



Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group



Annual Report 2017

www.shropscwgs.org.uk

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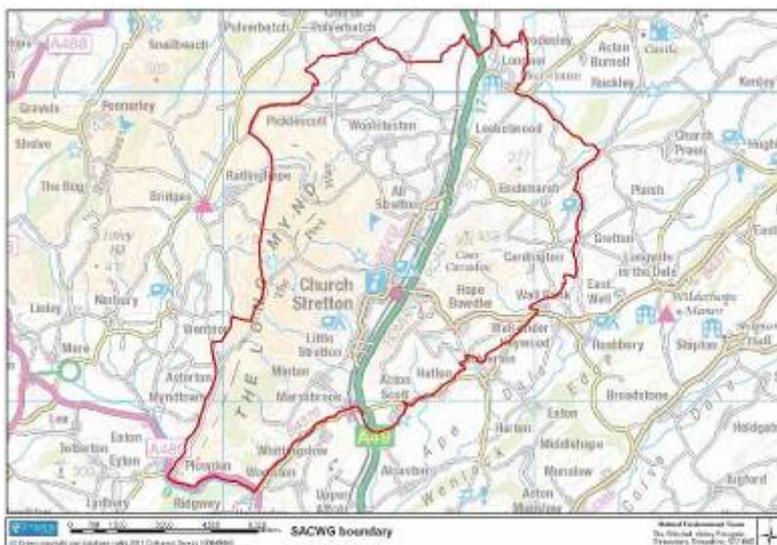
1. Introduction

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 eight 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 to the location of members and study subjects.

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 leader, 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.

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.

*Committee members (bold) and project leaders 2017: **S. Butler (chair), P. Bienz (publicity), H. Hathaway (secretary), J. Arnfield (treasurer & website), A. Perry (annual report), C. Uff, J. Bacon, L. Smith, I. Carter, J. Cowley, S. Whitlock and K. Singleton.***

2. Survey Activities and Results

2.1 Butterflies

Project leader: Heather Hathaway, report by Caroline Uff

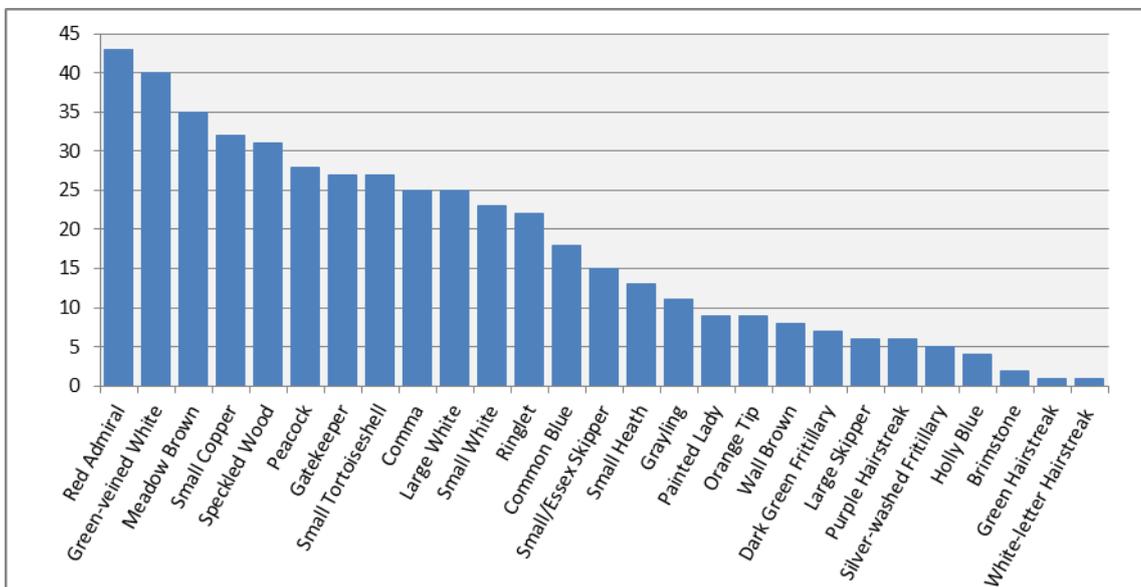
The aim of the current project is to try and build a better picture of the diversity and numbers of butterflies in the Strettons area and highlight vulnerable colonies that may be threatened if their habitat is lost. Some of the data collected also feed into the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS), which identifies national trends. Casual records are shared with Shropshire Ecological Data Network.

The Strettons area has several butterflies that are considered to be National ‘Priority Species’ (species that are either threatened internationally or have experienced serious decline). These are Grayling, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, White-letter Hairstreak, Small Heath and Wall Brown. Other species of local interest are Dark Green Fritillary, Purple Hairstreak and Green Hairstreak.

Methods. Butterflies records were collected using several different approaches.

- An established **UKBMS transect** was regularly walked in 2017 by J. Bacon at Clemcroft, Nr. Hazler Hill. The Batch Valley and Ragleth transects were not completed this year.
- P. Branson focussed on **target species** in the Batch Valley area – in particular Purple Hairstreaks and the priority species, Dark Green Fritillary and Grayling.
- **Casual records** were received from scattered sites across the SACWG area from A. Perry, C. Uff, P. Branson and iRecord, but no information was received from **timed counts** in 2017.

Results. 27 different species of butterflies were recorded, with Red Admiral being the most frequently recorded species. The graph shows the number of records (not individuals) received.



All of the SACWG target species were seen, with the exception of the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary. Peak Counts of selected target species were as follows:

Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

Species	Peak Count	Date	Site	Recorder
Dark Green Fritillary	5	13 Jul	Batch Valley	P. Branson
Grayling	9	25 Jul	Plush Hill area	P. Branson
Purple Hairstreak	30	23 Jul	Nover's Hill	P. Branson
Wall Brown	2	3 Jun 12&19 Aug	Clemcroft transect	J. Bacon

Discussion. At a National level, the warm dry 2017 spring resulted in good numbers of early butterfly species. However a wet July and August resulted in disappointing summer butterfly counts. The full figures for 2017 are not yet published, but Butterfly Conservation's [Big Butterfly Count](#) which takes place in Jul/Aug of each year gives an indication of the trends of our commoner species. Many species still showed a decline, including the UK's three common species of White. The Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock both remained at the low levels of 2016. However, despite the soggy conditions, the Red Admiral bucked the trends and experienced a record summer. The Comma benefited from the warm spring by producing a strong summer generation, and the Small Copper and Common Blue both showed big increases compared to 2016.

In the Strettons area, our common species mirrored the national trends with Red Admiral being the most frequently recorded species and early species such as Orange Tip being a common sight. The Clemcroft



(Hazler)

transect had a better year than 2016 and Small Copper and Common Blue recovered well from very low numbers.

