

CURLEWS, LAPWINGS AND OTHER BIRDS SURVEY

Introduction

Lapwing and Curlew have both 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 Strettons area Community Wildlife Group agreed to conduct a Lapwing and Curlew survey in 2017, to complement similar surveys carried out by other Community Wildlife Groups in different parts of the Shropshire Hills. The Church Stretton branch of the Shropshire Ornithological Society also agreed to participate in the survey.

An area was selected where these species were found breeding in the 2008-13 Shropshire Bird Atlas, comprising 30 2x2 kilometre squares on the Ordnance Survey National Grid, known as "tetrads", shown in Appendix 1. The aim was to locate the territories of breeding pairs, and record behaviour, to estimate the population. No attempt was made to locate nests. Although the survey concentrated on the two main target species, and their habitats, surveyors were asked to also record on their maps any of 20 other target species seen, if they were confident that they could do so.

Surveyors were recruited for each of the 30 squares, and were asked to make three visits, around 1 April, 1 May and mid-June, at times convenient to them, with visits concentrating on habitats where the main target species might be found, and lasting around three hours each. The surveys were conducted from Public Rights of Way, unless individual surveyors obtained landowners permission to leave them. Survey maps and recording instructions were supplied. A practical fieldwork training meeting was held for those that wanted one.

The survey was a success, and all 30 squares were covered. It was agreed to repeat it in 2018, and again in 2019, using the same methodology and aiming to cover the same 30 squares. A briefing meeting, outlining the results in 2018, and planning the 2019 survey, was held on 19 March. Many of the people who participated in 2017 attended, plus 15 new helpers. An outdoor fieldwork training meeting was held for those that wanted it, on Saturday 30 March, and 8 people attended.

Almost all the squares (28 out of 30) were surveyed. There were 44 participants, who between them contributed over 378 hours, an excellent effort.

A detailed report of the methodology and results has been supplied to all the participants.

Results

The following maps show the distribution of Lapwing and Curlew territories found in 2019. The populations are estimated at:-

- **Curlew: definitely 5 pairs, probably 6 or 7 and possibly 8**
- **Lapwing: 5 - 7 pairs**

This compares with the estimates made in previous years:-

- Curlew: 2018: definitely 6 pairs
2017: definitely 5 pairs, probably 6, possibly 7 and perhaps more
- Lapwing: 2018: 6 - 8 pairs, perhaps more
2017: 8 - 9 pairs, perhaps more

Strettons Area CWG & Church Stretton SOS

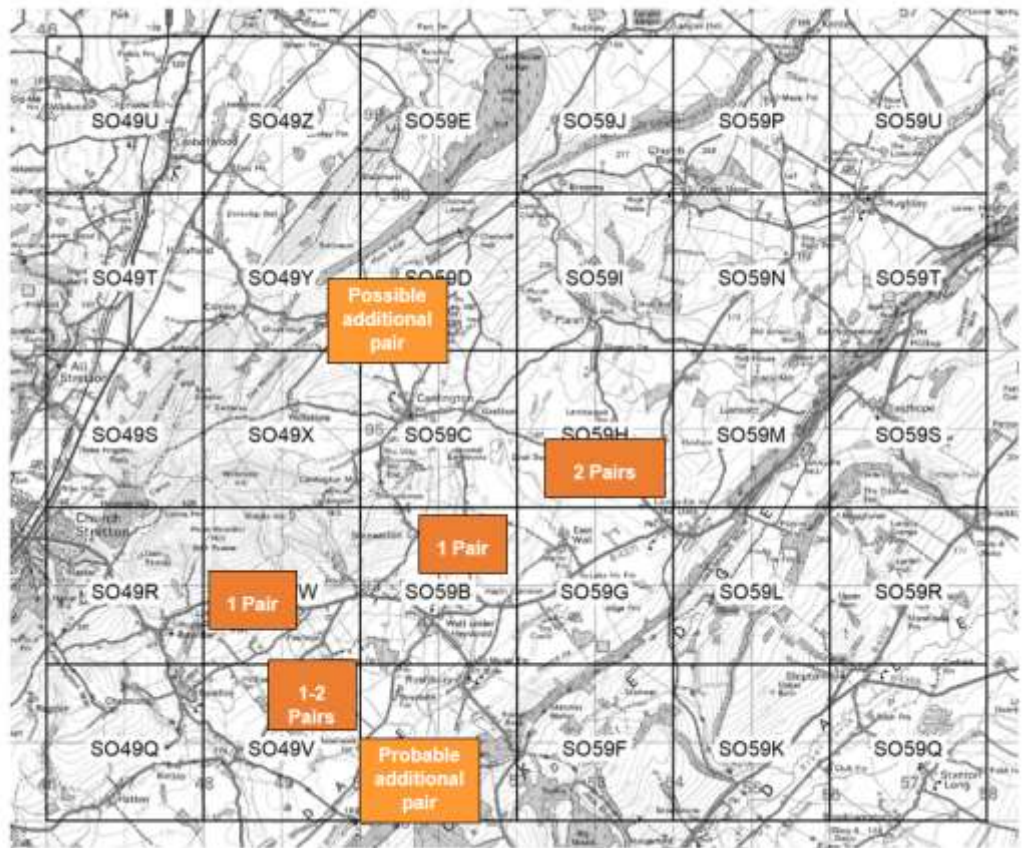
Lapwing & Curlew Survey

Results 2019

Curlew territories
(All survey and other information)

