

A bird with a long, straight beak and mottled brown and white feathers is shown in flight against a clear blue sky. The bird's wings are spread wide, showing the intricate patterns on the feathers.

Clee Hill

Community Wildlife Group

A bird with a distinctive crest of long, thin feathers on its head is standing on a patch of grass. The bird has a black and white face, a dark breast, and iridescent wings. Its legs are reddish-pink.

*Curlews,
Lapwings &
Other Birds
Survey 2017*

Curlews, Lapwings and Other Birds Survey 2017

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Objectives

Bird Group members were asked to find out where Curlew and Lapwing occur in the breeding season, record behaviour indicative of breeding, and record other species, most of which are of nature conservation importance (i.e. they were Target Species for Natural England’s Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (HLS), are on the *Red List* or *Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern* because they have suffered large declines in the last 25 or 50 years, and are Target Species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan).

In addition to Lapwing and Curlew, the target species were:-

- | | | |
|------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| • Kestrel | • Cuckoo | • Spotted Flycatcher |
| • Red Kite | • Dipper | • Tree Sparrow |
| • Barn Owl | • Swift (nest sites only) | • Linnets |
| • Grey Partridge | • Yellow Wagtail | • Bullfinch |
| • Snipe | • Dunnock | • Yellowhammer |
| • Skylark | • Stonechat | • Reed Bunting |
| • Meadow Pipit | • Wheatear | |

This repeated similar surveys undertaken every year since 2012, to monitor population trends for key species, as well as establish the current population and distribution.

Methodology

The area covered by the Clee Hill Partnership was divided up into 20 tetrads (2x2 kilometre squares, made up of four of the one kilometre squares shown on Ordnance Survey maps). A map showing all these tetrads, with the Tetrad Reference code, is attached as Appendix 1. (The prefix SO (defining the 100 km square on the OS National Grid) has been omitted, as this is common to all the squares in the area).

People interested in helping were given a copy of the Outline Survey Instructions, attached as Appendix 2.

Those who agreed to help were allocated a square / tetrad, and requested to survey it once during each of three specified two week periods, around 1st April, 1st May and mid-June.

- The first period follows the arrival of Lapwing and Curlew back on the breeding grounds. This is the best time to find breeding Lapwing (first egg date is usually around 1st April).
- The second period is the best time to find breeding Curlew (first egg date is usually around 30th April).
- The third period is timed to find any Curlews that have successfully hatched and still have chicks. It is also the best time to find the Other Target Species.

Members were provided with a large scale map of their tetrad for each of the three periods, to record observations, and requested to spend around three hours on each visit. The survey Instructions were printed on the back of the map. These instructions are attached as Appendix 3. Members were also asked to record target species just beyond the boundary of their tetrad.

Members were also requested to send in "Casual Records" of Lapwing, Curlew Kestrel and Red Kite seen at any time in the rest of the area, and also any seen in their own tetrad(s) outside the periods when the three tetrad surveys were being carried out. Casual Record maps were provided for this purpose.

Members were consulted on whether to hold a feedback meeting to present the results of the first two surveys, but most had undertaken survey work in previous years, and it was felt to be unnecessary.

In 2014, for the first time, some survey work was carried out in all 20 tetrads, but two tetrads (57U and X) received no coverage in 2015. These squares were covered in 2016, but 67H was not. In 2017, 67H was covered, and all squares were allocated at the start of the season, but no survey returns were received for 68J. Again, priority was given to squares with Curlews, particularly the cluster around Cleeton St Mary (squares 67D, E and J), and 67D and 67j were each surveyed by two members. A few other squares were also surveyed by more than one member, doing their home square. Altogether, members spent almost 175 hours on surveys (excluding the double time spent when couples or friends surveyed a square together), not as good as the highest ever figure in 2015, but the figures are not directly comparable as some members sent in records for later surveys on casual record sheets. This still represents an excellent effort.

