

Upper Clun



Community Wildlife Group

Report 2020



**Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group
Report 2020
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INTRODUCTION

The *Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group* was formed in 2007, following extensive promotion and development work in the area initiated by 'Down to Earth in the Clun Forest' as part of the Shropshire Hills AONB's Blue Remembered Hills Project. This process was described in the Group's 2007 report. The first Annual Public Meeting in November 2007 agreed the Aims and Objectives, and its area of operation, and elected a Committee.

The Group aims to contribute to local knowledge and conservation of popular "flagship" wildlife species, by undertaking surveys to establish their status, and promoting conservation by working with farmers and landowners to safeguard and increase important habitats. It complements but does not duplicate the work of either *Land, Life and Livelihoods*, or the Clun and Bishop's Castle branch of the Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT). We have worked closely with both groups, which have in turn actively supported the Wildlife Group.

The Group has carried out Bird and Plant surveys each year since 2007, and Butterfly surveys since 2010. Well over 100 different people have been involved in these surveys. This Report presents the results for the current year, and updates our knowledge of wildlife in the area. However, activities were severely curtailed in 2020, because of restrictions introduced by the Government to limit the spread of Coronavirus. This report covers the activities that did take place.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The Group will

- Undertake survey work to establish the status of key bird, plant and butterfly species and habitats
- Encourage and enhance local interest in wildlife
- Actively promote conservation.

AREA & MEMBERSHIP

The Group covers the catchment area of the River Clun west of Clun, including the River Unk and the Folly Brook, plus the part of the Bettws-y-Crwyn parish that is outside the River Clun catchment area. It includes the whole of the parishes of Newcastle, Bettws-y-Crwyn & Mainstone, and parts of the parishes of Clun, Colebatch and Llanfair Waterdine.

The Group is open to anyone who lives or works in the area, and who wants to actively contribute to local knowledge and conservation. It is for everyone in the community, not just experts. Interest in the area, and enthusiasm, are far more important than detailed knowledge. The target birds and plants are important and easy to recognise and search for. Initial training on identification and simple survey methods, and regular support and advice, is provided, so members learn a lot, and the work is very enjoyable.

The mailing list has grown each year, but all mailings are now sent by email. It now includes over 184 local people at 146 email addresses, plus representatives of various organisations.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Role of the Committee is to

- Organise survey work
- Involve more local people
- Work with local people and other groups to develop a policy for conservation action
- Seek to influence other organisations
- Obtain and manage funds to continue existing work and develop new projects.

The membership, and details of meetings in 2020, are set out in the Annexe to the Report.

PUBLICITY

To help recruit and involve new members, the activities that did take place have been publicised in the area, through posters and press releases, and articles in the *Clun Chronicle*. A recruiting leaflet is available in community centres and elsewhere. However, the two main opportunities to present

our work, the Annual Public Meeting in November, and Newcastle Show in September, were both cancelled. We will need to promote our activities widely when they re-start next year.

WEBSITE

There is a website for all the Community Wildlife Groups, with separate pages for the Upper Clun Group www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk. Previous reports can be found, and future events and news will be listed. Members are requested to check the website periodically, particularly before events.

FACEBOOK GROUP

UCCWG has a Facebook group. Log into Facebook and then in the search bar, (with the magnifying glass icon), start typing the name of the group, i.e. 'Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group, (UCCWG)'. Facebook may come up with a list of suggestions as soon as you start typing in the name. Click on the group name to select the group and it should come up (the 'cover' photo is currently a picture of a Curlew), then click on '+ join group', to become a member.

The UCCWG Facebook group was created before last year's annual meeting, and so far has attracted 36 members, 13 more than a year ago. The group provides timely communication with members and they can post their wildlife sightings, photos, videos and questions.

The group is administered and moderated by Karen Mitchell and Katie Steggles and is open to the public, so anyone can find the group, see who is in the group and what they post. Anyone can request to become a member or submit posts once they are a member but posts require approval from the administrator or moderator.

It has promoted events and activities, and, although these have been limited in 2020, requests for records of Curlew sighting have been made. It also keeps non-members informed about UCCWG.

The group has shared relevant 'posts' from other affiliated organisations, such as the SWT and the Clun & Bishops Castle branch of the SWT, about other local activities and events. Information from other appropriate organisations, such as the RSPB, 'Curlew Country' and Butterfly Conservation on wildlife identification and suggestions on how to help local wildlife have also been shared. Wildlife surveys such as the British Trust for Ornithology's 'Tawny Owl survey', Freshwater Habitats Trust's 'Spawn Survey', Butterfly Conservation's 'Big Butterfly count', Woodland Trust's 'Natures calendar' and RSPB's 'Big Garden Bird Watch' have been promoted too.

The web address for the group is:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/UpperClunCommunityWildlifeGroup/>

CO-OPERATION WITH FARMERS, LANDOWNERS & OTHER ORGANISATIONS

The vast majority of the area is farmland, and almost all of the birds, plants and butterflies that the Group wishes to conserve live on it. Close co-operation with farmers is therefore crucial to our success.

The Group has continued to actively promote conservation of popular "flagship" wildlife species by working with, and influencing, farmers, landowners, other local organisations, Government Agencies and the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, to protect and restore important habitats.

In 2010, we brought together the results of four years' survey work to identify some of the best sites for birds, plants & butterflies in the Upper Clun. These sites have survived thanks to the way they have been managed, and we have subsequently worked with some of the land owners to help ensure that they continue to be managed in the same way. We have now made personal contact with almost all the farmers who own one of these high-quality sites, and we hope the information we have collected is useful to them. We have worked with both farmers and Natural England to ensure that the best wildlife sites are incorporated into Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (HLS) agreements.

We made a successful joint application with Land, Life and Livelihoods for a Natural England Countryside Stewardship (CS) Facilitation Fund Grant for a three year project to support people and

organisations that bring farmers, foresters, and other land managers together to improve the local natural environment at a landscape scale. This landscape scale approach can cover land under existing agri-environment and forestry/woodland agreements, common land and land not currently covered by a scheme. It builds on the principles of partnership working to deliver environmental benefits. For further information, see p21.

ACTIVITIES & SURVEYS

Since its launch in 2007, the Group has set out to find all breeding pairs of Lapwing and Curlew, monitor other important farmland birds and their habitats, and promote the conservation of Barn Owls, Dippers and woodland birds through provision of nest boxes. This built on local knowledge of Lapwing and Curlew gained since 2004.

In 2007, a dozen different wild flowers were also located, and a further 12 plants indicative of woodland, and 12 indicative of grassland, were included in the 2008 surveys. These results were used to highlight the most important sites, and these sites have been the subject of detailed Plant surveys in each subsequent year since 2009, with the aim of getting the best sites adopted as Local (County) Wildlife Sites.

Three Nature Reserves in the Upper Clun area are owned by Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Rhos Fiddle, Lower Shortditch and Mason's Bank. These reserves have also been surveyed in some years.

Our area was initially divided into 31 squares, 2x2 kilometre squares on the Ordnance Survey National Grid. The Group recruited a local member to survey each of these squares for birds and/or plants each year, and well over 100 people have either undertaken surveys, or provided additional useful information, since 2007. However, since 2009, only the best sites have been selected for further survey work, and many of them do not fall into single squares, so this division of the area into squares is no longer important. The map of the area, divided up into these squares, can be viewed on the website.

Butterfly surveys, supported by Butterfly Conservation and concentrating on Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, were started in 2010.

The aims and results of these surveys are described elsewhere in this Report.

COVERING OTHER TYPES OF WILDLIFE

The Group wants to expand its activities, and survey and promote conservation of other types of wildlife. These activities will be shaped by the interests of all the people who join.

FUNDING

Initially the Group was funded by the AONB's *Down to Earth* programme, and then its Sustainable Development Fund.

From October 2011 until June 2013, funding came via the "LEADER in the Shropshire Hills" programme, "part financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development 2007-2013: Europe investing in rural areas". This programme was co-ordinated by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership with Defra as the Managing Authority. The National Trust was the lead organisation and banker for the LEADER Project

The Group is not currently in receipt of any grants to fund its general work. Efforts will therefore be made to raise funds by asking people attending meetings and events to make donations, and support raffles. Members have not been asked to contribute since the Group started, and the Committee hopes to avoid having to charge a membership subscription, but hopefully members will now support the Group financially, as well as through voluntary activity.

Grant Applications will be made when the opportunity arises. A successful application was made to the Garreg Llwyd Windfarm Community Fund to help finance the Curlew Nest Monitoring and

protection project in Bettws-y-Crwyn parish in 2020. It was not possible to undertake the work this year, but it has been agreed that the grant can be carried forward to 2021.

CONSTITUTION

To make Grant Applications, it is necessary to have a written Constitution, which was adopted at the Annual Public Meeting in November 2013. The Constitution can be viewed on the website.

OTHER COMMUNITY WILDLIFE GROUPS

The Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group was the second CWG to be formed, following the Upper Onny Wildlife Group, launched in 2003.

The Kemp Valley CWG started in 2011. The LEADER project funded these three Groups, and also three new groups, covering Clee Hill, the Strettons, and Wenlock Edge. However, one of these three new groups, Wenlock Edge, is no longer operating.

The Stiperstones – Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS), financed by the Heritage Lottery Fund, has supported the development of two new CWGs, covering the Rea Valley and Camlad Valley, between 2014 and March 2018.

These groups all survey important wildlife in their areas, but they are developing differently. All are monitoring birds and plants, but the species being searched for are different. Six of these groups are monitoring Lapwings, and five Curlews.

Until 2017, all the Community Wildlife Groups were in the Shropshire Hills, in the south-west of the County, but the Three Parishes CWG (covering Weston Rhyn, St. Martins and Gobowen, north of Oswestry) was formed in 2017, and Tanat to Perry CWG (covering the area to the south of Oswestry and the Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence CWG were both launched in 2018.

An eleventh group, Abdon District CWG, was formed by local residents in 2018. It also carries out a Lapwing and Curlew survey, but monitors other local wildlife too.

**The activities and results for each of the Groups can be found on the website
www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk**

THE BIRD GROUP

BIRD SURVEYS

Introduction

Since 2007 the Bird Group has monitored the population and distribution of Lapwing, Curlew, and other species of conservation interest. Early surveys highlighted the importance of 'wetland' areas retaining a more diverse flora, especially Soft Rush *Juncus effusus*, and such sites were given particular attention from 2010 onwards. Up to 2011 the Group attempted to survey all 31 tetrads ((2x2 kilometre squares) in the Upper Clun, focusing increasingly on Curlew as Lapwings disappeared. However, as Curlew's range contracted and its population decreased, blanket coverage was replaced by more intensive fieldwork on its strongholds.

Geographic surveys are now supplemented by observations from a network of resident recorders in Curlew hotspots who are prompted to collect evidence of activity at key points in the breeding cycle, and members of the Wildlife Group are encouraged to send in all records of Lapwing or Curlew. Observers are kept informed by emailed progress reports.

The Methodology and Recording Instructions for the Bird Surveys were described fully in the 2011 Report (Appendix 1), and can be found on the website.

Participation and Coverage

This year 16 members reported on particular geographic areas, either by survey or, if resident, by continuous observation; 29 others contributed records by phone, email or personal contact, a total of 45 participants; 174 Curlew observations or sets of observations were received, the highest annual total to date. *Six nest box hosts sent in breeding results.*

All observers who undertook surveys or continuous recording, or submitted nest box data, live within the survey area. Several are farmers, and many other farmers provided valuable information. The co-operation of landowners who allowed access to their land is gratefully acknowledged

LAPWINGS

Fieldwork Results

There was one report of Lapwing in the Rhos Fiddle area during the breeding season but no evidence that they stayed. There have been no breeding records since 2012. A map showing the approximate location of all breeding Lapwing found by the Group since 2007, together with the nests found previously in 2004 – 06 (Smith 2006) has appeared in previous reports, and can be found on the website.

Local Extinction

The local breeding population declined from 6 pairs in 2004 by around a pair a year up until 2010; only two pairs have been found since, both in 2012. As no young are known to have fledged since 2008, Lapwing appears to be extinct as a breeding species in this area.

Habitat requirements

Their Habitat Requirements, and the reasons for the Population Decline, were described in the Group's 2010 (and previous) Report, and are not reproduced here. Full details are provided in Shrubbs's book *The Lapwing*, and papers by Sheldon, listed in the References.

CURLEW RECOVERY PROJECT

We had intended this year to repeat the Curlew Recovery Project launched in 2018 and continued in 2019, in co-operation with the Shropshire Ornithological Society "Save our Curlews" campaign, with financial support from the Wind Farm Community Benefit Fund, to pay for professional help with nest finding and protection. The restrictions on movement and activity in response to Covid19 coincided with the Curlew nesting period making it impossible to proceed with the project.

However our resident participants were able to monitor Curlew activity while going about their everyday business and this allowed us to form a clear picture of the early season. By

the time the eggs hatched in early June movement restrictions had been eased and the breeding attempts were followed up.

Fieldwork Results

All the sites occupied in 2019 were at least investigated by Curlew pairs, and most were used. One site vacant last year remained so, and at a further site Curlew did not appear to settle. The number of active territories about which we could be confident was therefore six, the same as last year.