With regard to the SACWG target species the following observations are made.

- The **Dark Green Fritillary** was recorded from the Clemcroft (Hazler Hill) transect, Ragleth, Batch Valley, High Park and Ashes Hollow, with Batch Valley still appearing to be their stronghold. The Clemcroft record was the first time it had been recorded on that transect. However it only stayed briefly - it had perhaps wandered from Batch Valley?
- **Graylings** are still present at various sites on Long Mynd, with the peak count near Jonathan's Rock (Plush Hill) which is one of the butterfly's known strongholds in the area. Nationally, the Grayling continues to suffer significant declines.
- **Purple Hairstreaks** – The colony associated with oaks on Nover's Hill is still thriving. Butterflies were recorded regularly from mid to late July.



Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

- **Small Heath** sightings in 2017 were similar to those in 2016, but lower than in previous years in the Strettons. This is in contrast to other parts of the UK which had a very good year, despite national long term declines.
- **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary:** This butterfly has not been recorded in the Strettons area in recent years with the exception of a single specimen recorded on the south-western edge of Long Mynd in 2013. However, there is appropriate habitat and established colonies on the eastern side of Stiperstones, so it is hoped they may, in time, come.
- **Wall Brown** is still being recorded regularly in the Strettons, albeit in low numbers. It shows a preference for garden walls and banks rather than flat meadows and was recorded from the Clemcroft (Hazler Hill) transect, Woolstaston and Woolston. Surprisingly, there were no records from Long Mynd this year. Nationally, the Wall continues to suffer significant declines.
- **White-letter hairstreaks** are only occasionally recorded in the Strettons area. This year, one was recorded in Horderly Wood for the first time in over 15 years, but none were recorded from the Clemcroft (Hazler) transect. White-letter Hairstreaks have suffered a significant 10 yr. decline in the UK.

2.2 Stretton Wetlands

Project leader: Isabel Carter

Report for SACWG Annual Report - January 2018



The willing catering team

In January 2017 we received the positive news that the Stretton Wetlands had received wildlife site status. In order to raise awareness and improve access to the Stretton Wetlands – a fundraising programme to improve the footpath and build a boardwalk was planned for spring 2017. This combined grant applications and community fund raising events – each targeting a slightly different target audience. Direct personal contributions were also encouraged.

An attractive flyer provided the background to the wetlands and contained details of four community fund-raising events.

First was a wildlife quiz in March (which brought in some real experts and was run with flair by Chris Stratton). This was followed by an ambitious three course candle lit meal and a plant sale in April. The meal was served to around 70 people and was a great success.

Held on a rainy Saturday in early May, the plant sale was also very successful and provided a great opportunity for folk to share some flourishing plants and vegetables. Lastly we had a music evening from Whalebone on a balmy May evening. All four events included an opportunity to chat about the wetlands.

Showing community support is always important in gaining the interest of funders. Though there were plenty of disappointments, in the end four grants were obtained from the Shropshire Hills AONB, Holiday Fellowship (who run Long Mynd House), Severn Trent and the Jean Jackson Trust.



Ten individual donations were made, with £9250 from grants and £2200 from the community events, realising a total of just over £13,260. In addition Bayston Hill quarry generously donated a 20 ton truck of stone and the Council are helping with the provision of an information board.

In the summer Storm Doris caused considerable damage with several crack willows falling and blocking the footpath. With landowner help, Dave from the Council and some willing volunteers cleared and burned the debris and took the opportunity to do further clearing in preparation for the footpath work.

With some judicious stretching of our finances, the public access team from Shropshire Council began work on the footpath at the end of January. The first section now has a raised stone path – which will also allow access across the path for the machinery of the Environment Agency. The remaining section through the wetlands has a wooden boardwalk with recycled supports. Willing volunteers from SACWG, the National Trust and the Public Paths Partnership and other supporters helped to speed the work along and keep it within budget.

An information board will be erected to raise awareness of what plants, insects and mammals people can look out for as they cross the wetlands. An official opening event is planned for April/May – to thank all those who have given their support. Alongside all this fundraising, work has also been on-going to improve the biodiversity of the area by introducing some limited grazing. This is still at the planning stage but things are looking hopeful.



Together with Andy, the NT ecologist, a water vole survey was carried out in June. The evidence is still tentative but we live in hope that one day we will have a confirmed sighting! More surveys will be done in 2018.

Among the birds sighted in 2017 on the wetlands were barn owl, little egret and snipe. A wildlife surveying day is planned for the summer of 2018 – looking for birds, butterflies, moths, flora, bugs, beetles and dragonflies – and generally anything that moves. Do come and join in – full details will be available on the website and by email to members.

Now completed, the wetlands footpath will enable SACWG to hold events such as guided walks, bat evenings and pond dipping in pools adjacent to the footpath.



2.3 Estimating the Red Grouse Population 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, 2014). 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, using volunteer surveyors. This approach produced an estimate of 60-63 territorial males, 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. The method produced excellent results, and it was decided to repeat it annually. The 2013 survey was affected by hard, bad weather, and produced an estimate of 53-54 territorial males. The reduction may have been due to fewer observations as a result of lower activity because of the weather, or a real reduction in the population. However the estimate of 56-58 territorial males in 2014, and 57-59 in 2015, still lower than in 2011 and 2012, suggests the latter. The 2016 survey was disrupted by bad weather, so the estimate based on its results of at least 42 territories was considered to be too low.

Methodology

The 2017 survey was undertaken by 70 volunteers, including 10 couples. Those participating for the first time attended an indoor briefing session in March, and several 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 marked on 1-10,000 Ordnance Survey maps. Each participant was allocated a watch point, and sent 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, the activity seen or heard, and number of individuals.

The project was again disrupted by bad weather, and three of the planned surveys had to be cancelled and rearranged. Surveys were undertaken on seven evenings between 6 April and 18 May 2017. The aim was to cover each watch point three times, but only 46% (31/67) of them were. Thirty-five (52%) watch points were covered twice, and one was covered only once.

A full description of the analysis is provided in a detailed project report. It follows the territorial mapping method (Bibby et al, 2006), which uses concurrent observations of different birds exhibiting territorial behaviour (display flight or aggression) to estimate the number of territories.

Results

A total of 164 result sheets (112 maps with observations, plus 52 nil counts) were returned for analysis. These maps included 721 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 previous years. Coverage was less good than in 2014 and 2015, but almost the same as 2016. More importantly, conditions during four of the counts were poor, resulting in very a low number of Grouse, and territorial interactions, being observed then. On each evening, observers go to adjacent watch points, so this affected specific areas disproportionately, resulting in many watch points having no effective count. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the results on each of the seven Survey dates.

