



***Strettons Area
Community
Wildlife
Group
&
Shropshire
Ornithological Society
(Church Stretton Branch)***



***Bird Survey
Results
2020***

CONTENTS

Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group	1
Curlews, Lapwings and Other Birds Survey	3
Introduction.....	3
Curlew.....	4
Survey results	5
Population Trend.....	6
Colour-ringing	7
Recording Curlew Nest Sites	8
Curlews in adjacent parts of the Strettons area.	8
Lapwing	8
Anecdotal Evidence for the Decline of Lapwing and Curlew	10
Kestrel.....	10
Cuckoo.....	11
Red Kite	13
Other Target Species	14
Lapwing and Curlew on the Long Mynd.....	14
Decline of Lapwing and Curlew	14
Comparison of CWG Bird Survey Results with the Bird Atlas 2008-13.....	16
Work with Individual Farmers	17
Recommendations.....	17
Other Community Wildlife Groups	17
The SOS Save our Curlews Campaign.....	18
Save our Curlews in the Strettons area.....	18
Curlews and Pheasant Release	18
Use of CWG Survey Results	19
Dipper Project	20
Dipper Habitat	20
Dippers in the Strettons area	20
Nest boxes.....	21
Rings.....	21
Acknowledgements, References and Future Plans	22
Acknowledgements.....	22
References.....	22
Plans for 2021	23
Appendix 1. Map of Bird Survey Area, showing Square Boundaries	24
Appendix 2. Map of Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group area	25
Appendix 3. All Curlew Observations.....	26
Appendix 4. Save our Curlews appeal.....	27

STRETTONS AREA COMMUNITY WILDLIFE GROUP

The Group was established in March 2012, to bring together people interested in wildlife, undertake survey work to establish the status of priority wildlife and habitats, encourage and enhance local interest in wildlife and actively promote nature conservation. A wide variety of surveys have been carried out each year since.

The Annual Public Meeting in early March 2017 agreed to conduct a Lapwing and Curlew survey, to complement similar surveys carried out by Community Wildlife Groups in other parts of the Shropshire Hills. Both species have suffered a massive contraction in range and population decline in the last 20 years or so, nationally and locally. Curlew has been described as the UK's highest bird conservation priority, as we have an estimated 28% of

the European breeding population, and 19 – 27% of the world population. The AGM of the Church Stretton branch of the Shropshire Ornithological Society also agreed to support the survey, and it has been carried out each year since 2017.

The Group also carries out surveys on many other aspects of local wildlife. Anyone can join who lives or works in the area, or has an interest in it, 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 those from previous years can be found on the Community Wildlife Groups website www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk A Facebook Group has also been established.

A project to monitor and protect Swift nest sites has operated since the Group started. Results can be found in the Annual Reports.

A Dipper project started in 2020.

This report contains a detailed account of the Curlews, Lapwings and other birds Survey, and the Dipper project, prepared primarily for participants. Summaries will be included in the Group's Annual Report.

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



CURLEWS, LAPWINGS AND OTHER BIRDS SURVEY

Introduction

A bird survey has been carried out in the Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group (SACWG) area shown in Appendix 1 since 2017. It complements surveys carried out by three other Community Wildlife Groups in the Stepping Stones area, the Upper Onny Wildlife Group since 2004, and the Rea Valley and Camlad Valley CWGs since 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 for the bird survey is slightly different from the SACWG area, shown in Appendix 2. It has been divided up into 30 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 public meeting to recruit and brief new surveyors was due to take place on the day that coronavirus restrictions were introduced, and it was cancelled. A practical fieldwork training meeting is usually held for those that want one, but this was abandoned too.

Most squares were allocated to participants in previous years, or volunteers who responded to early publicity, but some squares were not allocated. The first and second surveys were cancelled too, after the Government's advice to people to stay at home to help prevent the spread of the virus, 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 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, it was recognised that some of them would not be able, or willing, to do so, for various persons reasons. 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. “Yes” means a survey was carried out, or someone covered the square reasonably well in the usual survey period. Blank means there was little or no coverage, unless there is a “Yes” in the Good Casual Coverage column, where a local resident made several visits to the parts of the square where Curlews have been found previously. It will be seen that no records were received from 11 of the 30 squares, and only casual records were received from a further six. The squares that had Curlews last year 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 two of the 30 tetrads, and 45 members spent over 375 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					Good casual coverage
	Tetrad surveys					
	First	Second	Second (late)	Third		
SO49 Q						Yes
SO49 R	Yes	Yes	yes	Yes		Yes
SO49 S						
SO49 T						Yes
SO49 U						
SO49 V	Yes		Yes			Yes
SO49 W	Yes		Yes			Yes
SO49 X						
SO49 Y			Yes	Yes		Yes
SO49 Z						Yes
SO59 A						
SO59 B	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
SO59 C						Yes
SO59 D						Yes
SO59 E						

Tetrad	Survey coverage					Good casual coverage
	Tetrad surveys					
	First	Second	Second (late)	Third		
SO59 F	Yes		Yes	Yes		
SO59 G						Yes
SO59 H	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
SO59 I						
SO59 J						
SO59 K			Yes	Yes		
SO59 L						
SO59 M						
SO59 N	Yes		Yes	Yes		
SO59 P			Yes	Yes		
SO59 Q						
SO59 R						
SO59 S	Yes	Yes		yes		
SO59 T			Yes	Yes		
SO59 U			Yes	Yes		Yes

Curlew



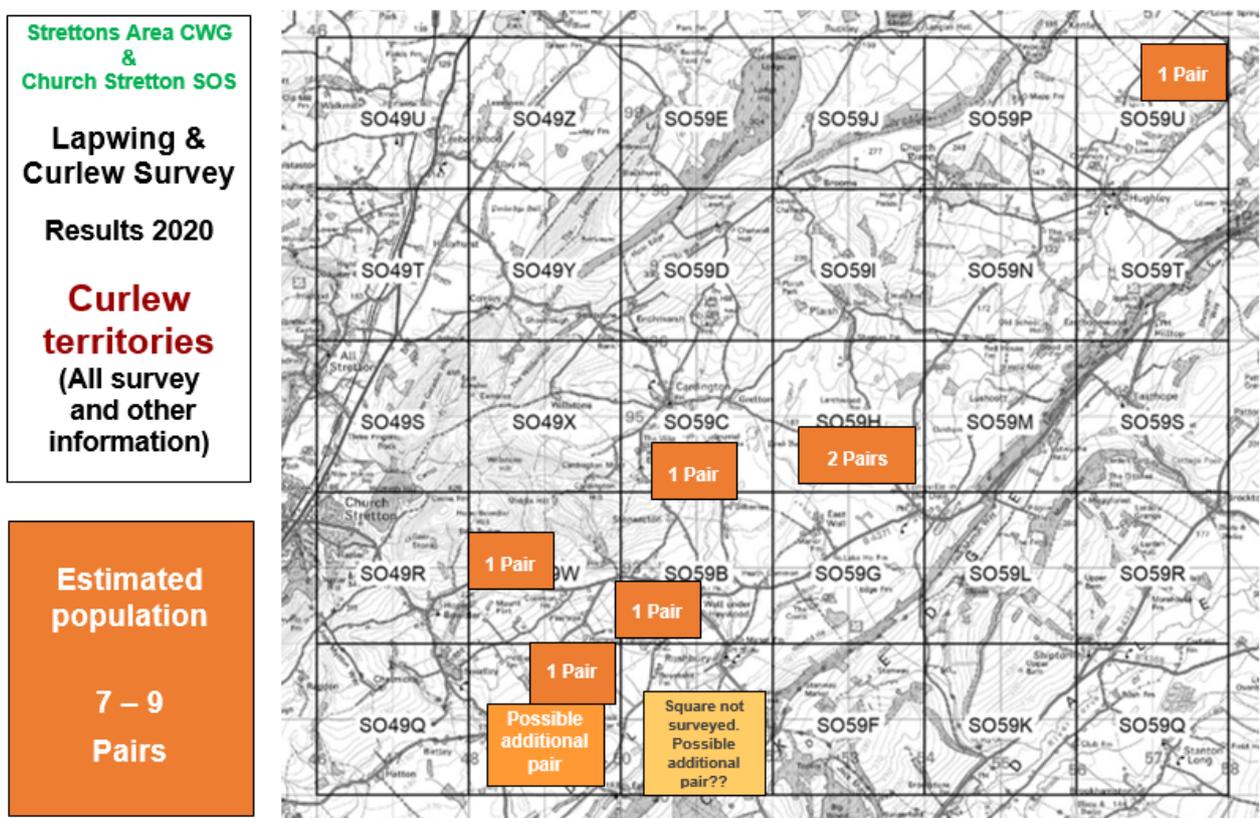
Curlew is the “most pressing bird conservation priority in the UK” (Brown *et al*, *British Birds* 2015), because the UK has an estimated 28% of the European, and 19-27% of the world population and is on the national *Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern* 4 (Eaton *et al*, *British Birds* 2015),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

