Severn – Vyrnwy Confluence
Community Wildlife Group

Bird Survey Results 2019

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Severn - Vyrnwy Confluence Community Wildlife Group

The Group was established in February 2018, primarily to look for Curlews as part of the Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) and Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS) *Save our Curlews* Campaign. There were already Community Wildlife Groups surveying Lapwing and Curlew in most areas in the County where several pairs of Curlew had been found during Bird Atlas surveys carried out in 2008-13, but there was no previous coverage of the important Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence.

Both Lapwing and Curlew have suffered a massive contraction in range and population decline in the last 20 years or so, nationally and locally. Curlew has been described as the UK's highest bird conservation priority, as we have an estimated 28% of the European breeding population, and 19 – 27% of the world population.

The aim of the Group is therefore to involve local people in surveying the area for Lapwing and Curlew, to see if the populations have continued to fall here following the Bird Atlas survey. The survey aims to locate the territories of breeding pairs, estimate the population, and if possible pin-point the fields with nests. No attempt is made to look for nests.

The launch meeting was well attended, by 19 people, most of whom agreed to help. Several other people, who were unable to come to the meeting, also volunteered to help. In total, 21 people, including four couples, and one of the Shropshire Wild Teams, did survey work. Seven pairs of Curlew, and 7 – 8 pairs of Lapwing, were found.

The survey was repeated in 2019. Participants in 2018 were encouraged to help again, a poster was put up round the area, and articles were placed in community newsletters and parish magazines, with an appeal for volunteers. A briefing meeting was held on 19 February. Eighteen of the 21 surveyors continued, and five new ones were recruited. The results have been summarised in articles in the local community press, and this report describes the 2019 results in detail.

CURLEWS, LAPWINGS AND OTHER BIRDS SURVEY

Objectives

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

Corn Bunting was added to the target species for the final survey in 2018.

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

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

This was the second year in which a bird survey was carried out in this area. It is intended to repeat it annually, to monitor long-term population trends for the two main species, as well as establish the current population and distribution, and use the results to promote conservation and attempt to reverse the decline.

Methodology

The area covered by the Community Wildlife Group was divided up into 27 tetrads (2x2 kilometre squares, each made up of four of the one-kilometre squares shown by the pale blue grid lines on Ordnance Survey maps. A map showing these tetrads, and the reference code, is attached (Appendix 1).

People who agreed to help were allocated a square / tetrad, and requested to survey it once during each of three specified two week periods, around the end of March, end of April, and mid-June.

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

Each survey visit concentrated on suitable habitat for the two main target species, and was expected to take around three hours. Participants were provided with detailed survey instructions, and a large scale map of their tetrad (the map filled an A4 sheet of paper) for each survey. The aim was to establish the number of territories (number of breeding pairs) for Lapwing and Curlew, not to find the nest. All survey work was carried out from public rights of way, unless a surveyor obtained landowners permission to look in specific fields.

Three training sessions were held for those members of this and two other Community Wildlife Groups who wanted to attend one. Eight SVC members attended.

Survey work was carried out in all except two of the 27 tetrads, and 21 members spent just over 176 hours on it. This represents an excellent effort

Participants at the February meeting decided that feedback meetings in June and November were unnecessary.

Curlew

In addition to the regular tetrad surveys, a Curlew Territories map, centred on the SWT reserve at Holly Banks, was supplied to surveyors, requesting additional visits to record Curlew. It was hoped that these additional visits would increase the records of concurrent observations of birds from different pairs, to help establish the population, and territory boundaries. This map was used for survey visits to cover tetrad SJ31P and the adjacent area, and 11 additional visits were made altogether on 24 and 28 March, 10, 26 and 30 April, 2 and 6 May, 1, 10 and 23 June, and 19 July). Five surveyors made these visits between them, and the total additional time spent on them totalled 22 hours 40 minutes. The observations made on them are shown as casual records on the Curlew records map. Two sets of concurrent observations were made, with an additional set on one of the training sessions on 3 April, and Curlews were seen on the ground in the same locations on several visits.

All Curlew records from the surveys, together with the results of the additional visits to record Curlew territories, are shown on the map on page 5.

All participants were also asked to send in records of any Lapwing, Curlew, Kestrel and Red Kite seen or heard in their own survey squares when not actually doing their survey, and any others seen elsewhere in the area at any time. These “casual records” supplement the survey records, and are very helpful in the analysis to locate and separate territories. The casual Curlew records are also shown on the map, with hatched shading.

The methodology requires observations of a pair together, or a single bird on two of the three surveys, or on additional visits, to confirm a territory. However, Curlews often have large territories, and may be seen a kilometre or more from their nest site, so interpretation of the observations is sometimes difficult, unless singing or displaying birds are seen or heard concurrently. It must be stressed that on some surveys both the birds in a breeding pair might be seen, but on others only one is seen; that the same birds will probably be seen on more than one survey, and on additional visits; and a pair nesting close to the corner of a tetrad might also be recorded in up to three adjacent tetrads. Therefore the total number of observations made on the surveys will almost certainly be rather more than the total population in the area, and analysis of the results aims to establish the total number of breeding pairs or territories, and the approximate location of the centre of each territory (i.e. the nest site).

Around 40 Curlews on passage, delayed by the floods in March, were seen in two tetrads in the early survey. Excluding these, there were a total of 18 observations of Curlew in the three surveys (i.e. excluding observations on the 11 additional visits), rather less than the 32 last year.

These floods disrupted the nesting behaviour in this part of the area, as Curlews arrived back or passed through late, the breeding sites were flooded or waterlogged, and large flocks of over 20 birds were seen up until early April. It is therefore possible that not all the “breeding pairs” in the area made nesting attempts, and, if attempts were made that were predated early, then territorial activity would be curtailed, and defensive action would not be necessary.

Floods returned to the area after very heavy rains in early and mid-June, and again large flocks were seen, totalling up to 40 birds. This is far too soon for there to have been any fledged young, so these flocks almost certainly consisted of failed breeders, either from the surrounding area, or on return migration from further north.

The most useful records are of two singing or displaying males or pairs seen or heard concurrently. The boundary between the two territories will be between them. The analysis in 2018 was greatly helped by observations in the vicinity of Holly Banks on the training sessions, when birds were seen or heard concurrently on several occasions, as summarised in the map on page 5 of the 2018 report This allowed the dense cluster of records shown in SJ31I, J, N and P to be separated into five territories, as shown on page 6 in that report. A found nest, and observations of defence of probable nest sites from potential predators, indicated the locations of the centre of the territory of four of them.

All observations made in all three surveys of these tetrads in 2019, together with the results of the additional visits and several casual records, can be fitted into the same notional territory boundaries, with minor adjustments, as shown on page 6. However, no nests were found, no defensive behaviour was observed, and there were no concurrent observations to show that the two territories in the north-east quadrant were both occupied, so there might have been four pairs rather than five, on the Holly Banks territories map shown on p.6.

In addition to these 4-5 pairs, there was again another pair near Pentre (SJ31T), and casual records again indicate another pair in the vicinity of Crew Green and Melverley. However, in both years these latter birds were usually seen in flight, and the centre of the territory is unknown, and is probably in Wales.

Curlew was again recorded on Hendre Hill (SJ20Z, also outside the survey area in Wales).

The methodology requires the analysis to produce the lowest population estimate consistent with the records, in this case 5-6 pairs, compared with seven pairs in 2018.

There were no observations of continuously calling Curlews on any of the third (June) surveys, or any other observations that suggested the presence of chicks, in the Holly Banks area or elsewhere. Nor were there any observations of defensive activities to drive off potential predators, indicating likely nest sites, although a farmer reported a nest with eggs near Cae Howell.

This raises the possibility that some pairs did not come into breeding condition, or, if they did lay, they failed early. The reduction in the number of observations, as well as the reduction in territorial activity, both support the conclusion that there might have been fewer pairs in 2019.

