Camlad Valley Community Wildlife Group

Bird Group Report Survey Results 2020

Contents

CAMLAD VALLEY COMMUNITY WILDLIFE GROUP

The group was initiated by the Stiperstones-Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) in 2014, covering the area shown in Appendix 1, to

- Bring together local people interested in wildlife
- 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.

The LPS supported the Group over the four years 2014-17 but in 2018 it was formally established and independently constituted as the Camlad Valley Community Wildlife Group.

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

Communication with members is largely by email. An Annual Report is published, and posted on the Community Wildlife Groups website www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk A Facebook Group has been established.

Several projects organised by the Group have benefitted from support received from players of People's Postcode Lottery.

Supported by players of PEOPLE'S POSTCODE LOTTERY

Awarded funds from POSTCODE EARTH TRUST

CURLEWS, LAPWINGS AND OTHER BIRDS SURVEY

Introduction

A bird survey has been carried out in the Camlad Valley Community Wildlife Group (CVCWG) area shown in Appendix 1 since 2014. It complements surveys carried out by the Upper Onny Wildlife Group since 2004, and the Rea Valley CWG, also initiated by the LPS in 2014. It is intended to repeat the survey annually, to monitor long-term population trends for key species, as well as establish the current population and distribution.

The area has been divided up into 20 tetrads (2x2 kilometre squares, each made up of four of the one-kilometre squares shown on Ordnance Survey maps). These tetrads, and their reference code, are shown on the map in Appendix 1.

The survey normally consists of three visits to each of these tetrads, once during each of three specified two week periods, around 1st April, 1st May and mid-June. Plans were made to carry out the surveys in 2020 as normal, but the first and second surveys were cancelled after the Government's advice to people to stay at home to help prevent the spread of coronavirus, although some surveyors could do their square(s) within the daily exercise walk from home, complying with social distancing guidelines. Otherwise, surveyors were requested to choose daily exercise walks from home that enabled them to collect records of the main target species, in any survey square. They were requested to concentrate on Lapwing, Curlew and Kestrel, and any potential Red Kite breeding sites, and submit records on tetrad sheets or casual records maps, or by email, as appropriate.

However, particular efforts were made to continue to record Curlews, as "the Curlew situation is critical, with a 77% decline in Shropshire between 1990 and 2010, and a further decline since. There's probably only 120 pairs left in the whole of the County now, and we haven't got long to save them from local extinction. We can't afford a total loss of data on their population and distribution in 2020". Therefore surveyors were requested to consider ways to continue to record Curlews, while still complying with the Coronavirus lockdown restrictions.

The lockdown restrictions in England were eased in mid-May, including allowing car journeys for travel to exercise, and no limit on the time spent exercising each day, so surveyors were requested on 15 May to resume survey work, and do a survey of their square(s) as soon as possible (the early May survey, a couple of weeks late), and the mid-June survey as usual. However, restrictions in Wales were not eased to the same extent, and the situation was complicated because some members residents in Wales had agreed to cover tetrads in England, and vice versa, so part of the journey to their square was prohibited. In addition, some members were not able, or willing, to resume survey work, because of their various personal circumstances.

At the same time, members were advised that "there have been more Cuckoo records than usual; it's not clear whether there are more Cuckoos about, or we're better able to hear them in the peace and quiet of staying at home", so they were asked to submit all records of Cuckoo as well.

This report therefore summarises the records of Curlew, Lapwing, Kestrel and Cuckoo.

The coverage actually achieved in 2020 is set out in Table 1. It will be seen that no records were received from six of the 20 squares, and only casual records were received from a further one. Two of the squares with no records (SJ20Q and SJ20W) had Curlews last year. The other squares with Curlews were well covered.

Previous reports have included a table, listing the square surveyors, the time spent on the surveys, and all records of all target species, together with an estimate of total time spent. In view of the limited coverage in 2020, this information has not been collated. For comparison, in 2019, survey work was carried out in all except three of the 20 tetrads, and 18 members spent almost 120 hours on it. The list of Other Target Species surveyed in a normal season is shown on page 11.

Table 1. Coverage in 2020

Tetrad	Survey coverage				
	Tetrad surveys				Good casual coverage
	First	Second	Second (late)	Third	
SJ20 K	Yes			Yes	
SJ20 Q	Yes			Yes	
SJ20 V					
SJ20 W					
SO29 L					
SO29 M					
SO29 N			Yes		
SO29 P	Yes			Yes	
SO29 R					
SO29 S	Yes	Yes		Yes	

Tetrad	Survey coverage				
	Tetrad surveys				Good casual coverage
	First	Second	Second (late)	Third	
SO29 T					
SO29 U					Yes
SO29 W	Yes	Yes		Yes	
SO29 X	Yes				Yes
SO29 Y	Yes		Yes		
SO29 Z	Yes		Yes		
SO39 A					Yes
SO39 B	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
SO39 C	Yes				Yes
SO39 D	Yes	Yes			Yes

Curlew

Curlew is the “most pressing bird conservation priority in the UK” (Brown *et al*, *British Birds* 2015), because the UK has an estimated 28% of the European, and 19-27% of the world population and is on the national *Red List* of *Birds of Conservation Concern* 4 (Eaton *et al*, British Birds 2015), because of a decline of 62% in the UK between 1969 and 2014. The BTO Breeding Bird Survey has found a 48% decline in the UK, a 31% decline in England and a 69% decline in Wales, over the 23 year period 1995-2018.

The Birds of Shropshire (Smith, 2019) showed a decline from about 700 breeding pairs in 1990 to 160 in 2010 (a loss of 77%), and it disappeared from 62% of the Atlas survey squares (tetrads) between 1985-90 and 2008-13. The decline has continued, and there were probably only 120 pairs left in the whole of the County in 2019. This is almost 30% of the total in southern England (*Saving England’s lowland Eurasian Curlews* Colwell *et al* British Birds 2020). At the current rate of decline, the County population will halve in about 13 years, and become virtually extinct in 25. Curlew is on the *Red List* of *Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire*, recently published by Shropshire Ornithological Society.

In Montgomery, a survey of the eastern half of the County found 176 breeding pairs in 1986. An MWT survey in 2000 located only 42 pairs at 30 sites, “a catastrophic decline”, while a further survey showed a 69% decline between surveys in 1993 and 2006 (Holt & Williams 2008)

Survey results

The map summarises the estimated number and distribution of Curlew territories in the Camlad Valley area in 2020. The location of all Curlews found during the surveys, or reported on Casual Record maps or by email, is shown on the map in Appendix 2.

