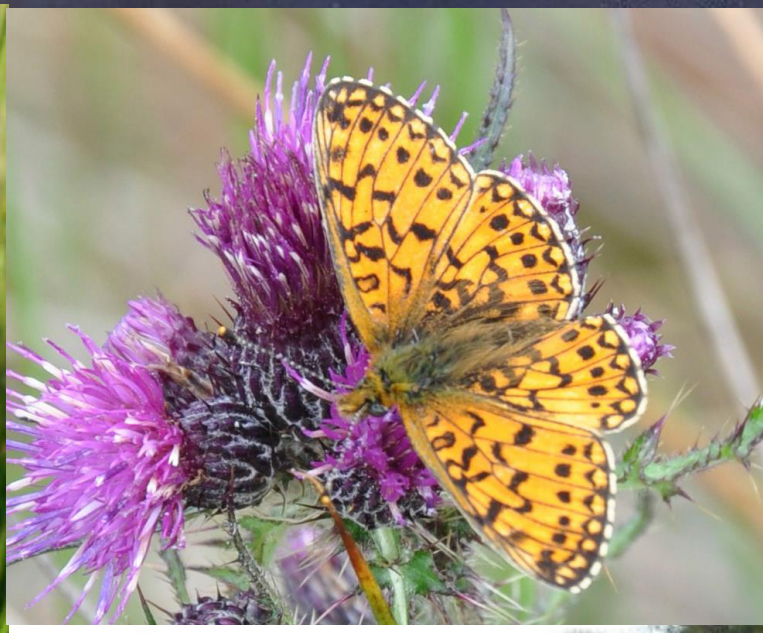
Upper Clun

Community Wildlife Group

Report 2017



Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group
Report 2017
Contents

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The Group will

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

AREA & MEMBERSHIP

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

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

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

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Role of the Committee is to

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

The membership, and details of meetings in 2017, are set out in the Annexe to the Report.

PUBLICITY

To help recruit and involve new members, the Group's activities have been well publicised in the area, through posters and press releases, and articles in the *Clun Chronicle.* The annual public meeting is well advertised, a recruiting leaflet is available in community centres and elsewhere, a

display is put up at the Newcastle Show, and occasional Bird, Plant and Butterfly events have been organised.

WEBSITE

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

CO-OPERATION WITH FARMERS, LANDOWNERS & OTHER ORGANISATIONS

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

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

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

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

ACTIVITIES & SURVEYS

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

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

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

Our area was initially divided into 31 squares, 2x2 kilometre squares on the Ordnance Survey National Grid. A map showing these squares has been included in previous Annual Reports. The Group recruited a local member to survey each of these squares for birds and/or plants each year, and well over 100 people have either undertaken surveys, or provided additional useful information, since 2007. However, since 2009, only the best sites have been selected for further survey work, and many of them do not fall into single squares, so this division of the area into squares is no longer important. The map of the area, divided up into these squares, can be viewed on the website.

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

It was hoped to organise Mammal surveys, following the invitation to the Shropshire Mammal Group to speak at the 2014 Annual Public Meeting. However, this has not proved possible, and it is hoped to find a volunteer to take this on.

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

COVERING OTHER TYPES OF WILDLIFE

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

FUNDING

Initially the Group was funded by the AONB's *Down to Earth* programme, and then its Sustainable Development Fund.

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

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

Grant Applications will be made when the opportunity arises.

CONSTITUTION

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

OTHER COMMUNITY WILDLIFE GROUPS

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

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

The Stiperstones – Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS), financed by the Heritage Lottery Fund, has supported the development of two new CWGs, covering the Rea Valley and Camlad Valley, since 2014.

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

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

THE BIRD GROUP

BIRD SURVEYS

Introduction

Since 2007 the Bird Group has monitored the population and distribution of Lapwing, Curlew, and other species of conservation interest. Early surveys highlighted the importance of 'wetland' areas retaining a more diverse flora, especially Soft Rush *Juncus effusus,* and such sites were given particular attention from 2010 onwards. Up to 2011 the Group attempted to survey all 31 tetrads (2x2 kilometre squares) in the Upper Clun, focusing increasingly on Curlew as Lapwings disappeared. However, as Curlew's range contracted and its population decreased, blanket coverage was replaced by more intensive fieldwork where it remained.

Geographic surveys are now supplemented by observations from a network of resident recorders in Curlew hotspots who are prompted by email to collect evidence of activity at key points in the breeding cycle, and members of the Wildlife Group are encouraged to send in all records of Lapwing or Curlew. Observers are kept informed by emailed progress reports.

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

Participation and Coverage

This year seven members carried out surveys of agreed geographic areas; 25 others, including resident recorders and 'casual' observers, contributed records by phone, email or personal contact, a total of 32 participants. One hundred and thirty-three Curlew observations were received, some representing serial activity, the greatest volume of records to date.

All 28 observers who undertook geographic surveys or continuous recording, or submitted nest box data, live within the survey area. Several are farmers, and many other farmers provided valuable information. The co-operation of landowners who allowed access to their land was crucial to this year's effort to locate active nests, and this is gratefully acknowledged

LAPWINGS

Fieldwork Results

Six Lapwing were recorded at a rushy field by the River Clun near Whitcott Keysett, but they were seen on one date only, #. The same field was also visited in 2015 and 2016. However, for five successive years Lapwings have visited the area only in passing, and in small numbers. Without significant improvements in habitat, grazing regimes, and the timing and sensitivity of agricultural operations, Lapwing is unlikely to recolonize the area.

Previous reports have included a map showing the approximate location of all breeding Lapwing found by the Group since 2007, together with the nests found previously in 2004 – 06 (Smith 2006). None were found in the area in 2009, 2011, or since 2013. This map can now be found on the Group’s website

Local Extinction?

The local breeding population declined by around a pair a year between 2004, when there were six, and 2010; only one pair has been found since, in 2012. No Lapwing is known to have fledged since 2008, when two pairs produced an unknown number; in the three previous years only two young had fledged. Since that does not fulfil the minimum requirement of about 0.7 young per pair per year to sustain a population, Lapwing appears to be extinct as a breeding species.

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

CURLEWS

Fieldwork Results

The 2017 Curlew surveys gathered more data than in any previous year. Residents in Curlew hotspots provided updates on activity in their areas, while more remote sites were surveyed regularly. Eight active territories were identified with a high degree of confidence; in one further case it was unclear whether there were two pairs close together, one of which failed early, or whether a single pair moved site early in the season.

Most nest sites were identified to within a field or two, and one nest was found. In one or two cases, a site was occupied, but the pair(s) either did not breed, or failed early. At all other sites observations indicated that eggs were laid and chicks hatched. The nest that was found was protected from trampling or predation by an electric fence. Four chicks hatched in early June, and parental activity was monitored to assess their progress. Defensive behaviour ceased about ten days after hatching. It is believed the young were predated.

No activity was recorded after mid-June at five of the other nest sites, or early July at the sixth, suggesting that no young fledged. In all cases predation was the most likely cause of failure; there was no evidence this year that any nests or young were lost as a result of agricultural operations. Predation at the nest stage did not appear to be an important cause of failure, this year at least: at most two nests might have failed in this way, but there is no evidence that any actually did.

Two adults breeding in the area had been colour-ringed as part of the LPS Curlew Recovery Project. One ring was read by enlarging the photograph on the left (letters HF on the yellow ring); the other could not be read, but confirmed that two different pairs of Curlew were occupying adjacent territories.

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

The distribution of territories in 2017 is shown in Map 1.

The rate of decline of the Curlew population appears to have slowed since 2010, following several years of steep decline. However, productivity in recent years was not sufficient to maintain, let alone rebuild, the population, and as no young fledged in 2017, the decline is set to continue.

The estimated population found each year since 2007 is shown in Figure 1.