Table 1. Summary of Survey Coverage and Results 2011 - 17

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total Number of Watchpoints	38	60	67	67	67	67	67
Number of Surveyors	48	67	40	52	62	63	60
Number of Counts	147	204	122	181	184	167	164
Average Number of Counts / Watchpoint	3.9	3.4	1.8	2.7	2.7	2.5	2.4
Number of Records	818	816	460	865	839	637	721
Average Records / Count	5.6	4.0	3.8	4.8	4.6	3.8	4.4
Counts with no Grouse recorded	12	51	26	44	38	50	52

Table 2. Summary of Observations of Red Grouse during the 2017 Long Mynd survey.

Watchpoint Number	Survey Dates							Totals		
	April				May			Counts	Records	Average
	6	13	18	20	2	16	18			
Total Counts	29	31	18	44	15	10	17	164		
Counts of Zero	0	19	2	16	0	3	12	52		
Total Grouse Records	287	62	96	124	106	29	17		721	
Average Records / Count	9.9	2.0	5.3	2.8	7.1	2.9	1.0			4.4

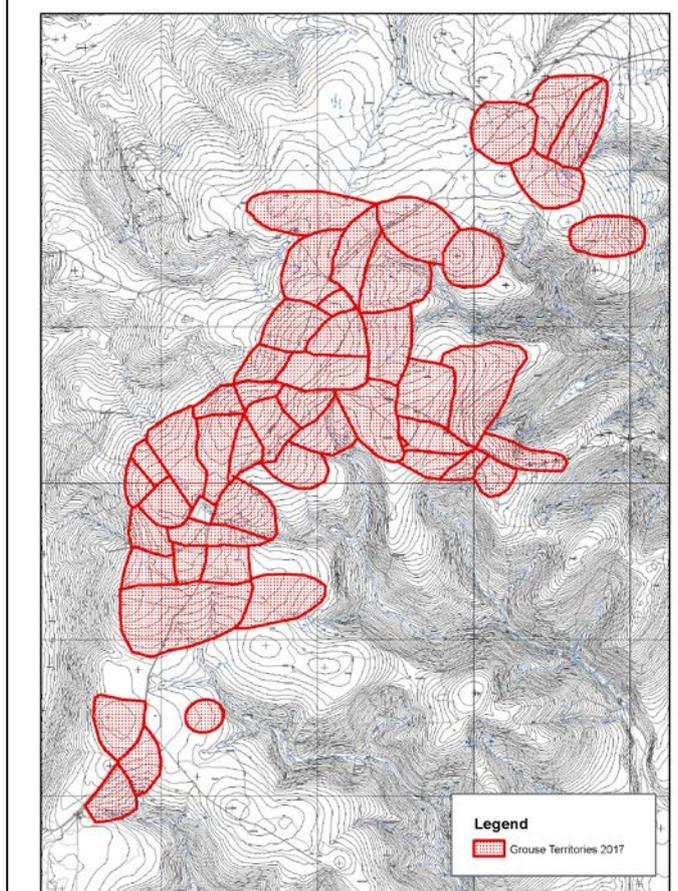
The mapped observations are summarised in Figure 1. The map shows notional territories, based on those observations which approximately locate a boundary between territories. There is not necessarily any correlation between the size and shape of territories shown on the maps and the area that each Grouse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

Based on analysis of the survey results, the total population in 2017 is estimated at 49 territorial males.

Given the patchy nature of the survey coverage, it is likely that there were more Grouse territories than that.

Several participants had good views of other moorland species.

Figure 1. Territories identified by the 2017 Long Mynd Red Grouse survey.



Comparison with Previous Years

Table 3 provides a comparison of the population estimate for each of the six years of the survey

Table 3. Estimated Number of Red Grouse (Territorial Males) on the Long Mynd 2011-17

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Population Estimate	60 - 63	63 - 66	52 - 54	56 - 58	57 - 59	42+	49+

Heather Management

Approximately 700 hectares of heather dominated heathland is owned by the National Trust on Long Mynd. Of this, an estimated 450ha is continuous heather (>75% cover), but 150ha of this is either non-intervention or unsuitable for burning or cutting. The remaining 300ha is managed on an approximately 15 year rotation, a target average of 20ha per year, which started in 2001. Around 220ha has been burnt or cut: the target is frequently not achieved due to lack of suitable burning days within the permitted period.

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 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 has benefited Red Grouse.

Discussion and Conclusions

The level of Red Grouse activity, and the likelihood of them being observed and recorded, depends on good weather conditions, but also on good coverage of all watch points. The number of participants, the number of counts, and the weather conditions, all therefore affect the total number and distribution of records, and, more importantly, the observations of two male Grouse seen or heard concurrently which are needed to define territory boundaries.

Detailed comparisons cannot be made between the maps produced each year, because they reflect the variations in coverage. More importantly, the methodology does not produce a map of the actual occupied territories, and there is some natural annual rearrangement of territories, as the burning, and further growth of the mature heather, both lead to areas becoming unsuitable habitat.

It is likely that the poor weather conditions in 2017 depressed the level of Grouse activity on four of the seven survey dates, so there were not enough observations to separate territories, particularly at the northern and southern ends of the property, and some of those shown on the map may have actually held two or more males. Some territories may have been overlooked altogether. Therefore the population was likely to be higher than the 49 territories identified from analysing the survey results. However, breeding success on the Stiperstones was very poor in 2015, resulting in lower numbers there at the start of 2016 than in 2015. It is likely that the Long Mynd was similarly affected, and population was therefore less than that in 2015.



Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

Participants

Thanks to the participants who carried out the surveys: Edward Andrews, John Arnfield, Alison Ash, Judy Axelbank, Lesley Baddeley, Sam Bishop, Pete & Chrys Bonds, Lesley Brown, Simon Brown, Chris Cooke, Mags Cousins, Judith Darling, Steve Darling, Sylvia Davidson, Gill Davies, Malcolm Dixon, Patrick Edwards, Mike Flavell, Bernard & Jane Ford, Greg Forster, Sue Forster, Sue & Greg Forster, Mark Foxall, Jeremy Freeland, Julian French, Martin George, Steven Green, Carol & Richard Gresswell, Helen Griffiths, Darren Hall, Heather & John Hathaway, Andrew Holder, David Holmes, Peter & Jane Howsam, Peter Jackson, Neil Jeffries, Abbi Knight, John Knowles, Liz Knowles, Edward Marvin, Anna McCann, Stephen & Margaret Mitchell, Jennie Morris, Roger Owen, Andrew Perry, Sue Pinsent, Sue & Steve Rooney, Ben Shipston, Christopher Skeate, Leo Smith, Tony & Jo Stanley, Geoff Taylor, Lorna Taylor, Jennifer Vine, Tom Wall, Ben Warren, Andrew Weaver, Sandra & Peter Whitlock, Heather Williams and Sarah Williams.

