



Clee Hill

Community Wildlife Group

Curlews, Lapwings & Other Birds Survey 2019



Curlews, Lapwings and Other Birds Survey 2019

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CLEE HILL COMMUNITY WILDLIFE GROUP

The Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group was launched at a well-attended public meeting at the end of February 2012. It was one of three new Community Wildlife Groups in the Shropshire Hills promoted by a European Union LEADER Rural Development Programme in the Shropshire Hills, delivered by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership.

The group is centred on the open hill land of Titterstone Clee and Clee Hill Common, extending approximately as far as Knowlegate and Knowbury to the south, Bitterley to the west, Cleedownton and Bromdon to the north, and Catherton Common and Doddington to the east.

There are five different wildlife survey groups, co-ordinated by the committee and involving almost 100 volunteers. The five survey groups have focused on Lapwing & Curlew, woodland birds, butterflies and moths, protecting breeding Peregrines, and botanical surveys of wildlife sites.

Further information about the Group and its activities can be found on the relevant pages of the Community Wildlife Groups collective website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

CURLEW, LAPWING AND OTHER BIRDS SURVEY

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

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 2x2 kilometre squares (known as "tetrads"), 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).

People 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 1st April, 1st 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 1st April).
- The second period is the best time to find breeding Curlew (first egg date is usually around 30th April).
- The third period is timed to find any Curlews that have successfully hatched and still have chicks. It is also the best time to find 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 2019, 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 2019, 23 members spent over 180 hours on surveys (including the double time spent when couples or friends surveyed a square together), and a few people sent casual records only. This represents an excellent effort.

In addition, four tetrads to the west were added to the survey area, as they were known to also hold Curlew. These tetrads (reference code 58A, F, G and K) are shown in the map in Appendix 3.

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.

In addition, the Curlew records from the four tetrads to the west, that were added to the survey area, are shown in the map in Appendix 3.

Comparison of the 2019 results with those from previous years is set out in the next section of the report.

There was only one pair in 67J to the east of Cleeton St Mary, and their nest was found on Catherton Marshes, but they were probably the pair that nested in the tree nursery in previous years, as they took their chicks there after hatching. There have been two pairs in this area up until 2017. The tree nursery site was not usual habitat, and became steadily less suitable over the years as the trees became established and then grew taller. Curlews are site faithful, and it is likely that the trees were planted on a field where the Curlews had nested regularly for many years, but finally became too tall in 2019.

The “possible additional pair” in 58Q was only seen on three occasions by local residents, and only heard twice in 2018. There was no other evidence that a pair was present. If a breeding pair was in the square, it would almost certainly have been reported by residents far more frequently.

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 and 2019.

Little is known about the outcome of many of 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, and nested outside the tree nursery fence in 2019, on Catherton Marshes (see above). However, the Curlew Conservation Project (see below) reported that a brood of three all fledged on Random Hill. Apart from these three, there is no evidence that any other young fledged in the survey area in 2019.

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. The square has now been incorporated into the Abdon District Community Wildlife

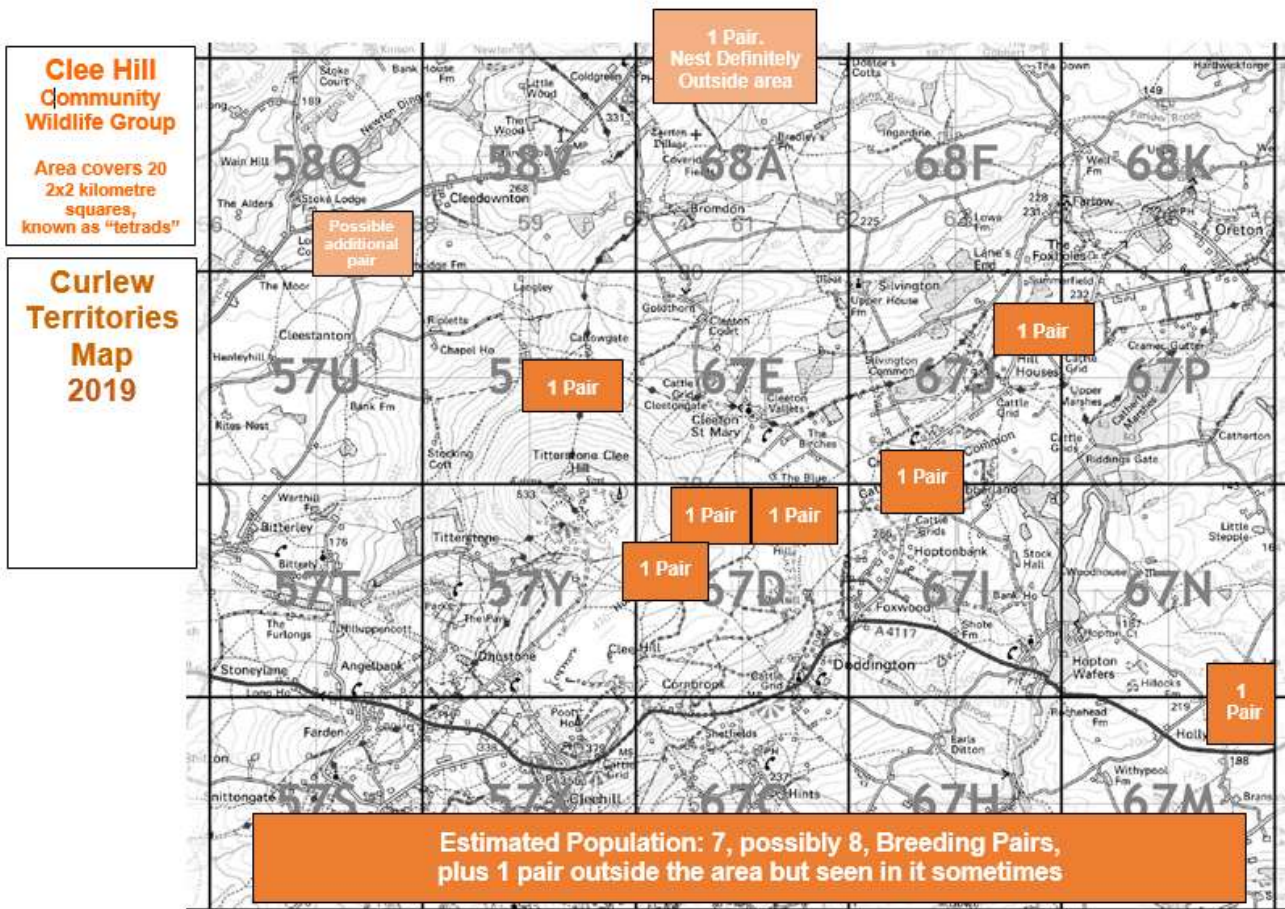
Group. The nest was found and fenced in 2019. The eggs went beyond their full term, but did not hatch.