In Shropshire, it declined 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.

Survey results

The map summarises the estimated number and distribution of Curlew territories in the Strettons 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 3 on p.26..

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. Curlews seen up until early April (including during the first survey) may be passing through on their way to breeding sites elsewhere. Nesting does not usually occur until late April or early May. Therefore, 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 7 - 9 pairs.



The locations of several pairs were established more accurately than usual, partly from casual records sent by people working from, or exercising near, home, and partly by square surveyors getting to know their squares better, and following up earlier sightings.

Two pairs, near Hope Bowdler (SO49W), and near Stoneacton (SO59C), were seen to defend a nest (rise, drive off a Buzzard, and then land at the starting point), while another

pair near Wall Bank (SO59B) were seen with small chicks. There were two pairs in SO59H, as usual: the nesting field of one was identified by a farmer, and the second pair was a bit further north in the same square. Another farmer confirmed the return of a pair to a regular nesting field between Wall Bank and Ticklerton (SO49V), while a pair seen several times closer to Ticklerton may have been the same, or an additional, pair.

A breeding pair was located for the first time in the north-east corner of SO59U, near the road 2km north-east of Hughley / Kenley, and seen 4-5 times in the same two fields from late March through to May. This part of SO59U has not been well-surveyed in previous years, but a pair were seen in flight there in 2017. Probably the same pair was seen in the well-surveyed square SO59N, but only for three days at the very beginning of April, and not subsequently. Another pair was heard beyond the newly-discovered pair to the north-east, but probably outside the area.

There was no evidence in 2020 for the pair in SO49X found in 2017 and 2018, or the possible additional pair found in SO59D in 2019.

However, there was evidence of a probable additional pair south of Rushbury (SO59A) in 2018 and 2019, but there was no coverage of this square in 2020. Had this square been covered, evidence of an additional pair may have been found. All other squares where Curlews have been found in previous years were covered.

The population estimate is therefore at least 7 – 8 pairs, perhaps 7 – 9 pairs if SO59A had been covered.

There was no evidence of any fledged young. The pair that had chicks were last heard on 20 June. Curlews with chicks are very noisy, so the chicks must have perished before that date, several weeks before they could have fledged. A post-breeding flock of 9 was seen in SO59H on 22 June, and presumably the same flock of 10-12 was seen several times around Wall under Heywood up until the end of June, but not subsequently. This flock was almost the same size as the total population in the area.

Although the area as a whole was less well covered than usual, because of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions (see pp.2-3), the areas where Curlews were found in 2019 were mostly as well, or better, covered in 2020, except for SO59A. The results from 2020 can therefore be compared with those from earlier years.

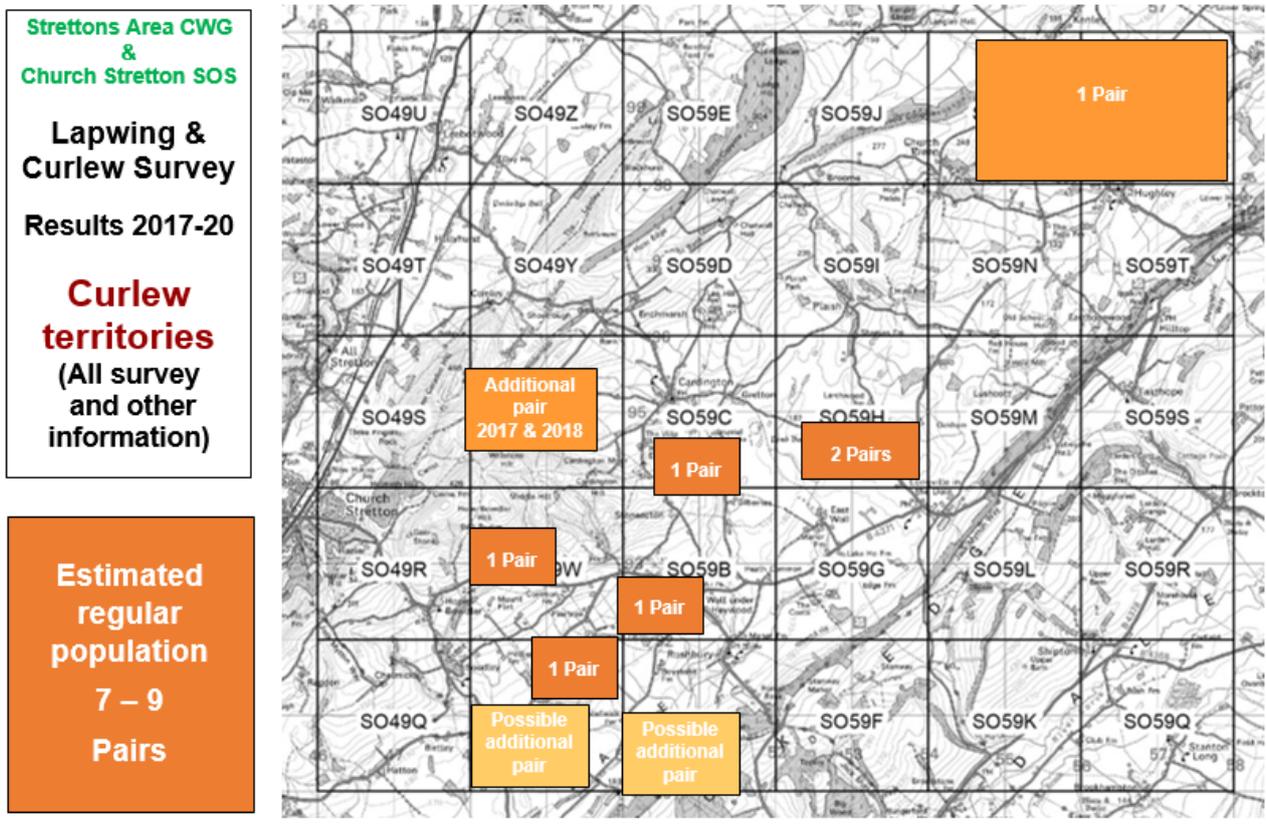
From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Curlew population in the area is definitely 7 pairs, probably 8, and possibly 9.

The 2017 - 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.

Population Trend

Establishing trends is not easy, as some squares have not been surveyed every year, but pairs of Curlews are site-faithful, so as the locations of territories become more certain in the light of increased knowledge, it is possible to re-interpret the results of the surveys from earlier years. The all records, and territories, maps published in previous reports have been re-considered, and the composite results for 2017-20 are shown in Map 2.

