Three Parishes

(Weston Rhyn, St. Martin's & Gobowen)

Community Wildlife Group

Bird Survey Results 2019

CONTENTS

Three Parishes Community Wildlife Group
covering the parishes of
St Martins, Weston Rhyn and Selattyn & Gobowen

The Group was established in November 2016, with objectives that include actively promoting conservation, encouraging local interest in wildlife, pursuing original research and making findings available to legitimate conservation organisations

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.

One of the aims of the Group, when established, was therefore to involve local people in surveying the area for Lapwing and Curlew, to see if the populations had continued to fall here following the Bird Atlas surveys carried out in 2008-13.

The Group meeting in March 2017 was devoted to a presentation on the methodology and results of similar surveys carried out by Community Wildlife groups in the Shropshire Hills since 2004, and the organisation of a similar survey in the Three Parishes area.

An Introductory leaflet, outlining the reasons for the survey and how it would be carried out, with an appeal for volunteers and publicising the meeting, was sent out by email to all members of the Group. Posters were put up in all three parishes, notices were included in all three parish magazines, and a press release was also sent out. The meeting was well attended, by 26 people, most of whom agreed to help. Several other people, who were unable to come to the meeting, also volunteered to help.

The survey was successfully carried out in 2017, and the whole process was repeated again in 2018 and 2019. In 2019, 21 participants surveyed all except five of the 28 survey squares. This report presents the results.

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).

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
- Reed Bunting
- Corn Bunting

This was the third 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 key 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, and an additional area to the east with suitable habitat for both species, was divided up into 28 tetrads (2x2 kilometre squares, each made up of four of the one-kilometre squares shown on Ordnance Survey maps). A map showing these tetrads, and the reference code, is attached (Appendix 1).

People who agreed to help were allocated a square / tetrad, and requested to survey it once during each of three specified two week periods, the first around 1 April, the second around 1May and the third around 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 most of 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 the 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.

A training meeting was held for those that wanted one, on Sunday 24 March, at Pen-yr-Estyn, near Queens Head in the Tanat to Perry CWG area, and around Holly Banks SWT

reserve in the Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence CWG area. About three participants attended, and were treated to observations of about several feeding Lapwing, and the call of a Curlew. Two other participants attended an evening training session at Holly Banks in early April.

Members decided that a formal feedback meeting to consider results from the first two surveys was unnecessary, but an informal get-together was arranged for 17th July. About 10 people attended, and the meeting was welcomed as a way of giving immediate feedback that surveyors work was appreciated.

Survey work was carried out in all except five of the 28 tetrads, and members spent over 200 hours on it. This represents an excellent effort.

Many surveyors, and other local people, sent in casual records (observations in their survey squares when not actually doing the survey, or in other parts of their area at any time) of Lapwing, Curlew, Kestrel and Red Kite. Such records are extremely useful, as they often include a higher number of birds than seen on the surveys, and they help distinguish between different territories.

Note that some records, of birds heard calling from an unknown position, or seen only in flight with origin or landing place unknown, or believed to be post-breeding flocks or passing through, are not shown on the species maps showing the records received, because they are not helpful in establishing the territories of breeding pairs (the aim of the survey). However, these records are included in the count of records in each tetrad shown in Appendix 2, for completeness. Note also that records listed in Appendix 2 are attributed to the square surveyor, although the survey map has sometimes shown the bird(s) in an adjacent square, which is where they are shown on the maps in this report.

The methodology requires observations of a pair together, or a single bird on two of the three surveys, to confirm a territory. However, Curlews in particular 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 a pair nesting close to the corner of a tetrad might also be recorded in up to three adjacent tetrads, in either different survey periods, or by different surveyors. Some squares were surveyed by more than one observer. 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 estimate the total number of breeding pairs or territories, and the approximate location of the centre of each territory (i.e. the nest site). The rules of the methodology (the territory mapping method) requires the analysis to produce the lowest population estimate consistent with the records.

Curlew

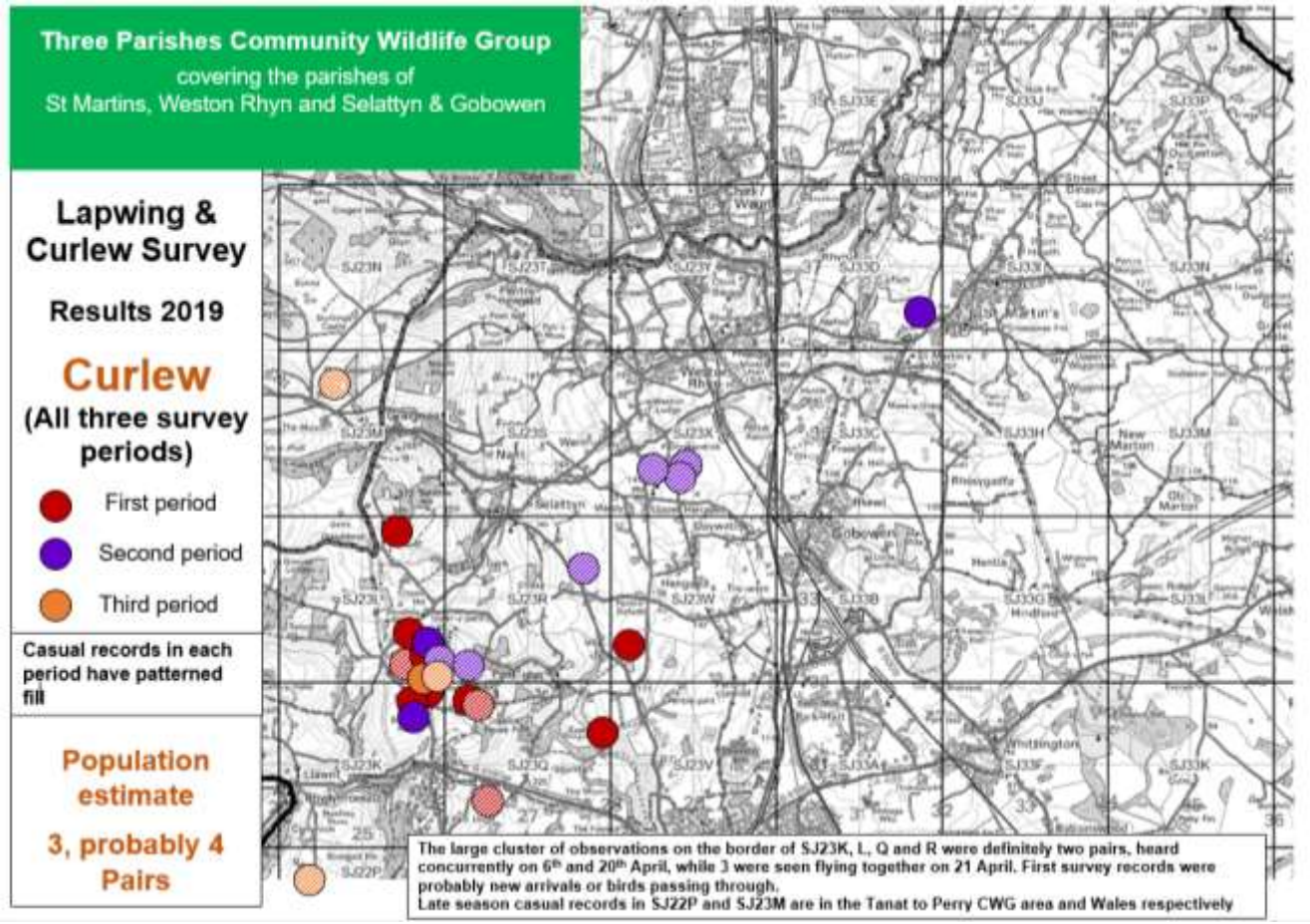
The map on page 4 shows the location of Curlews seen during the surveys, and summarises the estimated number and location of Curlew territories in the area, in this case definitely 3 pairs, probably 4.