The methodology requires observations of a pair together, or a territorial display, or a single bird on two of the three surveys, to confirm a territory. However, Curlews often have large territories, and may be seen a kilometre or more from their nest site, so interpretation of the observations is sometimes difficult, unless singing birds are seen or heard concurrently. If that does not happen, the methodology requires the analysis to produce the lowest population estimate consistent with the records, in this case 8 - 10 pairs.

A pair has been found in SO29Y every year since 2014 (except 2015), but in 2020, two pairs were found for the first time. A pair including a colour-ringed bird was found, and then a nest was found. However, attempts to read the colour ring found two colour-ringed birds with different colour combinations, each paired with an un-ringed mate. Neither colour-ring was read. Judging from the colour-ring combination, one was probably caught at Dolydd Hafren in March 2020, on its way back to the breeding site. It is not known when the other was ringed. It may also have been caught at Dolydd Hafren in March, in 2020 or a previous year, or it might possibly be a “headstarted” bird (see p.14)

Apart from that, Curlews were found at all the sites except one where they were found last year. There was definitely one pair again in SJ20K, which was covered for the first time in 2019. Three other Curlews were seen in this square, but it was not revisited because of the Covid-19 restrictions. They may have stayed to breed in the square, or they might have settled in the adjacent square, SJ20Q, which was not visited at all.

A casual record of one heard in the north-east may have been in this area, but might equally have been in the adjacent square to the east, in the Rea Valley area, where Curlews are also know to breed.

The northern part of SO39B was covered thoroughly for the first time, by new members who sent in several records of a pair in the north-west corner of the square. Another local resident reported seeing this pair defend a nest by driving away a Red Kite, and this pair “are nesting in a field fairly close to our home, and have been for some years”. The pair was recorded by Group surveys 2014-16, but not 2017-19, when this part of the square was not covered.

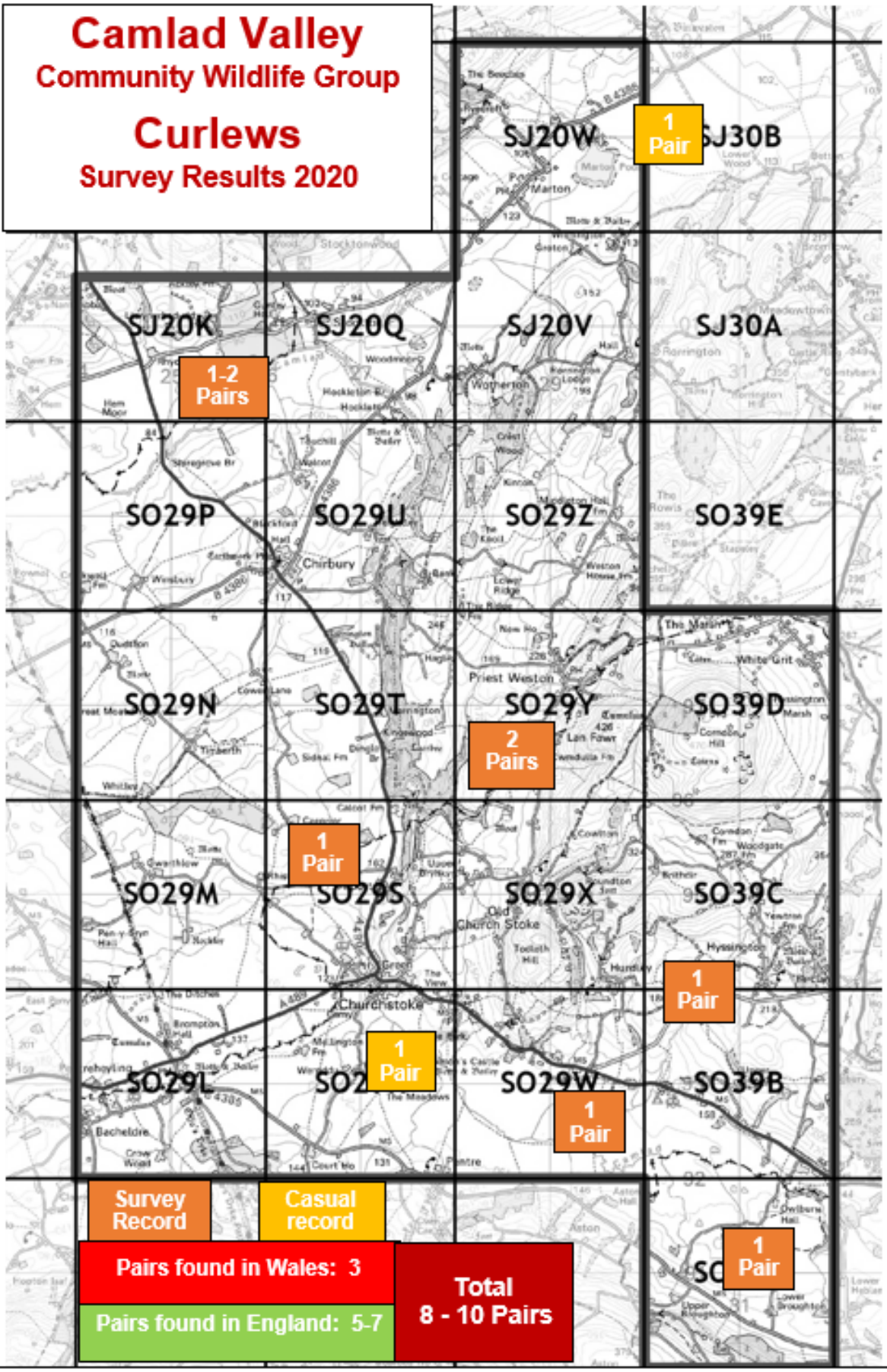
There were only two records from local residents in SO29S, of one heard near Rhiston (but in England). Such scanty records call into question the continued presence of a pair at this location.

There is no evidence that any young Curlews fledged in the area.

From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Curlew population in the area in 2020 was 8-10 breeding pairs, 5 – 7 in England and 3 in Wales

The 2014 - 20 surveys have been the start of regular annual monitoring to establish the number of pairs actually present, better knowledge of nesting and foraging areas, and the population trend. The survey will be repeated in future years.

Camlad Valley
Community Wildlife Group
Curlews
Survey Results 2020



The pair in SJ20K was relocated. Three other Curlews were seen in the square in March, and may possibly have remained to breed. A casual record from the north-east may have come from this area, or from the adjacent square in the Rea Valley CWG area. Two pairs were found in SO29Y, for the first time.

