

A bird with a long, straight, downward-curved bill and mottled brown and white plumage is shown in flight against a clear blue sky. The bird's wings are spread, showing dark feathers with lighter spots.

# *Clee Hill*

## *Community Wildlife Group*

A bird with a distinctive crest of long, thin feathers on its head, a black and white face, and iridescent green and blue wings is standing on a patch of grass. The bird has a long, thin beak and is looking to the right.

*Curlews,  
Lapwings &  
Other Birds  
Survey 2018*



# Curlews, Lapwings and Other Birds Survey 2018

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## Objectives

Bird Group members 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 were Target Species for Natural England’s Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (HLS), are on the *Red List* or *Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern* because they have suffered large declines in the last 25 or 50 years, and are Target Species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan).

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

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

This repeated similar surveys undertaken every year since 2012, to monitor population trends for key species, as well as establish the current population and distribution.

## **Methodology**

The area covered by the Clee Hill Partnership was divided up in 2012 into 20 tetrads (2x2 kilometre squares), made up of four of the one kilometre squares shown on Ordnance Survey maps). A map showing all these tetrads, with the Tetrad Reference code, is attached as Appendix 1. (The prefix SO (defining the 100 km square on the OS National Grid) has been omitted, as this is common to all the squares in the area).

Those who agreed to help were given a copy of the general Survey Instructions and allocated a square / tetrad, and requested to survey it once during each of three specified two week periods, around 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1<sup>st</sup> May and mid-June.

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

Members were provided with a large scale map of their tetrad for each of the three periods, to record observations, and requested to spend around three hours on each visit. The part of the survey Instructions that change each year were printed on the back of the map. Members were also asked to record target species just beyond the boundary of their tetrad.

Members were also requested to send in "Casual Records" of Lapwing, Curlew, Kestrel and Red Kite seen at any time in the rest of the area, and also any seen in their own tetrad(s) outside the periods when the three tetrad surveys were being carried out. Casual Record maps were provided for this purpose.

Members were consulted on whether to hold a feedback meeting to present the results of the first two surveys, but most had undertaken survey work in previous years, and it was felt to be unnecessary.

In 2018, 16 of the 20 tetrads were surveyed. Only in 2014 and 2017 has survey work been carried out in all 20 tetrads, so we still need more helpers. Altogether, in 2018, 23 members spent over 180 hours on surveys (including the double time spent when couples or friends surveyed a square together), the Shropshire Wild team covered two squares, and three people sent casual records only. This still represents an excellent effort.

## **Curlew**

The location of all the Curlews found during the surveys, or reported on Casual Record maps, is shown in Appendix 2. These observations have been analysed, and the apparent number of territories is shown on page 3.

Comparison of the 2018 results with those from previous years is set out in the next section of the report.

There was one, perhaps two pairs, in 67J near Cleeton St Mary (they were seen in different locations, but were probably the same pair), but the pair on Catherton Marshes did not return.

The "possible additional pair" in 58Q was only heard twice by local residents, and that in 67I was a pair seen on one occasion only, and there was no other evidence that a pair was present in either square.

Squares 57T and 57U, where there have been Curlew records in previous years, but no evidence of breeding, were not covered in 2015 or 2018.

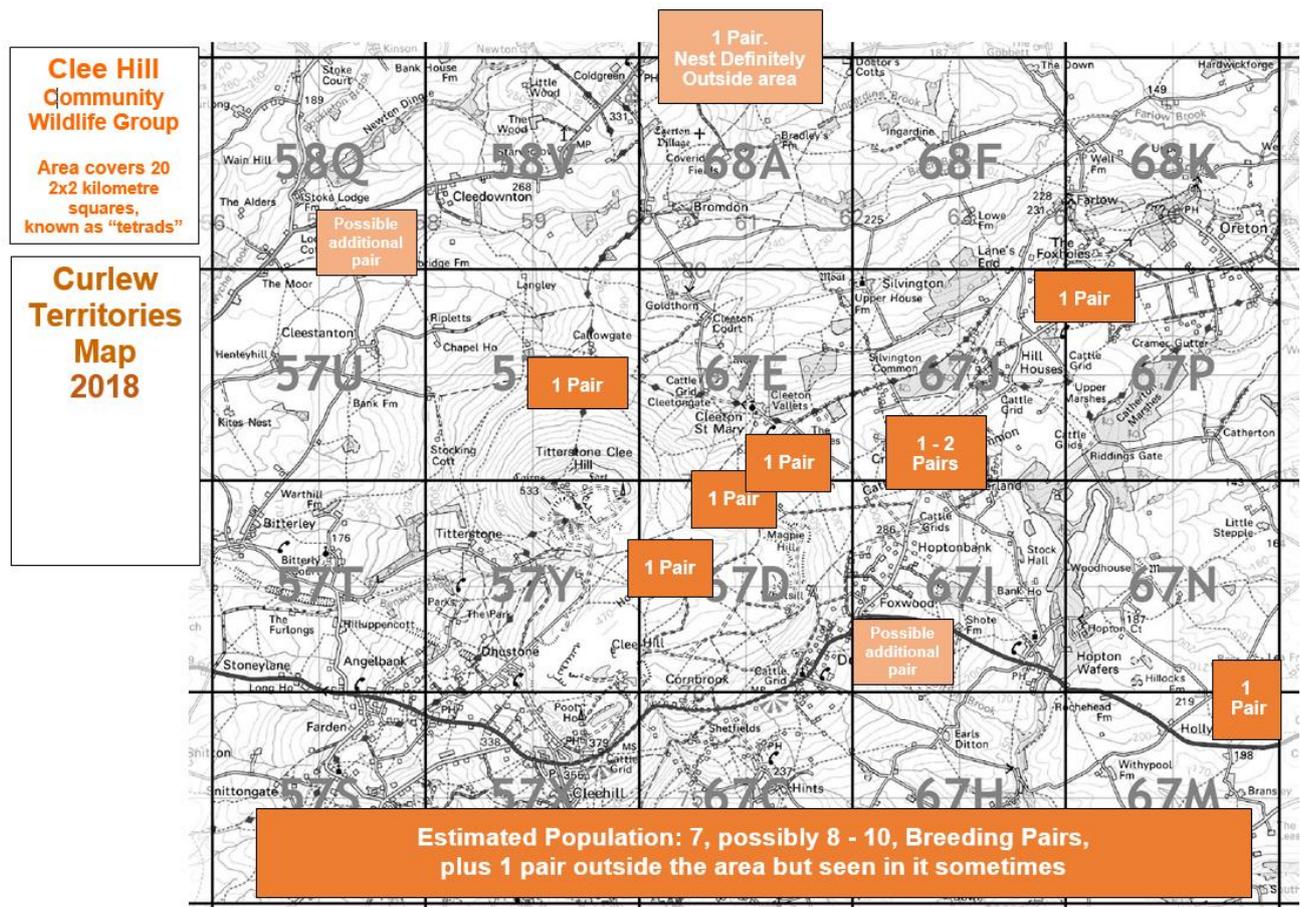
Little is known about the outcome of all the breeding attempts, as the third survey, designed to see which Curlews have chicks, takes place around a month before any young birds are due to fledge. Breeding success is undoubtedly very poor, and the only known fledged young, in 2016 and again in 2017 were protected from mammalian predation by being inside a rabbit (and hence fox and badger) proof fence at a tree nursery, but this pair failed in 2018. However, the Curlew Conservation Project (see below) reported definitely one, probably two, fledged young on Random Hill. Apart from these, there is no evidence that any other young fledged in the survey area in 2018.

A pair nest just outside the area, north of 68A at a known site in 68B (see below). A casual record from just outside the area was received this year, almost certainly attributable to this pair.

**From the above observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Curlew population in the area is now probably 7, just possibly up to 10 breeding pairs, with another pair again located in the adjacent tetrad 68B.**

**There were no observations in the area to suggest Curlews might still be present in 57N, but a pair was reported in 68L.**

### Curlew Territories 2018



### Curlew Population Change 2012 – 18

In general, Curlews are site faithful, and return to the same nesting area, often the same field, for as long as the pair are alive. One year old birds spend their first summer on their

wintering grounds, and return to their natal area to breed when they are two. New pairs have to establish a territory, but are likely to be faithful to it subsequently.