In 2017, local residents reported Curlew in the area north of Whittington, but details could not be obtained. This area was surveyed more thoroughly in 2018 and probably two territories were located there, in SJ33C and SJ33L. However, it is possible that both records were of one pair, or the one seen on the first survey was passing through. In 2017 one Curlew was heard in the early season, at a location mid-way between the two 2018 records. In 2019, there was a record of a single Curlew a bit further north, at the southern end of SJ33D.

There was a cluster of records in SJ23L and the adjacent squares in 2017, and even more in 2018. These clusters were estimated at two pairs in both years, but there was no definite evidence that more than one pair was present. However, this evidence was obtained in 2019, as two were heard concurrently on 6th and 20th April, while 3 were seen flying together on 21 April. Curlews are generally site faithful, using the same field(s) for many years.

Curlews have been found in SJ23X in both previous years as well, including a pair seen feeding in 2017, but they were not seen or heard regularly in 2019 either by a local resident or the farmer, so this pair either nested elsewhere, or failed early.

Scattered first survey period records were probably new arrivals or birds passing through. Late season casual records in SJ22P and SJ23M are in the Tanat to Perry CWG area and Wales respectively. A single Curlew was seen three times in SJ23K in July, but most had left the area by then.



From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Curlew population in the area is definitely 3 pairs, probably 4.

The survey should be repeated in 2020, and subsequent years, to clarify the number of pairs actually present, and the location of nest sites and foraging areas, and work towards regular monitoring to establish a population trend.

Experience of undertaking this type of survey with more long-standing Community Wildlife Groups suggests that, in future years, evidence will be found to confirm that there are 4 pairs or more.

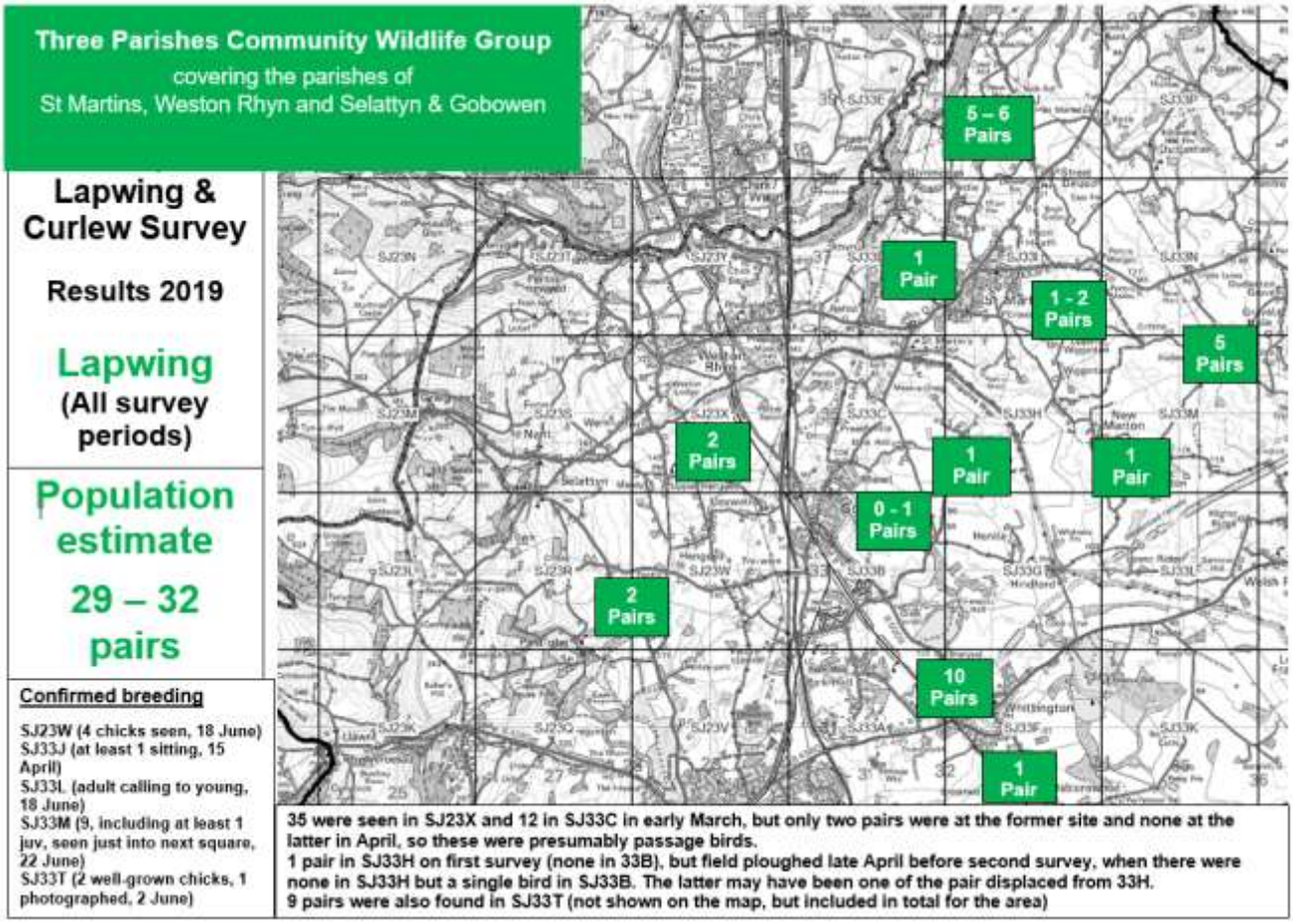
Over 150 adult Curlews have been colour-ringed since 2016, mainly at Dolydd Hafren Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust Reserve on the River Severn near Welshpool during March, when they are passing through on their way to their breeding sites. Each of these Curlews is individually identified by the two letters on the yellow ring on the left leg. Several of them