From the above observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Curlew population in the area is now 7, possibly 8, breeding pairs, with another pair again located in the adjacent tetrad 68B.

There were no observations to suggest that the possible additional pairs on Cather-ton Common, and near Doddington, noted in the 2018 report, were present in 2019

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

Curlew Territories 2019



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, up to three, possibly four, pairs have nested 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 eight years from the launch in 2012, including the 2019 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 since suggest it is no longer there, although 57T was not surveyed in 2018 or 2019.

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 or 2019. 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, and seen three times in 2019, 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 2012-19. Records in these two squares in previous years, but not in 2017, 2018 or 2019, 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. There were four again, perhaps with a fifth, in the area in 2018, but evidence for only four pairs in 2019.

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 has apparently been only one in 2016 and each subsequent year. 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. There were no similar records in 2019.

67P – the pair in the north-west of the square, near Cramer Gutter, were present every year up until 2018, 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 that year, and more than in any previous year. There was only one pair again in 2019, but they abandoned the tree nursery and nested on Catherton Marshes.

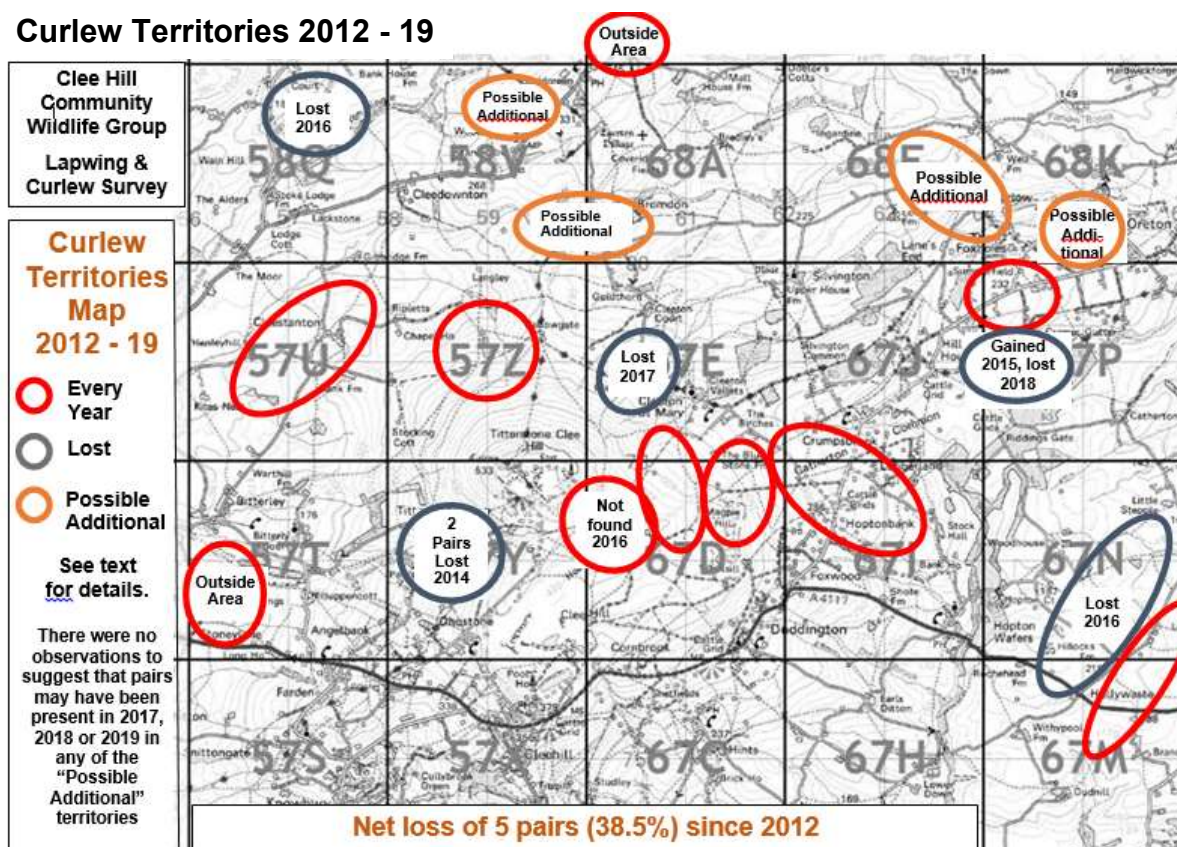
68F – sporadic records over the years, particularly in 2015, were likely to reflect the pair near Cramer Gutter using feeding areas further north, displaced by their new neighbour to the south, which would also encourage the pair further north still, from outside the area near Stottesdon, to come to 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, and there were none in 2019

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 and 2019.

Based on this analysis, it will be seen that five pairs were 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. There were no observations (or absence of them) to suggest any changes in 2019.

This analysis is summarised on the Curlew Territories 2012-19 map. There were no observations to suggest that pairs may have been present in 2018 or 2019 in any of the “Possible Additional” territories.

