



Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group



Annual Report 2018

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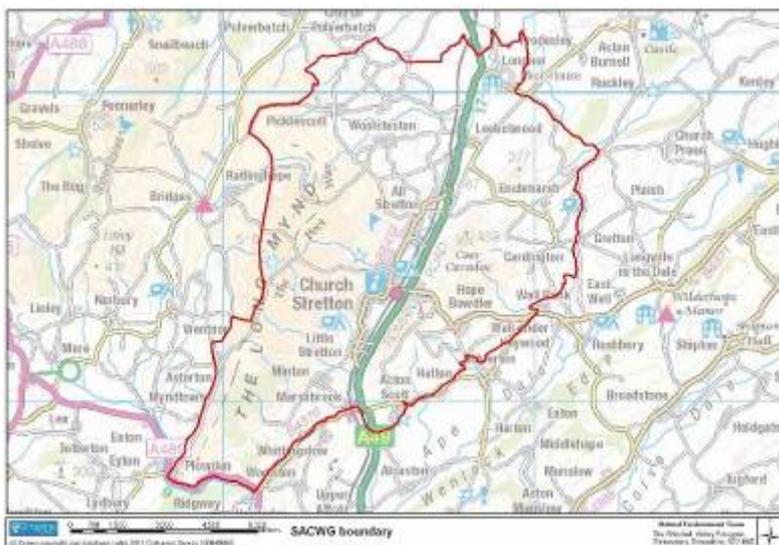
1. Introduction

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: **Steve Butler (chair), Penny Bienz (publicity), Heather Hathaway (secretary), John Arnfield (website), Andrew Perry (annual report), John Bacon, Leo Smith, Isabel Carter, Julie Cowley and Sandra Whitlock.***



2. Survey Activities and Results

2.1 Butterflies

Project leader: Heather Hathaway

Introduction

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

This year members of SACWG have had a three pronged effort to record butterflies in the Stretton Area. As before, occasional sightings have been recorded by 6 members and 28 species identified. This is 28 out of 37 species that can be seen in South Shropshire. One transect has been carried out during 2018; John Bacon has continued his transect on Hazler Hill. A transect involves walking the same route every week between April and September recording butterflies using a proscribed method stated by UKBMS and results have been entered into their site.

The third prong of recording was to carry out timed counts of two species, Green Hairstreak and Grayling in Carding Mill Valley during the flight seasons. These were done by Mr and Mrs Peter Howsam.

The survey was composed from sightings made by Peter Branson, Catherine Wellings, Peter and Jane Howsam, John Bacon, Heather Hathaway and Caroline Uff who also kindly extracted iRecord findings for this area. Peter concentrated his observations on recording Dark Green Fritillary and Purple Hairstreak in our area.

John Bacon has made the following summary of his transect, which reflects observations in the wider area:

- April was a very cold month and also the first half of May. Then followed the hottest summer since 1976 with similar vegetation burn off- crisp to walk on! Many summer species finished earlier than normal as a result.
- 25 species recorded. Odd records of Brimstone, Marbled White, White-Letter Hairstreak, Dark Green Fritillary, Grayling typical of hot summer movements
- Common Blue really responded to the heat with the best year since recording began in 2005; the second brood came in exceptional numbers. 34 individual Common Blue were counted roosting in my tiny meadow on 11th August.
- By contrast the Venissids did poorly considering how good the weather was. Particularly poor in number were the Small Tortoiseshells, causing continued concern nationally.
- Wall Brown had the best year so far; two broods
- Good to see Six-Spot Burnet moths recovering again, the best since 2012 summer, probably due to a decline in parasites – none of the 19 cocoons were found to be parasitized.

Thank you John for your summary and to all the contributors for their records.



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Results

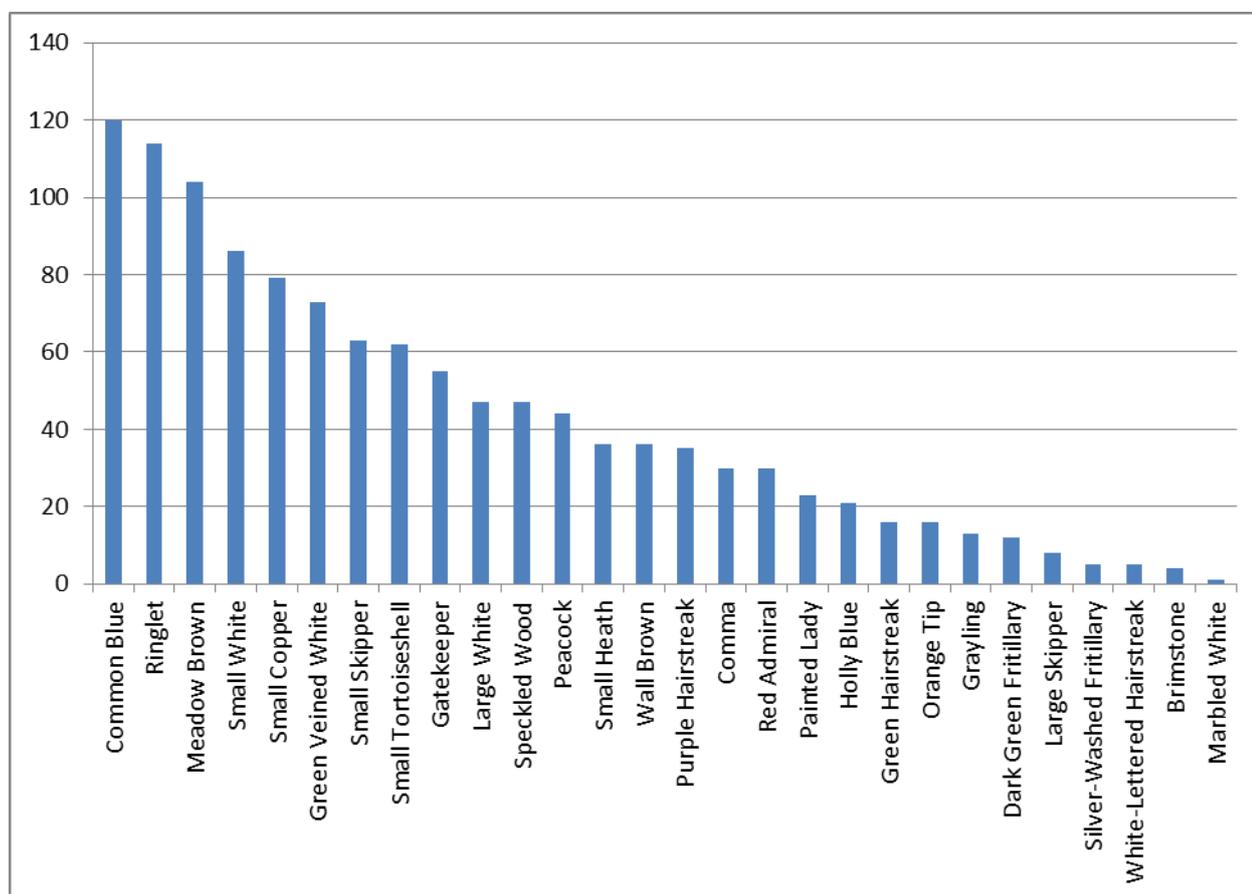
The following compilation of results combines all the observations received, but the numbers are a mere approximation, as some of the reports recorded only the presence of the species and did not include the number present.

