



Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group



Annual Report 2019

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Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

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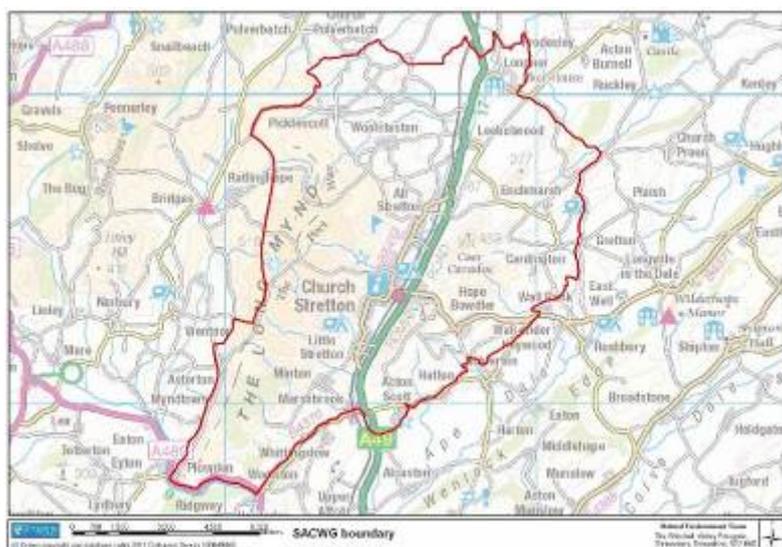
1. Introduction

1.1 Community Wildlife Groups (CWGs)

Community Wildlife Groups bring people together to survey and conserve threatened local wildlife. They enable nature enthusiasts to make a real contribution to wildlife conservation in their local area and develop their own skills.

The groups are open to anyone who lives or works in each area, and who wants to actively contribute to local wildlife knowledge and conservation. They are for everyone, from experts to complete novices. Enthusiasm is far more important than detailed knowledge and initial training on identification and simple survey methods is provided. There are currently eight CWGs in the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), most developed and supported through a project funded by the Shropshire Hills AONB LEADER programme. For more information on these CWGs, visit the website www.shropscwgs.org.uk

1.2 Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group



The Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group (SACWG) was launched in February 2012, after consulting local groups and organisations. The group covers a broad area around the Stretton Hills. This boundary is not fixed, so activities can be extended according to the location of members and study subjects.

Since 2013 the group has been co-ordinated by a committee, elected from the membership at the Annual Public Meeting. Survey activities are adopted by members at the Annual Public Meeting, on the condition that they meet the following criteria.

Each activity requires a leader, who will be responsible for organising surveyors, ensuring that useful data is collected, distributing survey forms (if necessary), analysing data for the SACWG annual report and submitting records to Shropshire's County Recorders. The survey manager will be responsible for ensuring that any necessary training is provided.

On the Community Wildlife Groups website, you will find that the SACWG has its own section, where you will be able to keep updated with survey activities and the latest discoveries.

http://www.shropscwgs.org.uk/?page_id=206

We would like to encourage all members to share their wildlife experiences and photographs. If you have seen something interesting or taken a nice wildlife photograph, please let the web manager know by emailing SACWG_Curator@shropscwgs.org.uk. For those of you into social media, find us on Twitter @StrettonsWild or look for the Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group page on Facebook. You can use this to keep up to date with latest news, meet other members and share wildlife news.

*Committee members (bold) and project leaders 2019: **Steve Butler (chair), Penny Bienz (publicity), Heather Hathaway (secretary), John Baines (website), Will Priestley (Treasurer), Andrew Perry (annual report), John Bacon, Leo Smith, Isabel Carter, Mike Carter, Caroline Uff, Julie Cowley and Sandra Whitlock.***



2. Survey Activities and Results

2.1 Butterflies

Project leader: Heather Hathaway

Introduction

The aim of the current project is to try and build a better picture of the diversity and numbers of butterflies in the Strettons area and highlight vulnerable colonies that may be threatened if their habitat is lost. The data collected will serve also as a baseline against which we can measure future changes in the butterfly population.

Methodology

This year members of SACWG have had a three-pronged effort to record butterflies in the Stretton Area. As before, occasional sightings have been recorded by 6 members and 30 species identified. This is 30 out of 37 species that can be seen in South Shropshire. Two transects have been carried out during 2019. John Bacon has continued his transect on Hazler Hill. A transect involves walking the same route every week between April and September recording butterflies using a proscribed method stated by UKBMS and results have been entered their site. A second transect has been re-started in Batch Valley with the help of Peter and Jane Howsam and John and Heather Hathaway.

The third prong of recording was to carry out timed counts of two species, Green Hairstreak and Grayling in Cardingmill Valley during the flight seasons. These were done by Peter and Jane Howsam.

The survey was composed from sightings made by Catherine Wellings, Peter and Jane Howsam, John Bacon, Heather Hathaway and Caroline Uff and Kate Johnson.

Hazler Hill Transect

John Bacon has made the following summary of his transect, which reflects observations in the wider area:

- Meadow was strip grazed' tight' by 8 sheep during January and February 2019.
- What a strange year it's been - difficult to summarise due to all the extremes - cold spring up to mid May; very dry till end of May and although there was 150 mm rain in June by the end of June it was very dry again, with vegetation scorching off by mid July; 30°C in the last week of July; 100 mm rain in a very wet August; and 100 mm rain in In the years 2005 to 2019 this was the second highest total butterfly count since 2013.
- Second ever highest transect count of Six Spot Burnets since 2010 - later ones failed to emerge from cocoons due to parasites.
- First Dark Green Fritillaries were very freshly emerged and probably bred on one of my daughters' meadows next door (which have *Viola hirta*) which are managed jointly with mine.
- One sighting again of Marbled White in my meadow for 1 day.
- Highest ever Painted Lady index.
- All 3 species of Whites in lower numbers - cabbages benefited!
- Cinnabar Moth was first ever record but no caterpillars seen subsequently on the few ragwort plants.
- Will be interesting to see what the really wet August to November (18" rain so far) will do to this winter's overwintering?!



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Summary of Results

The following compilation of results combines all the observations received. The numbers are approximate as some of the reports recorded only the presence of the species and did not include the number present.

Table: Summary of butterfly survey results 2019

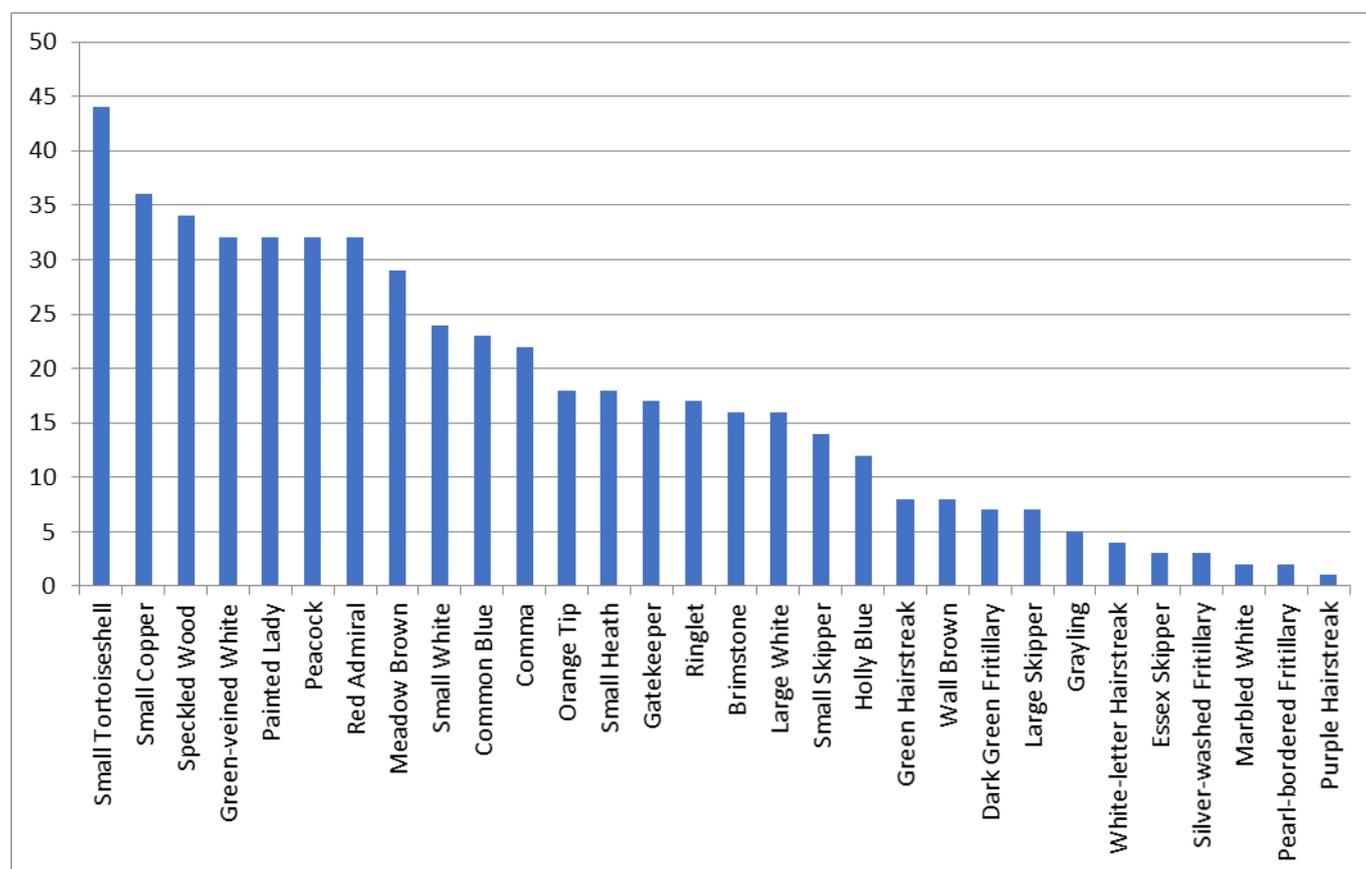
| Common name | Frequency of sightings ¹ | Maximum seen at once | No. of Sites | Earliest recording | Latest recording |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Brimstone | 16 | 1 | 6 | 26/02/2019 | 26/02/2019 |
| Comma | 22 | 5 | 6 | 26/02/2019 | 16/09/2020 |
| Common Blue | 23 | 10 | 5 | 17/05/2019 | 16/09/2019 |
| Dark Green Fritillary | 7 | 3 | 4 | 24/06/2019 | 05/08/2019 |
| Essex Skipper | 3 | 2 | 2 | 08/07/2019 | 02/08/2019 |
| Gatekeeper | 17 | 50 | 5 | 15/07/2019 | 11/09/2019 |
| Grayling | 5 | 5 | 4 | 08/07/2019 | 29/07/2019 |
| Green Hairstreak | 8 | 4 | 4 | 06/05/2019 | 03/07/2019 |
| Green-veined White | 32 | 14 | 6 | 08/04/2019 | 09/09/2019 |
| Holly Blue | 12 | 2 | 5 | 15/04/2019 | 20/08/2019 |
| Large Skipper | 7 | 3 | 3 | 10/06/2019 | 12/08/2019 |
| Large White | 16 | 15 | 6 | 21/04/2019 | 11/09/2019 |
| Marbled White | 2 | 1 | 2 | 01/07/2019 | 28/07/2019 |
| Meadow Brown | 29 | 78 | 6 | 19/06/2019 | 26/08/2019 |
| Orange Tip | 18 | 7 | 6 | 28/03/2019 | 30/05/2019 |
| Painted Lady | 32 | 18 | 6 | 03/06/2019 | 23/09/2019 |
| Peacock | 32 | 21 | 6 | 22/02/2019 | 11/09/2019 |
| Pearl-bordered Fritillary | 2 | 21 | 1 | May | June |
| Purple Hairstreak | 1 | 1 | 1 | 11/07/2019 | |
| Red Admiral | 32 | 5 | 6 | 02/02/2019 | 28/10/2019 |
| Ringlet | 17 | 36 | 6 | 05/06/2019 | 29/07/2019 |
| Silver-washed Fritillary | 3 | 2 | 3 | 24/06/2019 | September |