Curlew Territories 2012 - 19

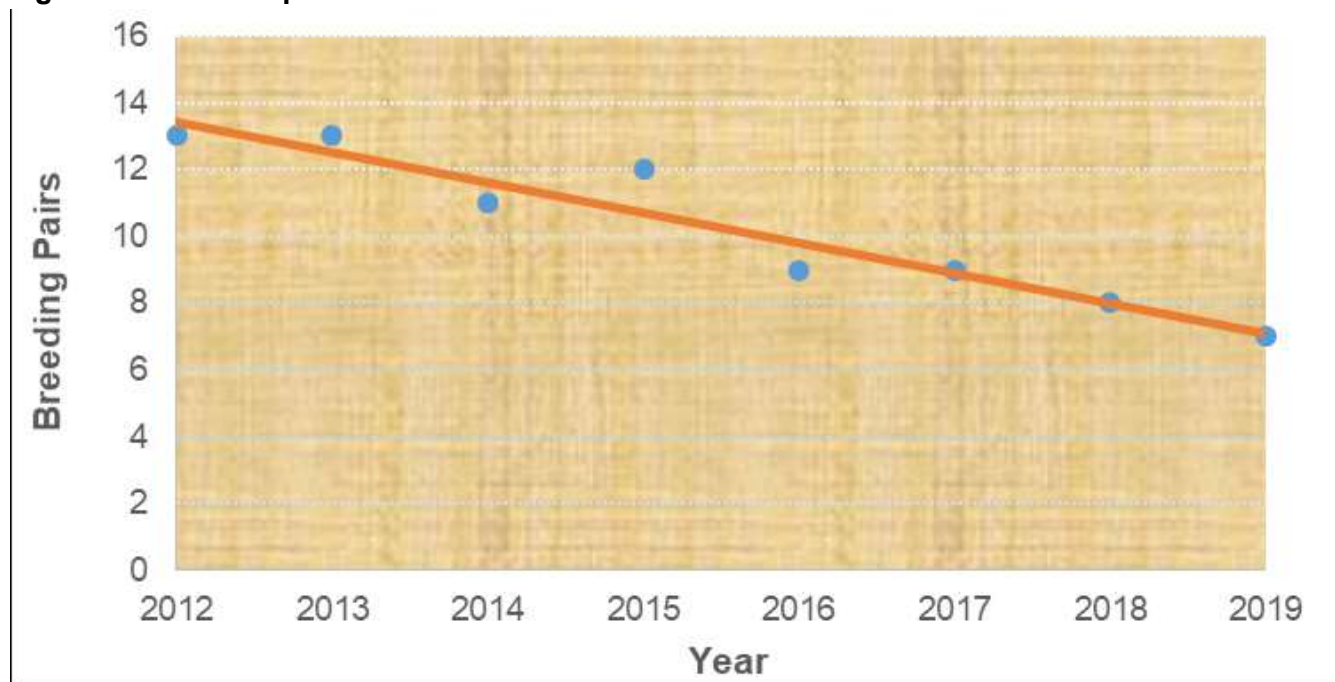


The population for each year in this assessment is within the range published in each Annual Report, except the under-estimate published in 2012, which was revised upwards in the 2013 report in the light of results in that year. The apparent increase between 2012 and 2013 was probably due to improved 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.

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 - 2019



It will be seen that the net population loss is six pairs, a decline of 46.2% in only eight 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 all again in 2020.

Lapwing

Lapwings were seen on each of several visits by the surveyors covering two squares, and multiple casual visits by other members, to fields near the Hollywaste crossroads on the border between squares 67M & N. At least three pairs nested in the maize field on the junction of the main road and aggressively defended their territories against gulls and corvids. A maximum of 10 individuals, presumably five pairs, were seen in early April.

From the survey results and casual records, it is believed that there were at least five breeding pairs of Lapwing, compared with 2 – 4 breeding pairs in 2018 and 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 2019 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 4. 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 (over 180 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.

No attempt was made to survey the Other Target Species in the four tetrads in the extension to the main area.

Table 1. Other Target Species - Summary

Square (Tetrad)	Maximum count of each species												
	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Dipper	Dunnock	Wheat-ear	Stone-chat	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
57S							1				5	1	
57T	Square not surveyed												
57U	1	1											
57X	1	1					1				1		
57Y	1	2	5	4	1			3	1	1			
57Z	3	2	12				4	4	3	5		7	4
58Q	No target species recorded												
58V	Square not surveyed												
67C				5		1	9		5	8		10	
67D	1	2							2				
67E	1	3	2	10	2		4		2	10		4	1
67H			1			1	2			5			
67I	2		2	5	1		1				1	1	
67J	1			2					5	4			
67M	1	1	11									1	
67N													
67P	1	1	1		1				3	2	2		
68A	Square not surveyed												
68F	Square not surveyed												
68K					1		2					1	
Total birds	13	13	34	26	6	2	24	7	21	35	9	25	5
Total squares	10	8	7	5	5	2	8	2	7	7	4	7	2

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

Spotted Flycatcher was recorded in only one square, one in 57Y.

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 were the only species recorded in half the squares. They 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 2019

The nest box near Pot house Farm in SO67I was occupied late in the season, probably a second breeding attempt after the first attempt in a nearby tree failed.

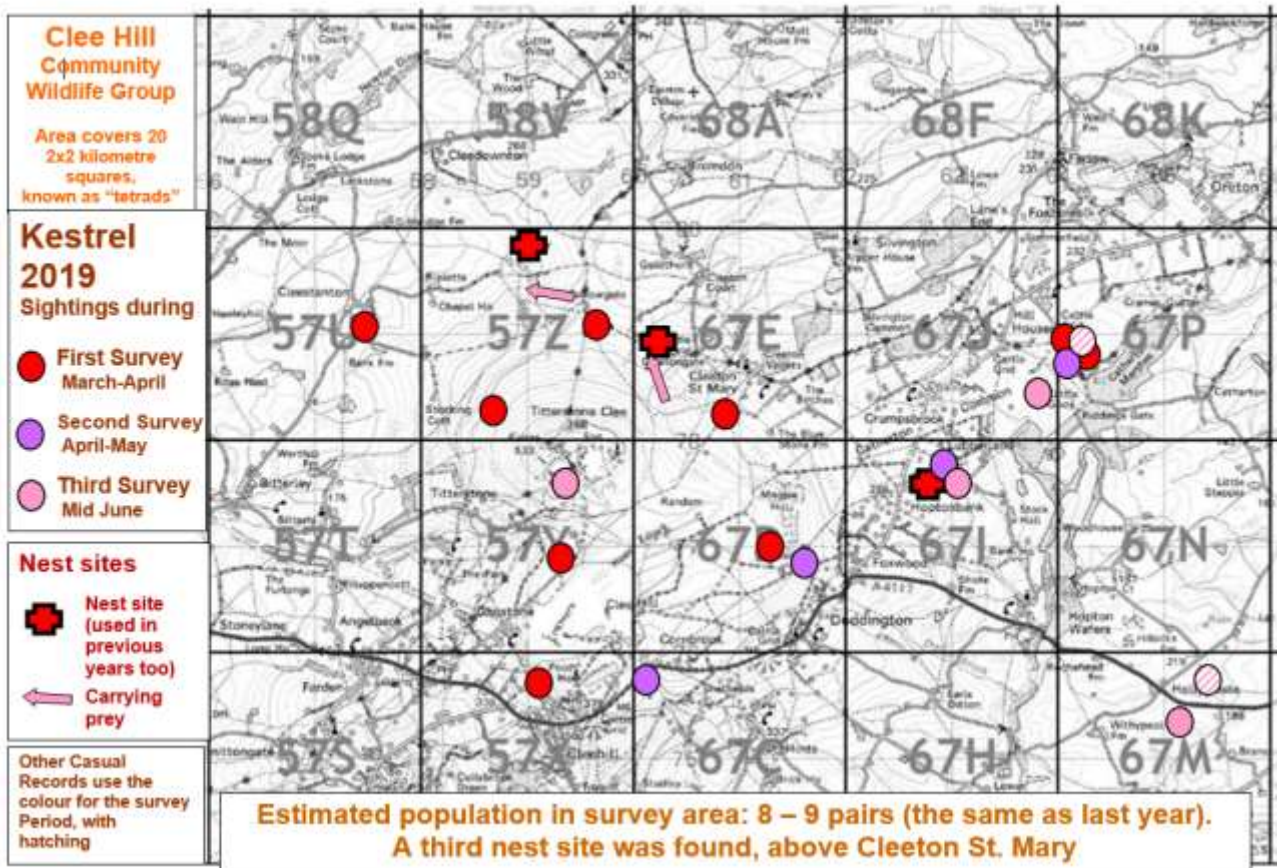
A pair near Upper Marshes were seen frequently during the season, but the outcome of any nesting attempt is unknown. The nest site in SO57Z was apparently occupied again (outcome also unknown).