They are long-lived, often living to 20 years old or more, but the population is falling nationally and locally because not enough young birds fledge and reach breeding age to replace the older ones dying off.

As well as the pairs breeding in the area, three, possibly four, pairs nest just outside it, but one or both of the birds in each of these pairs have sometimes been recorded on our surveys.

In the light of this knowledge, the distribution maps included in all the Group's reports in the seven years from the launch in 2012, including the 2018 results referred to above, have been reviewed and compared. Interpretation has been helped by the observations of several members of the Group who live near where some pairs, and interactions between pairs, have been seen frequently over the years.

The results are as follows:-

57T – occasional records of a single bird recorded in 2015, and in each of the three earlier years, in 57T suggests this is part of an additional territory of a pair believed to have nested outside the area, to the west (probably in 57N), but the absence of records in 2016, 2017 or 2018 suggest it is no longer there, although 57T was not surveyed this year.

57U – found in three years up until 2014. The square was not surveyed in 2015, and a pair was found on the first survey in 2016 but not seen again, and no evidence of breeding was found. A calling bird was heard twice in 2017, but the square was not surveyed in 2018. The status of this territory is uncertain, but, in view of the 2017 records it has been counted as still present.

58Q – present in the northern part of the square every year up until 2015, but not in 2016 or 2017. One was heard twice in the square by local residents in 2018, but if there was a nest in this square, it would have almost certainly have been heard much more frequently. However, it is shown on the territories map as a “possible additional pair.

57Y – two pairs nested regularly for many years until 2014, when the fields they used were grazed. None have been recorded in the square since, apart from in the early survey period, when birds are returning to, and passing through, the area.

57Z – present every year

58V and 68A – a pair nest just outside the area, to the north of 68A at a known site in 68B. They have been there many years, including the whole of the period 2012-18. Records in these two squares in previous years, but not in 2017 or 2018, are probably due to this pair. Curlews have not been seen in these two squares on surveys after April, and the sporadic records over the years are likely to represent the territory boundary between the pair in 68B, and the pairs to the south. It is likely that, if there had been a pair breeding in these squares regularly, it would have been very active, defending its territory against its neighbours, and would have been recorded in most, if not every, year.

67D, 67E, 67I and 67J – these four squares have been the regular hotspot. In the early years it was not possible to determine the exact number of pairs, and the cluster of records was variously interpreted as 3-5 or 4-5 pairs. However, in 2015, concurrent observations proved five pairs. The pair on Magpie Hill, whose nest with four eggs was found in 2012, were not there in 2016, but were present again in 2017. However, in 2017 there was a pair on Random Hill, on the border of 67D and 57Y, which defended a nest site against Buzzard and Crow, suggesting chicks were

present. Conversely, the pair at Cleetongate, present every year up until 2016, was not found in 2017, leaving four pairs again.

67M and 67N – there were two pairs near the Hollywaste crossroads in the early years, and nests of both were found in 2013. Records from 2014 and 2015 indicate 1 – 2 pairs there, but there was apparently only one in 2016, 2017 and 2018. Records from Little Stepple (67N) in 2015, and from further south between there and Hollywaste in 2016, 2017 and 2018, may have been foraging from a territory to the east, or may have been foraging from a territory near Hollywaste.

67P – the pair in the north-west of the square, near Cramer Gutter, have been present every year, and fledged young in 2014 (2) and 2016 (1). The pair to the south of them in this square were first present in 2015, and were also there in 2016, when the northern pair produced one fledged young, while the nest of the new pair was found predated. The southern pair was again present in 2017, but not 2018, when two pairs interacted at the site, then one flew off towards Cramer Gutter, and the other towards Hollywaste. The arrival of the new pair in 2015 resulted in many more observations in 67P, and 68F and 68K, and more than in any previous year.

68F – sporadic records over the years, particularly in 2015, were likely to reflect the pair near Cramer Gutter using feeding areas further north, displaced by their new neighbour to the south, which would also encourage the pair further north still, from outside the area near Stoddeston, to come to the southern edge of their territory to defend it. The territory of the new neighbour was not occupied in 2018, and there was only one record from 68F or 68K

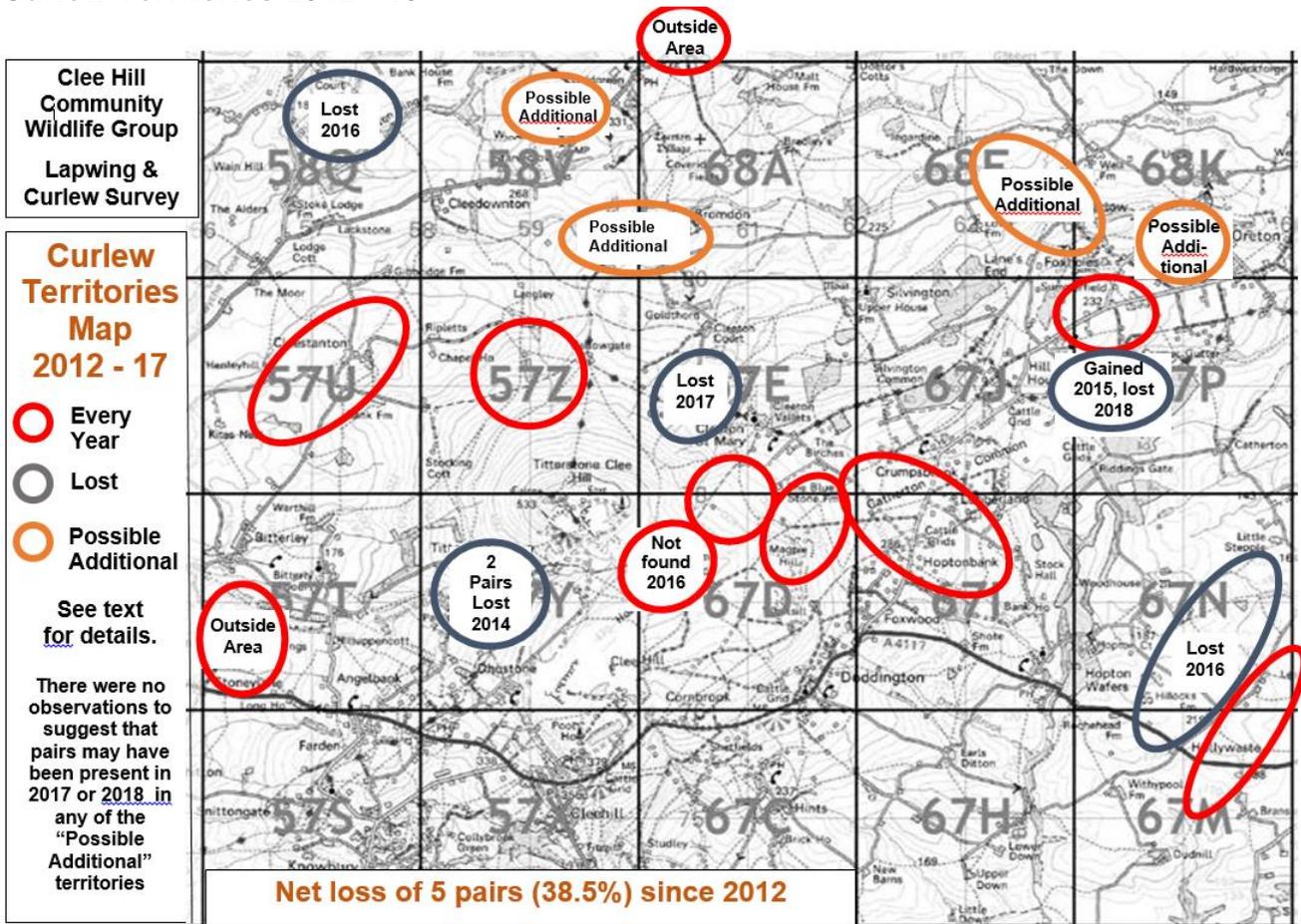
68K – there were several records in the north of the square in 2012, attributed in 2012 to “a pair [breeding close to] Stottesdon (in 68L)”. There have been no records from the north of this square since. There were no records in the south of the square until 2015, and again in 2017, which are also likely to reflect the pair near Cramer Gutter using feeding areas further north, away from their new neighbour to the south (see 68F above). The former pair was reported still present near Stottesdon in 2018.