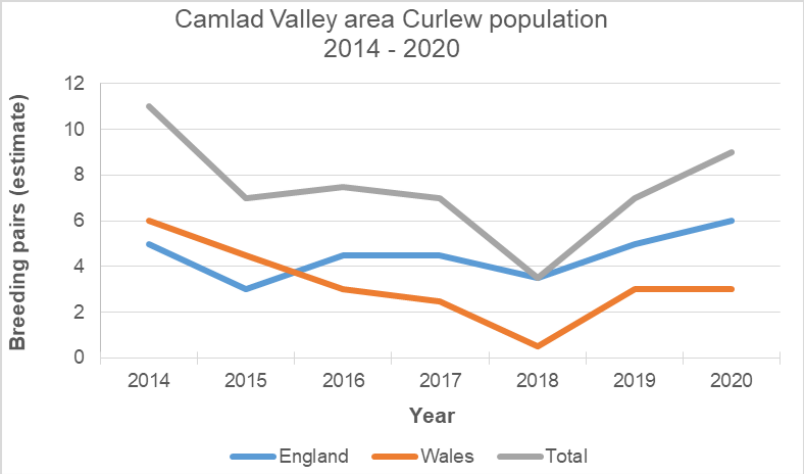
Population Trend

Table 1 shows the estimated number of pairs found in each year since 2014, and the chart shows the annual trends. In most years the number of pairs has not been established precisely, so a range has been given, and the pair in SO29S nested right on the border, so it has been counted as possibly breeding in both countries up until 2017. The chart is based on the mid-point of each range, so the total population shown is not necessarily the sum of the English and Welsh populations.

Establishing trends is not easy, as some squares have not been surveyed every year, and the 2018 report stated "*The weather in 2018 was not helpful to Curlew. Strong winds and wet weather ("the beast from the east") restricted the availability of invertebrate food, and delayed the growth of grass to provide cover for nest sites, so it is possible that some pairs delayed nesting, never tried, or moved on". Three pairs found in 2017 were not found in 2018, but were re-found in 2019 and 2020.*

Table 1. Curlew population 2014 – 20

Year	Number of Curlew pairs		
	England	Wales	Total
2014	4 - 6	5 - 7	9 - 13
2015	2 - 3	4 - 5	6 - 8
2016	4 - 5	2 - 4	7 - 8
2017	4 - 5	2 - 3	7
2018	3	0 - 1	3 - 4
2019	5	3	7
2020	5 - 7	3	8 - 10



In addition, at least one pair, possibly two, were found in SJ20K in 2019. A pair had not been recorded there before, but the part of the square where it was found had not been surveyed previously, so this pair may have been present every year.

The population apparently increased in 2020, compared to 2019, as a second pair was found south of Priest Weston, in SO29Y. Overall, since 2014, it appears that the population in Wales has decreased, while that in England has remained the same.

Colour-ringing

Well over 150 wild Curlews have been caught and colour-ringed by the Mid-Wales Ringing Group since March 2015 at the Dolydd Hafren Montgomery Wildlife Trust Reserve on the River Severn near Welshpool. All the "headstarted" chicks released by Curlew Country since 2017 have also been colour-ringed (see p.14).

Four colour-ringed wild Curlews have been found breeding in the area in previous years, one near Owlbury, one near Hockleton and two near Marton. In 2020 both birds in the pair in SO29W, and one in each of the pairs in SO29Y, were colour-ringed, but most individuals were not observed closely enough to see whether they were colour-ringed or not. No headstarted Curlews have been found,

although one of the birds in SO29Y may possibly have been (the other three definitely were not).

Recording Curlew Nest Sites

To improve the value of CWG Curlew surveys, nest site habitat data is being collected to feed into the database being developed by the South of England Curlew Forum. Although nests are not searched for, they are found occasionally. More importantly, the field containing the nest can often be identified (by seeing the sitting bird from a distance, or from the behaviour of the adults defending the nest from potential predators), and as far as defining the habitat is concerned, the precise location of the nest within the field is unnecessary.

Observers have been requested to complete a questionnaire for every case where a nest was found, or the field containing the nest was identified beyond reasonable doubt.

Some of the questions try to assess what farming activities take place in the field during the period before any chicks would fledge, up until early August (the full term if a pair nest late, or relay after the first clutch fails).

The questionnaire has been piloted this year, and comments on it (including any omissions) have been requested.

The two nest sites found in this area are shown on the Curlew Records Map in Appendix 2. The one nest actually found in SO29Yis shown as a cross with solid colour, while the field with a nest (in SO39C) has hatched colour

Lapwing

Lapwing was added to the national *Red List* of *Birds of Conservation Concern* in 2009, and this status was confirmed in 2015 (Eaton *et al*, British Birds 2015), because of a decline in the UK of 63% between 1969 and 2014, and 57% over the previous 25 years. The BTO Breeding Bird Survey has found declines of 43% in the UK, 30% in England and 47% in the English West Midlands, over the 23 year period 1995-2018. There are no BBS figures for Wales, because the decline has been so great that Lapwing is not found in sufficient squares (only an average of 30 are needed for the whole period) to calculate a trend.

The Birds of Shropshire (Smith, 2019) showed a decline from about 3,000 breeding pairs in 1990 to 800 in 2010 (a loss of 73%), and it disappeared from 46% of the 870 Atlas survey squares (tetrads) between 1985-90 and 2008-13. The decline has continued, certainly in the areas monitored by several Community Wildlife Groups. Lapwing is on the *Red List* of *Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire*. The decline is partly obscured by the much larger numbers seen in winter flocks, which comprise birds escaping from the frozen ground in northern Europe.