A third nest was found, in an oak tree above Cleeton Gate. At least one young fledged.

2019 was generally a poor year for Kestrels, again affected by the long period of cold wet windy weather that lasted until their nesting time, followed by a drought. The number of records in 2018 and 2019 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, with a record from 57U in 2019. The estimate made in 2016, of 8 – 9 pairs, still seems reasonable.

The Barn Owl box near Mahorall, just south of Clee Hill village but outside the survey area, was not re-occupied in 2019.



Cuckoo was recorded in 5 squares, compared to only 3 in 2018, 6 in 2017, 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 this and previous years, except 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 eight squares (max. counts totalled 13 birds) during surveys, the highest yet, and several casual records were also received. Previous highest counts were six squares in 2018 and in 2015, but there were also several casual records in both those years too. There was no evidence of breeding. A nest was reported from near Bridgnorth, further east than anywhere in the Clee Hill area, and 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 (35) than in any previous year, 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

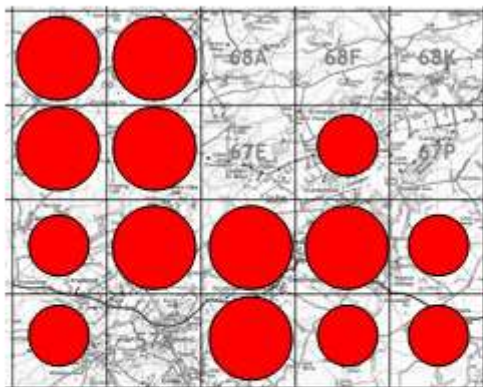
Lapwing and Curlew are in decline, nationally, here, and elsewhere in Shropshire. Nationally, both have recently been added to the *Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern*, Lapwing in 2008 and Curlew in 2015, because of the magnitude of the decline

The decline in the Clee Hill area is shown graphically in Figure 2. This compares the distribution maps representing the results of the current survey 2012-18 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. There were no records in 2019 that would have put additional dots on the map showing results of the current survey.

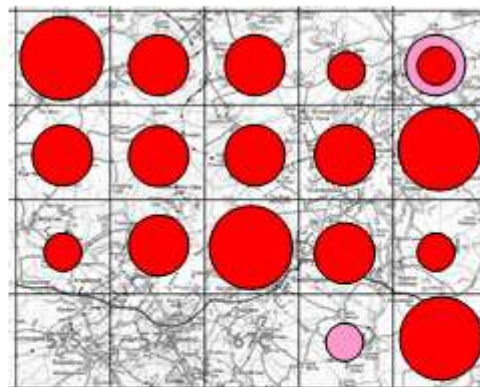
It will be seen from the maps above showing the survey results for 2019 that many of the pairs represented on the 2012-18 map are no longer present.

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

Curlew

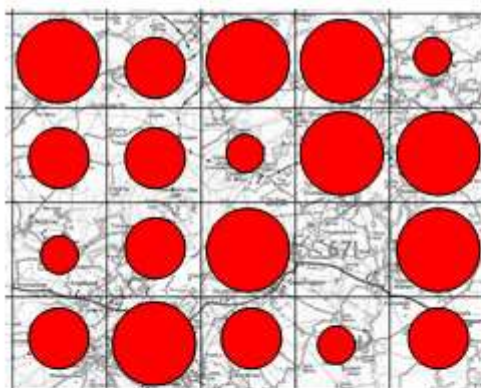


1985 – 90 From *An Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Shropshire* (1992)

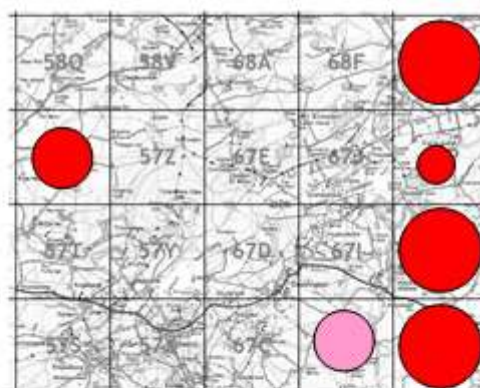


2012 - 18 Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group survey (additional records in Pink from the Shropshire Bird Atlas survey 2008 – 13)

Lapwing



1985 – 90 From *An Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Shropshire* (1992)



2012 – 18 Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group survey (additional records in Pink from the Shropshire Bird Atlas survey 2008 – 13)

Key

The background map is the 20 tetrads (2x2 kilometre squares) surveyed by the Clee 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 46.2% between 2012 and 2019, and the absence of Lapwing altogether in 2015 and 2016, and presence in only 1-2 tetrads since 2017, shows that the decline is continuing. Both species are now absent from tetrads where they were found less than 10 years ago.

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 was been replaced by a new Scheme, Countryside Stewardship, part of the EU Common Agricultural Policy for 2015 - 22, with similar objectives. However, the new scheme is more focussed, 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.

Defra is now organising trials for a new post-Brexit agri-environment scheme, but it will be some years before this can be introduced. In the meantime, farmers with existing agreements are likely to be able to get them extended.

SWT / SOS “Save our Curlews” Campaign 2019

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) 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 in 2018, 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.

In 2019, the Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group found 7 – 8 pairs in the area that has been monitored since 2012, and another one just to the north. Four nests were found and fenced. One clutch of 4 eggs went full term, but didn't hatch, and another clutch was destroyed after sheep with thick coats (which protected them from the fence) were released in the field and trampled part of the fence down.

Two clutches hatched. Radio tags were fitted to six chicks, and they were tracked. The first pair, on SWT land at Catherton Common, were presumably the pair that used the tree nursery in previous years, as they took the chicks there after hatching. Three of the 4 chicks were tagged. Two were predated. The third lost its tag, which was found, but it appears this too was predated.

