habitat; and around half the farms in the Upper Clun have not been able to make a strong enough case that their farm provides wider environmental benefits, and others have decided that they do not want to enter into such agreements, so their incomes have gone down. This has already had an effect on grassland management in the area, as some farmers need to increase production to make up for the shortfall in income, and this may further disadvantage wildlife.

Therefore, while HLS has been a major benefit, it still protects only a small proportion of the area, so the Group still needs to monitor key wildlife species, and promote conservation.

COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP

HLS has now been replaced by a new Countryside Stewardship Scheme. This is part of the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy for the next seven years. It is supposed to be more simple than HLS, but will have less funds. It will aim to implement the proposals of the Lawton Report, which recommended more joined up land management to reduce the fragmentation of habitats. There will therefore be more emphasis on NE selecting areas for schemes, rather than individual landowner applications.

Targeting Statements have now been published by NE, but it is still not clear how the new scheme will work in practice. In particular, it is not clear how the new scheme will benefit Curlew, as it is no longer an individual target species, in spite of the rapid decline here and elsewhere. New applications will be developed next year. Finding out how Countryside

Stewardship will work, and influencing it for the benefit of Wildlife, will be a major priority in the coming years.

HABITAT REQUIREMENTS FOR TARGET SPECIES

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

Unfortunately, little management work has been carried out in recent years to ensure that sites retain their value for wildlife, but farms that have now moved into HLS are being paid for carrying out such work.

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

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

HABITAT MANAGEMENT LEAFLETS

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

1. *Please Conserve our Curlews*, requesting farmers to make changes in the way in which grassland is managed and grazed in 2007 This is based on a similar leaflet produced by the Upper Onny Wildlife Group
2. *Please Help Hedgerow Birds*, requesting all landowners to make small scale changes to the management of hedges, verges, field margins and scrub, in 2008.
3. *Managing Wetlands for Wildlife*, to benefit birds, plants and butterflies, in 2009.
4. *Management of Rush Pasture*, also to benefit birds, plants and butterflies, in 2013.

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

Each leaflet was published in the appropriate Annual Report, and further copies are available on request. They can also be viewed and downloaded from the website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

WILDLIFE SITES

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

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

Sites have to meet published criteria drawn up by Shropshire Wildlife Trust, in consultation with Statutory Bodies such as Natural England, Environment Agency and Forestry Commission, and other Wildlife Organisations such as Shropshire Ornithological Society and Butterfly Conservation. Individual applications have to be approved by a committee including most of these bodies. Adoption needs land owner consent.

RIVER CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

Increasing attention is being paid by statutory organisations to water quality in the River Clun and its tributaries, particularly to meet the requirements of the EU's Water Framework Directive (WFD).

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

The Environment Agency, the statutory body responsible for rivers, has been charged with getting all rivers into “good ecological condition” by the “Water Framework Directive”

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

The Government has invited local communities to put forward proposals for managing whole catchments, and the Severn Rivers Trust (SRT) submitted proposals for a “Teme Pilot Project” at the end of 2012. SRT is now co-ordinating the development of projects to implement this. As part of this, SRT is funding the Dipper project.

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

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership has set up a Working Group to co-ordinate these various initiatives, and to also co-ordinate the production of a Clun Catchment Management Plan. The Wildlife Group is represented on the Working Group.

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

The Severn Rivers Trust has now secured Heritage Lottery Funding for a major project to promote community involvement in the Teme Catchment. The development of the project will take place over the next year, after which it should operate for a further four years.

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

SHROPSHIRE HILLS AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN

The AONB has a statutory obligation to produce a Management Plan every five years. Conservation and enhancing Biodiversity are important elements of the Plan. The plan for 2014-19 can be found on the AONB website

CONSERVATION ACTION

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

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

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

Our surveys since 2007 have identified the most important sites, leading to most of them being adopted as Local (County) Wildlife Sites, and many of them also being protected by HLS Agreements between Natural England and the landowners and farmers. These agreements run for 10 years, but only around 10% of the total area is covered.

Our work has therefore provided lasting benefit for wildlife in our area, but much of it is still declining, so we need to continue to monitor the populations of key species, try to safeguard their habitats, and promote conservation.