Map 1. Approximate location of Curlew Territories 2017

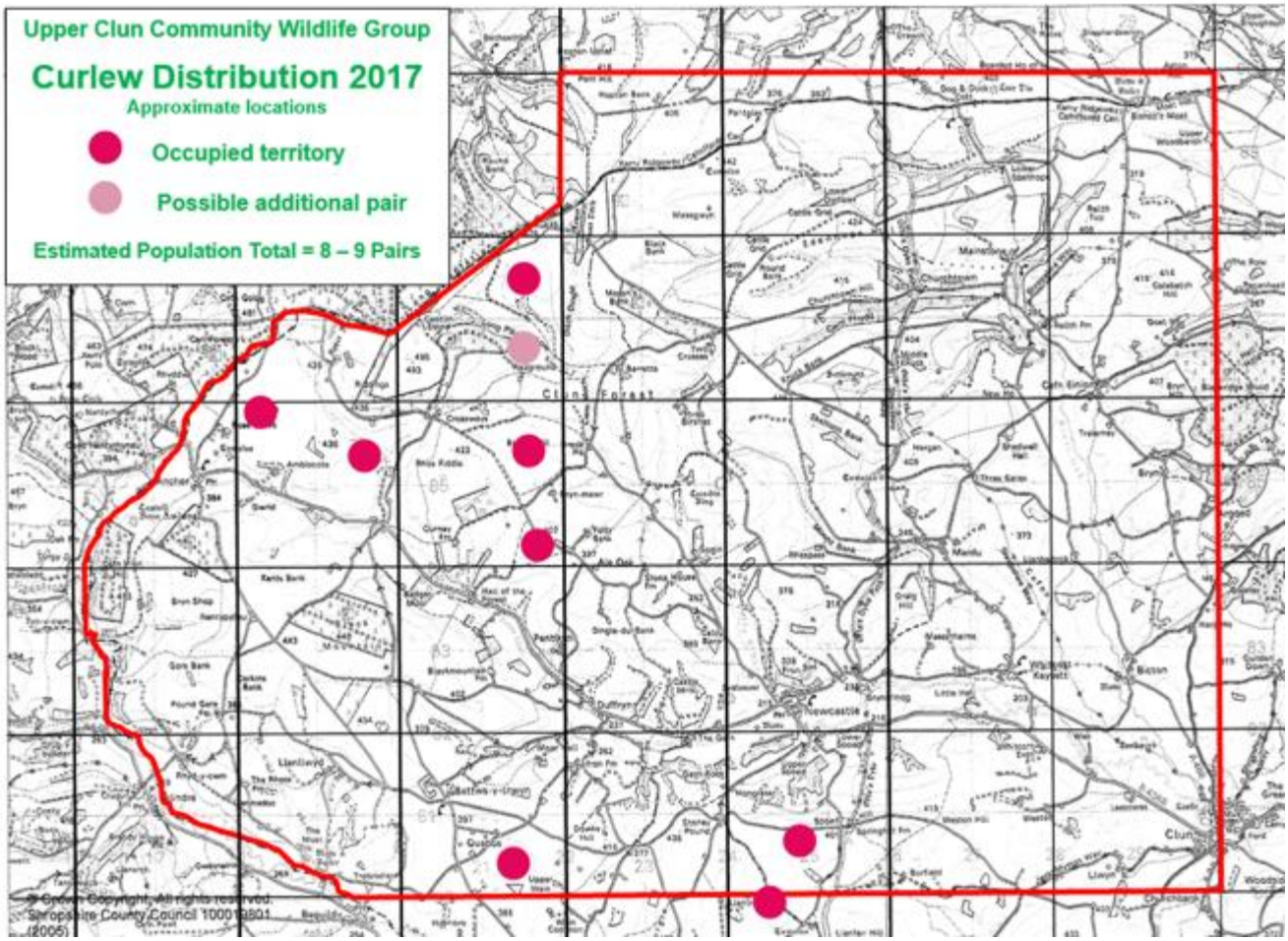
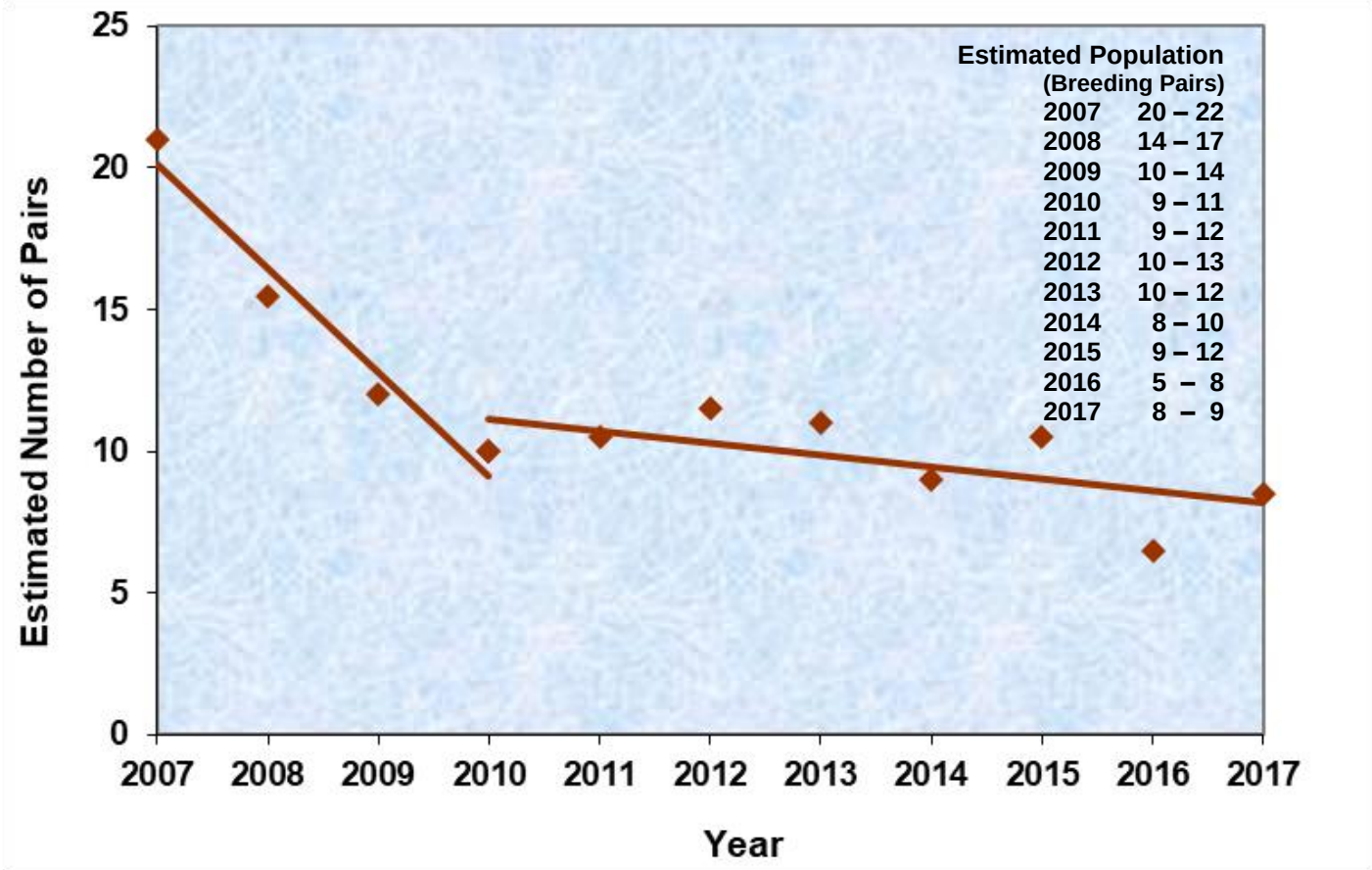


Figure 1. Decline of Curlew in the Upper Clun 2007 – 2017



Curlews are long-lived, and may return to their breeding territories for many years without producing any fledged young. Eventually the adults will die, and the breeding population will only be stable if there are enough young birds to replace them. Breeding success will fluctuate from year to year, and is likely to be better in years when wet weather delays grass cutting and other agricultural activity until after the Curlew breeding season, so any long term decline is unlikely to be steady – it will go in fits and starts.

Habitat Requirements and Population Decline

Curlews are ground-nesting birds, requiring rank vegetation as cover for the sitting bird and eggs. They nest on unimproved grassland and heather moorland, rushes or tussocks on rough grazing, or grass being grown for hay or silage, and feed on damp pasture and meadows with wet, boggy areas rich in invertebrates. Since they need all-round visibility to detect approaching predators, they are found only in open landscapes.

The local decline has been accompanied by a sharp contraction of what was already a very limited range in a short space of time. The last pair of Curlew nesting in the “lowlands” of the Upper Clun has been lost: they occupied a territory north-west of Clun, in the Unk valley, but they were last recorded there in 2010. The Curlew population appears now to be entirely confined to the very highest ground, with no known territory below around 375 metres.