The second pair (at the same site where definitely one, probably two, young fledged last year) had three eggs that all hatched, and all the chicks were tagged and tracked. All three young were colour-ringed and fledged, an excellent result.

Another nest, in a cereal crop which made it unfindable, definitely produced chicks, but they were not re-sighted. No evidence was found that any other nests produced chicks. The main aim of the project in 2019 was to gain more information about how the chicks behave and forage, and the threats they face, and we have achieved this on Clee Hill.

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 More information about the aims and other work of the campaign, including results from the Upper Clun, can be found on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

We want to repeat the project in Clee Hill in 2020, but we will only be able to if the appeal raises considerably more money.

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 Cleve Hill CWG Survey Results

Most importantly in the short term, the survey results will be made available to Natural England. They show the importance of particular areas for these species, which will hopefully encourage farmers to manage their land sensitively, and provide Natural England with objective evidence to judge individual farm applications to join Countryside Stewardship, and information to target the use of their limited resources more effectively.

The results also reinforce and supplement the results from other Community Wildlife Groups operating in the Shropshire Hills, and the north-west. The former now cover well over 500 square kilometres, around two-thirds of the Shropshire Hills AONB. These results help inform the AONB Management Plan, which has now been revised to cover the five years 2019 – 24.

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 Local (County) Wildlife Sites. These sites are monitored by Shropshire Wildlife Trust, which encourages the landowners to manage the sites sensitively, so they retain their value for wildlife.

Conservation action to halt and reverse the decline of Curlew in particular is becoming increasingly important at the regional and national level. The South of England Curlew Forum is encouraging local conservation projects, and collating results from Shropshire and all counties to the south of us, to show that Curlews are still declining, and productivity (the number of fledged young per breeding pair) is not sufficient to maintain even the existing depleted population.

Shropshire has about 20 – 25% of the Curlew records contributed to the Forum, including those from this Group.

The same information is contributed to a national Curlew Species Recovery Group, comprising RSPB (who provide the chair / secretariat), BTO, GWCT, WWT, JNCC, National Trust, Birdwatch Ireland, National Parks Ireland and the four country-based statutory agencies. The purpose of the group is to bring together five statutory agencies and various non-governmental organisations to shape and drive a co-ordinated programme for curlew conservation

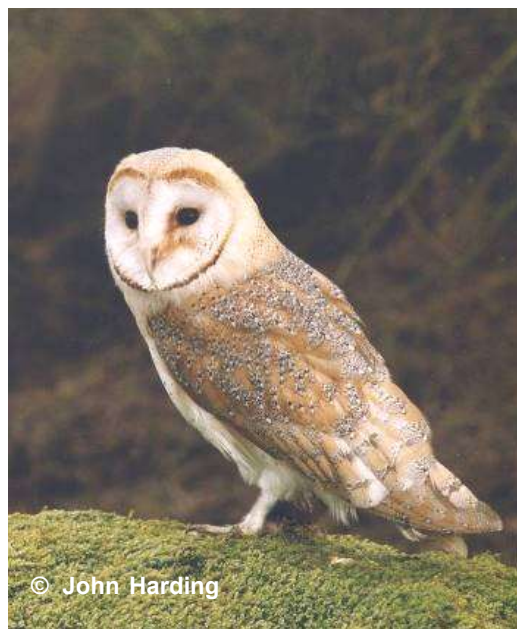
More importantly in the longer term, the location of Curlew territories and nest sites will provide vital information to the *Save our Curlews* campaign. Subject to locating the approximate locations of the centre of several Curlew territories (i.e. the field(s) containing the nest site), and the appeal raising the necessary funds to employ someone to find the

nests and put up and maintain electric fences to protect them, it is hoped to start nest protection in the near future. A professional ornithologist will be employed to find nests once we are confident that we have located several territories. This will obviously require permission for access to the appropriate land, and co-operation from farmers on how their land is managed, so building relationships with individual farmers will be a crucial part of our work in future years

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 Clee 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 was put up around the area for several years. A few landowners responded and potential sites were 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, were both used for roosting in 2016 and 2017, but there has been no evidence of breeding. Kestrels bred in this box in 2018.

No new boxes have been installed since 2017, no reports of any box being used by breeding Barn Owls have been received, and there have been very few Barn Owl reports in the last few years. The Barn Owl project has therefore been suspended, until the owls make a comeback.

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

***To report a Barn Owl sighting in the Clee Hill area, please contact Chris Bargman
01299 270514 chcw@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 have not been used. 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.

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.

A volunteer is wanted to collate information each year on the use made of all these nest boxes, please.

Bird Walks

Two walks were held, for members and the general public

1. Sunday 6 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 12 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 about 10 participants on each walk.

Acknowledgements

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

Chris Bargman	Eric Davies	David & Ginny Seckerson
Sally Barnaby	Eric Evans	Margaret Shaw
Bob Braddock	Ian Ferguson	Peter Simon
Beth & Lionel Bridge	Celia & Ewan Gibb	Kit Smith
John Cartledge	Helena Hale	Gareth Thomas
Caroline Dahn	David Harper	Emma Tipton
Barbara Daniels	Julie Price	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.
- Eric Davies, for the Lapwing photo on the cover, and the Cuckoo photo
- Leo Smith, for the Curlew photo on the cover.

Other Community Wildlife Groups

The first Group, the Upper Onny Wildlife Group, first surveyed Lapwing and Curlew in 2004, and has done so every year since. Upper Clun CWG started in 2007, Kemp Valley in 2009, Clee Hill CWG in 2012, and Rea Valley and Camlad CWGs (part of the Stiperstones-Corndon HLF funded Landscape Partnership Scheme) in 2014. Stretton Hills CWG was launched in 2012, and surveyed Lapwing and Curlew for the first time in 2017. The Three Parishes CWG, covering Weston Rhyn, St. Martin's and Gobowen, undertook a Bird Survey in 2017. All these groups continued with a Lapwing and Curlew survey in 2018, when they were joined by new CWGs covering Oswestry south (Tanat to Perry) and Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence. A further Group, centred on Abdon (near Brown Clee), also started in 2018, the initiative of a local resident.

All these groups (except Kemp Valley, which has no breeding Curlews) continued with their surveys in 2019. Clee Hill and Abdon extended their areas, to close the gap between them and monitor known additional Curlew territories. Between them, the 10 groups cover around three-quarters of the County's breeding Curlews. The Curlew distribution map from the County Bird Atlas 2008-13 is attached as Appendix 4, overlain with the Community Wildlife Group areas.

In 2019, these Groups covered 267 survey squares (tetrads), totalling 1,048 square kilometres. There were 320 participants, who spent a total of more than 2,350 hours on

survey work, and 94 - 115 Curlew territories were identified. This is a clear indication of the concern that local people have for the decline of Curlew, and their willingness to support action to do something about it.