At five of the six breeding sites the nest appeared to be in much the same place as last year; at the sixth a breeding pair that had been suspected last year is believed to have nested. The latter territory may be an alternative site for the pair whose nest was found nearby in 2017.



One breeding attempt ended at the incubation stage when one of the adults was attacked by a Buzzard and injured beyond hope of recovery. At another site regular territorial activity ceased well before hatching would be expected and any nest is assumed to have failed. Based on adult behaviour the other four were judged to have survived to hatching, and anti-predator responses in some cases strongly suggested the survival of chicks for a number of weeks. Activity at these sites ended between the third week in June and mid-July, before any young would have fledged.

In common with the previous two years, there was another pair just to the south of the area, also shown on the map, on Llanfair Hill.

The breeding season progressed in similar fashion to the last few years: Curlew pairs arrive back and occupy traditional territories, though the nest sites themselves may vary between years. Most if not all pairs go on to incubate and hatch eggs but once hatched the chicks succumb within a few weeks, and certainly before they could have fledged. In two cases, one the adult mentioned above, and one reported incident in which a chick seems to have been carried off by a corvid, possibly a Raven, predation was the cause. With such a rate of attrition it can be only a matter of time before the Curlew is locally extinct.

A feature of this year's fieldwork was the unusual number of Curlews recorded in groups or pairs at new locations, or ones that had not been used for many years. In most cases the shortness of the stay indicated they were passing through. There were at least three cases where the length of occupation and the dates on which activity was recorded were consistent with occupation of a territory. Breeding attempts at two of these sites cannot be ruled out, but there was not sufficient evidence to confirm it.

The drought early in the year may help to explain some of the unusual movement: damp dingles and ponds seemed to be the focus of some of the activity. However, groups of Curlew continued to turn up throughout the breeding season, but it is likely that these were pairs that failed early and moved on.

Curlews are long-lived, but the breeding population will only be stable if there are enough young birds to replace the adults as they die. As things stand there is no evidence that the local Curlews are producing any fledged young, let alone enough to maintain the population. Although they are likely to attempt to breed for some years yet, without significant changes in landscape and ecological balance it is hard to see how they can avoid local extinction.

The distribution of territories in 2020 is shown in Map 1.

The estimated population found each year since 2007 is shown in Figure 1.

The full results of the Group's Curlew surveys are set out in Appendix 2.

Map 1. Approximate location of Curlew Territories 2020

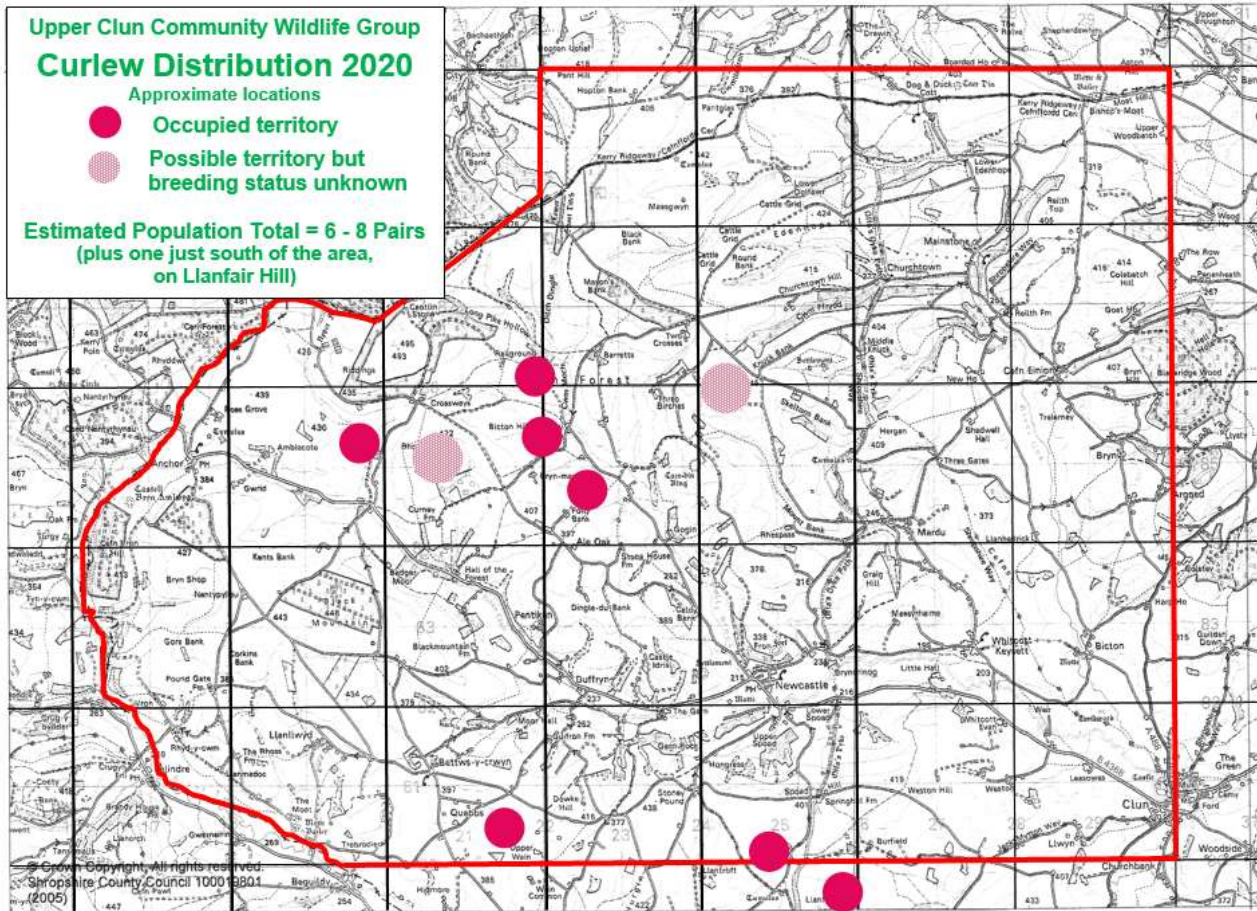
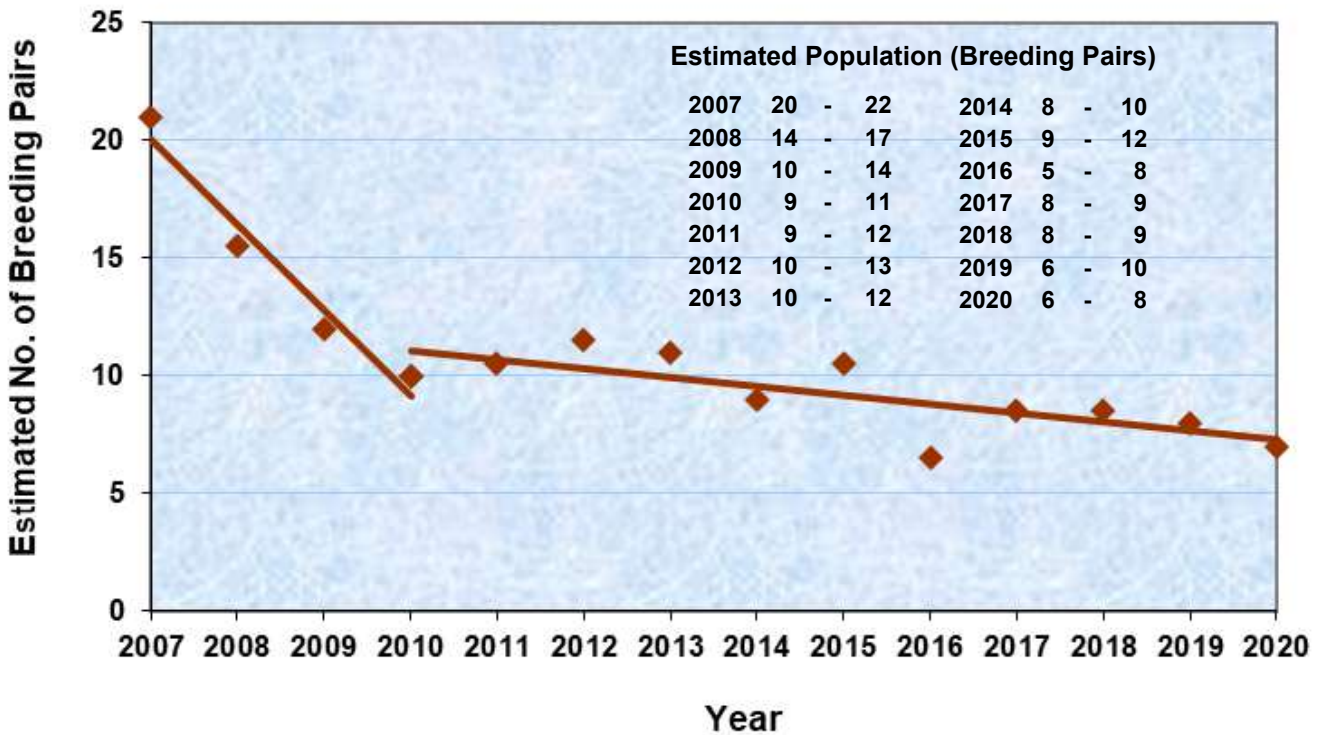


Figure 1. Decline of Curlew in the Upper Clun 2007 – 2020

Estimated Curlew population 2007-2020



The rate of population decline appears to have slowed since 2010, following several years of steep decline. However, productivity in recent years was not sufficient to maintain, let alone rebuild, the population, and, as no young are believed to have fledged since 2017, the decline is set to continue.

Colour-ringing

No colour-ringed Curlews were seen in 2020. The one in the photo was found in 2017. If you see a Curlew on the ground in future years, please check it for colour rings. The red/orange on the right leg is conspicuous.

Habitat Requirements and Population Decline

Curlews are ground-nesting birds, requiring rank vegetation as cover for the sitting bird and eggs. They nest on unimproved grassland and heather moorland, rushes or tussocks on rough grazing, or in grass being grown for hay or silage, and feed on damp pasture and meadows with wet, boggy areas rich in invertebrates. Since they need all-round visibility to detect approaching predators, they are found only in open landscapes.



The local decline has been accompanied by a sharp contraction of what was already a very limited range in a short space of time. The last pair of Curlew nesting in the “lowlands” of the Upper Clun has been lost: they occupied a territory north-west of Clun, in the Unk valley, but they were last recorded breeding there in 2010. The Curlew population appears now to be entirely confined to the very highest ground, with no known territory below around 350 metres.

In late 2015, Curlew, previously Amber-listed, was added to the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern. Its national decline is attributed primarily to agricultural intensification, in particular:

- land drainage, which reduces rank vegetation for nest sites, and the invertebrate food supply
- increased use of fertilizers, intensifying the effect of drainage
- control of 'weeds', such as rushes, which are necessary for nest cover
- rolling and chain-harrowing when it can destroy nests and chicks
- silage production, with earlier and more frequent cutting, endangering eggs and chicks
- intensive grazing, with higher stocking levels leading to an increased risk of trampling

(See Birds of Wet Meadows Survey 2002 (Wilson et al., 2005) and the Repeat Upland Bird Survey 2002 (Sim et al., 2005))

Predation has also played a part in the decline (Grant et al, 1999). The sparse Curlew population, the reduced amount of nesting cover, and the distances involved in finding food mean nests and chicks are extremely vulnerable to predators, particularly foxes and corvids, which do very well in the current farmed landscape.

Curlew are loyal to nesting sites even if the habitat has changed over the years, so their choices may reflect historic conditions rather than those prevailing at present. However, the few remaining Curlew nest sites are all within 1 km of damp, rough or semi-natural areas, three of which are SWT reserves, and there is evidence that these are important for foraging. Sites which have themselves become marginal may continue to support Curlew by virtue of their proximity to such habitats.

Curlew do not have to raise many young each year to survive in an area, but no population can sustain productivity as poor as that found here. In the Upper Clun there is still a nucleus of breeding birds to work with; in other parts of the country the situation is even worse. Revival will require a long-term strategy aimed at re-establishing habitat of suitable quality on an appropriate scale.

A contributory factor to the decline is now being increasingly understood, the impact of releasing large numbers of Pheasants into the countryside for shooting (see p. 25).

The importance of Curlew conservation has been increasingly recognised in recent years, and a summary of work towards this goal, at local, regional and national level, can be found on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

In summary, in this area, after a rapid initial decline until 2010, then a period of relative stability for five years, the decline in the Curlew population has resumed, and is now around 6 pairs, but perhaps as many as eight.

The situation is now critical, and a Curlew Action Plan was launched in 2016 to attempt to recover the population.

In 2018, nest finding and protection was organised as part of the “Save our Curlews” campaign. Three nests were found and fenced. The nests all survived, but none of the chicks fledged. All were predated, mainly by foxes. However, we learnt a lot about how the chicks move about, and feed, in the landscape, and this will help future conservation efforts.

In 2019, one nest was found, but it could not be fenced, so we added little to our previous knowledge

SNIPE

The important local Snipe population at SWT Rhos Fiddle Nature Reserve was surveyed as part of the Shropshire Snipe Survey 2009. Four pairs were found, including a new territory in the centre of the Reserve, compared with 3 – 4 pairs in 2004. The survey was repeated in 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2019, but there was no evidence of breeding Snipe. No breeding-season records were obtained this year either.