In late 2015, Curlew, previously Amber-listed, was added to the *Red List* of *Birds of Conservation Concern*. Its national decline is attributed primarily to agricultural intensification, in particular:

- land drainage, which reduces rank vegetation for nest sites and the invertebrate food supply
- increased use of fertilizers, intensifying the effect of drainage
- control of 'weeds', such as rushes, which are necessary for nest cover
- rolling and chain-harrowing when it can destroy nests and chicks
- silage-production, with earlier and more frequent cutting, endangering eggs and chicks
- intensive grazing, with higher stocking levels leading to an increased risk of trampling

(See *Birds of Wet Meadows Survey 2002* (Wilson et al., 2005) and the *Repeat Upland Bird Survey 2002* (Sim et al., 2005))

Predation has also played a part in the decline (Grant et al, 1999). The sparse Curlew population, the reduced amount of nesting cover, and the distances involved in finding food mean nests and chicks are extremely vulnerable to predators, particularly foxes and corvids, which do very well in the current farmed landscape.

Monitoring for the LPS Curlew Recovery Project found foxes predated more than half of the nests found in 2015 and 2016, but protecting nests with an electric fence ensured about half the eggs hatched in 2017, so fencing is effective in protecting nests.

Discussion

This year's more intensive fieldwork confirmed previous findings, but at a higher level of detail. The number of territorial pairs was similar to estimates for the last three years. The population is concentrated in two areas, one on the high ground north of the Clun valley, the other on the southern ridge. The latter group may be part of a larger population that extends beyond the Upper Clun area into the Teme catchment: there was evidence of successful breeding at Llanfair Hill, where adults appeared still to be defending young in mid-July.

A range of habitat was used: the nest that was found, and probably one other, was on improved pasture. Two sites were on rush pasture, one on heathland, and the rest almost certainly on silage. Curlew are loyal to nesting sites even if the habitat has changed over the years, so their choices may reflect historic conditions rather than those prevailing at present. However, the few remaining Curlew nest sites are all within 1 km of damp, rough or semi-natural areas, three of which are SWT

reserves, and there is evidence that these are important for foraging. Sites which have themselves become marginal may continue to support Curlew by virtue of their proximity to such habitats.

In the absence of any other obvious threats, it is highly likely that all the young were lost to predation. It is not possible to say which predators were responsible, though in the past there has been direct evidence of young Curlews being taken by foxes and buzzards. This year a Curlew pair with hatched chicks was seen driving off a Magpie. No nests or chicks are believed to have been destroyed by agricultural operations this year, but in years when growing conditions lead to earlier cutting of silage, broods being raised in those fields may be at risk.

Curlew do not have to raise many young each year to survive in an area, but no population can sustain productivity as poor as this. In the Upper Clun there is still a nucleus of breeding birds to work with; in other parts of the country the situation is even worse. Revival will require a long-term strategy aimed at re-establishing habitat of suitable quality on an appropriate scale. In the short term, with basic survival in question, emergency measures need to be considered. The nest protection piloted this year was successful in ensuring that chicks hatched.

The next, more challenging, step is to improve survival of hatched young to fledging. The Curlew situation is now so serious that in 2016 the Group launched a campaign to attempt to recover the population. This is explained in more detail in the later Chapter on Conservation Action.

After a rapid initial decline, then a period of stability, the decline in the Curlew population has resumed, and 5 – 8 pairs located in 2016 was the lowest ever found by the Group.

The situation is now critical, and a Curlew Action Plan was launched in 2016 to attempt to recover the population.

This will be part of the SWT / SOS "Save our Curlews" campaign

SNIPE

The important local Snipe population at SWT Rhos Fiddle Nature Reserve was surveyed as part of the Shropshire Snipe Survey 2009. Four pairs were found, including a new territory in the centre of the Reserve, compared with 3 – 4 pairs in 2004. The survey was repeated in 2014, 2015 and 2016 with no conclusive evidence that any Snipe remained. No breeding-season records were obtained this year either.

Snipe appear now to have been lost as breeding birds throughout the area. A site on Black Mountain, occupied in 2004, was surveyed in 2009 and 2010, but no Snipe recorded. Rush management and the creation of a scrape may now have improved the habitat for Snipe, and the site should be revisited, but the prognosis is poor if the much better and more extensive habitat at Rhos Fiddle is vacant.

BIRDS OF THE "WETLANDS"

The Wetlands Project, launched in 2010, aimed to identify and survey all bogs, mires, flushes, wet meadows and rush pasture in the Upper Clun area in order to assess their condition and census the birds, plants and butterflies they support.

A baseline survey of the major 'wetland' sites and their bird communities was made in 2010 and 2011, with the aim of resurveying the sites at approximately five-year intervals to monitor breeding

species and assess the effectiveness of any conservation measures. Where sites have been shown to support Lapwing, Curlew or Snipe, or at least four of the additional target species (Kestrel, Cuckoo, Barn Owl, Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Stonechat, Linnet, Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting), they qualify for adoption as County Wildlife Sites (CWS).

Initially, priority was given to privately-owned farmland with potential for inclusion in HLS. (This work is described in the Chapter on Conservation Action later in the Report.) The sites owned or managed by SWT (Lower Short Ditch, Masons Bank & Rhos Fiddle) are now included in the survey as a standard of comparison, and, since they are more extensive than the other sites, as a means of assessing the importance of site area.

Survey Findings

Ten of the fifteen 'wetland' sites were surveyed in 2016. One, Penargoed near Clun, no longer supports the Curlew on which its status as a 'wetland' site was based. However its population of some 'wetland' species, Skylark, Yellowhammer and Linnet, together with Tree Sparrow, Yellow Wagtail and an impressive assembly of warblers including Sedge Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat, justify its continued status as a Wildlife Site.

The sites were not formally surveyed in 2017, but were visited as part of other fieldwork. Observations of wetland target species submitted to the County Bird Recorder. There was no evidence of any marked change in the species breeding at each site with the exception of Cuckoo, which like last year arrived very late, and was active in only few places over a short period.

The more diverse flora and fauna of the wetlands benefit many other bird species besides the group's targets, including other Red-listed species such as Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Spotted Flycatcher, Whinchat, Tree Pipit and Lesser Redpoll.

All records collected on these surveys, and the maps based on them (Maps A2.1 and A2.2 in the 2011 Report, Appendix 2) will be submitted to Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS) as evidence of the extent to which the sites continue to justify their status as County Wildlife Sites.

RED KITE

Seven nests, including four new ones, were found in the Upper Clun this year, the highest number yet. Three failed, and productivity was low this year even at established nests, each producing one chick fewer than would have been expected. This was the case throughout the county, and the reason is unclear. The four successful nests produced a total of six young which were all tagged.

The local population, after a few lean years, has now exceeded its maximum of four known nests in 2012. A total of 33 active nests have now been found in the Upper Clun since 2007. Twenty-one were successful, producing 31 young. An additional used nest was identified after this year's breeding season, and judging by the number of untagged young in the area shortly after fledging it is almost certain that more are going undetected.

Shropshire kites were tagged for the last time in 2017. Tagging takes considerable time and effort, and since Red Kite is now well established it is felt that conservation of species in more urgent need should now take priority. Nest monitoring will continue for another three years to follow up kites that have been tagged, so please continue to report sightings of a Kite in the same vicinity on several occasions, or of two together, or of one going into a wood between January and July, which may indicate a nest site.

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

OTHER SPECIES

A regular Kestrel nest produced five young, and three more fledged from a nest box put up in 2016. More Kestrel boxes are planned to help revive the population. A Hobby nest had at least two chicks, but they were predated before fledging. Sparrowhawk was confirmed breeding at four locations, three where adults were seen carrying prey to their young and one where an adult female and fledgling were seen together.


© Phil Mugridge

Several Yellow Wagtail pairs bred on arable fields in the Unk valley, with Skylark there too, and Sedge Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat and Tree Sparrow in the hedgerows. Spotted Flycatcher was confirmed breeding at seven different locations. Mandarin Duck bred on the Clun, and was seen with seven ducklings in late May. In mid-August a Little Egret was flushed from the Clun, the first seen locally at this time of year. Passage Whinchat were seen at Rhos Fiddle in spring and Masons Bank in autumn.

A flock of 35-40 increasingly-rare Tree Sparrows settled on an arable field in the Clun Valley from mid-August or earlier until late September, at least one pair having bred there.

DIPPERS

Dippers are restricted to, and dependent on, fast-flowing streams and rivers with stony beds. The headwaters of the River Clun, including the River Unk and the Folly Brook, are one of the County strongholds. The average length of the fiercely-defended territory, approximately 1km in the Upper Clun, is closely related to water quality, so that the health of the Dipper population, assessed by nest monitoring, ringing, and trapping or re-sighting ringed adults, is an important indicator of changes in the river environment.


© John Swift

Nests are located directly above flowing water; natural sites are used, but man-made structures are preferred where available, and Dippers take readily to nest boxes. With landowners' permission, specially-designed nest boxes have been installed under bridges in the Upper Clun to increase nesting opportunities and breeding success and facilitate monitoring of the Dipper population.