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|------------------------------------|----|----|----|------------|------------|
| Small Copper | 36 | 15 | 6 | 15/04/2019 | 28/10/2019 |
| Small Heath | 18 | 41 | 4 | 13/05/2019 | 26/08/2019 |
| Small Skipper | 14 | 2 | 3 | 01/07/2019 | 26/08/2019 |
| Small Tortoiseshell | 44 | 31 | 6 | 21/02/2019 | 16/09/2019 |
| Small White | 24 | 6 | 15 | 30/03/2019 | 16/08/2019 |
| Speckled Wood | 34 | 5 | 5 | 15/05/2019 | 23/09/2019 |
| Wall Brown | 8 | 2 | 3 | 03/06/2019 | 26/08/2019 |
| White-letter Hairstreak | 4 | 2 | 3 | 19/07/2019 | 01/08/2019 |
| Total number of species: 30 | | | | | |

¹Frequency refers to the number of sightings reported, not the number of individual butterflies seen (i.e. you may see more than one butterfly at once, but the number of individuals was not reported for every sighting).

Chart: Frequency of sightings for each species recorded (from most abundant to least abundant)



It was a delight to see so many Painted Ladies in all our gardens and an increased number of sightings of Brimstone. According to the Big Butterfly Count results, nearly half a million Painted Ladies were counted in three weeks during the count.



Above: Brimstone, Below: Painted Lady



Acknowledgements

Thank you John for your summary and to all the contributors for their records.

2.2 Stretton Wetlands

Project leader: Isabel Carter

Update on Stretton Wetlands for SACWG Annual Report

Since building the boardwalk it has proved extremely popular with town residents and several walking groups routinely include it on their routes.

It has proved necessary to cut back the vegetation under and adjacent to the boardwalk 2 or 3 times a year. This has now been included by 3Ps as part of their routine tasks.

The unseasonal amount of rain caused issues for the wetlands. Firstly, they became wetlands in reality over much of their area for several weeks and for a couple of days the road leading to the allotments, cemetery and Brockhurst was also flooded. The boardwalk itself was inundated for a couple of weeks. This inundation together with the continued wet weather has meant that the wood (despite assurances that this would not happen from Shropshire Council) has become dangerously slippery in places. Funding has been applied for to provide wire along the full length of the boardwalk and this will be stapled into place by the 3Ps group in February 2020.



Water vole survey

Water voles are inoffensive little creatures who live in and near waterways, causing no problems to people. They're shy and retiring and so rarely seen. Their numbers have plummeted in recent decades through a combination of the rise in non-native mink predation, pollution of waters and drainage or culverting of many areas for building or agriculture.

Confirmation of water vole in the wetlands were reported by the Environment Agency in 2008 but no confirmed sightings have been made since. The wildlife group has been looking out for these creatures for the past four years, noting possible signs – 'feeding stations' of cut grass and weeds, small tennis ball-sized holes in the banks of the Quinny (Town) brook in the Stretton wetlands and with several possible reported sightings from members of the public.



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Members from the Shropshire Mammal Society asked permission to conduct a survey of the Wetlands on 21 June 2019. Local householders along Ludlow Rd were given prior warning of their visit and its purpose, to ensure a reasonably positive reception. Two Mammal Society members came and set mammal traps overnight on the previous night with Isabel 's help, which yielded wood mouse and young bank vole.

Malcolm Monie is the water vole 'expert' from Shropshire Mammal Society and together with mammal society members and a few local SACWG members, a really thorough search of the area was made following initial explanations from Malcolm. Over the years possible sightings have been made along Ludlow Rd and by the bridge over the allotment/cemetery road. These two areas were therefore taken as the initial focus with a third area also surveyed deeper into the wetlands.



Numerous feeding stations and possible holes were found. We can now confirm that we have two definitive sites along the Quinny brook where proof of water vole was found (in terms of droppings and footprints, both of which are unmistakable). A trail camera has since been used in several places in the hope of picking up further images – and information about whether we have one individual or a small breeding colony. Sadly, a dead water vole was recovered along the southern part of Ludlow Rd a few weeks later which appeared to have been killed by a cat.

In addition, two sites had otter spraint – quite surprising for such a relatively small stream.

Gardeners with land adjoining the Quinny brook have been asked to encourage water voles, which appreciate nicely overgrown and undisturbed grassy banks, ideally with a fairly gentle slope.

Wider interest

The tree group arranged a walk through the wetlands and nearby woodland in April. There was such a large group attending that we split into two groups. As always those leading the walk gained new information from local people, in particular about the workings of the previous town laundry (formerly on the site of Continental Fires).

Future plans

The Action group has continued to look for opportunities to improve the biodiversity of the site; contacting landowners with offers to lease or purchase their land or facilitate conservation grazing, and visiting landowners to discuss these possibilities. Shropshire Council confirms that no further new sites will be considered for building during the next 20 years ruling out the wetland site, and this will help in negotiations. Following a meeting in December to which all landowners were invited, one landowner has now expressed a definite desire to sell and following two meetings of the 'action' group, Middle Marches Community Land Trust (now with charitable status) are willing for the land to be purchased in their name. A land agent has been commissioned to survey the whole area, following which a follow-up approach to other landowners will be made, before launching a fund-raising campaign.

On **Thursday 25th June 2020** another Bioblitz Day will be held. The Strettons Flora group will attend and there will be a particular focus on invertebrates with Caroline Uff providing training in beetle ID. Landowners will be consulted.

2.3 Crayfish Survey 2019

Project leader: Steve Butler

Background

The survey was done under licence from Natural England and with the support of the Environment Agency. The aim was to investigate upstream of a known site for the Native **White-Clawed Crayfish** *Austropotamobius pallipes* on the Cound River at Leebotwood (in this area it is more characteristic of a stream and is still referred to as Cound Brook).



Native White-Clawed Crayfish

The search aimed to uncover any reasons for the apparent absence of the species southwards into the Stretton Valley. These might include Water Quality (pollution, water chemistry & human activity), predators and physical barriers. Surveying for Native Crayfish is confined to the months July to September. Earlier than this the females are still carrying young and afterwards as the temperatures fall the adults seek out mates in order to reproduce. They then find refuges to overwinter in and are almost impossible to find. Techniques used included stone-turning, night-time torching and later cylinder-trapping.

The stretch of the Cound River (fig 1) surveyed flows through land owned by four landowners. They were approached and were supportive throughout the project. During the summer the record of a Native Crayfish from a feeder stream came to light and the survey was widened to include this area.