Snipe appear now to have been lost as breeding birds throughout the area, although they are still regular winter visitors. A site on Black Mountain, occupied in 2004, was surveyed in 2009 and 2010, but no Snipe recorded. Rush management and the creation of a scrape may have improved the habitat for Snipe, and the site should be revisited, but the prognosis is poor if the much better and more extensive habitat at Rhos Fiddle is vacant.

BIRDS OF THE “WETLANDS”

The Wetlands Project, launched in 2010, aimed to identify and survey all bogs, mires, flushes, wet meadows and rush pasture in the Upper Clun area in order to assess their condition and census the birds, plants and butterflies they support.

A baseline survey of the major 'wetland' sites and their bird communities was made in 2010 and 2011, with the aim of resurveying the sites at approximately five-year intervals to monitor breeding species and assess the effectiveness of any conservation measures. Initially, priority was given to privately-owned farmland with potential for inclusion in HLS.

All survey records, and the maps based on them (Maps A2.1 and A2.2 in the 2011 Report, Appendix 2) were submitted via Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS) to the Local (County) Wildlife Sites committee, co-ordinated by SWT. It was agreed that, where sites have been shown to support Lapwing, Curlew or Snipe, or at least four of the additional target species (Kestrel, Cuckoo, Barn Owl, Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Stonechat, Linnet, Yellowhammer & Reed Bunting), they qualify for adoption as County Wildlife Sites (CWS).

(This work is described in the Chapter on Conservation Action later in the Report.)

The sites owned or managed by SWT (Lower Short Ditch, Masons Bank & Rhos Fiddle) are now included in the survey as a standard of comparison, and, since they are more extensive than the other sites, as a means of assessing the importance of site area.

Survey results are submitted to SOS each year, as evidence of the extent to which the sites continue to justify their status as Wildlife sites.

Survey Findings

The sites were not formally surveyed in 2020, but were visited as part of other fieldwork, although visits were curtailed by Covid19 precautions. All target species were recorded, though not at all sites, and numbers again seemed lower than in earlier years: for example, fewer pairs of Stonechat were using regular sites, and very few Reed Bunting were found. Cuckoo was however recorded at many more sites, including some where it has not been found for several years, although it is hard to judge how many individual birds were involved.

The more diverse flora and fauna of the wetlands benefit many other bird species besides the Group's targets, including other Red-listed species such as Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Whinchat, Tree Pipit, Tree Sparrow and Lesser Redpoll.

Results for 2020 are shown on Map A2.1 in Appendix 2, p35.

RED KITE

The long incubation period of Red Kite allowed nest monitoring to go on much as usual, although with the start of fieldwork delayed fewer nests were found as they are harder to detect once eggs have been laid and the trees are in full leaf.

Six nests were found and monitored, including a new one. There was strong evidence of a further nest at an established site but it was not found. Two sites used for several years were vacant. At least five nests were successful producing a total of at least 8 young. A total of 51 nests have been found in the Upper Clun since 2007, of which 35 were successful, producing 51 young.

Although the kite-tagging project is much reduced kites can be long-lived and there are still tagged birds in the area whose breeding history is of interest, so please continue to report sightings of a Kite in the same vicinity on several occasions, or of two together, or of one going into a wood between January and July, which may indicate a nest site.

Such locations should be kept strictly confidential, as Kites are still persecuted, but should be reported immediately to Leo Smith or Michelle Frater (each of whom has a monitoring licence).

KESTREL PROJECT

The state of the Kestrel population has given rise to increasing concern in recent years, and in response the Shropshire Raptor Study Group and the Shropshire Ringing Group have begun a county-wide programme of nest monitoring. Nest boxes are being erected in areas of suitable habitat, such as rough grassland, heath and rushy areas, which have surviving Kestrel populations, in order to supplement scarce natural sites and to gather data on breeding and productivity.



There are now four nest boxes in the Upper Clun. Only one was occupied in 2020, but it was successful, producing four young. A natural site was visited by a pair at the beginning of the season but was later found to have been occupied by Tawny Owl; a nearby alternative was filled with what appeared to be a squirrel dray. There were a couple more breeding-season records of Kestrel but no further confirmation of breeding, and sightings in the area continue to decline.

Kestrel fortunes fluctuate according to the peaks and troughs in the vole cycle, so they can recover from bad years, but the overall trend is not encouraging.

Please report all Kestrel sightings to Michelle Frater, 01588 640909.

DIPPERS

Dippers are restricted to, and dependent on, fast-flowing streams and rivers with stony beds. The headwaters of the River Clun, including the River Unk and the Folly Brook, are one of the County strongholds. The average length of the fiercely-defended territory, approximately 1km in the Upper Clun, is closely related to water quality. The health of the Dipper population, assessed by nest monitoring, ringing, and trapping or re-sighting ringed adults, is therefore an important indicator of changes in the river environment.



Nests are located directly above flowing water; natural sites are used, but man-made structures are preferred where available, and Dippers take readily to nest boxes. With landowners' permission, specially-designed nest boxes have been installed under bridges in the Upper Clun to increase nesting opportunities and breeding success, and facilitate population monitoring.

2020 Monitoring Results

Dipper fieldwork was more seriously affected than other species as they breed early. The majority of known nest sites were checked but some too late to find chicks still in the nest.

- 24 potential nest sites were monitored, the great majority nest boxes under bridges
- 8 sites were, or had been, occupied, 16 were vacant and the status of 7 more is not known; some of the latter are prime sites and likely to have been used
- 3 active nests were found, on the Clun, the Folly Brook and the Unk; others were judged to have been active by field signs or local information
- all known nests were in boxes
- 13 chicks and 1 adult were ringed; chicks that reach ringing age are likely to fledge
- 3 colour-rings on breeding adults were read

No comparison is possible with previous years. The occupancy rate appears low, but perhaps not quite as low as might have been feared after the poor 2019 season. A better impression may be arrived at when, or if, winter roosts are monitored, but that will depend on whether or not restrictions are in place.

Tony Cross has been monitoring Dippers in the Teme catchment since 1987, by ringing chicks at nest sites, and counting birds at winter roost sites. Colour-ringing of adults started in 2011, and since then as many colour-rings as possible have been read during the breeding season, giving an important measure of adult movements and survival. The oldest dipper so far in the Upper Clun was seven years old when he disappeared; the national record is 8 years 9 months. Three dippers ringed as nestlings at sites on the River Ithon in Powys have bred in this area, and a recent ringing report included a dipper that fledged at Bicton and moved to a site near Ratlinghope, 40km away.

Annual reports of this project, *Dippers in the River Teme Catchment*, have been produced since 2007.

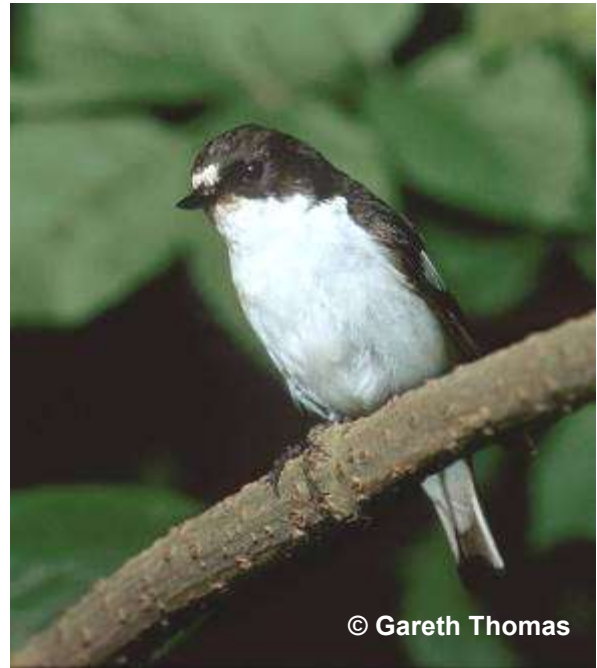
The study suggests that the local population declined in the 20 years prior to the start of the nest box scheme in 2006, then increased until 2010, as the boxes created more nesting opportunities. Productivity is slightly higher in boxes as they tend to be less vulnerable to predation. The highest number of chicks so far fledged in 2015, with the number of breeding pairs peaking the following year before declining to the present. Natural fluctuations are normal for species inhabiting dynamic environments, and long-term trends will become apparent only after years of monitoring.

**If you see Dippers regularly, or know of an existing nest site,
please contact Michelle Frater, 01588 640909.**

NEST BOXES FOR WOODLAND BIRDS

The Nest Box Scheme aims to increase the number of suitable nest sites for hole-nesting woodland birds, and to collect data on their breeding success. Some members with suitable gardens or access to woodland host up to 10 boxes provided by UCCWG. New members are welcome to join, but unfortunately the Group is no longer able to fund new boxes, so people must now provide boxes themselves.

Results were submitted for about 35 boxes from four long-standing sites, but another was discontinued because the host wood was sold. A new scheme, in the Teme Valley near Felindre which started last year, was extended to 32 boxes. In total, 33 boxes were used, by three species: Blue Tit occupied 15, followed by Pied Flycatcher (10) and Great Tit (8). At least 62 Blue Tits fledged, along with 61 Pied Flycatchers and 17 Great Tits. These are minimum figures as final outcomes were not obtained for a few of the nests. Results are much better than 2019.



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Andy Spencer rings Pied Flycatcher and Redstarts at Woodbatch, together with sites in the Onny valleys and the Stiperstones, and some to the south of the Upper Clun (over 700 boxes altogether). There are now about 120 boxes at Woodbatch, and the Group helps him identify which of the boxes hold the two target species, and more volunteers for this work would be welcome.

The metal rings, fixed to the leg, are inscribed with a unique number, recorded by BTO. If the bird is caught again, or found dead, and the ring details are reported, its age and movements are known. Almost everything we know about bird migration and longevity is as a result of ringing.

Ringing results for Woodbatch in 2020 are shown in the table.

Species	Adults	Chicks	Retraps	Total
Pied Flycatcher	6	32	1	39
Redstart	3	6	0	9
Total	9	38	1	48

The male Pied Flycatcher, re-trapped at Woodbatch Farm, was originally ringed as a chick in the nest at Bridges, 11km north-east, a year previously, on 9 June 2019.

If you live in the Upper Clun area, and are interested in having nest boxes on your land, or you would like to help monitoring Pied Flycatchers at other nest box schemes in the area, please ring Marie Zenick on 01588 630750 e-mail mariezenick@yahoo.co.uk

BARN OWLS

Barn Owl was removed from the *Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern* in 2015, but remains scarce locally. Loss of rough grassland rich in prey is the major factor, but lack of suitable nest sites has contributed. The Shropshire Barn Owl Group (SBOG) installed a few nest boxes in the Upper Clun, and UCCWG many more, mostly in isolated farm buildings or large trees 400m or more from woodland, near at least 4 ha (10 acres) of permanent rough grassland.

In 2017 and 2018 there were active nests at two sites, though the final outcomes are unknown. No results of monitoring by the license holder have been received for 2019 or 2020, and the individual has not been in contact with the Group. If he cannot be found, we will need to find



someone else with a licence to monitor the boxes.

**If you see a Barn Owl, especially if you suspect it may be breeding,
please tell Michelle Frater, 01588 640909.**

OVERVIEW

Our survey work over 14 years has made a detailed assessment of the bird populations in the Upper Clun. During this period Lapwing appears to have become extinct as a local breeding species, and Curlew appears to be heading the same way. The status of the other target species is more secure, largely because their habitat requirements are less exacting, and are met on the three SWT reserves and a few other sites of comparable quality.

The data has helped us to identify key Local (County) Wildlife Sites, and support several farmers in applications to join Environmental Stewardship HLS; Natural England made use of our data in identifying priorities for new agreements. Future surveys will continue to monitor the populations of the target species, especially in relation to changes in land management under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Their fortunes will be an important measure of its effectiveness.

The Bird Group has evolved over the years: geographic surveys are still important, and those who carry them out are reliable, conscientious and increasingly knowledgeable. At the same time, the contribution of our network of resident recorders and other local people who send in records of the bird activity they see around them has greatly increased. Information is exchanged via an email distribution list. Records are submitted to the County Bird Recorder, and, where relevant, to BTO.

THE PLANT GROUP (THE WILDLIFE SITE AND BOTANY SURVEY GROUP)

INTRODUCTION

The Upper Clun Plant Group have been recording for 14 years in the Upper Clun and Teme (tetrads SO18, SO27 and SO28). The focus over the years has mostly been on the local wildlife sites (LWS) and in 2019 the group continued to survey these sites, although far fewer due to funding issues at Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT). The surveys are an attempt to assess the health of LWS and the wildlife they support. The methodology for the surveys was changed to be in line with the national Nature Recovery Networks (NRN).

Around 100 target species are usually recorded each year. These plants are the Shropshire 'axiophytes', the species which are good habitat indicators as they are relatively uncommon and indicate an unimproved and relatively unspoilt habitat. As a rule of thumb, the higher the number recorded, the better the site. The *axiophyte* lists cover the three key habitats: Rush Pasture/Purple Moorgrass, Blanket Bog and Meadows, and are shown in Appendix 4.

Species-rich hay meadows are measured using a different set of indicators since they may have few axiophytes but are nonetheless important priority habitats.