Table: Butterfly survey results 2018

Common name	No. of Sites	No. of recordings	Total No. butterflies	Earliest recording	Latest recording
Brimstone	3	4	4	12-May	07-Jul
Comma	9	25	30	17-May	30-Nov
Common Blue	3	18	120	02-Jun	30-Aug
Dark Green Fritillary	4	7	12	30-Jun	03-Aug
Gatekeeper	8	22	55	20-Jun	19-Aug
Grayling	6	9	13	10-Jul	01-Aug
Green Hairstreak	5	6	16	20-May	20-Jun
Green Veined White	9	37	73	05-May	26-Sep
Holly Blue	5	16	21	05-May	09-Aug
Large Skipper	3	7	8	11-Jun	23-Jul
Large White	7	24	47	02-Jun	17-Oct
Marbled White	1	1	1	09-Jul	
Meadow Brown	7	21	104	11-Jun	07-Aug
Orange Tip	5	9	16	05-May	09-Jun
Painted Lady	5	18	23	02-Apr	21-Sep
Peacock	9	24	44	24-Apr	26-Sep
Purple Hairstreak	2	4	35	12-Jul	22-Jul
Red Admiral	9	23	30	26-May	27-Oct
Ringlet	7	16	114	23-Jun	24-Jul
Silver-Washed Fritillary	2	3	5	20-Jul	06-Aug
Small Copper	11	34	79	07-May	19-Oct
Small Heath	12	23	36	17-May	02-Sep

Small Skipper	4	13	63	20-Jun	04-Aug
Small Tortoiseshell	10	28	62	10-Apr	30-Sep
Small White	8	27	86	07-May	30-Sep
Speckled Wood	13	34	47	17-May	30-Sep
Wall Brown	11	25	36	28-May	30-Aug
White-Lettered Hairstreak	3	3	5	10-Jul	23-Jul
Total Species	28				

Chart: Total number of each species recorded (from most abundant to least abundant)





Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*



Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*

2.2 Stretton Wetlands

Project leader: Isabel Carter

Update on Stretton Wetlands for SACWG Annual Report 2019

In January the boardwalk was built by Shropshire Council's Public Access team thanks to funds raised during 2017 and considerable volunteer input. An information panel was so that boardwalk users could be informed about the history of the footpath and the biodiversity of the wetlands area. Preparing the text, sourcing an artist, designer and producing a tough long lasting board provided a sharp learning curve, but the final product justified all the effort.

As a means of thanking the community and volunteers a public opening ceremony was planned. The newly formed Wetlands Action group planned the event. On Friday 20th April on a glorious warm sunny evening, the new boardwalk crossing the wetlands to the south of Church Stretton was officially opened. Good press coverage resulted.



The information panel was unveiled by some of the generous donors; Cath Landles representing the Shropshire Hills AONB, Harvey James of the Jean Jackson Memorial Trust and Colin Carson representing the Pathways Fund of HF Holidays. The ribbon to officially open the boardwalk was cut by landowner Ann Griffin with the town mayor, Mike Braid introducing her, and then both led an inaugural walk along the boardwalk.



The evening finished in a nearby hall with a delicious ploughman's meal with local foods and drink; a really positive opportunity to thank donors, supporters and volunteers and to mark this positive development for the town and for the future wellbeing of the wetlands.

Since the opening the boardwalk has proved very popular with walkers.

The Action group has continued to look for opportunities to improve the biodiversity of the site; contacting landowners with offers to lease or purchase their land or facilitate conservation grazing, and visiting

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landowners to discuss these possibilities. As yet there are no definite positive developments, but the recent town plan confirms that no further planning sites will be considered for the next 20 years on the wetland site, and will help in these negotiations. At some point soon an opportunity will arise and there will be a need for some urgent fund-raising.

On June 14th 2018 a very successful Bioblitz Day was held. The landowners were all consulted and gave permission for their land to be surveyed.

The evening before two moth traps were set up and despite the rather damp evening there were a good number of moths recorded both outside and inside the traps. A total of 29 species (52 moths) were recorded over night with a further 3 species of larvae noted during the following day.

A bat detector produced a good number of positive results with 4 definitive bat species identified (Whiskered, Noctule, Common Pipistrelle and Soprano Pipistrelle. Unconfirmed results were also obtained for Nathusius' Pipistrelle.



