



Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group



Annual report 2013

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Europe Investing in rural areas.*





Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

Chairman's Report 2013

The Committee, elected at the last AGM, took over the running of the Group in February 2013. We produced a constitution, opened a bank account and began to organise the agreed surveys. The group undertook seven survey activities in 2013; Butterflies, Hedgehogs, Hedgerows, Moths in YOUR garden, Red Grouse on the Long Mynd, Ladybirds & Shieldbugs and Wildlife Site Botanical Surveys. A total of 65 volunteers contributed to these surveys.

The progress of our surveys during the first few months was not helped by the awful weather, and the Red Grouse surveys were seriously disrupted. The cold spring weather resulted in very sparse activity in the world of invertebrates and early results of the Moth, Ladybird and Shieldbug surveys were well down on expectations. However with warmer summer weather numbers picked up and there were some exciting finds. As the summer progressed it produced a very good crop of butterflies and the detailed report shows a set of excellent records for the area; a big improvement on the 2012 situation.

Hedgerow surveys commenced once there were enough leaves on the plants to ensure identifications and the Hedgehog survey training session was well attended.

Members of the group also brushed up on their botanical skill and helped to survey 10 County Wildlife Sites in the area. The data collected will help to demonstrate the nature conservation value of these sites, enabling the landowner to try and work out how best to manage the habitat.

The Group is very pleased to announce that in November it was awarded a grant of £100 from the Strettondale Joint Committee which can be used for training purposes and in December a £475 grant from the Co-operative Society Community Directplus Customer Donation scheme.

I would like to thank the Committee Members and survey leaders for their enthusiasm, help and advice throughout the year and to all of you who have participated in the surveys.

We have put together a proposed set of surveys for 2014 and hope you will find these interesting.

G J Wenman, Chairman

Committee members and project leaders during 2013: Graham Wenman, Heather Hathaway, John Arnfield, Mike Shurmer, Caroline Uff, Leo Smith, Clive & Clarissa Cooke, Kate Singleton, Andrew Williams, John Bacon, Frank Hay, Fran Eade, Gareth Parry.



Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

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1. Introduction

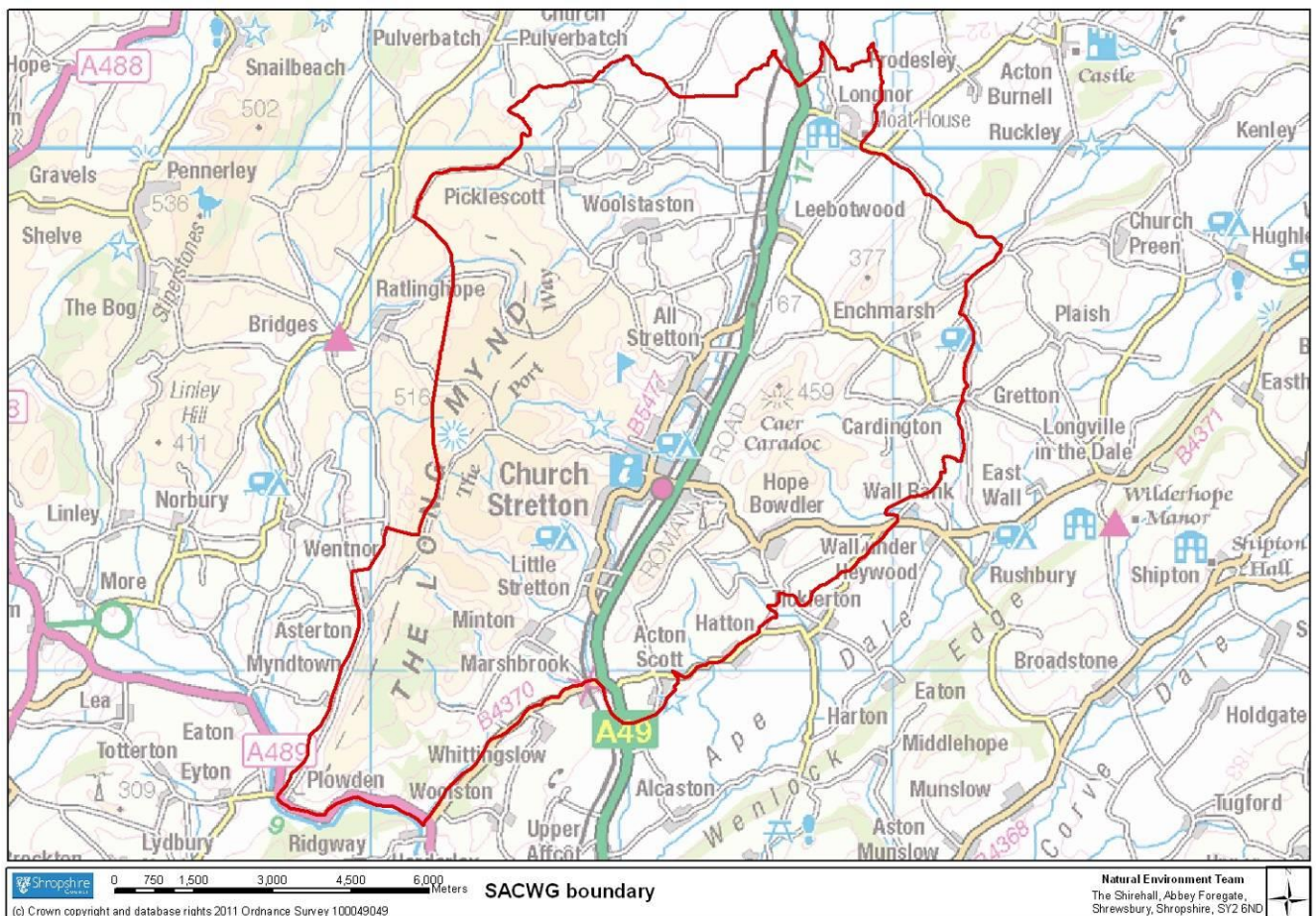
1.1 Community Wildlife Groups (CWGs)