It appears that the pairs present in 2020 were also present in all previous years, but a pair west of Cardington (SO49X) has been lost. It was present in 2017 and 2018, but not subsequently. This represents a population decline of about 10% since the survey started. It is not known if the newly discovered pair north-east of Hughley (SO59U) has been present in previous years, but this is likely.



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 near the Stiperstones since 2017 have also been colour-ringed.



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The colour-rings can be seen in the photo, taken in the Upper Clun in 2017.

Only one colour-ringed bird was seen, near Longville in the post-breeding flock on 22 June. Probably the same bird was seen in April 2019, near Rushbury, but the ring could not be read on either occasion, and no rings have been seen on birds at nest sites in any year, so its breeding location is unknown. However, being able to see rings requires a good view of the bird on the ground, before the grass gets too

long, so in practice most birds have not been checked.

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 nest site found in this area is shown on the Curlew Records Map in Appendix 2, as a cross with

hatched colour.

Curlews in adjacent parts of the Strettons area.

It will be seen by comparing the maps in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 that the Long Mynd, and the area to the north of it around Picklescott, are within the CWG area, but not included in the Bird Survey area.

Two pairs were located near Picklescott, one two kilometres to the south-west, near Betchcott Hill (SO49J), and the other a kilometre to the east, near Smethcott Pool (SO49P). The outcome is not known for either pair. These squares have not been covered by the bird survey in previous years, but they will be included from 2021 onwards.

There were two pairs on the Long Mynd, one on Wildmoor near Duckley Nap, and one on Round Hill, south-east of Pole Cottage. Both are in the Strettons area, but the former is also in the Upper Onny Wildlife Group area, and is monitored by them, while the latter is monitored by the Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project. Both pairs failed shortly after laying, and presumably the nests were predated.

Lapwing

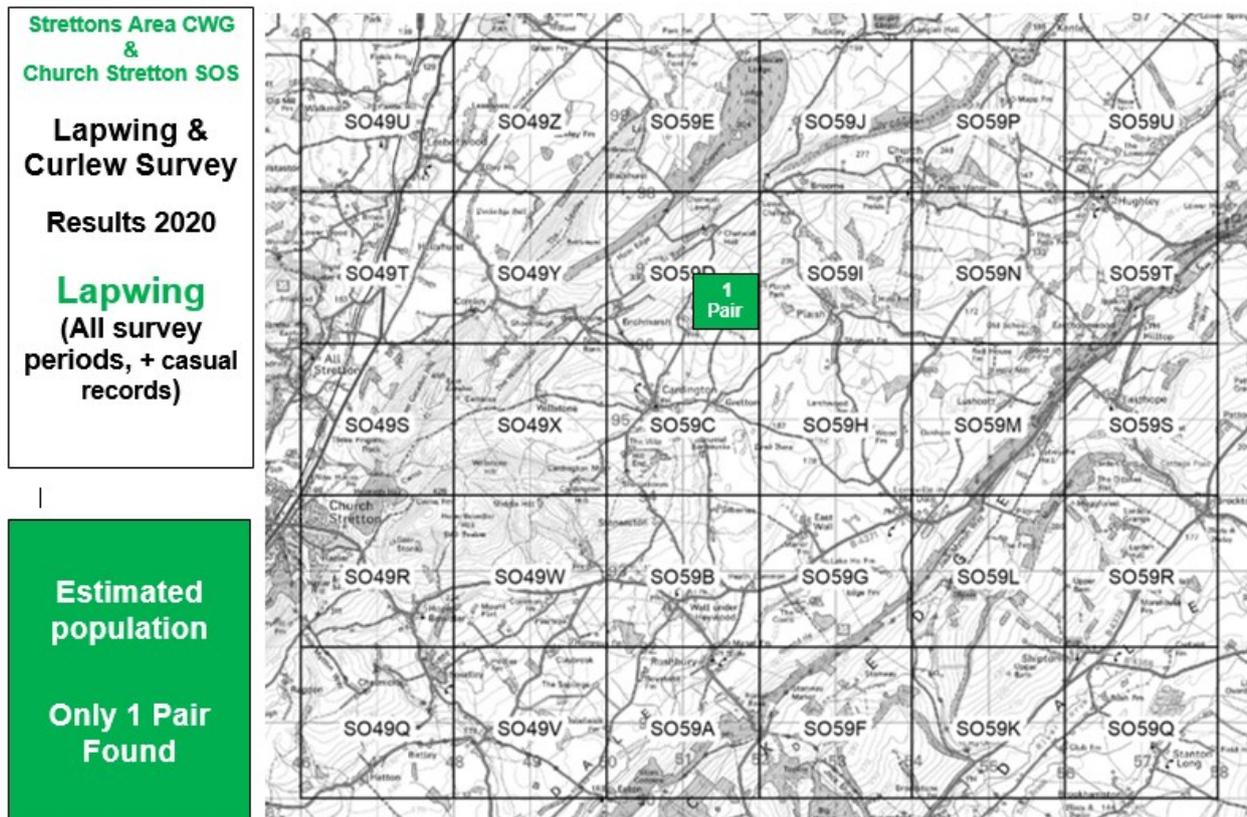
Lapwing was added to the national *Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern* in 2009, and this status was confirmed in 2015 (Eaton *et al*, British Birds 2015), because of a decline in the UK of 63% between 1969 and 2014, and 57% over the previous 25 years. The BTO Breeding Bird Survey has found a 43% decline in the UK and a 30% decline in England over the 23 year period 1995-2018.

In Shropshire, it declined from about 3,000 breeding pairs in 1990 to 800 in 2010 (a loss of 73%), and it disappeared from 46% of the 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.



Lapwings 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.

The map summarises the estimated number and distribution of breeding Lapwings in the Strettons area. Only one pair was located, at a new pool near Plaish, but they fledged two young.



There was only one other record, a single near Wall took off and headed towards Longville on 9 April, but none were located there subsequently.

Last year there were 3 pairs east of Leebotwood (in SO49Z), two pairs between Rushbury and Eaton (SO59A), and single birds were seen near Botvyle (SO49T, where breeding pairs have been found in previous years) and north-east of Broadstone (in SO59K). All four of these sites were specifically checked, but no Lapwings were seen or heard. However, the squares weren't systematically surveyed, and several other squares that might have had suitable habitat were not covered at all.

Only one pair was found, but there were probably more

Anecdotal Evidence for the Decline of Lapwing and Curlew

Participants who live in the area, and other local residents, say that Lapwings and Curlews are less common now than they used to be. Some members talked to local farmers in the course of their surveys, and they too said that Lapwings and Curlew are less common now than they used to be.

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 a 35% decline in the UK and a 21% decline in England over the 23 year period 1995-2018.

In Shropshire, 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*.

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 usually carried out within 1.8km of the nest, but the home range is often partly shared with neighbouring pairs.