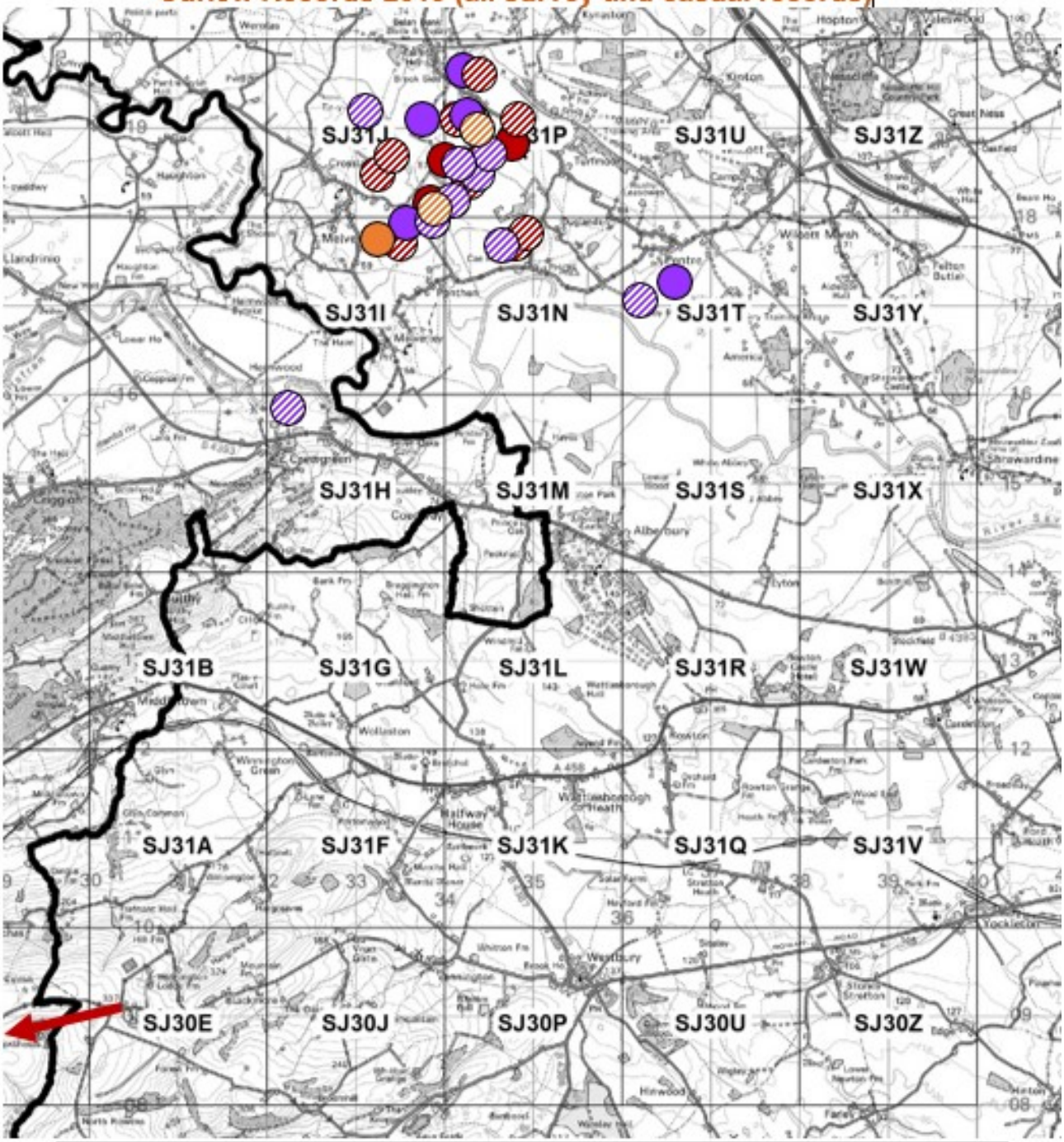
There has been no indication of fledged young in 2018 or 2019.

Experience of undertaking this type of survey with more long-standing Community Wildlife Groups suggests that it takes several years to get a complete understanding of the populations, and that, in future years, evidence may be found to confirm a higher population.

From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Curlew population in the area is 5 - 6 pairs, but there is no evidence that any young fledged.

Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence Community Wildlife Group

Curlew Records 2019 (all survey and casual records)



Survey Period:	First (Up to 7 April)	Second (8 April – 5 May)	Third (8 – 23 June)
Survey Observation	●	●	●
Casual Observation	●	●	●

A fourth survey was carried out in mid-July in SJ31I, N & P, and SJ31R and T, but no Curlews were recorded

Population estimate: 5 - 6 pairs, + 1 in SJ31H (Wales)

Three Curlews were seen on 7 April flying over SJ30E towards Heldre Hill (SJ20Z, outside SVC CWG area), a pair chasing an intruder off their territory)

Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence
Community Wildlife Group

Curlew Results (Holly Banks area) 2019

Tetrads SJ31
I, J, N & P

Notional territory boundaries enclose all observations on all surveys.

A slight adjustment has been made to the boundaries in the same area shown in the 2018 report. However, there were no observations that suggested a likely nest site (based on observation of defensive activity).

Observations proved the two territories in the south were different from those in the north, but there were no observations that proved there were more than two territories in the north of this area.

Population in area shown on map: 4 - 5 pairs

Over 150 Curlews have been colour-ringed since 2016, mainly at Dolydd Hafren Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust Reserve on the River Severn near Welshpool during March, when they are passing through on their way to their breeding sites. Each of these Curlews is individually identified by the two letters on the yellow ring on the left leg. Several of them have been found at breeding sites elsewhere in Shropshire. Surveyors in this area were asked to check any Curlews that were seen on the ground at breeding sites for rings, but none were seen.

Lapwing

The location of Lapwings found during the surveys is shown on page 8.

Only one small colony was found, five pairs defending nests against Crows in a part-flooded field near Berwyn House (SJ31P), just north of Holly Banks. The same site was occupied by two pairs last year

From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Lapwing population in the area is 5 pairs, probably more There was no evidence of any fledged young.

Other Target Species

Kestrel

The location of Kestrels seen during the surveys is shown on page 9.

Kestrels forage up to about 1.5 kilometres from their nest site, so the two dots just to the east of SJ31X will be different observations of the same individual or pair. It is likely that the dots represent three pairs. Kestrel have had a very poor breeding season, with a shortage of prey, so activity in 2019 was considerably less than in 2018, when the survey results suggested around seven pairs.

Kestrels have also declined considerably in recent years, and the Shropshire Ringing and Raptor Groups have launched a nest box scheme to help improve breeding success, and try and find out the reasons for the decline.

The Other Target Species recorded during the surveys are summarised in Table 1 on page 9.