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

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

1.2 Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

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



Map showing the operating area of the Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group.

Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

During 2012 the SACWG was developed and co-ordinated by a steering group of local residents, led by Shropshire Council's Community Biodiversity Project Officer. Since 2013 the group has been co-ordinated by a committee, elected from the membership at the Annual Public Meeting. Survey activities are adopted by members at the Annual Public Meeting, on the condition that they meet the following criteria.

- Each activity requires a manager, who will be responsible for organising surveyors, ensuring that useful data is collected, distributing survey forms (if necessary), analysing data for the SACWG annual report and submitting records to Shropshire's County Recorders.
- The survey manager will be responsible for ensuring that any necessary training is provided. Ideally the training should be provided free of charge to ensure the sustainability of the activity.
- Proposed surveys must state the minimum number of participants required to make the survey worthwhile. If the minimum number surveyors are recruited at the Annual Public Meeting, and all other criteria are met, then the survey will be adopted.



SACWG on a training day at Coppice Leasowes. Nets and field guides were provided through a DEFRA grant.

On the Community Wildlife Groups website you will find that the SACWG has its own section, where you will be able to keep updated with survey activities and the latest discoveries. http://www.shropscwgs.org.uk/?page_id=206

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

2. Survey activities and results

2.1 Butterflies

Project leader: Heather Hathaway

Introduction and aims

A number of nationally threatened butterfly species live in the Stretton Area and have been recorded this year. Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and White-letter Hairstreak for the first time in recent years and Grayling have been seen in several areas and seem to be increasing in numbers. Richard Fox of Butterfly Conservation has stated that the Small Tortoiseshell has to be the butterfly of 2013 and that for the first time in years “buddleia bushes were dripping with them, along with Peacocks, Commas, Red Admirals and Painted Ladies (all of which did well this year)” However, he states that the spring-flying species like the Orange Tip were hit by the wettest spring in 2012 and the coldest in 2013.

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

Methodology and results

This year it was decided to encourage as many people as possible to make casual records within the compass of the Strettons. One transect was carried out and with the results from this year it is hoped to identify a new area for a transect to be enacted for next year.

Unfortunately, the cold spring did not provide a good start and records for the early part of the year were not numerous. However, 500 records of 29 species were received from 23 1km squares covered by 13 recorders. Most of the records came from casual observations rather than transects or timed counts.