Five members of the Stretton's flora group came and surveyed two areas – the Griffin land centred on SO45179318 and the Sankey land, centred on SO45059313. A total of 71 flowering plants were recorded, with an abundance of Skullcap, creeping Forget me not and the rare Marsh Cinquefoil. In addition two axiophytes were recorded.

A bird survey recorded 23 species. Of particular note were Reed Bunting, Black cap, Tree Creeper and Long Tailed Tit.

Time was set aside for searching an area of the Quinny brook for signs of water vole activity. Several potential holes were recorded and two feeding stations were noted in the area.



A detailed survey was made of water invertebrates by Frances Riding yielding a total of 17 different water beetles, one of which, *Helophorus strigifrons*, is nationally scarce. Three other water bugs were identified – common pond skater, a species of water scorpion and water cricket.

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A huge Southern Hawker dragonfly larva was found, adding to the four other species identified during the day. In addition a number of butterflies were recorded and several bugs.

A detailed beetle survey recorded 17 species with two (*Cantharis thoracica* and *Stenolophus mixtus*) of particular note.



A hedgehog tunnel was set out over two nights but with no conclusive evidence. Three other mammals or field signs were identified – rabbit, badger and wood mouse.

It proved a very successful day and there are plans to repeat them every two years ([a full report and species lists are available on SACWG website](#))

Wider interest

Success always encourages interest. Isabel was invited to take part in the 50th anniversary celebration of the AONB and to lead a walk through the area. A report was also made to a Town Council event and a presentation given to the annual branch forum of the Shropshire Wildlife Trust. In addition several informal talks have been given to local groups.

Ongoing maintenance

The boardwalk is well used but still gets quite overgrown at the edges. A volunteer has cleared the surrounding vegetation twice. Ongoing maintenance will now be done three times a year by Shropshire County using the Three P's volunteers.

2.3 Hedgehog Survey 2018

Project leader: Sandra Whitlock

The European hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) is a nocturnal mammal, much loved by the general population, whose gardens it often shares. It has been a priority species for conservation since 2007 due to concerns about population decline. In 2018, a report published by the Peoples Trust for Endangered Species and the British Hedgehog Preservation Society (1) used data from three major surveys to show that hedgehogs are continuing to decline in rural areas, although there was some optimism that the decline might have eased in more urban locations.

The Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group (SACWG) decided to conduct this survey to investigate whether or not hedgehogs were present in the Strettons and to raise awareness of their plight.

Method

Between June and the end of October 2018, three volunteers from SACWG conducted a survey of hedgehogs in the small town of Church Stretton and the two nearby rural villages of Little Stretton and All Stretton. The survey area is within the area designated as AONB. The Participants volunteered to have their garden surveyed in response to email requests (members of SACWG only), articles in Focus, notice-board posters, and leaflets delivered to a small number of houses.



Orphan hedgehog

We surveyed 40 locations using hedgehog tracking tunnels to discover whether or not hedgehogs were active. Each tunnel was prepared using paper to 'capture' the footprints, next to an area brushed with a mixture of vegetable oil and carbon powder which would adhere to the feet of anything walking over it, and a small dish of food (usually peanuts and mealworms) to tempt creatures into the tunnel. Depending on the availability of tunnels and the size of the garden, 1-3 tunnels were used, usually for one or two nights.

Findings

We discovered hedgehog footprints in 12 of the 40 gardens surveyed (30%). The absence of hedgehog prints on the survey night(s) does not mean that hedgehogs were always absent as they may have been present at other times, but it does indicate that hedgehogs were not widely present.

In addition we received 24 reports of hedgehogs in the locality. One of these reports was of a road casualty and the remainder were of live hedgehogs. Two of these sightings were of orphaned infant hedgehogs: both sets of orphans were rescued and taken to Cuan Wildlife Rescue.



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Table 1: Recordings and Sightings of Hedgehogs across the Strettons

	All Stretton	Church Stretton	Little Stretton	Total
Recorded in Tracking Tunnel	0	8	4	12
Footprints absent from Tracking Tunnel	6	21	1	28
Sightings*	1	20	3	24

* Number of reported sightings, not numbers of hedgehogs.

Discussion and Conclusions

It is impossible to state from our survey how many hedgehogs live in the survey area for three reasons. Firstly, we were unable to survey all the gardens in the locality; we relied on people volunteering to have their gardens surveyed and were restricted by a shortage of surveyors and an inadequate number of tunnels for the larger gardens. Secondly, our tracking tunnels could show whether or not hedgehogs had visited, but we could not normally tell from the prints whether it was one or more hedgehogs. Finally, because hedgehogs travel widely (up to 2kms) in their nightly search for food, we may have recorded (or had sightings) of the same hedgehogs on more than one occasion. Our results, however, are in line with national surveys which show that hedgehogs are not commonly found.

Within Church Stretton many of the sightings and footprint recordings were located in smaller town gardens rather than in the large, apparently wildlife-friendly gardens, many of which adjoin woodland on the outskirts of the town. This may be because hedgehogs struggle to live successfully alongside badgers, which are known to be active locally, and with whom they compete for food. In the town, one hedgehog and her infant were even sighted sleeping just 1 metre from a house doorway in a complex of sheltered accommodation. It may be that hedgehogs appear to be more common within small town gardens because they are more visible or because the presence of regularly topped-up bird feeders provides a useful and easily-found source of food. In some gardens where hedgehogs were already known to be present, the householders were providing them with a regular source of food, which was undoubtedly helpful in ensuring their survival.

The summer of 2018 was one of extremes, with periods of heavy rain following a long period of unusually hot and very dry weather. Our surveys were conducted in a range of weather conditions which may have affected our results.