Curlew

The location of all the Curlews found during the surveys, or reported on Casual Record maps, is shown in Appendix 4. These observations have been analysed, and the apparent number of territories is shown on page 5.

In 2015, analysis of the cluster of records in tetrads SO67D, E and I was greatly helped by having survey observations from several members, and for the first time several records of concurrent observations of Curlews in different territories allowed detailed analysis which

confirmed the presence of five pairs (a range of 3-5 or 4-5 has been found in previous years). These observations included 36 records from the diary kept at Pot House Farm, which again suggested one pair in square SO67I and the southern part of 67J, with a different pair in SO67D (Angela and Kirsty Mackirdy, *pers.comm.*).

Other observations separated this territory in 67D from another one spanning 67D and 67E west of The Blue Stone Farm and Aerial Cottage; another on Random Hill above Shirley Farm; and another west of Cleetongate in 67E.

In 2016, only four of these territories were occupied. There were no survey observations of Curlews in 67D (Random Hill) and the two local residents at Whatshill who survey the square confirmed that they had no casual sightings of Curlews up there either. Presence of this territory in previous years was confirmed without doubt by the presence of a nest, found with four eggs, in 2012. However, in 2017 there was a pair on Random Hill, on the border of 67D and 57Y, which defended a nest site against Buzzard and Crow, suggesting chicks were present. The territory at Cleetongate was apparently unoccupied, leaving four pairs again.

There were again two pairs in 67J.

No Curlew were found at the northern end of 58Q, where they were found every year until 2015. Only one, rather than two pairs, were found near Hollywaste (67M and 67N), the same result as 2016.

One was heard twice on the border of 57U and 58Q, where a pair was seen in 2016, and 2012-14. The square was not covered in 2015.

Little is known about the outcome of these breeding attempts, as the third survey, designed to see which Curlews have chicks, takes place around a month before any young birds are due to fledge. Breeding success was almost certainly very poor in 2012 and 2013 because of the bad weather during these breeding seasons (April – July), but it is likely to have been better in 2014, because of the warm spring, but perhaps poor again in 2015, because of the cold dry spring. In 2016 four pairs were still active in June, and the pair near Cramer Gutter fledged one young. The nest and chick were protected from mammalian predation by being inside a rabbit (and hence fox and badger) proof fence at a tree nursery. A pair with a chick were seen at the same site on 14 June 2017, the adults were alarm calling there three days later, and the chick was seen again on 23 June. The owners reported that two chicks hatched but one was later found dead. They saw the remaining young curlew flying around, so hopefully it successfully fledged. The site on Random Hill where Curlews defended a nest or chicks, probably the latter, on #, and drove off a Buzzard on 24 June, almost certainly had chicks on that date. However, it was revisited on three subsequent dates, but no Curlews were seen, suggesting that this pair failed too. Apart from the chick near Cramer Gutter, there is no evidence that any young fledged in the survey area in 2017.

Curlews at Pot House farm (67I) were first seen and heard on 27 February, the same first date as last year. Two were fighting in early April, when pairs would be establishing territory, but there were few records in May, and none of more than two birds. This suggests the presence of at least two pairs, but there were fewer records than last year, and the last record was 14 June, suggesting that these pairs failed early.

In addition, there have been three, possibly four, pairs that nest outside the area, but which forage in it, and one or both of each of these pairs are sometimes recorded in our area.

grounds, and return to their natal area to breed when they are two. New pairs have to establish a territory, and are likely to be faithful to it subsequently.

They are long-lived, often living to 20 years old or more, but the population is falling nationally and locally because not enough young birds fledge and reach breeding age to replace the older ones dying off.

In the light of this knowledge, the distribution maps included in all the Group's reports in the five years from the launch in 2012, including the 2017 results referred to above, have been reviewed and compared. The results are as follows:-

57T – occasional records of a pair believed to nest outside the area, to the west, but no records in 2016 or 2017.