2017 Monitoring Results

- 26 potential nest sites were monitored, the great majority nest boxes under bridges
- 22 sites were occupied; there were 18 active nests, 10 on the Clun, 4 on the Folly Brook, 3 on the Unk and 1 on Mardu Brook
- 16 nests were in boxes and two were natural, one on a bridge and one in a riverbank
- 55 chicks and 3 adults were ringed at 13 sites; chicks that reach ringing age are likely to fledge
- 20 colour-rings on breeding adults were read

Tony Cross has been monitoring Dippers in the Teme catchment since 1987, by ringing chicks at nest sites, and counting birds at winter roost sites. Colour-ringing of adults started in 2011, and since then as many colour-rings as possible have been read during the breeding season, giving an

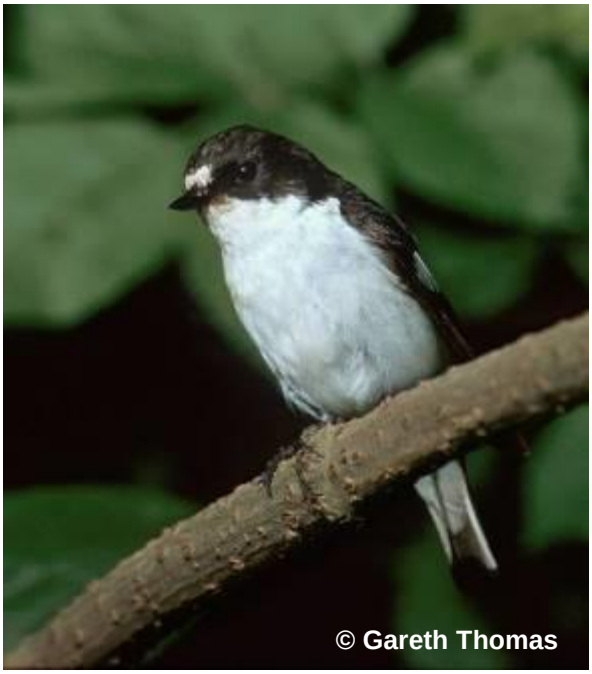
important measure of adult movements and survival. Annual reports of this project, *Dippers in the River Teme Catchment*, have been produced since 2007.

The study suggests that the local population declined in the 20 years prior to the start of the nest box scheme in 2006, then increased until 2010, as the boxes created more nesting opportunities. Productivity is slightly higher in boxes, as they tend to be less vulnerable to predation. Adverse conditions in 2011 and 2012, appeared temporarily to reverse the growth. Natural fluctuations are normal for species inhabiting dynamic environments, and long-term trends will become apparent only after years of monitoring.

If you see Dippers regularly, or know of an existing nest site,
please contact Michelle Frater, 01588 640909.

NEST BOXES FOR WOODLAND BIRDS

The Nest Box Scheme aims to increase the number of suitable nest sites for hole-nesting woodland birds, and to collect data on their breeding success. Some members with suitable gardens or access to woodland host up to 10 boxes provided by UCCWG. New members are welcome to join, but must now provide boxes themselves.


© Gareth Thomas

Boxes have been supplied to 15 hosts, but results have been provided for only four schemes, nest records for 11 boxes, and occupancy for 2 more. Four species were represented, Pied Flycatcher (6 nests), Blue Tit (4), Great Tit (2) and Redstart (1). At least 18 Pied Flycatchers, plus another complete brood (uncounted) fledged, along with 6 Redstarts, at least 23 Blue Tits and at least 1 Great Tit. One Pied Flycatcher clutch was abandoned and one Great Tit clutch was predated.

The largest scheme, at Woodbatch, has 98 boxes. Andy Spencer rings Pied Flycatcher and Redstarts here, together with sites in the Onny valleys and the Stiperstones (over 700 boxes altogether). Four boxes at Woodbatch contained Pied Flycatcher nests, and six adults (3 male and 3 female) and 16 nestlings were ringed. Five contained Redstarts, and four adults (1 male and 3 female) and 32 nestlings were ringed.
The metal rings, fixed to the leg, are inscribed with a unique number, recorded by BTO. If the bird is caught again, or found dead, and the ring details are reported, its age and movements are known. Almost everything we know about migration and longevity is as a result of ringing.

If you live in the Upper Clun area, and are interested in having nest boxes on your land,
or you would like to help monitoring Pied Flycatchers at Woodbatch,
please ring Marie Zenick on 01588 630750 e-mail mariezenick@yahoo.co.uk

BARN OWLS

Barn Owl was removed from the Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern in 2015, but remains very scarce locally. Loss of rough grassland rich in prey is the major factor, but lack of suitable nest sites has contributed. The Shropshire Barn Owl Group (SBOG) installed a few nest boxes in the Upper Clun, and UCCWG many more, mostly in isolated farm buildings or large trees 400m or more from woodland, near at least 4 ha (10 acres) of permanent rough grassland. At the peak there were over 20 boxes, although only two have been used.

No Barn Owl bred in 2013. Two broods were raised in 2014, one in 2015 and two in 2016. This year there were active nests at two sites. At the same time, there has been a modest but noticeable increase in records of Barn Owl from several different parts of the Upper Clun.

If you see a Barn Owl, especially if you suspect it may be breeding, please tell Michelle Frater, 01588 640909.

OVERVIEW

Our survey work over 11 years has made a detailed assessment of the bird populations in the Upper Clun. During this period Lapwing appears to have become extinct as a local breeding species, and Curlew is only just holding on. The status of most of the other target species is more secure, largely because their habitat requirements are less exacting, and are met on the three SWT reserves and a few other sites of comparable quality.

The data has helped us to identify key Local (County) Wildlife Sites, and support several farmers in applications to join Environmental Stewardship HLS; Natural England made use of our data in identifying priorities for new agreements. Future surveys will continue to monitor the populations of the target species, especially in relation to changes in land management under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Their fortunes will be an important measure of its effectiveness.

The Bird Group has evolved over the years: map-based surveys are still important, and those who carry them out are reliable, conscientious and increasingly knowledgeable. At the same time, the contribution of our network of resident recorders, and other local people, who send in records of the bird activity they see around them has greatly increased. Information is exchanged via an email distribution list. Records are submitted regularly to the County Recorder, and, where relevant, to BTO.

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

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

THE PLANT GROUP

(THE WILDLIFE SITE AND BOTANY SURVEY GROUP)

INTRODUCTION

It is now eleven years since the group started their botanical survey work on farms and local wildlife sites (LWS) in the Upper Clun and Teme catchments. SO18, SO27 and SO28 were three of the most under recorded hectads (10km squares) but are perhaps now amongst the best surveyed areas in the county, particularly the wildlife sites. This data collection has of course led to a very good knowledge of the landscape, habitats and its species.


Moonwort

The Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), providing strong ecological links with the nature reserves have now been surveyed in detail for around eight years. Each year 'new' sites are found and surveyed and so the number of these important links in the landscape continue to increase.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The Upper Clun and Teme have a core group of seven skilled volunteers to carry out the LWS surveys. Training of the group in methodologies takes place each winter and the group is fairly autonomous. Since this is a community wildlife group, other local people are always encouraged to join in, and do.

In 2017 overall 12 sites were surveyed over a 15 week period, mostly by the botany group but also by Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) (see Appendix #). The 5 year SWT funded LWS Project ended last year, hence the fewer than normal number of sites visited.

At present SWT supports the UCCWG with an officer who provides maps, condition survey cards, NVC recording cards, species record cards, Invertebrate Habitat Assessment check lists, risk assessments and a degree of training. SWT also arranges access permissions.

SWT also arranged a training course this year on 'Phase I Habitat identification and Assessment'. There was also training in survey methodology during the winter.

All surveyors use recommended floras (listed under References) and the *axiophyte* lists; the target species for the area covering the three key habitats: Rush Pasture/Purple Moorgrass, Blanket Bog and Meadows, (Appendix 2) are used for guidance.

In addition to recording species, the LWS Condition Form for Grassland was completed (it was included in the 2012 report as Appendix 3, and gives an idea of the data collected). Condition forms for Woodland, Wetlands and Heathlands were also used where appropriate.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Nine people variously carried out the site surveys in 2017, collecting valuable information on both LWS and new sites. Again, excellent species lists were compiled along with good quadrat data and in-depth information about site condition.

In summary, nine LWS were visited and surveyed. An additional three other areas, some of them already identified as sites of ecological significance were also surveyed and all will be put forward

at the Local Sites Partnership meeting for consideration as new LWS. All sites visited are listed in Appendix #.