Over several decades, the hedgehog population in the UK has shown a worrying and steep decline. We hope that our survey has drawn attention to the problems faced by this charming mammal and that it will inspire residents to help hedgehogs to survive and thrive. We suggest repeating the survey in three years' time to see if there is any apparent change to the hedgehog population.

Recommendations for helping hedgehogs

- To help hedgehogs forage far and wide to find sufficient food they need to access as many gardens as possible - holes 6" x 6" at the bottom of your fences will enable them to do this.
- Avoid using rodent poisons whenever possible as hedgehogs and other animals may eat the poison or carcasses of poisoned animals.
- Try not to use pesticides such as slug pellets to avoid hedgehogs being poisoned by either the pellets or by poisoned slugs.
- Leave some areas of your garden undisturbed.
- Make piles of logs and branches which might attract a hedgehog to make a home in your garden or make a hedgehog house (there are patterns on the internet) and put it under a bush in an undisturbed part of your garden.
- If you can, feed hedgehogs with a little meat-based pet food or dried cat biscuits and put water out every evening during the hedgehog season - from mild days in February through to November.
- Bread and milk should never be offered.
- Finally, if you spot a hedgehog during daylight hours it will be sick or starving. Please catch the hedgehog in an old towel, put it in a box in a quiet place and call Cuan Wildlife Rescue on 01952 728070



Hedgehog footprints

With many thanks for looking after hedgehogs and for taking part in our survey and with thanks particularly to Gen Garnett and Sue Rooney for their tremendous help in conducting the surveys.

References

1. PTES & BHPS (2018) The State of Britain's Hedgehogs (https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/SoBH-2018_final.pdf)

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 then 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. Surveys in 2013, 2016 and 2017 were disrupted by hard, bad weather, and the estimate of the number of territories was considered to be too low.

Methodology

The 2018 survey was undertaken by 38 volunteers, including 4 couples, the lowest number since the survey started. 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 the first two planned surveys, and one in May, had to be cancelled and rearranged, and several rearranged dates also had to be cancelled. Surveys were undertaken on eight evenings between 19 April and 24 May 2018. The aim was to cover each watch point three times, but this was not achieved.

A full description of the analysis and results 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

The analysis of the results has not yet been completed, nor has the detailed report yet been produced. It will be available shortly, hopefully by the public meeting on 26 February. All participants will be supplied with a copy. It will be posted on the Community Wildlife Groups website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk Reports from previous years can also be found there.

The summary of coverage and results, and estimated population for 2011-17, follow.

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. 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 225ha 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



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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 not yet known if the poor weather conditions in 2018 depressed the level of Grouse activity on the survey dates, as there were not enough observations to separate territories, particularly at the northern and southern ends of the property. Some of those shown on the map may have actually held two or more males and some territories may have been overlooked altogether.

Participants

Thanks to the participants who carried out the surveys in 2018: John Arnfield, Lois Baker, Sam Bishop, Sandy Burton, Chris Cooke, Judith and Stephen Darling, Gill Davies, Malcolm Dixon, Greg Forster, Sue Forster, Jeremy Freeland, Julian French, Joe Gomme, Helen Griffiths, Darren Hall, Frank Hinde, Pat Holbourn, Peter Houlder, Peter and Jane Howsam, Peter Jackson, Ray Jones, Sarah Lane, Edward Marvin, Anna McCann, Roger Owen, Sue Pinsent, Jane Potts, Sue and Steve Rooney, Anne Schofield, Leo Smith, Mike Statham, Ben Warren, Sandra and Peter Whitlock, and Heather Williams.

Leo Smith
February 2019



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 Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group 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 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. 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, if they were confident that they could do so.

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 main target 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.

The survey was a success, and all 30 squares were covered. It was agreed to repeat it in 2018, using the same methodology and aiming to cover the same 30 squares. A briefing meeting, outlining the results in 2017, and planning the 2018 survey, was held on 20 March. Most of the people who participated in 2017 attended, plus 11 new helpers. An outdoor fieldwork training meeting was held for those that wanted it, on Saturday 7 April, and 5 people attended.

Almost all the squares (27 out of 30) were surveyed, but one square was only surveyed once, in early May. There were 33 participants, who between them contributed over 350 hours, an excellent effort.

A detailed report of the methodology and results will be supplied to all the participants shortly.

Results

The following maps show the distribution of Lapwing and Curlew territories found in 2018.