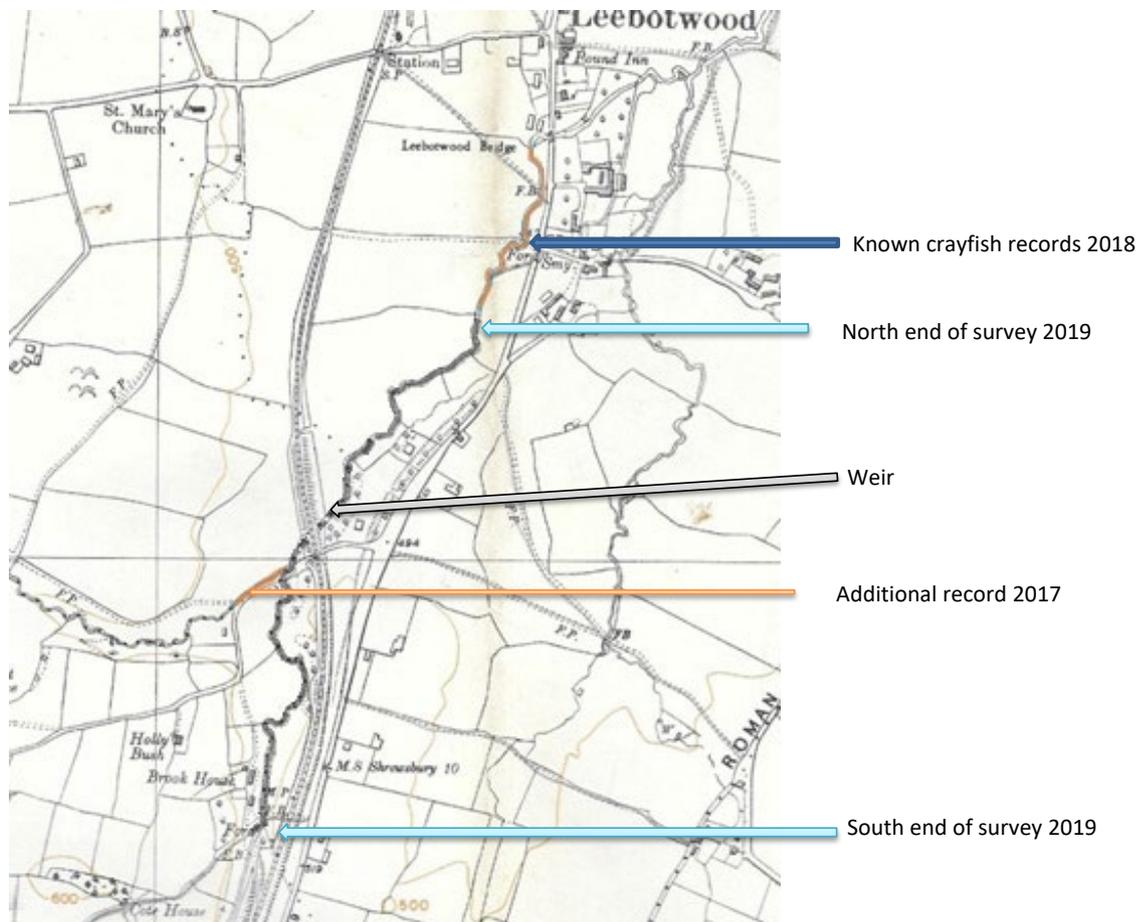


Fig 1. Map of Cound River (survey section highlighted in black)

In 2018 a report of **Crayfish Plague** (*Aphanomyces astaci*) downstream at Longnor resulted in public notices being posted. No infected Native Crayfish were seen and it may be that the disease was spread by animals (herons or otters) which had been in contact with nearby populations of the **North American Signal Crayfish** (*Pacifastacus leniusculus*).

Methodology

Stone turning was begun on 5th July and continued until 4th August 2019 for a total of 11 hours. During this period, mainly in clear weather during daylight no signs of crayfish were seen. Sections of the river that were searched included shallow, stony, deeper and muddy stretches, the majority of which were in shaded sections. Medium and large stones were turned as well as bottles, metalwork and sacking.

Night torching was conducted on 24th July on the same northernmost stretch where two sightings were made in 2018. Again there were no signs of crayfish.

Cylinder trapping was then begun because of the lack of success. This was done with permission from EA using their equipment and was begun 8th August and continued until 30th of that month. These Live Traps were kept in place for a week and then re-sited. Unfortunately by the end of August the weather had deteriorated and the depth and rapid flow of water meant it was unlikely that the later sitings would be successful. Again this technique was also completely unsuccessful with no signs of crayfish.

Results and Possible Causes

The negative result of this survey is puzzling and there appears no obvious answer to the lack of sightings.

Water quality- although not thoroughly analysed- appears satisfactory. There were plenty of water creatures ranging from Mayfly larvae to Freshwater Shrimp in good quantities and the pH level was a steady 7.17 (crayfish need mineral rich water to build their shells, but can tolerate as low as 5.5).

One owner reported some pollution (not confirmed) from upstream in 2018, but this did not seem to have affected other water creatures.



pH Testing on Cound River

Predators- the main known predators are otters, mink, herons and kingfishers, whilst juveniles are taken by trout and eels and also can be subject to cannibalism. Other birds and mammals can be opportunistic feeders. Otter



Otter spraint on log

spraints were regularly collected during the period, but had no crayfish remains in them.

There were historic reports of mink, but no evidence was obtained during the survey. Kingfishers and Dippers were regularly seen and Heron tracks were observed, but no crayfish remains were seen on the riverside (one possible heron victim was photographed in 2017 in the section). No evidence of Crayfish Plague was sighted or further reported in 2019, although there was an unconfirmed report of the **North American Signal Crayfish** in a feeder stream nearby.



Barriers- there is a small weir situated at the north end of the tunnel underneath the railway. It does not appear to be sufficient to prevent any upstream spread of crayfish, but more importantly information was later received of a crayfish discovered **above** the weir (Rob Mileto *pers comm.*)

Summary

No definite causes of the absence of the Native Crayfish from the study area during 2019 can be easily identified. In the past only scant evidence of its presence is available and it may be, for what ever reason, that the low population here is more prone to annual fluctuations than a larger population would be. After the survey was completed information was received that regular sightings of crayfish had been made by a local person in the next downstream section of the Cound River- it was not stated if the species was native or otherwise. Hopefully the survey will be continued next year and a positive result obtained, or if negative a clearer idea of the causes may be more apparent.

Acknowledgement

Grateful thanks must go to the owners of the five sections who gave permission and showed interest. Also to the Environment Agency for loan of traps and permission to use them- in particular to Julie Cowley, and to Ruth Lawrence for conducting a water quality test and pH readings.

S. Butler
January 2020

2.4 Estimating the Red Grouse Population on The Long Mynd Project leader: Leo Smith

Introduction and aims

Red Grouse is on the amber list of UK Birds of Conservation Concern (Eaton et al. 2009, 2015). The Long Mynd contains the larger of the two breeding populations of this species in Shropshire.



The National Trust implemented a monitoring programme of Red Grouse on the Long Mynd in 1994, based on dawn counts of calling territorial males in winter. The number of territorial males present has grown steadily since then, and in 2010-11 it was estimated to be 40-59 (Caroline Uff *pers. comm.*).

It was felt this method did not produce a sufficiently accurate population estimate for such a scarce species, or to assess the effectiveness of the Trust's heather management. A new survey method was piloted in 2011, which aimed to map the territories of males displaying at dusk at the start of the breeding season, using volunteer surveyors. This approach produced an estimate of 60-63 territorial males, an improvement on the dawn count methodology. The dusk survey technique was repeated in 2012, when it was adopted by the then-new Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group, producing an estimate of 63 – 66 territorial males. The method produced excellent results, and it was decided to repeat it annually. The 2013 survey was affected by hard, bad weather, and produced an estimate of 53-54 territorial males. The reduction may have been due to fewer observations as a result of lower activity because of the weather, or a real reduction in the population. However, the estimate of 56-58 territorial males in 2014, and 57-59 in 2015, still lower than in 2011 and 2012, suggests the latter. The 2016 and 2017 surveys were both partially disrupted by bad weather, so the estimate based on their results of at least 42, and at least 49, territories are considered to be too low.

The summary report for 2018 was not completed in time for publication in last year's Annual Report, but it was sent to all participants on 6 January, together with the detailed report, and the short report was sent to all SACWG members on 7 January. The main results are included in Tables 1 and 3 below. It will be seen that the count in 2018 was equal to the highest number previously recorded.

Methodology

The 2019 survey was undertaken by 33 volunteers. Those participating for the first time attended an indoor briefing session in March, and several of them attended an "on the job" training session during an evening fieldwork survey. Sixty-seven watch points, selected to give a good field of view of a large part of the survey area, were marked on 1-10,000 Ordnance Survey maps. Each participant was allocated a watch point, and sent the relevant survey map and recording sheet. Participants used the map to record the location of all Grouse seen or heard, together with a number for each observation. This number corresponded to data entered on the recording sheet, which included the time, the activity seen or heard, and number of individuals.

The project was again disrupted by bad weather, and three of the planned surveys had to be cancelled and rearranged. Surveys were undertaken on eight evenings between 8 April and 16 May 2019. The aim was to cover each watch point three times, but only 21% (14/67) of them were. Thirty-nine (58%) watch points were covered twice, and 14 (21%) were covered only once.



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A full description of the analysis is provided in a detailed project report. It follows the territorial mapping method (Bibby et al, 2006), which uses concurrent observations of different birds exhibiting territorial behaviour (display flight or aggression) to estimate the number of territories.

Results

A total of 134 result sheets (108 maps with observations, plus 26 nil counts) were returned for analysis. These maps included 574 different observations of Red Grouse (some of which were concurrent observations of two or more birds). The coverage is summarised in Table 1, and compared with that of previous years. Coverage in 2018 and 2019, in terms of the number of surveyors and number of counts, was less good than all previous years except 2013. However, levels of Grouse activity were very good on two of the eight survey dates, but conditions during four of the counts were poor, resulting in very a low number of Grouse, and territorial interactions, being observed then. On each evening, observers go to adjacent watch points, so this affected specific areas disproportionately, resulting in many watch points having no effective count. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the results on each of the eight Survey dates.