Estimated population

5 – 8 Pairs



There is no evidence that the Curlews produced any chicks, let alone fledged young in 2019, but there were at least two chicks (outcome unknown) in 2018.

Strettons Area CWG & Church Stretton SOS

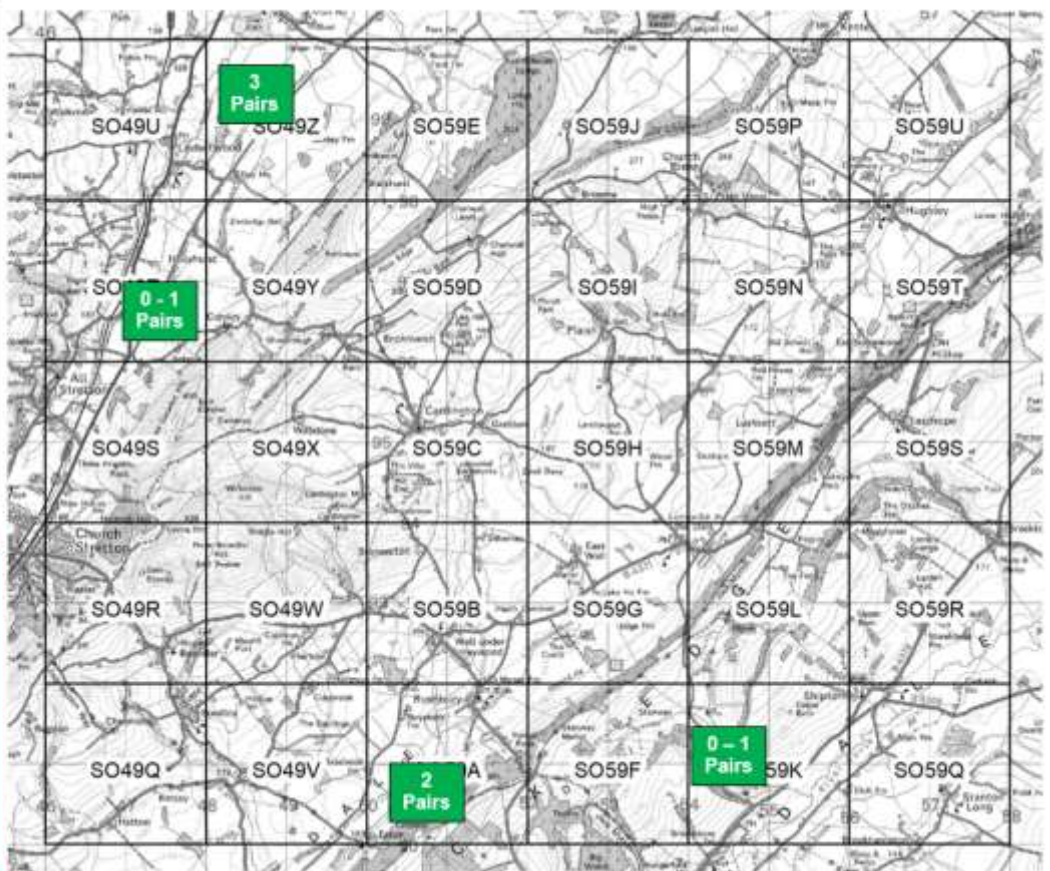
Lapwing & Curlew Survey

Results 2019

Lapwing
(All survey periods, + casual records)

Estimated population

5 – 7 Pairs



At two sites, a single Lapwing was seen. It is likely that this bird was on guard, and the female was sitting out of sight nearby, but it is possible the bird was feeding well away from its nest site. There was at least one well-grown Lapwing chick, ready to fledge, in SO49Z.

Other Target Species

Participants were requested to make an effort to record Kestrels, as a nest box scheme and colour-ringing project is being undertaken, as they too have declined considerably in recent years. However there were few observations, and none were recorded where a pair raised three young in 2017, near Longville. The population in the area was estimated at up to 10 pairs in 2018, perhaps a few more than the 6 – 8 estimated in 2017, but 2019 was a very poor year, and the records suggest only 4 – 5 pairs.

Cuckoo has also 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. There were records of calling from two tetrads, that were probably different males, but Cuckoos have large territories, and there might have been only one, ranging between the south-east of Caer Caradoc, over Helmeth Hill and Ragleth Hill to the southern end of Church Stretton.