Since the start of the Community Wildlife Group in 2007, 26 (38)* LWS are either completely new or are significant extensions to existing sites. These are included in the total of 50 (67)* LWS in the Upper Clun (and Teme), many of which have been surveyed since 2015. Around 70% are in a reasonably good condition, with this figure remaining relatively consistent year on year. The concern now is that due to SWTs lack of funding, the healthy cycle of LWS surveys will decline along with the support and advice given to farmers and landowners.



Species-rich grassland at Three Gates, put forward as a new Local Wildlife Site in 2015

The cumulative result of the Botany Group's work (together with the complementary work of the Bird and Butterfly Groups) is shown in Map 4 "Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife and Candidate Sites in the Upper Clun" in the Chapter on Conservation Action on page 20.

SURVEYS IN 2020

In 2020, continuing work was hampered by the delay in appointing a successor to the Conservation Officer at SWT, changes in the remit of the new post-holder, then the Coronavirus lockdown restrictions, and then a further delay in getting a new risk assessment approved by SWT.

Eventually, in mid-August, SWT proposed that two heathland sites to the south of the Upper Clun, which have not been visited for more than 5 years, and for which land owner permission had been obtained, should be surveyed: Caer Caradoc (near Knighton), and Obley Recreation Ground. These LWS were chosen because they hadn't been surveyed for some years and SWT are now working on sites which could have a layer of peat, and if managed properly could absorb more carbon, thereby helping to reduce the effects of climate chaos.

The Upper Clun and Teme have a core group of seven skilled volunteers who carry out the LWS and network surveys. The group to date has been supported by SWT and since this is a community wildlife group, other local people are always encouraged to join in.

SWT provided maps, network survey cards, NVC recording cards, botanical record cards and risk assessments and arranged for access to sites.

Training has been provided in previous years, and all surveyors used recommended floras (listed under References).

Seven members variously carried out the site surveys in 2020, collecting some valuable information on the two sites. Good species lists were compiled along with useful ecological network and site condition data.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Obley Recreation Ground is on Black Hill, above Clun, and is owned by Clunbury Parish. It is a small area (4.13ha) of remnant heath surrounded by blocks of forestry at different stages of maturity or recently clear felled. It is rectangular and one of the longer sides is bordered by a stone forestry track. At the time of the survey in late August, the site was covered in bracken with occasional mixed species trees. In some areas, below the bracken, heathland species remain, and there are a few small areas without bracken.

The Axiophytes recorded were Spiked sedge *Carex spicata*, Fairy Flax *Linium catharticum*, Common Cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense*, Billberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Wavy Hair-grass *Avenella flexuosa* and Heath Speedwell *Veronica officinalis*.

Caer Caradoc. Chapel Lawn. This site is an important Shropshire Scheduled Monument, and several Agencies have responsibilities associated with the site. The hillfort (arguably the best in Shropshire) has



multiple ramparts with deep ditches and is in a wonderful situation overlooking the Redlake valley. It is mostly unimproved acid grassland, with gorse in some areas but there appears to be some management of this taking place. Some good species were found, and areas where Spring Ephemerals would have been seen earlier in the year. However, the site was not covered adequately due to deteriorating weather.

CONCLUSION

Through both the LWS and mapping surveys over the years it is evident that there are still some very good semi-natural areas in the Teme and Clun valleys, which although small are nevertheless important for the species they support and for the re-building of ecological networks.

Where sites were found to be in a poor or declining condition this was attributed to fertiliser use and over grazing by livestock. Surveys of woodland sites showed that fencing woodland is important, given high stocking densities on some farms, but that grazing animals should be given access to woodland for short periods at certain times of the year, because such woods have greater diversity of ground flora and more indicator plants per quadrat.

Much of the work of the three groups: Bird, Butterfly and Botany focuses on rush pasture, bogs and unimproved grassland habitats of the Clun Forest. There are around 15 good rushy pastures in this landscape where conservation work needs to be focused for vulnerable and threatened species like the Curlew and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary butterfly. A key aim of the Upper Clun Facilitation Fund is to increase the extent of these rushy pastures (see p.21).

FURTHER WORK

Fiona Gomersall has supported the Plant (Wildlife Sites and Botany Survey) Group since UCCWG was founded in 2007, partially through her paid employment as Conservation Officer at Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT), although she put in a lot of extra effort as well. She changed jobs in late 2019, but Fiona has agreed to co-lead the Group in 2021.

Jacky Harrison will be the other co-leader, and anyone interested in joining the Group should contact Jacky.

It is likely that at least four sites will be visited in 2021, a return to farms where good habitat has been identified, and where a more extensive survey by the group is needed.

The Group will continue to work closely with our farmers, which is essential if habitat conservation and restoration is to be successful, since most of the Upper Clun is farmed land. It will also continue to work closely with Natural England (NE) and staff of the Shropshire Hills AONB (SHAONB) office, to ensure that LWS receive appropriate management within schemes and projects.

The extent to which SWT will continue to support the Group is still unclear, but this will be taken up by the co-leaders.

()* = figures where Teme valley local wildlife sites are included



Marsh Violet, an axiophyte typical of rush pasture, and the food plant for the caterpillar of the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary Butterfly

THE BUTTERFLY GROUP

INTRODUCTION

Surveys of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries started in 2010 and have continued to be conducted annually. The results for 2010 to 2016 were summarised in the 2016 report.

This fritillary is a UKBAP Priority Species, of High Conservation Priority which has suffered long term decline across the UK. In the Upper Clun the species is associated with rush pasture, where the caterpillars feed on Marsh Violet, *Viola palustris*. The most important sites are: Barretts West (Masons Bank West Local Wildlife Site), Pant-y-Lidan LWS and Gors Bank LWS. The numbers found at Barretts West in 2010- 2011 made this a regionally significant site.



Unfortunately, in 2020 survey activity was severely curtailed by Covid19 restrictions and only two known sites, Barretts West and Rhos Fiddle NR, were surveyed. Good numbers of butterflies were recorded at Barretts West, which remains a regionally significant site for the species. No adults were observed at Rhos Fiddle, although signs of caterpillar grazing were observed on Marsh Violet leaves.

A new site for the species was located with the surprise sighting, on two occasions, of butterflies at Crossways Meadow LWS. This site does not contain Marsh Violet but signs of caterpillar feeding activity were found on leaves of Common Dog Violet, *Viola riviniana*, which is known to be used as a food plant elsewhere (for example, in the Wyre Forest).

SAFEGUARDING HABITAT

Rush Pasture is an important habitat for Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries, and the food plants they need, and it is also an important habitat for wetland birds. A UCCWG leaflet on the management of Rush Pasture for its characteristic wildlife was included in the 2013 Report, and can be found on the website www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

A similar document, but concentrating on the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and its needs, has also been produced. This is available on the website of the West Midlands Branch of Butterfly Conservation www.westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk

WOOD WHITE



The Wood White is a nationally 'Endangered' species whose steady recovery is being successfully managed by Butterfly Conservation volunteers and Forestry England at Bury Ditches and elsewhere in the Marches. It is found in Blakeridge Wood, in the extreme east of our area. The species appears to be spreading and has been recorded from a number of local woods, several kilometres away from its stronghold. It is worth checking any delicate looking small white butterflies in woodland, where the caterpillars feed on Bird's-foot Trefoil along the forest tracks.

A NEW MOTH FOR SHROPSHIRE

In May a Cinerous Pearl moth (*Anania fuscalis*) was spotted flying in Crossways Meadow - the first record of the species in Shropshire. This delicate moth is a relatively large 'micro-moth' which feeds on Yellow Rattle, an important component of traditional hay meadows.



LEPIDOPTERA RECORDS ON iRecord

An Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group recording 'activity' was set up on iRecord at the end of 2019.

Between January and September 1461 lepidoptera records have been logged: 856 butterfly records (27 species) and 605 moth records (186 species). Nine people have added their sightings – many thanks to you all. If you haven't used iRecord yet, please consider doing so. It is a free, and very easy to use, online database and app. maintained by the Biological Records Centre. All the records go to the county recorders and the National Biodiversity Network database for conservation use. iRecord is a 'one stop shop', where all biological records may be entered: insects, plants, birds, fungi etc. (although iRecord is not recommended for bird records). All records are useful – even common species may not remain common - and retrospective records can be entered.

FUTURE PLANS

John Lyden has taken over organising Butterfly surveys. Unless more volunteers materialise, all that can be done is to concentrate on sites where significant numbers of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries have been seen previously, i.e. (in descending order of importance): 1. Barretts West, 2. Pant-y-Lidan, 3. Cefn S/Bryn Shop (2 sites close together), 4. Ditch Dingle (close to Barretts W) and 5. Bank.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

We need more surveyors to monitor all the important sites in the area. If you can help, please contact John Lyden 01686 671263 jalyden59@gmail.com

MAMMALS

For a number of reasons the intention to get a new Mammal Group up and running has not proved possible. Hopefully, new volunteers will come forward and help with that. If you want to help, please tell Rob Harris, phone 01588 640234, email wilksharris@hotmail.com

CO-OPERATION WITH FARMERS

The Wildlife Group needs, and wants, to work closely with the farmers in the area. The vast majority of land in the Upper Clun area is farmland. Therefore, if we are to gather a worthwhile picture of local wildlife, and then undertake effective action to increase populations and habitat, we need the active cooperation of local farmers. We will therefore continue to work with farmers, individually and generally, on conservation issues in future.

We also encourage members of the Group who are not farmers to do whatever they can to develop good relations with individual farmers while carrying out surveys. This often includes discussion while seeking permission to carry out surveys on farmland.

There are now many examples of where this co-operation has produced results, for the benefit of wildlife and farmers, as we have helped farmers with good wildlife habitat to secure an Environmental Stewardship HLS Agreement with Natural England, so they are rewarded for managing these habitats sensitively and effectively. More details are given in the next Chapter.

CONSERVATION ACTION

The Group was set up in 2007 to monitor nationally or locally threatened bird, plant and butterfly species and their habitats, and to encourage interest in, and actively promote, conservation in the

area. Annual Reports have documented the results of the surveys, and the data have been used to underpin Conservation Action, particularly in relation to the steeply-declining Curlew population.

The Group has successfully

- formed a good estimate of the breeding population, distribution and habitat use of Lapwing, Curlew and other target Bird Species
- identified plant sites which contain axiophytes, indicators of high habitat quality, and produced complete species lists in support of their adoption as Local Wildlife Sites
- identified important Butterfly sites, two of which are regionally important

LOCAL (COUNTY) WILDLIFE SITES

Survey results presented in previous reports demonstrated that 'Wetland' sites which support many of the target birds are also key habitats for plants and butterflies. Data were collated across the three survey groups, and used to make the case that sites that were not already Local Wildlife Sites should if possible be adopted. These sites of wildlife interest in the Upper Clun in 2018 are shown in the Local Sites Map on page 19. They include Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Sites and Candidate Sites. All the proposals have been accepted in principle by the LWS Committee, but formal adoption requires landowners consent, and this is still being sought in some cases, shown as "Candidate Sites" on the map. The map also shows the deleted (red) sites. The wildlife attributes of these sites were lost when they were ploughed, fertilised, built on, planted on, felled or destroyed in some other way, usually more than 10 years ago.

There is little to add to the 2018 map, but good habitat found at The Graig and also Coed yr Hendre wildlife sites.

HLS AGREEMENTS

Until 2014, the national and local strategies to reverse the declines of local priority species and habitats, and meet Government Biodiversity targets, were based on using Environmental Stewardship (particularly Higher Level Scheme - HLS) agreements between Natural England and landowners to safeguard and enhance the habitats. Such agreements aimed to mitigate the long-term agricultural changes which have led to the decline of many bird, plant and butterfly species, including "improvement" of grassland by ploughing, reseeding and / or draining.