Table 1. Summary of Survey Coverage and Results 2011-19

| Year | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Total Number of Watchpoints | 38 | 60 | 67 | 67 | 67 | 67 | 67 | 67 | 67 |
| Number of Surveyors | 48 | 67 | 40 | 52 | 62 | 63 | 60 | 30 | 33 |
| Number of Counts | 147 | 204 | 122 | 181 | 184 | 167 | 164 | 120 | 134 |
| Average Number of Counts / Watchpoint | 3.9 | 3.4 | 1.8 | 2.7 | 2.7 | 2.5 | 2.4 | 1.8 | 2.0 |
| Number of Records | 818 | 816 | 460 | 865 | 839 | 637 | 721 | 643 | 574 |
| Average Records / Count | 5.6 | 4.0 | 3.8 | 4.8 | 4.6 | 3.8 | 4.4 | 5.4 | 4.3 |
| Counts with no Grouse recorded | 12 | 51 | 26 | 44 | 38 | 50 | 52 | 18 | 26 |

Table 2. Summary of Observations of Red Grouse during the 2019 Long Mynd survey.

| Counts | Survey Dates | | | | | | | | Totals | | |
|----------------------|--------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------|---------|---------|
| | April | | | | May | | | | Counts | Records | Average |
| | 8 | 11 | 18 | 29 | 7 | 13 | 14 | 16 | | | |
| Total Counts | 13 | 22 | 25 | 16 | 18 | 5 | 19 | 16 | 134 | | |
| Counts of Zero | 5 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 9 | 26 | | |
| Total Grouse Records | 18 | 64 | 93 | 60 | 140 | 14 | 166 | 19 | | 574 | |
| Ave. Records / Count | 1.4 | 2.9 | 3.7 | 3.8 | 7.8 | 2.8 | 8.7 | 1.2 | | | 4.3 |

The mapped observations are summarised in Figure 1. The map shows notional territories, based on those observations which approximately locate a boundary between territories. There is not necessarily any correlation between the size and shape of territories shown on the maps and the area that each Grouse actually occupies. Many of the Grouse recorded could not be assigned to a territory with any degree of certainty.

**Based on analysis of the survey results,
the total population in 2019 is estimated at 54 territorial males.**

Given the patchy nature of the survey coverage, it is likely that there were more Grouse territories than that. In particular, it will be seen that counts on 8 April and 16 May produced very few records, and both these counts covered the watchpoints to the south of Pole Cottage, so the population is likely to be under-recorded in that part of the area

Several participants had good views of other moorland species.

Comparison with Previous Years

Table 3 provides a comparison of the population estimate for each of the nine years of the survey

Table 3. Estimated Number of Red Grouse (Territorial Males) on the Long Mynd 2011-19

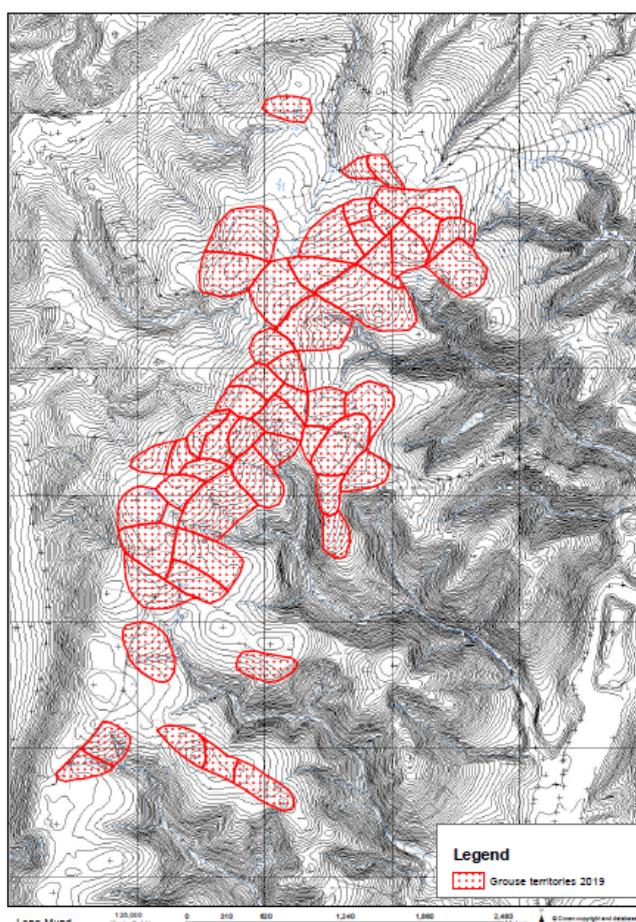
| Year | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|------|------|---------|------|
| Population Estimate | 60 - 63 | 63 - 66 | 52 - 54 | 56 - 58 | 57 - 59 | 42+ | 49+ | 64 - 66 | 54 |

Heather Management

Approximately 700 hectares of heather dominated heathland is owned by the National Trust on Long Mynd. Of this, an estimated 450ha is continuous heather (>75% cover), but 150ha of this is either non-intervention or unsuitable for burning or cutting. The remaining 300ha is managed on an approximately 15 year rotation, a target average of 20ha per year, which started in 2001. Around 220ha has been burnt or cut: the target is frequently not achieved due to lack of suitable burning days within the permitted period.

This practice benefits a range of species, in particular the Red Grouse. The remaining 40% of heathland is left as 'non-intervention' to support less mobile species, which are negatively affected by burning or cutting. The detailed report includes a direct comparison between the territories and the heather management map. In general, most territories have some area of short heather in them. It therefore appears that the heather management has benefited Red Grouse.

Figure 1. Territories identified by the 2019 Long Mynd Red Grouse survey.



Discussion and Conclusions

The level of Red Grouse activity, and the likelihood of them being observed and recorded, depends on good weather conditions, but also on good coverage of all watch points. The number of participants, the number of counts, and the weather conditions, all therefore affect the total number and distribution of records, and, more importantly, the observations of two male Grouse seen or heard concurrently which are needed to define territory boundaries.

Detailed comparisons cannot be made between the maps produced each year, because they reflect the variations in coverage. More importantly, the methodology does not produce a map of the actual occupied territories, and there is some natural annual rearrangement of territories, as the burning, and further growth of the mature heather, both lead to areas becoming unsuitable habitat.



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However, it is likely that the poor weather conditions in 2019 depressed the level of Grouse activity on at least two of the eight survey dates, so there were not enough observations to separate territories, particularly at the southern end of the property, and some of those shown on the map may have actually held two or more males. Some territories may have been overlooked altogether. Therefore, the population is likely to be higher than the 54 territories identified from analysing the survey results.

Participants

Thanks to the participants who carried out the surveys: John Arnfield, John Bacon, Sam Bishop, Judith Darling, Gill Davies, Patrick Edwards, Greg Forster, Sue Forster, Jeremy Freeland, Julian French, Beth Furlong, Rob Furlong, Joe Gomme, Richard Halahan, Heather Hathaway, Janet Hill, John Knowles, Liz Knowles, Sarah Lane, Edward Marvin, Anna McCann, Andrew Middleton, Sue Pinsent, Amy Porter, Steve Rooney, Sue Rooney, Ray Slack, Leo Smith, David Stafford, Mike Streetly, Jenny Vine, Heather Williams and Carol Wood.

Detailed Report

A more detailed report, with a full description of the methodology and analysis has been prepared *Red Grouse on The Long Mynd: Survey and Population Estimate 2019* (Smith 2020). All participants have been supplied with a copy. It can also be viewed and downloaded from the Community Wildlife Groups website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk Reports from previous years can also be found there.