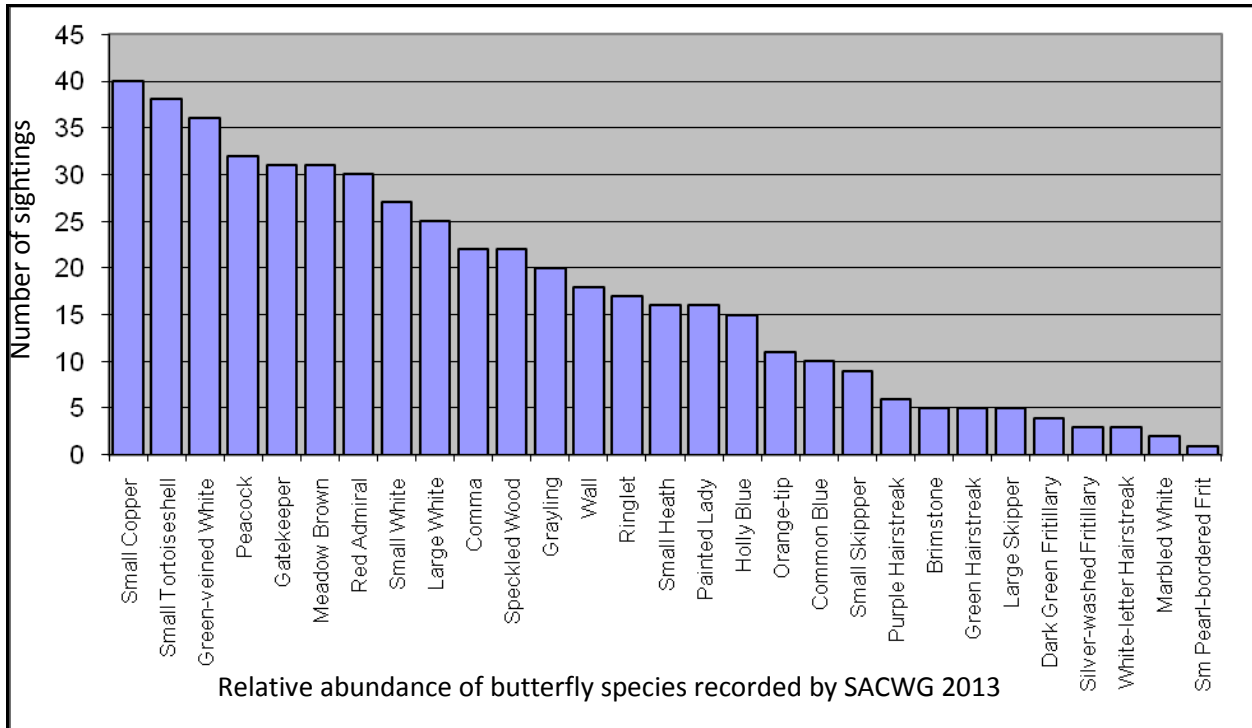


Green hairstreak



Grayling

Four BAP species have been recorded, White-letter Hairstreak in three separate monads, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary in one monad, and the Small Heath and Grayling in growing numbers and sites. It has also been exciting to have Marbled White observed in our area. One transect was carried out with an impressive total of 24 species.



Conclusions

With an increase of observers carrying out casual records, a much greater number of butterflies have been seen and counted, an increase of 5 species over last year. The cold and wet start to the year impacted on recordings for the early months, but the warm dry summer and autumn saw plentiful numbers of Small Tortoiseshell, Whites, Red Admiral, Small Coppers and Commas.

To benefit the group and encourage more observers in 2014 it is hoped that we will have training days as well as identifying transects to add another dimension to our understanding of butterflies in the area.



Dark-green Fritillary nectaring on thistles in Batch Valley

2.2 Hedgehogs

Project leader: Gareth Parry

Introduction and aims

The Hedgehog is a charismatic species, which has seen sharp declines in recent years. It is estimated that populations may have decreased by 25% in the last 10 years, making it a real priority for conservation action. It is tricky to survey and monitor Hedgehog populations, but a new technique involving 'Hedgehog tunnels' has proved quite effective. The SACWG project aims to determine the distribution of hedgehogs in the Strettons area, identifying hot spots and areas where habitat improvement action may be required.

Methodology and results.

Participants were asked to record any hedgehogs they spot in gardens or the wider countryside. It was hoped that hedgehog tunnels could also be constructed, to be deployed in participant's gardens. However the planned re-use of estate agent signs didn't work out, so Shropshire Mammal Group are in the process of seeking funding to purchase a set of hedgehog tunnels for SACWG.



"The Pattern of Tiny Feet" – SACWG participants get to grips with the mysteries of the "Hedgehog tunnel"

The Hedgehog Survey got under way in March 2013, with members being asked to keep an eye out for any sightings of Hedgehogs. In June the hedgehog surveyors went to check footprint tunnels at Rectory Wood.

The tunnels had footprints from Field Vole, Brown Rat and either Wood or Yellow-necked Mouse but, sadly, no hogs. A tunnel survey at Coppice Leasowes also failed to collect any evidence of Hedgehogs.

There were very few reported sightings of Hedgehogs throughout Shropshire in the first half of 2013 - perhaps a worrying sign considering the cold winter. However, in September 2013 Lynn and Bill Ross reported

that they had at least one Hedgehog 'cleaning up under the bird feeders' in All Stretton. Lynn wrote: 'It was a perfect moment when we saw it go past the conservatory slightly earlier than usual one evening in early September'.

In the summer, Gareth Parry, who was coordinating the survey, unfortunately left the area. However, Stuart Edmunds (Chair of Shropshire Mammal Group) has taken on the responsibility of coordinating the survey. He is proposing to lead a couple of hedgehog surveys this year. He has also taken on the duty of Hedgehog carer and might even have a Hedgehog to bring to the first session!



Rattle – being cared for by Shropshire Mammal Group

2.3 Hedgerow Survey

Project leaders: Clive and Clarissa Cooke

Introduction and Aims

It is estimated that 50% of the UK's hedgerows have been lost since 1945. Mapping the native species-rich hedgerows is very useful to inform the management and conservation of these habitats. The hedgerow survey aimed to assess the structure, condition and composition of hedgerows in the Strettons Area. This information is provided to Shropshire Council, Natural England and other Conservation Organisations to help protect, enhance and create hedgerows, where there are opportunities to do so. Participating members received training to help them survey and map these habitats and the wildlife they support.