The populations are estimated at:-

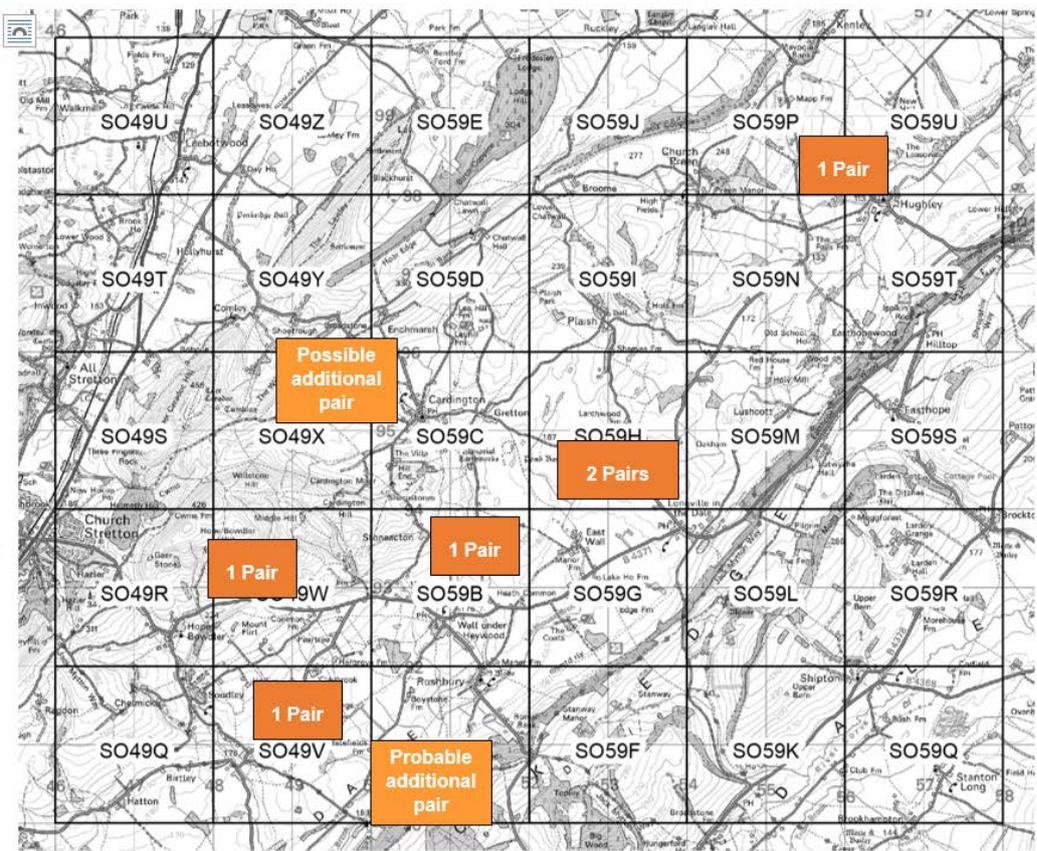
- **Curlew: definitely 6 pairs, probably 7, possibly 8 and perhaps more**
- **Lapwing: 6 - 8 pairs, perhaps more**

This compares with the estimates made last year:-

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

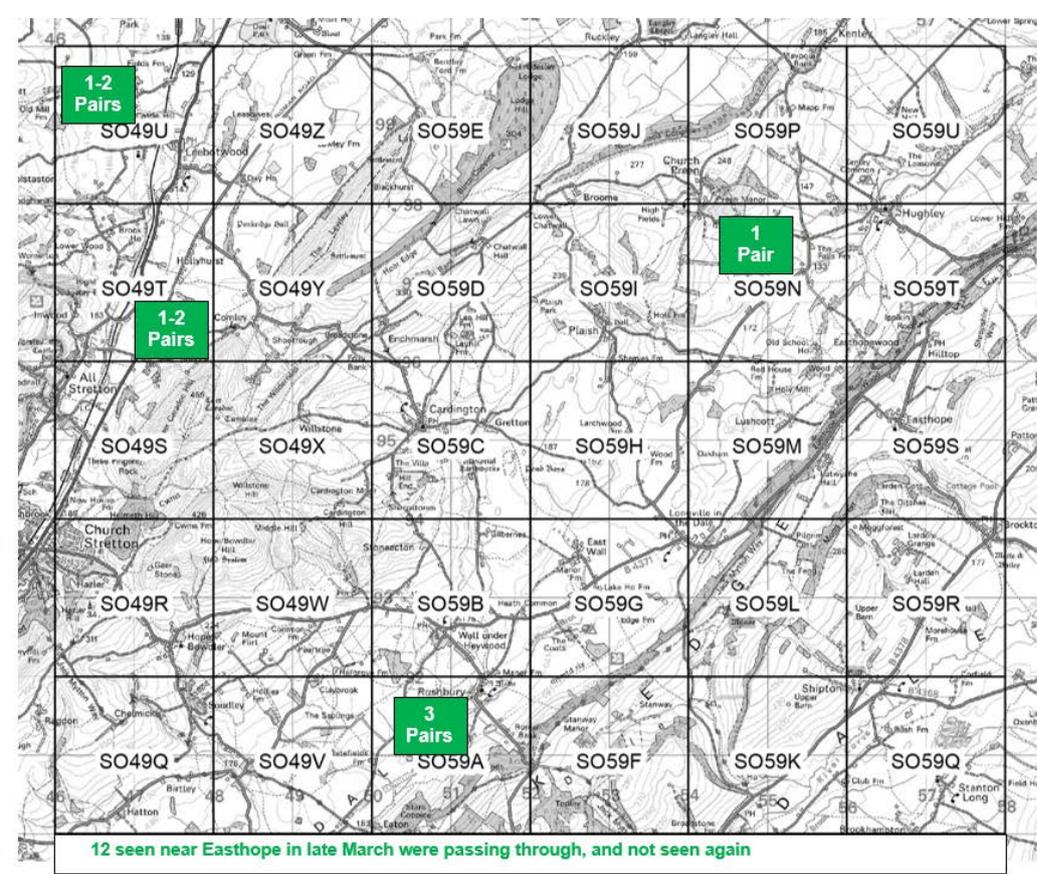
Strettons Area CWG & Church Stretton SOS
Lapwing & Curlew Survey
 Results 2018
Curlew territories
 (All survey and other information)

Estimated population
 6 – 8 Pairs



Strettons Area CWG & Church Stretton SOS
Lapwing & Curlew Survey
 Results 2018
Lapwing
 (All survey periods, + casual records)

Estimated population
 6 - 8 Pairs



12 seen near Easthope in late March were passing through, and not seen again



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Other Target Species

Participants were requested to make an effort to record Kestrels, as a nest box scheme and colour-ringing project is planned for them, as they too have declined considerably in recent years. However there were few observations, and none were recorded where a pair raised three young last year, near Longville. The population in the area is estimated at up to 10 pairs, perhaps a few more than the 6 – 8 estimated last year.

All except four of the other target species were found (Grey Partridge, Snipe, Barn Owl and Dipper). Swift nest sites were found only at Wilderhope Manor, where there is a substantial colony, but this survey is targeted at habitats where Swifts are unlikely to be found. Spotted Flycatcher (SO59H) and Reed Bunting (SO49S) were also only found in one square. Skylark, Dunnock and Yellowhammer were numerous and widespread, but only Red Kite was found in more than half the 30 tetrads. This reflects the rapid increase and spread of this graceful raptor, which bred in Shropshire for the first time in 130 years as recently as 2006.