Around 100 target species are recorded each year. These plants are the Shropshire 'axiophytes', the species which are indicators of good habitat because they are relatively uncommon and indicate an unimproved and relatively unspoilt habitat. As a rule of thumb, the higher the number recorded, the better the site. Species-rich hay meadows are measured using a different set of indicators since they may have few axiophytes but are nonetheless extremely important priority habitats.


Brittle Bladder-fern

Species of interest recorded in 2017 included: Greater Tussock-sedge, Broad-leaved Helleborine (several plants), Sheep's-bit, Northern Marsh-orchid, Brittle Bladder-fern and Beech Fern, with a new site for Moonwort.

The cumulative result of the Botany Group's work (together with the complementary work of the Bird and Butterfly Groups) is shown in Map 4 "Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife and Candidate Sites in the Upper Clun" in the Chapter on Conservation Action on page 18.

DISCUSSION

Once again it is cause for celebration that new sites are still being discovered, that there are still semi-natural areas in the Clun and Teme which to date have been overlooked. A further five (three in the Teme Valley) prospective sites were adopted during 2017 as LWS: Trebert Wood and Bottom Pasture at The Graig, Tack Wood Pastures; an extension to Brynmawr and a section of the Folly Brook. Since the start of the Community Wildlife Group in 2007, 26 (37)* LWS are either completely new or are significant extensions to existing sites.

The majority of the 51 (66)* LWS in the Upper Clun (and Teme) areas have been surveyed within the last five years, and 70% are in a reasonably good condition.

Where sites were found to be in a poor condition this was attributed to: erection of pheasant pens, inappropriate woodland management, fertiliser use and possible re-seeding with rye grass, overgrazing and bracken encroachment, leading to loss of species-richness or acid grassland and semi-natural woodland.

Most of the work of the three groups: Bird, Butterfly and Botany focuses on rush pasture, bogs and unimproved grassland habitats of the Clun Forest. There are around 15 good rushy pastures in this landscape where conservation work needs to continue to be focused for key threatened species like the curlew and small pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly.

The Botany group continues to work closely with farmers, which is essential if habitat conservation and restoration is to be successful. The group also works closely with Ceri Meehan of Natural England (NE) and the various staff of the AONB office to ensure that LWS receive appropriate management within schemes and projects.

Conclusion

Although fewer sites were visited by the group in 2017, this still amounted to 175 hectares, and means that a reasonable number of local sites are still receiving health checks. The landowner involvement, interest and cooperation is good and most of the data collected has been useful. Working with our partners at the AONB, Shropshire Council, Natural England, SWT, Severn Rivers Trust and Land Life and Livelihoods means that so much more (and better) is achieved.

FURTHER WORK

Botanical surveys and mapping on a similar scale will continue next year although after 2018 there is again the question of funding. New and returning surveyors will once more be encouraged to join the survey group.

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

Ten years of botanical survey work on farms in the Upper Clun and Teme translates to a huge amount of data collection which has led to a much improved knowledge of this landscape and a good picture of the health of wildlife in south-west Shropshire. Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) which provide strong ecological links with the nature reserves have now been surveyed in detail for around seven years. The surveying of these sites is now always the main focus as is the assessment of 'new' areas which arise each year.

Wild Thyme

THE BUTTERFLY GROUP

INTRODUCTION


Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary
© Stephen Lewis

Surveys of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries started in 2010 and the results for 2010 to 2016 were published in last year's report. The survey results for this year are given in Appendix 5#.

This fritillary is a “near-threatened” UKBAP Priority Species. The most important sites have been Barretts West and Pant-y-Lidan, and the numbers found at Barretts West and nearby in Ditch Dingle in 2010 and 2011 make this a regionally significant site.

The original intention was to extend the survey period to look also for Dark Green Fritillaries but few surveys were specifically devoted to this species and only casual sightings of Dark Green Fritillaries are now recorded. There were none in 2017

SAFEGUARDING HABITAT

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

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

BURY DITCHES (a nationally important site for Wood Whites)

Although it's not in the Upper Clun area, readers may be interested to know that, from April to September every year, weekly surveys (“Transects”) of a 2 ¼ mile section of forest track in Bury Ditches are conducted by a team of volunteers under the auspices of Butterfly Conservation. The volunteers count the numbers of all species seen, but the prime object is to count Wood Whites (a rare species classified as “Endangered” on the UK Red List – the second highest danger rating), so that the effect of habitat improvement measures taken to help the Wood White population can be assessed

Anyone who would like to help with these Transects, even for only the occasional visit, should contact Dennis Twist 01588 640629, email dandmtwist@gmail.com

Dennis Twist has been the Group’s lead butterfly surveyor since the first surveys in 2010, and has co-ordinated the work of other volunteers. He is unable to continue with this work in future years.

Thank you very much for the excellent work you have done for the Group, and Butterfly Conservation, since 2010, Dennis.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

We need someone new to co-ordinate the surveys of Small Pearl- bordered Fritillaries in the Upper Clun area, and more surveyors, please. If you can help, please contact Rob Rowe 01588 630648, email rob@robrowe.co.uk

MAMMALS

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

However, for a number of reasons the intention to get a new Mammal Group up and running has not proved possible. Hopefully, new volunteers will come forward and help with that. If you want to help, please tell Rob Harris, phone 01588 640234, email wilksharris@hotmail.com

CO-OPERATION WITH FARMERS

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

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

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

CONSERVATION ACTION

The Group was set up in 2007 to monitor nationally or locally threatened bird, plant and butterfly species and their habitats, and to encourage interest in, and actively promote, conservation in the area. Annual Reports have documented the results of the surveys, and the data have been used to underpin Conservation Action, particularly in relation to the steeply-declining Curlew population.

The Group has successfully

- formed a good estimate of the breeding population, distribution and habitat use of Lapwing, Curlew and other target Bird Species
- identified plant sites which contain axiophytes, indicators of high habitat quality, and produced complete species lists in support of their adoption as Local Wildlife Sites
- identified important Butterfly sites, two of which are regionally important