have been found at breeding sites elsewhere in Shropshire, and seen at the nearby Wood Lane Nature Reserve. Surveyors in this area were asked to check any Curlews that were seen on the ground at breeding sites for rings, but none were.

Lapwing

The location of Lapwings found during the surveys is shown below.

In 2017, local residents reported Lapwing in SJ33F, which may have nested in the vicinity of Fernhill Hall (SJ33G). This area was surveyed more thoroughly in 2018, and two small colonies were found, one of 4-5 pairs and another of two pairs.



In 2019, the number and distribution of pairs was similar to that found in 2018.

Lapwings are not site faithful. They need bare earth or short vegetation for a nest site, and usually lay their first clutch in late March or early April. If they lose this clutch, usually due to either agricultural operations or predation, they will probably re-lay. However, if the field with the nest has become unsuitable (probably because the crop has grown too tall, or stock have moved onto the field, or the food supply has gone because the field has dried out) they will have to move to a new nest site, perhaps some distance away. The notes below the Lapwing map refer to several pairs that were dislodged from their first breeding site by agricultural operations, and the assessment that has been made to try and avoid double-counting.

If the eggs hatch, the adults usually move the chicks to good feeding sites, perhaps some distance from the nest. If all breeding attempts fail, the adults start to form post-breeding flocks, and might move out of the area. Thus fewer Lapwings will be seen on the third survey, and those that are might have already been counted in a different tetrad in the first two surveys.

Numbers seen on the third survey cannot therefore be reliably added to the population estimate from the first two surveys, but evidence of confirmed breeding might be obtained. Such evidence is also noted on the map for three tetrads.

There was no evidence of fledged young from the surveys, but the dates for the third survey would probably have been too soon to find them.

Breeding was confirmed in five tetrads: SJ23W (4 chicks seen, 18 June); SJ33J (at least 1 sitting, 15 April); SJ33L (adult calling to young, 18 June); SJ33M (9, including at least 1 juv., seen just into next square, 22 June) and SJ33T (2 well-grown chicks, 1 in the photograph, 2 June).

Coverage in 2019 what not quite so good as 2018, but both these years were better than 2017, and some surveyors benefitted from knowledge of their square gained last year.

From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Lapwing population in the area is 29 - 32 pairs, similar to the 24 -30 pairs found last year, but more than the 19 – 22 pairs found in 2017.

Several small flocks of Lapwings were located at pools in and near the area in late June, and July. They form post-breeding flocks at suitable feeding sites, initially of failed breeders then they are joined by successful breeders and their juveniles, then when conditions become unsuitable for the flock to feed there (i.e. the crops grow, and / or the wet ground dries out) they move on to somewhere better. The SWT reserve at Wood Lane is an ideal location for such local flocks to gather.

Unfortunately, two of the best pools were drained by the landowner in the autumn. It is not surprising that the population is declining so quickly when good habitat is destroyed.

Anecdotal 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.

Kestrel

The location of Kestrels seen during the surveys is shown the map below.

Kestrels forage up to about 1.5 kilometres from their nest site, so if there are clusters of dots they would probably be different observations of the same individuals. However, there were no such clusters in 2019. In 2018, there was evidence for around six pairs. Of the three dots on the 2019 map, two of them correspond with observations in 2018. There were no corresponding observations with that in SJ33C, which may have been one of the pair seen in SJ23W foraging some way from its usual haunts. No nest sites have been found in the area.

Kestrels have also declined considerably in recent years, and the Shropshire Ringing and Raptor Groups are launching a nest box scheme to help improve breeding success, and try and find out the reasons for the decline; 2019 was a bad year for Kestrels everywhere, and hopefully more will be found in 2020.