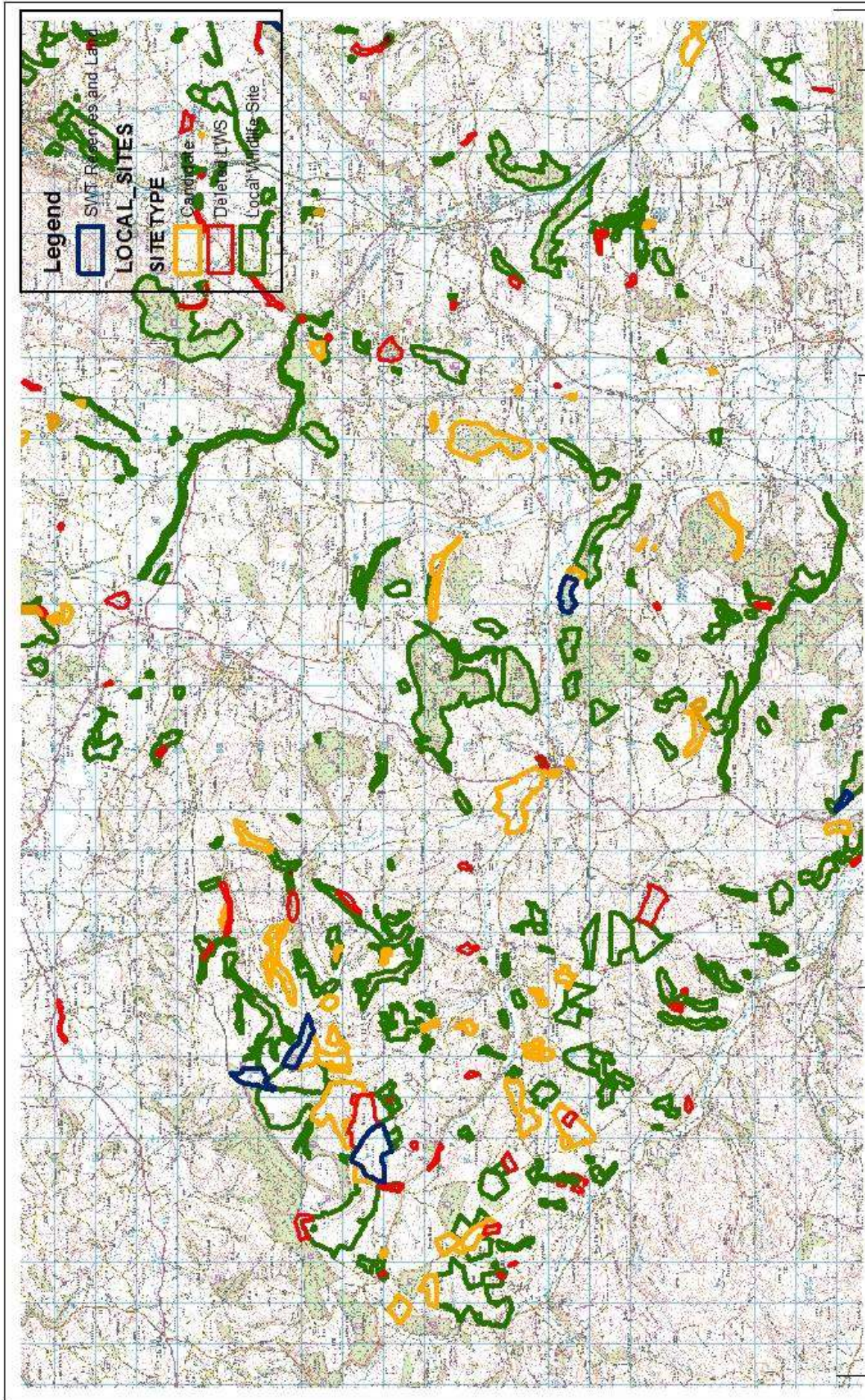
Most farmland in the Upper Clun was previously covered by Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) agreements, but these all expired in 2014 or earlier. Natural England (NE) had to consider which of the land covered by ESA Agreements should be incorporated into HLS Agreements. The Group's strategy was therefore to identify the best wildlife sites, make survey information freely available to the land owners and to Natural England, and ask for the species-rich habitats most likely to benefit bird, plant and butterfly species to be included in the scheme. Our detailed proposals to Natural England have been described in previous Reports. The strategy was successful, as our data was taken into account.

New HLS agreements between Natural England and individual Landowners in the Upper Clun were entered into in 2013 (21) and 2014 (a further 11), covering more than 10 sq. km altogether. These agreements run for up to 10 years, so they are still safeguarding some of the best wildlife habitat in the area.

However, while HLS has been a major benefit, it protects only a small proportion of the area, so the Group still needs to monitor key wildlife species, monitor the impacts of HLS, positive or negative, and promote conservation

COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP

HLS has now been replaced by a Countryside Stewardship Scheme, which, although it is supposed to be more simple than HLS, is much more bureaucratic and less well funded. It aims to implement the proposals of the Lawton Report, which recommended reducing habitat fragmentation through a more integrated approach to land management. It is administered by Defra, rather than Natural England.



Legend

SWT Rivers and Land

LOCAL_SITES

SITE TYPE

- Candidate
- Deleted TWS
- Local Wildlife Site



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 Ordnance Survey 100050351
 Date: 12/11/2018
<http://www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk>

Local Sites in Upper Clun area 2018

**Shropshire
 Wildlife Trust**



CLUN FOREST FARMERS FACILITATION FUND



In 2018, Land, Life & Livelihoods secured a 3-year grant from Natural England Countryside Stewardship (through a joint application with the Wildlife Group) to help farmers and other land managers to work together and find ways to conserve soil, water, wildlife and landscape and to improve farm viability.

Funding is awarded to successful applications through a competitive process. Priority is given to approaches which show partnership and a collective approach across holdings to deliver shared environmental outcomes that go beyond what could be delivered by individual holdings acting in isolation. The area covered by the Clun Forest project comprises the parishes of Mainstone, Newcastle, Bettws-y-Crwyn and Llanfair Waterdine, and is shown on the map.

The Fund is to help farmers and land managers in the Clun Forest to come together to find ways in which they can manage their land to conserve, enhance and link up valuable areas for nature:

- Protect and manage land, soil, and water, and conserve rare and threatened plants and animals, e.g. white clawed crayfish, mountain pansy, small pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly, curlew, haymeadows and wet flushes
- Link up areas across the catchment that are important and valuable for wildlife, biodiversity & flood/water management
- Increase farm viability and care for our special landscape
- Achieve new and improved environmental schemes
- Meet together to discuss, problem-solve and act
- Obtain encouragement, technical, and personal support
- Find funds, advice and practical help so that these aims/objectives can be achieved

The Fund provides free specialist advice on farm practices that help to conserve soil and biodiversity, and prevent water pollution, which may attract future financial support, particularly important in challenging upland areas like our own. This will include assistance with existing grant schemes and helping shape new schemes to combine high quality livestock and food production with environmental benefits, or, in the new jargon, “public goods”.

By demonstrating the ability of our area to meet the government’s aims, we may also help influence the development of future incentive schemes so that they are more suitable to our unique hill circumstances.

Bringing farmers and other landowners together in this way provides an ideal opportunity to try and meet the needs of many of the Group’s priority wildlife species and habitats.

A “Curlews need Farmers” event was held in February 2019. At the event, the Trustees of Llanfairwaterdine Turbary made some management suggestions to help Curlews, and a site meeting was held in March to discuss them. It was agreed that livestock, removed for the winter, would not be put out again until mid-May to allow the grass to start growing early to provide more cover, and give the Curlews chance to nest without disturbance. An electric fence would be put up around any nest and a poster requesting that dogs were kept on a lead was displayed at the Open Access site. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic the nest protection project was postponed, but it is hoped the agreement will operate in 2021.

A leaflet, "Curlews Need Farmers" drawn up using information and comments from the February 2019 curlew event was drafted and edited through the year and will be distributed to all farmer/landowners in due course. The current version is attached as Appendix 4 on p37.

Lack of information on the future of environmental schemes and agricultural support after Brexit has limited the initiatives and commitments that farmers and other landowners are willing to make, and meetings and events have not been possible since March due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Funding will be extended beyond the cut-off in March 2021, but no details are available yet. More information can be found on the relevant part of the Land, Life and Livelihoods website <http://www.landlifeandlivelihoods.org.uk/>

FUTURE AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SCHEMES

All agri-environment schemes for many years have been part of the European Union Common Agricultural Policy. Given the Government's decision to leave the EU, with the end of the transition period at the end of 2020, the future arrangements for farm payment schemes and benefits for wildlife are very uncertain. It is likely that any new scheme will not be operational for many years.

We hope that future arrangements will help farmers and wildlife, and we will continue to work with local farmers to ensure that both benefit from any new schemes.

HABITAT REQUIREMENTS FOR TARGET SPECIES

If the various threatened species are to be saved from local extinction, it is necessary to protect them where they breed now, and improve breeding success so their populations can increase and spread. The loss of Lapwing as a breeding species underlines the urgency of this work. The habitat requirements for Curlew, Lapwing, Snipe, the other Target Bird Species and Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary have been included in previous reports.

Unfortunately, little management work has been carried out in recent years to ensure that sites retain their value for wildlife, but now that some land is being managed under HLS, with funding for such work, it is hoped that this will lead to beneficial changes in farming practice such as rush management, growing hay rather than silage, creating shallow pools and muddy patches, and managing livestock in the vicinity of nest sites.

The Group will continue to monitor these species and sites, particularly the wetlands and Wildlife Sites, to see if our aspirations are borne out in the future.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT LEAFLETS

Based on the results of our local surveys, four leaflets have been published

1. *Please Conserve our Curlews*, requesting farmers to make changes in the way in which grassland is managed and grazed, in 2007. This is based on a similar leaflet produced by the Upper Onny Wildlife Group.
This leaflet was superseded by a replacement, *Curlews Need Farmers*, produced following the Facilitation Fund event in February 2019. This replacement is included as Appendix 4.
2. *Please Help Hedgerow Birds*, requesting all landowners to make small scale changes to the management of hedges, verges, field margins and scrub, in 2008.
3. *Managing Wetlands for Wildlife*, to benefit birds, plants and butterflies, in 2009.
4. *Management of Rush Pasture*, also to benefit birds, plants and butterflies, in 2013.

All these leaflets have been endorsed by the AONB, Natural England, RSPB, Shropshire Wildlife Trust and, while it still existed, Shropshire FWAG.

Each leaflet was published in the appropriate Annual Report, and further copies are available on request. They can also be viewed and downloaded from the website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

SURVEYING WILDLIFE SITES

'Local Wildlife Site' is not a statutory designation. It provides no protection, and does not limit landowner activity. It recognises the wildlife value of a piece of land based on the species it

supports. Sites have to meet published criteria drawn up by Shropshire Wildlife Trust in consultation with Statutory Bodies such as Natural England, the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission, and other Organisations such as Shropshire Ornithological Society and Butterfly Conservation. Applications have to be approved by a committee representing most of these bodies, and adoption needs landowner consent.

Fieldwork associated with current or potential Local Wildlife Sites was done in consultation with landowners, whose permission has been sought both for the survey, and for any subsequent adoption of sites. Landowners are given all survey results, and information about any rare or unusual plants at sites.

RIVER CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

Water quality in the River Clun and its tributaries has declined as a result of silting up of the river bed and pollution from people, transport and farming practices. This is being addressed by statutory organisations in compliance with the EU's Water Framework Directive (WFD), which has now been incorporated into UK law, under which The Environment Agency (EA) is charged with getting all rivers into 'good ecological condition'. None of the waterbodies in the Clun catchment are currently in "good condition" – all are "moderate".

Part of the lower Clun is designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) [under the EU Habitats Directive, also now incorporated into UK Law](#). It is one of only three such designations in England, because it supports a threatened population of Freshwater Pearl Mussels. The designation requires the statutory organisations to protect the mussel population. The pearl mussel remains in a critical situation, and action is urgent: the population is less than 1000, and monitoring suggests that if the current rate of decline continues, the population will be extinct within the very near future. A translocation project is being attempted at two sites, but they are still sub-optimal and translocation is now dependent on reducing pollutants from upstream.

Initiatives now underway include:

- AONB practical work in the Clun Catchment continues through an EA funded "Unmuddying the Waters" project, and tree planting through Woodland Trust funding. Work continues to address problems at source, restore/naturalise riparian habitats, wetland creation, and intercept runoff pathways.
- A Water Environment Grant (WEG), hosted by AONB and delivered by Severn Rivers Trust, is funding Teme, Clun and Onny Farm Advisors to assess the impact of individual farms on water quality and freshwater habitats. Each farm receives a plan which highlights issues and recommends methods to address them. Soil health assessments are also undertaken.
- The Clun is a High Priority area for the Catchment Sensitive Farming initiative, a partnership between Defra, EA and NE, which provides training, advice and grant support for farmers and land managers to reduce water and air pollution from agriculture.
- A Clun Nutrient Management Plan is being implemented by EA and NE (in partnership with farmers, conservation agencies, water companies and other bodies)
- A Crayfish Survey has been completed. No non-native signal crayfish were identified. A new Crayfish Ark site has been secured and a number crayfish translocated to it by EA.
- Dippers in the Teme Catchment project, with UCCWG involvement, collects data on a species with similar habitat requirements to the Mussel

The Wildlife Group supports these initiatives, and will seek to become involved in them wherever possible.

SHROPSHIRE HILLS AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN

The AONB has a statutory obligation to produce a Management Plan every five years. Conservation and enhancing Biodiversity are important elements of the Plan. The current plan for 2019-24 can be found on the AONB website.

CONSERVATION ACTION

UCCWG recognizes that most land in the area is farmland in private ownership, and the Group needs to work closely with farmers to achieve our conservation objectives, although other

landowners, householders with gardens, the County Council (responsible for verges and public open space), Welsh Forestry and the Wildlife Trust, among others, should also be involved. Declines in habitat quality and species richness have occurred slowly over many years, and it will take many more years of sustained, incremental habitat improvement if the populations of the “flagship” species are to return to their former levels.

The Group will continue to promote its vision of a diverse, wildlife-rich landscape, and to collect the evidence that enables it to make authoritative representations for inclusions in Parish Plans, the AONB policy and Management Plan, Natural England’s Countryside Stewardship, the Environment Agency’s work on river habitats, the Statutory Planning Process, and the policies of other statutory and voluntary organisations. Such influence is necessary if we are to help make a difference to the quality and diversity of wildlife habitats.

CURLEW ACTION PLAN, & THE SOS “SAVE OUR CURLEWS” CAMPAIGN

The Wildlife Group has been surveying the Upper Clun for 14 years now, and working to reverse species declines by promoting the protection and restoration of habitat. It remains committed to such an approach as the only means of sustaining healthy species populations in the long term.