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 2017* (Smith 2018). 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 Reports from previous years can also be found there.

Leo Smith
February 2018



Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

2.4 Curlews, Lapwings and Other Birds Survey

Project leader: Leo Smith

Introduction

Lapwing and Curlew have both suffered a massive contraction in range and population decline in the last 20 years or so, nationally and locally. Curlew has been described as the UK's highest bird conservation priority, as we have an estimated 28% of the European breeding population, and 19 – 27% of the world population.

The Annual Public Meeting in early March agreed to conduct a Lapwing and Curlew survey in 2017, to complement similar surveys carried out by other Community Wildlife Groups in different parts of the Shropshire Hills. The AGM of the Church Stretton branch of the Shropshire Ornithological Society also agreed to support the survey.

An area was selected where these species were found breeding in the 2008-13 Shropshire Bird Atlas, comprising 30 2x2 kilometre squares on the Ordnance Survey National Grid, known as "tetrads", shown in Appendix 1.

A well-publicised planning meeting to explain the project and the reasons for it, and recruit surveyors, was held on 15 March. Surveyors were recruited for each of the 30 squares, and were asked to make three visits, around 1 April, 1 May and mid-June, at times convenient to them, with visits concentrating on habitats where the species might be found, and lasting around three hours each. The surveys were conducted from Public Rights of Way, unless individual surveyors obtained landowners permission to leave them. Survey maps and recording instructions were supplied. A practical fieldwork training meeting was held for those that wanted one, on Saturday 25 March.

The aim was to locate the territories of breeding pairs, and record behaviour, to estimate the population. No attempt was made to locate nests. Although the survey concentrated on the two main target species, and their habitats, surveyors were asked to also record on their maps any of 20 other target species seen.

A detailed report of the methodology and results has been supplied to all the participants.

Results

The following maps show the distribution of Lapwing and Curlew territories found.

Strettons Area CWG & Church Stretton SOS

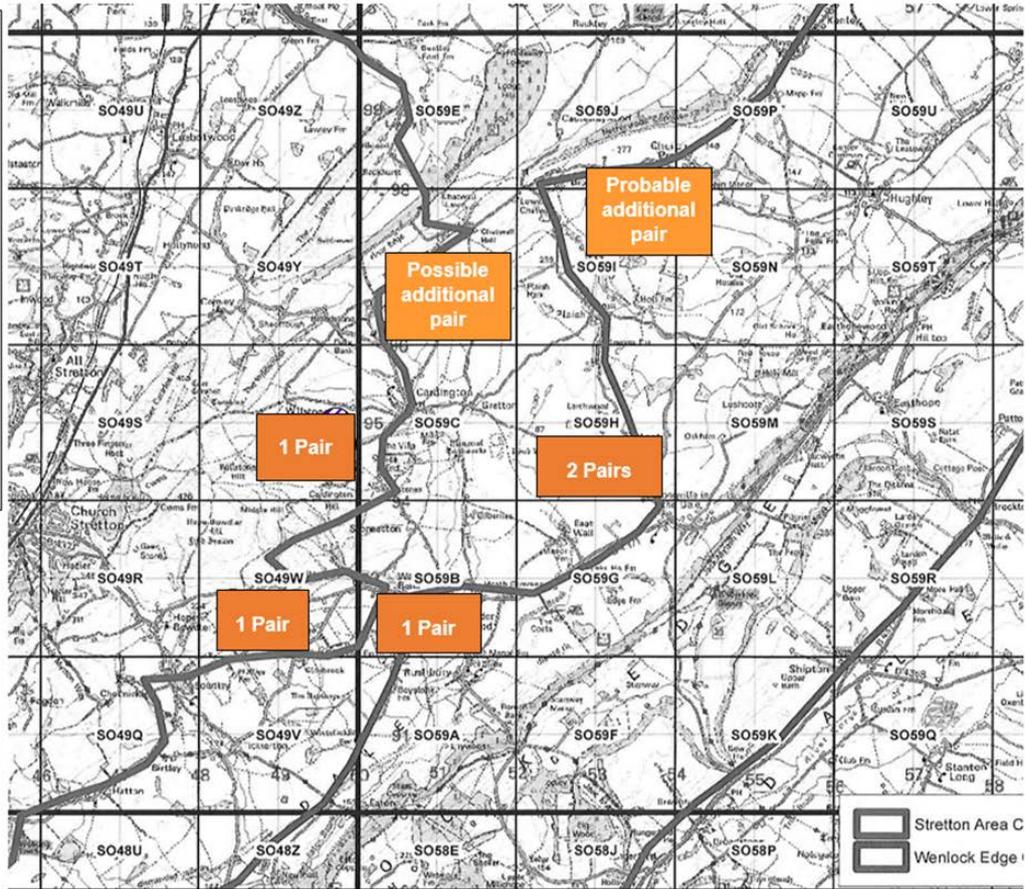
Lapwing & Curlew Survey

Results 2017

Curlew territories
(All survey and other information)