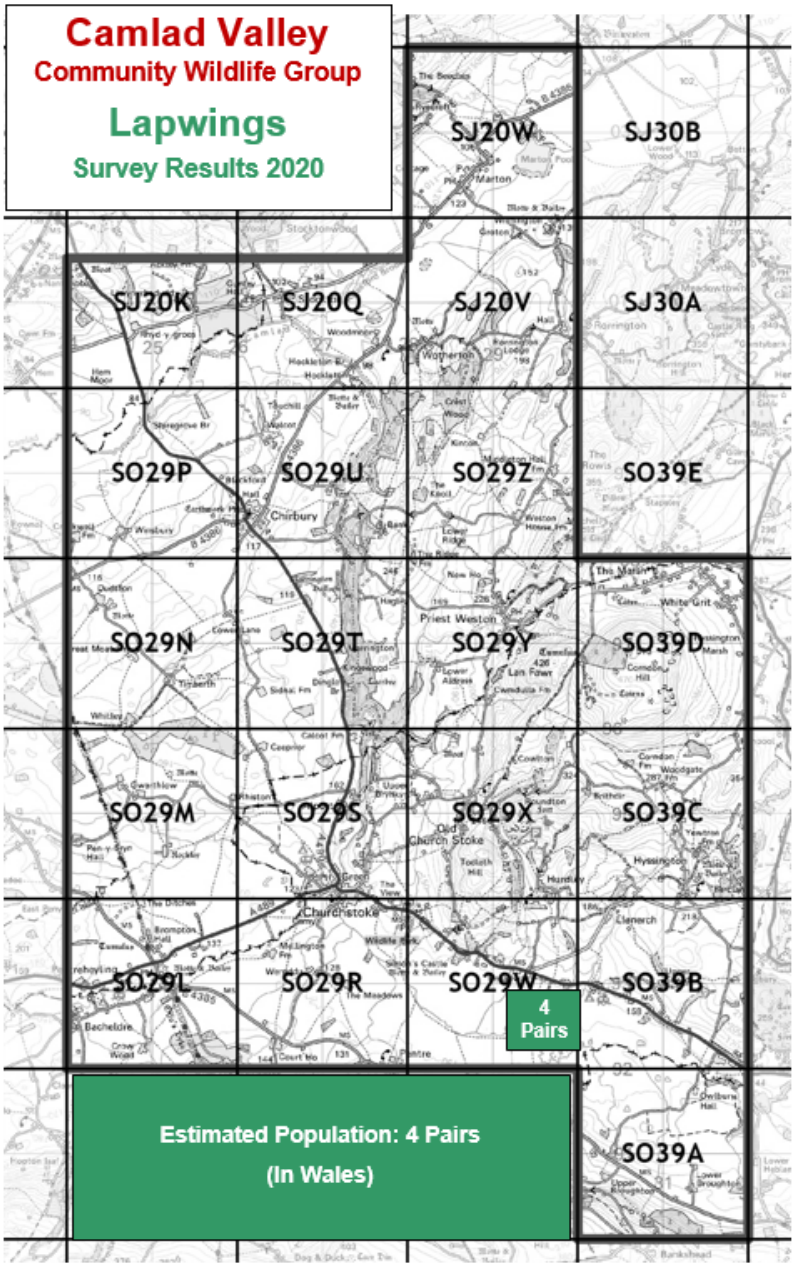
In Wales, it was estimated that breeding numbers in the 1990s had crashed to about 10% of the population in the early 1970s. In Montgomeryshire, 144 pairs were found by a survey of the eastern part of the county in 1986, while a survey of the whole County in 2000 found that a minimum of 38 pairs attempted to nest at 24 sites, but there was no evidence of any fledged chicks. Lapwings face extinction as a breeding bird in the county" ((Holt and Williams 2008).

The map summarises the estimated number and distribution of breeding Lapwings in the Camlad Valley area.

Six Lapwing were seen feeding and displaying one mile east of Churchstoke, eight were seen there subsequently, and four were feeding and one was sitting on a nest at the same place on 5 April.

Two were seen feeding at new scrape 500m to the east, on 17 April, but it is likely they were visitors from the colony of eight.

Lapwings have nested in this vicinity in some previous years. However, unlike Curlew, they are not site-faithful. They need short vegetation or bare ground to nest on, and those that nest on arable land have to move round to follow the farm crop rotation and find bare earth or spring crops, so the annual population fluctuates. It is therefore important to survey squares every year, even if no Lapwings were found in the previous year.



There have been previous years when few Lapwing were found, as low as two pairs in 2015 and one in 2018, but 2019 is only year when none were found (although two squares where they have been found previously, SO29L and N, were not surveyed in that year). There were 10 -12 pairs in 2016.

From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Lapwing population in 2020 was 4 breeding pairs, all in Wales

Anecdotal Evidence for the Decline of Lapwing and Curlew

Members of the Bird Group who live in the area, and other local residents, have said that Lapwings and Curlews are less common now than they used to be. In previous years, some members talked to local farmers in the course of their surveys, and they too said that Lapwings and Curlews are less common now than they used to be. No attempt was made to talk to farmers or other residents in 2020.

Lapwings have apparently declined much more than Curlews.

Kestrel

Kestrel is on the national *Amber List* of *Birds of Conservation Concern* 4 (Eaton *et al*, 2015), because of a decline in the UK of 46% between 1969 and 2014, and 33% over the previous 25 years. The BTO Breeding Bird Survey has found declines of 35% in the UK, 21% in England and 35% in the English West Midlands region, over the 23 year period 1995-2018. There are no BBS figures for Wales, because Kestrel is not found in sufficient squares (only an average of 30 are needed for the whole period) to calculate a trend.

The Birds of Shropshire (Smith, 2019) showed that records of confirmed or probable breeding declined by 46% in the 870 Atlas survey squares (tetrads) between 1985-90 and 2008-13, and the population probably halved in that time. Kestrel is on the *Red List* of *Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire.*