Further information can be found on the joint website for all the Community Wildlife Groups in Shropshire, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

SOS Save our Curlews Campaign 2020

SWT supported the *Save our Curlews* campaign and appeal during 2019, but has subsequently withdrawn from it. SOS is continuing to support the appeal in 2020, and has also made a commitment to part-fund the campaign itself over the next three years. Applications will also be made to other funding bodies.

The identification of Curlew territories by the Community Wildlife Groups is the foundation of the campaign. When local knowledge has located them sufficiently for a professional ornithologist to have a good chance of finding several nests, it is intended to find them and protect them with an electric fence, and then radio tag the chicks that hatch, to gain information on how they feed, and the threats they face. The work will hopefully be funded by the campaign and appeal.

Such work was carried out in the Upper Clun and Clee Hill CWG areas in 2018 and 2019, and the results in Clee Hill are described above. Detailed reports of the work in each of these two areas, and more information about the aims of the campaign, can be found on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

The planned work in Clee Hill in 2020 will be funded by the Appeal. If you want to donate to the appeal see the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

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

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.

Summary 2019

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

Sixteen of the original 20 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 years suggests a loss of six pairs (46.2%) of Curlew since 2012. This is valuable information to promote its conservation. Five pairs of Lapwing were found.

Four more tetrads to the west were added to the survey area, and six more pairs of Curlew were found in them.

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 has been suspended, but nest boxes for other species have been provided, and two Bird Walks were held.

Plans for 2020

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.

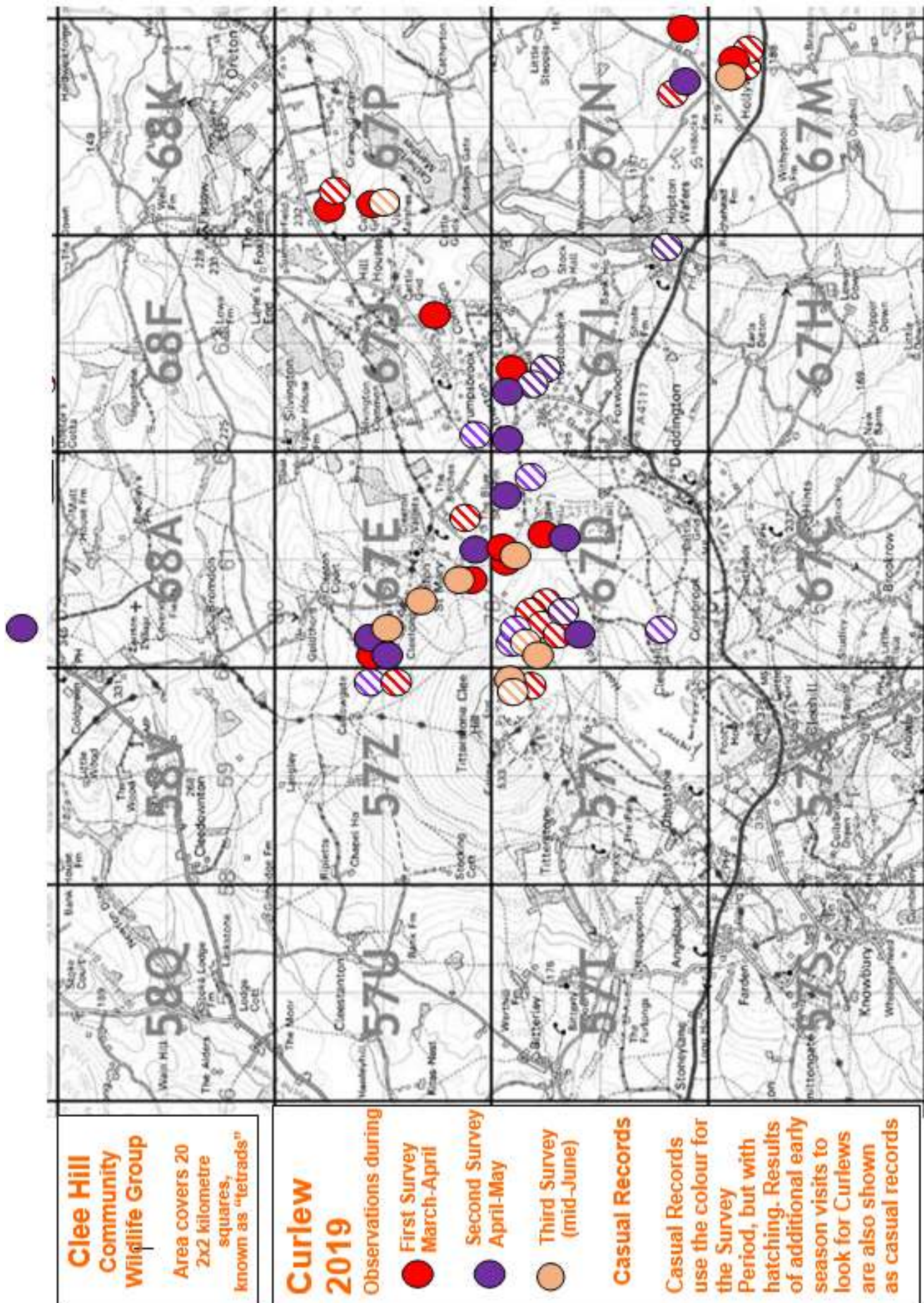
A programme of local bird walks and other activities will be held if there is a demand.

Further consideration was due to be given to these plans, and any other proposals people want to make, at a Bird Group meeting on Monday 23 March 2020. However, the meeting has had to be cancelled, due to the outbreak of the coronavirus. Alternative arrangements will be made to plan the survey (which will still be carried out), and allocate survey squares to participants. , and arrange and publicise the other activities.