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Elizabeth & Steve Blackman (s)
Colin & Sheila Davies (r)
Chris Evans (s)
Michelle Frater (s)
Keith Hodson (r)
Tim Lewis (r)
John Lyden (s & r)
Mark Measures (r)
Peter Morris (r)
Mervin Mullard (r)
Katie Steggles (s & r)
Roger Thomas
Richard Whately (r)
Roger Williams
Duncan Yapp (s)
Marie Zenick (s)

(r) = Resident (Continuous) Recorder

(s) = Map Surveys

Plant Recorders

John Clayfield
Susan Gardener
Ros Gillard
Fiona Gomersall
Paul Knights
John Lyden
Rob Rowe
Janet Watkin

Butterfly Recorders

Rob Rowe
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The Chapters on the work and results of the Bird Group have been compiled and written by Michelle Frater. She also organised the surveys.

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

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

Michelle Frater produced and distributed the periodic Bird Group newsletter

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

Rob Rowe led the Plant Walk.

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

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- Rob Rowe, for publicising the Group's work, particularly via Clun Chronicle and posters
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Smith, L. *Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group Report* Annually since 2007

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

References and fieldguides used by the Plant Group for survey work include:-

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

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

DISTRIBUTION

Paper copies of this Report are being distributed to the people listed above in the acknowledgements.

An electronic version of this Report, in .pdf format, will be supplied to the individuals and organisations listed below. Paper copies will be supplied to them on request.

Natural England

- Roger Owen (Area Manager, West Midlands)
- Chris Hogarth & Lucy Roberts (joint Team Leaders, Shropshire Land Management, Parkside Court, Telford)
- Harley Goodwin (Natural England Lead Adviser responsible for the Clun area)
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- Graham Walker (Chair, Conservation Sub-committee)
- Martyn Owen (County Bird Recorder)

Severn Rivers Trust

- Emma Buckingham (Teme Catchment Project Officer)
- Ieuan Davies ('Springs of Rivers' Project Officer)

THE REPORT

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

Some of the best grassland and wetland sites in the area, which contain good habitat for scarce Birds, Plants and Butterflies, have been identified. The Group has now started working with land owners to safeguard these sites. Most have been adopted as Local (County) Wildlife Sites.

The information we collected helped land owners apply for Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme agreements, and helped Natural England target these agreements for maximum benefit for wildlife in our area. Most of the best wildlife habitat in the area has been safeguarded through HLS Agreements that have 10 years to run, mainly from 2013 or 2014.

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

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

Planned survey work in 2016 will build on this knowledge, particularly in the wetlands, and enable us to extend the action to promote conservation of our target species and their habitats.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Bird Survey Recording Instructions 2015

Appendix 2. Bird Survey Results

- i) **Curlew and Lapwing**
- ii) **Other Target Bird Species, and Wetland Surveys**
- iii) **Curlew, Reed Bunting, & Other Target Species: Explanatory Note to the Maps**

Appendix 3. Plant Group – Sites Surveyed 2015

Appendix 4. Plant Survey - Target Indicator Species (Axiophytes)

Appendix 5. Butterfly Records 2015

Appendix 6. Index of Maps, Tables and Figures

Annexe 1: The Management Committee

Appendix 1. Bird Survey Recording Instructions 2015

(Operation Curlew Briefing)

The maps and recording instructions for the Survey (“Operation Curlew, plus Lapwing & Other Target Species”) have not changed since 2011, and are not reproduced here.

The survey is organised and administered via email, and all surveyors are sent reminders at key stages in the season, the first in late March.

Some returns are marked on survey maps, but most come from surveyors via email, as and when they have observations to report. This is particularly useful to collect all the observations of recorders who live in the area and hear Curlews frequently.

Appendix 2: Bird Survey Results

i) Curlew and Lapwing

The only observation of Lapwings is described in the main body of the Report. Observations were so few that there is no Table of Lapwing Survey Results.