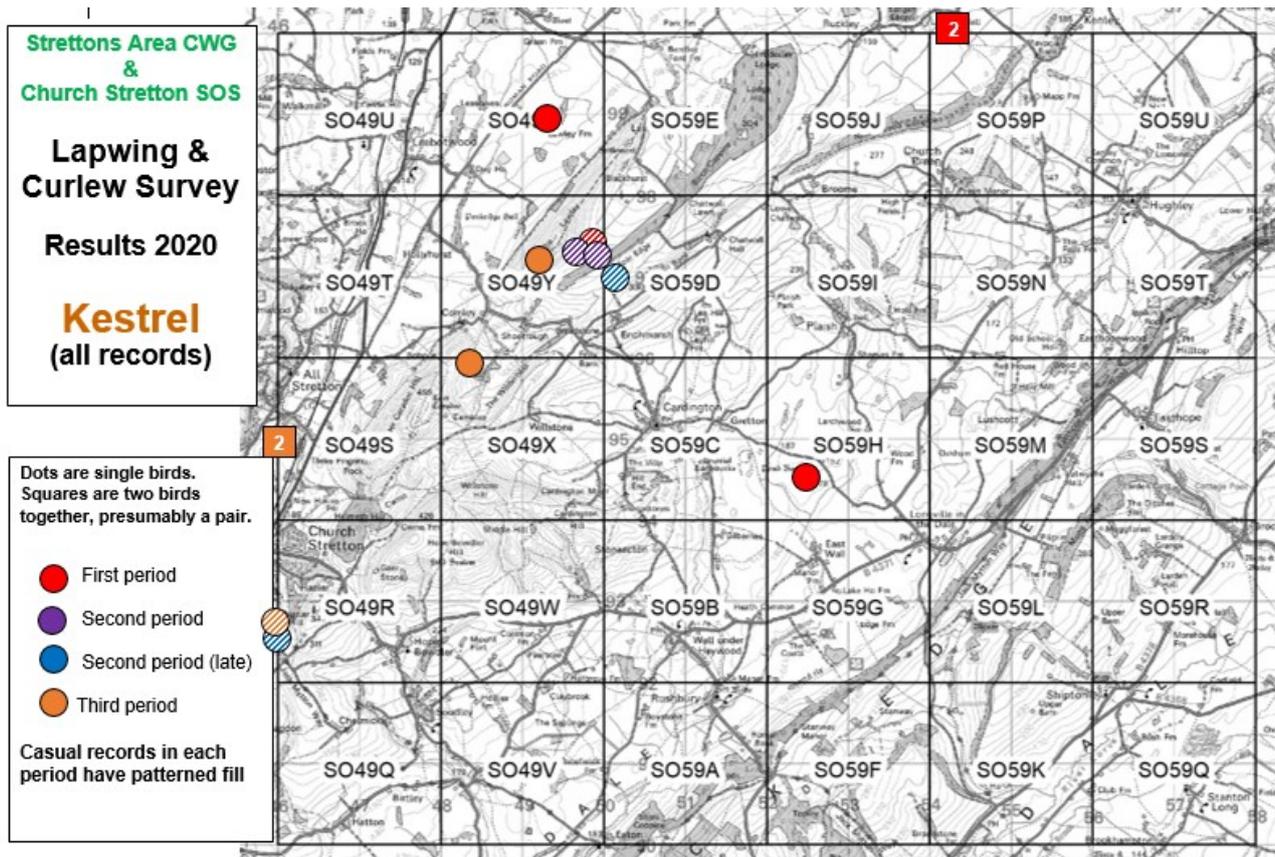
The local decline appears to have continued in recent years, and the Shropshire Ringing and Raptor Groups have launched a nest box scheme to help improve breeding success, and try and find out the reasons for the decline. To help get a better understanding of the population and distribution, members 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 Strettons 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 around seven pairs. 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.



In 2017, a pair was located near Longville, which produced three fledged young. Otherwise, there was a pair on the edge of SO49V, resident in or near Gogbatch, and another pair near Church Preen, plus sightings indicating additional pairs near Hazler / Ragleth Hills, Caer Caradoc and The Lawley. The status of other sightings near Cardington Hill and Shipton is less clear, and the population was estimated at 6 – 8 pairs

It was estimated at up to 10 pairs in 2018, perhaps a few more than 2017, but 2019 was a very poor year, and the records suggest only 4 – 5 pairs, although this was probably an under-estimate in a poor breeding season.

Comparing the 2020 map with those from previous years, Kestrels have been seen at all seven of the 2020 sites in previous years, but there have also been territories near Stanway in SO59F and near Shipton / Easthope in SO59R/S. None were reported from three survey visits to SO59F, but there were no records at all from SO59R/S.

Over the four years, in these 30 tetrads, the cumulative results equate to five occupied tetrads, one confirmed and four probable breeding records. There were four confirmed, and seven probable, breeding records in the Shropshire Bird Atlas 2008-13, suggesting a fairly large decline in the last 10 years or so.

The population is estimated at 7 – 9 pairs.

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 had reached 60% in the

previous 25 years. The BTO Breeding Bird Survey has found a 71% decline in both England and the English West Midlands region between 1995 and 2018.

In Shropshire, 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 published in *The Birds of Shropshire* was 90–95 pairs, less than half that estimated in the earlier Atlas.

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.



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.

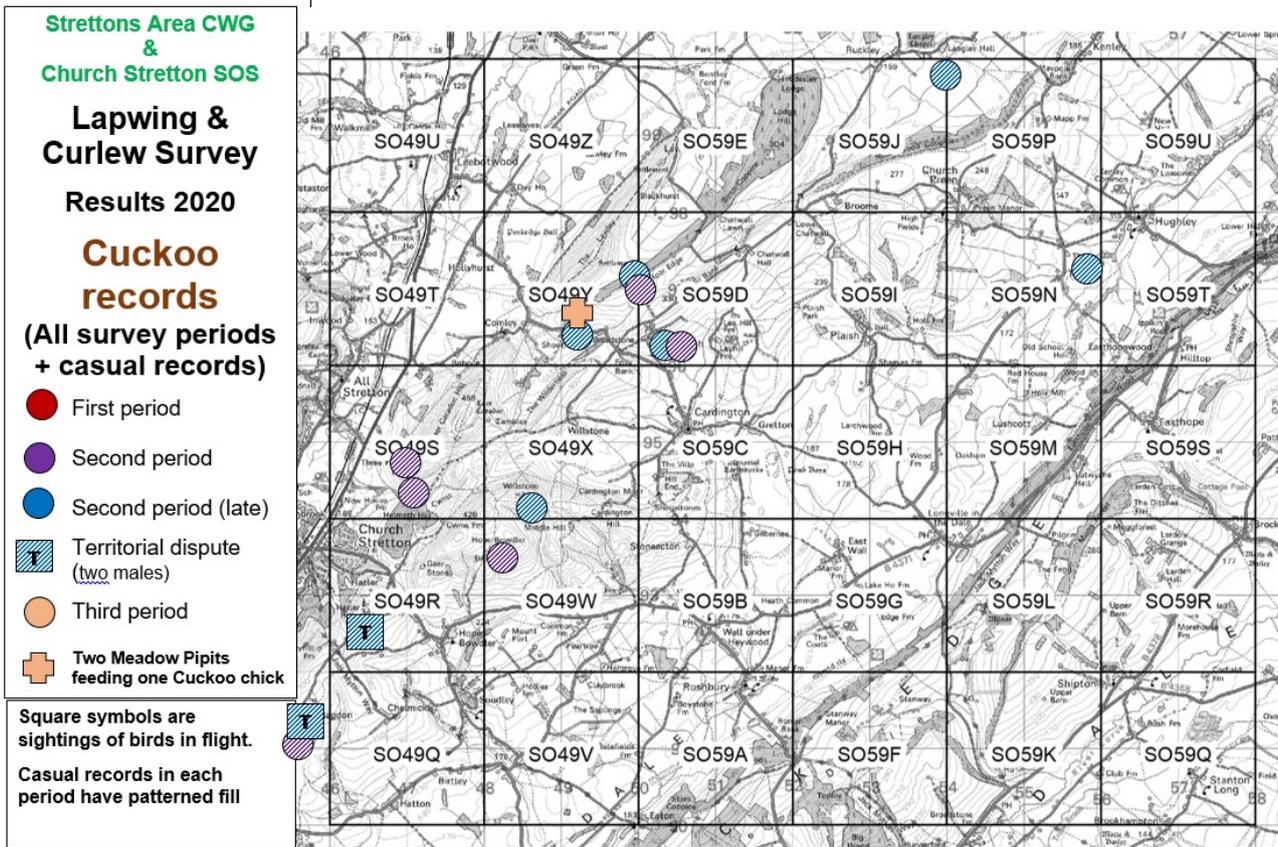
The home range of each female varies considerably, depending on the ease of finding enough nests of the host species (i.e. parts of the home range will not be suitable breeding habitat for the host species, and the home range needs to include feeding areas for the Cuckoo as well). Thus the females' home 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”).