Leo Smith



2.5 Curlews, Lapwings and Other Birds Survey

Project leader: Leo Smith

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

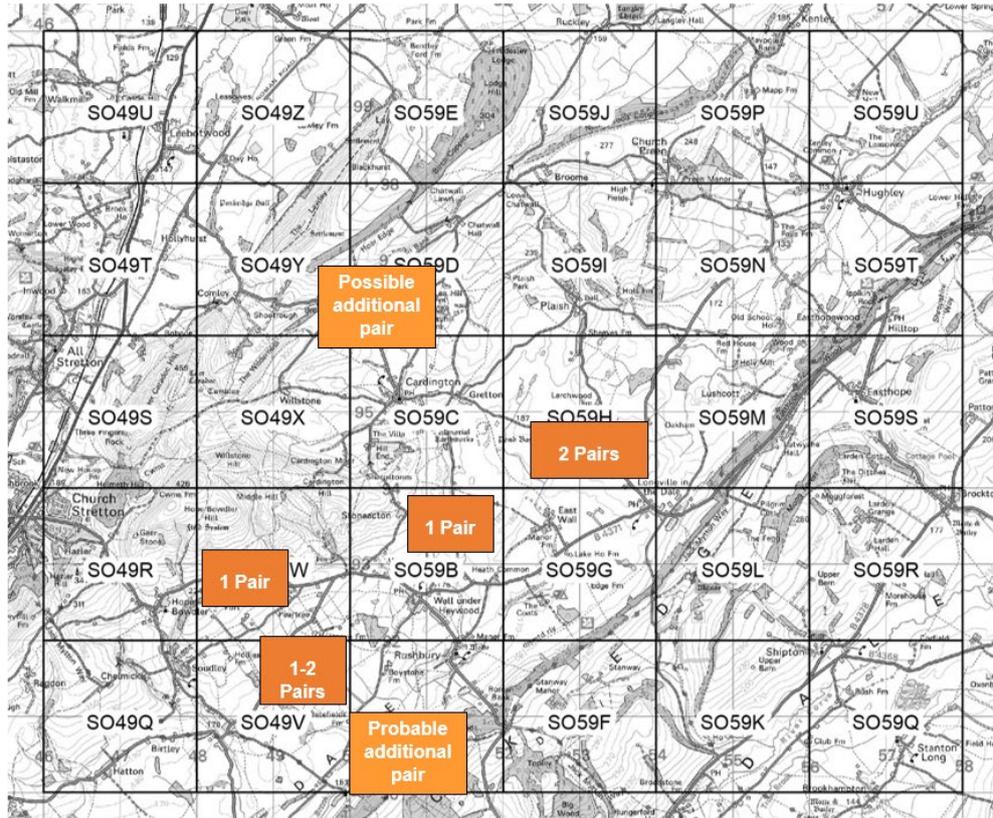
Lapwing & Curlew Survey

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

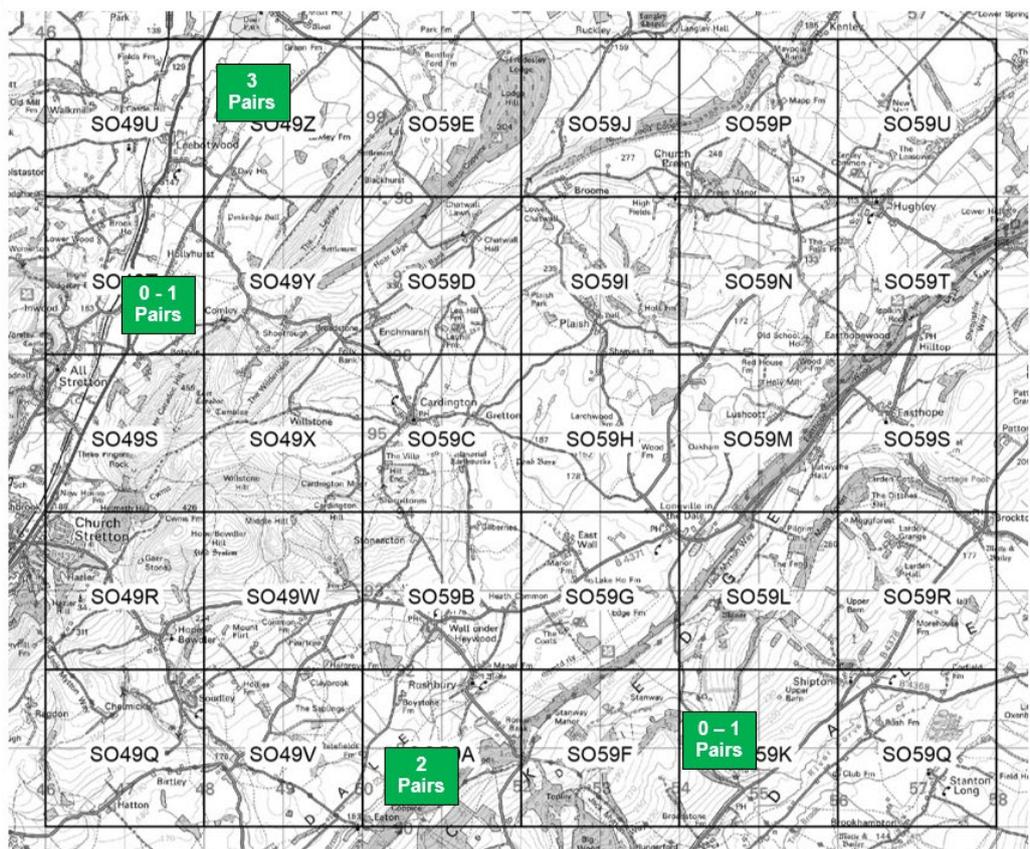
Lapwing & Curlew Survey

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 | Duncock | 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 |



Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

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 Thickers, 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

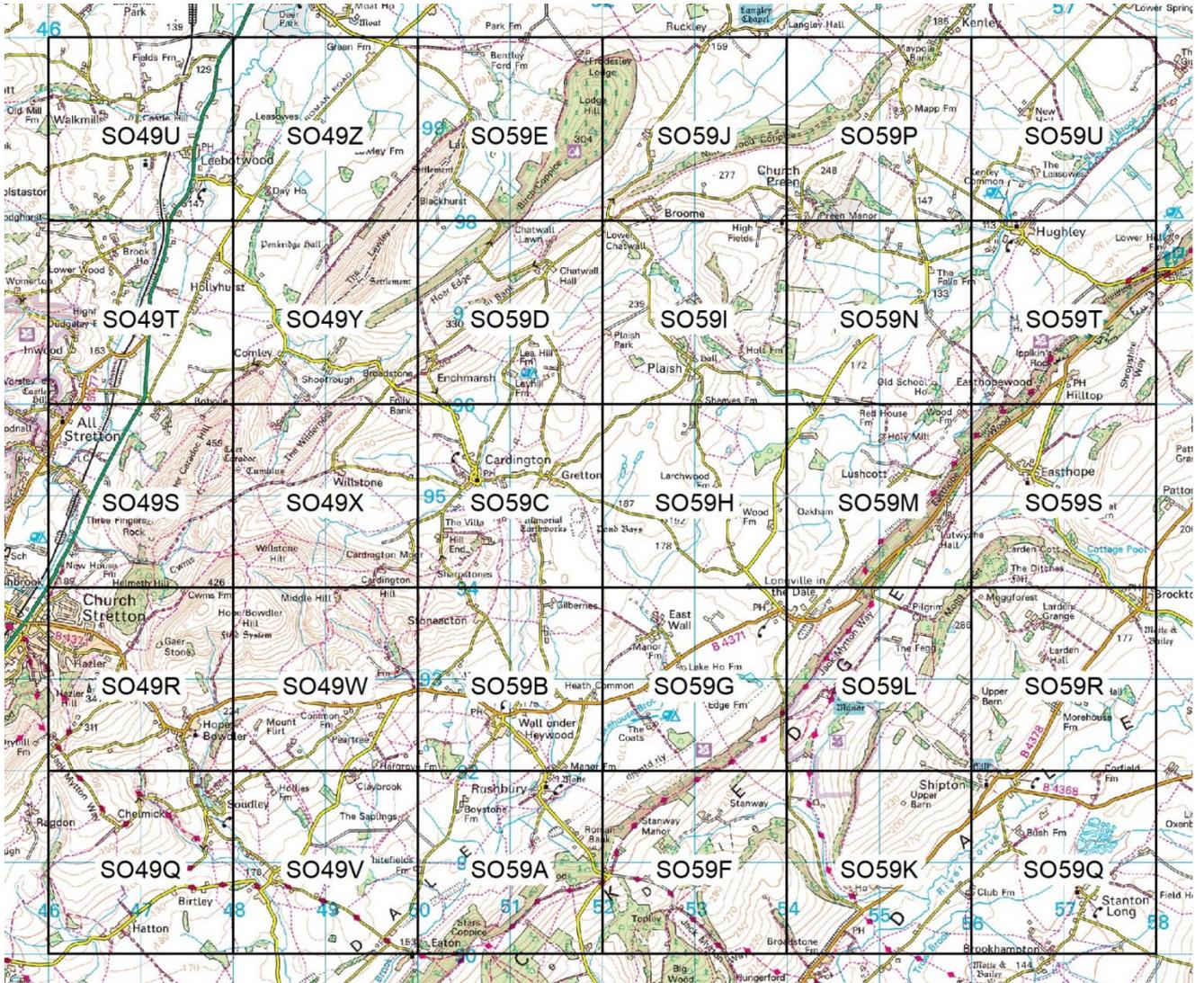
Plans for the Future

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)



2.6 Swifts in the Strettons 2019

Project leader: Julie Cowley



Purpose and objectives of the project

The swift (*Apus apus*) is amber-listed as a bird of conservation concern (due to falling population numbers) and it is thought that the loss of nest sites due to modern building methods and materials has played a key role in their decline. By recording known nest locations, it is possible to monitor whether these sites continue to be used in subsequent years or whether new sites are selected and, importantly, to liaise with residents, builders and planners when works to improve properties is carried out to ensure the preservation of nesting opportunities.

Surveying also indicates where it might be worthwhile installing artificial nest boxes to increase colony size – the birds are sociable and tend to nest within close range of each other.

Swifts are commonly observed in and around the Strettons but there was no formal recording of the locations of nest sites or the number of birds until 2014, when the first “Swifts in the Strettons” was inaugurated by the Stretton Area Community Wildlife Group, under the leadership of Peta Sams. Observations were carried out in 2015 and 2016 which enabled the earlier study to be built on and extended. In 2020 the same methodology was again used, but observations were more ad hoc due to the survey co-ordinator having other commitments. Any reports by members of the public were also followed up.

The location of the nest sites recorded will be passed to Shropshire Council, Church Stretton Town Council, Church Stretton Civic Society, RSPB swift survey and the county bird recorder for use when proposals for maintenance or modification of buildings occupied by swifts are filed with planning authorities and to establish the presence of swift populations in the county.

Results

General observations of swifts in the Strettons

The earliest arrivals of the 2019 breeding season were observed in late April with birds continuing to arrive during the following weeks. As expected the number of birds observed increased as the month of May progressed, noted from anecdotal evidence. By July it became apparent that the seasonal trend was following the 2018 season, with further confirmation of the loss of a significant number of nest sites at key locations. In 2019 the survey method was more ad hoc but this did not detract from the accurate recording of sites. 29 nest sites were confirmed (i.e. birds entering a consistent location two or more times, or feeding young, or presence of young), down on 2018. Figure 1 shows the number of nest sites confirmed since 2015.