If other activities and events are planned, a programme will be published before the end of March. Details will be found on the Cleve Hill part of the joint website for all the Community Wildlife Groups in the County, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

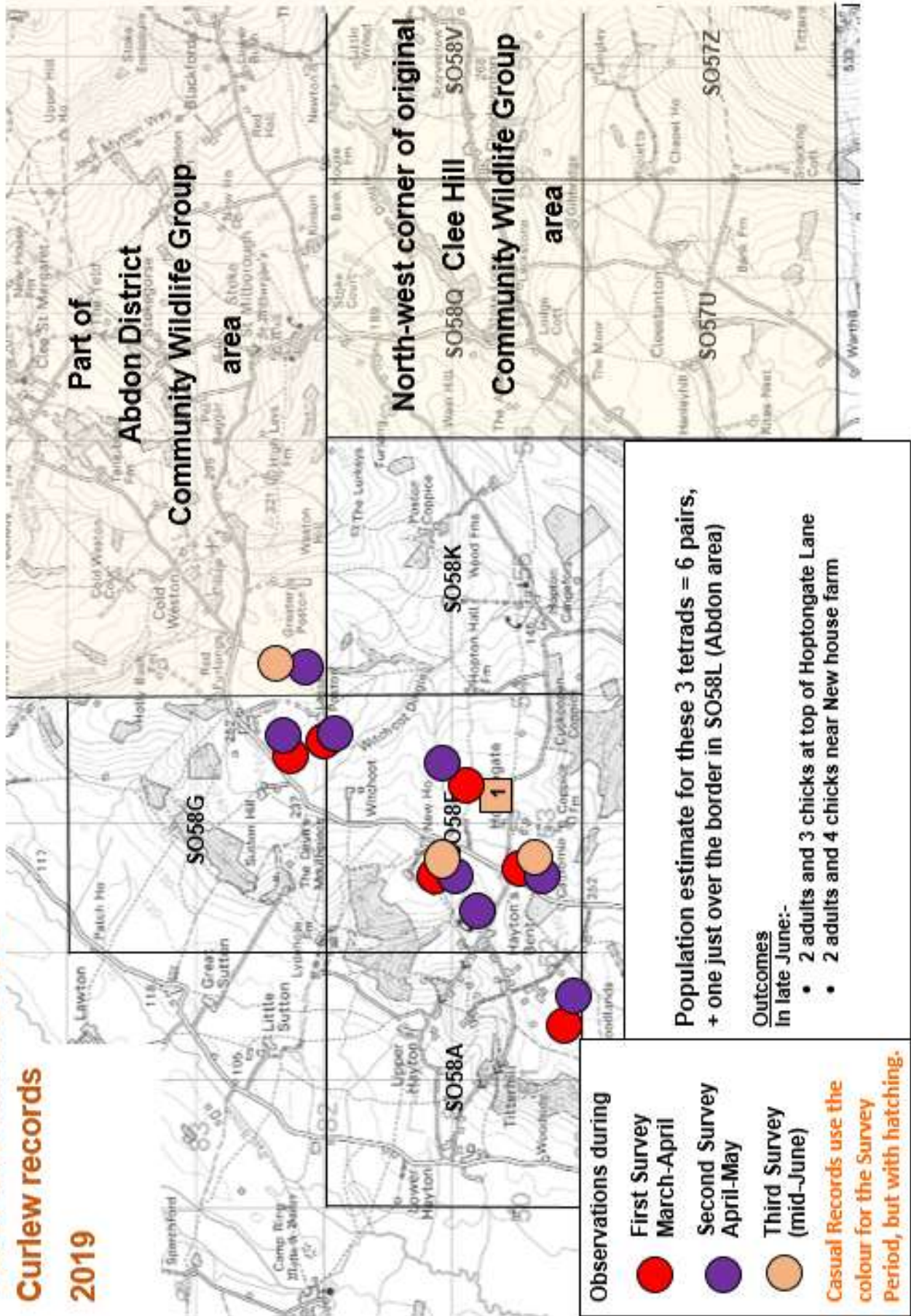
Leo Smith
March 2020

Appendix 2. All Curlew Observations 2019 (Main area)



Appendix 3. All Curlew Observations 2019 (Extension to area)

**Survey area extension 2019
Curlew records
2019**



Appendix 4. Bird Survey – Results from each of the Three Survey Periods

First Period Survey: 23 March – 7 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	Spotted Flycatcher	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting	
57S	Gen Norris & Julie	Price	3	45									1					1	1		
57T					Square not surveyed																
57U	John	Cartledge	4	0			1	1													
57X	Kate	Wyke	2	0			1	1					1					1			
57Y	Bob	Braddock	4	30				2	5	4											
57Z	Margaret	Shaw	3	10		1	1														
58Q	Barbara	Daniels	5	10			2	2	12	lots			4		2		3		7	3	
58R	Caroline	Dahn			Square not surveyed																
67C	Beth & Lionel	Bridge	4	20						5		1	9		5						
67D	Celia & Ewan	Gibb	4	30		3	1	2							2						
67E	Eric	Davies	2	55		3	1	1	2	4			2		1		1		2	1	
67F	Sally	Barnaby	3	20		4	1	3													
67H	Kit	Smith	2	45					1			1	2				5				
67I	David & Ginny	Seckerson	2	50		2	1			2			1								
67J	Ian	Ferguson	2	45		2				1					1						
67K	Chris	Bargman	2	0	No target species recorded																
67L	Emma	Tipton	3	0		2		1	11												
67M	Peter	Simon	3	0		2															
67N	Chris	Bargman	3	0		2	1	1	1												
67P	David	Harper	3	0		2	1	1	1								1	2			
68A					Square not surveyed																
68B					Square not surveyed																
68K	Eric	Evans	5	10									2							1	
TOTALS			65	10	0	23	11	15	33	16	0	2	22	0	11	0	10	4	11	4	4