A Cuckoo was heard regularly on Ragleth Hill (SO49L) over 3 - 4 weeks, the “best year for several”, and on one occasion two cuckoos were seen flying from Ragleth Hill to Hazler Hill (SO49R), one after the other about 30m apart, both calling as they went, an excellent record of two males in territorial conflict.

Later, two Meadow Pipits were seen feeding a recently fledged Cuckoo near Hoar Edge (SO59D) on 22 July, another excellent record of an unusual sighting. It is likely that all the records from SO49Y and SO59D are of one male, and the other three dots are separate individuals.

The Population estimate in the survey area is therefore 7 territorial males, substantially more than recorded in previous years. In 2019, there were records from four tetrads, SO49R, S and X, which were probably all the same male, and two in SO59L, so up to three males; in 2018, records from two tetrads (SO49W and X) were probably of one male, and in 2017, from two different tetrads (SO49S and Y) were again probably just one male).

Elsewhere in the Strettons area, one was heard frequently in May from Ludlow Road, Church Stretton (SO49L) probably the same male as the one on Ragleth Hill, and another from New Pool Hollow and Batch Valley (Long Mynd). Two were heard concurrently on several occasions above All Stretton (SO49M).



Red Kite

Red Kites were seen in several tetrads, reflecting the spread of this species. However, in view of the limited coverage, no comparison with previous years can be made.

A pair that nested last year north of Longville, in SO59I, returned to the same nest and raised two young. Another site, closer to Longville in SO59H, unsuccessfully occupied in 2018 and 2019, was not reoccupied.



A new site was occupied, near Stanway (SO59F). A breeding pair was found during the bird survey, in the first period before Coronavirus restrictions were introduced, but before

nesting would have started. A likely nest was seen, but it was not occupied when checked later, so the breeding attempt failed.

Kites were first found breeding in the area in 2012 (two sites, one east of the A49), and two further sites have been used prior to the three referred to above. However, there are likely to be other pairs nesting at unknown locations, as wing-tagged birds that are old enough to breed have been photographed in the area. Regular sightings throughout the year near Ragleth Hill (SO49S) suggest that might be one such location.

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 more frequently observed 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
Duncock	Reed Bunting	Swift (nest sites only)	Yellowhammer
Grey Partridge	Skylark	Tree Sparrow	

House Martin

Although it is not an Other Target Species, a new member reported a fairly large colony of House Martins, about a kilometre north-east of Longville, which provided pleasure during lock-down. There were a total of 20 nest cups on 16 June, all most probably occupied last year. This year an estimated 14 nests were active. Two pairs at a house in Ticklerton in 2019 did not return.

Lapwing and Curlew on the Long Mynd

Most of the Long Mynd is within the Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group area shown in Appendix 2, but it has not been included in the bird survey, as it is covered by a different Breeding Bird Survey.

It is not suitable habitat for Lapwing, and none are known to have nested there during the 1985-90 Bird Atlas, or since.

It is suitable habitat for Curlew and there was evidence of breeding in most tetrads during the 1985-90 Bird Atlas. The Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project surveyed the whole site in 1994-98, and estimated a dozen pairs in 1995. This had declined to only two pairs in 2004, and it has fluctuated between one and three pairs since. In 2017 three pairs were found, on Pole Bank, Wild Moor and near High Park. There have been two pairs each year since, with nests on Round Hill and Wildmoor in 2020. Both failed in early May.

Decline of Lapwing and Curlew

In England, Lapwing and Curlew are in decline, nationally, and in Shropshire. Objective evidence for this comes from Bird Atlas work, and the Breeding Bird Survey carried out each year by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), and the summary tables in the annual

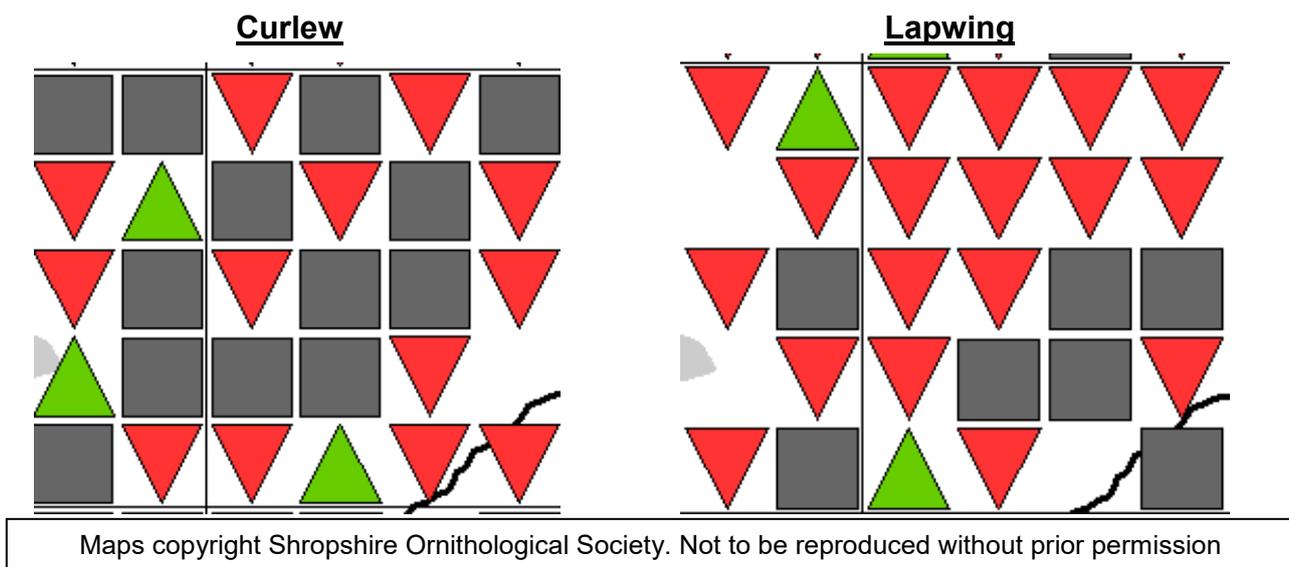
State of the UK's Birds. Figures for the decline of each species are summarised at the beginning of the respective species counts above.

Shropshire Ornithological Society undertook six years fieldwork between 1985 and 1990, and covered all 870 tetrads in the County. The results were published in *An Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Shropshire* in 1992. The survey was repeated in 2008-13, with similar amounts of fieldwork effort, and the Atlas maps produced are directly comparable.

The resulting breeding distribution change maps for the survey area are shown below. The grid lines enclose the 10km squares SO49 and SO59 on the Ordnance Survey National Grid, and each symbol represents a tetrad (2x2km square on the OS grid, 25 tetrads in each 10km square). The background pale grey shape on the left hand side of map is the eastern part of the town of Church Stretton.

Tetrads where each species was found in both Atlas surveys are shown as grey squares, and tetrads where it was found in the earlier period, but not the more recent period are marked with red downward triangles. It will be seen that the range of both species declined substantially in this area in only 20-25 years.

