



Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group



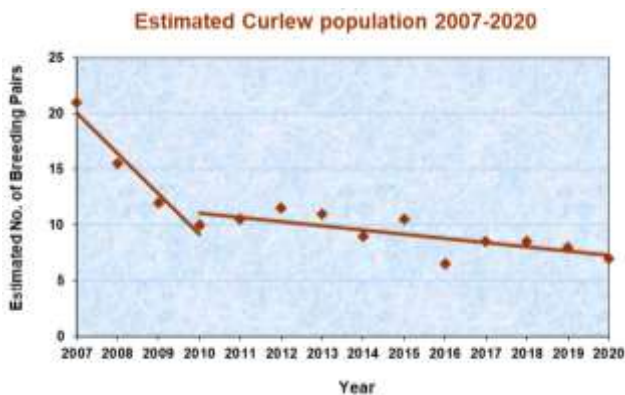
www.ShropsCWGs.co.uk

Annual Report 2020 Summary

The full report can be found on the website

Birds

We found 6-8 breeding pairs of Curlew. All are on high ground above 350m. in the west. The population has declined steadily since our first survey found 21-22 pairs in 2007. We have no evidence that any young fledged.



We are working with the Shropshire Ornithological Society *Save our Curlews* Campaign. In 2018 and 2019 we found nests and protected them with electric fences, then attached radio tags to chicks when they hatched, to see how they used the landscape and what happened to them. We

wanted to do the same this year, but were prevented by Covid19. We will do it again next year.

Lapwings 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. No young are known to have fledged since 2008, so Lapwings appear to be extinct as a breeding species. Snipe have disappeared too, the last known breeding on Rhos Fiddle in 2009.

Kestrels are declining, and only one nest was found.

Six Red Kite nests were found including a new one. At least five nests were successful, producing a total of at least 8 young. Red Kite is a conservation success story. First breeding in the area was in 2007, and since then a total of 51 nests have been found, of which 35 were successful, producing 51 young.



Dippers inhabit the fast-flowing rocky streams. Many nest in boxes put up by the Group. Twenty-four potential sites were monitored, but Covid19 prevented full coverage. Three pairs are believed to have fledged 13 young. In a normal year, around 4-5 times that number are found.



We also operate a nest box scheme for woodland birds, with Pied Flycatcher and Redstart as the target species. Five members sent in reports of their own boxes, and a larger scheme is operated by the ringer. Altogether, almost 100 Pied Flycatcher chicks fledged, and an adult male, ringed as a chick in the nest last year at Bridges, 11km north-east, was caught.

Plants

Site visits didn't get underway until August, and only two were made, to Obley Recreation Ground and Caer Caradoc Hillfort (near Chapel Lawn).

Obley Recreation Ground is on Black Hill, above Clun, and is a small area of remnant heath surrounded by blocks of forestry at different stages of maturity or recently clear felled. At the time of the survey it 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" (scarce plant indicators of good habitat) 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 Hillfort, Chapel Lawn is an important Shropshire Scheduled Monument, 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.



Heathland at Obley



Surveying at Obley



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

The Group has been surveying since 2007, and the main focus has been on the Local Wildlife Sites (LWS): 67 in the Upper Clun (and Teme) have been surveyed since 2015, and around 70% are in a reasonably good condition. Of these, 38 LWS are either completely new or are significant extensions to existing sites.

Around 100 target species (the "Axiophytes") are usually recorded each year. Much of the work has concentrated on rush pasture, bogs and unimproved grassland habitats. These wetlands support vulnerable and threatened species like the Curlew and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary butterfly, as well as important plants.

The Group works closely with farmers and other land-owners, who are offered advice on managing their sites.

A key aim of the Clun Forest Farmers Facilitation Fund project, described opposite, is to increase the extent of these rushy pastures.

Butterflies

Surveys of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries started in 2010 and have been conducted annually. This is a UKBAP priority species, and there are several sites where it is found, including five good ones and two that are regionally significant.

Unfortunately, in 2020 activity was severely curtailed by Covid19 restrictions and only two known sites, Barretts West and Rhos Fiddle Wildlife Trust Reserve, 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.



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.



The first record of a new species in Shropshire, the Cinerous Pearl moth, came in May when one was spotted flying near Crossways. This delicate moth is a relatively large 'micro-moth' which feeds on Yellow Rattle, an important component of traditional hay meadows.

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). Please add your records.

The Wildlife Group wants to work closely with local farmers.

The vast majority of land in the 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 farmers' active cooperation and support.

In 2018, Land, Life & Livelihoods secured a 3-year "Facilitation Fund" grant from Natural England, through a joint application with the Wildlife Group. This aims to help farmers to work together to find ways to conserve soil, water, wildlife and landscape, and improve farm viability, by going 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.

Bringing farmers 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.

For example, "Curlews need Farmers" events have been held, and an Information and Discussion Paper has been prepared to help farmer groups discuss ways of helping to improve Curlew breeding success.

The Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group has been surveying iconic birds, plants and butterflies since 2007.

We will be doing so again in 2021, and we'd like more help, please.

Participants

14 people helped with Curlew surveys, and another 36 sent in Curlew Records; 7 helped with plant surveys, 9 submitted butterfly and moth records, and there are 11 on the Committee. Thank you, one and all.

Over the years, well over 100 people have contributed, a very high proportion of the local population. Interest and enthusiasm is more important than expertise, so please join in.

Area of Operation

We cover the catchment area of the River Clun west of Clun, including the valleys of the River Unk and the Folly Brook, plus the part of the Bettws y Crwyn parish that is outside the River Clun catchment area. This is around 110 square kilometres.

Aims & Objectives

We

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

Membership

Anyone can join who lives or works in the area, or is interested in its wildlife, and who wants to actively contribute to local knowledge and conservation. Membership is free.

Constitution

We have a Constitution, an elected Committee, and a bank account.

Website and Facebook Group

Keep in touch through our website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk, and join our Facebook Group (log into Facebook, enter the Group's full name in the search, and click on it when the name comes up: 36 members so far.

Conservation Action

We not only survey species of conservation concern, we work to increase their population and improve their habitats. We work closely with other statutory bodies and community organisations, and have published four advice leaflets on habitat management. There is an extensive chapter on Conservation Action in the full report.

We have secured a grant of £1,000 from the Garreg Llwyd Hill Windfarm Community Benefit Fund for our *Save our Curlews* project to protect nests and track chicks. You can find more information on the SOS website, www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/ There is increasing evidence that the release of large numbers of Pheasants for shooting, 726,000 in Shropshire in 2018 alone, is fuelling a big increase in the numbers of predators that eat the Curlew eggs and chicks.

The full Annual Report can be viewed on, or downloaded from, our website
www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

If you want to go on our mailing list, or you want to help with a survey, or get more information, please ask the Secretary

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Contact Jacky or any other Survey Leader or Committee Member via the Group's email address
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