Methodology

The surveyors set out to identify the following 3 factors in their local hedgerows and to record the dominant hedgerow species:

- Whether it was species rich – i.e. it had 5 or more woody species in any 30m length.
- Whether the whole hedge was intact having no gaps large enough to walk through.
- If it have any mature trees in its length

Summary of Results

5 monads (squares of one km²) were completed in 2013. In total, **203** hedges were surveyed. 29% of hedges achieved all 3 categories i.e. were they were species rich with mature trees and were in good condition. The most common dominant species were hawthorn and hazel, and 23% of hedges contained honeysuckle.

Measure	2012 survey	2013 survey
Species rich hedgerows	63.2%	53%
Intact hedgerows	50.7%	59%
Hedgerows containing mature trees	17.9%	75%

During the survey a range of other plant and animal species were also recorded including sightings of buzzards, butterflies, stoats and weasels. Flowering plants included Betony and Bird's foot trefoil.

Discussion and conclusions

Over the past two years 331 different hedgerows have been surveyed by the group. The species diversity of the hedgerows is overall high and the number of mature trees found in 2013 was good (much higher than in 2012). This provides good habitat for wildlife in particular birds, bats and dormice. The data will be shared with the Council and other relevant organisations. This will help to protect the rich hedgerows as well as identifying key hedges that require improvement.

2.4 Moths in YOUR Garden

Project leaders: Mike Shurmer and Graham Wenman

There were two main aims of the survey:

- to improve knowledge of the distribution of moth species in the Strettons area.
- to introduce members to moths and encourage further study of moths in the area.

The survey leaders both carry out regular moth trapping in their respective home gardens throughout the year.

As everyone will remember, the weather in the early part of the year was, to say the least, pretty awful in terms of its effects on most aspects wildlife. We were in touch with what was happening in the moth scenario and we knew that taking our traps to YOUR garden would produce virtually nothing. This would not really enthuse you and help to get you interested in moths. So we delayed our visits until we knew that there would be some moths to look at.

However, once we got going we had some very interesting garden visits, with some very good results. Many people were surprised at the range of species recorded and we have received records of their own independent sightings.

The method was very simple. We took one or both of our moth traps to a garden in the evening, set them up and gave an introduction to the British species of moths. In the morning the homeowners would turn off the trap as early as possible, cover it and collect any moths around the trap in supplied pots. We would then visit the house at an agreed time and go through the catch with the homeowners to identify the species present.



Map showing the locations of the gardens which we visited during the year.

Summary of results

Date	Who	Location	No. moths	No. species	Comments
14 Apr	M*	Batch Valley	18	6	Encouraging
29 Apr.	G	Cunnery Road	65	9	Better
02 May	G	Wall	54	11	Reasonable
04 May	G	Gulley Green	23	7	Disappointing
09 Jun.	G	Longhills Road	6	3	Very disappointing
10 Jun	G	Ludlow Road	37	24	Improving
22 Jun.	G	The Lawley	42	28	Good.
	M		17	11	Bacon sarnies too!
28 Jun.	M	Shrewsbury Road AS	23	17	Not bad.
20 Jul	G	Shrewsbury Road	114	54	Super mothing.
	M	CS	23	21	Super all round!
26 Jul	G	Woodcote Edge	219	75	The tops!
	M		52	37	
06 Sep	M	Lydbury North	6	6	Cold, damp – but great evening!
	G		6	4	

G – Graham with 125W MV trap M – Mike with 40W “actinic” moth trap

* Homeowner actually had their own (unused) light-trap, but now it is being used regularly!

It should be noted that the 2 moth traps used are quite different. The MV bulb is far more attractive to moths than the actinic, but often, the actinic bulb will attract different moths, even at the same location.

We had hoped to trap twice at each location to illustrate the changing seasonal moth scene, but with the late start, it was not possible.

The final entry in the above table shows results of a pre-arranged evening at Lydbury North with the neighbouring Kemp Valley Community Wildlife Group.

Had we been able to complete two surveys at all the sites we would possibly have been able to detect factors affecting the moth populations (for example comparing similar locations and dates where captures were significantly different, looking at factors like presence or absence of trees, quantity of flowering plants and perhaps the effects of regular bird feeding or not.) We hope to achieve this in 2014.

It should be noted that over the past year, running our traps in our home locations has produced records for almost 500 species (including leaf-mining records). The total number of species recorded from our visits to the above sites was around 150, with 92 of these coming from one site. There were several species caught during the surveys which we did not catch at home. This is very encouraging when taken in the context of the limited range of dates covered, which excludes all the autumn and winter flying species.