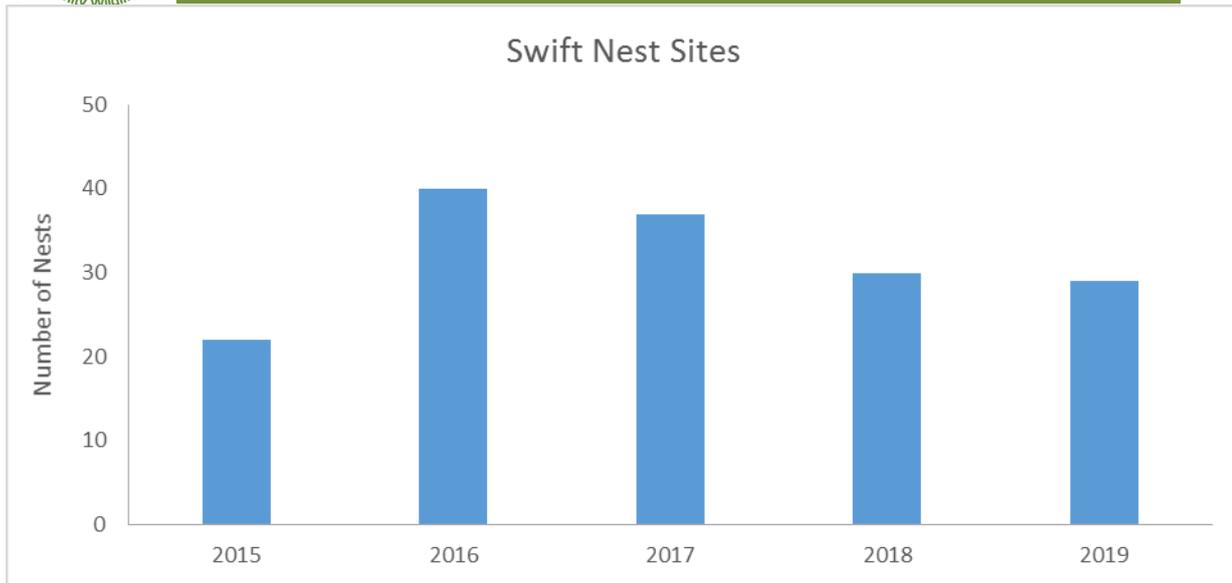


Figure 1. Number of swift nest sites in the Strettons since 2015.

The last date of observation of a swift was 1 September 2019.

Swift Nest Site Locations

Nest aspect shows a bias towards the easterly direction: where the nest cavity entrance is apparent: 44% face an easterly direction (see table 1).

Table 1: Nest Aspect for Confirmed Nest sites (where known).

| Aspect of nest | Confirmed sites |
|----------------|-----------------|
| N | 7 |
| S | 8 |
| E | 13 |
| W | 1 |

Of the confirmed nest sites in Church Stretton town they were found in 20 buildings at 21 addresses. A nest site was confirmed in All Stretton, and there were no confirmed sightings for Little Stretton.

Summary

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from the confirmed sightings recorded in the 2019 survey season:

- Nest occupation at known sites was down compared to previous years
- Stretton’s swifts continue to largely exhibit nest site fidelity. However, exact locations exhibited some variation between years



Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

- Older buildings in the town centre are favoured overall, preferably with an eastern aspect, although certain post War buildings also have a high occupancy rate
- The installation of two nest boxes on one building in Church Stretton resulted in successful breeding in 2019
- Of the 13 other nest boxes installed in 2017/2018 there was no record of occupancy in 2019.

Concluding Remarks

The 2019 breeding season revealed a further decline in breeding swifts. The County recorder also noted a decline in breeding birds for the season.

Swift nest “hot spots” continue to provide nesting sites for returning birds. The use of the call attraction system for the boxes installed throughout the town will also be important in attracting swifts to these new locations.

Acknowledgements

This survey would not have been possible without the efforts of those who participated in evening survey walks and contributed casual observations (Nicky Halliburton, Tony Jones, Will Priestley, John Arnfield, Sandra Whitlock and Richard Bacon), and to the residents of the Strettons who talked to us about the swifts with which they shared their houses.

Julie Cowley

19th January 2020

IMPORTANT: Confidentiality

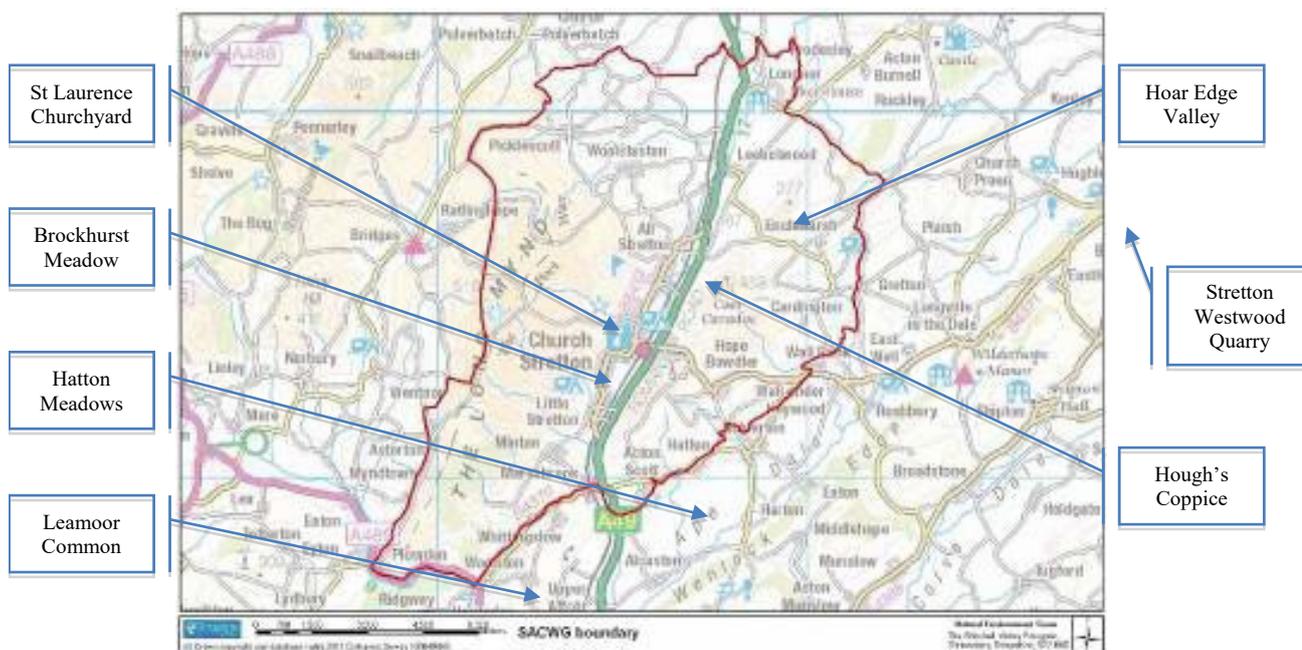
This is an edited version of the report without specific site information. Should you need to know further information please pass your request to Julie Cowley (grahamandjuliecowley@gmail.com tel: 01694 722310), who will consider whether this is appropriate.

2.7 Wildlife Sites Botanical Surveys

Project leader: Mike Carter

Botanical Surveys 2019 in conjunction with Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT)

In 2019 the Strettons Area Botanical Survey Group surveyed seven sites of interest, Local Wildlife Sites¹ or potential LWSs:



A Brief Methodology

We aim to cover the whole of each site as thoroughly as possible. All the vascular plant species observed are recorded using a Shropshire Botanical Society (SBS) recording card. The frequencies of indicator species ‘axiophytes’² are noted and NVC quadrats done where possible. In addition, ‘site visit cards’ provided by SWT are also completed to make an assessment of the habitats and the condition of a site. Any other relevant information is also noted and photos of the site taken. The maps provided by SWT enable us to check site boundaries and indicate the extent of each habitat by annotating maps. A GPS is used to take precise grid references for NVC quadrats and any rare species.

The data gathered from each survey is processed at SWT and a species list for each site is sent to the landowners and to the county recorder along with any useful management suggestions.

¹ Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are places that have been shown to have special local nature conservation value. They are the most important places for wildlife outside the legally protected areas, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Many of them are in private ownership and **not accessible to the public** except along existing public footpaths or where the site lies within designated open access areas.

² Axiophytes are species of particular interest to botanists and ecologists because of their strong association with important habitats. They are not necessarily rare, but they are useful indicators.

Description of Sites Surveyed in 2019

1. Stretton Westwood Quarry, SO 596984, 7th May 2019

This quarry is on the south side of the Longville to Much Wenlock road. It ceased to be an active quarry about 50 years ago and is now owned by Shropshire Council. In recent years it has been used to deposit material from the Much Wenlock flood-alleviation scheme. The spoil has been landscaped into heaps topped with local limestone topsoil leaving rock faces exposed. Work has now stopped and the quarry has been fenced with funding secured by SWT. The site is now leased to the National Trust and is open to the public with a car park. It is well worth a visit especially if your interests are geological or botanical.

Andy Perry, Ecologist at the National Trust arranged a field visit of the Shropshire Botanical Society (SBS) on 29 June 2019. Andy asked our group to visit in early May to catch any spring ephemerals which might have finished their life cycle by late June. We recorded 87 species in a short visit (plus several aliens no doubt from garden waste over the years). The SBS field visit recorded 158 species including 27 axiophytes including a number of rarities, one not previously recorded in Shropshire. We felt duly humbled! However, our list did include 22 species not on the SBS list, which confirmed the purpose of our visit. This is a fascinating site; do visit it. On Google it is now labelled Stretton Westwood Nature Reserve.



Figure 1 *Pyramidal orchid* in Stretton Westwood Quarry in late June



Figure 2 *Toothwort* in Hough's Coppice

2. Hough's Coppice, SO 468954, 9th May 2019

This is an L-shaped woodland lying on the west side of Caer Caradoc parallel with the A49. Most of the wood, unusually for the Stretton valley, is on limestone, an outlier of Silurian lime-rich mudstone. The southern section is of mainly etiolated ash with some oak, overcrowded, of uniform age 80-100 years old. The middle section (where a public footpath enters from the A49 to ascend Caradoc) is conifer plantation of Norway spruce, larch and Douglas fir. The larger northern block is oak woodland with hazel coppice and some wetter patches of alder and willow. A stream issues from Caradoc, enters this block via an old overgrown woodland pond, then descends to the valley floor and joins the Cound Brook on the edge of All Stretton.

The southern and middle sections have limited ground flora with little regeneration because of heavy grazing; here the wood is unfenced and is used by sheep for shelter. Surprisingly we found a few patches of early purple orchid *Orchis mascula* in the conifer plantation close to the footpath; this has presumably hung on for 80 years when this was perhaps a broadleaved wood.