Based on this analysis, it will be seen that five pairs have been lost between 2012 and 2018, and the one gained in 2015 was lost in 2018. Apparently the pair at Cleetongate was absent in 2017, but replaced by a pair re-occupying Random Hill. The pair in 57U, whose current status is uncertain, has been counted as not lost.

The population for each year in this assessment is within the range published in each Annual Report, except the under-estimate published in 2012, which was revised upwards in the 2013 report in the light of results in that year. The apparent increase between 2012 and 2013 was probably due to improved and increased survey coverage, as more members got to know their squares better. The highest estimate of 12 – 14 was made in 2013, and the current assessment has revised that to 13 pairs.

This analysis is summarised on the Curlew Territories 2012-18 map. There were no observations to suggest that pairs may have been present in 2018 in any of the “Possible Additional” territories.

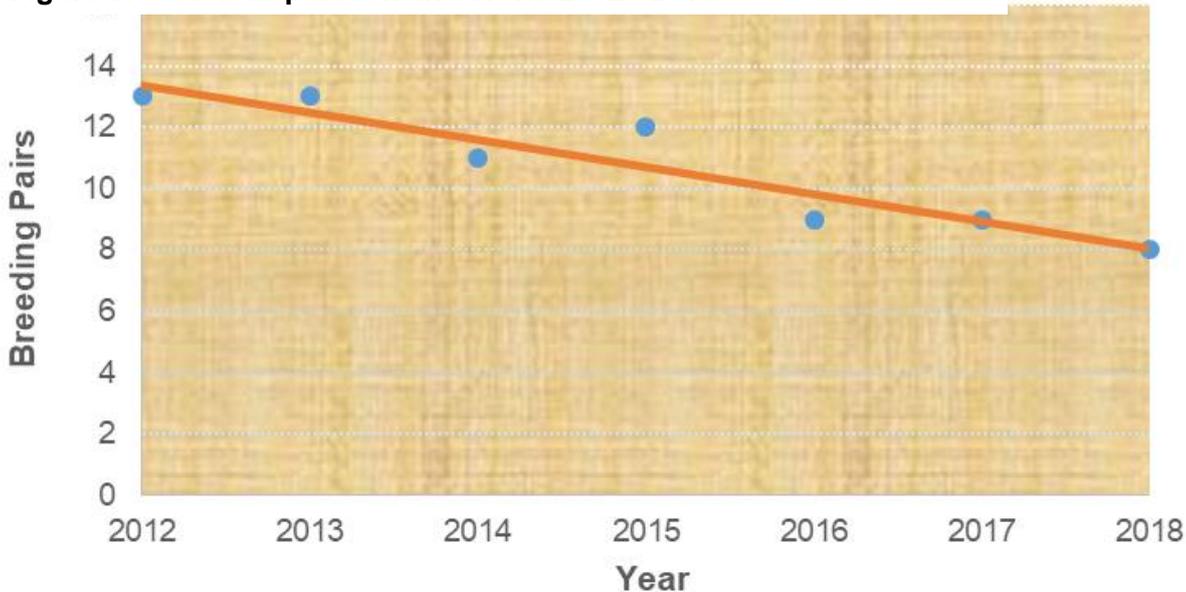
## Curlew Territories 2012 - 18



## Curlew Population Trend

The revised annual population, and population trend, excluding possible additional pairs, is shown in the chart (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Curlew Population and Trend 2012 - 2018



It will be seen that the net population loss is five pairs, a decline of 38.51% in only seven years.

Breeding success has been insufficient to sustain the population for many years, so it is likely that the population is elderly, and it may well disappear quickly if nothing is done to improve breeding success. This process may be starting already, with the apparent loss of three pairs in 2016, and another one in each of 2017 and 2018.

**It is, of course, possible that pairs were present in the apparently vacant territories, and efforts will be made to search them in 2019.**

## ***Lapwing***

Four Lapwings were seen frequently at the start of the year into March, and were still present at the start of the breeding season and in to May, north-east of the Hollywaste crossroads, on the border between 67M & N. Four birds were seen on the ground there on the second survey, and others might have been out of sight, so there were presumably at least two pairs there then.

**From the survey results and casual records, it is believed that there were 2 – 4 breeding pairs of Lapwing in 2018, the same number and at the same location as in 2017.**

**This is a welcome improvement on 2016 or 2015, when none were found, and compares with 2 in 2014, 1 - 2 pairs in 2013, and 3 pairs in 2012.**

The pairs seen in 2014 and 2013, and one of the pairs in 2012, were also near Hollywaste. Pairs found in SO57U and SO68K in 2012 have not been relocated since.

## ***Anecdotal Evidence for the Decline of Lapwing and Curlew***

Members of the Bird Group 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, in 2018 and in previous years, and they too said that Lapwings and Curlew are less common now than they used to be. Lapwings have apparently declined much more than Curlews. Specific examples of such anecdotal evidence were quoted in the reports in previous years.

## ***Other Target Species***

The numbers of the Other Target Species recorded during each of the three survey periods are listed in the Tables in Appendix 3. They are summarised in Table 1.

The summary table shows the maximum count from the three survey visits for each species in each tetrad. This may under-record some species, but the alternative – adding all the counts together – would lead to considerable double or triple counting of some individual birds.

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

Some members did not send in survey returns, particularly for the third period. This would not have affected the number of records of the main target species. Some of the returns did not include the time spent, and some members sent in returns on casual record sheets, so the total time put into surveys taken from record sheets (almost 185 hours) understates the effort put in.

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

**Table 1. Other Target Species - Summary**

Square (Tetrad)	Maximum Number of Each Species Recorded												
	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Dipper	Dunnock	Wheatear	Stone-chat	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
57S							9				3		
57T	Square not surveyed												
57U	Square not surveyed												
57X	Square not surveyed												
57Y	1	1	4	4	1			1	1				
57Z	1		15		1		1	7	1	4		8	3
58Q	No target species recorded												
58V	Square not surveyed												
67C	2			2			8		2	5	2	4	
67D	1	1		1					1				
67D				1									
67E	2		2	4				1	4	1			3
67H		1			1	1							
67I	1			2									
67J				4			2		3				
67M			8								3	3	
67N												2	
67P	1												
68A	No target species recorded												
68F			4			1	8			6	1	13	
68K												3	
<b>Total birds</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Total tetrads</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>

Not surprisingly, Barn Owl, Snipe, Grey Partridge and Yellow Wagtail were not recorded, but, more surprisingly, no Swift (nest sites), Spotted Flycatcher or Tree Sparrow were recorded on surveys either.

It will be seen that Skylark, Dunnock and Yellowhammer are numerous, Meadow Pipit are numerous in restricted parts of the area where suitable habitat still exists (the hills and Commons), and the remaining species that were found are present only in their specific habitats, and in small numbers. No species was recorded in half the tetrads surveyed.