57U – found every year except 2015, when the square was not surveyed, but the pair found on the first survey in 2016 was not seen again, and no evidence of breeding was found. A calling bird was heard twice in 2017. The status of this territory is uncertain, but, in view of the 2017 records it has been counted as still present.

58Q – present in the northern part of the square every year up until 2015, but not in 2016 or 2017.

57Y – two pairs nested regularly for many years until 2014, when the fields they used were grazed. None have been recorded in the square since.

57Z – present every year

58V and 68A – a pair nest just outside the area, to the north in 68B. They have been there many years, including the whole of the period 2012-17. Records in these two squares in previous years, but not in 2017, are probably due to this pair. Curlews have not been seen in these two squares on surveys after April, and the sporadic records over the years are likely to represent the territory boundary between the pair in 68B, and the pairs to the south. It is likely that, if there had been a pair breeding in these squares regularly, it would have been very active, defending its territory against its neighbours, and would have been recorded in most, if not every, year.

67D, 67E, 67I and 67J – these four squares have been the regular hotspot in the area. In the early years it was not possible to determine the exact number of pairs, and the cluster of records was variously interpreted as 3-5 or 4-5 pairs. However, in 2015, concurrent observations proved five pairs. The pair on Magpie Hill, whose nest with four eggs was found in 2012, were not there in 2016, but were present again in 2017. Conversely, the pair at Cleetongate, present every year up until 2016, was not found in 2017.

67M and 67N – there were two pairs near the Hollywaste crossroads in the early years, and nests of both were found in 2013. Records from 2014 and 2015 indicate 1 – 2 pairs there, but there was apparently only one in 2016 and 2017.

67P – the pair in the north-west of the square, near Cramer Gutter, have been present every year, and fledged young in 2014 (2) and 2016 (1). The pair to the south were first present in 2015, and were also there in 2016 and 2017. This new pair also suggests successful breeding somewhere in or near the area in 2013. The arrival of the new pair in 2015 resulted in many more observations in 67P, and 68F and 68K, and more than in any previous year. Two pairs were observed there in 2016 as well, as one fledged young while the nest of the new pair was found predated.