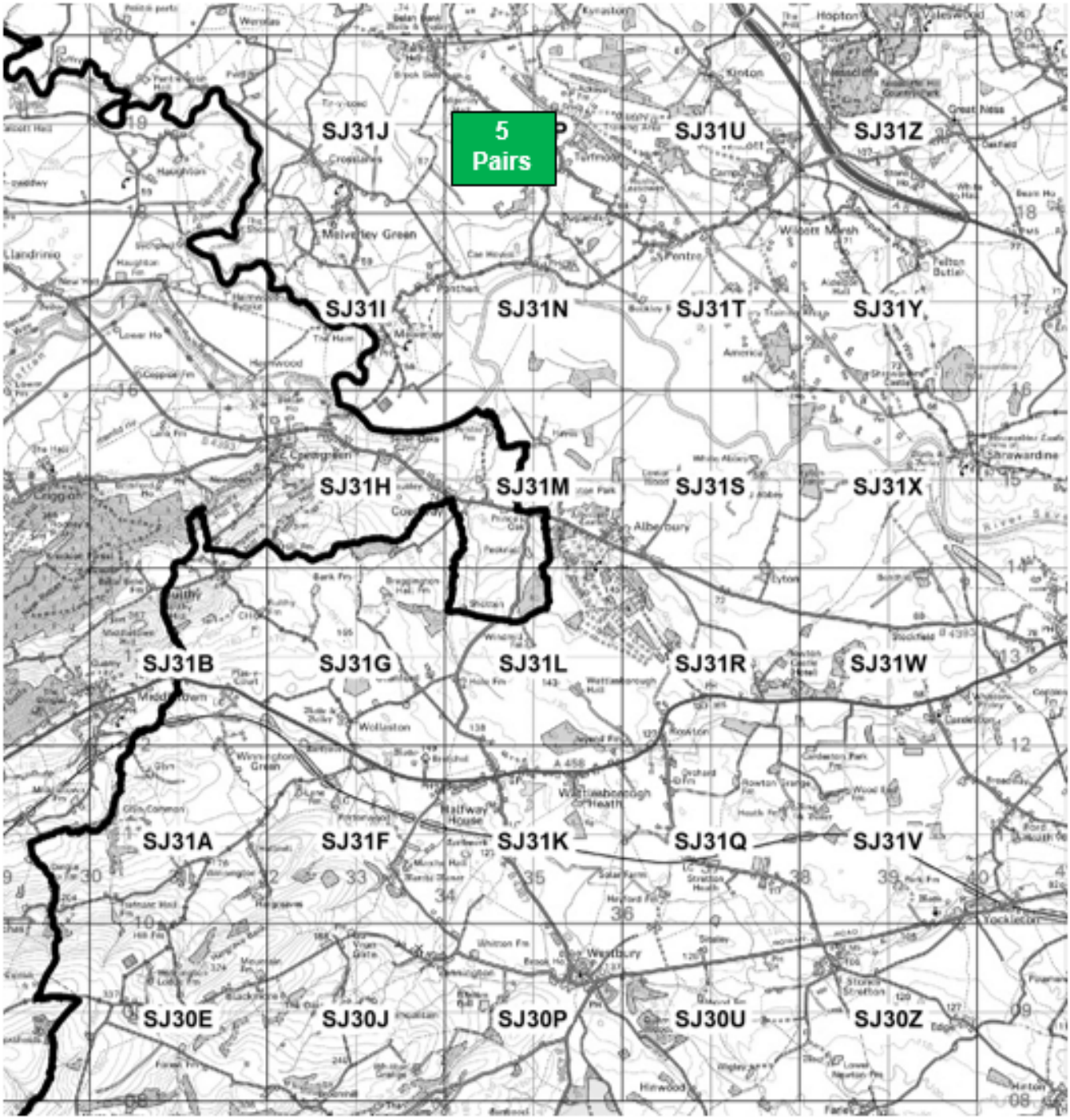
As expected in a survey of this type, the expertise of members, and the time they had available to undertake the surveys, varied considerably. The primary aim was to look for Lapwing and Curlew, and all participants were familiar with both species, but several participants made no attempt to look for, or record, the other target species. However, they were requested to make an effort to record Kestrels.

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

The summary table shows the maximum count for each species on any one survey in each tetrad. This may under-record some species, but the alternative – adding all the counts together – would lead to considerable double or triple counting of some individual birds. The results of every survey are shown in Appendix 2.

Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence Community Wildlife Group

Lapwing Records 2019 (all surveys and casual records)



Breeding sites

Two Lapwing seen feeding at north-east corner of SJ31I on 23 March, but not subsequently (including on the three training sessions) are believed to have been visitors from the colony in SJ31P

Five pairs were seen near Berwyn House (SJ31P) on 14 April, defending nests against crows. Smaller numbers were seen on other surveys in the same tetrad, presumed to be from the same colony.

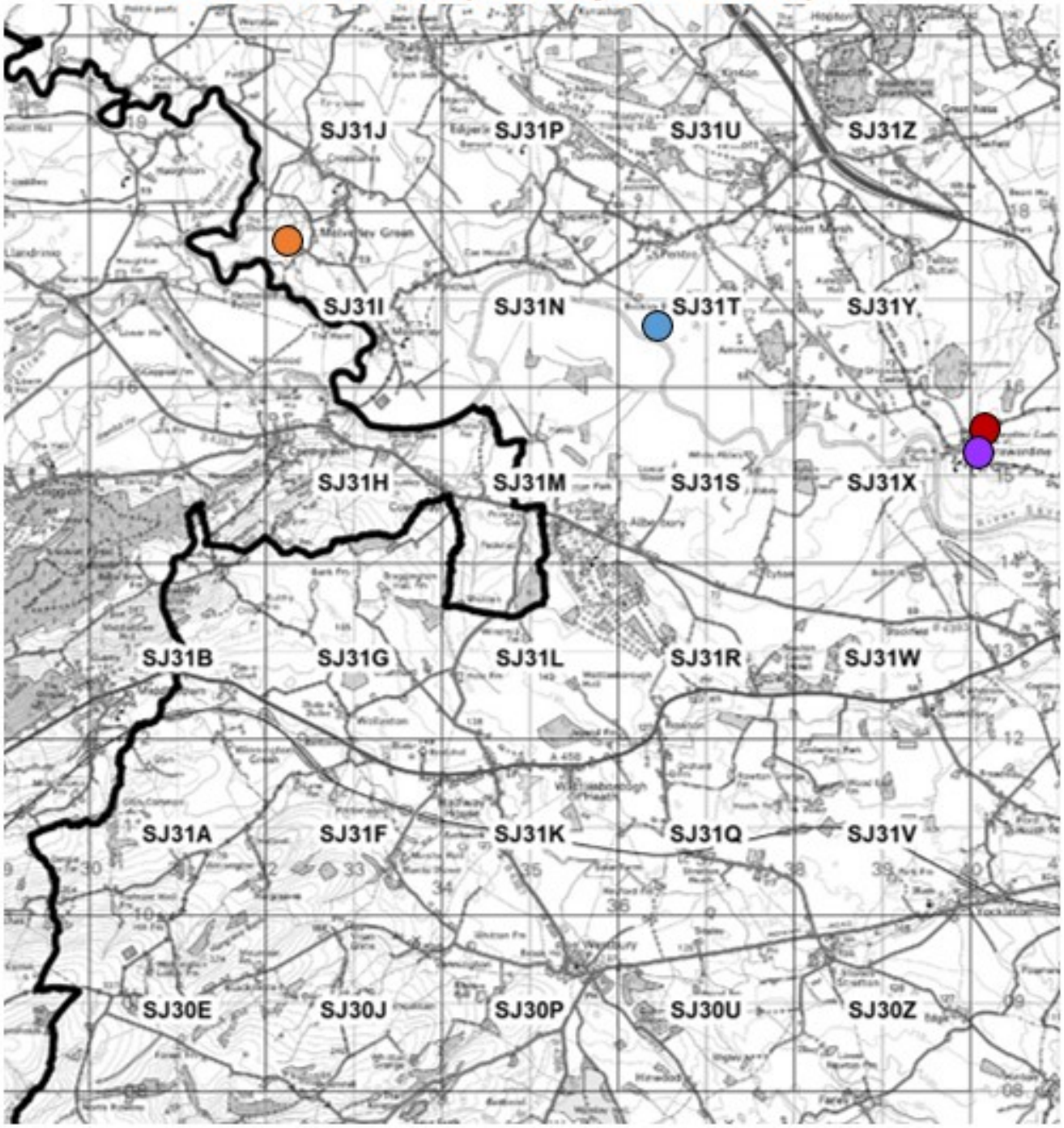
The regular site in SJ31F, near Halfway House, was not checked until 12 May, when the usual area was found to be under cultivation with no Lapwing present.

Five individuals seen in SJ31R in June, but not on the earlier surveys, are assumed to have bred elsewhere.