Breeding Distribution Change Maps for the Strettons survey area (1985-90 to 2008-13)



Surveys including counts complement these maps. The county Lapwing population has fallen from about 3,000 pairs in 1990 to only about 800 in 2013, a decline of around 70%. The Curlew population has fallen from about 700 pairs in 1990 to about 160 pairs in 2010 (a 77% decline).

Surveys carried out by several other Community Wildlife Groups suggest that the population has fallen further since 2010.

Other evidence for the decline of Lapwing and Curlew can be found on the website of the British Trust for Ornithology www.bto.org

Action to reverse the declines must start by improving the breeding success of the remaining pairs, so conservation action in the areas where they are still found, such as the Strettons area, is vital. Such action is being taken, nationally and locally. Both species 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.

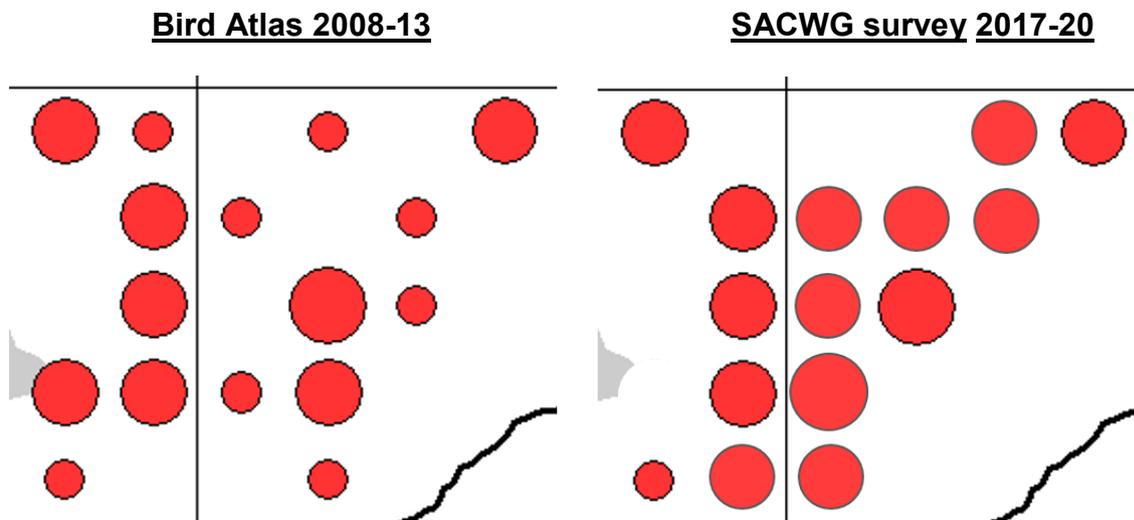
Both species nest on farmland, and the Countryside Stewardship Agri-environment Scheme (part of the system of payments to farmers through the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union) includes provision to reward farmers for sensitive management of habitat on their farms, and providing other environmental benefits. ES includes specific prescriptions, and payments, for Lapwing and Curlew habitat, if the farmer wants to apply, and the application is successful.

Comparison of Strettons Area CWG Bird Survey Results with the Shropshire Bird Atlas 2008-13

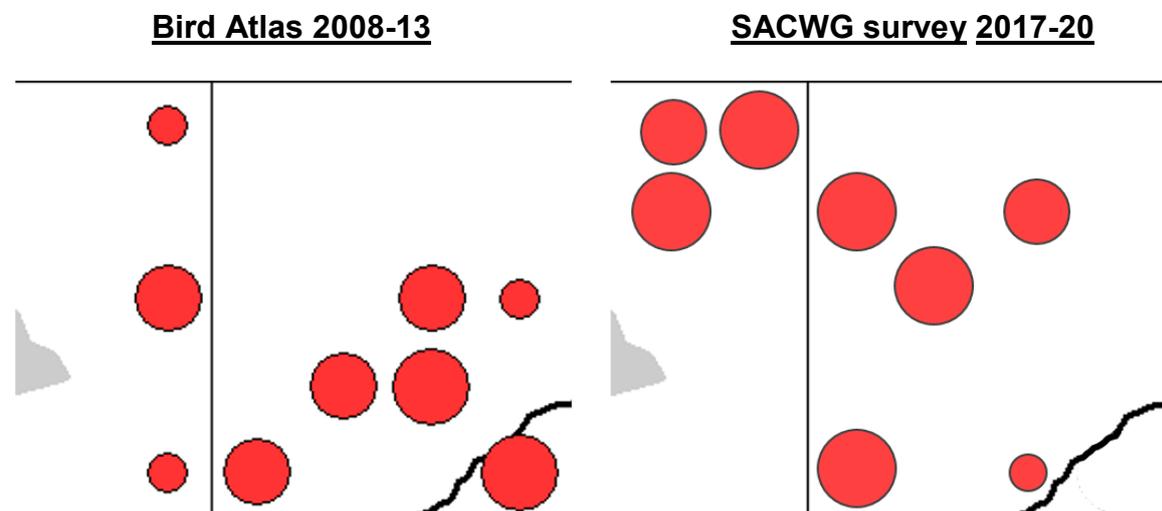
The next two pairs of maps show, on the left, the results of the Bird Atlas 2008-13 for the 30 tetrads covered by the survey, and, on the right, the results of the survey in the Strettons area as shown on the maps on pages 5 and 6. Each dot represents at least one observation during the Atlas period, or during the 2017 survey, in the appropriate tetrad.

- Large dot = Confirmed Breeding (Bird seen sitting on nest, or chicks seen)
- Middle dot = Probable Breeding (Pair or display seen)
- Small dot = Seen or heard in suitable habitat
- No dot = Not found

Curlew



Lapwing



It must be stressed that the Atlas map includes survey work over six years, not four, but most tetrads will not have been visited every year, it was only necessary to find confirmed breeding evidence once in the six years, and the surveyors were looking for breeding evidence for all species. On the other hand, the Bird Atlas maps are a record of what was found, and do not include the judgement to eliminate likely passage birds. It is unlikely that the 2017-20 surveys found all the pairs, but results have improved as surveyors have got to know their squares better, and more people find out about the survey and contribute records or information. Most squares have been visited in all four years, at the time when the target species are most likely to be found, so the recent survey is the more intensive.

The two target species are conspicuous and noisy, so most will not have been overlooked in the recent survey, and these maps suggest strongly that the decline of both species has continued over the last 10 years, as Curlew has disappeared from two squares, and Lapwing from five, over the last 10 years or so.

Work with Individual Farmers

The vast majority of the Lapwing and Curlew populations in the area nest on private farmland. The active support of farmers is therefore essential if the declines are to be reversed. As our knowledge builds up, efforts will be made to work with individual farmers to safeguard their habitats. This will be particularly important for finding and protecting Curlew nests, through the Save our Curlews project in the Strettons area 2021 and subsequent years (see below, and Appendix 4).

Recommendations

Natural England is recommended to encourage farmers with breeding Lapwing or Curlew on or near their land, to join the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, utilising the appropriate options to maintain and enhance the habitat for these priority species

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 and radio-tracking project had to be abandoned because of Coronavirus restrictions.

The Strettons area 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.

Save our Curlews in the Strettons area

Project work to find as many nests as possible and protect them with an electric fence, then radio tag the chicks and track them, is due to start in the Strettons area next Spring. Most of the money needed has been raised already, but we need to raise some more to complete the whole project. The Appeal Leaflet is attached as Appendix 4.

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 in Shropshire, 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.

DIPPER PROJECT

Dipper Habitat



Dippers inhabit fast flowing streams with rapids, small waterfalls and gravelly beds, and the Shropshire Hills, particularly in the Teme catchment, is the County stronghold.