Other Target Species

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

Table 1. Other Target Species - Summary

Tetrad	Maximum Number of Each Species Recorded								
	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Dipper	Swift (sites)	Dunnock	Linnet	Bull-finch	Yellow-hammer
SJ23 K						1			
SJ23 L			1						
SJ23 Q						1			
SJ23 R			2			6		2	
SJ23 S						1			
SJ23 T				2	2				1
SJ23 V			1			2	3		2
SJ23 W	(None of these species recorded)								
SJ23 X						3			
SJ23 Y	(Square not surveyed)								
SJ33 A	(Square not surveyed)								
SJ33 B	(None of these species recorded)								
SJ33 C						1			
SJ33 D	1		7			9		2	
SJ33 F									
SJ33 G						2			
SJ33 H		1				11	2	4	
SJ33 I			4						
SJ33 J						12	7		
SJ33 K	(Square not surveyed)								
SJ33 L	(None of these species recorded)								
SJ33 M	(None of these species recorded)								
SJ33 N	(None of these species recorded)								
SJ33 N	(None of these species recorded)								
SJ33 P	(Square not surveyed)								
SJ33 Q	(None of these species recorded)								
SJ33 R	(None of these species recorded)								
SJ33 S	(None of these species recorded)								
SJ33 T	(None of these species recorded)								
Total	1	1	15	2	2	49	12	8	3

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, even if they did not map all target species, participants were requested to make an effort to record Kestrels, and the results are shown above.

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.

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.

Most species were found only in small numbers.

Ten species were not recorded at all on the surveys: Grey Partridge, Snipe, Barn Owl, Meadow Pipit, Cuckoo, Yellow Wagtail, Stonechat, Spotted Flycatcher, Tree Sparrow and Reed Bunting
Another seven species were recorded in one tetrad only: Kestrel (one in SJ33D), Red Kite (one in SJ33h), Dipper (two in SJ23T), Swift (nest sites - 2 in SJ23T) and Wheatear (one in SJ33H)

Red Kite was seen in one tetrad, compared to three last year and two in 2017, and the sightings were the first time some observers have seen them in the area, reflecting the rapid spread of Kites in recent years. The first successful breeding in Shropshire for 130 years occurred as recently as 2006, but there are 40 known pairs now, so it is likely that breeding will become a regular occurrence in the near future.

Grey Partridge has largely disappeared from Shropshire, but there was a casual record of two in SJ23L in late April or early June.

The absence of Cuckoo was a surprise, in spite of its increasing rarity, although there was a casual record of one heard three times in SJ23Q in early May. 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. It was added to the UK Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern in 2009. The Swift colony at Pentre (SJ23T) was welcome news, as the Swift population in the UK and in England has declined by 53% over the same period.

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.

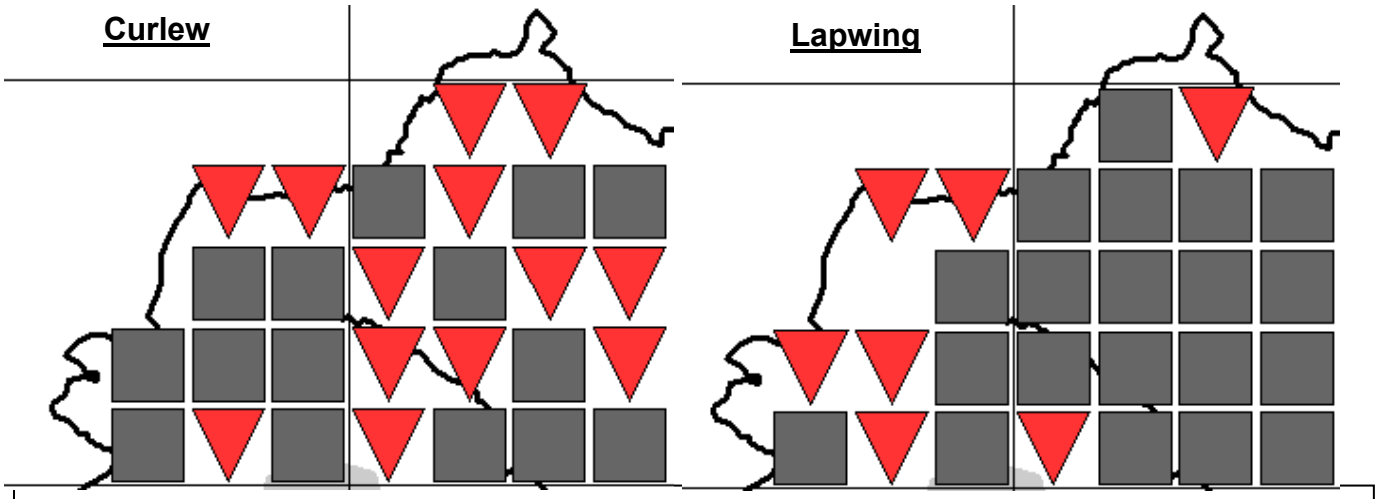
Shropshire Ornithological Society undertook six years fieldwork between 1985 and 1990, and covered all 870 tetrads in the County. The results were published in *An Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Shropshire* in 1992. The survey was repeated in 2008-13, with similar

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 Three Parishes area are shown below. The black line round the left and top of each map is the border with Wales, and then Cheshire. The grid lines enclose the 10km squares SJ23 and SJ33 on the Ordnance Survey National Grid, and each symbol represents a tetrad (2x2km square on the OS grid, 25 tetrads in each 10km square). The background pale grey shape at the bottom of the map, at the intersection of the horizontal and vertical grid lines, is the northern part of Oswestry.

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 will be seen that the range of both species has declined substantially in this area in only 20-25 years.

Breeding Distribution Change Maps for the Three Parishes area (1985-90 to 2008-13)



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.

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 Three Parishes, 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 Three Parishes 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 29 tetrads covered by the survey, and, on the right, the results of the survey in the Three Parishes as shown on the maps on pages 4 and 5. Each dot represents at least one observation during the Atlas period, or during the 2017 survey, in the appropriate tetrad.

- Large dot = Confirmed Breeding (Bird seen sitting on nest, or chicks seen)
- Middle dot = Probable Breeding (Pair or display seen)
- Small dot = Seen or heard in suitable habitat
- No dot = Not found

It must be stressed that the Atlas map includes survey work over six years, not one, 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 2017 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.