Population estimate 5 pairs

Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence Community Wildlife Group

Kestrel Records 2019 (all surveys and records)



Survey Period:	First	Second	Third	Fourth
	(Up to 7 April)	(8 April – 5 May)	(8 – 23 June)	Mid-July
Survey Observation				

The survey squares also vary considerably, in accessibility and terrain. The “detectability” of the birds themselves also varies considerably, according to prevailing weather conditions, time of day, stage in the breeding cycle, and the normal behaviour of each species. Thus the survey results will give an indication of the species present, and perhaps their habitat preferences, but only a very small proportion of the total population will have been recorded.

Table 1. Other Target Species - Summary

Tetrad		Maximum Number of Each Species Recorded											
		Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Snipe	Skylark	Dunnock	Spotted Flycatcher	Linnet	Bull-finch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
SJ30	E						1	2					
SJ30	J				1						1		
SJ30	P				2								
SJ30	U	Square not surveyed											
SJ30	Z				1			2				1	
SJ31	A				1								
SJ31	B				1		1						
SJ31	F						2	2			2		
SJ31	G	Square not surveyed											
SJ31	H						1	2					
SJ31	I	2	40	1		4	2						
SJ31	J	3	5				1	2	1	5	3	2	4
SJ31	K	No target species recorded											
SJ31	L	No target species recorded											
SJ31	M						8	2	6	100		2	1
SJ31	N		36		1		3	2				2	1
SJ31	P	10	4					1		1			
SJ31	Q	No target species recorded											
SJ31	R	5						1		1			
SJ31	S				1	3		2		8			
SJ31	T		2	1			2	3					
SJ31	U						2						
SJ31	V						3						
SJ31	W				1		4	2		1			
SJ31	X			2			2	2		2	2		
SJ31	Y	No target species recorded											
SJ31	Z							3					
Total		20	87	4	9	7	32	28	7	118	8	7	6

Most species were found only in small numbers. The large counts of Snipe and Linnet on the first surveys were almost certainly migrants passing through on their way north in the first case, and a winter flock moving to breeding grounds in the latter case.

Last year, Red Kite was seen in five squares, and sightings were the first time some of the observers have seen them in the area, reflecting the rapid spread of Kites in recent years. The increase has continued, and this year Kites were seen in nine squares.

The first successful breeding in Shropshire for 130 years occurred as recently as 2006, but there are around 40 known pairs now, still mainly in the south-west hills, but a nest north of Shrewsbury was reported in 2017, with others in 2018 and 2019, so it is likely that breeding will become a regular occurrence here in the near future.

Four species, Grey Partridge, Dipper, Wheatear and Corn bunting, were not recorded at all, in any square. The partridge has virtually disappeared, and there is little suitable habitat in the area for Dipper or Wheatear. The lack of Corn Bunting records is a surprise.

Seven species were recorded in one square only: Barn Owl (SJ31R), Meadow Pipit (SJ30J), Cuckoo (SJ31T), Swift (nest sites - 2 in SJ31T), Yellow Wagtail (3 in SJ31W), Stonechat (1 in SJ31B) and Tree Sparrow (1 in SJ30E).

There was only one survey record of Cuckoo and no casual record. It has become increasingly rare – it has declined by 41% in the UK between 1995 and 2017, and by 70% in

England and 77% in the English West Midlands in the same period. Two pairs of Swift nesting again near Pentre (SJ23T) was welcome news, as the Swift population in England has declined by 50% over the same period.

Anecdotal Local Evidence for the Decline of Lapwing and Curlew

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

Objective Evidence for the Decline of Lapwing and Curlew

In England, Lapwing and Curlew are in decline, nationally, and in Shropshire. Objective evidence for this comes from Bird Atlas work, and the Breeding Bird Survey carried out each year by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), and the summary tables in the annual State of the UK's Birds.

In the UK, Curlew has declined by 65% between 1970 and 2015, and 48% between 1995 and 2017. In England the decline has been 30%, and in Wales 68%, between 1995 and 2017.

Lapwing has declined by 64% in the UK between 1970 and 2015, and 42% between 1995 and 2017. In England the decline has been 28%, between 1995 and 2017. The decline in Wales since 1995 has been so large that there is insufficient data now to calculate a change.

Shropshire Ornithological Society undertook six years fieldwork between 1985 and 1990, and covered all 870 tetrads in the County. The results were published in *An Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Shropshire* in 1992. The survey was repeated in 2008-13, with similar amounts of fieldwork effort, and the Atlas maps (included in *The Birds of Shropshire*, published by Liverpool University Press in 2019) are directly comparable.

The resulting breeding distribution change maps for the Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence are shown below. The black line along the left of each map is the border with Wales, the black line through the middle is the River Severn, and the background pale grey shape towards the bottom right corner is the settlement of Westbury. The grid lines enclose the 10km square SJ31 on the Ordnance Survey National Grid. Each symbol represents a tetrad (2x2km square on the OS grid), with 25 tetrads in the10km square, but four in Wales are excluded. Five squares along the northern edge of SJ30 are included at the bottom.

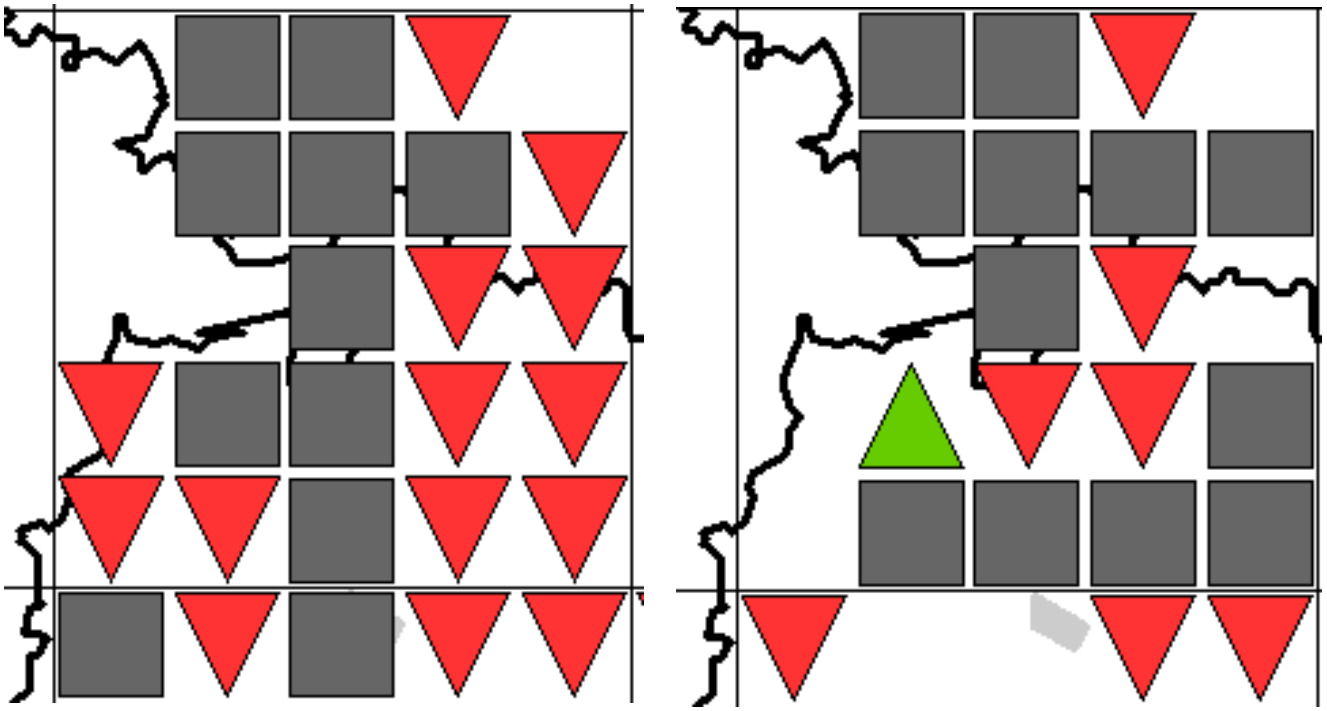
Ttetrads where each species was found in both Atlas surveys are shown as grey squares, and tetrads where it was found in the earlier period, but not the more recent period, are marked with red downward triangles. It was not found in either period in the blank squares, and a gain in the later period is shown as a green upward triangle. It will be seen that the range of both species declined substantially in this area in that 20-25 year period. Curlew was still present in 11 tetrads, but lost from 14, while Lapwing was still present in 12, lost from 7 and gained in one.