Estimated population

5 – 7 Pairs



Strettons Area CWG & Church Stretton SOS

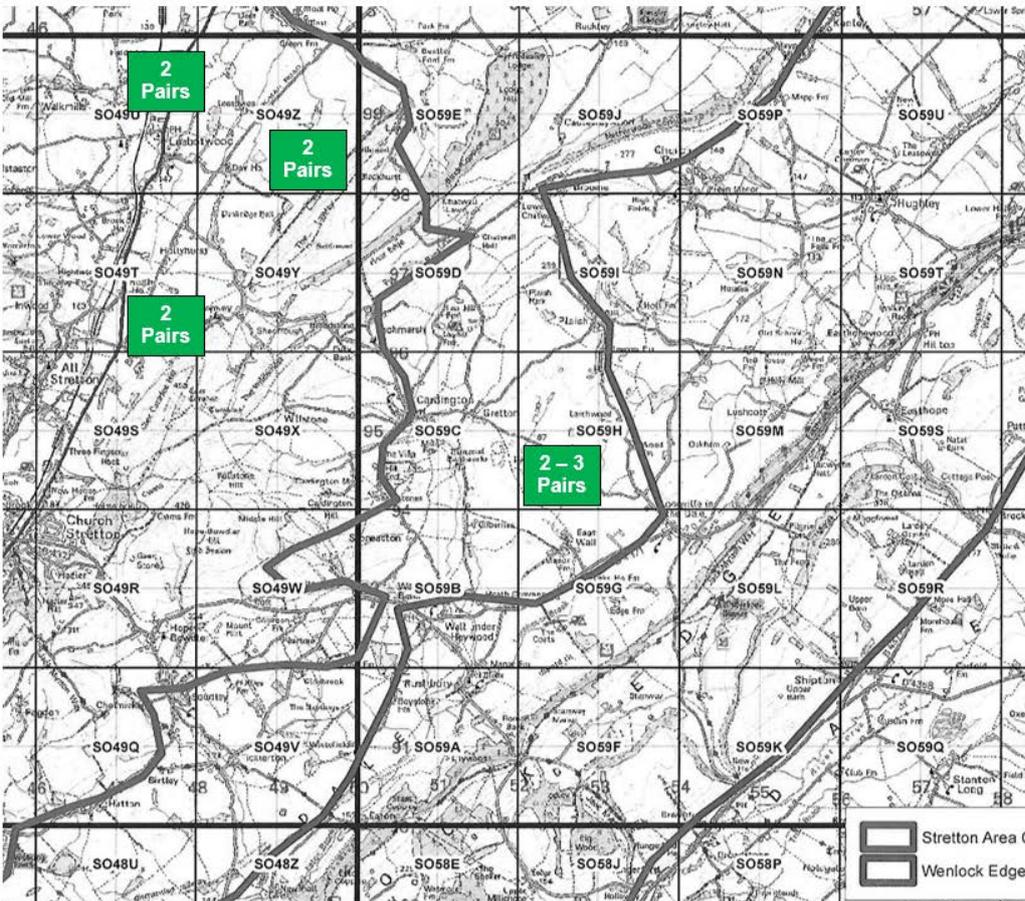
Lapwing & Curlew Survey

Results 2017

Lapwing
(All survey periods, + casual records)

Estimated population

8 – 9 Pairs





Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

The populations are estimated at:-

- **Curlew: definitely 5 pairs, probably 6, possibly 7 and perhaps more**
- **Lapwing: 8 - 9 pairs, perhaps more**

A nest box scheme and colour-ringing project is planned for Kestrels, as they too have declined considerably in recent years. Participants were requested to make an effort to record Kestrels, and one pair with three fledged young was found, but there were few other observations.

All except three of the other target species were found (Grey Partridge, Snipe and Dipper). Skylark, Dunnock and Yellowhammer were found in more than half the 30 tetrads.

Save our Curlews Campaign

Shropshire Wildlife Trust and Shropshire Ornithological Society are leading a "Save our Curlews" Campaign, funded by a joint Appeal. See <http://www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/> Members are encouraged to donate to the Appeal.

It is hoped that, once this survey has located the Curlew breeding territories in the area, efforts will be made to find and protect Curlew nests.

Participants

Thanks to the following people, who undertook the survey work:-

John Arnfield, John Bacon, Steve Baker, John Bent, Michael Bowler, Steve Butler, Ian Cheeseborough, John Corfield, Mags Cousins, Stuart Cowper, Judith Darling, Gill Davies, Malcolm Dixon, Jude Duffy, Nigel Green, Kerri & June Holloway, Jim Jarrett, David John, Tony Jones, Carol Lyons, Stephen & Margaret Mitchell, Andrew Morton, Roger Owen, Ron Parnell, Ian & Jill Plumridge, Steve & Sue Rooney, Brian Santry, Peter Stephenson, Lorna Taylor, Vivienne & Peter Thorpe, Robin Trew, Caroline Uff, Jenny Vine, Dick Ward, Michael White, Sandra & Peter Whitlock and Mike Worthington.

Full Report

The full report can be downloaded from the Community Wildlife Groups website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

Plans for the Future

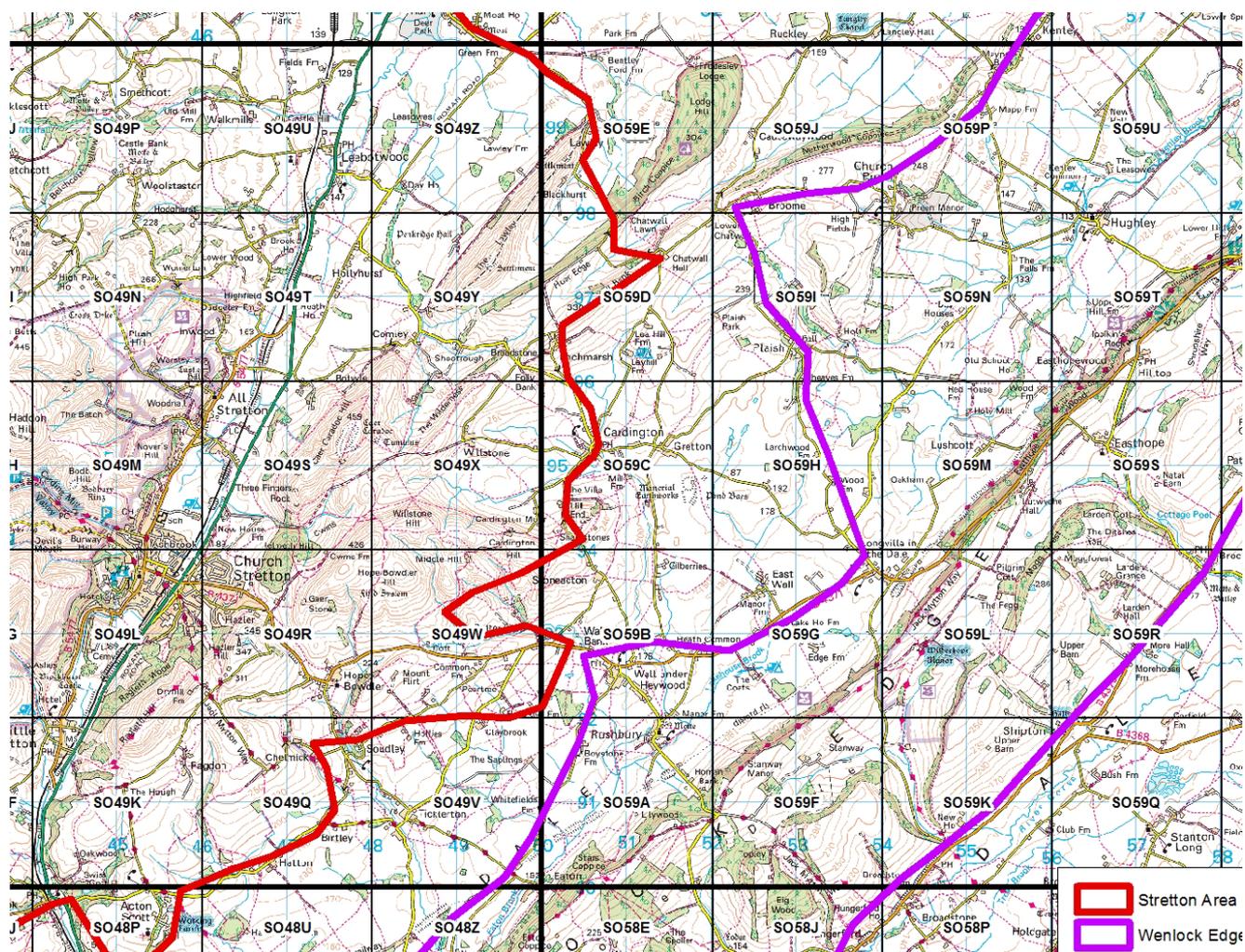
The survey will be repeated in future years, so we can get a better picture of the population and distribution of Lapwing and Curlew, work with farmers to promote conservation, and organise nest protection for Curlews.