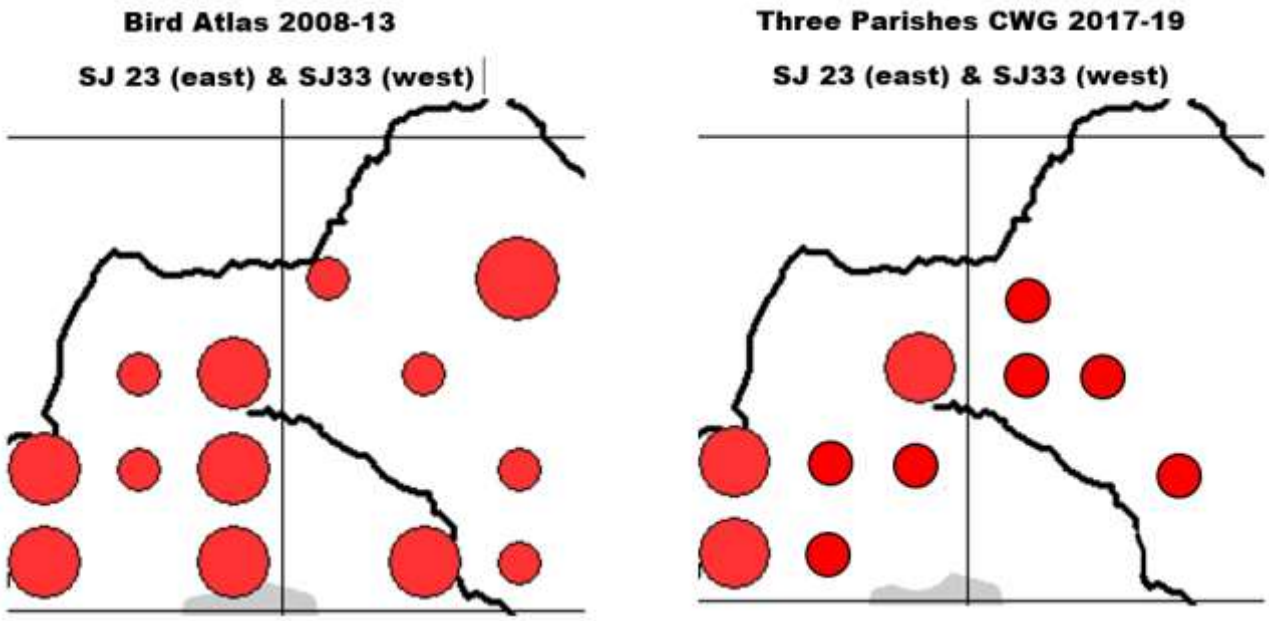
However, the two target species are conspicuous and noisy, so most will not have been overlooked, and these maps suggest strongly that the decline of both species has continued since the Atlas started in this area too.

Curlew

Three Parishes (Weston Rhyn, St.Martin's and Gobowen) Community Wildlife Group

Curlew

Comparison between Bird Atlas 2008-13 (left) and CWG survey 2017-19

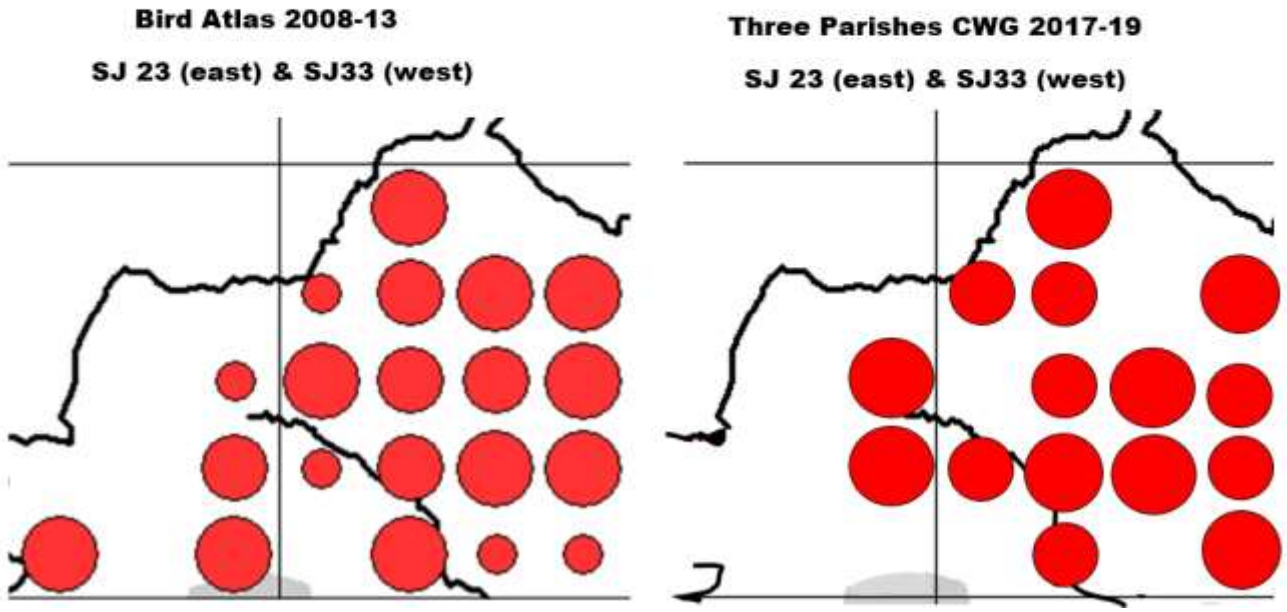


Lapwing

Three Parishes (Weston Rhyn, St.Martin's and Gobowen) Community Wildlife Group

Lapwing

Comparison between Bird Atlas 2008-13 (left) and CWG survey 2017-19



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

The field where the concentration of Lapwing were found in 2017 in SJ23X had become ideal habitat, as a result of a blocked drain and planting of spring crops. The farmer was approached and requested to leave the drain as it was, and continue to plant spring crops, preferably spring barley, in future years. He agreed, but in 2018 cold, windy wet weather in spring affected grazing, so the wet area had become too overgrown, and delayed the field preparation, so it was not as suitable. Similarly, the weather in 2019 affected field preparation, and it was grazed by cattle. Cows also grazed a winter crop on the large field nearby in the early part of the breeding season, but it was eventually planted with oats, very late because of the wet weather. Cattle grazing on wet pasture does create good conditions for Lapwing nests, and two pairs were present.