They feed largely on larvae collected on the stream bed (they don't take invertebrates from bankside vegetation, like Grey Wagtails do), and, to a lesser extent, on small fish. They take readily to carefully-sited nest boxes over water.

Several other Community Wildlife Groups have put up boxes, and shown that they help increase the population, partly by

providing new nest sites on suitable stretches of stream which otherwise lack them, and partly by protecting the eggs and chicks from predators, so the average number of fledged young per nest increases.

Dippers in the Strettons area

Dippers have been absent from most of the Strettons area since the 1980s, but the population has increased across the whole of the Teme catchment in recent years, as a result of the nest boxes, which has led to more observations here. The Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group has now started its own Dipper Project, covering the Cound Brook north to Longnor, and the Quinney Brook south to Marshbrook, and their tributaries.

Dippers are very territorial, so the first step was getting a better understanding of which streams they inhabit, their favoured locations and the distances between nests, before putting up boxes.

Members were asked to report sightings in 2020, and from previous years, and an appeal for information appeared in *Stretton Focus*.

Nest building usually starts in early April, and young are being fed in late April or early May, so that is the best time to locate breeding pairs. Some pairs raise two broods.

All reports were followed up, and some nest sites were already known, and a search was made to locate nests. Three were found at previously known sites, and four were found at new sites. The nests of two pairs could not be found, as they probably nest under bridges in private gardens, in Church Stretton itself, and Little Stretton. Three previously-known sites were not visited, but it is likely at least two were occupied. The population in the area is therefore estimated at 9 – 11 pairs.

Two of the found nests each produced four fledged young, four more almost certainly produced fledged young (they were about to fledge from the nest), and the unfound nest in Little Stretton produced at least two fledged young. The final found nest was definitely predated. A pair near Leebotwood laid a second clutch, but the outcome is unknown.

Nest boxes

The Community Wildlife Group has received a grant from the Stepping Stones project, with the support of players of People's Postcode Lottery, which includes funding to install 10 new nest boxes. The nest finding in 2020 has identified some sites that will be more secure if boxes are placed there, and other suitable sites have been identified, some mid-way between nests now known, which may result in a population increase. These boxes should be installed before the start of the 2021 breeding season.

Rings

Ringling has been going on for many years, across the whole of the Teme Catchment, but also on the Cound Brook around Leebotwood and Longnor, but the colour-rings to identify individual birds in the field were only introduced in 2014. A colour-ring on the left leg is shown in the lower photo. The letter and two numbers on each ring are unique, so if the ring can be read it will add to what is known of the life history of the bird.



Colour-ringed Dipper © John Hanley

The smaller ring looks silver, and in silhouette it looks like a small wellington boot (the leg appears thicker at the bottom than the top). The Dipper in both photos has a small metal (BTO) ring on the right leg.

Members were asked to look for colour-rings and the smaller metal rings, and an attempt was made to read them all, by photography with a long lens, or a telescope. Nine colour-ringed birds were found: five were read, but four did not provide a good enough view.

Two of the five were colour-ringed in Cardingmill Valley in the winter of 2018, and the other three were all ringed in winter 2019, all adults at or very close to the sites where they nested. None of these five had been ringed earlier, as nestlings

By carrying on with the project in future years, it will be possible to build up an understanding of how long Dippers live, how far they move between fledging, roosting and nesting, and fidelity.

If you see a Dipper, please try and see if it has a ring and colour-ring, and report it, with the location, to Leo Smith (01694 720296 leo@leosmith.org.uk).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, REFERENCES AND FUTURE PLANS

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Most importantly, thanks to the Group members who undertook survey work, or contributed records, for Curlew, Lapwing, Kestrel and Cuckoo:-

John Bacon	Paul Eade	Andrew Morton
Alison Bennett	Ros & Charlie Ephraim	Claire Nicholson
Phil Constable	Joe Gomme	Ron Parnell
Julie Cowley	Melanie & Peter Houlder	Phil Playford
Stephen Cox	David John	Ian & Jill Plumridge
Adrian Cullis	Tony Jones	Leo Smith
Gill Davies	Sarah Lane	Pat Stokes-Smith
Anne Davis	Shirley McNichol	
Jude Duffy	Valerie Morris	

Alison Bennett, Phil Constable, Stephen Cox, Anne Davis, Paul Eade, Ros and Charlie Ephraim Shirley McNichol, Valerie Morris, Claire Nicholson and Phil Playford participated for the first time.

A further 24 individuals who have helped with the survey in previous years also undertook to survey squares in 2020, but were unable to do so because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Thanks for records and information about Dippers to Steve Butler, Sandra Whitlock, Julie Cowley, John and Anne Hanley, Richard Bacon, Greg and Sue Forster, John Arnfield, David John, Eric Sant, Carolyn Swales, Bernard Ford, Dave Pearce and Paul Westall, together with several readers of *Stretton Focus*.

Thanks also to:-

- Jonathan Groom, previously Shropshire Council Biodiversity Data Officer, who provided the survey maps.
- Gill Davies, for making several additional survey visits to monitor the Curlews
- John Bacon, for the information about Kestrel and Cuckoo on Ragleth Hill

The Curlew photo on the cover is © Gareth Thomas, and the Lapwing is © John Harding. Other photos are © Leo Smith, Allan Bernau, Miles Leach, Celia Todd, John Harding, Mark Hamblin, John Swift and John Hanley. Thanks to them all for permission to use them.

The Bird Survey, and the Dipper project, have benefitted from support received from players of People's Postcode Lottery.



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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.