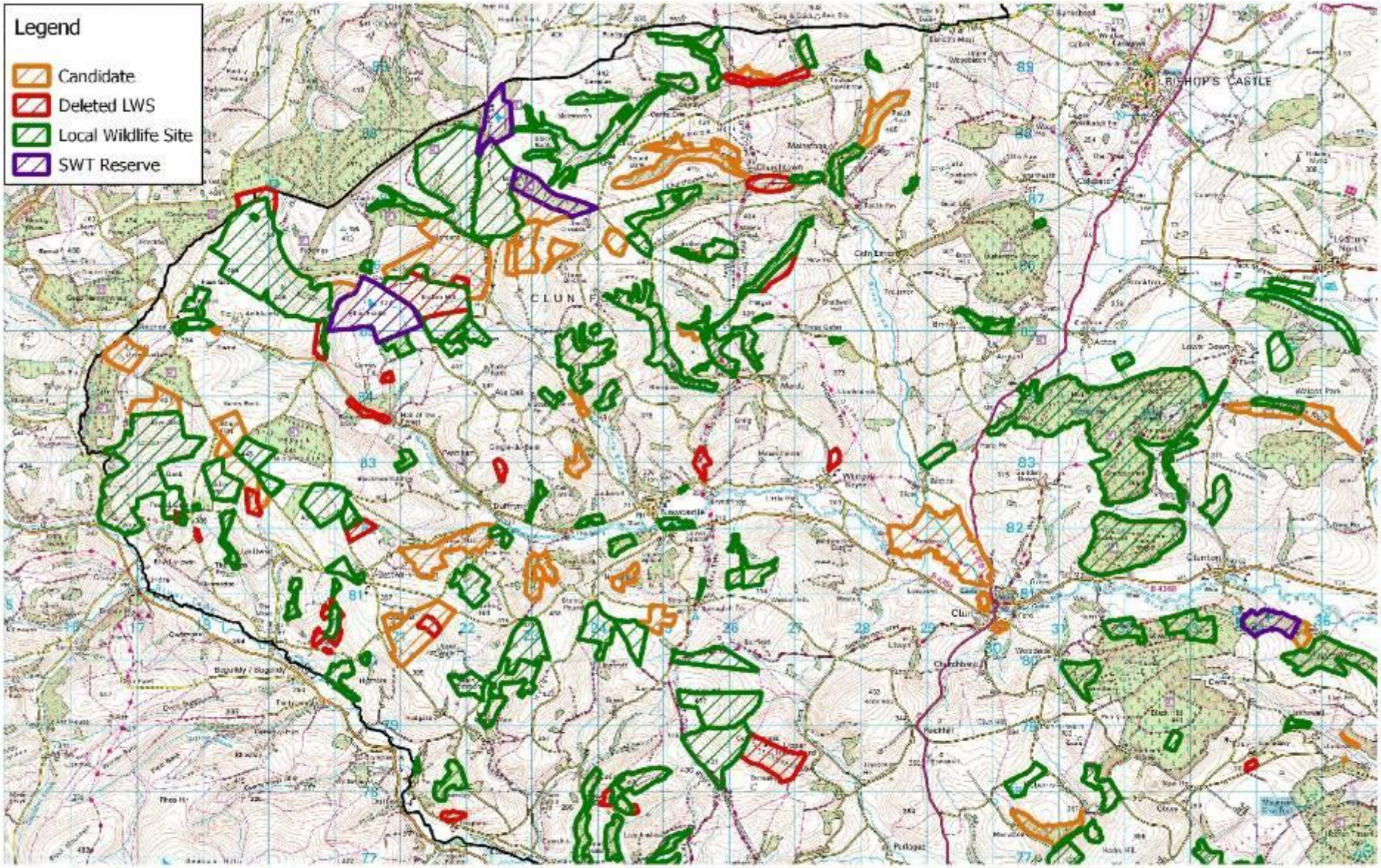
LOCAL (COUNTY) WILDLIFE SITES

Survey results presented in previous reports demonstrated that 'Wetland' sites which support many of the target birds are also key habitats for plants and butterflies. Data were collated across the three survey groups, and used to make the case that sites that were not already Local Wildlife Sites should if possible be adopted. These sites of wildlife interest*, Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Site, Candidate Sites and Deleted Sites in the Upper Clun 2017* are shown in the Map on page 20. All the proposals have been accepted in principle by the LWS Committee, but formal adoption requires landowners consent, and this is still being sought in some cases, shown as “Candidate Sites” on the map.

The map also shows the deleted (red) sites. The wildlife attributes of these sites were lost when they were ploughed, fertilised, built on, planted on, felled or destroyed in some other way, usually more than 10 years ago.

NEW HLS AGREEMENTS

Until recently, the national and local strategies to reverse the declines of these species and habitats, and meet Government Biodiversity targets, were based on using Environmental



Shropshire Wildlife Trust

Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Sites Candidate and Deleted sites of the Upper Clun (2017)

Date: 13/11/2017

Stewardship (particularly Higher Level Scheme - HLS) agreements between Natural England and landowners to safeguard and enhance the habitats. Such agreements aimed to mitigate the long-term agricultural changes which have led to the decline of many bird, plant and butterfly species, including “improvement“ of grassland by ploughing, reseeding and / or draining.

Most farmland in the Upper Clun was covered by Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) agreements, but these all expired in 2014 or earlier. Natural England (NE) had to consider which of the land covered by ESA Agreements should be incorporated into HLS Agreements. The Group’s strategy was therefore to identify the best wildlife sites, make survey information freely available to the land owners and to Natural England, and ask that the species-rich habitats most likely to benefit bird, plant and butterfly species would be included in the scheme. Our detailed proposals to Natural England have been described in previous Repots.

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

Our strategy was partially successful, and the 2014 report included comments from Lucy Roberts and Chris Hogarth, the Joint Shropshire Land Management Team Leaders at NE, about how valuable the data we provided was in helping NE decide which land should be covered by Agreements.

Maps showing the location of holdings which include HLS agreements that started in 2013 or earlier, and in 2014, were published on pages 26 and 27 of our report for 2014 These agreements are scheduled to last for 10 years, so they should bring substantial benefits to local wildlife for many years to come.

However, each agreement is voluntary, so it may not protect the best habitats, and funding constraints mean that it is unlikely that any agreements will create significant amounts of new habitat. Around half the landowners in the Upper Clun were not able to make a strong enough case that their farms should have a share of an inadequate budget to provide wider environmental benefits; others preferred to forgo the income rather than enter into HLS agreements. Some farmers need to increase production in order to make up the shortfall in income, and this has already had an effect on grassland management that may further disadvantage wildlife.

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

COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP

HLS has now been replaced by a Countryside Stewardship Scheme, which, although it is supposed to be more simple than HLS, is much more bureaucratic and less well funded. It aims to implement the proposals of the Lawton Report, which recommended reducing habitat fragmentation through a more integrated approach to land management. Participating areas will be selected by Natural England, rather than relying on applications from individual landowners.

Targeting Statements have been published, but do little to clarify how the scheme will work in practice. In particular, Curlew has been given no priority, despite a decline so serious that it now figures on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern. Getting to grips with Countryside Stewardship, and using local knowledge to promote the interests of conservation, will be a major priority for the Group in coming years.

FUTURE AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SCHEMES

All agri-environment schemes for many years have been part of the European Union Common Agricultural Policy. Given the referendum result and the Government’s plan to leave the EU by 2019, the future arrangements for farm payment scheme and benefit for wildlife are very uncertain.

We hope that future arrangements will help farmers and wildlife, and we will continue to work with local farmers to ensure that both benefit from any new schemes.

HABITAT REQUIREMENTS FOR TARGET SPECIES

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

Unfortunately, little management work has been carried out in recent years to ensure that sites retain their value for wildlife, but now that some land is being managed under HLS, with funding for such work, it is hoped that this will lead to beneficial changes in farming practice such as rush management, growing hay rather than silage, creating shallow pools and muddy patches, and managing livestock in the vicinity of nest sites.

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

HABITAT MANAGEMENT LEAFLETS

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

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

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

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

SURVEYING WILDLIFE SITES

'Local Wildlife Site' is not a statutory designation. It provides no protection, and does not limit landowner activity. It recognises the wildlife value of a piece of land based on the species it supports. Sites have to meet published criteria drawn up by Shropshire Wildlife Trust in consultation with Statutory Bodies such as Natural England, the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission, and other Organisations such as Shropshire Ornithological Society and Butterfly Conservation. Applications have to be approved by a committee representing most of these bodies, and adoption needs landowner consent.

Fieldwork associated with current or potential Local Wildlife Sites was done in consultation with landowners, whose permission has been sought both for the survey, and for any subsequent adoption of sites. Landowners are given all survey results, and information about any rare or unusual plants at sites.

RIVER CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

Water quality in the River Clun and its tributaries has declined as a result of silting up of the river bed and pollution from people, transport and farming practices. This is being addressed by statutory organisations in compliance with the EU's Water Framework Directive (WFD), under which The Environment Agency is charged with getting all rivers into 'good ecological condition'.

Part of the lower Clun is designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) by the European Union, one of only three such designations in England, because it supports a threatened population of Freshwater Pearl Mussels. The designation requires the statutory organisations to protect the

mussel population. Action is urgent: monitoring suggests that if the current rate of decline continues, the population will be extinct within the very near future.

Current initiatives include:

- work on farms to reduce run-off into the rivers through the **Catchment Sensitive Farming** project funded by Natural England
- a **Teme Pilot Project** whose implementation is being co-ordinated by Severn Rivers Trust (SRT); it includes funding for the **Dipper Project**
- a **Clun Catchment Management Plan** being drawn up by a Working Group, set up by Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, on which UCCWG is represented
- **Dippers in the Teme Catchment** project, with UCCWG involvement, collects data on a species with similar habitat requirements to the Mussel
- Land, Life and Livelihoods, a community initiative in the Clun Forest, is developing a **Catchment Management Plan** as invited by the government

The Wildlife Group supports these initiatives, and will seek to become involved in them wherever possible.

SHROPSHIRE HILLS AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN

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

Preparing the next five year plan is about to start.

CONSERVATION ACTION

UCCWG recognizes that most land in the area is farmland in private ownership, and the Group needs to work closely with farmers to achieve our conservation objectives, although other landowners, householders with gardens, the County Council (responsible for verges and public open space), Welsh Forestry and the Wildlife Trust, among others, should also be involved. Declines in habitat quality and species richness have occurred slowly over many years, and it will take many more years of sustained, incremental habitat improvement if the populations of the “flagship” species are to return to their former levels.

The Group will continue to promote its vision of a diverse, wildlife-rich landscape, and to collect the evidence that enables it to make authoritative representations for inclusions in Parish Plans, the AONB policy and Management Plan, Natural England’s Countryside Stewardship, the Environment Agency’s work on river habitats, the Statutory Planning Process, and the policies of other statutory and voluntary organisations. Such influence is necessary if we are to help make a difference to the quality and diversity of wildlife habitats

CURLEW ACTION PLAN

The Wildlife Group has been surveying the Upper Clun for 11 years now, and working to reverse species declines by promoting the protection and restoration of habitat. It remains committed to such an approach as the only means of sustaining healthy species populations in the long term. However, Curlew has now declined so severely that it may follow Lapwing into local extinction before such measures can take effect. In an effort to prevent this, the Group launched an emergency *Curlew Action Plan* at the 2016 Annual meeting

Fieldwork suggests that fewer Curlew pairs are settling to nest, and the habitat at many of the traditional breeding sites is now marginal and requires landscape-scale conservation measures. Where pairs do manage to breed, nest and chick survival is extremely poor: in 2015 and 2016 only one brood per year is believed to have survived to an age where young might have gone on to fledge. This falls so far below the productivity needed to maintain the population that the situation is has become critical.