Surveys including counts complement these maps. The County Lapwing population has fallen from about 3,000 pairs in 1990 to only about 800 in 2013, a decline of around 70%. The Curlew population has fallen from about 700 pairs in 1990 to about 160 pairs in 2010 (a 77% decline).

Surveys carried out by several other Community Wildlife Groups suggest that the population has fallen further since 2010.

Breeding Distribution Change Maps for the Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence (1985-90 to 2008-13)

Curlew **Lapwing**



Other evidence for the decline of Lapwing and Curlew can be found on the website of the British Trust for Ornithology www.bto.org

Action to reverse the declines must start by improving the breeding success of the remaining pairs, so conservation action in the areas where they are still found, such as the Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence, is vital. Such action is being taken, nationally and locally. Both species have been designated as UK Biodiversity Priority Species by the Government, as part of its commitment to international biodiversity targets, precisely because of the rapid decline.

Both species nest on farmland, and the Countryside Stewardship Agri-environment Scheme (part of the system of payments to farmers through the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union) includes provision to reward farmers for sensitive management of habitat on their farms, and providing other environmental benefits. The scheme includes specific prescriptions, and payments, for Lapwing and Curlew habitat, but it unlikely that new applications will be successful.

A new Agriculture Bill has been submitted to Parliament by the Government, and it remains to be seen whether the post-Brexit agri-environment schemes will be effective in reversing the decline of farmland birds.

Comparison of Severn – Vyrnwy Confluence CWG Bird Survey Results with the Shropshire Bird Atlas 2008-13

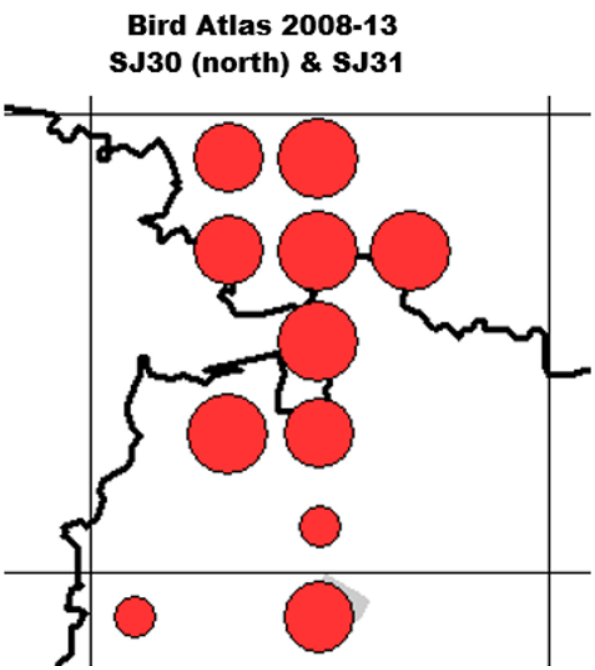
The next two pairs of maps show, on the left, the results of the Bird Atlas 2008-13 for the 27 tetrads covered by the survey, and, on the right, the results of the survey in the Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence as shown on the maps on pages 4 and 8 in the 2018 report. Each dot represents at least one observation during the Atlas period, or during the 2018 survey, in the appropriate tetrad.

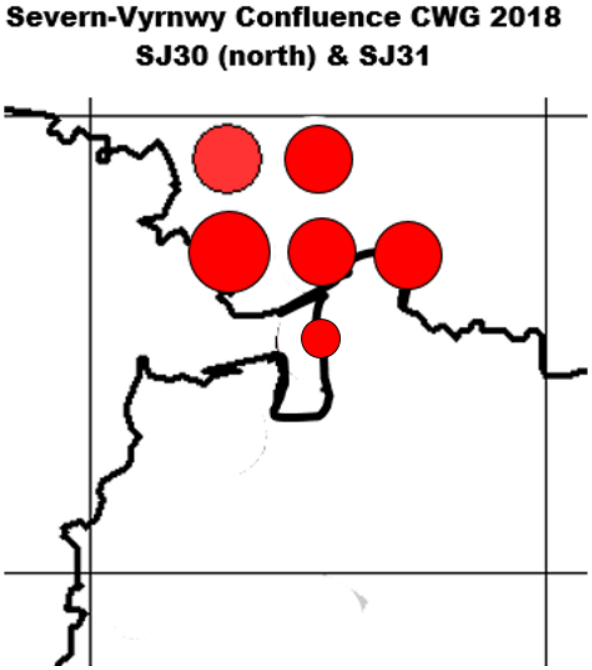
- Large dot = Confirmed Breeding (Bird seen sitting on nest, or eggs or chicks seen)

- Middle dot = Probable Breeding (Pair or display seen)
- Small dot = Seen or heard in suitable habitat
- No dot = Not found

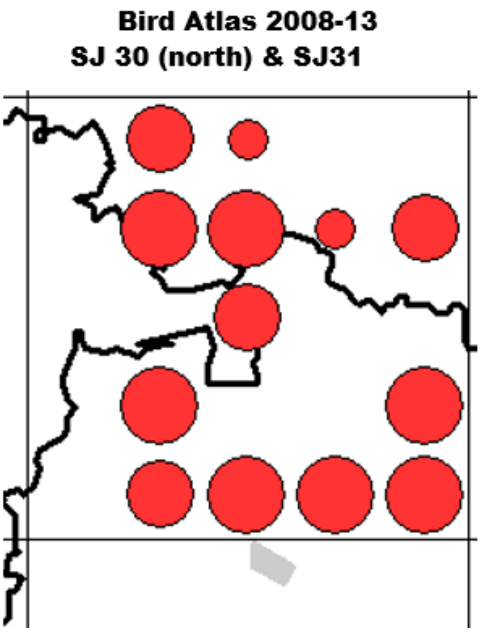
There were no observations in 2019 which result in any changes to the CWG results maps.

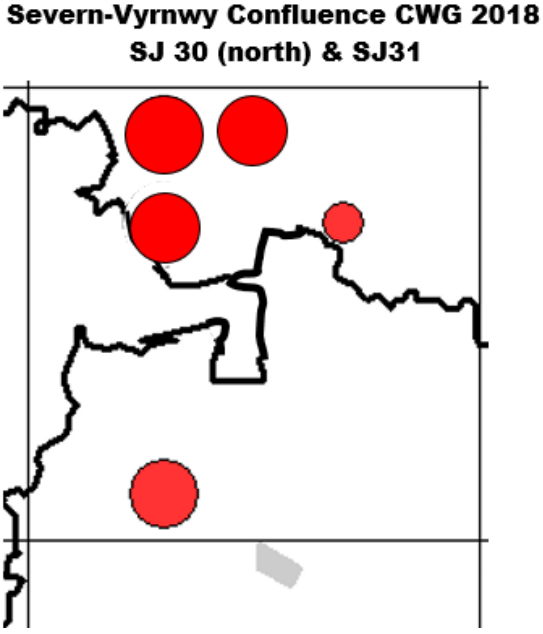
Curlew





Lapwing





It must be stressed that the Atlas map includes survey work over six years, not two, but most tetrads will not have been visited every year, and it was only necessary to find the highest level of breeding evidence once in the six years, and the surveyors were looking for breeding evidence for all species. Even so, it is unlikely that the 2018 survey found all the pairs, and results should improve as surveyors get to know their squares better, and more people find out about the survey and contribute records or information. It is likely to take 2-3 years to build up a complete picture.