Scarlet Tiger, a recent rediscovery in the Strettons



Going through the night's catch with Janette Murray, friends and family

We would like to thank the households which welcomed us for the surveys and took such an interest. We hope to continue our surveys and with luck will start earlier in the year and make many more visits. We hope you enjoyed the experience – certainly we did.

There will be a new Shropshire County Micro-moth List produced soon and this will include all the records from our surveys.

You can also keep up with our moth recording in the area at strettonmoths.blogspot.co.uk

2.5 Red Grouse on The Long Mynd

Project leader: Leo Smith

Introduction and aims

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



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

It was felt this method did not produce a sufficiently accurate population estimate for such a scarce species, or to assess the effectiveness of the Trust's heather management. A new survey method was piloted in 2011, which aimed to map the

territories of males displaying at dusk at the start of the breeding season. This approach produced an estimate of 60-63 territorial males (Smith 2011), representing an improvement on the dawn count methodology. The dusk survey technique was repeated in 2012, when it was adopted by the new Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group, producing an estimate of 63 – 66 territorial males (Smith 2013). The method has produced excellent results, and it will be repeated annually to monitor the Red Grouse population on the Long Mynd.

Methodology

The 2013 survey was undertaken by 40 volunteers. Those participating for the first time attended an indoor training session in March, and four of them attended an “on the job” training session during an evening fieldwork survey. Sixty-seven watch points, selected to give a good field of view of a large part of the survey area, were identified, and marked on 1-10,000 Ordnance Survey maps. Each participant was allocated a watch point, and given the relevant survey map and recording sheet. Participants used the map to record the location of all Grouse seen or heard, together with a number for each observation. This number corresponded to data entered on the recording sheet, which included time, description and number of individuals.

The project was severely delayed by bad weather, but Surveys were eventually undertaken on seven evenings between 25 April and 30 May 2013, with 73% (49/67) of the watch points covered on at least two occasions. Sixteen (24%) watch points were covered only once, and two were not covered at all.

A full description of the analysis is provided by Smith (2014). It follows the territorial mapping method (Bibby et al, 2006), which uses concurrent observations of different birds exhibiting territorial behaviour (display flight, aggression or song) to estimate the number of territories present.

Results

A total of 122 result sheets (96 maps with observations, plus 26 nil counts) were returned for analysis. These maps included 460 different observations of Red Grouse (some of which were concurrent observations of two or more birds). The coverage is summarised in Table 1, and compared with that of the previous two years. Coverage was less in 2013 than in either of the two previous years. While the high number of observers and survey returns in 2012 was offset by the poorer weather in that year, the number of records was only 56% of those received for either 2011 or 2012.

Table 1. Summary of Survey Coverage and Results 2011 - 13

Year	2011	2012	2013
Total Number of Watchpoints	38	60	67
Number of Surveyors	48	67	40
Number of Counts	147	204	122
Average Number of Counts / Watchpoint	3.9	3.4	1.8
Number of Records	818	816	460
Average Records / Count	5.6	4.0	3.8
Counts with no Grouse recorded	12	51	26

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the results on each of the seven Survey dates

Table 2. Summary of Observations of Red Grouse during 2013 Long Mynd survey.

Survey Dates	April		May					Totals		
	25	30	2	7	16	21	30	Counts	Records	Average
Total Counts	24	23	23	18	12	12	10	122		
Counts of No Grouse	11	4	4	2	1	1	3	26		
Total Grouse Records	38	83	118	74	93	44	10		460	
Average	1.6	3.6	5.1	4.1	7.8	3.7	1.0			3.8

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

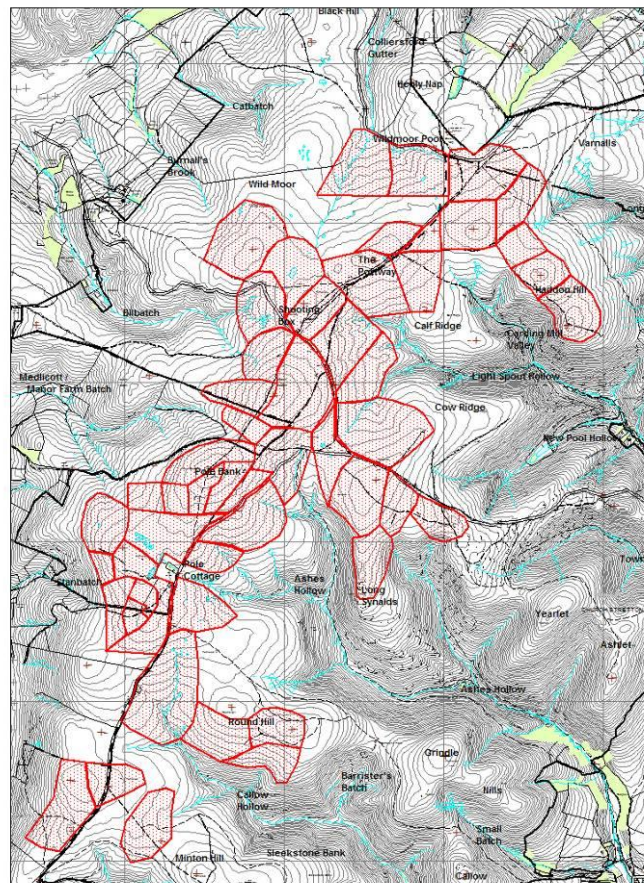
The total number of territorial males estimated from analysis of the survey maps is 52 - 53.