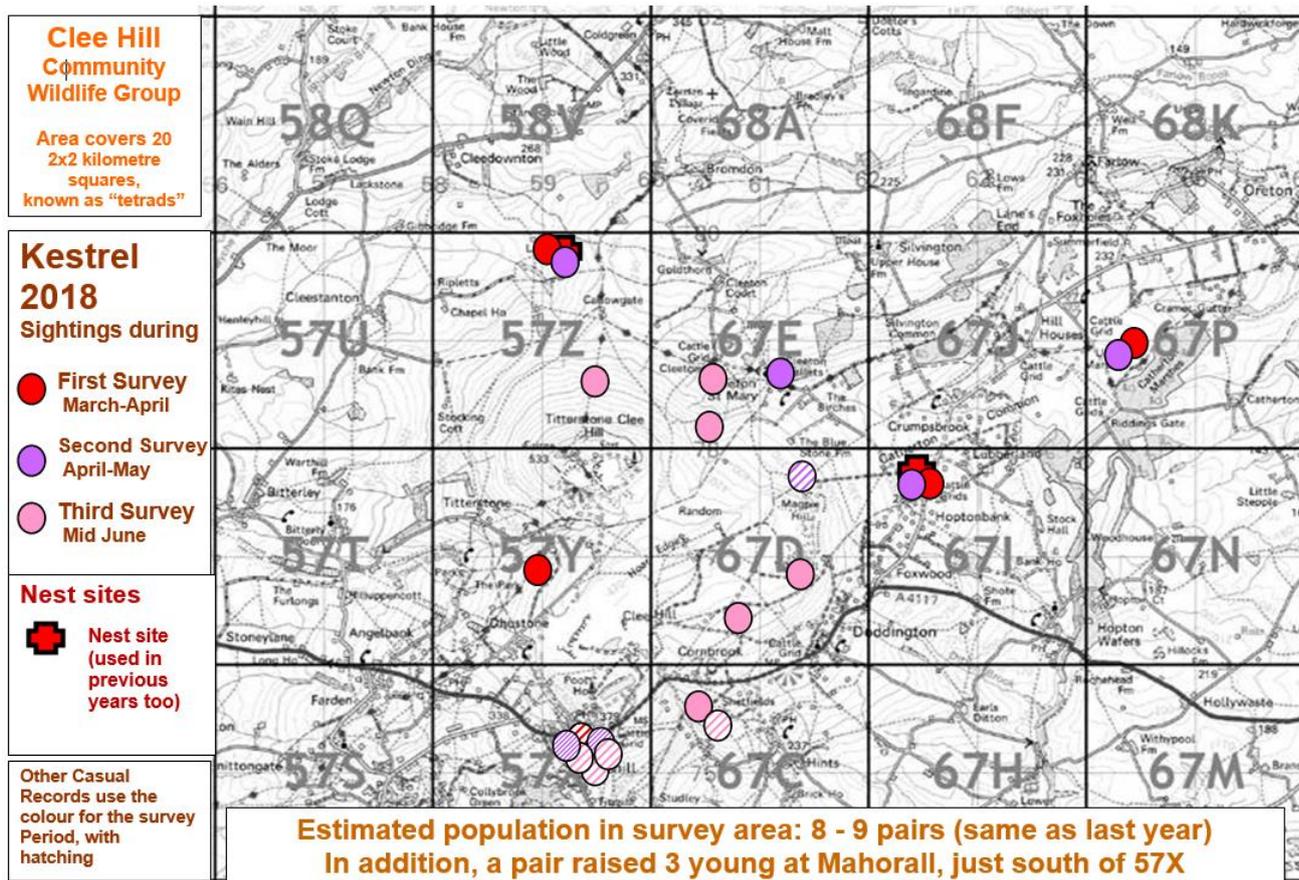
Kestrels are conspicuous, and forage over large areas, so an assessment can be made of their population. The records from 2018 are shown in the map.

### **Kestrel Observations 2018**

The nest box near Pot house Farm in SO67I was occupied, and six eggs were laid, but they were cold when the box was examined when there should have been chicks in it. A pair near Upper Marshes were seen frequently at the beginning of the season, but much less so later, so any nesting attempt was unsuccessful. The nest in SO57Z was apparently occupied again (outcome unknown).

Kestrels were presumably affected by the long period of cold wet windy weather that lasted until their nesting time. The number of records was considerably less than in the previous couple of years, but the distribution was similar. The analysis in 2014, when there were more records, suggested perhaps nine pairs, and these still appear to be present, except perhaps in 57U. The estimate made in 2016, of 8 – 9 pairs, still seems reasonable.

Better news was received from Mahorall, just south of Clee Hill village but outside the survey area, of a pair that nested in the Barn Owl box shown on p.13, and successfully fledged three young.



Cuckoo was recorded in only 3 squares, compared with 6 last year, 5 in 2016, 7 in 2015 and 5 in 2014. Each pair ranges far and wide, so an estimate of two breeding pairs seems reasonable for previous years, but there was perhaps only one in 2018. The population has been estimated at this level, or just one pair, each year since 2012.

Red Kites were recorded in three squares during surveys, less than the six last year, which was the same as the previous highest, in 2015, but there were also several casual records. There was no evidence of breeding. If a nest was found here, it would be the most easterly found in Shropshire since successful breeding recommenced in 2006, following a gap of 130 years. Across the County, more nests were found in 2017 (28) than in any previous year, and almost the same number was reached in 2018.

Dippers were seen in two squares on surveys, and several active Dipper nests were found in the area (Jon Lingard, *pers.comm.*).

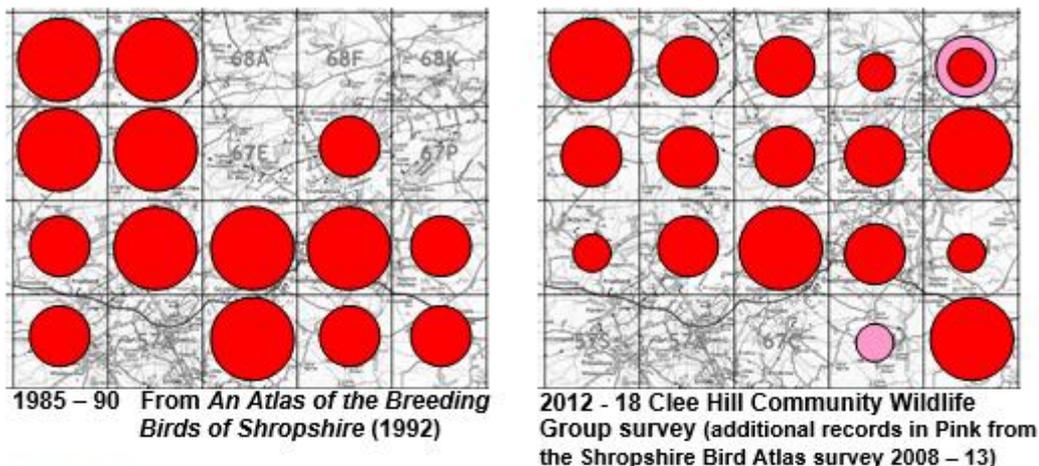
### ***Decline of Lapwing and Curlew***

Lapwing and Curlew are in decline, nationally, here, and elsewhere in Shropshire. Nationally, both have recently been added to the *Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern*, Lapwing in 2008 and Curlew in 2015, because of the magnitude of the decline

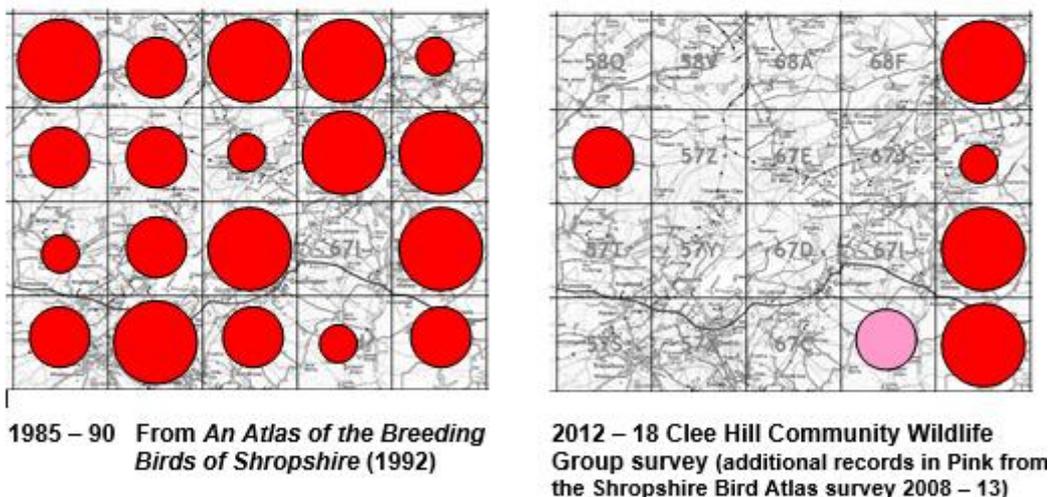
The decline in the Cleve Hill area is shown graphically in Figure 2. This compares the distribution maps representing the results of the current survey in 20 tetrads with the relevant parts of the maps shown in *An Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Shropshire*, based on six years fieldwork 1985-90, and published in 1992. Both maps have been compiled on the same basis and it is likely that more fieldwork has taken place in the current period, so the decline is undoubtedly real.