The northern block has a more or less effective fence to keep out sheep so has a more abundant and interesting ground flora and plenty of regeneration. Highlights were moschatel (townhall clock) *Adoxa moschatellina* and the parasitic, chlorophyll-less toothwort *Lathraea squamaria*. Wood speedwell *Veronica montana* and wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa* were abundant in places. The shaded stream banks had frequent ferns including soft shield fern *Polystichum setiferum*. The wood margins had some excellent hedges, tall, bushy and mixed. In all we recorded 75 species including 10 axiophytes; not bad for so early in the year.

3. St Laurence Churchyard, Church Stretton, SO 453937, 30th May and 9th August 2019

We visited the churchyard twice to compile a full species list. The churchyard is managed following a plan developed using Caring for God's Acre training resources. Some areas are regularly mown, others are treated as meadow, others are left uncut for overwintering wildlife. Some seed of local provenance has been introduced.

A total of 126 vascular plant species were recorded. Only 3 are axiophytes, yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, eyebright *Euphrasia nemorosa* and salad burnet *Poterium sanguisorba*. But diversity rather than rarity is the priority here.

4. Hoar Edge Valley, SO 496972, 6th June 2019

The middle and northern end of this valley is a tenanted part of the Corbett Estate, lying between the Lawley and Hoar Edge. The Edge to the east is a scarp face of tough Hoar Edge Grit with a plantation of scot's pine and larch with volunteer rowan. Valley sides and floor are of rough sheep grazing at low density. The valley floor is of glacial deposits overlying Shineton Shales. The valley sides are a mosaic of upland grassland with, in damper places, mat grass *Nardus stricta*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile* and, in drier areas, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and soft grass *Holcus mollis*. The mid and north-end valley floor does not have a permanent stream; it may be culverted, or fairly free draining glacial till. Towards the southern end water collects in more botanically interesting mire with star sedge *Carex echinata* and carnation sedge *C. panicea*, lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella* and quaking grass *Briza media*. In all we recorded a modest 54 species including 13 axiophytes.

Modest perhaps botanically speaking, but this valley is an important corridor, parallel with the much busier Stretton valley, of limited agricultural productivity, but very significant for conservation linking as it does better known habitats like Lawley, Caer Caradoc, Lodge Hill, Yeld Bank, Hope Bowdler Hill and the Wilderness. A public footpath runs through part of the site.

5. Leamoor Common and the Wettles, SO 435869, 13th June 2019

We surveyed five fields which are moderately species-rich grassland used for horses and late-cut hay. The hedges around all the fields are generally excellent, tall, bushy and diverse. But our brief in the time available was to survey the grassland, not the hedges. All fields are more or less level, but draining south, in some fields to a



Figure 3 St Laurence churchyard

wetter area or seasonal pond with diagnostic species like mint *Mentha aquatic* and meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*. Common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsia* was present in one field; green winged orchid *Anacamptis morio* was reported in the same field earlier in the year but we found none. Other interesting species included pale sedge *Carex pallescens* and ladies mantle *Alchemilla sp* that didn't look like a garden escape.



Figure 4 Hatton Meadows

extensively managed mesotrophic, neutral-ish, and botanically uninteresting grassland mostly M9 *Holcus lanatus*, *Deschampsia cespitosa* though with many diverse bushy hedges some with fine mature oaks; also remnants of hedges, planted parkland oaks (many planted in the last 25-30 years); and self-regenerating hawthorn. Nettles and creeping thistle are a real problem in many areas, the former especially where sheep have sheltered and dunged.

Towards the railway line there are signs of frequent inundation with rushes including sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* and heath spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*. This was a large site and mapping the various features and management issues took much of our time. In total we recorded 79 species including 9 axiophytes.

7. Brockhurst meadow, SO 447927, 12th July 2019

We were asked to survey the field in front of Brockhurst House. The residents are interested in managing the field as a meadow. The flora was very uniform with just 4 species dominating, common bent *Agrostis capillaris* (about 60% cover) plus Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, red fescue *Festuca rubra* and sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*. This field was clearly sown as a sports field when Brockhurst was a school. Suggestions were made for developing a species diverse meadow; it will be interesting to see how they get on.



Figure 5 Heath spotted orchid

6. Hatton Meadows, SO 463890, 27th June 2019

This 34ha site is part of the Acton Scott Estate. A bridleway and a footpath (the Shropshire Way) access the site. It is comprised of several fields gently sloping and draining to the southeast with drainage impeded by the now dismantled railway line. The bedrock is Silurian sand and mudstones overlain with glacial till. The fields are of

Many thanks to everyone involved in the 2019 surveys.

We're not sure how our link with SWT will pan out in 2020. Our recent 'mentors' Kate Singleton moved to the SWT rivers department in 2018, and Fiona Gomersall left SWT in 2019 to join the Severn Rivers Trust. But, whatever happens, we as a group plan to continue surveying.



2.8 Dormice in the Strettons

Project leader: Caroline Uff

Introduction

Dormice are very cute orangey-brown mice with thick furry tails and large black eyes. They spend most of their life asleep, sleeping all day in the summer and hibernating from the end of October until April. They are rarely seen because they are nocturnal and feed in trees and shrubs, preferring not to come down to the ground. Over the last 100 years dormouse populations in Britain have dramatically declined and because of their rarity they are now strictly protected by law.

There are known to be small but fragmented populations of dormice around the Strettons, but some records are quite old. This project trained members of the group to identify signs of dormouse with an aim to build an up-to-date picture of the current dormouse population in the Strettons area.



Image 1. Examples of dormouse nibbled nuts from Horderley and All Stretton (C.Uff)

Methods and Results

Nibbled hazel nuts were collected and the teeth marks checked to determine whether they were from dormice, squirrels, wood mice or voles. Dormouse nest boxes and tubes were also checked for old nests. Searches focussed on areas where dormice had been recorded in the past or sites with suitable habitat. The following table lists the areas searched in 2019/2020 and any signs of dormice.

| | |
|---|--|
| Gulley Green | Dormouse nuts and used nests present - continued presence confirmed. Nuts also found slightly further up the valley. |
| Comley Quarry | No signs found. This was a known dormouse site. Last published record 2015. |
| Inwood (incl. Bagbatch /Hurst area) | Dormouse nuts found along Bagbatch boundaries - continued presence confirmed. They were not found however under other hedgerows in the Inwood area. |
| Castle Hill and The Paddock | No signs found. Nest tubes present and checked, but negative. |
| Woodlands NW of All Stretton | No signs found. Nest tubes present and checked, but negative. |
| Batch Valley Track and Batch Barn Field | Dormouse nuts found in Batch Valley (3 nuts only). None in Batch Barn Field. |
| Wood at Cargan | No signs found. |
| The Wern | No signs found. |
| Bushmoor Coppice | No signs found. Boxes also checked but negative. This was a known dormouse site. Last published record 2016. |

| | |
|--|---|
| Churchmoor – green lane | No signs found. |
| Hamperley - hedges | No signs found. |
| N side of B4370 between Horderley and Cwm Head | Dormouse nuts found in several places along green lane / footpath confirming continued presence. |
| Horderley Woods | Dormouse nuts found in several areas confirming continued presence. |

Discussion

The results confirm the presence of dormouse in three main areas: Horderley, All Stretton and Comley (Gulley Green), with Batch Valley being the only new site. The populations are generally small and isolated. They may not survive in the long term if their habitats remain fragmented. A dormouse, being arboreal, is unlikely to cross open ground or even a long gap within a hedgerow. For this reason, it is essential that continuous hedgerows are maintained, offering safe links between woodlands and allowing populations to disperse. As a result of the survey SACWG are bringing together a map and liaising with neighbouring land owners and the National Trust to look at opportunities for improving hedgerow links in the Batch Valley areas. This is supported by information from the hedgerow surveys carried out by SACWG several years ago which flagged up hedgerows that were gappy, as well as those with honeysuckle and hazel (dormouse favourites). Further surveys are needed to get a fuller picture of the Stretton dormice and it is hoped that the project will continue next year. All records have been submitted to Peoples Trust for Endangered Species who lead the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme.

Thanks to Chris Cooke, Gill Silk, Heather Hathaway, Jane & Peter Howsam, Kate Price, Penny Beinz, and Steve Butler for all their help.

Image 2. Dormouse nests found in bird boxes at Gulley Green (C.Uff)



2.9 Bat records from the Church Stretton area

An informal survey by Steve Butler

Introduction

All records were recorded using an **Echometer Touch2 connected to iPad** (except iPhone once). Where possible, timings are included, which sometimes involved leaving the equipment out overnight.

The equipment used attempts to automatically identify the species based on the call. Unlikely identifications are recorded in *italics* although bats are migratory, and the *Greater Horseshoe* has been recorded from Stiperstones for the first time this year, so these are still included. Where possible likely alternatives are given. Quite naturally the rarer species recorded would need to be confirmed by more expert Bat specialists.



Soprano Pipistrelle

Many Noctule records have not been included, as they and Leisler's are sometimes triggered when walking on any rough surface, or by bird calls. Bechstein's has been recorded from South Shropshire in the past but is unlikely and the call can be confused with other related bats.

Local status of British species

RED= Church Stretton Area. BLUE= Shropshire. BLACK= Not recorded.