However, Curlew has now declined so severely that it may follow Lapwing into local extinction before such measures can take effect. In an effort to prevent this, the Group launched an emergency *Curlew Action Plan* at the 2016 Annual meeting



**Electric fence protecting a Curlew nest
Ale Oak 2017
© Tim Lewis**

Fieldwork suggests that fewer Curlew pairs are settling to nest, and the habitat at many of the traditional breeding sites is now marginal and requires landscape-scale conservation

measures. Where pairs do manage to breed, nest and chick survival is extremely poor, and falls so far below the productivity needed to maintain the population that the situation is has become critical.

It has been shown that predation is now the major cause of breeding failure, although agricultural activities sometimes play a part; and the same is likely to apply in the Upper Clun. Fencing nests has been shown to increase the chance of eggs hatching. Breeding success will not improve unless the immediate causes of failure are tackled directly, with close landowner involvement at all stages. Therefore, as part of the *Action Plan*, more effort was made in 2017 to locate nest sites, rather than territories. One nest was found, and protected by an electric fence. The eggs hatched, increasing the chances that young would fledge, although they did not.

Monitoring of Curlew populations by other Community Wildlife Groups has shown a similar rate of decline elsewhere. Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) and Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS)

launched a “Save our Curlews” campaign, and a joint appeal funded the nest monitoring and protection work in the Upper Clun in 2018 and 2019, described in the Bird Group work on p9.

Similar work was carried out in the Clee Hill CWG area in 2018 and 2019, and detailed reports of it can be found on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/. SWT withdrew from the appeal in November 2019, but SOS is continuing with it, and the campaign. More information about the aims of the campaign, can also be found on the website, which is updated regularly.

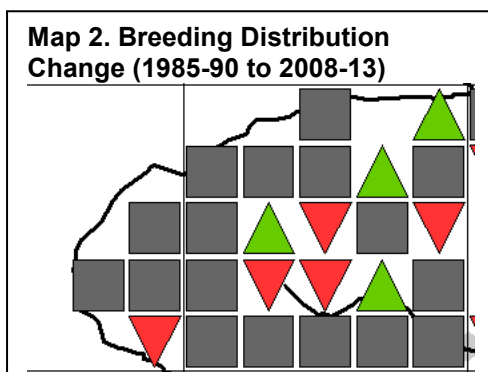
SOS Save our Curlews Campaign

The identification of Curlew territories by the Community Wildlife Groups is the foundation of the campaign strategy – nests can only be protected once they are found. As and when enough have been located for a professional ornithologist to find several in a CWG area, it is intended to find them and protect them with an electric fence, and then radio tag the chicks that hatch, to gain information on how they feed, and the threats they face. This is a long-term project, so funding will be needed for many years.

The UCCWG Curlew Action Plan will continue in 2021 and future years, as part of the wider campaign. Anyone who wants to help with locating Curlews next April and early May should contact Michelle Frater via the Group’s website. If you see or hear a Curlew next spring, please tell Michelle immediately.

Decline in the Upper Clun since 1985-90

Figure 1 on p.7 shows a 66% decline in the Upper Clun Curlew population since 2007 found by UCCWG. There are no population estimates from before that date, but the Shropshire Bird Atlas 2008-13 repeated the 1985-90 Atlas work, and achieved similar levels of coverage across the County as a whole. *The Birds of Shropshire* (2019) published a breeding distribution change map, comparing the results of the two Atlases.



In this area, the recent Atlas benefitted from the increased coverage provided by the Group’s more intensive survey work. The Atlases did not count the Curlews in each square, but recorded the level of breeding evidence found. Map 2 shows the change in breeding distribution for the same survey squares shown in Map 1 on p.7 (the Curlew distribution in 2019). In the grey squares, there was breeding evidence of Curlew in both Atlas periods, in the green upward triangles, Curlews were found in 2008-13 but not 1985-90, almost certainly as a result of the Group’s intensive efforts. In the red downward triangles, Curlews were found in 1985-90, but not 2008-13, in spite of the Group’s efforts to find them. It will be seen that Curlew had apparently disappeared from five of the 22 squares (23%, almost one-quarter) where it was found in 1985-90.

It will be seen from Map 1 that there was evidence of breeding Curlew in nine of these squares in 2019, so the range has decreased by 59% since 2008-13, comparable to the reduction in population of 66%.

It will also be seen from Map 1 that there was evidence of breeding Curlew in nine of these squares in 2019, so the range has decreased by 59% since 2008-13, comparable to the reduction in population of 66%.

Curlews and Pheasant Release

Local fieldwork research by the Stiperstones-Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme established that almost all nests were predated (more than half by foxes), and when the nests were protected with electric fencing, most nests survived but almost all chicks were predated before fledging (i.e. protecting nests makes little difference to productivity in some areas - it results in the chicks getting eaten, not the eggs). So why are there so many foxes?

The number of Pheasants and Red-legged Partridges released in the UK EACH YEAR has increased from 4 million in 1961, the first year for which there are figures, to almost 60 million now. Only 35% are shot, and the remainder don't live very long, so they provide a year-round supply of

food for every other predator and scavenger. While the number of Pheasants released since 2004 has increased by one-third, the number shot has not increased since the 1990s.

In Shropshire, 726,000 Pheasants were released in 2018 alone, so predation of Curlews (collateral damage from foxes hunting Pheasants) is very high, and the Curlew population is heading for extinction (down 80% since 1990). Conversely, the feral breeding population of Pheasants increased by 62% between 1997 and 2014 (County BBS results), and it is now the tenth most common breeding species in the County (and far and away the biggest in terms of biomass). They have spread from the release sites to virtually every part of the County now.

BTO has published research showing a disproportionate increase in the Buzzard and Crow population in areas with a high number of released Pheasants (Pringle *et al* 2019).

The massive increase in Pheasant carrion has allowed Buzzard and Raven to spread eastwards across most of England since 1990, and is undoubtedly the food source that has allowed Kites to spread into, and right across, Shropshire in only 15 years.

In 2014 there were an estimated 44,000 pairs of breeding pheasants, all descended from previous releases (Pheasant is an introduced species, not a native one), compared to 160 pairs of Curlew and 800 pairs of Lapwing.

The RSPB announced the results in October 2020 of the review of its policy on game bird shooting, because of the effect of releasing Pheasants on the landscape and other wildlife. It is now seeking improved environmental standards, a reduction in the number of gamebirds released and better compliance with existing rules about reporting releases. The RSPB is committed to working with the shooting industry over the next 18 months to bring about this change. If substantial reform is not forthcoming in this period, then the RSPB will press for tighter regulation of large-scale gamebird releases. For further information see www.rspb.org.uk/gamebirdreview

Again, further information about the impact of Pheasant release can be found on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

OTHER COMMUNITY WILDLIFE GROUPS

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

All these groups (except Kemp Valley, which has no breeding Curlews) continued with their surveys in 2019. Clee Hill and Abdon extended their areas, to close the gap between them and monitor known additional Curlew territories. Between them, the 10 groups cover around three-quarters of the County's breeding Curlews. They covered 267 survey squares (tetrads), totalling 1,048 square kilometres. There were 320 participants, who spent a total of more than 2,350 hours on survey work, and 94 - 115 Curlew territories were identified. This is a clear indication of the concern that local people have for the decline of Curlew, and their willingness to support action to do something about it.

The Curlew distribution map from the County Bird Atlas 2008-13, overlain with the Community Wildlife Group areas, and their 2019 results, can be found on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

The Groups all also survey Lapwing, but they monitor a much smaller proportion of the County population, which is concentrated in north and north-east Shropshire.

In 2020, all these groups did some Curlew survey work, but it was truncated because of the Coronavirus restrictions. These results are still being analysed, and will be supplied separately to Bird Group members when they are available.

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & DISTRIBUTION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most importantly, thanks to all the people who undertook the Survey work, and contributed additional information. None of the work would have been possible without their effort and commitment. Their names are listed below

Bird Surveyors

Brian Angell (s)
Geoff Clarke (r)
Colin & Sheila Davies (r)
Sue Evans (r)
Michelle Frater (s)
Tim Lewis (r)
John Lyden (r)
Mark Measures (r)
Karen & Steve Mitchell (r)
Katie & Scott Steggles (s & r)
Richard Whateley (r)
(r) = Resident (Continuous) Recorder
(s) = Map Surveys

Plant Recorders

John Clayfield
Susan Gardner
Jacky Harrison
Sarah Jameson
John Lyden
Tess Pearson
Rob Rowe

Butterfly Recorders

John Lyden

Casual records of Curlew and other species were provided by Stephen Abbott, Chris & Susan Blackman, Bob & Susie Cunning, Bonnie Dobson, Fiona Gomersall, Tony Haighway, Martin Hockly, Roger Hughes, Bob Juleff, Nick & Mary Lambert, Clive & Gill Lewis, Diana Mackintosh & Jo Anderson, Derek Matthews, Mark Measures, David & Frances Morris, Jan Morris, Peter Morris & Josie Crompton, Mervin Mullard, Polly Noble, Steven Oaken, Brian Roberts, Alan Sedgwick, Russell Thomas, Tony Weston, Delphine Whateley, Trevor & Paul Wheeler, Mike Wilkes, Roger Williams and Roly Young.

Michelle Frater organised the bird surveys, liaised with the surveyors and kept them informed with an e-newsletter, and wrote the chapters on the work of the Bird Group. She also undertook additional Bird Survey work, particularly in determining the Curlew population.

Allan Bernau photographed the ringed Curlew at Llanfair Hill in 2017

Andrew Beavan arranged the meeting with the Llanfair Waterdine Turbary Trustees,

The Small Woodland Birds Nest box Scheme was run by Marie Zenick, who collected the information for the Report. Hosts who provided data were Gill Binks, Fiona Gomersall, Jackie Harrison, Mervin Mullard and Marie Zenick.

Andy Spencer maintained the nest boxes at Woodbatch, and undertook the Bird Ringing.

John Swift made and installed the Dipper and Woodland Bird nest boxes up until 2011. Vince Downs has made the nest boxes since then.

Tony Cross carried out the Dipper nest monitoring and ringing.

The Chapter on the Plants Group was compiled from information supplied by Tess Pearson, and comments from Fiona Gomersall and Jacky Harrison.

Sarah Jameson provided the content for the Clun Forest Farmers Facilitation Fund,

John Arnfield, who set up the website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk, and trained the members of the Group who manage the UCCWG pages: this role has now been taken on by Chris Bargman. Rob Harris posted the UCCWG material on the website. The website has recently been upgraded by Lizzie Hulton-Harrop

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The cover photograph of Curlew is © Leo Smith, and the Curlew photos are © Phil McLean, Allan Bernau and Leo Smith; the Dipper and Pied Flycatcher photographs are © John Swift and © Gareth Thomas respectively. The Marsh Violet plant photo on the cover, and in the Plants Chapter, and Three Gates are © Fiona Gomersall. The Plant Group photo on the cover, and the two in the Plants chapter are Tess Pearson. The Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary on the cover is © John Hughes and the 3 photos in the Butterfly Chapter are © John Lyden. The photo of the electric fence is © Tim Lewis. Thanks to them all for permission to use them.

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- Cath Landles (Community Officer at the AONB), for continued support of the Group's work
- Shropshire Wildlife Trust, for the input of Robin Mager, the Planning & Data Systems Officer (who provided the map of *Sites of Wildlife Interest*)
- The farmers and landowners who helped facilitate the survey work, and provided information about land ownership
- Farmers and landowners who accepted nest-boxes on their land, for their cooperation and hospitality
- The members of the *Down To Earth In The Clun Forest Land, Life and Livelihoods* Project Steering Group, for support and information, particularly the Secretary, Sarah Jameson, for maintaining their website.
- Karen Mitchell, for publicising the Group's work, particularly via Clun Chronicle and posters, and setting up the Facebook Group
- Clun Chronicle, for publicising the Group's work
- The National Trust, for admin support.

THANK YOU ONE & ALL

DISTRIBUTION

This report has been posted on the Community Wildlife Groups website www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

An electronic version of this Report, in .pdf format, will be supplied to the organisations listed below.

- **Natural England**
- **Environment Agency**
- **Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership**
- ***Land, Life and Livelihoods in the Clun Forest***
- **Shropshire Wildlife Trust**
- **Shropshire Council**
- **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds** (Conservation Officer, Shropshire and Staffordshire)

- **British Trust for Ornithology** (Shropshire Regional Representative)
- **Shropshire Ornithological Society (County Bird Recorder)**
- **Severn Rivers Trust**

THE REPORT

A short report has been circulated to the membership, and interested individuals and Agencies.