The same farmer owned another field, which included an overgrown scrape, and two overgrown ponds, and where silage was grown in 2017. He agreed to clear the vegetation from the scrape and ponds, create muddy margins, and plant spring barley rather than silage, in future years. This will create substantially more Lapwing habitat, fairly close to the hotspot described in the previous paragraph.

The resulting over-winter stubbles from the spring crops should also benefit a whole range of other seed eating farmland birds that are in serious decline.

Natural England made a one-off grant to pay for the scrub removal and re-profiling of the pond and scrapes, and the work was carried out early in 2018. The photo shows the site just after the work was completed. It produced an immediate result – a Lapwing nest with eggs was found nearby. However, the removal of the willow scrub was not completed properly, and the scrub is regrowing. The matter has been referred back to Natural England, and satisfactory completion of the work is still awaited.

A leaflet about the work of the Wildlife Group and the results of the surveys has been distributed to some farmers in the area, encouraging them to take the habitat needs of Lapwing and Curlew into account in their farm management, tell us about the birds that nest on their land, and, if appropriate work to secure financial support for creating and managing Lapwing and Curlew habitat through natural England's Countryside Stewardship agri-environment scheme.

The chair of the community Wildlife Group, the Bird Survey organiser, and some of the surveyors have visited individual farmers, or made contact with them during survey work. Contact with farmers is very important, and will be maintained.

Lessons Learnt, to be Applied in 2020

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 appropriate agri-environment schemes, when available, utilising the appropriate options to maintain and enhance the habitat for these priority species

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.

Acknowledgements

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

Tony Bird
Jenny Bromage
Julie Clark
Roy Davis
Steve Drake
Neil Graham
Bill Harding
Rachel Harding
Elaine Jones
Charles Kerr
Tom Lerwill
Julian Mason
Hannah Peel
John & Helen Shackell
Cath Stevens
Henry Thomas
Paul Thomas
Celia Todd
Kit Twigg
Sue Worsfold

Special thanks to Celia Todd, who organised the meetings, distributed information to members, co-ordinated the survey work, collected and chased up the survey maps, and collated the large number of Curlew records from the four tetrads near the Old Racecourse.

Kit Twigg visited several pools that supported breeding Lapwing, and supplemented the records with extensive notes.

Polly Smith (Chair of the Group), Celia Todd and Kit Twigg also visited or contacted individual farmers to promote the Group's work, and conservation of Lapwings.

Thanks also to:-

- Jonathan Groom, then Shropshire Council Biodiversity Data Officer, who provided the survey maps.
- Robin Gilbert, of Natural England, for following up the Group's survey results and arranging funding for the clearance of willow scrub and re-profiling of the scape and pond (see p.11).
- Celia Todd, for the photos of Lapwing and Curlew on the cover, and the Lapwing chick on p.6.

Summary 2019

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

All except five of the 28 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.

Coverage was not quite as thorough in 2019 as 2018, but it was better than the first year, 2017. More Lapwings were found (an estimated 29 – 32 breeding pairs, compared with 24 - 30 pairs in 2018 and 10 – 13 pairs in 2017), together with at least 3, probably 4, pairs of Curlew (the same as both previous years).

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. More participants are needed, so we hope to recruit new members.

The Group's meeting on Thursday 19th March 2020 at The Pavilion, St Martins Road, Gobowen, Oswestry SY10 7GA will receive a presentation on the results from 2019, and plan the 2020 survey.

Everyone interested in birds is welcome to participate.

Further Information

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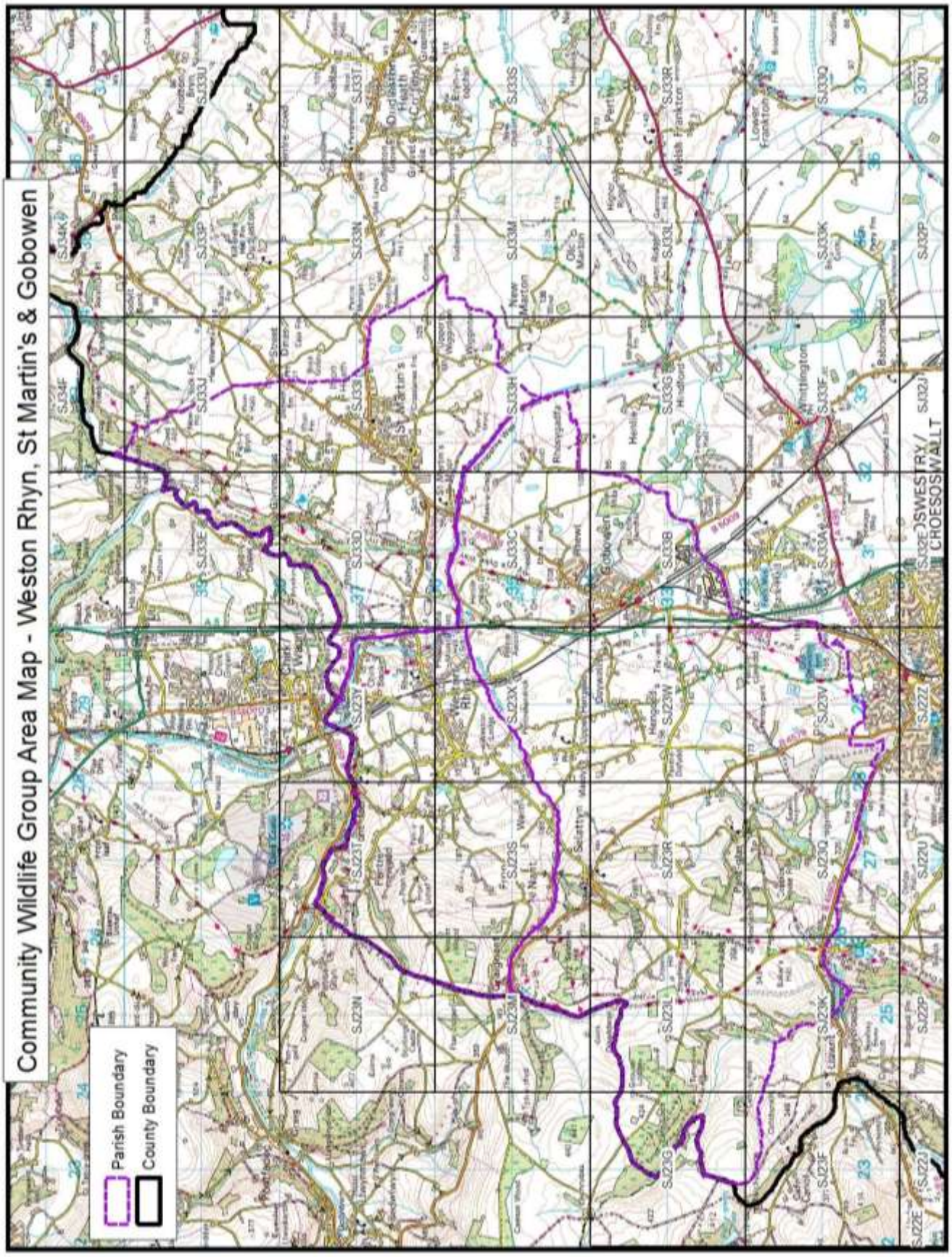
- Celia Todd celia.todd@btinternet.com 01691 652181