**Figure 2. Distribution of Curlew and Lapwing in the Cleve Hill area: Comparison between 1985-90 and 2008 – 18**

**Curlew**



**Lapwing**



**Key**

The background map is the 20 tetrads (2x2 kilometre squares) surveyed by the Cleve Hill Community Wildlife Group each year since 2012  
 Each dot represents at least one observation during the Atlas period  
 Large dot = Confirmed Breeding  
 Middle dot = Probable Breeding  
 Small dot = Seen or heard in suitable habitat

A large dot indicates that breeding was proved in the tetrad (usually a nest was found, or a bird was seen incubating, or dependent young were seen), a middle size dot indicates probable breeding (usually a pair was seen, or territorial behaviour was observed), and a small dot indicates possible breeding (a bird was seen or heard in the breeding season).

Such an observation needs to occur at least (but perhaps only) once in the whole Atlas / survey period, and it gives no indication of the number of breeding pairs. These distribution maps therefore probably overestimate the population:-

- Lapwings have specific nesting habitat requirements, which in this area usually mean they nest on arable fields planted with spring crops, which get moved each

year by crop rotation on farms. Therefore one pair, or a small colony, may breed in several different tetrads over a period of years.

- A pair of Curlews may also move their nest from place to place within their large territories, so again one pair may nest in several tetrads in the Atlas period. Nests are difficult to find, but pairs and territorial display are relatively easy to find, but may be observed anywhere within the large territory, so one pair may be recorded in several tetrads.

Even so, it is clear from the distribution maps in Figure 1 that both species are now absent from places where they were found 20 – 25 years ago. The decline of the Curlew population by 38.5% between 2012 and 2018, and the absence of Lapwing altogether in 2015 and 2016, and presence in only 1-2 tetrads in 2017 and 2018, shows that the decline is continuing.

Action to attempt to reverse these declines is being taken. 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 Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (part of the system of payments to farmers through the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union) included provision to reward farmers for sensitive management of habitat on their farms, and providing other environmental benefits. Farmers applying to join the scheme had to take into account the breeding habitat requirements of a number of birds, including Lapwing and Curlew, if they breed on or near the farm, or use land there for feeding. HLS includes specific prescriptions, and payments, for Lapwing and Curlew habitat, if the farmer wants to take them up. The data provided by Community Wildlife Groups, on the location and habitat of these priority species, helped Natural England (the Government Agency responsible both for achieving the Biodiversity targets, and administering the Environmental Stewardship Scheme) to target its limited resources more effectively to achieve this objective.

At least two farms were able to join HLS as a result of the Group's survey results.

HLS has now come to an end, and has been replaced by a new Scheme, Countryside Stewardship, part of the EU Common Agricultural Policy for 2015 - 22, with similar objectives. However, it is intended to focus the new scheme more, to help achieve the Government's Biodiversity 2020 targets, and overcome the fragmentation of habitats that has led to so much of the decline of wildlife.

A Targeting Statement and Criteria have been approved, and new applications have been invited from 2016 onwards. As a direct result of evidence supplied by the Upper Onny Wildlife Group, Curlew has been added to Lapwing as a Target Species for Countryside Stewardship. However, the new scheme is more bureaucratic and less generous, so it is not likely to be particularly effective in halting the decline, and "Brexit" makes its future uncertain.

## **SWT / SOS "Save our Curlews" Campaign**

Curlew is the highest bird conservation priority in the UK, as we have a special responsibility for them (28% of the European Population, and 18-27% of the World Population, breed here). Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) and Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS) have therefore launched a *Save our Curlews campaign*, funded by a joint Appeal. The appeal raised enough to fund nest protection and chick monitoring work in Upper Clun and Clee Hill in 2018, carried out jointly with the respective Community Wildlife Groups.

In Clee Hill, three nests were found and fenced. None of these nests were wholly predated, although 2 eggs were lost from one nest, presumably to Crows. Fences were totally successful in protecting nests from mammalian predators, including foxes. Definitely one, probably two, of the chicks from one brood fledged, but none of the other three radio tagged chicks are believed to have fledged: one was definitely predated by a Buzzard, and two were probably predated, but the tags were carried out of range or underground. They may have been taken by either avian or mammalian predators. If the latter, fox is most likely, although not the only possibility.

There was evidence of hatched young at one further site from the CWG bird survey, but no evidence of any other fledged young.

The project report on work in Clee Hill has been sent separately to all members of the CWG Bird Group, and it can be found on the Clee hill part of the Community Wildlife Groups website, [www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk) More information about the aims and other work of the campaign can be found on the SOS website [www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/](http://www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/)

We want to repeat the project in Clee Hill in 2019, but we will only be able to if the appeal raises considerably more money. If you would like to see Curlew return to Clee Hill for many years to come, please donate to the appeal if you can. See [www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/appeals](http://www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/appeals)

## **Recommendations**

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

## **Use of Clee Hill CWG Survey Results**

Most importantly, the Clee Hill CWG survey results are made available to Natural England. They show the importance of particular areas for these species, which will hopefully encourage farmers to manage their land more 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, which together now cover well over 500 square kilometres, around two-thirds of the Shropshire Hills AONB. These results help inform the AONB Management Plan, which is currently being revised to cover the five years 2019 - 24

The records at tetrad level were also supplied to Shropshire Ornithological Society for incorporation into the Shropshire Bird Atlas, based on six years fieldwork 2008-13, and results should be published in a new county Avifauna, *The Birds of Shropshire*, around the end of 2019.

Comparison of the Atlas maps from the current project with those from the 1985 – 90 Atlas, for the whole of Shropshire, show that Curlew, Lapwing and Kestrel are all declining rapidly. Our survey results show that Curlew and Kestrel are still well established here, and this area is therefore very important to them.

Coupled with the results of other surveys, the results may also contribute to the identification of potential new 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.

## **Barn Owl Nest Box Scheme**

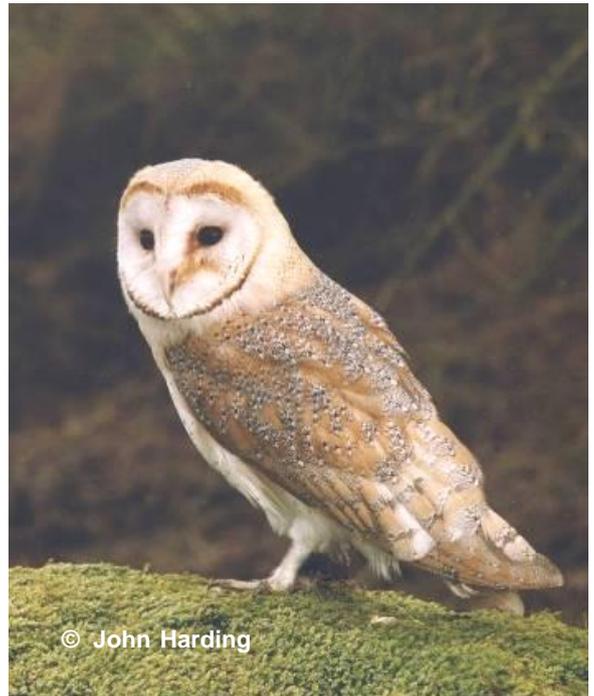
The Bird Group initiated a Barn Owl nest box scheme in the area in 2013.

Barn Owl was on the *Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern 3 (2009)*, because of a long term population decline caused by loss of foraging habitat and nest sites. Conservation action (nest boxes and field margins through agri-environment schemes) led to Barn Owl being moved to the Green List in 2015, but there is no evidence that any recovery has occurred in this area. Provision of nest boxes will help reverse this decline locally. Nest boxes are more likely to be used, and help increase the population, if they are put near to existing Barn Owl territories and foraging areas.

These specially designed nest boxes can be provided free of charge to farmers and landowners with suitable habitat in the Cleve Hill area. This requires-

- An isolated farm building, or large isolated tree or pole more than 400 metres from nearest woodland
- Four hectares (10 acres) of permanent rough grassland nearby, several inches tall to provide cover for voles and other prey

A poster advertising the scheme has been put up around the area. Several landowners have responded and potential sites have been assessed by Chris Bargman and Anton Schooley, together with John Lightfoot from the Shropshire Barn Owl Group.