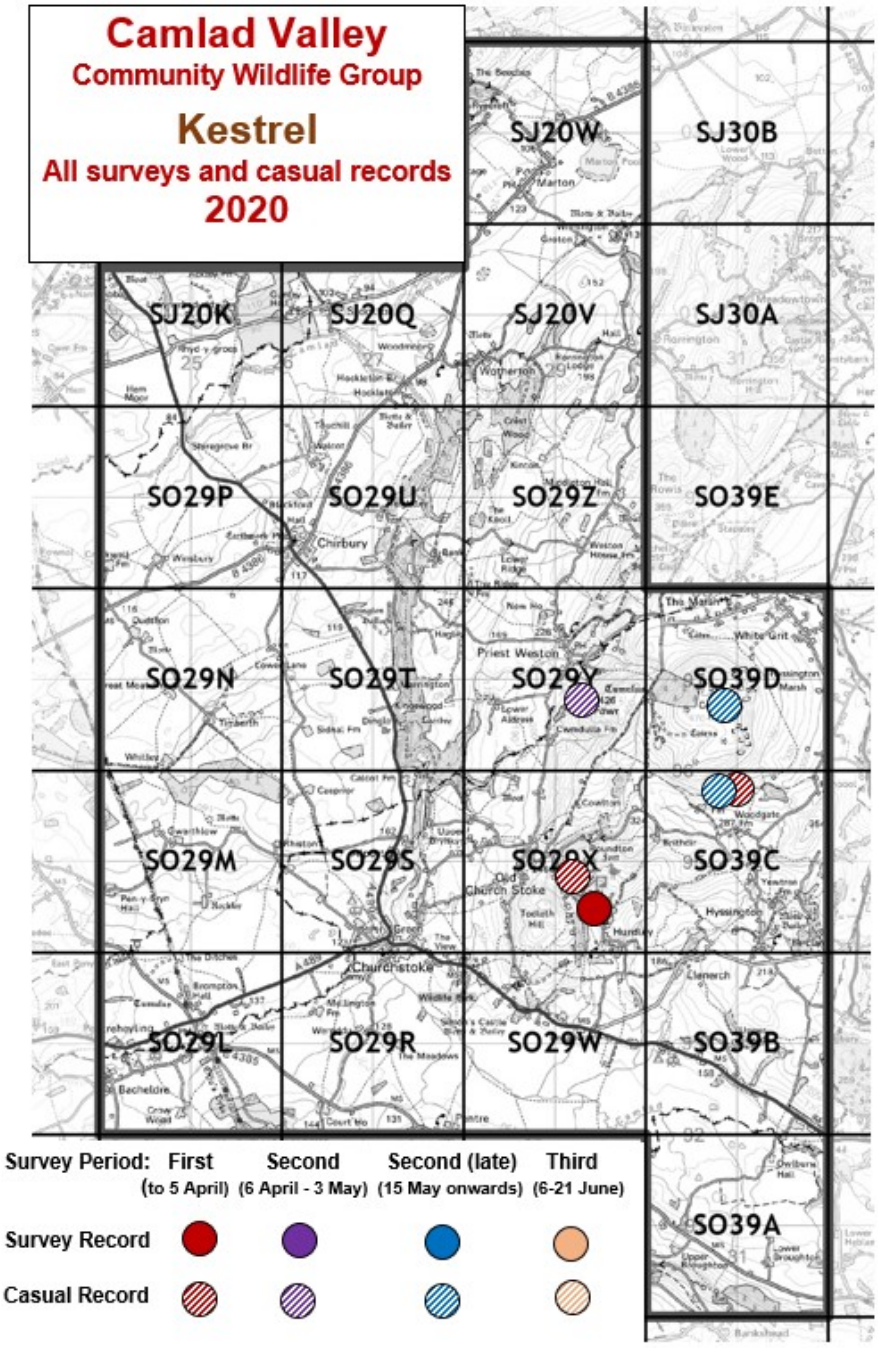
In Montgomeryshire, ”there continues to be a smattering of breeding records from various quarries and cliffs . . . and from tree nesting sites, but this species is clearly much reduced in numbers since Forrest’s time” [the early twentieth century] (Holt and Williams 2008).

Kestrels defend a small territory around the nest, but their home range, where they find most of their food, is at least 1 km square, but can be as large as 10 km square. Most hunting is carried out within 1.8km of the nest, but the home range is often partly shared with neighbouring pairs.

The local decline appears to have continued in recent years, and the Shropshire Ringing and Raptor Groups have launched a nest box scheme to help improve breeding success, and try and find out the reasons for the decline. To help get a better understanding of the population and distribution, members doing CWG surveys have been asked to make a special effort to record Kestrels.

The population varies from year to year, depending on prey abundance, mainly voles, but Kestrels are much more likely to be observed in good breeding seasons, when they have to spend more time hunting for food for chicks, and travelling to and from the nest. In 2019, the numbers of Kestrels seen were much lower in all the CWG areas than in 2018, suggesting that 2019 was a very poor year for them. 2020 appears to have been generally better. Clee Hill has a relatively high density, and the CWG found six nest sites, with the distance between two nests only about 1km, in 2020.

Observations in the Camlad Valley area in 2020 are shown on the Map. Some of the dots will be different observations of the same individuals. However, it is likely that the clusters of dots represent up to four pairs. Kestrel has been poorly recorded in previous years, and this is the largest number of sightings since the first survey in 2014. There were no records at all in 2019. There are previous records from Lan Fawr (SO29Y) and Corndon Hill (SO39D, which appear to be regular sites. The records from SO39C, the southern end of Corndon Hill, are probably from the same latter pair, while Roundton Hill is probably a different pair. Kestrel is frequently seen on the MWT reserve.



No nest sites were found, nor were any fledged young reported, although young would not have fledged until after the main survey period ended in mid-June.

Cuckoo

Cuckoo has declined considerably in recent years, and was added to the *Red List* of *Birds of Conservation Concern* in the UK in 2009. By 2015 the decline reached 60% decline in the previous 25 years. The BTO Breeding Bird Survey has found declines of 38% in the UK, 71% in both England and the English West Midlands region, and 29% in Wales, between 1995 and 2018.

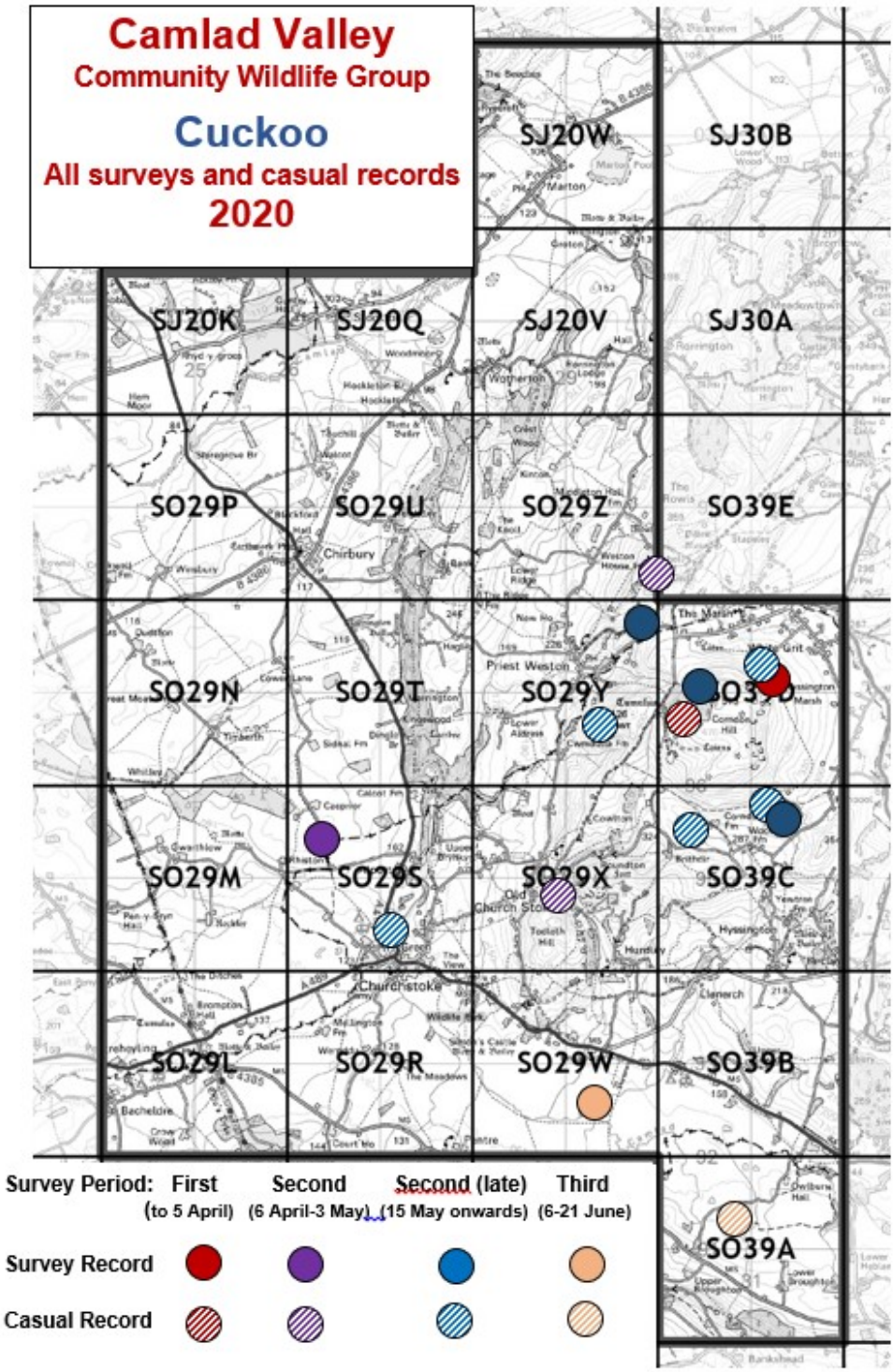
In *The Birds of Shropshire* (Smith, 2019), a comparison of the 1985-90 and 2008-13 Atlas distribution maps showed it had disappeared from 56% of the tetrads occupied in the earlier period. The population estimate for the later period was 90–95 pairs, less than half that estimated in the earlier Atlas.