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

ii) Other Target Bird Species, and Wetland Surveys

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

By the end of 2009 it became apparent that many of the Target Species were restricted to “wetlands” (mires, flushes and damp pasture) in the area. The best wetland sites were therefore targeted in 2010 and 2011, and were revisited from 2012 onwards only where incidental to other fieldwork. The results were shown on the *Curlew, Reed Bunting, & Other Target Species* maps for 2007-10, and for 2011, reproduced in the 2011 Report, while the similar map for 2012 and 2013 appeared in the relevant report.

Because priority was given to recording Curlew, surveyors were not asked to record Other Target Species this year, although some contributed records voluntarily. This year’s records are shown on Map A2.1. *Curlew, Reed Bunting, & Other Target Species 2015*. The map has been produced on the same basis as those in previous reports.

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

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

Curlew, Reed Bunting and Kestrel are usually represented by one lozenge per record, although in some cases only representative Curlew records are shown, as some resident recorders were seeing or hearing them almost daily at some stages of the season. The presence of the other species is marked by a single lozenge which may represent multiple records.

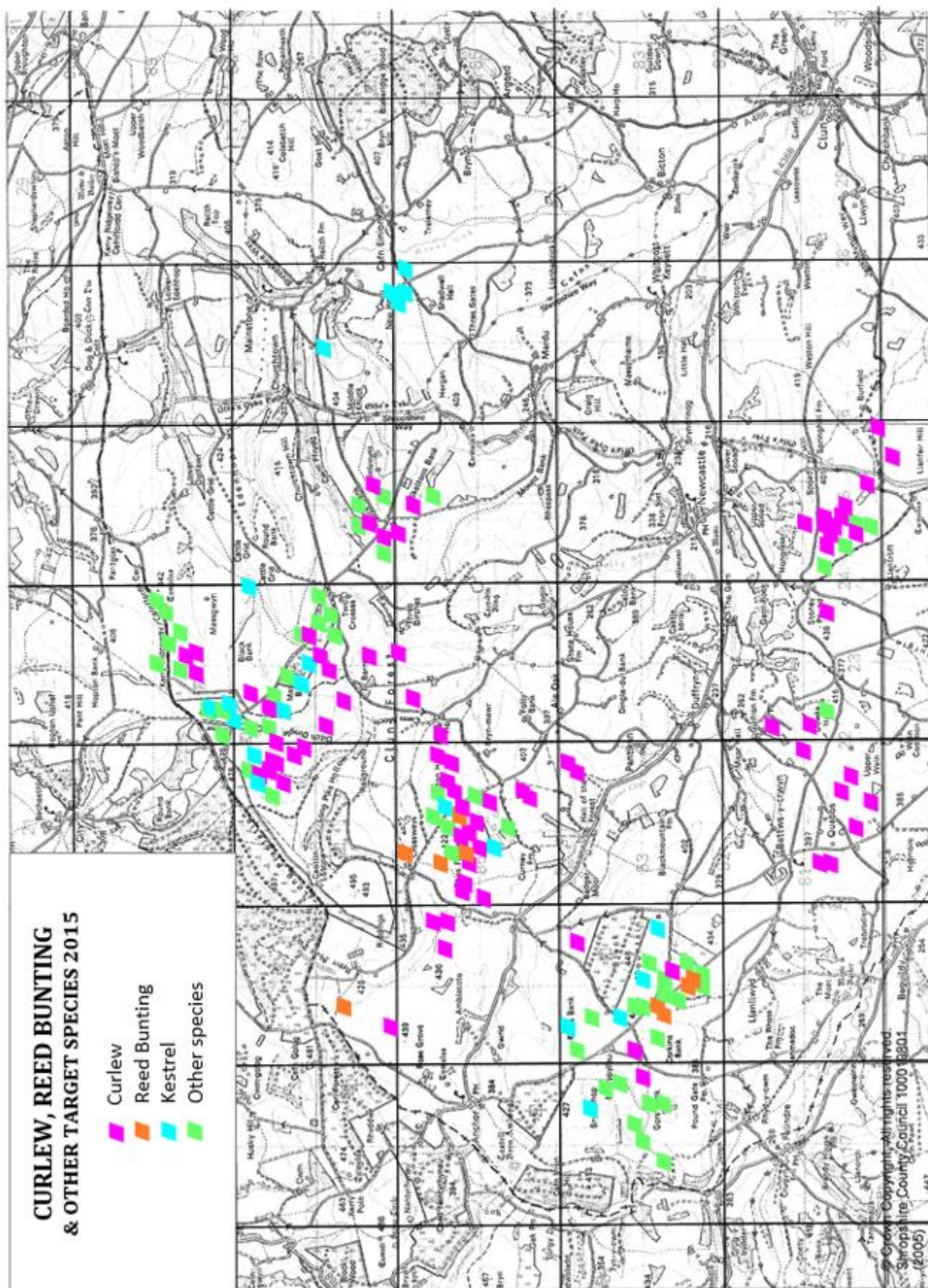
At sites where Curlew records came mainly from local residents, no attempt may have been made to record the Other Target Species. These species will therefore be under-represented on the Map.