However, the two target species are conspicuous and noisy, so most will not have been overlooked, and these maps suggest strongly that the decline of both species has continued since the Atlas finished in this area too.

Use of CWG Survey Results

Most importantly in the short term, the survey results will made available to Natural England. They show the importance of particular areas for these species, which will hopefully encourage farmers to manage their land sensitively, and provide Natural England with objective evidence to judge individual farm applications to join Countryside Stewardship, and information to target the use of their limited resources more effectively.

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

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

Conservation action to halt and reverse the decline of Curlew in particular is becoming increasingly important at the regional and national level. The South of England Curlew Forum is encouraging local conservation projects, and collating results from Shropshire and all counties to the south of us, to show that Curlews are still declining, and productivity (the number of fledged young per breeding pair) is not sufficient to maintain even the existing depleted population.

Shropshire has about 20 – 25% of the Curlew records contributed to the Forum, including those from this Group.

The same information is contributed to a national Curlew Species Recovery Group, comprising RSPB (who provide the chair / secretariat), BTO, GWCT, WWT, JNCC, National Trust, Birdwatch Ireland, National Parks Ireland and the four country-based statutory agencies. The purpose of the group is to bring together five statutory agencies and various non-governmental organisations to shape and drive a co-ordinated programme for curlew conservation

More importantly in the longer term, the location of Curlew territories and nest sites will provide vital information to the *Save our Curlews* campaign. Subject to locating the approximate locations of the centre of several Curlew territories (i.e. the field(s) containing the nest site), and the appeal raising the necessary funds to employ someone to find the nests and put up and maintain electric fences to protect them, it is hoped to start nest protection in the near future. A professional ornithologist will be employed to find nests once we are confident that we have located several territories. This will obviously require permission for access to the appropriate land, and co-operation from farmers on how their land is managed, so building relationships with individual farmers will be a crucial part of our work in future years

Work With Individual Farmers

A Curlew nest with eggs was found in 2018 near Ponthen. The farmer who owned the field was identified, and visited to advise him of the presence of the nest. It was in a grass (silage) field, which he said was about to be mowed. This would have destroyed the nest if no action was taken to save it, so the farmer was advised of where the nest was, and he agreed to

mow round it. This positive response from the farmer, in that he went out of his way to avoid the nest, is welcome and something to build on.

It was agreed that similar contacts would be made with farmers in 2019, if the group identified any fields with Curlew (or Lapwing) nests or chicks, but unfortunately no nest sites were located. Almost all group members are willing to visit farmers to discuss the presence of nests, preferably with someone familiar with farming and the farmers in the area, and this will be pursued in 2020 if nest sites are located.

Lessons learnt, to be applied in 2020

Participants at the feedback meeting in October 2018 were happy with the survey methodology and the paperwork and guidance provided, and no further comments were received during 2019.

More emphasis will be placed on noting the behaviour of Lapwing and Curlew, to try and ascertain whether birds were part of the same breeding pair, or different ones, and whether they were defending nests or chicks, indicating the nesting field and level of breeding success.

Recommendations

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

Acknowledgements

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

Simon & Libby Cockill	Roger & Mary Lovegrove	Karl Spence
Tony Comley	Jamie Maclauchlan	Nicola Strudwick
Warwick Davies	Steve & Yvonne Mancey	Margaret Sumnall
Rodney Farmer	Mike & Jenny Masterson	Michael Wallace
Sally Gwilliam	Andrew Morton	Alec White
Tony Hill	Mark Pearson	
Joanna Langfield	Dennis Seager	

Thanks in particular to Warwick Davies, Nigel Hughes, Jamie Maclauchlan, Dennis Seager and Karl Spence, for making additional survey visits to look for Curlews in the Holly Banks area.

Special thanks to Michael Wallace, who publicised all the meetings, wrote articles for the local community press, distributed information to members, and co-ordinated the work.

Thanks also to:-

- Richard Hammerton, Shropshire Council Biodiversity Data Officer, who provided the survey maps.
- David Hardwick, for helping with, and promoting, the launch meeting and giving permission for the training sessions in March to visit his land.
- Warwick Davies, for extra survey work in the Holly Banks area, and help interpreting the curlew observations described in the report.
- Kate Mayne, for advice on contacting farmers.

Other Community Wildlife Groups

The first Group, the Upper Onny Wildlife Group, first surveyed Lapwing and Curlew in 2004, and has done so every year since. Upper Clun CWG started in 2007, Kemp Valley in 2009, Clee Hill CWG in 2012, and Rea Valley and Camlad CWGs (part of the Stiperstones-Corndon HLF funded Landscape Partnership Scheme) in 2014. Stretton Hills CWG was launched in 2012, and surveyed Lapwing and Curlew for the first time in 2017. The Three Parishes CWG, covering Weston Rhyn, St. Martin's and Gobowen, undertook a Bird Survey in 2017. All these groups continued with a Lapwing and Curlew survey in 2018, when they were joined by new CWGs covering Oswestry south (Tanat to Perry) and Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence. A further Group, centred on Abdon (near Brown Clee), also started in 2018, the initiative of a local resident.

All these groups (except Kemp Valley, which has no breeding Curlews) continued with their surveys in 2019. Clee Hill and Abdon extended their areas, to close the gap between them and monitor known additional Curlew territories. Between them, the 10 groups cover around three-quarters of the County's breeding Curlews. The Curlew distribution map from the County Bird Atlas 2008-13 is attached as Appendix 3, overlain with the Community Wildlife Group areas.

In 2019, these Groups covered 267 survey squares (tetrads), totalling 1,048 square kilometres. There were 320 participants, who spent a total of more than 2,350 hours on survey work, and 94 - 115 Curlew territories were identified. This is a clear indication of the concern that local people have for the decline of Curlew, and their willingness to support action to do something about it.

Further information can be found on the joint website for all the Community Wildlife Groups in Shropshire, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

Save our Curlews Campaign

SWT supported the *Save our Curlews* campaign and appeal during 2019, but has subsequently withdrawn from it. SOS is continuing to support the appeal in 2020, and has also made a commitment to part-fund the campaign itself over the next three years. Applications will also be made to other funding bodies.

The identification of Curlew territories by the Community Wildlife Groups is the foundation of the campaign. When local knowledge has located them sufficiently for a professional ornithologist to have a good chance of finding several nests, it is intended to find them and protect them with an electric fence, and then radio tag the chicks that hatch, to gain information on how they feed, and the threats they face. The work will hopefully be funded by the campaign and appeal.

Such work was carried out in the Upper Clun and Clee Hill CWG areas in 2018 and 2019. In 2018, three nests were found and fenced in each area. No chicks survived in the Upper Clun, but at least one, probably two, fledged in Clee Hill. In 2019, four nests were found and fenced in the Clee Hill area, five chicks were tagged and followed, and a brood of three all fledged. Unfortunately, because insufficient funds were available to allocate enough time to nest finding, only one nest was found in the Upper Clun, and permission could not be obtained to fence it. Detailed reports of the work in each of these two areas, and more information about the aims of the campaign, can be found on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/ If you want to donate to the appeal see the same website.

Summary 2019

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

All except two of the 27 tetrads were surveyed, and we now have a better understanding of the population and distribution of Lapwing and Curlew, and the status of the Other Target Species.

The populations in the Severn – Vyrnwy Confluence area were estimated at 7 pairs of Curlew and 7-8 pairs of Lapwing in 2018, and 5 – 6 pairs of Curlew and 5 pairs of Lapwing, in 2019. Breeding conditions were poor in the spring of 2019, with extensive floods, so it remains to be seen whether these population declines are real, or a blip caused by abnormal weather.

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

Plans for 2020

The Group intends to repeat the Bird Survey next year, and in subsequent years, to clarify the number of pairs of Curlew and Lapwing actually present, and the location of nest sites and foraging areas, and work towards regular monitoring to establish a population trend. New participants are needed, so we hope to recruit new members.