New participants are needed in 2018. It's easy and enjoyable, simple instructions will be provided, and there's a fieldwork training session for anyone that wants it. If you want to help, or would like further information, please come to the meeting at 7.30pm on Tuesday, 20th March 2018 at the Methodist Church Hall, Watling Street, Church Stretton, or contact Leo Smith (leo@leosmith.org.uk 01694 720296), Nigel Green (nigel662@btinternet.com 01694 722043) or John Arnfield (arnfield.2@osu.edu 01694 724170)

Leo Smith

February 2018

Appendix 1. Survey area (30 tetrads)



2.5 Strettons Community Tree Planting Project

Project leaders: Penny Bienz and Steve Butler

There have been a variety of activities in 2017 undertaken as part of this project, including;

2nd Longmynd Scouts – bracken bashing and putting up next boxes

The 2nd Longmynd Scouts have shown ongoing commitment to the tree planting project and came out in full force on the 12th June, armed with bamboo canes and the energy of youth, they hacked, thwacked and effectively shredded a large area of bracken in an area of newly planted broadleaves. When the arms got tired they resorted to the tried and tested method of rolling down the hill.

The Scouts had also been making a large bug hotel and dormouse boxes at the Scout hut. They have put these up, along with some bat boxes, near the tree planting areas in Batch Valley. Future sessions will focus on more bracken bashing and also some supervised survey work on the success of these nesting boxes.



Photo. Penny Bienz

Pond and Stream (Park Coppice) 2017 – restoring habitats

In spring, the Project Leaders met with the National Trust to discuss plans to improve the stream and two ponds in Park Coppice. The stream runs the length of the small valley, with a smaller pond at the top, feeding a stream which then disappears via a pipe underground, to emerge into a larger pond area. The top small pool has been extended and while serving as a water source for the Hebridean sheep has been a breeding site for Golden Ringed Dragonfly (*Cordulegaster boltonii*) and the Large Red Damselfly (*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*).



Photos. Steve Butler

In the summer, the NT Ranger and volunteers removed the piped middle section of the stream, exposing this section for the first time in many years. During the summer it was interesting to see several species of birds drinking and feeding over the water. In late summer there were up to 20 swallows feeding prior to departure.

Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

The pond is now mainly dry during the whole of summer and there are few aquatic insects present compared to three years ago when we first did surveys. Talks are ongoing with the NT to look at how we can finance the works required in the larger pond, dredging the pond, removing the debris and reinforcing the dam wall to restore the pond and maintain the water level.

Successful Bat Boxes – creating homes!

Bat (nest) boxes were put up in Open Coppice during 2016. In August 2017 bats were recorded bats flying around the boxes. Other NT records dating back to 2009 include 5 bat species present at Batch Barn in Park Coppice, including Common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*), Brown Long- eared (*Plecotus auratus*), Noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*), Soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*) and Natterer’s bat (*Myotis nattereri*) probably resting temporarily during the night. We hope to develop more in-depth surveys over time.



Photo. Steve Butler



Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

2.6 Swifts in the Strettons 2017

Project leader: Julie Cowley

Purpose & Objectives of the Project

The Swift (*Apus apus*) is amber-listed as a bird of conservation concern (due to falling population numbers) and it is thought that the loss of nest sites due to modern building methods and materials has played a key role in their decline. By recording known nest locations, it is possible to monitor whether these sites continue to be used in subsequent years or whether new sites are selected and, importantly, to liaise with residents, builders and planners when works to improve properties is carried out to ensure the preservation of nesting opportunities.

Surveying also indicates where it might be worthwhile installing artificial nest boxes to increase colony size – the birds are sociable and tend to nest within close range of each other.

Swifts are commonly observed in and around the Strettons but there was no formal recording of the locations of nest sites or the number of birds until 2014, when the first “Swifts in the Strettons” was inaugurated by the Stretton Area Community Wildlife Group, under the leadership of Peta Sams. Observations were carried out in 2015 and 2016 which enabled the earlier study to be built on and extended. In 2017 the same methodology was again used, involving weekly surveys on foot of appropriate areas. Any reports by members of the public were also followed up.

The location of the nest sites recorded will be passed to Shropshire Council, Church Stretton Town Council, Church Stretton Civic Society, RSPB swift survey and the county bird recorder for use when proposals for maintenance or modification of buildings occupied by Swifts are filed with planning authorities and to establish the presence of Swift populations in the county.

Results: General Observations of Swifts in the Strettons

The earliest arrivals of the 2017 breeding season were observed in early May, with the first observation being the 2nd of that month, one day earlier than last year. Birds continued to arrive during the following weeks. Breeding activity appeared to be late this year, perhaps owing to the adverse weather during May. Large numbers of birds were, however, common by the end of May with groups of 20 plus birds regularly sighted. Occasionally, during late summer, there were sightings of very large groups estimated at 50 plus.

“Screaming parties” were reported during June and July throughout the daylight (and twilight) hours. Most of these were close to the Market Square and Church Street and also the playing fields, Essex Road and Lutwyche Road. Swift flight activity (even at low levels) was apparently unaffected by the presence of stalls and large numbers of people in the former location on Thursdays (market day).

A total of 37 nest sites was confirmed (i.e. birds were observed entering a consistent location on a building two or more times), which is three fewer than 2016 but 15 more than in 2015.

The last date of observation of a Swift was August 27th.



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There are several conclusions that can be drawn from the confirmed sightings.

- Stretton’s Swifts continue to largely exhibit nest site fidelity. On re-used buildings, exact locations exhibited some variation between years.
- Older buildings are favoured, preferably with an eastern aspect. Three sites, however, were found in post-World War II buildings.
- The installation of two nest boxes on one building in Church Stretton resulted in successful breeding in one box.

Nest aspect shows a bias towards the easterly direction: where the nest cavity entrance is apparent: 65% face an easterly direction (see table 1).

Table 1: Nest Aspect for Confirmed Nest sites (where known)

Aspect of Nest	Confirmed sites
N	2
NNE	1
NE	2
ENE	0
E	24
S	1
SW	4
WNW	2
WSW	1

in 2017 there were 37 confirmed nest sites in Church Stretton but these are found in only 18 buildings with 21 addresses. There were no confirmed sightings for Little Stretton or All Stretton.