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

Table A2. 1. Results of Curlew Survey

Site name	Square	Observer	Curlew breeding status	Comment
Maesgwyn	1	M Frater (s) D Yapp	Probable	Pair established early in season; active to mid-June, outcome unknown
Amblecote/Riddings	5S & 12N	Colin & Sheila Davies (r)	Possible	Pair arrived and began to settle; no evidence of successful breeding
Riddings/Curney Bank	12NE & 13W	John Lyden (s) C & S Davies (r)	Probable	At least 1 pair, possibly 2, active until late June; outcome unknown
Bicton Hill	6SE & 13NW	Katie Steggles (s & r)	Probable	Frequent activity through season, ceased around mid-June; presumed failure
Cwm Moch	6NE	Michelle Frater (s)	Confirmed	Active to mid-July; evidence of well-grown young but fledging unknown
Masons Bank	6NE & 7W	M Frater (s), D Mackintosh (r)	Probable	Occupied from early April; territorial interaction mid-June, nothing further
Cwm Frydd, Knuck Bar	8S & 9S	Mervin Mullard (r) M Frater	Possible	First seen early April; very active late May then nothing; possible failed nest
Anchor, Kents Bank	11E & 12S	Michelle Frater (s)	Unknown	No records this year, but little visited
Ale Oak/Rhos Fiddle	13S & 20NE	Chris Evans (s), Tim Lewis (r)	Probable	Regular activity April to late June, but location of territory(s) unclear
Black Mountain	18SE & 19	MF(s) K Hodson, D&F Morris (r)	Possible	Sparse, scattered records from April to June but no territory located
Quabbs	27	Richard Whately (r) P Morris	Probable	Active March - mid-June; interactions with possible 2nd territory, location unknown
Spoad Hill	29	E&S Blackman (s) B Angell (s)	Confirmed	Active to late June; evidence of dependent young but subsequent failure

Map A2. 1. Approximate location of Curlew and Other Target Bird Species 2015



Appendix 3 Plant Group – Sites Surveyed 2015

Site Name	Site Code	Habitats	No.of axiophytes *	Condition of site
Black Mountain Common	SO18.03	Rush Pasture & Purple- moorgrass, Flush, Wet Heath	27	Good
Gors Bank & Bryn Shop	SO18.09	Rush Pasture & Purple- moorgrass, Flush, Unimproved Grassland	40	Good but part- destroyed
Cwm Sanaham	SO27.08	Acid Grassland, Mesotrophic Grassland, Scrub	23	Declining
Panpunton Hill	SO27.09	Acid Grassland, Mesotrophic Grassland, Scrub	19	Declining
Cefn Hepraes	SO27.14	Rush Pasture & Purple- moorgrass, Flush	34	Declining
Maice, The Graig	SO27.20-PS	Species-rich Grassland, Scrub	12	Good
Lady's Meadow	SO27.21-PS	Rush Pasture & Purple- moorgrass	11	Good
Crossways	SO28.07-PS	Species-rich Haymeadow	6	Good
Brynmawr	SO28.31	Rush Pasture & Purple- moorgrass, Species- rich Haymeadows, Standing Open Water	24	Declining
Dowke Wood, The Garn	SO28.50-PS	Semi-natural Woodland, Rush Pasture & Purple- moorgrass,	33	Good
Three Gates	SO28.54-PS	Species-rich Grassland	8	Good
Pants & The Weather Rough	SO28.68-PS	Species-rich Grassland, Scrub	22	Good but part- destroyed
* axiophytes = good habitat indicator species				