Several boxes have now been installed, like the one at Mahorall Farm pictured, and it, and an indoor box at the same site, have both been used for roosting in 2016 and 2017, but there has been no evidence of breeding. Kestrels bred in this box in 2018 (see p.9). No new boxes were installed in 2018, and there is one indoor box unallocated from the first batch made, for installation if a suitable site is identified.

A Barn Owl has been seen occasionally over Catherton common in previous years, but no positive sightings, or use of any of the boxes by Barn Owls have been reported.

**If you see a Barn Owl, we'd like to know, please**

**For further information, or to report a Barn Owl sighting in the Cleve Hill area, please contact Chris Bargman 01299 270514 [chcwg@shropscwgs.org.uk](mailto:chcwg@shropscwgs.org.uk)**

## **Other Nest Boxes**

The Group successfully applied to the Ludlow Rotary Club “Rotary Cares” fund in September 2017 to acquire nest boxes for several other species: Kestrels, Pied Flycatchers and Redstarts, Swifts, Swallows and House Martins. A total of 26 boxes were purchased, and they were almost all installed before the 2018 season.

These were offered to people within the area who had suitable locations for the target species.

Two Kestrel boxes have been installed, one on Catherton Common and one at Whatshill. Kestrels have been seen in these areas but the boxes were not used last year. One further box is available when a suitable location has been found.



Seven Swallow, seven House Martin and three Swift boxes have been installed at suitable locations where the target species have been seen or have previously nested.

Feedback has indicated that there has been some success, particularly with the Swallow cups, and we are hopeful that this second season will see more of the boxes being used.

Six boxes have been installed for Redstart and Pied Flycatcher. Feedback to date shows that some of these were used but unfortunately not by target species – blue tits and one wasp nest. One box is waiting to be allocated when a suitable location where the target species have been seen can be identified.

## **Bird Walks**

Two walks were held, for members and the general public

1. Sunday 8 April, starting at Cleeton St Mary, and visiting the Common up to Magpie Hill. This walk also provided practical training for people who wanted to help with the Bird Survey
2. Sunday 13 May at The Novers woodland, specifically to learn about identifying birds by their song (Joint Meeting with Clee Hill Heritage Trust)

A wide variety of birds were seen and heard, and there were 7 participants on the first and 10 on the second.

## ***Other Community Wildlife Groups***

The identification of Curlew territories by the Community Wildlife Groups is the foundation of the Save our Curlews campaign. The first of these groups, 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.

Between them, these Groups cover well over half 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 2018, these Groups covered 137 survey squares (tetrads), totalling 536 square kilometres. There were over 270 participants, who spent a total of more than 2,400 hours on survey work, and 85 – 103 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.

## ***Acknowledgements***

Most importantly, thanks to the Group members who undertook the survey work, or submitted casual records:-

**Chris Bargman  
Bob Braddock  
Beth & Lionel Bridge  
Simon Brown / SWT  
John Cartledge  
Caroline Dahn  
Barbara Daniels  
Rachael Davenhill**

**Eric Davies  
Eric Evans  
Ian Ferguson  
Celia Gibb  
Helena Hale  
Peter Johnson  
Angela Mackirdy  
Chris Neal**

**Carl Price  
David & Ginny Seckerson  
Margaret Shaw  
Kit Smith  
Gareth Thomas  
Linda Webb  
Marian Wootton  
Kate Wyke**

Particular thanks to the surveyors who also submitted casual records.

Thanks also to:-

- Chris Bargman and Anton Schooley, for organising the Barn Owl nest box scheme
- John Lightfoot, of the Shropshire Barn Owl Group, for help and advice
- Jonathon Lingard for additional records and information.
- Margaret Shaw, for publicity on Clee Hill Facebook page
- Gareth Thomas, for leading the Bird Song walk
- Matt Cotterill of Natural England, who provided the survey maps.
- Ludlow Rotary Club, for a grant for new nest box schemes.
- Chris Bargman, for co-ordinating these nest box schemes.

Special thanks to Angela Mackirdy, who has moved away from the area, for her work as Bird Group Secretary, and maintaining a diary of Curlews seen or heard from Pot House farm, for several years. Best wishes for the future, Angela.

## **Report**

A copy of this report has been supplied to all people who contributed to the surveys, or supplied additional records, and to Natural England.

Copies can be downloaded from the Clee Hill part of the Shropshire Community Wildlife Groups website, [www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk)

Alternatively, copies are available (electronic .pdf versions or paper copies) from Leo Smith, The Bryn, Castle Hill, All Stretton, Shropshire SY6 6JP. Phone: 01694 720296 email [leo@leosmith.org.uk](mailto:leo@leosmith.org.uk).

## **Summary 2018**

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

*Sixteen tetrads were surveyed, and we now have an even better understanding of the population and distribution of Lapwing and Curlew, and the status of the Other Target Species. Comparison of results over the six years suggests a loss of five pairs (38.5%) of Curlew. This is valuable information to promote its conservation. At least two pairs of Lapwing were found.*

*Further survey work in future years will continue to establish population trends in the area. In particular, the tetrads where Curlew have apparently disappeared will be checked carefully.*

*The Barn Owl nest box scheme was developed, nest boxes for other species were provided, and two Bird Walks were held.*

## **Plans for 2019**

The Bird Group intends to repeat the Bird Survey. New participants are needed, so we hope to recruit new members.

Participants with Curlews in their square will be asked to make a special effort to locate territories in late April, to help the "Save our Curlews" Campaign find and protect nests.

The Barn Owl nest box scheme will be developed, and a programme of local bird walks and other activities will be held if there is a demand.

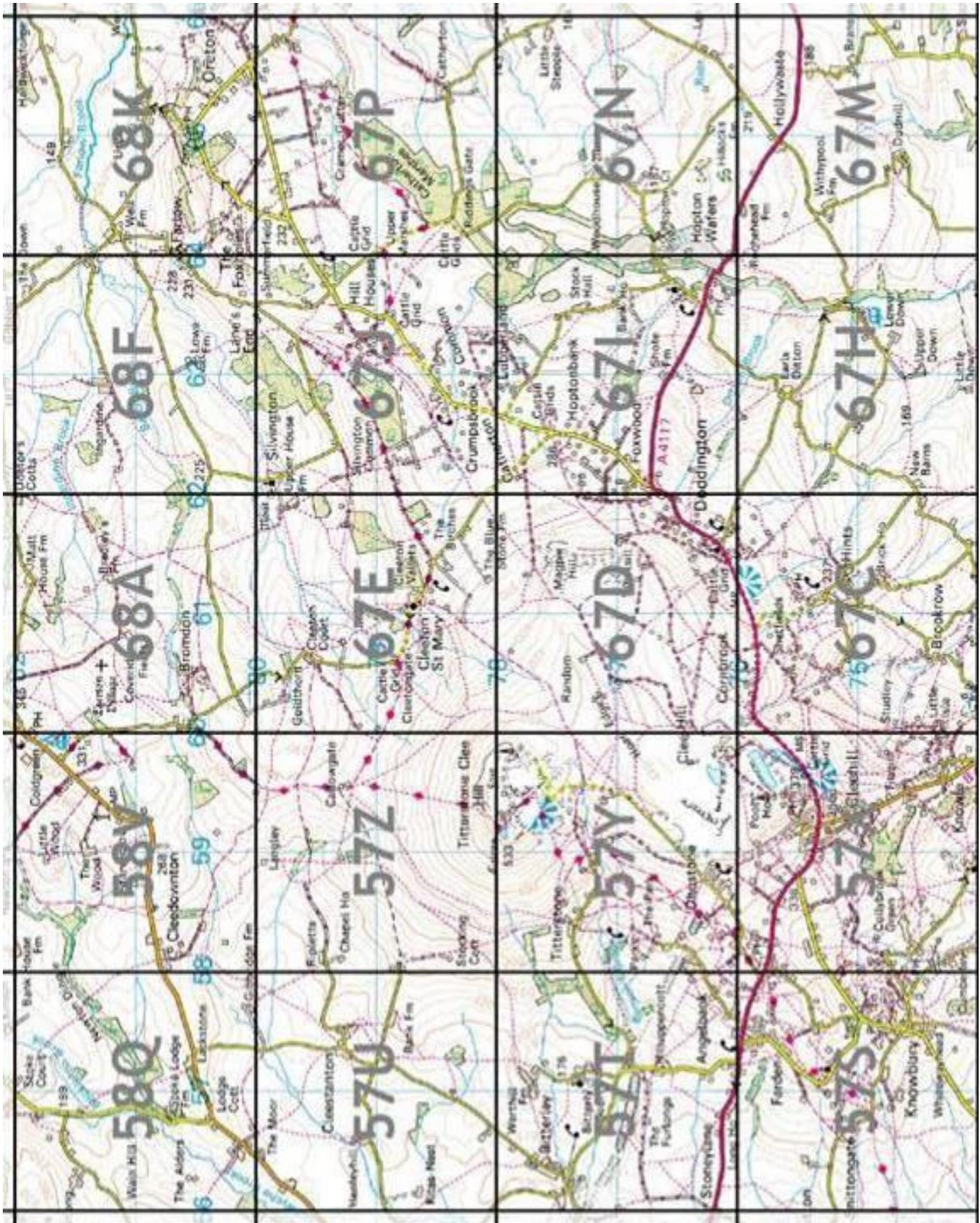
Further consideration will be given to these plans, and any other proposals people want to make, at the Group meeting on Monday 25 March 2019. This meeting will plan the survey, allocate survey squares to participants, and arrange and publicise the other activities.