Concluding Remarks

There is little reason to believe that the Strettons area Swift population or nest total has changed significantly since 2014. While the number of nest sites found each year has varied, this increase may be attributed to newly discovered sites in areas of Church Stretton, which were not surveyed as intensively in earlier years and to variations in the numbers of volunteer swift recorders. Accordingly, it is concluded that the breeding status of Swifts probably has remained unchanged in the Strettons in the four year period since the first “Swifts in the Strettons” survey.



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Despite the new nests alluded to above, the core breeding area remains in the older building stock in the area of the Market Square, Church Street and Cunnery Road. Evidence for all of these areas suggests that, while Swifts are generally faithful to particular *buildings*, they do not always re-use the precise *sites* employed in previous breeding seasons. Whether this represents flexibility on the part of an individual returning adult or whether location shifts denote the returning offspring of birds raised in those buildings must remain a source of speculation.

It is interesting to note that swifts used a new site, not previously recorded, in a post-war house, which indicates they may have discovered an opening under the eaves, unusual in such modern housing. It is also encouraging to note that swifts bred successfully in one of the nest boxes installed last year, which suggests that the installation of similar boxes elsewhere in the Strettons might encourage an increase in the local swift population through increased nesting possibilities.

Acknowledgements

This survey would not have been possible without the efforts of those SACWG members who participated in evening survey walks and contributed casual observations (Nicky Halliburton and Tony Jones) and to the residents of the Strettons who talked to us about the Swifts with which they shared their houses.

Julie Cowley

Sandra Whitlock

19th January 2018



IMPORTANT: Confidentiality

This is an edited version of the report without specific site information. Should you need to know further information please pass your request to Julie Cowley (gimli@gotadsl.co.uk 01694 722310), who will consider whether this is appropriate.

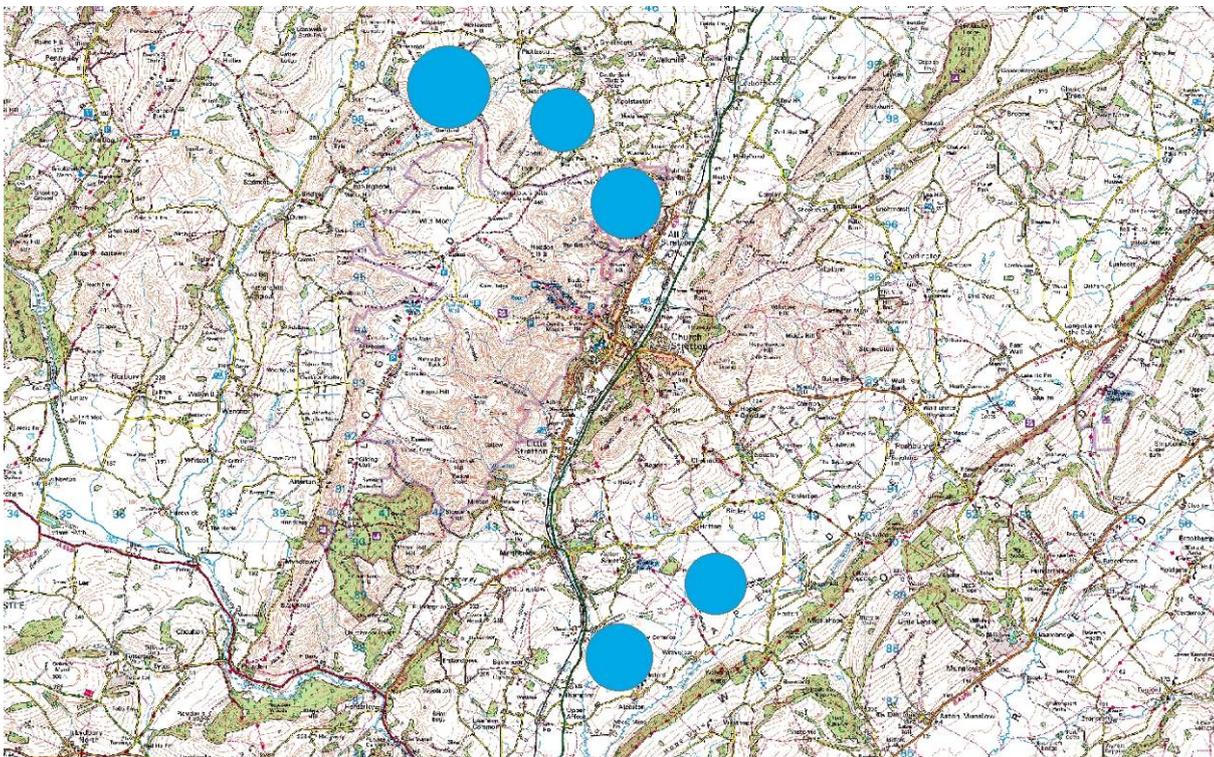
2.7 Wildlife Sites Botanical Surveys

Project leader: Kate Singleton

Botanical Surveys in conjunction with Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT)

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) 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). Many of them are in private ownership and **not accessible to the public** except along existing public footpaths or where the site lies within designated open access areas.

In 2017 the Strettons Area Botanical Survey Group surveyed five Local Wildlife Sites, the locations of which are shown on the map below:



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A Brief Methodology

The surveyors aim to cover the whole of each site as thoroughly as possible. All the vascular plant species observed are recorded using a Shropshire Botanical Society recording card. The frequencies of indicator species are noted and NVC quadrats done where possible. In addition 'site visit cards' provided by SWT are also completed to make an assessment of the habitats and the condition of a site. Any other relevant information is also noted and photos of the site taken. The maps provided by SWT enable the surveyors to check site boundaries and indicate the extent of each habitat by annotating maps. A GPS is used to take precise grid references for NVC quadrats and any rare species.

The data gathered from each survey is processed at SWT and a species lists for each site are sent to the landowners and also to the county recorder along with any useful management advice.

Description of Sites Surveyed in 2017

- “Henley Common LWS” is owned by a large estate. It is a habitat mosaic consisting of Tufted Hair-grass and Soft Rush dominated wet pasture with large tracts of mixed dense scrub and smaller areas of willow and oak woodland with suckering elm. It is an important habitat for birds. A local resident reported barn owl breeding in the vicinity. Of botanical interest is the relatively tall Field Elms with corky outgrowths along the branches (see photo below).



Photograph showing winged bark formation (corky growths) of *Ulmus minor* (Field Elm) at Henley Common

- “Woodland North of the Railway Line (Hangman’s Wood) LWS, nr Hatton Farm” This is a small area of predominantly oak and ash woodland but also contains alder. It is an interesting woodland in good condition with Bluebells, Wood Anemone, Wood-sedge, Wood-sorrel, Wood speedwell and Violets. However, in 1979 it was described as predominantly wet woodland, which implies that over the years the drainage may have been altered and it has become drier.