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

Rush Pastures

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

Blanket Bog

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

Species-rich Meadows

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

Appendix 5: Butterfly Records 2015

FRITILLARY SIGHTINGS 2015

	30-May	05-Jun	07-Jun	11-Jun	12-Jun	24-Jun	Late Jun	10-Jul	09-Jul	12-Jul
SMALL PEARL BORDERED FRITILLARIES										
Barretts West	0	2			11			6		
Ditch Dingle					6					
Cwm Moch					1					
Pant-y-Lidan			7							
Black Mountain 1										
Black Mountain 2						0		0		
Black Mountain 3						0				
Rhos Fiddle						0		3		
SE corner										
Corkins Bank								2*		
Llanfair Hill				0						
Cwm Burholes				0						
Gors Bank						Several				
Bryn Shop							Several			
DARK GREEN FRITILLARIES										
Pant-y-Lidan										2
Three Gates									2*	

Entries given only for sites visited. * Probable

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Annexe 1

The Management Committee

Membership

The following people were elected at the Annual Meeting in November 2014

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

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

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

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

Meetings

The Committee has met once since the last Annual Public Meeting, on 15 October 2015. Most of the practical work of the Group is carried out by the Bird and Plant Groups, and the organisers report to, and are overseen by, the Management Committee. In practice this means that it is not necessary to have frequent meetings of the Committee.

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

The Committee believes that social events are very important, and a barbeque was arranged for 7th July, at the Straw Bale building on Brynmawr Farm. Unfortunately very few people booked, so the event was cancelled

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

Funding and Bank Account

The Group had a Bank Account at the Co-operative Bank, but the Bank decided to close it. A new account has been opened with HSBC in Bishop's Castle, the only branch of any bank convenient for the area.

Each cheque requires two signatures from four nominated Committee members: the current Officers, and Rob Rowe

Up until 2011, all the costs of the Group were met through various grants to Leo Smith. From October 2011 to June 2013, all costs were met by the LEADER Community Wildlife

Groups Project, administered by the Shropshire Hills AONB and part financed by the European Union Regional Development Fund, with the National Trust as Banker. These grants were listed in the Acknowledgements in the various Reports, and all of them have been accounted for to the funding body.

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

Financial Report and Accounts

In 2014-15, apart from the income and balancing expenditure for the BBQ, the only income was receipts from the 2014 Annual meeting. Expenditure was hire of hall and refreshments for the meeting, and expenses for Group mailings (mainly postage). In October 2014, the available funds were £467.21. Now, the Treasurer has a cheque for £404.16 from the Co-operative bank, which will be paid into the new account when it is open.

Income and Expenditure for 2014-15

Income		Expenditure	
Donations	£50.00	Stamps	£38.16
BBQ	154.00	Newcastle show	15.00
AGM	32.93	Website	15.00
Total	236.93	BBQ	136.50
		Hall hire AGM	45.00
		Total	249.66
Bank statement @ 01/04/14	482.87	@ 31/03/15	470.14

Since 1 April there have been no receipts but Expenditure has been:

Stamps	43.20
Newcastle show	22.78
Total	65.98

Cath Landles, the Community Officer for the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Team, will verify the Accounts.

Members

Michelle Frater has resigned from the Committee, having been Bird Group representative and Organiser since the Group was formed in 2007. Michelle has made a major contribution to the work and success of the Group, and we are all very grateful for her efforts over many years. Thank you very much, Michelle.

Marie Zenick has taken over the operation of the Nest Box scheme, and has agreed to join the Committee to represent the Bird Group. Michelle Frater will continue to organise the Curlew survey.

John Lyden and Katie Steggles have also agreed to join the Committee.

Any other volunteers for membership of the Committee will be very welcome.

Apart from Michelle, all the current Committee members are willing to stand for re-election. Existing and new members are all subject to election at the Public Meeting

Leo Smith (Chair)
Mervin Mullard (Treasurer)
November 2015