The work of the LPS *(see Bird Report above)* has shown that predation is a major cause of breeding failure, though agricultural activities sometimes play a part; the same is likely to apply in the Upper Clun. Fencing nests has been shown to increase the chance of eggs hatching, and about 50% did in 2017, a big improvement on last year.

Breeding success will not improve unless the immediate causes of failure are tackled directly, with close landowner involvement at all stages. Therefore, as part of the *Action Plan*, more effort was made in 2017 to locate nest sites, rather than territories. One nest was found, and protected by an electric fence. The eggs hatched, increasing the chances that young would fledge, but it will be seen from Appendix 2 that no young fledged in 2017.

Electric fence around Curlew nest
Ale Oak © Tim Lewis

Monitoring of Curlew populations by other Community Wildlife Groups has shown a similar rate of decline elsewhere. Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) has therefore convened a multi-agency Shropshire Curlew Group to co-ordinate a County-wide “Save our Curlews” campaign, and SWT and Shropshire Ornithological Society have launched a joint appeal to fund the nest monitoring and protection. Locating Curlew territories by Community Wildlife Groups is a key part of the strategy – nests can only be protected once they are found.

The appeal will be sent out to members. More information will be posted shortly on the SOS website http://www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

The Group’s Curlew Action Plan will continue in 2018 and future years, as part of the wider campaign. Anyone who wants to help with locating Curlews next April and early May should contact Michelle Frater 01588 640909, email michellefrater@outlook.com If you see or hear a Curlew next spring, please tell Michelle immediately.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & DISTRIBUTION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most importantly, thanks to all the people who undertook the Survey work, and contributed additional information. None of the work would have been possible without their effort and commitment. Their names are listed below

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Brian Angell (s)
Elizabeth & Steve Blackman (s)
Colin & Sheila Davies (r)
Chris Evans (s)
Michelle Frater (s)
Elizabeth Johnson (r)
Tim Lewis (r)
John Lyden (s & r)
Mark Measures (r)
Mervin Mullard (r)
Katie Steggles (s & r)
Richard Whately (r)

(r) = Resident (Continuous) Recorder
(s) = Map Surveys

Plant Recorders
Fiona Gomersall
Janet Watkin
John Clayfield
John Lyden
Rob Rowe
Ros Gillard
Susan Gardner
Tess Pearson

Butterfly Recorders
Dennis Twist

Casual records of Curlew and other Target Species were provided by Gill Binks, John Clayfield, Casual records of Curlew and other Target Species were provided by Barney Britnell, Fiona Gomersall, Michael Green, Jacky Harrison, Cath Landles, Gill Lewis, Mark Measures, David & Frances Morris, Peter Morris, Trevor Wheeler, Roger Williams and Marie Zenick.

Tim Lewis monitored his local pair of Curlew and maintained the electric fence round the nest.

Allan Bernau photographed the ringed Curlew at Llanfair Hill.

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The Snipe survey at Rhos Fiddle was carried out by Katie Steggles and John Lyden.

The Small Woodland Birds Nestbox Scheme was run by Marie Zenick, who collected the information for the Report. Hosts who provided data were Gill Binks, John & Ginny Hall, Mervin Mullard and Marie Zenick.

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

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

Tony Cross carried out the Dipper nest monitoring and ringing.

Additional Bird Survey work, particularly in determining the Curlew population, was carried out by Michelle Frater, who organised the surveys and wrote the chapters on the work of the Bird Group.

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

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

Thanks to Rory McCann for the Lapwing, Curlew and Snipe drawings

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- The farmers and landowners who helped facilitate the survey work, and provided information about land ownership
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- Rob Rowe, for publicising the Group's work, particularly via Clun Chronicle and posters
- Clun Chronicle, for publicising the Group's work
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Smith, L. *Lapwing & Curlew in the Clun Environmentally Area* Survey Report *2006.*

Smith, L. *Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group Report* Annually since 2007

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

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

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

DISTRIBUTION

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

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

Natural England

- Chris Hogarth & Lucy Roberts (joint Team Leaders, Shropshire Land Management, Parkside Court, Telford)
- Ceri Meehan (Natural England Lead Adviser responsible for the Clun area)
- Frances McCullagh (Ecologist, Midlands Land Management Team, Parkside Court, Telford)

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- Ieuan Davies ('Springs of Rivers' Project Officer)

THE REPORT

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

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

Planned survey work in 2018 will build on this knowledge, particularly in the wetlands, and enable us to extend the action to promote conservation of our target species and their habitats.

We will continue to implement our Curlew Action Plan, to try and save Curlew from local extinction as a breeding species, and work as part of the SWT / SOS "Save our Curlews" campaign.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Bird Survey Recording Instructions 2017

Appendix 2. Bird Survey Results

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

Appendix 3. Plant Group – Sites Surveyed 2017

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

Appendix 5. Small Pearl-bordered Butterfly Records 2017

Annexe 1: The Management Committee

Appendix 1. Bird Survey Recording Instructions 2017

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

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

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

Appendix 2: Bird Survey Results

i) Curlew and Lapwing

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

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

ii) Other Target Bird Species, and Wetland Surveys

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

By the end of 2009 it became apparent that many of the Target Species were restricted to "wetlands" (mires, flushes and damp pasture) in the area. The best wetland sites were therefore targeted in 2010 and 2011, and were revisited from 2012 onwards only where incidental to other fieldwork. The results were shown on the *Curlew, Reed Bunting, & Other Target Species* maps for 2007-10, and for 2011, reproduced in the 2011 Report, while the similar map for subsequent years appeared in the relevant report. That for 2017 is on the page after next.

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

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

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

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

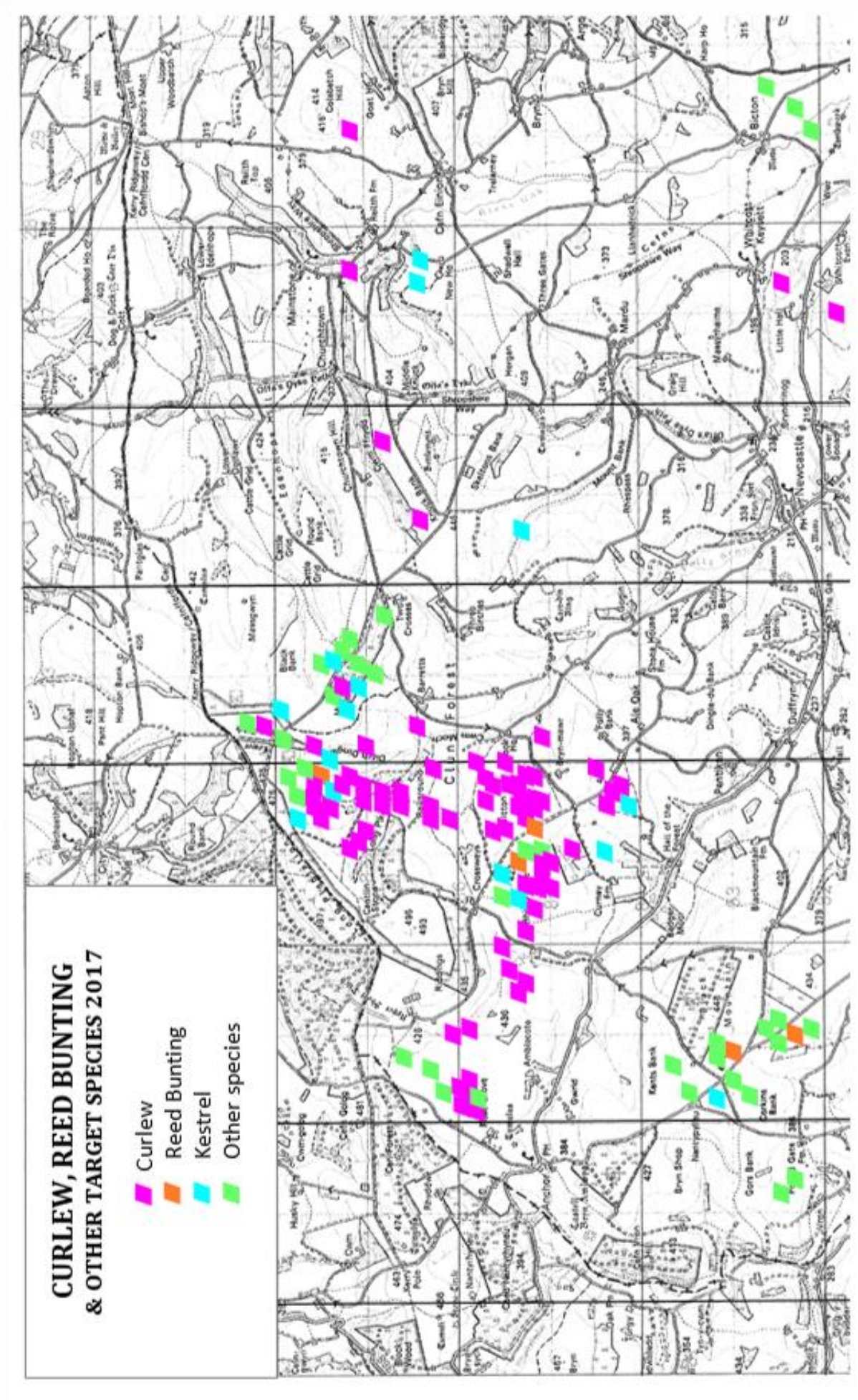
At sites where Curlew records came mainly from local residents, no attempt may have been made to record the Other Target Species. These species will therefore be under-represented on the Map.