Everyone interested in birds is welcome at all meetings and events. A Programme will be published after the meeting. Details can also be found and downloaded from the Clee Hill part of the joint website for all the Community Wildlife Groups in the Shropshire Hills, [www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk)

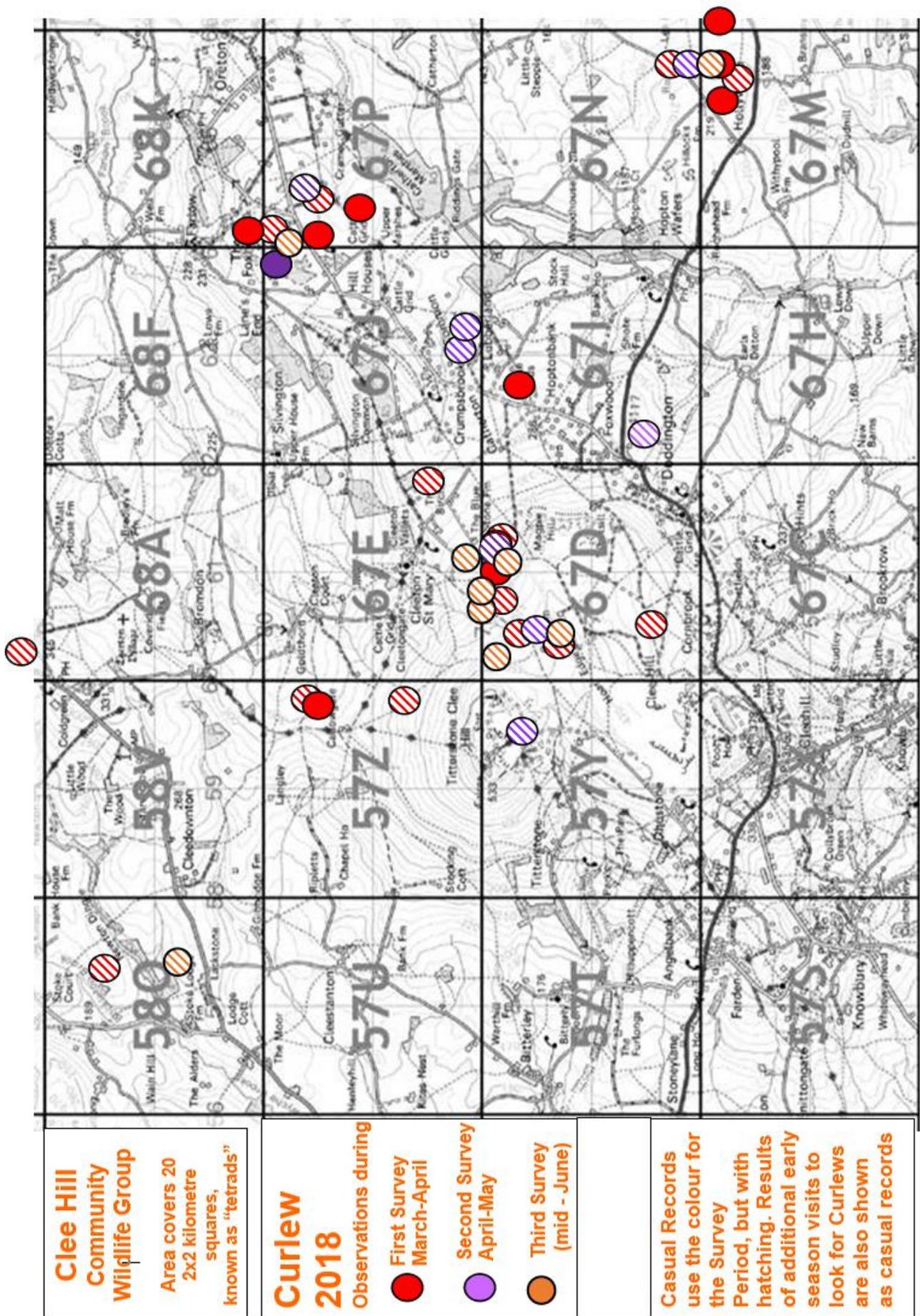
Leo Smith  
March 2019

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

The prefix SO (defining the 100 km square on the OS National Grid) has been omitted, as this is common to all the squares in the area.



## Appendix 2. All Curlew Observations 2018



## Appendix 3. Bird Survey – Results from each of the Three Survey Periods

First Period Survey: 24 March – 8 April (approx)

Square (Tetrad)	Surveyor				Number of Each Species Recorded														
	First Name	Surname	Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Dipper	Duncock	Wheat-ear	Stone-chat	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
57S	Beth & Lionel	Bridge	2	30									9				3		
57T	Linda	Webb			Square not surveyed														
57U	Gareth	Thomas			Square not surveyed														
57X	Kate	Wyke			Square not surveyed														
57Y	Chris	Neal	2	0		2	1	1							1				
57Y	Bob	Braddock			Square not surveyed														
57Z	Barbara	Daniels	7	30		2	1		15	lots			1	1	1			4	1
58Q	Caroline	Dahn	4	30	No target species recorded														
58V	Mark Hood & Martyne	Hook			Square not surveyed														
67C	Beth & Lionel	Bridge	3	20						2			6				2		
67D	John	Cartledge			Square not surveyed														
67D	Rachael	Davenhill	1	45		1				1									
67D	Celia	Gibb	1	45	(with Rachael Davenhill)														
67E	Eric	Davies	3	10					1	4									3
67E	Simon	Brown / SWT	3	0		2													
67H	Kit	Smith	3	5				1											
67I	Angela	Mackirdy	5	30		1	1			2									
67I	David & Ginny	Seckerson	5	30	(with Angela Mackirdy)														
67J	Ian	Ferguson	3	0						4			2						
67M	Peter	Johnson	2	0	4	2			1										1
67M	Carl	Price	3	10	8	1			8								3	3	
67N	Peter	Johnson	2	0		1													2
67P	Chris	Bargman	3	0		4	1												
68A	Simon	Brown / SWT	2	0	No target species recorded														
68F	Marian	Wootton	2	0					2				7			6	1	13	
68K	Eric	Evans	5	10		2												3	
<b>TOTALS</b>			<b>65</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>4</b>