In Montgomeryshire, “a massive decline has taken place since Forrest’s day”, with no recent reports from this area.

The characteristic Cuckoo call is made only by the male, and he defends a “song territory” to attract females and deter other males. The female has a different, rarely heard, “bubbling call”. Each male will chase other males out of his home patch, but the cuckoo isn't strongly territorial, and several males and females have been found to share overlapping ranges.

Each female lays between 10 and 25 eggs per year, each in a different nest. Each female usually selects nests of a single host species, most frequently Meadow Pipit, Dunnock or Reed Warbler.

The home range of each female varies considerably, depending on the ease of finding enough nests of the host species (i.e. parts of the home range will not be suitable breeding habitat for the host species, and the home range needs to include feeding areas for the Cuckoo as well). Thus the females’ home range might overlap the song territory of more than one male, and she will mate with each of them (an estimate of “breeding pairs” would therefore be better termed “male territories”).



It is one of the Other Target Species that members have been asked to record each year, but in 2020 there were more Cuckoo records than usual. It was not clear whether there were actually more Cuckoos about, or that people were better able to hear them in the peace and quiet, or were at home rather than work, because of the coronavirus lockdown. Members were

therefore specifically encouraged to submit Cuckoo records, and the results are shown on the map.

Darker blue dots represent multiple records from the same (approx.) location. Each paler blue dot represents a single Cuckoo record. The records probably represent around six territorial males, substantially more than recorded in previous years, when records have come only from Corndon Hill (SO39D).

Red Kite

The number seen each year has steadily increased, and 17 were seen in 10 squares last year. In view of the limited coverage in 2020, no direct comparison can be made, but several Kites were reported, including three instances of two or three together.

However, this is the first year when a nest has been found in the Welsh part of the area. In an oak tree in SO39C, two young fledged.

Given the rapid spread and population increase (over 40 known pairs in Shropshire in 2019 – the first successful breeding for 130 years occurred as recently as 2006), it is likely that breeding will become a regular occurrence in the near future.

Other Target Species

Apart from the four main Target Species listed and mapped above, members are normally asked to record observations of 19 Other Target species. Very few records of any of them were received in 2020, because of the limited extent of the survey work.

The Other Target Species usually recorded are:-

Barn Owl	Linnet	Snipe	Wheatear
Bullfinch	Meadow Pipit	Spotted Flycatcher	Whinchat
Dipper	Red Kite	Stonechat	Yellow Wagtail
Dunnock	Reed Bunting	Swift (nest sites only)	Yellowhammer
Grey Partridge	Skylark	Tree Sparrow	