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

Table A2. 1. Results of Curlew Survey

Site name	Tetrad	Observer	Status	Comment
Amblecote	SO18X/Y	Colin & Sheila Davies (r)	ON	Settled pair, evidence of active nest; may have hatched young, but activity ceased by late June
Riddings, Rhos Fiddle	SO18X	C & S Davies (r) J Lyden (r)	T	Territorial pair, either laid and failed early or moved away; site vacant by mid-May
Ale Oak Cottage	SO28C	Tim Lewis (r) Chris Evans (s)	FL	Nest identified and protected; 4 young hatched but disappeared at c10 days, probably predated
Bicton Hill, Rhos Fiddle	SO28C	Katie Steggles (s & r)	FL	Settled pair; strong evidence of hatched young mid-June, but activity ceased around 21/06
Cwm Moch	SO28D	Michelle Frater (s)	T	Territorial behaviour ceased early May; breeding attempt abandoned or failed soon after laying
Cwm Moch 2	SO28D	Elizabeth Johnson (r)	FL	Pair occupied territory from early May; evidence of hatched young, activity ceased early July
Quabbs	SO28A	Richard Whately (r)	FL	Settled pair, activity to mid-June suggested hatched young, but then ceased; probably predated
Spoad Hill	SO28K	E & S Blackman (s) B Angell (s)	FL	Active nest; strong evidence of hatched young to 13/06, ceased by next morning; probably predated
Llanfair Hill West	SO27P	B Angell (s)	FL	Settled pair; evidence of hatched young up to mid-June; probably predated
Knuck Bank	SO28N	Mervin Mullard (r)	M	}
Mainstone	SO28T	Jacky Harrison	M	} Records of Curlew passing through
Weston Hill	SO28Q/R	E & S Blackman	M	}
Black Mountain	SO18R/W	D&F Morris (r)	0	No activity reported
		(s) map surveys		
		(r) resident recorder		

Map A2. 1. Approximate location of Curlew and Other Target Bird Species 2017



Appendix 3 Plant Group – Sites Surveyed 2017

Site name	Site Code	Grid Reference	Area Surveyed (ha)	Habitat 1	Condition	Habitat 2	Condition	No. of axiophytes
Cow Hall Meadows	SO28.27	SO225818	4.58	Species-rich grassland	good condition			10
Rhoneth	SO28.32	SO276829	2.2	Species-rich grassland	destroyed			0
The Cote, Beguildy	SO27.13	SO203801	12.94	Species-rich grassland	good condition	Rush pasture	good condition	33
Little Hall, Clun	SO28.66	SO261818	16	Species-rich grassland	no change in condition	Semi-natural woodland	no change in condition	21
Llandinshop Wood	SO27.16	SO251773	5.8	Semi-natural woodland	Improving in condition	Acid grassland	declining in condition	19
Cwm Collo	SO27.04-PS	SO242784	4.24	Species-rich grassland	good condition			full survey not carried out
Upper Unk	SO28.14	SO228881	58	Acid grassland	good condition	Rush pasture	no change in condition	43
Bryn Bedw pastures	SO28.56-PS	SO224794	10	Mesotrophic grassland	good condition	Alder carr	good condition	42
Newcastle Churchyard	SO28.74-PS	SO253825	0.2	Species-rich grassland	good condition			8
Dowke Hill	SO28.28	SO223809	10.17	Species-rich grassland	good condition	Rush pasture	good condition	32
Gors Bank and Bryn Shop	SO18.09	SO171828	39.8	Species-rich grassland	good condition	Upland flush	good condition	59

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

Rush Pastures

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

Blanket Bog

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

Species-rich Meadows

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

Appendix 5: Small Pearl bordered Fritillary Butterfly Surveys 2017

Date	27-May	14-Jun	14-Jun	16-Jun	16-Jun	18-Jun	19-Jun	22-Jun	24-Jun	26-Jun	27-Jun	01-Jul	TOTAL
Recorder	DT	DT	BA	DT	JL	DT	DT	MF	DT	JL	DT	DT	
Barretts West	3		3				17					9	**32**
Ditch Dingle							0						**0**
Cwm Moch*													
Pant-y-Lidan	2												**2**
Black Mountain 1*													
Black Mountain 2						0						0	**0**
Black Mountain 3*													
Rhos Fiddle SE		2						1				5	**8**
Rhos Fiddle N					1								**1**
Corkins Bank						1						1	**2**
Llanfair Hill*													
Cwm Burholes*													
Cefn Vron S						0							**0**
The Riddings				0					0		0		**0**
Gors Bank						11							**11**
Dowke Hill										1			**1**
TOTAL	5	2	2	0	1	12	17	1	0	1	0	15	**57**

Annexe 1. The Management Committee

Membership

The following people were elected at the Annual Meeting in November 2015

- Leo Smith (Chair)
- Jacky Harrison (Secretary)
- Mervin Mullard (Treasurer)
- Fiona Gomersall (Plant Recorder)
- Rob Rowe (Publicity Officer)
- Joy Greenall
- Rob Harris
- John Lyden
- Katie Steggles
- Trevor Wheeler
- Marie Zenick (Bird Group rep)

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

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

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

Meetings

The Committee has met once since the last Annual Public Meeting, on 17 October 2017.

Much of the meeting was concerned with a joint application with Land, Life and Livelihoods to Natural England's Facilitation Fund, to encourage farmers largely on the high ground in the area to work together to provide "joined up management" to improve key upland habitats. A lot of work was put into this, particularly by Fiona Gomersall, Joy Greenall, Rob Harris and Sarah Jamieson, who are hereby thanked for their efforts. The outcome of the bid should be known before Christmas.

Otherwise, most of the practical work of the Group is carried out by the Bird and Plant Groups, and the organisers report to, and are overseen by, the Management Committee. In practice this means that it is not necessary to have frequent meetings of the Committee.

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

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

Funding and Bank Account

The Group had a Bank Account with HSBC in Bishop's Castle, the only branch of any bank convenient for the area.

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

Up until 2011, all the costs of the Group were met through various grants to Leo Smith. From October 2011 to June 2013, all costs were met by the LEADER Community Wildlife Groups Project, administered by the Shropshire Hills AONB and part financed by the European Union

Regional Development Fund, with the National Trust as Banker. These grants were listed in the Acknowledgements in the various Reports, and all of them have been accounted for to the funding body.

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

Financial Report and Accounts

In 2015-16, the only income was receipts from the 2015 Annual meeting. Expenditure was hire of hall and refreshments for the meeting, and expenses for Group mailings (mainly postage), a stall at Newcastle Show, and UCCWG's share of the cost for the website.

Income and Expenditure for 2016-17

OPENING BALANCE @ 01/04/16 £400.68

Expenditure		Income	
Postage stamps	34.65	AGM	115.00
Newcastle show	15.00	Donation	25.00
Website	15.00		
AGM hall hire	32.00		
Postage stamps	34.10		

CLOSING BALANCE @ 31/03/17 409.93

Expenditure from 01/04/2017

Stamps	40.32

Balance @ 26/10/17 369.61

Audited by Cath landles (AONB Community Officer) 26/10/17

Members

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

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

Leo Smith (Chair)
Mervin Mullard (Treasurer)
November 2017