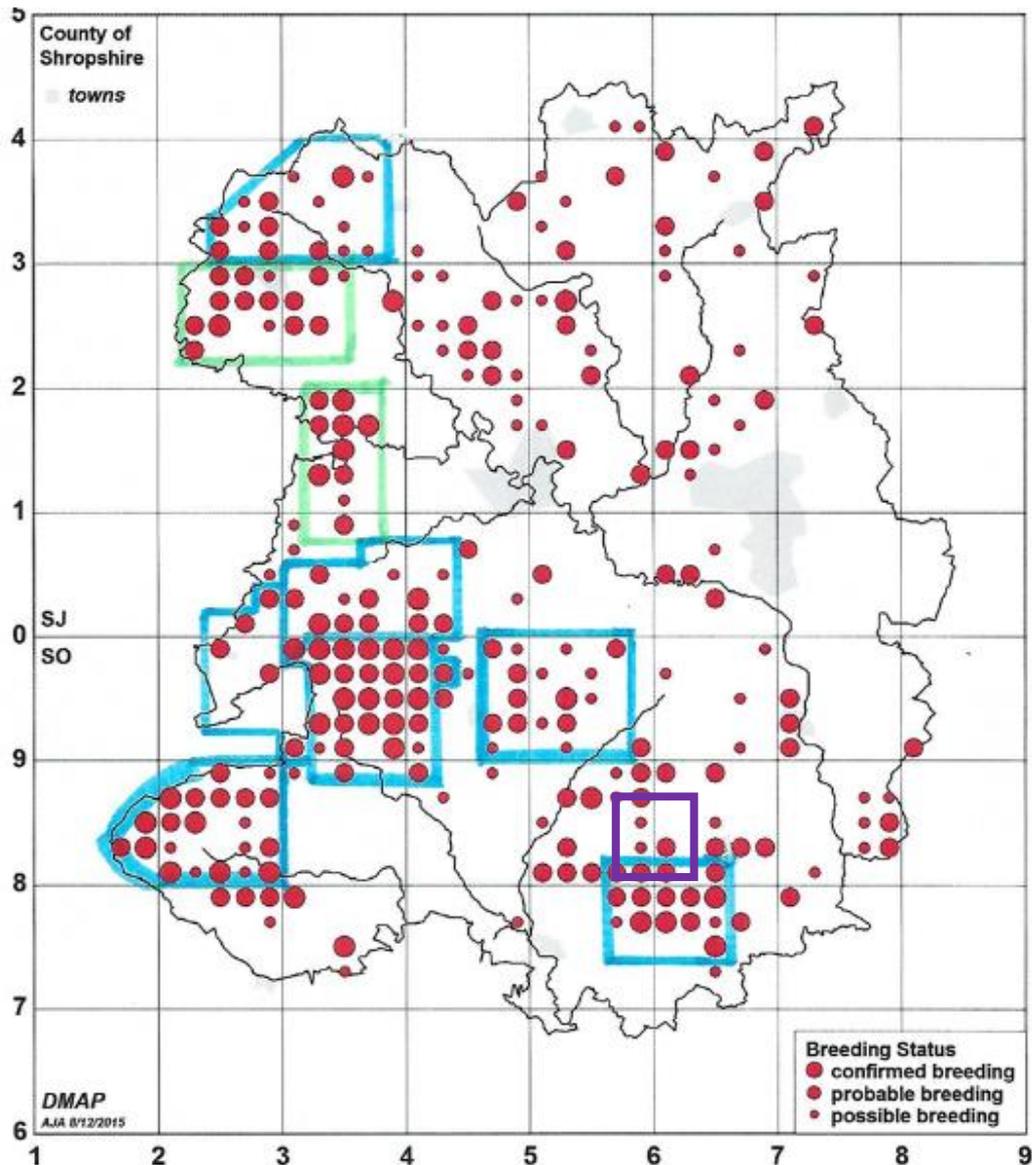
Second Period Survey: 21 April - 6 May (approx)

Square (Tetrad)	Surveyor				Number of Each Species Recorded														
	First Name	Surname	Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Dipper	Duncock	Wheat-ear	Stone-chat	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
57S	Beth & Lionel	Bridge			Square not surveyed														
57T	Linda	Webb			Square not surveyed														
57U	Gareth	Thomas			Square not surveyed														
57X	Kate	Wyke			Square not surveyed														
57Y	Chris	Neal	2	0															
57Y	Bob	Braddock	4	30					4	4	1		1						
57Z	Barbara	Daniels	3	30			1		10	lots	1		1	7		4		1	1
58Q	Caroline	Dahn			Square not surveyed														
58V	Mark & Martyne	Hook			Square not surveyed														
67C	Beth & Lionel	Bridge	3	5						2			8			2	2	4	
67D	John	Cartledge			Square not surveyed														
67D	Rachael	Davenhill			Square not surveyed														
67D	Ewan & Celia	Gibb			Square not surveyed														
67E	Eric	Davies	3	45		5			2	2			1	4	1				1
67E	Simon	Brown / SWT	2	0	No target species recorded														
67H	Kit	Smith	2	35							1	1							
67I	Angela & Iain	Mackirdy	2	30			1												
67I	David & Ginny	Seckerson	2	30	(with Angela Mackirdy)														
67J	Ian	Ferguson	2	20		2													
67M	Peter	Johnson			Square not surveyed														
67M	Carl	Price	6	30	3	2			lots										
67N	Peter	Johnson			Square not surveyed														
67P	Chris	Bargman			Square not surveyed														
68A	Simon	Brown / SWT	2	0	No target species recorded														
68F	Marian	Wootton	1	50									8			2			9
68K	Eric	Evans	3	10	No target species recorded														
<b>TOTALS</b>			<b>42</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>

### Appendix 3. Bird Survey Results (continued)

Third Period Survey: 9-24 June																				
Square (Tetrad)	Surveyor				Number of Each Species Recorded															
	First Name	Surname	Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Dipper	Dunnock	Wheatear	Stone-chat	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting	
57S	Beth & Lionel	Bridge	2	50									5							
57T	Linda	Webb			Square not surveyed															
57U	Gareth	Thomas			Square not surveyed															
57X	Kate	Wyke			Square not surveyed															
57Y	Chris	Neal			Square not surveyed															
57Y	Bob	Braddock	3	20	No target species recorded															
57Z	Barbara	Daniels	6	30			1		12	lots						4		8	3	
58Q	Caroline	Dahn			No target species recorded															
58V	Mark & Martyne	Hook			Square not surveyed															
67C	Beth & Lionel	Bridge	3	30			2			1					2	5		3		
67D	John	Cartledge	15	0		2	1	1	lots						1					
67D	Rachael	Davenhill			Square not surveyed															
67D	Ewan & Celia	Gibb			Square not surveyed															
67E	Eric	Davies	3	20		1	2													
67E	Simon	Brown / SWT	2	0	No target species recorded															
67H	Kit	Smith			No target species recorded															
67I	Angela & Iain	Mackirdy			Square not surveyed															
67I	David & Ginny	Seckerson			Square not surveyed															
67J	Ian	Ferguson	3	0						2			1		3					
67M	Peter	Johnson	4	0	No target species recorded															
67M	Carl	Price			Square not surveyed															
67N	Peter	Johnson	4	0	No target species recorded															
67P	Chris	Bargman			Square not surveyed															
68A	Simon	Brown / SWT	2	0	No target species recorded															
68F	Marian	Wootton	3	30					4			1	3				1	8		
68K	Eric	Evans			Square not surveyed															
<b>TOTALS</b>			<b>53</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>3</b>	

**Appendix 4. Bird Atlas 2008-13 Curlew Distribution map, overlain by Community Wildlife Group areas, and CWG data and survey activity in 2018**



Group	Area		First Year	Curlew		% decline since First Year	Participants		
	Survey squares (tetrads)	(sq. kms.)		Breeding Pairs (2018)			No. people	Hours	Minutes
				Min	Max				
1 Upper Onny	31.5	125	2004	25	28	37	27	232	5
2 Upper Clun	31	110	2007	8	9	60	19	130	0
3 Clee Hill	20	80	2012	7	10	31	28	180	55
4 Rea Valley	25.5	80	2014	9	11	n/a	21	179	5
5 Camlad Valley	11 **	44	2014	3	3	n/a	15	125	50
6 Strettons area	30	120	2017	6	8	n/a	35	356	55
7 Three Parishes	28	100	2017	3	4	n/a	29	194	55
8 Tanat to Perry (Oswestry south)	43	172	2018	12	15	n/a	70	600	31
9 Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence	27	108	2018	7	7	n/a	22	328	
10 Abdon	9	36	2018	5	8	n/a	11	109	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>536</b>		<b>85</b>	<b>103</b>		<b>277</b>	<b>2433</b>	<b>96</b>

Groups 1 – 7 formed before 2018. 1, 4 and 5 (yellow highlight) cover Curlew Country area. 8 & 9 promoted in 2018 by SWT / SOS campaign. 10 formed in 2018 by local resident