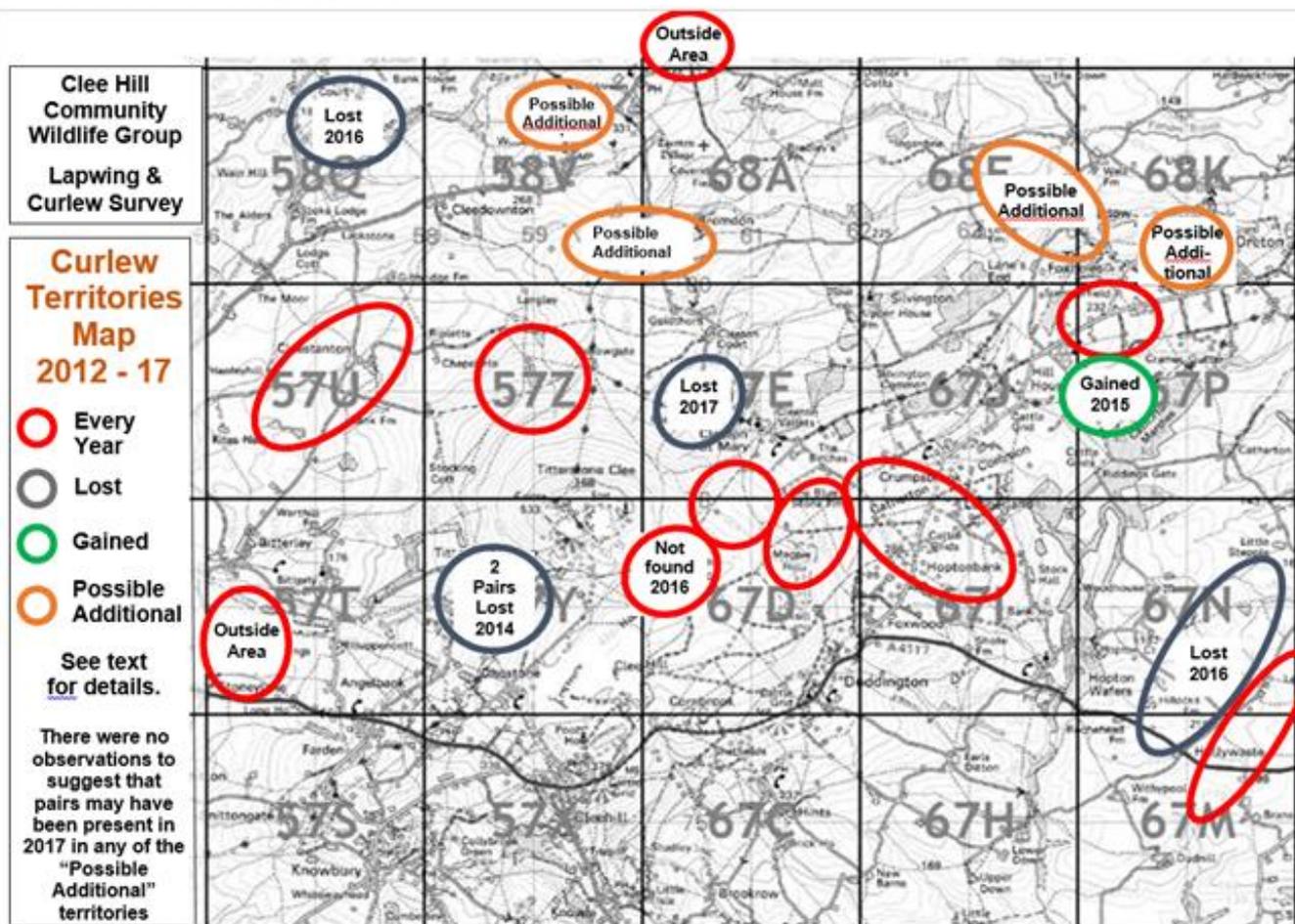
68F – sporadic records over the years, particularly in 2015, were likely to reflect the pair near Cramer Gutter using feeding areas further north, displaced by their new neighbour to the south, which would also encourage the pair further north still, from outside the area near Stoddeston, to come to the southern edge of their territory to defend it.

68K – there were several records in the north of the square in 2012, but not since. These were attributed to the pair breeding near Stoddeston. There were no records in the south of the square until 2015, which are also likely to reflect the pair near Cramer Gutter using feeding areas further north, away from their new neighbour to the south.

Based on this analysis, it will be seen that five pairs have been lost, and one gained, between 2012 and 2016. Apparently the pair at Cleetongate was absent in 2017, but replaced by a pair re-occupying Random Hill. The pair in 57U, whose current status is uncertain, has been counted as not lost. The population for each year in this assessment is within the range published in each Annual Report, except the under-estimate published in 2012, which was revised upwards in the 2013 report in the light of results in that year. The apparent increase between 2012 and 2013 was probably due to improved and increased survey coverage, as more members got to know their squares better. The highest estimate of 12 – 14 was made in 2013, and the current assessment has revised that to 13 pairs.

This analysis is summarised on the Curlew Territories 2012-17 map. There were no observations to suggest that pairs may have been present in 2017 in any of the “Possible Additional” territories.