The Group's meeting on Tuesday 18 February 2020 will largely be about planning the 2020 survey. Everyone interested in birds is welcome to participate.

Further Information

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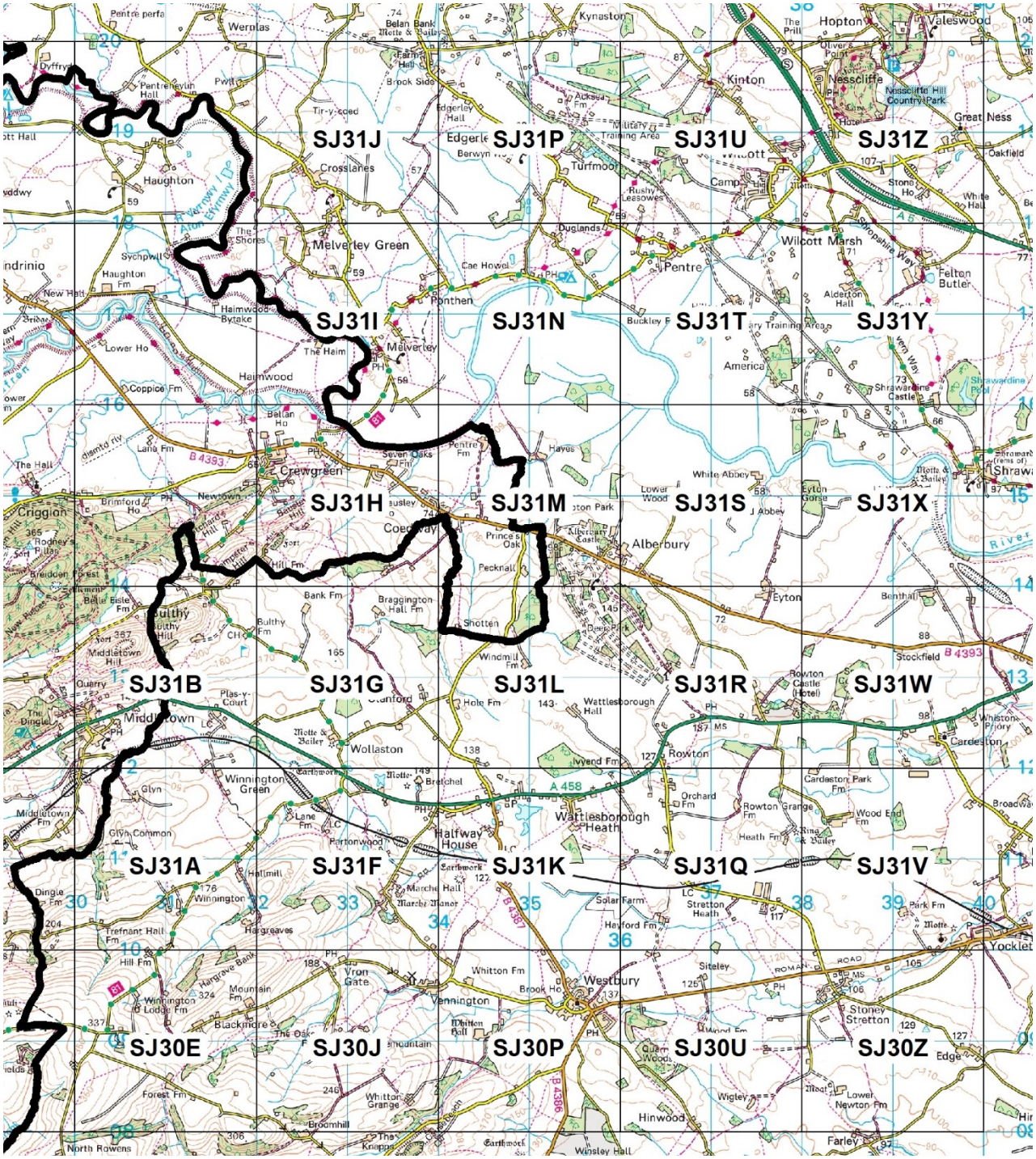
This report can be downloaded from the Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence CWG part of the Community Wildlife Groups website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk Further copies of this report can be obtained from Leo Smith

Leo Smith
January 2020

Appendix 1. Map of Survey Area, showing Square Boundaries and Tetrad Codes



Appendix 2. Detailed Survey Results

First period (23 March - 7 April)

Tetrad		Square Surveyor	Time		Number of Each Species Recorded												
			Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Snipe	Skylark	Dunnock	Spotted Flycatcher	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
SJ30	E	Joanna Langfield	2	20	No target species recorded											
SJ30	J	Rodney Farmer & Margaret Sumnall	3	0	No target species recorded											
SJ30	P	Rodney Farmer & Margaret Sumnall	2	30				1								
SJ30	U				Square not surveyed											
SJ30	Z	Mike & Jenny Masterson	3	10	No target species recorded											
SJ31	A	Alec White	3	0				1								
SJ31	B	Alec White	3	30						1						
SJ31	F	Tony Hill	1	45						2						
SJ31	G	Jane Weston			Survey not undertaken											
SJ31	H	Jamie Maclauchlan	2	45							1					
SJ31	I	Karl Spence	3	0	2	40			4							
SJ31	J	Tony Comley	3	0		5					2		3		1	3
SJ31	K	Roger & Mary Lovegrove			No target species recorded											
SJ31	L	Mark Pearson	1	20	No target species recorded											
SJ31	M	Michael Wallace	7	40						7			100			
SJ31	N	Michael Wallace	6	10		36				1	2				1	
SJ31	P	Warwick Davies	6	20	10	2										
SJ31	Q	Roger & Mary Lovegrove			No target species recorded											
SJ31	R	Mark Pearson	1	30	No target species recorded											
SJ31	S	Andrew Morton	1	0				1	1							
SJ31	S	Michael Wallace	4	15					3							
SJ31	T	Andrew Morton	4	15						2						
SJ31	U	Nicola Strudwick	3	30						1						
SJ31	V	Simon & Libby Cockill	2	30						2						
SJ31	W	Steve and Yvonne Mancey	2	40						2						
SJ31	X	Tony Hill	2	0			1			2	2			1		
SJ31	Y	Sally Gwilliam	2	30	No target species recorded											
SJ31	Z	Dennis Seager	2	55							3					
		Total	76	35	12	83	1	3	8	20	10	0	103	1	2	3