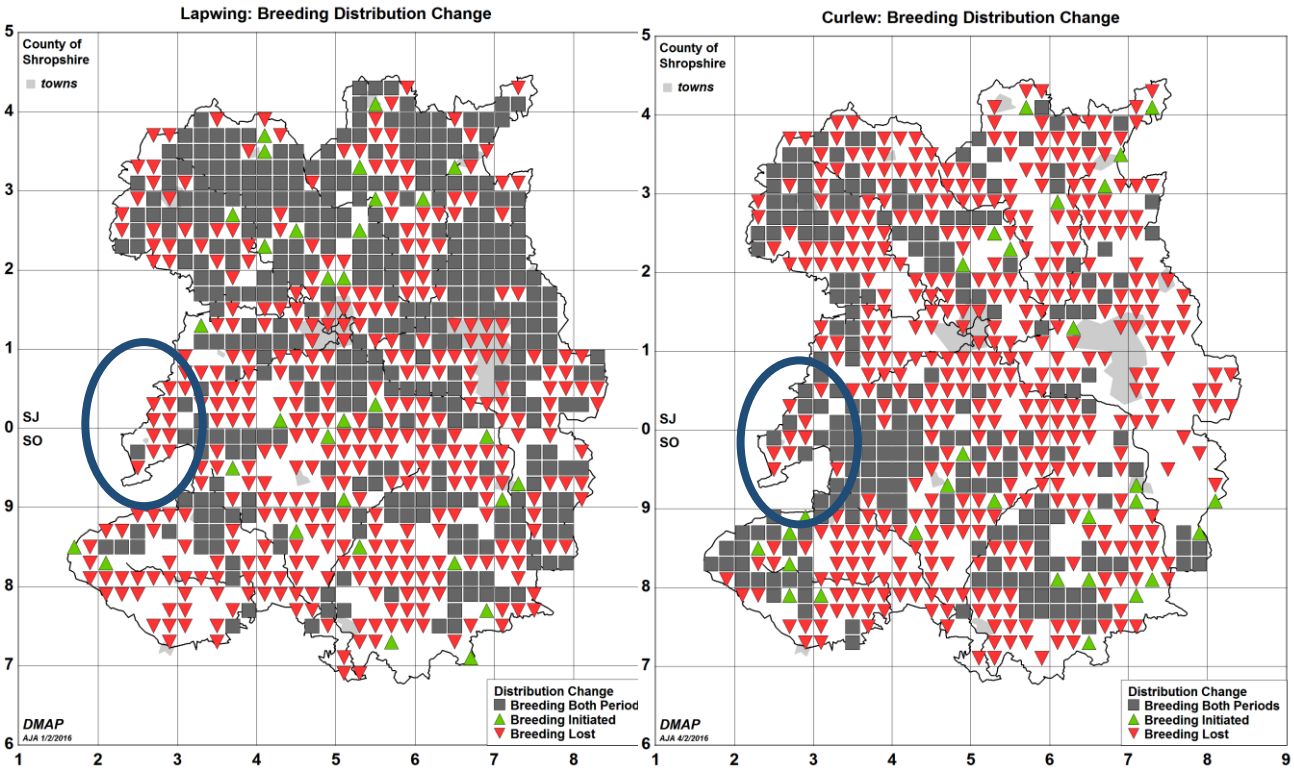
Nest Box Schemes

The Group has organised nest box making sessions in the last two years, so some members have a few boxes on their own land, and the Group has a small number in stock, but so far no systematic recording, or large schemes of several boxes, have been organised.

Decline of Lapwing and Curlew

Lapwing and Curlew are in decline, across the UK, in England and Wales, and in Shropshire. Objective evidence for the local decline comes from Bird Atlas work. The distribution maps showing the results of the recent 2008-13 Bird Atlas, published in *The Birds of Shropshire* (2019), can be compared with the maps in *An Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Shropshire*, based on six years fieldwork 1985-90, and published in 1992. Both sets of maps have been compiled on the same basis, with similar amounts of fieldwork effort, so the massive decline is undoubtedly real.

The maps show tetrads where each species was found in both Atlas surveys (grey squares) and tetrads where it was found in the earlier period, but not the more recent period (red downward triangles). The Camlad Valley CWG area is shown approximately by the blue ovals.



Surveys including counts complement these maps. The county Lapwing population has fallen from about 3,000 pairs in 1990 to only about 800 now. The Curlew population has fallen from about 700 pairs in 1990 to about 160 pairs in 2010 (a decline of over 73% for both species).

Other evidence for the decline of Lapwing and Curlew, including the BBS results quoted above, can be found on the website of the British Trust for Ornithology www.bto.org

Conservation Action is also being taken nationally to reverse the decline of these two species. Both have been designated as UK Biodiversity Priority Species by the Government, as part of its commitment to international biodiversity targets, precisely because of the rapid decline, and both species are now on the *Red List* of *Birds of Conservation Concern 4*, published in December 2015.

Both species nest on farmland, and recent and current agri-environment schemes (part of the system of payments to farmers through the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union) included rewards for farmers for sensitive management of habitat on their farms, and providing other environmental benefits. Farmers applying to join had to take into account

the habitat requirements of a number of birds, including Lapwing and Curlew, if they bred on or near the farm, or used land there for feeding. Many farms in the area will benefit from HLS agreements for 10 years from the date of signing, the last in 2014.

However, the funds available for current agri-environment schemes have been reduced, and the procedures are more bureaucratic, proving fewer benefits for birds. Future arrangements to protect birds and their habitats on farmland, after the UK leaves the EU at the end of 2020, are not clear, and will not be introduced for some years.

Recommendations

Natural England and the Welsh Government are recommended to encourage farmers with breeding Lapwing or Curlew on or near their land, to join the appropriate agri-environment scheme, utilising the appropriate options to maintain and enhance the habitat for these priority species

Curlew Country

The Stiperstones-Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) operated a Curlew Recovery Project in the area from 2014 to 2017. Fieldwork research 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 productivity didn't improve because the chicks were predated before fledging.

The LPS ended in March 2018, but the Curlew project has continued, under the name "Curlew Country". It has concentrated on the trialling of "headstarting". This involves removing eggs from Curlew nests, incubating them artificially, rearing chicks in captivity, and then releasing them into the wild after they fledge, at or near a potential breeding site. It is considered to be a short term measure to try to boost the Curlew population while discovering the appropriate measures to improve breeding success to the level needed for recovery. Under a Natural England licence, seven Curlew chicks were reared and released in 2017, 21 in 2018 and 33 in 2019. While this has been a successful technique for other species, it is not known whether our local Curlew chicks will survive and return to their natal area to breed. However, if it does work it is expected to lead to a significant short-term increase in the local Curlew population. While it is important to continue the trial, the whole project was suspended in 2020 because of Covid-19.

The whole of the Curlew Country area is within the area covered by three CWGs, Upper Onny, Rea Valley and Camlad Valley.

Curlews generally stay on their wintering grounds during their first year, and return to their natal areas to breed when they are two years old. About 36% of the fledged young survive until they are two (Rob Robinson, BTO, *pers.comm*.), so if headstarted Curlews survive at the same rate as wild Curlews, then around 2-3 of the 2017 cohort should have come back last year, and 7-8 of the 2018 cohort should have returned in 2020. Only one is known to have returned last year, in the Upper Onny area. The only new pair in the Rea Valley area in 2020, at Habberley, may possibly have included headstarted birds, but it is not known if they were colour-ringed or not. A new pair was found in the Upper Onny, but neither bird was colour-ringed. Two pairs were found in the Camlad area, where only one pair was found in previous years. One bird in each pair was colour-ringed. One was definitely caught and colour-ringed at Dolydd Hafren in 2020, so neither bird in that pair was headstarted. It

is not known when the other bird was colour-ringed, so it may possibly have been headstarted. While it is possible that new pairs returned to areas that were not monitored in 2020, all the squares in all three CWG areas that held Curlews in 2019 were well covered.

It will be interesting to see how the number of returns in 2021 compares with the expected number (about 11-12) from the 2019 cohort. Numbers found so far from the 2017 and 2018 cohorts are not encouraging. The location of any pairs of Curlew found by the Bird Survey will be passed on to the Curlew Country fieldworkers to check for colour-rings.

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

The SOS* Save our Curlews *Campaign

Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS) launched its *Save our Curlews* campaign in February 2020, with the intention of building on, and supporting, the Curlew monitoring work of the CWGs, and working initially with CWGs in the Upper Clun, Clee Hill and Strettons area to find nests, put an electric fence round them to protect the eggs, and then attach radio tags to the chicks just after they hatch, to track them to see how they use the landscape and what happens to them. Unfortunately, although the CWGs were able to monitor and map their populations, the nest protection project and radio-tracking had to be postponed because of Coronavirus restrictions.