Within the woodland the ground is uneven (from ancient clay extraction?) with hollows and ridges and seasonal ponds which add to the conservation interest. I have written to the owners highlighting the importance of not doing anything to affect the natural hydrology within the woodland.

A 500m stretch of linear woodland nearby (following the old Wenlock – Marsh Farm railway line) was also surveyed but much of it was impenetrable and what was recorded was not particularly rich botanically.

- “Betchcott LWS” (western section)
This site had not been surveyed since 1985 and the good news is that the diversity of species is still largely intact. It is a species-rich (e.g. with locally frequent Marsh Valerian, and patches of Common Spotted-orchid, Heath Spotted-orchid and various sedges), unimproved grassland with many springs and marshy areas with a central wooded stream with many alders and large hollies. There are also areas of dense gorse scrub. It has, until recently, been grazed with cattle from March to October but now is generally only grazed by sheep. This is not ideal as sheep tend to stay out of the wetter areas which will scrub up over time. Since the survey I have met the owner on site with Dave Cragg from Natural England to discuss future grazing and habitat management. The owner is keen on nature conservation and looking after the habitat.



Photograph of wet grassland leading into wooded stream at Betchcott (west) in April

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- “Overbatch LWS” lies between two other Local Wildlife sites and also shares a boundary with the Long Mynd SSSI. The owners have a small herd of Welsh Black which graze the acid grasslands and four hay fields. The herd also grazes neighbouring species-rich grassland and so is an integral part of the management of local habitat. *

In 2016 the group surveyed the acid grassland areas but didn’t have time to survey the meadows which were subsequently surveyed in 2017. The meadows contained a good array of meadow indicator species, amongst other commoner species, including Eyebright, Yellow Rattle, Yellow Oat-grass, Yarrow, Common Knapweed, Pignut, Heath Bedstraw, Bluebell, Common Birds-foot Trefoil and Tormentil.

- “Betchcott Marsh LWS” This LWS is a feeding area for lapwing and curlew during the breeding season. It comprises acidic and mesotrophic semi-improved grassland, relatively species-rich flushes and areas of alder woodland to the east (woodland not surveyed). These habitats lie close to the Long Mynd SSSI and therefore are even more crucial to supporting the biodiversity of the area. The surveyors found Marsh Violet which is a food plant for the caterpillar of the Dark Green Fritillary; known to be present on the Long Mynd. The owner is sympathetic to wildlife and is aware of the bird interest and works closely with the bird surveyor in the area.



Taking a break while at Betchcott Marsh

Shropshire Wildlife Trust would like to thank everyone involved in the 2017 surveys, particularly Mike Carter who volunteered to lead the group.

*meat is available to buy from Overbatch email: sales@farmerplantservices.co.uk



3. Other News

3.1 Government 25 Year Environment Plan

The Government recently launched its '25 year environment plan' and is currently consulting on its 'farming strategy'. Both these will govern how future resources will be allocated to look after wildlife, nature conservation and the environment. This may be looked back on as a 'watershed' moment!

1. The '**FUTURE FOR FARMING**' will concentrate on the following. **Although of relatively few words they are FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES!**

- The 'area-based' basic payments scheme will only continue to 2024.
- Thereafter "**public payments will be for public good**". E.g. improving animal welfare, maintaining wildlife habitat, improving water quality, helping with flood protection, ensuring environmental protection, etc.
- Food policy will 'integrate the needs of agriculture businesses, other enterprises, consumers, public health and the environment'.
- Land management policy will have at its heart that "*Sustainably managed land and soil is far more productive than land that is stressed.*"

2. The '**ENVIRONMENT PLAN**' targets are:

- **Thriving plants and wildlife**
 - We will achieve a growing and resilient network of land, water and sea that is richer in plants and wildlife.
 - At sea, we will do this by:
 - reversing the loss of marine biodiversity
 - increasing the proportion of protected and well-managed seas
 - making sure populations of key species are sustainable
 - ensuring seafloor habitats are productive and sufficiently extensive
 - On land and in freshwaters, we will do this by:
 - restoring 75% of our terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition.
 - creating or restoring 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside the protected site network
 - recover threatened animals, plants and fungi species in England and the Overseas Territories.
 - increasing woodland cover to 12% by planting 180,000 hectares by end of 2042.
- **Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently**
 - ensure that resources from nature of food, fish and timber, are used more sustainably by:
 - doubling resource productivity by 2050.
 - by 2030 manage England's soils to be sustainably
 - increasing timber supplies.
 - fish stocks maintained at levels of maximum sustainable yield.



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- food is produced sustainably and profitably.

- **Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment**
 - conserve and enhance the beauty of our natural environment
 - safeguard and enhance the beauty of our natural scenery and improving its environmental value ..
 - high quality, accessible, natural spaces to benefit peoples health and wellbeing
 - increasing action to improve the environment from all sectors of society.

- **Mitigating and adapting to climate change**
 - take all possible action to mitigate climate change, while adapting to reduce its impact.
 - cut greenhouse gas emissions from land use, agriculture and waste sectors
 - policies, programmes and investment decisions take into account climate change
 - implementing a sustainable and effective second National Adaptation Programme

- There are also sections on: Clean air; Clean and plentiful water; Reducing the risk of harm from environmental hazards; Minimising waste; Managing exposure to chemicals; Enhancing bio-security.

- These can be viewed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan/25-year-environment-plan-our-targets-at-a-glance>

OF COURSE IT PERHAPS GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT 'PLANS' AND 'STRATEGIES' ARE ONLY OF USE IF SUFFICIENT RESOURCES ARE MADE AVAILABLE and THAT THEY ARE IMPLEMENTED!



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4. SACWG Statement of Accounts

Income:

Wetland Project events	2089.21
Wetland donations	2170.00
Reimbursement from other CWGs for Web hosting fees	105.00
<i>Total Income</i>	<i>4364.21</i>

Expenditures:

Rental of Methodist Hall (Lapwing- Curlew Survey meeting)	24.00
<i>Total expenditures</i>	<i>24.00</i>

Balance Calculation:

Previous balance (24/01/2017)	629.80(plus)
Income	4364.21(minus)
Expenditures	24.00(equals)
New balance (31/01/2018)**	4970.01

** Note:

The total SACWG account balance consists of separate funds, as follows:

Wetlands Project	4259.21
Batch Valley Project	20.18
Undedicated funds	690.62
<i>Total</i>	<i>4970.01</i>

John Arnfield Treasurer, SACWG

(26/01/2018)

5. Acknowledgements

Thanks to all those members of SACWG and the public who supported the full range surveys and activities this year. Printing and copying was provided by the National Trust.