Nationally common: **Daubenton's, Whiskered, Natterer's, Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Noctule & Brown Long-eared.**

Nationally uncommon: **Lesser Horseshoe, Brandt's, Leisler's, Serotine** & Nathusius' Pipistrelle,

Nationally rare: **Greater Horseshoe, Alcahoie, Bechstein's, Greater Mouse-eared, Grey Long-Eared & Barbastelle.**

Results

RAGLETH HILL

22:04:2019 20:32-21:00 Weather fine 52*31'38.08N 02*47'39.11 311m

| | |
|---------------------|----------------|
| Noctule | 2 |
| Common Pipistrelle | 3 |
| Soprano Pipistrelle | 1 |
| Total | 6 calls |

ALL STRETTON

OPEN COPPICE BATCH VALLEY

02.07.2019 22.10- 03.07 Weather Fine 52*33'19.91N 2*48'45.63W 246m

| | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|---|
| Noctule | 005 | |
| <i>Leisler's</i> | 002 | <i>Probably Noctule, but Leisler's have been recorded in North Shropshire</i> |
| <i>Nathusius' Pipistrelle</i> | 015 | <i>Likely Common Pipistrelle</i> |
| Common Pipistrelle | 192 | |
| Soprano Pipistrelle | 100 | |
| Total | 314 calls | |



Above: Noctule



Right: Whiskered Bat

THE KNOLL PARK COPPICE

09.07.2019 Weather fine/cloudy 52°33'20.67N 2°48'59.17W 279m

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Common Pipistrelle | 7 |
| Soprano Pipistrelle | 1 |
| (Unidentified) | 1 |
| Total | 9 calls (Note Echometer with iPhone5) |

25/26.8.2019 Weather fine/clear (1st call 20:26 last call 05:48- both Common Pipistrelle)

| | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|---|
| Daubenton's | 4 | |
| Whiskered | 4 | |
| Natterers | 1 | |
| Noctule | 17 | |
| <i>Nathusius' Pipistrelle</i> | 3 | <i>Likely Common Pipistrelle</i> |
| Common Pipistrelle | 132 | |
| Soprano Pipistrelle | 34 | |
| Brown Long-eared | 54 | |
| <i>Grey Long-eared</i> | 6 | <i>Not recorded in Shropshire - probably Brown Long-eared.</i> |
| <i>Greater Horseshoe</i> | 1 | <i>Greater Horseshoe unlikely (though now found at Stiperstones 2019)</i> |
| (Unidentified) | 244 | <i>Many of these were thought to be Noctule</i> |
| Total | 500 calls | |

THE ROW- BATCH VALLEY

24/25:7:2019 21:48-05:00 Fine 52°53'16.21N 02°47'57.53W 193m

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-----|---|
| Barbastelle | 002 | |
| <i>Bechstein's</i> | 002 | <i>Not recorded recently in Shropshire, but in Herefordshire</i> |
| Daubenton's | 002 | |
| Whiskered | 003 | |
| <i>Leisler's</i> | 002 | <i>Probably Noctule, but Leisler's have been recorded in North Shropshire</i> |
| Noctule | 094 | |
| <i>Nathusius' Pipistrelle</i> | 019 | <i>Likely Common Pipistrelle</i> |
| Common Pipistrelle | 303 | |

| | | |
|---------------------|------------------|--|
| Soprano Pipistrelle | 010 | |
| Brown Long-eared | 024 | |
| Grey Long-eared | 002 | <i>Not recorded in Shropshire - probably Brown Long-eared.</i> |
| Total | 463 calls | |

FARM LANE WEST

7:7:2019 **21:58-** **Fine** 52*33'11.30N 2*47'51.03W 183m

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Daubenton's | 01 | |
| Noctule | 08 | |
| <i>Nathusius' Pipistrelle</i> | 05 | <i>Likely Common Pipistrelle</i> |
| Common Pipistrelle | 13 | |
| Soprano Pipistrelle | 01 | |
| Brown Long-eared | 05 | |
| Total | 29 calls | |

HEIGHWAYS LANE

15 5 19/15 6 19 (overnight) **Fine** 52*33'07.35N 2*47'44.41W 182m

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| Barbastelle | 01 | |
| Daubenton's | 02 | |
| Natterer's | 01 | |
| Noctule | 05 | |
| <i>Leisler's</i> | 02 | <i>Probably Noctule, but Leisler's have been recorded in North Shropshire</i> |
| Common Pipistrelle | 07 | |
| Soprano Pipistrelle | 06 | |
| <i>Nathusius' Pipistrelle</i> | 03 | <i>Likely Common Pipistrelle</i> |
| Brown Long-eared | 01 | |
| Grey Long-eared | 01 | <i>Not recorded in Shropshire - probably Brown Long-eared.</i> |
| Total | 29 calls | |

DIRTY LANE ALL STRETTON

03/04.07.2019 (09.56- 04.00) fine 52*33'14.51N 2*47'36.18W 181m

| | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|--|
| Whiskered | 055 | |
| Brandt's | | 042 |
| Daubenton's | 012 | |
| Natterers | 004 | |
| <i>Bechstein's</i> | 001 | <i>Not recorded recently in Shropshire</i> |
| <i>Alcathoe</i> | 001 | <i>Not recorded in Shropshire</i> |
| Noctule | 008 | |
| Common Pipistrelle | 149 | |
| Soprano Pipistrelle | 034 | |
| <i>Nathusius' Pipistrelle</i> | 005 | <i>Likely Common Pipistrelle</i> |
| Brown Long eared | 002 | |
| Grey Long eared | 001 | <i>Probably Brown Long-eared.</i> |
| Total | 314 calls | |



Above: Common Pipistrelle

FARM LANE CENTRAL

20-21:7:2019 10:22- 7:10 52*33'06.86N 2*47'42.38W 182m

| | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|---|
| Leisler's | 01 | <i>Probably Noctule, but Leisler's have been recorded in North Shropshire</i> |
| Noctule | 06 | |
| Nathusius' Pipistrelle | 06 | <i>Likely Common Pipistrelle</i> |
| Common Pipistrelle | 42 | |
| Soprano Pipistrelle | 02 | |
| Total | 57 calls | |

FARM LANE EAST

12/13:07:2019 21.37-04.41 overcast 52*33'05.07N 2*47'34.05W 181m

| | | |
|------------------------|------------------|--|
| Serotine | 001 | <i>More likely a Noctule</i> |
| Bechstein's | 001 | <i>Not recorded recently in Shropshire, but in Herefordshire</i> |
| Alcathoe | 001 | <i>Rare, in SE England only</i> |
| Whiskered | 001 | |
| Daubenton's | 003 | |
| Noctule | 019 | |
| Common Pipistrelle | 093 | |
| Soprano Pipistrelle | 009 | |
| Nathusius' Pipistrelle | 010 | <i>Likely Common Pipistrelle</i> |
| Brown Long-eared | 002 | |
| Grey Long-eared | 002 | <i>Probably Brown Long-eared</i> |
| Total | 142 calls | |



Above: Brown Long-eared bat

ROWLEY

07-08/10/2019 cold 8*C drizzly 52*33'08.47N 2*48'06.05W 208m

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|---|
| Noctule | 8 | |
| Daubenton's | 3 | |
| Whiskered | 1 | |
| Common Pipistrelle | 48 | |
| Soprano Pipistrelle | 10 | |
| Brown Long-eared | 6 | |
| Grey Long-eared | 1 | <i>Not recorded in Shropshire - probably Brown Long-eared</i> |
| Total | 77 calls | |
| Earliest call Noctule 18.57 | | Latest call Common Pipistrelle 07.05 |

(Old record of large colony in roof -no details. Planned development of demolition and 6 luxury homes built.)

LEEBOTWOOD COUND BROOK

26 6 2019 (Overnight) fine 52*34'44.63N 2*46'41.02W 144m

| | | |
|--------------------|----|--|
| Noctule | 33 | |
| Barbastelle | 03 | |
| Bechstein's | 01 | <i>Not recorded recently in Shropshire, but in Herefordshire</i> |
| Natterers | 01 | |
| Whiskered | 03 | |
| Serotine | 03 | <i>More likely a Noctule</i> |
| Common Pipistrelle | 05 | |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>Nathusius' Pipistrelle</i> | 01 | <i>Likely Common Pipistrelle</i> |
| Soprano Pipistrelle | 02 | |
| Brown Long-eared | 01 | <i>Colony in house nearby</i> |
| Total | 53 calls | |

GULLEY GREEN

13 5 19 21:21-22:37 **fine** 52*33'33.72N 2*45'30.91W 221m

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Noctule | 03 | |
| <i>Nathusius' Pipistrelle</i> | 02 | <i>Likely Common Pipistrelle</i> |
| Common Pipistrelle | 19 | |
| Soprano Pipistrelle | 13 | |
| Whiskered | 04 | |
| Natterers | 02 | |
| Total | 43 calls | |

COMLEY QUARRY

14 5 19 52*33'48.36N 2*45'30.91W 221m

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| Pipistrelle Common | 20 |
| Total | 20 calls |

STOP PRESS!

Greater Horseshoe Bat

Was recorded from Shropshire for the first time last year - roosting in the mine workings at Stiperstones. The **Lesser Horseshoe** is rarish in the county, with one small colony in Church Stretton.





3. Treasurers report for the year ending 31st January 2020

Balance sheet

| Income | | Expenditure | |
|------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------|-----------|
| Carry forward from last year | 1,256.01 | Village Hall AGM 2019 | 35.00 |
| | | Methodist Hall Curlews | 24.00 |
| AGM donations 2019 | 35.00 | Methodist Hall Curlews (half) | 12.00 |
| | | Website fee one tenth share | 12.00 |
| | | Village Hall AGM 2020 | 35.00 |
| | | Balance in Bank 31.01.20 | 1,173.01 |
| | ----- | | ----- |
| | £ 1,291.01 | | £1,291.01 |
| | ----- | | ----- |

| Monies held as follows :- | 31.01.20 | 31.01.19 |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Wetlands Project | 552.21 | 552.21 |
| Tree Planting Project | .18 | .18 |
| Undedicated funds | 620.62 | 703.62 |
| | ----- | ----- |
| | £1,173.01 | £1,256.01 |
| | ----- | ----- |

L W Priestley
Treasurer

4. Acknowledgements

Thanks to all those members of SACWG and the public who supported the full range surveys and activities this year. Printing and copying were provided by the National Trust.