Further copies of this report can be obtained from Leo Smith

Leo Smith
February 2020

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



Appendix 2 Detailed Survey Results

First survey period (23 March - 7 April)

Tetrad		Surveyor	Time		Number of Each Species Recorded											
			Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Dipper	Swift (sites)	Dunnock	Wheat-ear	Linnet	Bull-finch	Yellow-hammer
SJ23	K	Henry Thomas	6	30		3						1				
SJ23	K	Cath Stevens		40		2										
SJ23	L	Jenny Bromage	2	35		5										
SJ23	Q	Sue & Tony Bird	3	15								1				
SJ23	Q	Jenny Bromage	3	30		1										
SJ23	R	Celia Todd	3	0								6			1	
SJ23	S	Sue & Tony Bird	2	30								1				
SJ23	T	Tom Lerwill	3	0						2						
SJ23	V	Charles Kerr	2	45		1			1			2				2
SJ23	W	Julie Clark	3	0	4	2										
SJ23	X	Hannah Peel	3	0								3				
SJ23	Y				Square not surveyed											
SJ33	A				Square not surveyed											
SJ33	B	Bill Harding			No target species recorded											
SJ33	C	Paul Thomas	5	45								1				
SJ33	D	Kit Twigg	4	35	2				5			9				
SJ33	F	Steve Drake	3	15	22											
SJ33	G	Celia Todd	3	0								2				
SJ33	H	Sue Worsfold	3	30	No target species recorded											
SJ33	H	Kit Twigg	4	30	1			1				11				
SJ33	I	Neil Graham			Survey not undertaken											
SJ33	J	Kit Twigg	4	25	9							12				
SJ33	K				Square not surveyed											
SJ33	L	Julie Clark	4	0	No target species recorded											
SJ33	M	Julian Mason	3	0	No target species recorded											
SJ33	N	Rachel Harding			Survey not undertaken											
SJ33	N	Roy Davis	3	40	1											
SJ33	P															
SJ33	Q	John & Helen Shackell	4	30	1											
SJ33	R	Julian Mason	2	40	No target species recorded											
SJ33	S	Julian Mason	2	35	No target species recorded											
SJ33	T				Square not surveyed											
			83	10	40	14	0	1	6	2	0	49	0	0	1	2

Second survey period (20 April - 5 May)