The summary table on the following page shows the maximum count for each species on any one survey 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).

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, and perhaps their habitat preferences, but only a very small proportion will have been recorded.

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.

The campaign is encouraging a network of 11 Community Wildlife Groups across Shropshire, including ours, to monitor Curlews. The 11 Groups cover 137 tetrads where the vast majority of the County’s Curlew population was found in the recent 2008-13 Bird Atlas project. A map showing the area covered by each group, overlain on the Curlew distribution map, can be found on the website. Around 80-100 pairs were found altogether. Over 270 people participated, and put in nearly 2,300 hours, a clear indication of the commitment of local people to saving our Curlews.

Square (Tetrad)	Species											
	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Dunnock	Wheat-ear	Stone-chat	Tree Sparrow	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer
SO49 Q	1	5	4			6	4		3		4	3
SO49 R	No other target species recorded											
SO49 S	1	1	1	2		3		2		10	1	
SO49 T												1
SO49 U		1	1									
SO49 V		2	5						2			1
SO49 W	1	1			1	1					1	
SO49 X	1				1						2	1
SO49 Y	2	2		2		2	1			3	1	
SO49 Z	No other target species recorded											
SO59 A		1	2			2				2	1	2
SO59 B	1					3						1
SO59 C		3										
SO59 D		1				2					2	1
SO59 E	Square not surveyed											
SO59 F	1	1	6			2				10		2
SO59 G		1	1							1	1	1
SO59 H		2	2								1	1
SO59 I		1										
SO59 J			2			4					2	
SO59 K	Square not surveyed											
SO59 L		1				1					1	
SO59 M			1				1					3
SO59 N		5	7			17				3		5
SO59 P	1	1	10			6						2
SO59 Q						1					2	
SO59 R	Square not surveyed											
SO59 S	1					3						1
SO59 T			1									
SO59 U	1	1	13			6						3
Total	11	30	56	4	2	59	6	2	5	29	19	28

Participants

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

John Arnfield, Steve Baker, John Bent, Steve Butler, Stuart Chambers, John Corfield, Mags Cousins, Julie Cowley, Sue Cunningham, Gill Davies, Robin Gilbert, Joe Gomme, Nigel Green, Frank Hinde, June Holloway, Kerri Holloway, Melanie Houlder, Peter Houlder, Jim Jarrett, Tony Jones, John Knowles, Jaclyn Lake, Graham Lewis, Andrew Morton, Roger Owen, Ron Parnell, Ian Plumridge, Jill Plumridge, Jane Potts, Eric Sant, Anne Schofield, Jenny Vine and Dick Ward, .

Full Report

The full report will be available shortly on the Community Wildlife Groups website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk



Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

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 2019. 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, 19th March 2019 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 David John (dalison@hotmail.co.uk 01694 724772).

Leo Smith
February 2019



2.6 Swifts in the Strettons 2017

Project leader: Julie Cowley

Purpose and 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 2018 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 2018 breeding season were observed in late April, with the first observation being the 29th of that month, two days earlier than last year. The bird was seen visiting a nest box erected on a property in 2017. Birds continued to arrive during the following weeks. Surveying commenced in early June, in part due to only a small number of volunteers being recruited to help with the survey. As observations in May 2017 were sparse it was decided to start surveying in June to enable a greater likelihood of data capture. A growing number of birds were observed as the month of May progressed, noted from anecdotal evidence. As the survey season commenced it became apparent that some of the “regular” nest sites that had previously recorded consistent breeding were not being occupied in 2018. The survey co-ordinator was informed that in one particular building known to support a number of nest sites the owner had blocked up most of the cavities, thus only two sites out of a possible eight were recorded in 2018 from that location. Similarly another well occupied row of properties also returned poor results, with just one nest site out of a possible nine observed. As nest occupation was down from 2017 this enabled the opportunity to look in other locations and the results were more positive. A further seven new sites were recorded in Church Stretton and a new site in All Stretton was also confirmed.

“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). Numbers of birds active in the evenings reached 30+.

A total of 30 nest sites was confirmed (i.e. birds were observed entering a consistent location on a building two or more times), which is eight fewer than 2017. Figure 1 shows the number of nest sites confirmed since 2015.

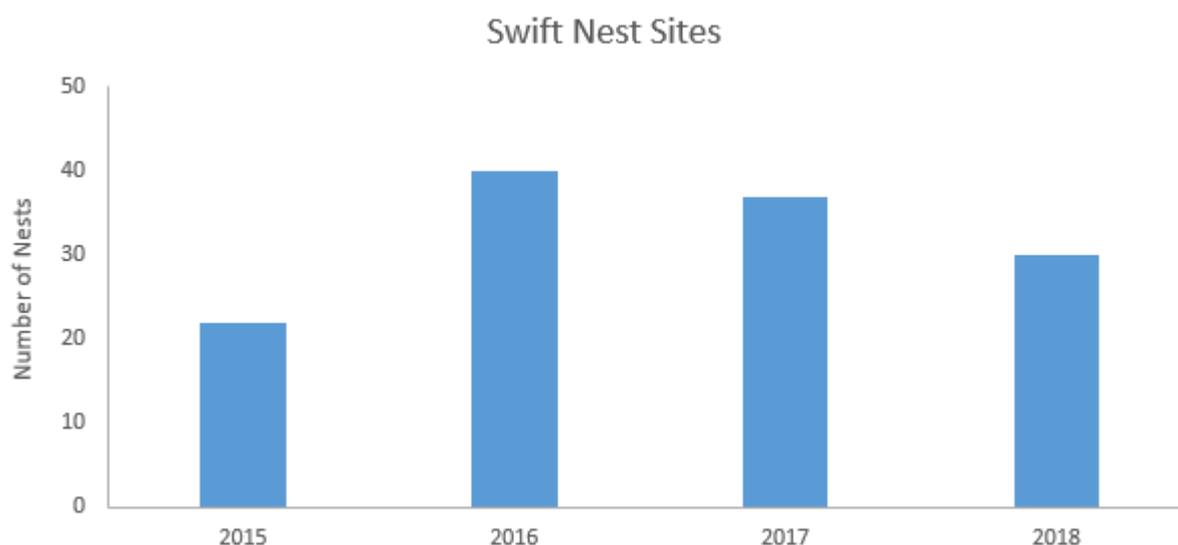


Figure 1. Number of swift nest sites in the Strettons since 2015.