The National Trust has found evidence from roost sites that one of the territories shown on the map, on Wild Moor, may actually be two territories.

The total population estimate in 2013 is therefore 52 – 54 territorial males.

Several participants had good views of other moorland species.

Figure 1. Territories identified by the 2013 Long Mynd Red Grouse survey.



Crown copyright & database rights 2012 Ordnance Survey AL100023974

Discussion and Conclusions

The level of Red Grouse activity varies with weather conditions. The likelihood of them being observed and recorded depends on good conditions, but also on good coverage of all Watch Points.

The number of participants, the number of counts, and total number of records were all the lowest of the three years in which the survey has been conducted. This inevitably reduced the number of observations of two male Grouse seen or heard concurrently which are needed to define territory boundaries. This reduction in observer effort may account for the lower population estimate in 2013, with other territorial males being overlooked altogether, and some “territories” holding more than one male but no observations were made to separate them.

However, the level of Grouse activity recorded (average number of records / count) was also the lowest of the three years, suggesting that the population was indeed less than in 2012, probably as a result of the prolonged very bad weather at the start of the breeding season, which led to some mortality, and other birds not reaching breeding condition.

Approximately 700 hectares of heather dominated heathland is owned and managed by the National Trust on Long Mynd. Roughly 60% is targeted for active management by burning or cutting on a long rotation cycle of 16 years. Over the previous 10 years, around 160 ha of heather has been cut / burnt in scattered patches. This aims to add structural diversity to the heathland, whilst maintaining heather as the dominant species. However, burning can only take place in favourable conditions during a limited winter period, and none was possible in 2013.

This practice benefits a range of species, in particular the Red Grouse. The remaining 40% of heathland is left as ‘non-intervention’ to support less mobile species, which are negatively affected by burning or cutting. The detailed report (Smith 2014) includes a direct comparison between the territories and the heather management map. In general, most territories have some area of short heather in them. It therefore appears that the heather management being carried out by the National Trust has benefited Red Grouse.

Hopefully an increase in surveyors, and better survey conditions, will occur in 2014, allowing an assessment to be made of whether the 2014 estimate is a blip in the overall upward population trend, or it reflects a reversal of the trend.

Detailed Report

A more detailed report, with a full description of the methodology and analysis has been prepared *Red Grouse on The Long Mynd: Survey and Population Estimate 2013* (Smith 2014). All participants have been supplied with a copy. It can also be viewed and downloaded from the Community Wildlife Groups website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk. Further copies can be supplied on request by the Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project c/o The Bryn, Castle Hill, All Stretton SY6 6JP (01694 720296 leo@leosmith.org.uk).

2.6 Other Target Birds

Project leader: Leo Smith

During the 2013 public meeting last January, members were asked to report any Curlew, Lapwing, Dipper, Barn Owl and Red Kite seen during the 2013 Breeding Season. The leaflet attached at the end of this report was given out at the meeting, circulated to the email distribution list, and displayed on the Website.

Apart from Red Kite, only one report (of a Barn Owl near All Stretton) was received from the SACWG area. There appears to be little point in developing projects on these species.

Red Kites were seen frequently all over the area, but only one nest was found (north of Church Stretton). However, the bad weather in April meant that birds did not display much, and potential observers stayed indoors, so there probably were other nest sites in the area which were not found. Members are again asked to report Red Kites



If you see evidence of breeding
Red Kites
We would like to know, please.
Contact Leo Smith
leo@leosmith.org.uk
01694 720296

2.7 Ladybirds and Shieldbugs

Project leader: Caroline Uff

Introduction and aims

Ladybirds and shieldbugs are distinctive and colourful groups of insects. Despite this they have been poorly recorded in South Shropshire. The purpose of the survey was firstly to familiarise people with some of the common species that may be present in their gardens. Participants were asked to record the species present. It was also the aim to start looking for some of the more uncommon specialist species, particularly those associated with heathland, which may be in the area.

The data collected for shieldbugs contributed to a county atlas which is due to be published in 2014.

Methodology

The survey started in spring with a training session led by Ian Cheeseborough. Search methods included beating, sweeping and hand searching. A grant from DEFRA funded nets and identification charts for the group to use. Participants were encouraged to continue searching independently throughout the season on their home patch.