Copies can be downloaded from the website www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

Additional Copies (either paper or electronic .pdf files), or copies of any of the Reports since 2007, can be obtained from Leo Smith *Ornithological Surveys & Consultancy*; The Bryn, Castle Hill, All Stretton SY6 6JP (01694 720296, email leo@leosmith.org.uk)

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Smith, Leo *Lapwing, Curlew, Dipper, & Other Wildlife in the Upper Onny Valley (Upper Onny Wildlife Group Survey Results & Report* Annually since 2004

Smith, Leo *Lapwing & Curlew in the Clun Environmentally Area Survey Report 2006.*

Smith, Leo *Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group Report* Annually since 2007

Smith, Leo *Dippers in the River Teme Catchment* Annually since 2007

References and fieldguides used by the Plant Group for survey work include:-

- *The Wildflower Key* (second edition): Francis Rose & Clare O' Reilly
- *Wildflowers of Britain and Ireland*: Marjorie Blamey, Richard Fitter and Alastair Fitter
- *The Vegetative Key to the British Flora*: John Poland and Eric Clement
- *New Flora of the British Isles*: Third Edition Clive Stace
- *Sedges of the British Isles* Jermy, A.C., Simpson D.A., Foley M.J.Y., Porter M.S.
- *Guide to Grassland Plants 1*: FSC (Field Studies Council) publications
- *Guide to Moorland Plants* FSC Publications
- *Guide to Woodland Plants* FSC publications
- *Guide to Orchids* FSC publications

CONCLUSION

The Group has covered the whole Upper Clun area with Bird and Plant Surveys since 2007, and knowledge of the numbers and distribution of target species is increasing. Butterfly Surveys have been carried out since 2010.

Some of the best grassland and wetland sites in the area, which contain good habitat for scarce Birds, Plants and Butterflies, have been identified. The Group has now started working with land owners to safeguard these sites. Most have been adopted as Local (County) Wildlife Sites.

The information we collected helped land owners apply for Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme agreements, and helped Natural England target these agreements for maximum benefit for wildlife in our area. Most of the best wildlife habitat in the area has been safeguarded through HLS Agreements that have 10 years to run, mainly from 2013 or 2014.

We have also worked with the local community, land owners, and the relevant Statutory and Voluntary Organisations, to raise awareness of conservation issues and influence decision-making bodies.

We have become increasingly involved in the land management issues which affect the water quality in the River Clun and its tributaries.

Planned survey work in 2021 will build on this knowledge, particularly in the wetlands, and enable us to extend the action to promote conservation of our target species and their habitats.

We will continue to implement our Curlew Action Plan, to try and save Curlew from local extinction as a breeding species, and work as part of the SOS "Save our Curlews" campaign.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Bird Survey Recording Instructions 2018

Appendix 2. Bird Survey Results

- i) Curlew and Lapwing**
- ii) Other Target Bird Species, and Wetland Surveys**
- iii) Curlew, Reed Bunting, & Other Target Species: Explanatory Note to the Maps**

Appendix 3. Plant Survey - Target Indicator Species (Axiophytes)

Appendix 4. Curlews need farmers leaflet, produced for discussion with farmers through the Facilitation Fund Project

Annexe 1: The Management Committee

Appendix 1. Bird Survey Recording Instructions 2020

The maps and recording instructions for the Survey (“Operation Curlew, plus

Lapwing & Other Target Species”) have not changed since 2011, and are not reproduced here. The survey is organised and administered via email, and all surveyors are sent reminders at key stages in the season, the first in late March.

Some returns are marked on survey maps, but most come from surveyors via email, as and when they have observations to report. This is particularly useful to collect all the observations of recorders who live in the area and hear Curlews frequently.

Appendix 2: Bird Survey Results

i) Curlew and Lapwing

There were no reports of breeding Lapwings, so there is no Table of Lapwing Survey Results.

The Curlew Results in Table A2.1, together with the results of follow-up fieldwork and visits to local farmers and residents, and a few casual records, have been used to produce Map 1 (the approximate location of Curlew Territories) in the main body of the Report.

ii) Other Target Bird Species, and Wetland Surveys

Members have been asked to record Other Target Species since 2007. The list has been revised occasionally, and the current list is included in the BIRDS OF THE “WETLANDS” section in the Bird Surveys Chapter in the main body of the Report.

By the end of 2009 it became apparent that many of the Target Species were restricted to “wetlands” (mires, flushes and damp pasture) in the area. The best wetland sites were therefore targeted in 2010 and 2011, and were revisited from 2012 onwards only where incidental to other fieldwork. The results were shown on the *Curlew, Reed Bunting, & Other Target Species* maps for 2007-10, and for 2011, reproduced in the 2011 Report, while the similar map for subsequent years appeared in the relevant report. That for 2018 is on the page after next.

Because priority was given to recording Curlew, and Coronavirus restrictions limited the opportunity for survey work, surveyors were not asked to record Other Target Species this year, although some contributed records voluntarily. This year’s records are shown on Map A2.1. *Curlew, Reed Bunting, & Other Target Species 2015*. The map has been produced on the same basis as those in previous reports.

iii) Curlew, Reed Bunting, & Other Target Species: Explanatory Note to the Maps

The “Other Species” are Snipe, Cuckoo, Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Stonechat, Linnet and Yellowhammer

Curlew, Reed Bunting and Kestrel are usually represented by one lozenge per record, although in some cases only representative Curlew records are shown, as some resident recorders were seeing or hearing them almost daily at some stages of the season. The presence of the other species is marked by a single lozenge which may represent multiple records.

At sites where Curlew records came mainly from local residents, no attempt may have been made to record the Other Target Species. These species will therefore be under-represented on the Map.

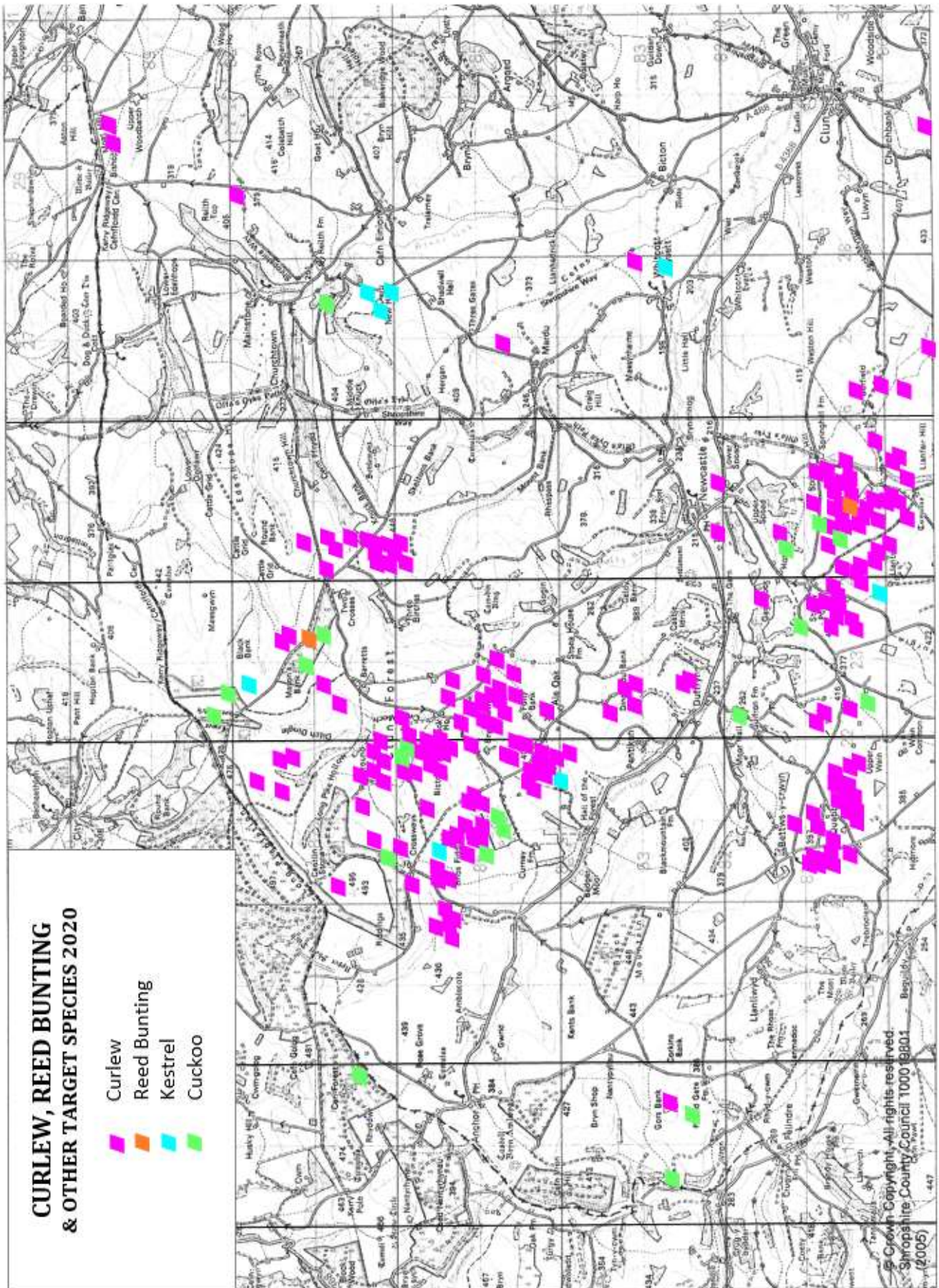
Fewer visits were made to some sites than others; this too will have affected the relative volume of records.

Table A2. 1. Results of Curlew Survey

UPPER CLUN CURLEW SURVEYS 2020

Site name	Observer	Breeding status	Comment
Amblecote	Colin & Sheila Davies (r)	No	No activity reported; 2nd year unoccupied
Bicton Hill	Katie Steggles (s&r)	Probable	Constant activity to early July, almost certainly hatched young but activity ceased before fledging
Railground	Katie Steggles (r) Martin Hockly (r)	Probable	Constant activity, probable nest; attempt ended when adult CU killed by buzzard during incubation period
Folly Bank	Tim Lewis (s) Karen Mitchell (r)	Probable	Constant activity, farmer reported probable nest; evidence of hatched young nearby but none of fledging
Llanfairwaterdine Turbary	B Angell (s) G Clarke (r) M Frater (s)	Confirmed	Territorial activity through season; strong evidence hatched young but activity ceased 3rd week June
Quabbs	S Evans (r) P Morris (r) R Whately (r)	Confirmed	Territorial behaviour at regular site; evidence hatched young but activity ceased by end 1st week July
Riddings &/or Rhos Fiddle	John Lyden (r)	Possible	Activity both sites; territorial pair Riddings, possible nest but not known whether young hatched

Map A2. 1. Approximate location of Curlew and Other Target Bird Species 2020



Appendix 3. Target Plant Indicator Species in the Upper Clun (The "Axiophytes")

Rush Pastures

Scientific name	Common name
<i>Achillea ptarmica</i>	Sheezewort
<i>Anagallis tenella</i>	Bog Pimpernel
<i>Briza media</i>	Quaking Grass
<i>Carex curta</i>	White Sedge
<i>Carex demissa</i>	Common Yellow Sedge
<i>Carex echinata</i>	Star Sedge
<i>Carex hostiana</i>	Tawny Sedge
<i>Carex panicea</i>	Carnation Sedge
<i>Carex pilulifera</i>	Pill Sedge
<i>Carex pulicaris</i>	Flea Sedge
<i>Comarum palustre</i>	Marsh Cinquefoil
<i>Dactylorhiza incarnata</i>	Early Marsh-orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza maculata</i>	Heath Spotted-orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza purpurella</i>	Northern Marsh-orchid
<i>Dryopteris carthusiana</i>	Narrow Buckler-fern
<i>Epilobium palustre</i>	Marsh Willowherb
<i>Equisetum sylvaticum</i>	Wood Horsetail
<i>Erica tetralix</i>	Cross-leaved Heath
<i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i>	Common Cottongrass
<i>Eriophorum vaginatum</i>	Hare's-tail Cottongrass
<i>Galium uliginosum</i>	Fen Bedstraw
<i>Isolepis setacea</i>	Bristle Club-rush
<i>Juncus foliosus</i>	Leafy Rush
<i>Menyanthes trifoliata</i>	Bogbean
<i>Molinia caerulea</i>	Purple Moor-grass
<i>Myosotis secunda</i>	Creeping Forget-me-not
<i>Narthecium ossifragum</i>	Bog Asphodel
<i>Pedicularis sylvatica</i>	Lousewort
<i>Pinguicula vulgaris</i>	Common Butterwort
<i>Polygala serpyllifolia</i>	Heath Milkwort
<i>Pulicaria dysenterica</i>	Common Fleabane
<i>Scutellaria minor</i>	Lesser Skullcap
<i>Succisa pratensis</i>	Devil's-bit Scabious
<i>Trichophorum cespitosum</i>	Deergrass
<i>Triglochin palustre</i>	Marsh Arrowgrass
<i>Valeriana dioica</i>	Marsh Valerian
<i>Veronica catenata</i>	Pink Water-speedwell
<i>Veronica scutellata</i>	Marsh Speedwell
<i>Viola palustris</i>	Marsh Violet