The last time of observation of a swift was the end of August 2018.

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

- Nest occupation at known sites was down compared to 2016 and 2017
- 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 overall, preferably with an eastern aspect, although post World War II buildings are also occupied during the breeding season
- The installation of two nest boxes on one building in Church Stretton resulted in successful breeding in one box in 2018
- A further 13 boxes were installed in late 2017/early 2018. None were recorded as being occupied although at least one site reported interest by swifts



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Nest aspect shows a bias towards the easterly direction: where the nest cavity entrance is apparent: 60% face an easterly direction (see table 1).

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

Aspect of Nest	Confirmed sites
N	6
S	3
E	18
W	3

In 2018 there were 30 confirmed nest sites in Church Stretton town, found in 21 buildings at 21 addresses. A nest site was confirmed in All Stretton, and there were no confirmed sightings for Little Stretton.

Concluding remarks

The 2018 breeding season revealed a significant decline in breeding swifts, with nest site occupation at 78% of 2017 sites. This is a 22% reduction in occupancy, despite the summer of 2018 being particularly suitable to breeding swifts. The County recorder also noted a decline in breeding birds for the season.

Of particular interest is the “hot spot” of swift nest sites in post war buildings in Essex Road. There was exceptional activity in this area and these houses appear to be a significant stronghold for the swift population in the town, alongside the previously reported core breeding area in the older building stock in the area of the Market Square, Church Street and Cunnery Road. The birds returning to the latter site areas have generally returned to the precise location in some of the buildings, but this is not always the case, as mentioned in the 2017 report.

It is hoped that the installation of the 13 nest boxes in the town will bring some success in 2019, particularly as swifts bred successfully in the box erected on Shrewsbury Road. The call system used to entice the birds was clearly successful and the occupation of these other boxes will depend upon attracting breeding birds to the boxes.

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

Julie Cowley

19th January 2019

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.

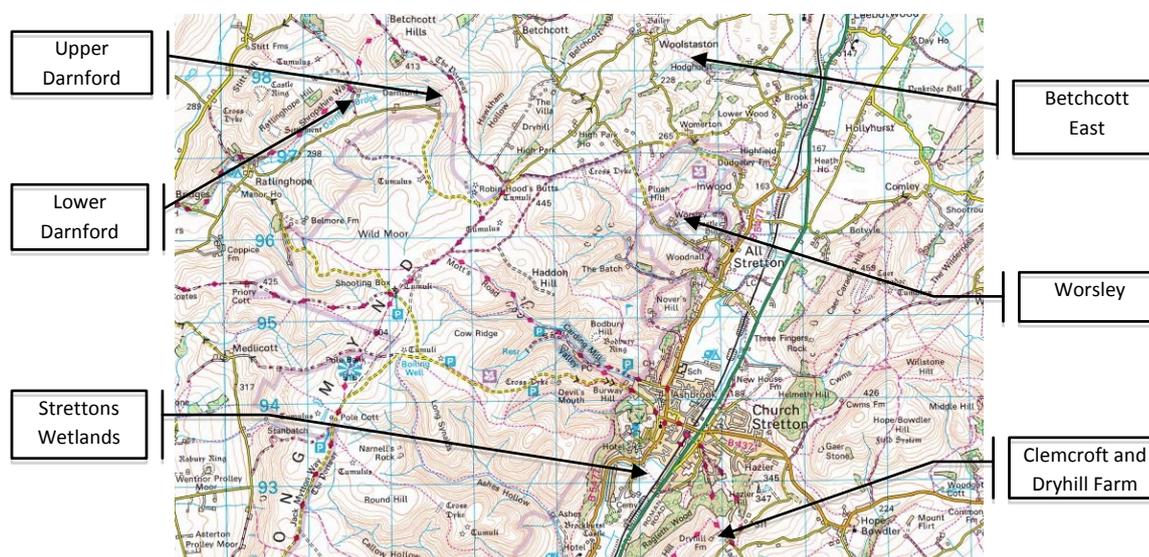
2.7 Wildlife Sites Botanical Surveys

Project leader: Mike Carter

Botanical Surveys 2018 in conjunction with Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT)

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are places that 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 2018 the Strettons Area Botanical Survey Group surveyed six sites, Local Wildlife Sites or potential LWSs, 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 list for each site is sent to the landowners and also to the county recorder along with any useful management advice.



The team at work; Lower Darnford

Photo: Peter Howsam

Description of Sites Surveyed in 2018

Clemcroft and Dryhill Farm

These are owned by one family; parents, and daughter/son-in-law. Clemcroft has been managed for biodiversity since the late 1980's. It includes 0.75ha of meadow with scrub, layed hedges and a planted woodland margin. The meadow used to be mown annually for hay but in recent years has been winter grazed by Badger-faced sheep. A variety of vegetation heights encourage diverse insect life – 29 species of butterfly have been recorded with 23 breeding, along with a population of Six-spot Burnet moths. 29 species of bird have bred on the site. Plant species were typical of mesotrophic grassland including Eyebright, Pignut and Bird's-foot Trefoils ('ordinary' and Greater). Less typical was Imperforate St John's Wort. Adder's Tongue has been found in the past but not in recent years.