In June we joined the Wrekin forest volunteers to search for the elusive heather shieldbug on the Long Mynd (Minton Hill). In August a group search was held in Rectory Field to look for widespread species followed by a walk into Townbrook Hollow to search for some of the more uncommon species.











Examining the invertebrates collected by beating foliage in Rectory Field



Results and conclusions

The following list describes those species recorded from both group events and garden records. The number in brackets after each species is the number of individuals recorded.









Shieldbugs. Having been poorly recorded historically, the Strettons area now stands out within the county as a well-studied area. Eight different species of Shieldbug were recorded.

SHIELDBUGS		
 Green (many)	<p>The Green and Hairy Shieldbug were the most frequently encountered shieldbugs in our gardens. This was expected and reflects their abundance across the UK.</p>	 Hairy (many)
 Dock (many)	<p>The Dock Leatherbug was found in high numbers later in the season on bramble, often with many individuals together. The Hawthorn Shieldbug was only ever found singly but is a common species found in most habitats.</p>	 Hawthorn (10)
 Red-legged (5)	<p>Red- legged Shieldbug was a nice find for the area, as was the Juniper Shieldbug. This recent colonist was first recorded in north Shropshire in 2013. It was found by SACWG at 3 sites in 2013 which is indicative of its rapid spread.</p>	 Juniper (3)
 Birch (2)	<p>The Birch Shieldbug was not picked up as frequently as expected as it is a widespread and common species. However, it was good to record the predatory Bronze Shieldbug, pictured here feeding on a caterpillar.</p>	 Bronze(2)

Ladybirds: Although numbers of ladybirds were particular low this year throughout Britain, SACWG still managed to record 9 different species.

Ladybirds		
 7-spot (many)	<p>The 7-spot Ladybird was the most common species recorded, reflecting national trends. The Pine Ladybird was also common and frequently recorded from Gorse in the area.</p>	 Pine (many)

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 Harlequin (18)	<p>The Harlequin Ladybird is a non-native species which, despite being in the UK since 2004, had not been previously recorded from the Strettons area. During 2013 it was seen by several members of the group, often in high numbers in the autumn sunshine. Several colour forms were recorded.</p>	 Harlequin (18)
 14-spot (6)	<p>The 14-spot Ladybird is a distinctive ladybird and usually very common and widespread, so it was a surprise to only have low numbers of records. The Orange Ladybird was found in a variety of habitats around the Strettons but is typically associated with wooded areas.</p>	 Orange (5)
 Larch (4)	<p>The Larch Ladybird is often found in wooded areas. In this survey it was only found associated with conifers. The 10-spot Ladybird is a common species, but can be difficult to identify as it is quite variable. This is shown in the image of two different colour forms mating.</p>	 10-spot (4)
 2-spot (2)	<p>Like most Ladybirds the 2-spot and brightly coloured 22-spot Ladybird appeared to have fallen victim to the cold spring and should have been found in good numbers.</p>	 22-spot (1)

Summary and conclusions

It was generally a poor year for both ladybirds and shieldbugs, although numbers did eventually pick up across the UK with the warm summer. Despite this, over a hundred records were collected by SACWG participants. The search in June for the heathland species, hampered by poor weather, failed to record any shieldbugs. However, better weather in the August brought out good numbers of a range of widespread species of both ladybird and shieldbug. Insects are able to respond rapidly to weather conditions, and those that fly can disperse widely, so the warm summer of 2013 may well bring better numbers in 2014.

2.8 Wildlife Sites Botanical Surveys

Project leader: Kate Singleton

Introduction and Methodology

In 2013 members of SACWG joined volunteers from the Shropshire Wildlife Trust's Botanical Survey Group to record plant species on County Wildlife Sites - many of which are privately owned and thus not normally available to the general public, although some have public access via footpaths and bridleways.

Wildlife Sites are places which have been shown to have special local nature conservation value. They are the most important places for wildlife outside the legally protected areas, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). They can vary in size and shape from ponds, verges and hay meadows to much larger areas such as woodlands, heaths, wetlands and rivers.

Members who signed up to these surveys were led by Rob Rowe, an experienced botanist who showed how to identify plants and helped members fill in the data collection forms.

Botanical surveys can only be carried out effectively between late April and early August, when herbaceous plants and grasses are best identified. Woodland sites come into flower first then later in the year meadows and grasslands come into their own. Water bodies tend to be left until the end of the season. It follows therefore that the array of wildlife sites visited by the botanical survey group should include all three types of habitat.