Blanket Bog

Scientific name	Common name
<i>Anagallis tenella</i>	Bog Pimpernel
<i>Apium inundatum</i>	Lesser Marshwort
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	Heather
<i>Carex demissa</i>	Common Yellow Sedge
<i>Carex dioica</i>	Dioecious Sedge
<i>Carex echinata</i>	Star Sedge
<i>Carex laevigata</i>	Smooth-stalked Sedge
<i>Carex pilulifera</i>	Pill Sedge
<i>Carex pulicaris</i>	Flea Sedge
<i>Dactylorhiza incarnata</i>	Early Marsh-orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza purpurella</i>	Northern Marsh-orchid
<i>Drosera rotundifolia</i>	Round-leaved Sundew
<i>Eleocharis multicaulis</i>	Many-stalked Spike-rush
<i>Eleocharis quinqueflora</i>	Few-flowered Spike-rush
<i>Erica tetralix</i>	Cross-leaved Heath
<i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i>	Common Cottongrass
<i>Eriophorum vaginatum</i>	Hare's-tail Cottongrass
<i>Hypericum elodes</i>	Marsh St. John's-wort
<i>Isolepis setacea</i>	Bristle Club-rush
<i>Juncus bulbosus</i>	Bulbous Rush
<i>Juncus foliosus</i>	Leafy Rush
<i>Lythrum portula</i>	Water Purslane
<i>Melampyrum pratense</i>	Common Cow-wheat
<i>Menyanthes trifoliata</i>	Bogbean
<i>Molinia caerulea</i>	Purple Moor-grass
<i>Myosotis secunda</i>	Creeping Forget-me-not
<i>Narthecium ossifragum</i>	Bog Asphodel
<i>Pedicularis palustris</i>	Marsh Lousewort
<i>Pedicularis sylvatica</i>	Lousewort
<i>Pinguicula vulgaris</i>	Common Butterwort
<i>Potamogeton polygonifolius</i>	Bog Pondweed
<i>Ranunculus ompiophyllus</i>	Round-leaved Crowfoot
<i>Scutellaria minor</i>	Lesser Skullcap
<i>Trichophorum cespitosum</i>	Deergrass
<i>Valeriana dioica</i>	Marsh Valerian
<i>Veronica scutellata</i>	Marsh Speedwell
<i>Viola palustris</i>	Marsh Violet

Species-rich Meadows

Scientific name	Common name
<i>Alchemilla filicaulis</i>	a lady's-mantle
<i>Anacamptis morio</i>	Green-winged Orchid
<i>Betonica officinalis</i>	Betony
<i>Botrychium lunaria</i>	Moonwort
<i>Briza media</i>	Quaking-grass
<i>Carex caryophyllaea</i>	Spring Sedge
<i>Carex pallescens</i>	Pale Sedge
<i>Carex panicea</i>	Carnation Sedge
<i>Carex spicata</i>	Spiked Sedge
<i>Colchicum autumnale</i>	Meadow Safron
<i>Euphrasia officinalis</i> agg.	Eyebright
<i>Filipendula vulgaris</i>	Dropwort
<i>Genista tinctoria</i>	Dyer's Greenweed
<i>Linum catharticum</i>	Fairy Flax
<i>Myosotis discolor</i>	Changing Forget-me-not
<i>Myosotis ramosissima</i>	Early Forget-me-not
<i>Neottia ovata</i>	Common Twayblade
<i>Ophioglossum vulgatum</i>	Adder's-tongue
<i>Pimpinella saxifraga</i>	Burnet-saxifrage
<i>Rhinanthus minor</i>	Yellow-rattle
<i>Serratula tinctoria</i>	Saw-wort
<i>Silau silaus</i>	Pepper-saxifrage
<i>Succisa pratensis</i>	Devil's-bit-Scabious
<i>Trisetum flavescens</i>	Yellow Oat-grass

Curlews need farmers - Information & Discussion Paper

This note has been prepared to help farmer groups discuss ways of helping to improve Curlew breeding success, which is the first step in reversing their population decline. It follows discussions at a Facilitation Fund event on 27th February 2019 for farmers to find out more about what is being done to protect and encourage Curlews to nest in the Clun Forest, and how they can help. The ideas in this note need adapting to reflect the experience of the farmers concerned, and to fit into the regime and terrain on their farms. Curlews have big territories, so hopefully farmers will be able to co-operate to produce suitable conditions over a sufficiently large area.



Curlews are slowly heading for extinction here because of poor breeding success. Adults live for many years, so the decline is slow, but not enough young birds fledge to replace the older ones as they eventually die off. In the Upper Clun, the population has declined from 20-22 pairs in 2007 to 6-10 in 2019. Most Curlews nest on farmland, so the help of farmers is vital if this decline is to be reversed.

Curlews nest on the ground. Eggs take around 4 weeks to hatch, and another 5 - 6

weeks before the chicks are able to fly, from late June onwards at the earliest. If nesting is delayed by the weather, or pairs have re-laid after losing their first clutch, many chicks can't fly until late-July or even later.



Nesting Time

Curlews usually return to their breeding areas in March, and start laying eggs towards the end of April. Laying is usually delayed if stock are present on the chosen nest field, to avoid the risk of eggs being trampled. Nests are usually in fields with damp patches, which are being used as rough pasture, or for growing grass to make hay or silage. Cattle pasture is preferred to sheep fields, as the uneven sward provides better cover and camouflage for nests, and retains moisture better, providing better feeding habitat. Laying is usually delayed until the grass is at least 6" (15 cm) tall.

Nests are destroyed if rolling or harrowing occurs after eggs are laid. Occasionally, some farmers find nests and mark their location, so they can avoid them later. Unfortunately, there is a risk that an obvious marker placed close to a nest, or a small part of a field which is treated differently from the rest, will attract inquisitive predators. It's not possible to pick up the eggs, and then put them back in the nest, as Curlews are very sensitive to disturbance, and will desert such nests. Also, it's illegal.

Farmers can help by:

- *Removing stock by mid-April from fields that will not be cut (or grazed) until July*
- *Leaving stock for as long as possible on fields that will be cut earlier, to encourage Curlews to nest elsewhere*
- *Grazing fields suitable for nesting Curlew with cattle, rather than sheep*
- *Completing rolling, harrowing and any other field preparation by mid-April, or as soon as possible thereafter, and certainly before late April*
- *Retaining and restoring damp areas.*

Reducing Predation

Nest monitoring and radio tracking of chicks, in the Upper Clun and elsewhere, has shown that predation of nests and chicks, mainly by foxes but also by Crows, is now the biggest threat to Curlew survival. Finding the nest, and putting an electric fence round it, protects the eggs from mammalian predators (and trampling by livestock).

Farmers can help by:

- *Controlling predators through legal means*
- *Reducing the availability of sheep carrion and afterbirth, which is a rich food source for foxes and avian scavengers and predators*
- *If a nest is found, erecting a 20m square electric fence around it, with the lowest strand only 11cm off the ground, to stop foxes getting underneath it*
- *Otherwise, calling Tim Lewis, who lives in the Upper Clun, and has extensive experience of fencing Curlew nests, who will do it for you (01588 640102, mobile 07966 180289, email: tim.p.lewis@gmail.com)*
- *If fencing is not possible, leaving any found nest undisturbed, and leaving the surrounding area the same, so the nest is not advertised to potential predators.*

Curlew chicks are not fed by their parents. They leave the nest within a day or two of hatching, and feed themselves, mainly on insects, spiders and worms. They may move several hundred metres. They are then vulnerable to Buzzards and other avian predators, as well as foxes and crows. They may stay in long grass or rushes, or move onto shorter pasture. It is important that there is lots of food, so chicks don't have to spend a lot of time in the open, and energy, looking for it, and plenty of cover for them to hide in when necessary.

Farmers can help by:

- *Using little or no pesticides or veterinary medicines, which reduce the insects and invertebrates which the chicks feed on*
- *Planting a greater diversity of leys*
- *Grazing less intensively, so there is plenty of cover*
- *Increasing the size and number of damp patches, to provide more food and avoid chicks being concentrated in a few small areas.*

Grass Cutting Time

Chicks feed mostly in the wetter areas of a field, and usually stay in deep cover. Unfledged chicks will be killed if they are in a field when the grass is cut, perhaps only a few days before they are able to fly to safety. Farming has become much more efficient, so fields are often cut earlier than they used to be, and modern machines complete the job in a day or two, rather than taking several days or weeks. Fewer chicks escape now. There is research evidence to show that this has been one of the main reasons for the decline in breeding success.

If Curlews are known to be in the area, farmers can help by:

- *Delaying grass cutting as late as possible, preferably into early August or later*
- *Checking for the presence of alarming adults in fields about to be cut, and, if they are present, delaying or calling for assistance.*
- *Cutting each field over several days, to allow the chicks to move*
- *Leaving the wetter areas uncut.*

Longer Term Action

Curlews often nest in the same places year after year, so the best way of helping them is by planning to avoid agricultural operations in known nesting areas between early April and mid-July or into August.

Farmers can help by:

- *Preparing potential or known nest sites by removing stock early, so the grass is long enough for nesting by mid-April*
- *Delaying grass-cutting in known nesting areas until mid-July*
- *Joining (or amending) an appropriate Agri-environment Scheme, to get financial help for management changes which benefit Curlews.*

Financial Help, and Advice

Farmers with a current HLS agreement can request an extension in the year prior to it expiring, while others can apply for Countryside Stewardship to fund action to help Curlews on their land. The Rural Payments Agency (RPA), Natural England and the Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group will all provide advice. Trials are underway to make future schemes more Curlew-friendly.

Annexe 1. The Management Committee

Membership

The following people were elected at the Annual Meeting in November 2019

- Leo Smith (Chair)
- Jacky Harrison (Secretary)
- Mervin Mullard (Treasurer)
- Fiona Gomersall (Plant Recorder)
- Rob Rowe
- Joy Greenall
- Rob Harris
- John Lyden
- Karen Mitchell (Publicity Officer / Facebook Group)
- Katie Steggles
- Trevor Wheeler

The Committee, and the Bird and Plant Group, have the support of Professional Advisers

- Fiona Gomersall (previously Conservation Officer Shropshire Wildlife Trust) actively supports and co-ordinates the Plant Group
- Leo Smith actively supports and helps co-ordinate the Management Committee and the Bird Group

Meetings

The Committee has not met since the last Annual Public Meeting due to the Coronavirus restrictions. Decisions during the year, particularly the cancellation of the Annual Public Meeting and how to handle the election of the Management Committee, were taken via email correspondence.

The Group is represented on the Advisory Committee to the Land, Life and Livelihoods Facilitation Fund project by Leo Smith, Jacky Harrison and Fiona Gomersall. Rob Harris and Trevor Wheeler are also involved through their work with LLL, and Joy Greenall is facilitator. The project aims to encourage farmers largely on the high ground in the area to work together to provide “joined up management” to improve key upland habitats.

Otherwise, most of the practical work of the Group is carried out by the Bird and Plant Groups, and the organisers report to, and are overseen by, the Management Committee. In practice this means that it is not necessary to have frequent meetings of the Committee.

Most of the issues discussed at Committee meetings normally relate to the conduct and results of surveys, mailings to members, publicity and getting more people involved, engaging with farmers and landowners, relations with Land Life and Livelihoods and the Clun & Bishop’s Castle SWT branch, Conservation Action & *Wildlife Habitats & Landscape* Policy, the increasing attention being paid to land management issues in the whole catchment, as they affect the water quality in the river, and other matters which are fully described in this Report.

Minutes of Committee meetings have been kept, and can be obtained from the Secretary.

Funding and Bank Account

The Group has a Bank Account with HSBC, originally at the Bishop’s Castle branch, and now, following closure of that branch, in Newtown.

Each cheque requires two signatures from four nominated Committee members: the current Officers, and Rob Rowe

Up until 2011, all the costs of the Group were met through various grants to Leo Smith. From October 2011 to June 2013, all costs were met by the LEADER Community Wildlife Groups Project, administered by the Shropshire Hills AONB and part financed by the European Union Regional Development Fund, with the National Trust as Banker. These grants were listed in the Acknowledgements in the various Reports, and all of them were accounted for to the funding body.

Most grants are for the financial year ending 31st March, so the Constitution has set the financial year as 1st April – 31st March, and accounts will be audited accordingly.

Financial Report and Accounts

In 2019-20 the only income was receipts from the 2019 Annual meeting. Expenditure was hire of hall for the meeting (refreshments costs were donated by Committee members). and UCCWG's share of the cost for the website. There are no longer expenses for Group mailings (mainly postage), as these are sent by email.

Income and Expenditure for 2019-20

Last year's report noted Income of £10 (a donation), and Expenditure of £25 for hiring a Hall, and a balance of £397.97 on 31 October 2019. Transactions since then are summarised in the table below.

Financial Year 2019-20

OPENING BALANCE 31/10/19	397.37
INCOME	
AGM (Raffle and food sales)	112.00
Curlew project grant	1,000.00
TOTAL INCOME	1,112.00
EXPENDITURE	
AGM Hall Hire	37.50
Website	12.00
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	49.50
CLOSING BALANCE 31/03/20	1,459.87

Financial Year 2020-21

OPENING BALANCE 04/01/2020	1,459.87
INCOME	
Nil	0.00
EXPENDITURE	
Nil	0.00
CLOSING BALANCE 31/10/2019	1,459.87

Audited by Cath Landles (AONB Community Officer) 13/11/20

Members

Any volunteers for membership of the Committee over the next year will be very welcome.

All the current Committee members except Trevor Wheeler are willing to stand for re-election. Trevor has been thanked for his support for wildlife, on his own farm and through membership of the Committee since the Group was formed in 2007.

Existing and new members are all usually subject to election at the Public Meeting, but this year the election will be via email correspondence with the membership.

Leo Smith (Chair)
Mervin Mullard (Treasurer)
November 2020