Dryhill Farm lies next door to the South-west of Clemcroft alongside Ragleth Hill. Four small fields totalling about 0.5ha are winter grazed by the same Badger-face sheep. One south facing steep bank in particular was interesting botanically with frequent Betony and Burnet Saxifrage, both Shropshire axiophytes ('worthy plants' that are useful as indicators, and make botanists go 'ooh'). Sixteen species of butterfly breed on the meadows. Six-spot Burnet moths have recently arrived to breed from next door.

Lower and Upper Darnford

These two sites are adjacent along the Darnford Valley NE of Ratlinghope. The brook is fed from springs from Golden Valley and the south side of the Betchcott Hills (along which the Portway runs). The sites were surveyed about 10 years ago by Dr Kate Thorne. Her records indicated them to be very special mire sites with unimproved grassland and flushes, unusually rich botanically. Our task was to update records on their current status and condition.

We spent a day recording each site. It is heartening to report that both sites are still in good condition. Terracing for building work at Lower Darnford has damaged a small area of mire; but otherwise management appears to have continued as no/low input with extensive grazing.

Species lists for Lower Darnford included a heady 37 axiophytes and for Upper Darnford 35 axiophytes, some, but not all, duplicated between the two sites. Anyone who enjoys sedges would

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find this a treat; a dozen different species including the unusual Dioecious Sedge plus White Sedge, Pill Sedge and Bottle Sedge. Other notables included Marsh Valerian, Marsh Speedwell, Marsh Arrowgrass, Marsh Violet, Bog Asphodel, Bog Pimpernel, Round-leaved Sundew, Heath Spotted Orchid and Lemon-scented fern. Marsh Violet is a food plant for the caterpillar of the Dark Green Fritillary; known to be present on the Long Mynd.



Lower Darnford looking south

Photo: Peter Howsam

- **Betchcott (Eastern section)**

Two other sites on the same estate were surveyed last year. This Eastern site had not been surveyed since 1985. It is a single field of about 2.3 ha rough grassland with several springs sloping down to the Colliersley Brook draining east off the Betchcott Hills towards the Cound. The field drains poorly and is undermanaged so is an oasis amongst adjacent improved grassland and intensive arable. Hedges are mature, tall and wide. A quarter of the area is dense scrub of hawthorn, blackthorn, bramble, willow and elder; the rest is rough grassland with marshy areas grazed by sheep (and perhaps cattle at other times of the year) at low densities. Bramble and tall Marsh Thistle were full of insect life. Species diversity appears to be largely intact. It is species-rich including 17 axiophytes, e.g. with locally frequent Sneezewort, Marsh Valerian, Marsh Pennywort, Betony, Bog Pimpernel, Heath Woodrush and Wood Speedwell. The owner is apparently keen on nature conservation and looking after the habitat.



Sneezewort

Photo: Peter Howsam

- **Worsley**

Worsley is a secluded valley to the north of the All Stretton Castle Hill road. The whole farm is about 6.5ha, at 260-300m altitude, very varied in aspect and topography. It used to include Overbatch Farm next door that we surveyed in 2017. Worsley is a rich mosaic of woodland, tall hedge boundaries, pond, mire and stream, and semi-improved and unimproved, acid and mesotrophic grassland. Once a dairy farm owned by the parents of the current owner, for the last several decades it has been managed primarily for biodiversity. The owner keeps no livestock or machinery but lets grazing (of sheep and Welsh Black cattle) and hay making to neighbours.

The owner is an amateur botanist (indeed one-time editor of the Shropshire Botanical Society newsletter). The farm has been regularly surveyed over the last 20 years including SBS field visits; it appears not to have been surveyed since 2013. We surveyed only a limited area (c2.5ha) of the grassland.

The farm is a gem. In total over 220 vascular plant species have been recorded in all the Worsley habitats over the past 20 years. We recorded over 100 including 22 axiophytes. Of particular note (some needing verification!) were Betony, Prickly Sedge, Spiked Sedge, Pale Sedge, Smith's Pepperwort, Bird's-foot, and Annual Knawel.



Pale sedge

Photo: Mike Carter

- **Strettons Wetlands**

The Wetlands were 'bio-blitz' surveyed in 2016, following which some fields were designated as LWS. A smaller bio-blitz was carried out in 2018 and is reported elsewhere. With only a small team available for a couple of hours, we focused on flora species not recorded 2 years ago.

The new species included Marsh Cinquefoil, Branched Bur-reed and Monkey Flower.

Skullcap, found more often in North Shropshire, is abundant in the Wetlands.

It would be good to do a thorough flora survey of the Wetlands, perhaps involving Shropshire Botanical Society, in 2020.



Marsh Cinquefoil
Photo: Mike Carter



Skullcap
Photo: Peter Howsam

Many thanks to everyone involved in the 2018 surveys!



Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

3. Stretton Area Community Wildlife Group Interim Accounts for the period ended 31st December 2018

Income and expenditure

	Period ended 31 st December 2018 £	Year ended 31 st March 2018 £
Income		
Private donations	520.00	1,185.00
Local council funding	1,595.00	250.00
Income from SACWG events	25.00	2,089.21
Stretton Focus funding	100.00	-
Other donations & funding	30.00	8,750.00
Total income	<u>2,270.00</u>	<u>12,274.21</u>
Expenditure		
Website management	(12.00)	(15.00)
Materials	(1,972.00)	-
Construction works	-	(12,000.00)
Room hire	-	(24.00)
Total expenditure	<u>(1,984.00)</u>	<u>(12,039.00)</u>
Net income for the period/year	<u>286.00</u>	<u>235.21</u>

Eleanor Watters, Treasurer, SACWG

4. 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.