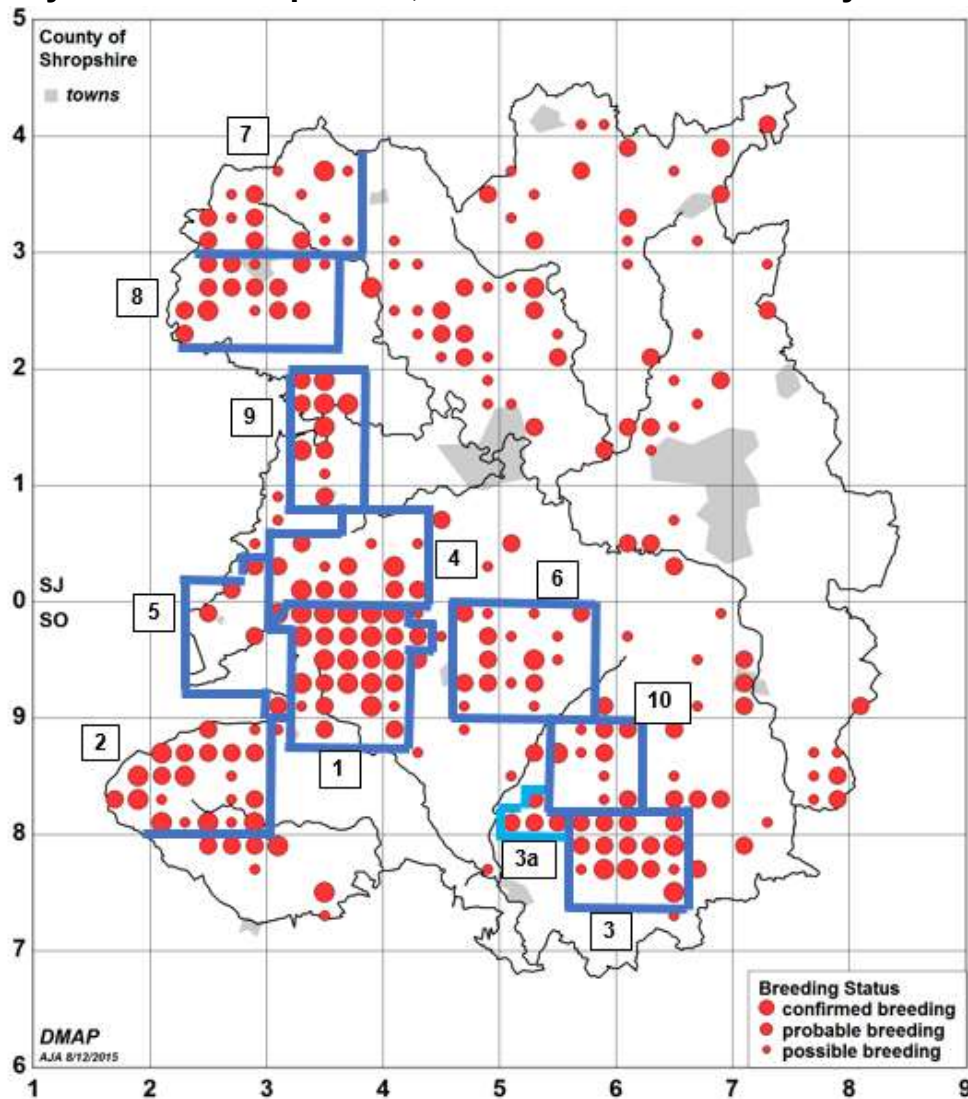
Second Period Survey: 20 April - 5 May (approx)

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	Spotted Flycatcher	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting	
57S	Julie	Price	1	45															5		
57T					Square not surveyed																
57U	John	Cartledge																			
57X	Kate	Wyke																			
57Y	Bob	Braddock	4	30		1			5	4	1			3							
57Z	Margaret	Shaw	3	10			1		2	2				1							
58Q	Barbara	Daniels	5	30		4	3		10	lots			1	4	1		4				4
58R	Caroline	Dahn			Square not surveyed																
67C	Beth & Lionel	Bridge	4	11						3			9		1		8		1		
67D	Celia & Ewan	Gibb	2	0		4															
67E	Eric	Davies	2	45		2			2	10	1		4		2		10		4		
67F	Sally	Barnaby	0	0		1															
67H	Kit	Smith	2	45		1											2				
67I	David & Ginny	Seckerson	3	0		2	2		1	5	1										
67J	Ian	Ferguson	2	30													4				
67K	Chris	Bargman			Square not surveyed																
67L	Emma	Tipton			Square not surveyed																
67M	Peter	Simon	3	0	1	1															
67N	Chris	Bargman			Square not surveyed																
67P	David	Harper	2	30		2	1				1				3		2				
68A					Square not surveyed																
68B					Square not surveyed																
68K	Eric	Evans	5	10							1									1	
TOTALS			42	46	1	18	7	0	20	24	5	0	14	8	7	0	30	5	6	1	4

Third Period Survey: 8-23 June

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	Spotted Flycatcher	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting	
57S	Julie	Price																			
57T					Square not surveyed																
57U	John	Cartledge																			
57X	Kate	Wyke																			
57Y	Bob	Braddock	4	0					lots	lots					1	1	1				
57Z	Margaret	Shaw	2	30		1	1		2	2											
58Q	Barbara	Daniels	4	5			2		12	lots			1	1	3		5		2	4	
58R	Caroline	Dahn	6	0																	
58V					Square not surveyed																
67C	Beth & Lionel	Bridge	3	45						4			2		4					10	
67D	Celia & Ewan	Gibb	3	0		4	1														
67E	Eric	Davies	2	15		3															
67F	Sally	Barnaby	3	15		2				1	2									1	
67H	Kit	Smith																			
67I	David & Ginny	Seckerson	3	10		1	1		2	2			1					1	1		
67J	Ian	Ferguson	2	15			1			2					5		4				
67K	Chris	Bargman			Square not surveyed																
67L	Emma	Tipton	3	35	4	2	1		4											1	
67M	Peter	Simon	45			2															
67N	Chris	Bargman			Square not surveyed																
67P	David	Harper			Square not surveyed																
68A					Square not surveyed																
68B					Square not surveyed																
68K	Eric	Evans																			
TOTALS			38	35	6	13	7	0	20	11	2	0	4	1	13	1	10	1	15	4	4

Appendix 5. Bird Atlas 2008-13 Curlew Distribution map, overlain by Community Wildlife Group areas, and CWG data and survey activity in 2019



Group	Area		First Year	Curlew			Participants		
	Survey squares (tetrads)	(sq. kms.)		Breeding Pairs (2019)		% decline since First Year	No. people	Hours	Minutes
				Min	Max				
1 Upper Onny	31.5	125	2004	27	32	31	31	283	15
2 Upper Clun	31	110	2007	6	10	60	51	150	0
3 Clee Hill	20	80	2012	7	7	46	22	181	2
3a Clee Hill (extension)	4 *	16	2019	6	6	n / a	1	26	30
4 Rea Valley	25.5	102	2014	9	10	n / a	24	173	24
5 Camlad Valley	11 **	44	2014	3	3	n / a	18	119	25
6 Strettons area	30	120	2017	5	8	n / a	45	373	38
7 Three Parishes	28	107	2017	3	4	n / a	21	220	10
8 Tanat to Perry (Oswestry south)	43	172	2018	15	19	n / a	65	356	10
9 Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence	27	108	2018	5	6	n / a	20	176	38
10 Abdon	16 *	64	2018	8	10	n / a	22	298	5
Total	267	1048		94	115		320	2355	17

Orange highlight = 3 CWGs incorporating "Curlew Country" area (76 tetrads)

** Area also includes 9 tetrads mainly in Wales (Camlad CWG = 20 tetrads), with 2-3 pairs of Curlew

Green highlight = 3 CWGs established in 2018

* In 2019, Clee Hill took on an additional 4 tetrads to the west, and Abdon took on an additional 7 tetrads to the west and south, to close the gap between the two areas, and cover additional squares with known Curlew territories
Some CWG areas include part-tetrads, so the total area is a bit less than the numbers of (whole or part) squares X 4