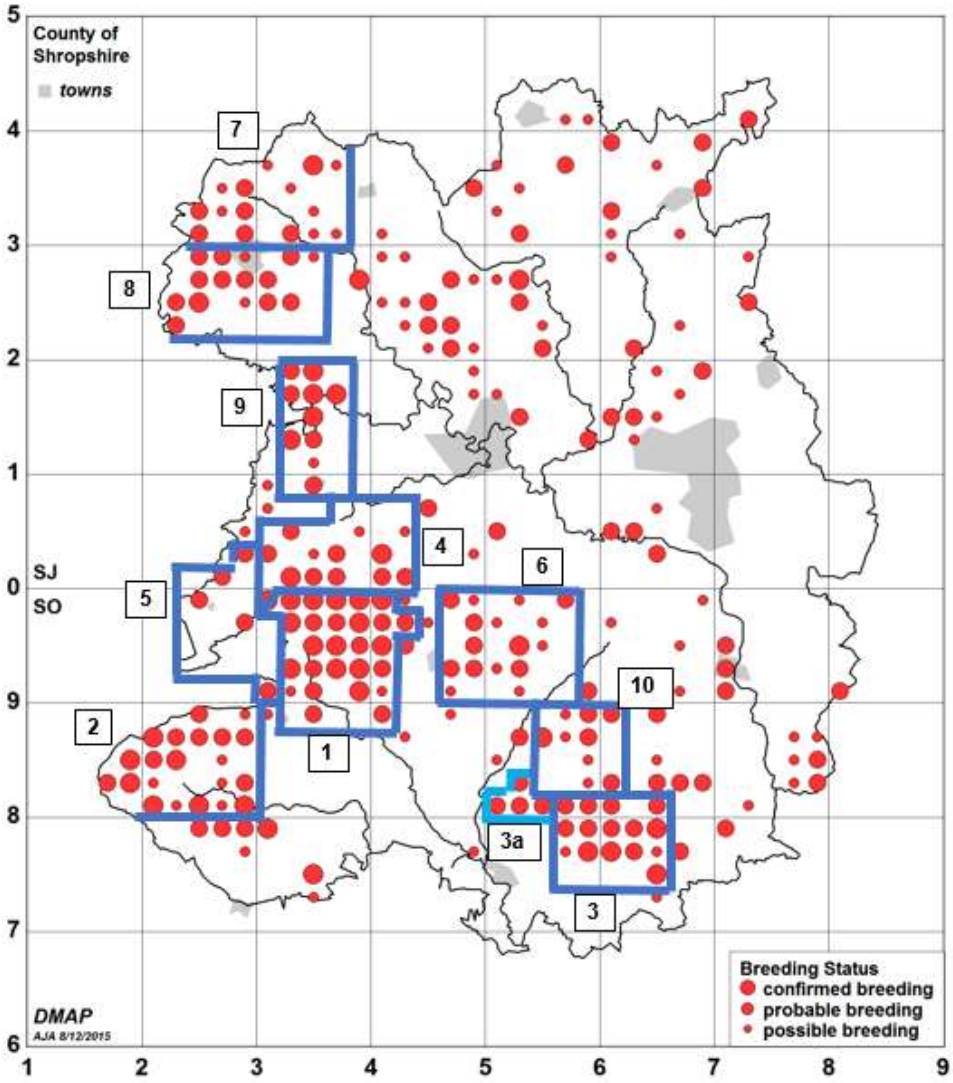
Tetrad		Surveyor	Time		Number of Each Species Recorded											
			Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Dipper	Swift (sites)	Dunnock	Wheatear	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer
SJ23	K	Henry Thomas	2	0		2										
SJ23	K	Cath Stevens			Survey not undertaken											
SJ23	L	Jenny Bromage	2	45					1							
SJ23	Q	Tony Bird	1	30	No target species seen or heard											
SJ23	Q	Jenny Bromage			Survey not undertaken											
SJ23	R	Celia Todd	2	0		3			2							
SJ23	S	Sue Bird	2	30	1							1				
SJ23	T	Tom Lerwill	3	0						2						1
SJ23	V	Charles Kerr			No target species recorded											
SJ23	W	Julie Clark	4	15		1										
SJ23	X	Hannah Peel	1	0	No target species recorded											
SJ23	Y															
SJ33	A															
SJ33	B	Bill Harding	2	50	1											
SJ33	C	Paul Thomas	1	5	No target species recorded											
SJ33	D	Kit Twigg	4	20	1	1	1		7			7				
SJ33	F	Steve Drake	4	0	No target species recorded											
SJ33	G	Celia Todd	3	0	No target species recorded											
SJ33	H	Sue Worsfold			Survey not undertaken											
SJ33	H	Kit Twigg	3	45									1	2		
SJ33	I	Elaine Jones	3	30												
SJ33	J	Kit Twigg	3	25	11							6		7		
SJ33	K															
SJ33	L	Julie Clark	2	30	No target species recorded											
SJ33	M	Julian Mason	2	0	4											
SJ33	N	Rachel Harding	2	30	No target species recorded											
SJ33	N	Roy Davis	3	10	No target species seen or heard											
SJ33	P															
SJ33	Q	John & Helen Shackell	2	40	No target species recorded											
SJ33	R	Julian Mason	2	30	No target species recorded											
SJ33	S	Julian Mason	2	10	No target species recorded											
SJ33	T				Square not surveyed											
Total			62	25	18	7	1	0	10	2	0	14	1	9	0	1

Appendix 2 Detailed Survey Results (continued)

Third survey period (8 - 23 June)

Tetrad		Surveyor	Time		Number of Each Species Recorded											
			Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Dipper	Swift (sites)	Dunnock	Wheat-ear	Linnet	Bull-finch	Yellow-hammer
SJ23	K	Henry Thomas	2	0	Survey not undertaken											
SJ23	K	Cath Stevens	1	15		1										
SJ23	L	Jenny Bromage			Survey not undertaken											
SJ23	Q	Sue & Tony Bird	3	30	No target species seen or heard											
SJ23	Q	Jenny Bromage			Survey not undertaken											
SJ23	R	Celia Todd	2	0											2	
SJ23	S	Sue & Tony Bird	2	0	No target species seen or heard											
SJ23	T	Tom Lerwill	3	0						1	2					1
SJ23	V	Charles Kerr	1	40										3		1
SJ23	W	Julie Clark	3	0	6											
SJ23	X	Hannah Peel	1	30	No target species recorded											
SJ23	Y															
SJ33	A															
SJ33	B	Bill Harding	1	5	No target species recorded											
SJ33	C	Paul Thomas	1	0	No target species recorded											
SJ33	D	Kit Twigg	3	15					6			5			2	
SJ33	F	Steve Drake	3	0	No target species recorded											
SJ33	G	Celia Todd	3	0	No target species recorded											
SJ33	H	Sue Worsfold	3	0	No target species recorded											
SJ33	H	Kit Twigg	4	45								4			4	
SJ33	I	Elaine Jones	3	0					4							
SJ33	J	Kit Twigg	2	15	12							3		2		
SJ33	K															
SJ33	L	Julie Clark	3	10	1											
SJ33	M	Julian Mason	1	30	No target species recorded											
SJ33	N	Rachel Harding	2	30	No target species recorded											
SJ33	N	Roy Davis	2	45	2											
SJ33	P															
SJ33	Q	John & Helen Shackell			No target species recorded											
SJ33	R	Julian Mason	1	0	No target species recorded											
SJ33	S	Julian Mason	1	0	No target species recorded											
SJ33	T	Celia Todd	4	0	10											
Total			60	10	31	1	0	0	10	1	2	12	0	5	8	2

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