Wildlife Site surveyors taking a coffee break

Summary of Results

Woodland Wildlife Sites

Ragleth Wood, Soudley and Hatton Wood Wildlife Sites were visited in April/ May and early June. Spring was late in arriving this year; but even so, it was evident that in Ragleth Wood, where there is no fencing to keep the sheep out, there is a general lack of shrub and field layers beneath the mostly oak/hazel woodland. Gough's Coppice (a section of Ragleth Wood Wildlife Site) owned by the Woodland Trust, is fenced off from stock and it is noticeable that the ground flora here is still prevalent. At Soudley the group found the woodland to be generally in good condition, although a meadow to the north (part of the Wildlife Site) has been improved and will need to come out of the site boundary. Hatton Wood has a wonderful ancient woodland ground flora but the wood itself contains tent structures and pheasant pens. Squirrels have damaged some of the planted oaks and there has been planting of non-native species in the past. A clump of Japanese Knotweed was found. SWT will be talking to all the land owners to discuss these issues in the New Year.

Grassland Wildlife Sites

Hamperley Wildlife Site is a species-rich hay meadow with adjacent carr and scrub land, the combination of which provides a diverse habitat for wildlife. It is generally in good condition and contains amongst other species Sneezewort and Eyebright. It is a large meadow with good species diversity including orchids and sedges. The boundary of the Wildlife Site has now been changed to include some wet woodland

In June the group visited **Coppice Leasowes Local Nature Reserve** and found 14 axiophytes. The area on the eastern side of the road was passed by the Local Sites Partnership as meeting the criteria for County Wildlife Site status. The Parish Council will decide whether or not to accept this. On the visit to Coppice Leasowes, more than 150 plant species were recorded, details of which can be seen on the SACWG website. In particular, Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed plants were recorded, leading to a working party to remove these invasive plants.

South of Hatton Wood Wildlife Site was visited twice, (June and August). This is a wonderfully rich unimproved grassland with damp areas, particularly towards the southern end near the disused railway line where there is some ridge and furrow. Interesting species include Adder's-tongue Fern which is an unusual fern that grows in old grasslands and is considered a good indicator species of ancient meadows. Betony, Quaking Grass, Devil's-bit Scabious and Common Spotted Orchid and many other species were found.

Shoot Rough is a mosaic of open rushy grassland, Bracken banks and wet Alder woodland and grazed Oak woodland habitats. It is a very large Wildlife Site with some areas in better condition than others. However, more information is needed on how the site is currently managed before recommendations can be made to the landowner. SWT will contact the landowner in the new year to discuss this matter.

Bushmoor Meadow is very steep south facing pasture with 12 axiophytes (potentially more if surveyed earlier in the season) adjacent to Bushmoor Coppice Nature Reserve. When the group surveyed the site it was late in the summer and many of the plants had been burned off by the sunshine on the dry slope. SWT have since visited the site and talked to both the tenant grazier and site owner and found the site to be in good condition and correctly managed for pasture. The name of the site is misleading and has since been changed from Bushmoor Meadow to Bushmoor Pasture.

The **Disused Railway Line**, Acton Scott is a linear Wildlife Site along the route of the old railway line. Only part of this Wildlife Site was surveyed and it is now predominantly wooded. The site was visited in August and therefore a spring survey in 2014 should be undertaken to check for woodland ground flora. The original Wildlife Site description suggests the site was more open in the past and SWT will be finding out more about its history by talking to the owners in the new year.

Other Wildlife Sites

Sibdon Pool is a possible medieval carp pool with a wooded bank on its eastern side and some on the southern side. The pool has dense marginal vegetation on the northern side but adjacent arable land may mean nitrates can wash in to the pool. At the time of survey a Wall Butterfly was spotted. This species has declined substantially over the last decade and is a Priority BAP species. Also spotted were a Kingfisher and three different species of dragonfly/damselfly. There are also several very large oak trees at 5m+ girth and a planted yew avenue of interest.

Wildlife Sites are not very well protected. They form a material consideration when the Planning Authority is considering a planning application. Otherwise there is no protection afforded to them. The Wildlife Trust relies solely on the good will of the landowner to manage and protect a Wildlife Site and that is why it is imperative to retain good relations with landowners. By undertaking these surveys we can demonstrate the importance of the Wildlife Site to the landowner and use them to try and work out how best to manage the habitat.

Conclusion

Wildlife Sites are vital in creating a countywide network of habitats which allow species to travel from one place to another. At the Wildlife Trust we call this creating a "Living Landscape". In essence they are like stepping stones along which wildlife can travel and spread.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust would like to thank everyone involved in the 2013 surveys and looks forward to surveying more sites in 2014.

** an axiophyte is the name given to a plant which has a strong association with a particular habitat and is usually considered to be an indicator of high habitat quality.*

3. Acknowledgements

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Hedgehog survey

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Moths in your Garden

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Wildlife Sites survey

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If you see any of these birds during the breeding season

(March – July)

we would like to know, please.

email or ring: Leo Smith leo@leosmith.org.uk 01694 720296



If we know where these birds breed, we can help improve their breeding success.

Other Community Wildlife Groups carry out Lapwing and Curlew surveys, operate nest box schemes for Barn Owl and Dippers, and report Red Kites.