The Camlad Valley CWG Curlew results, together with those from other CWGs, are fed into the monitoring of the County Curlew population by SOS, which then form part of the County data forwarded to the South of England Curlew Forum and the national Curlew Species Recovery Group, hosted by RSPB, and help make the case for Government-sponsored conservation work, including future Agri-environment schemes.

This is a long term campaign, and it is hoped to extend the nest protection and chick monitoring work to other CWG areas in future years. A lot more information can be found about the Campaign, including project work in Shropshire and elsewhere to find out the causes of the decline, and reverse it, on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

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

Curlews and Pheasant Release

The RSPB has just announced the results of the review of its policy on game bird shooting, which it undertook partly because of the effect of releasing large numbers of 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

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), compared to 160 pairs of Curlew and 800 pairs of Lapwing.

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

Use of CWG Survey Results

In addition to feeding into the monitoring of the County population by SOS, and helping the Curlew Country fieldworkers, the survey results are made available to Natural England.

They show the importance of particular areas for these species, which will hopefully encourage farmers to manage their land more sensitively, and provide Defra with objective evidence to judge individual farm applications to join agri-environment schemes in future, enabling them to target the use of their limited resources more effectively.

The results also reinforce and supplement the results from other Community Wildlife Groups operating in the Shropshire Hills, which together now cover well over 500 square kilometres, around two-thirds of the Shropshire Hills AONB. These results help inform the AONB Management Plan, which has now been revised to cover the five years 2019 – 24.

Coupled with the results of other surveys, the results may also contribute to the identification of potential new Local (County) Wildlife Sites. These sites are monitored by Shropshire Wildlife Trust, which encourages the landowners to manage them so they retain their value for wildlife.

The report is also sent to the Montgomeryshire County Bird Recorder

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The cover photos re © Mark Hamblin (Curlew) and John Harding (Lapwing). The other photos are individually credited (where known). Thanks for permission to use them.

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Plans for 2021

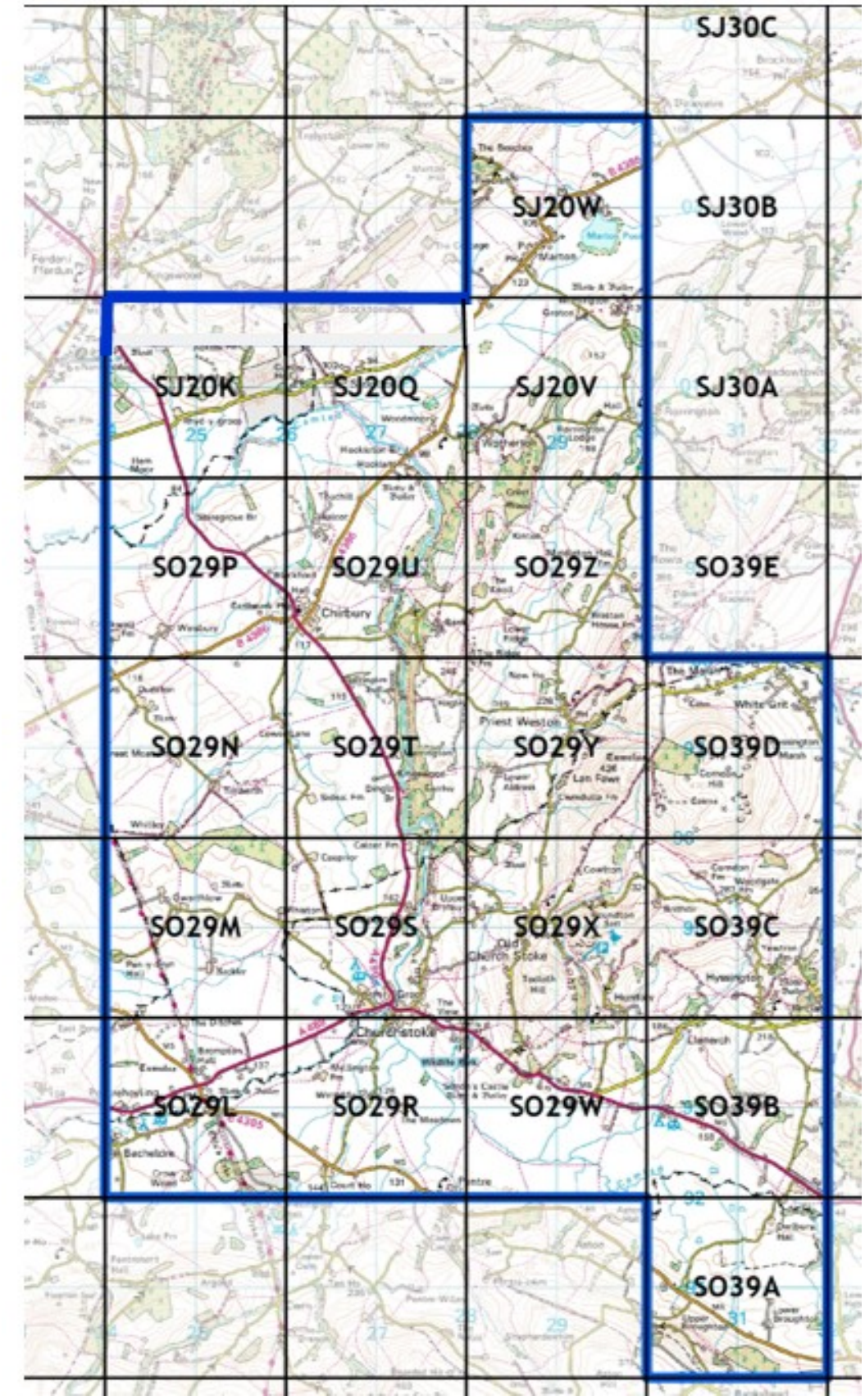
The Bird Group intends to repeat the Bird Survey next year. New participants are needed, so we hope to recruit new members.

Consideration will be given nearer the time to holding a Bird Group meeting next March, primarily to plan the bird survey, but current Covid-19 restrictions are unlikely to have been eased by then. We will therefore need to develop new ways of promoting our work in the local community. New members, anyone interested in birds, will be very welcome.

Details can also be found and downloaded from the joint website for all the Community Wildlife Groups in the Shropshire Hills, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk,

Leo Smith
December 2020

Appendix 1. Map of the Camlad Valley Community Wildlife Group Survey Area, showing Square Boundaries and Tetrad Codes



The Group's area includes Churchstoke, Chirbury and Marton, and Corndon and Roundton Hills, and part of Offa's Dyke, as shown on the map.

Each square ("tetrad") on the map is 2x2 kilometres, using gridlines marked on Ordnance survey maps. Total area: 20 tetrads = 80 square kilometres.

Appendix 2. All Curlew Records Received 2020