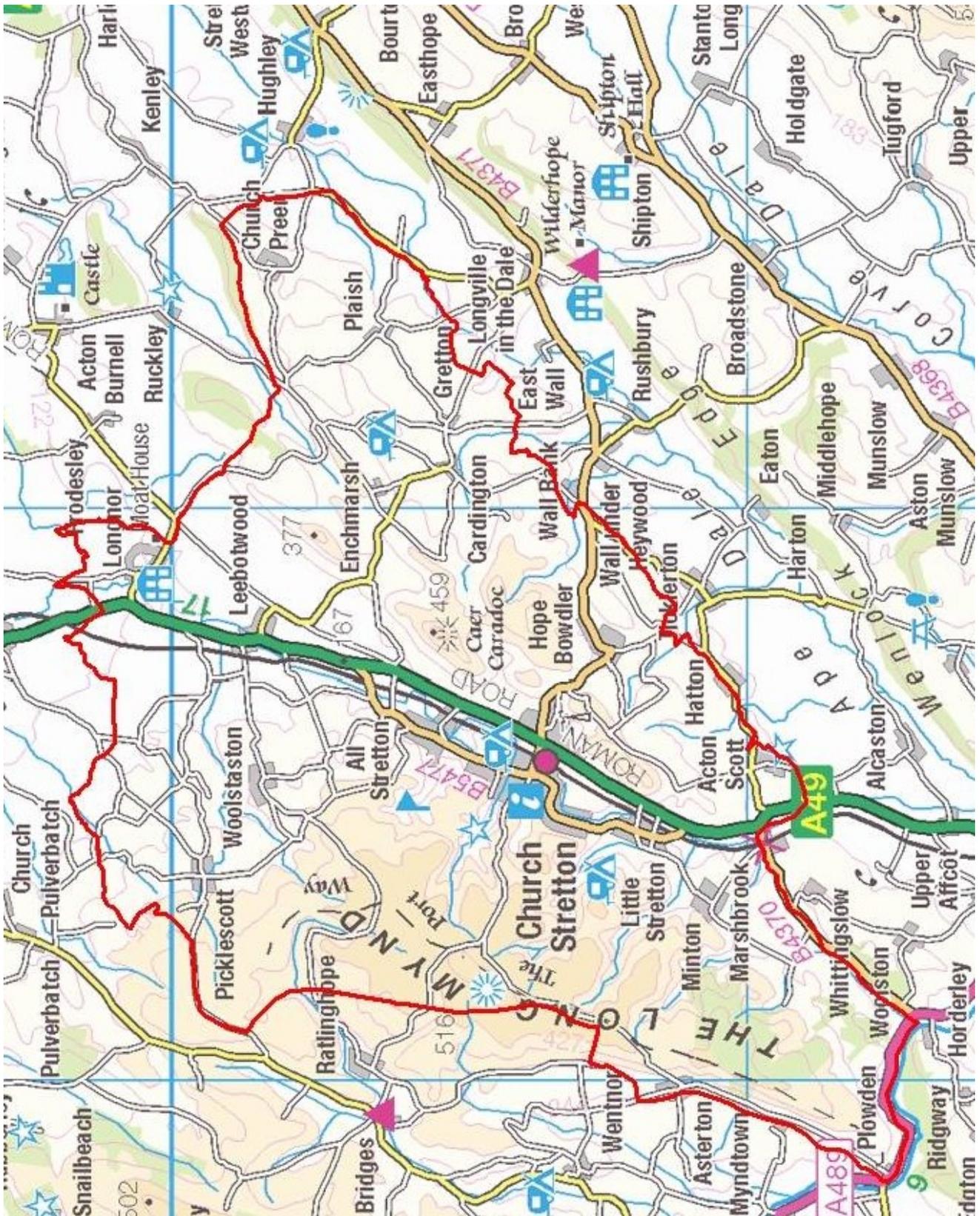
The Dipper project will also continue

The Save our Curlews project will get underway, subject to raising the necessary funds.

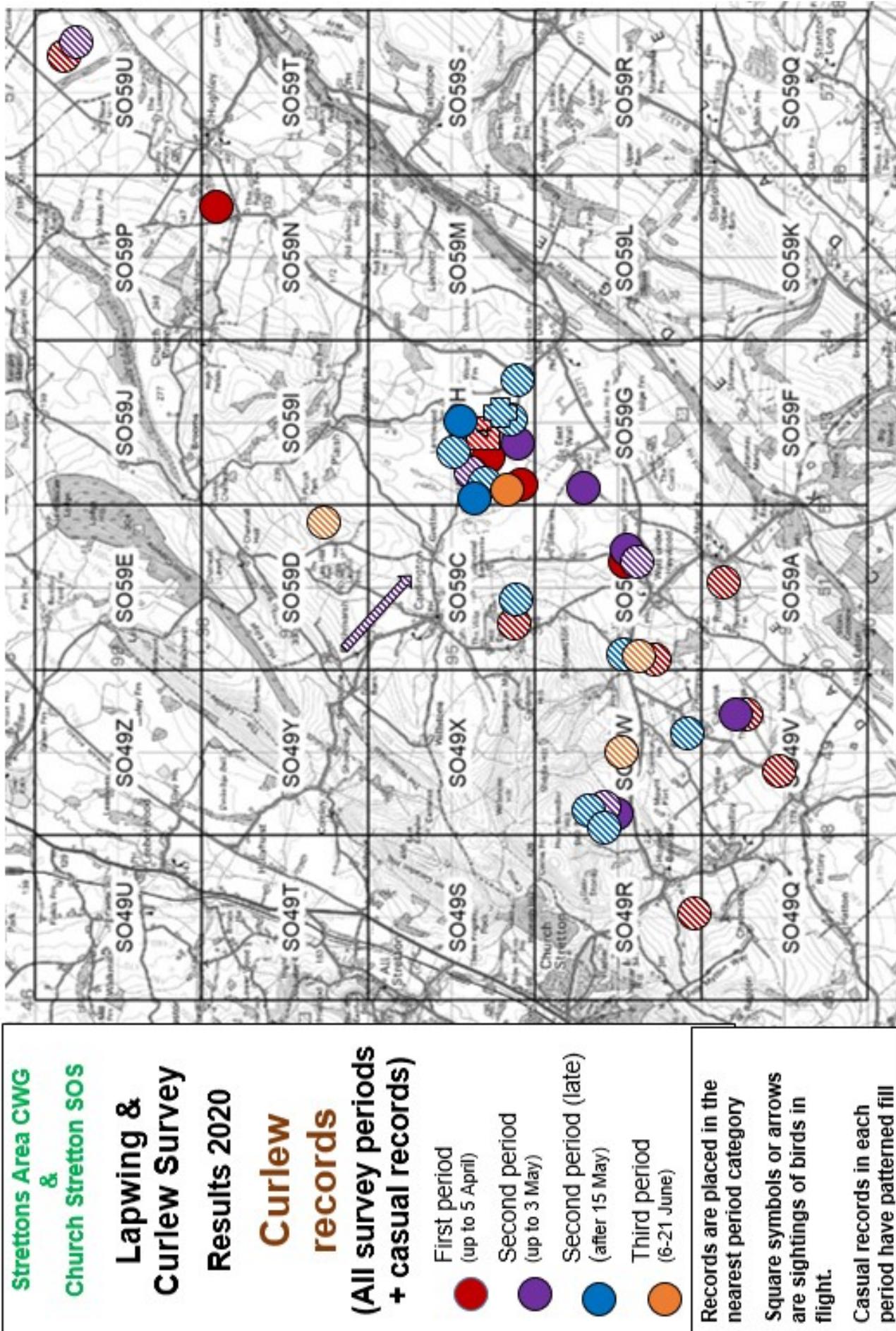
Details can also be found and downloaded from the joint website for all the Community Wildlife Groups in the Shropshire Hills, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk,

Leo Smith
December 2020

Appendix 2. Map of Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group area



Appendix 3. All Curlew Observations



Appendix 4. Save our Curlews appeal



Save our Curlews Appeal



We have been monitoring local Curlews since 2017, and found 7 - 9 pairs, similar to previous years. However, we think that at least one pair has disappeared since we started, only four years ago.

There is a real danger that we will lose these iconic birds for ever, unless we can find out why they are disappearing, and take action to halt and reverse the decline. Remind yourself of what we might lose, by listening to the Curlew's evocative and mournful song on www.british-birdsongs.uk/curlew/?type1585

The Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS) has been carrying out research with other Community Wildlife Groups to find nests, put an electric fence around them to protect the eggs from predators, and then fix radio-tags to the chicks and track them to see how they use the landscape, and what happens to them. Not enough young birds fledge to replace the older birds dying off. We need to know why.

This innovative research will be extended to the Strettons area in 2021, with land-owners help. It is expensive, but we have a grant of £5,000 towards the cost from the National Trust's Stepping Stones Project, which has benefitted from support received from players of People's Postcode Lottery. We need to raise another £3,680 to carry it out.

Please use the form overleaf for your donation.

If you pay income tax, please complete the Gift Aid certificate too. This increases the value of your donation by 25%, because SOS can claim the Gift Aid from HMRC.

If the appeal raises more than we need to complete the planned work in 2021, the money will be carried forward to 2022. Circumstances change each year, so we need to do the research for three successive years to draw reliable conclusions.

Curlew Facts and Figures

Curlew is the "most pressing bird conservation priority in the UK", because we have an estimated 28% of the European, and 19-27% of the world, population. It is on the national *Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern* 4, because of a decline of 62% in the UK between 1969 and 2014.

In Shropshire, it declined 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, but the County holds almost 30% of the total in southern England. At the current rate of decline, the County population will half 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 SOS.

You can find more information about local Curlews, including details of how to make donations and where to send them, on our website www.shropscwgs.org.uk/strettons-area-wildlife-group/ or contact Leo Smith (01694 720296, leo@leosmith.org.uk)

The Appeal is
supported by