The first successful breeding of Red Kite 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, and the most easterly nest to date was reported in 2019 from near the Staffordshire border.

In the Strettons area too, Red Kites have increased rapidly. The first nest east of the A49 road was found in 2012, and, in 2019, two nests were found: one pair fledged one young, and the other failed. In 2018, during the Bird Survey, it was seen in 17 squares, with the maximum counts totalling 30 individuals. This year slightly fewer were seen, with maximum counts totalling 21 individuals in 14 tetrads.

All except five of the other target species were found (Grey Partridge, Snipe, Barn Owl, Dipper and Tree Sparrow). Two species were found in only one tetrad: Swift nest sites in SO59L, where there is a substantial colony at Wilderhope Manor (an estimated 12 nest sites) and Spotted Flycatcher (1 in SO49X). However, this survey is targeted at habitats where Swifts are unlikely to be found. SACWG organises a Swift Survey in Church Stretton, and the results can be found elsewhere in this Annual Report.

Skylark, Dunnock and Yellowhammer were numerous and widespread, but only Skylark was found in more than half the 30 tetrads.

The summary table shows the maximum count for each species on any one survey in each tetrad. This may under-record some species, but the alternative – adding all the counts together – would lead to considerable double or triple counting of some individual birds. Note that members were asked to record individual birds, not pairs (so at some locations both the birds in the pair were recorded, and in the final survey some recently fledged juveniles may have been recorded as well).

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

Table 1. Other Target Species – number recorded (summary)

Square (Tetrad)		Maximum number recorded on any one survey											
		Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Dunnock	Wheat-ear	Stone-chat	Linnet	Bull-finch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
SO49	Q		1										
SO49	R		2	8		2	1	2	2	2	2	1	
SO49	S	2	1	1	2	1		1	3	4	1		2
SO49	T												
SO49	U		1	1									
SO49	V						2					1	
SO49	W												
SO49	X		2	2	1	1		2	1	40		3	
SO49	Y	1	1	1	2		2		1	3		1	
SO49	Z	1											
SO59	A		1	7			2					3	
SO59	B			1			1				2	3	
SO59	C			1	2						1		
SO59	D		2										
SO59	E												
SO59	F	1	1	2			3			1		1	
SO59	G	Square not surveyed											
SO59	H		2	1							2	1	
SO59	I												
SO59	J			1			1					4	
SO59	K												
SO59	L		1	4		1					2	2	
SO59	M			2							2	6	
SO59	N		1	12			11					5	
SO59	P	2	4	8			7					2	
SO59	Q		1								1		
SO59	R	Square not surveyed											
SO59	S												
SO59	T			2			2					7	1
SO59	U			3			5					4	
		7	21	57	7	5	37	5	7	50	13	44	3

Save our Curlews Campaign

Shropshire Ornithological Society is leading a “Save our Curlews” Campaign, funded by a public Appeal. See <http://www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/> Members are encouraged to donate to the Appeal.

It is hoped that, once this survey has located the Curlew breeding territories in the area, efforts will be made to find and protect Curlew nests.

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

Participants

Thanks to the following people, who undertook the survey work:-

John Arnfield, Meryl Austin, Steve & Brenda Baker, John Bent, Johanne Brachi, Steve Butler, Stuart Chambers, John Corfield, Mags Cousins, Julie Cowley, Greg Cox, Gill Davies,

Greg & Sue Forster, Rob & Beth Furlong, Robin Gilbert, Joe Gomme, Kerri & June Holloway, Melanie & Peter Houlder, Jim Jarrett, Geoff Jarrett, David John, Tony Jones, John Knowles, Jaclyn Lake, Sarah Lane, Andrew Morton, Ron Parnell, Ian & Jill Plumridge, Will Priestley, Rick & Maggie Roe, Anne Schofield, Ray Slack, Pat Stokes-Smith, Lorna Taylor, Carol Thickens, Jenny Vine and Dick Ward.

Full Report

A full report has been sent to all survey participants, and can be viewed or downloaded on the Community Wildlife Groups website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

Plans for the Future

The survey will be repeated in future years, so we can get a better picture of the population and distribution of Lapwing and Curlew. In 2020, new work will start, in co-operation with farmers, to promote conservation, and organise nest protection for Curlews.

New participants are needed for the survey in 2020. It's easy and enjoyable, simple instructions will be provided, and there's a fieldwork training session for anyone that wants it. If you want to help, or would like further information, please come to the meeting at 7.30pm on Tuesday, 17th March 2020 at the Methodist Church Hall, Watling Street, Church Stretton, or contact Leo Smith (leo@leosmith.org.uk 01694 720296), Nigel Green (nigel662@btinternet.com 01694 722043) or David John (dalison@hotmail.co.uk 01694 724772).

Leo Smith
January 2020



Appendix 1. Survey area (30 tetrads)