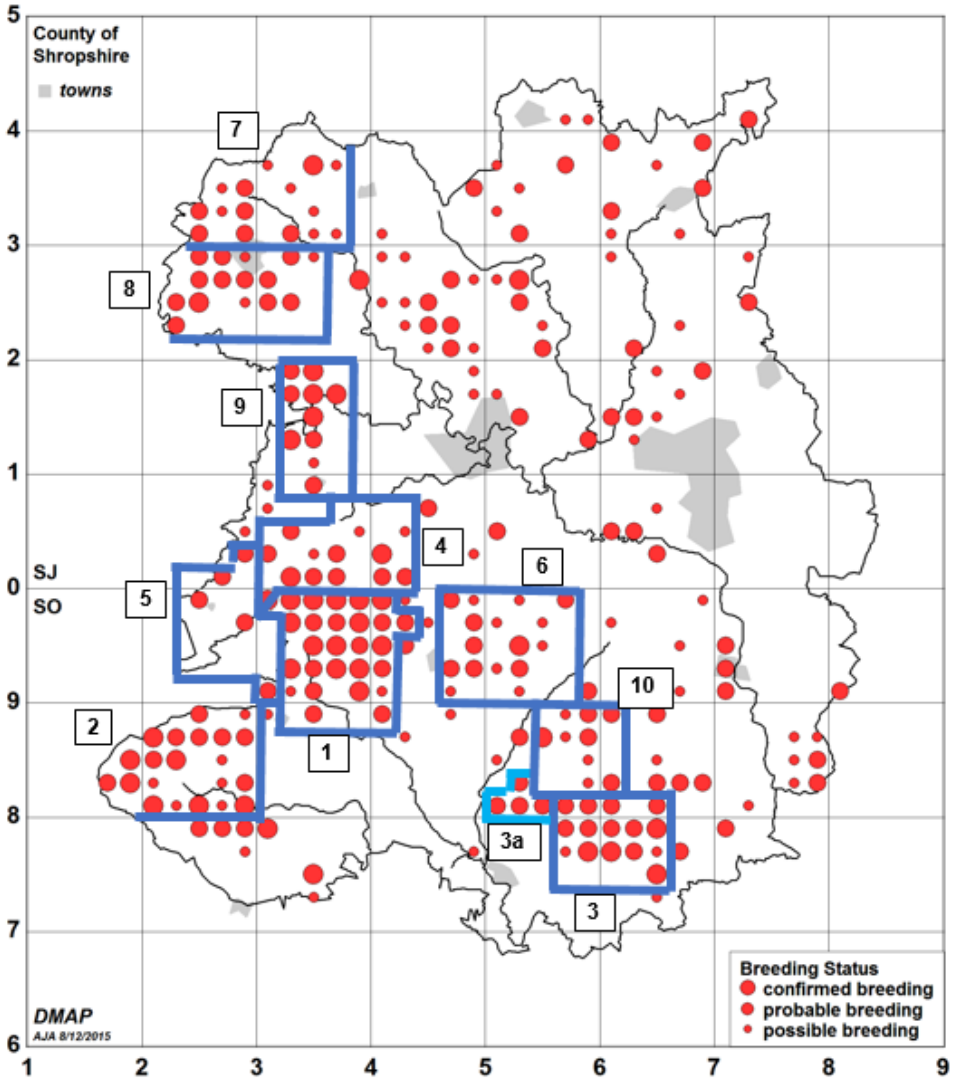
Second period (20 April - 5 May)

Tetrad		Square Surveyor	Time		Number of Each Species Recorded												
			Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Snipe	Skylark	Dunnock	Spotted Flycatcher	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
SJ30	E	Joanna Langfield	2	45	No target species recorded											
SJ30	J	Rodney Farmer & Margaret Sumnall	3	30				1						1		
SJ30	P	Rodney Farmer & Margaret Sumnall	3	0				2								
SJ30	U				Square not surveyed											
SJ30	Z	Mike & Jenny Masterson	3	45				1			1				1	
SJ31	A	Alec White	2	30	No target species recorded											
SJ31	B	Alec White	3	0				1		1						
SJ31	F	Tony Hill	2	0						1	2			2		
SJ31	G	Jane Weston			Survey not undertaken											
SJ31	H	Jamie Maclauchlan	3	15	No target species recorded											
SJ31	I	Karl Spence	5	30		2				2						
SJ31	J	Tony Comley	3	5							2		5	1	2	4
SJ31	K	Roger & Mary Lovegrove			No target species recorded											
SJ31	L	Mark Pearson	1	10												
SJ31	M	Michael Wallace	4	35						8			2		2	1
SJ31	N	Michael Wallace	7	15						2	2				2	1
SJ31	P	Warwick Davies	5	0	4	4										
SJ31	Q	Roger & Mary Lovegrove			No target species recorded											
SJ31	R	Mark Pearson	1	10	No target species recorded											
SJ31	S	Andrew Morton	3	45							2		8			
SJ31	T	Andrew Morton	8	30		2				2						
SJ31	U	Nicola Strudwick	3	45						1						
SJ31	V	Simon & Libby Cockill	3	0						1						
SJ31	W	Steve and Yvonne Mancey	2	30				1		2	2		1			
SJ31	X	Tony Hill	2	10			2				2		2	2		
SJ31	Y	Sally Gwilliam	2	15	No target species recorded											
SJ31	Z	Dennis Seager	2	50	No target species recorded											
		Total	80	15	4	8	2	6	0	20	13	0	18	6	7	6

Third period (8-23 June)

Tetrad		Square Surveyor	Time		Number of Each Species Recorded												
			Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Snipe	Skylark	Dunnock	Spotted Flycatcher	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
SJ30	E	Joanna Langfield	2	50						1	2					
SJ30	J	Rodney Farmer & Margaret Sumnall			No survey return received											
SJ30	P	Rodney Farmer & Margaret Sumnall			No survey return received											
SJ30	U				Square not surveyed											
SJ30	Z	Mike & Jenny Masterson	2	45				1			2				1	
SJ31	A	Alec White			Survey not undertaken											
SJ31	B	Alec White			Survey not undertaken											
SJ31	F	Tony Hill	1	30						1						
SJ31	G	Jane Weston			Survey not undertaken											
SJ31	H	Jamie Maclauchlan	2	40						1	2					
SJ31	I	Karl Spence	4	40		2	1			2						
SJ31	J	Tony Comley	3	5	3					1	1	1		3	1	3
SJ31	K	Roger & Mary Lovegrove			Survey not undertaken											
SJ31	L	Mark Pearson	1	0	No target species recorded											
SJ31	M	Michael Wallace	5	30						5	2	6			2	
SJ31	N	Michael Wallace	3	50				1		3						
SJ31	P	Warwick Davies	4	0		1					1		1			
SJ31	Q	Roger & Mary Lovegrove			Survey not undertaken											
SJ31	R	Mark Pearson														
SJ31	S	Andrew Morton	4	15							2		2			
SJ31	T	Andrew Morton	4	30						1	3					
SJ31	U	Nicola Strudwick	3	20						2						
SJ31	V	Simon Cockill	2	30						3						
SJ31	W	Steve and Yvonne Mancey	2	5						4	1					
SJ31	X	Tony Hill	1	50						1	1					
SJ31	Y	Sally Gwilliam	2	30	No target species recorded											
SJ31	Z	Dennis Seager	2	45	No target species recorded											
		Total	55	35	3	3	1	2	0	25	17	7	3	3	4	3

Appendix 3. Bird Atlas 2008-13 Curlew Distribution map, overlain by Community Wildlife Group areas, and table of CWG data and survey activity in 2019



Group		Area		First Year	Curlew		Participants		
		Survey squares (tetrads)	(sq. kms.)		Breeding Pairs (2019) Min - Max	% decline since First Year	No. people	Hours	Min-utes
1	Upper Onny	31.5	125	2004	27 - 32	31	31	283	15
2	Upper Clun	31	110	2007	6 - 10	60	51	150	0
3	Clee Hill	20	80	2012	7 - 7	46	22	181	2
3a	Clee Hill (extension)	4 *	16	2019	6 - 6	n / a	1	26	30
4	Rea Valley	25.5	102	2014	9 - 10	n / a	24	173	24
5	Camlad Valley	11 **	44	2014	3 - 3	n / a	18	119	25
6	Strettons area	30	120	2017	5 - 8	n / a	45	373	38
7	Three Parishes	28	107	2017	3 - 4	n / a	21	220	10
8	Tanat to Perry (Oswestry south)	43	172	2018	15 - 19	n / a	65	356	10
9	Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence	27	108	2018	5 - 6	n / a	20	176	38
10	Abdon	16 *	64	2018	8 - 10	n / a	22	298	5
Total		267	1048		94 - 115		320	2355	17

Orange highlight = 3 CWGs incorporating "Curlew Country" area (76 tetrads)

** Area also includes 9 tetrads mainly in Wales (Camlad CWG = 20 tetrads), with 2-3 pairs of Curlew

Green highlight = 3 CWGs established in 2018

* In 2019, Clee Hill took on an additional 4 tetrads to the west, and Abdon took on an additional 7 tetrads to the west and south, to close the gap between the two areas, and cover additional squares with known Curlew territories

Some CWG areas include part-tetrads, so the total area is a bit less than the numbers of (whole or part) squares X 4