Curlew Territories 2012 - 17



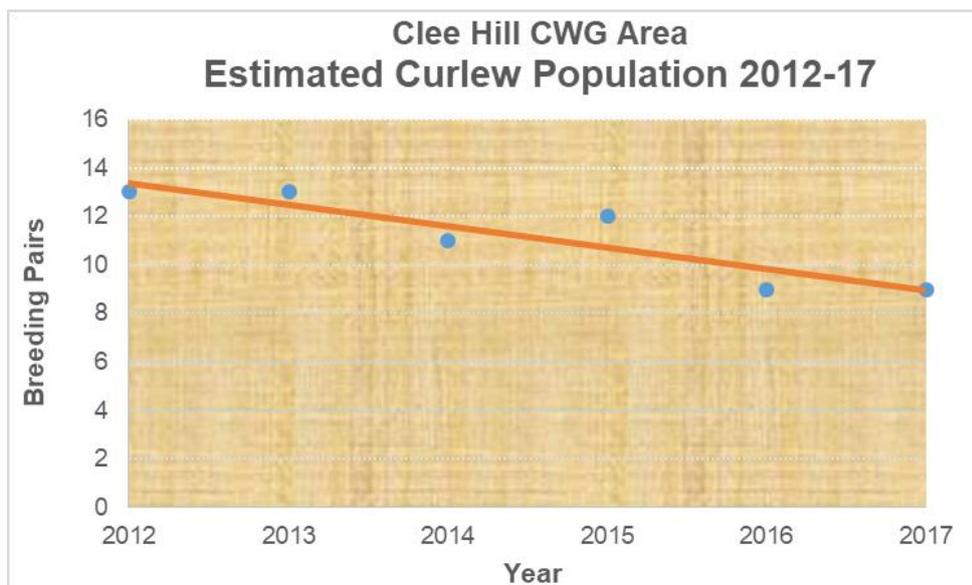
Curlew Population Trend

The revised annual population, and population trend, excluding possible additional pairs, is shown in the chart.

It will be seen that the net population loss is four pairs, a decline of 31% in only six years.

Breeding success has been insufficient to sustain the population for many years, so it is likely that the population is elderly, and it may well disappear quickly if nothing is done to

Figure 1. Curlew Population and Trend 2012 - 2017



improve breeding success. This process may be starting already, with the apparent loss of three pairs in 2016.

It is, of course, possible that pairs were present in the apparently vacant territories, and efforts will be made to search them in 2018.

Lapwing

Four Lapwings were seen frequently at the start of the year into March, and were still present at the start of the breeding season and in to May, north-east of the Hollywaste crossroads, on the border between 67M & N. Three chasing off a Kestrel on 10 June, when 8 Lapwings were seen, indicates that at least one pair had chicks, and 8 were still there on 16 June, driving off corvids. Twenty Lapwings were present on 12 June, suggesting that the small breeding colony had been joined by failed breeders from elsewhere.

From the survey results and casual records, it is believed that there were 2 – 4 breeding pairs of Lapwing in 2017.

This is a welcome improvement on 2016 or 2015, when none were found, and compares with 2 in 2014, 1 - 2 pairs in 2013, and 3 pairs in 2012.

The pairs seen in 2014 and 2013, and one of the pairs in 2012, were also near Hollywaste. Pairs found in SO57U and SO68K in 2012 have not been relocated since.

Anecdotal Evidence for the Decline of Lapwing and Curlew

Members of the Bird Group 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. Lapwings have apparently declined much more than Curlews. Specific examples of anecdotal evidence were collected in 2015: a farmer in 57Z, who hasn't seen either Lapwing or Curlew for many years; a farmer just south of 67H, who hasn't seen either for at least five years, but who said Curlew used to be more common; and a resident in 68A who hasn't seen Curlew "for a very long time". Several other specific anecdotes were quoted in the 2012 and 2013 reports.

Other Target Species

The numbers of the Other Target Species recorded during each of the three survey periods are listed in the Tables in Appendix 5. They are summarised in Table 1.

The summary table shows the maximum count on survey visits for each species in each tetrad. This may under-record some species, but the alternative – adding all the counts together – would lead to considerable double or triple counting of some individual birds.

Note that members were asked to record individual birds, not pairs (so at some locations both the birds in the pair were recorded, and in the final survey some recently fledged juveniles may have been recorded as well).

Some members did not send in survey returns, particularly for the third period. This would not have affected the number of records of the main target species. Some of the returns did not include the time spent, and some members sent in returns on casual record sheets, so the total time put into surveys taken from record sheets (almost 175 hours) understates the effort put in.

Table 1. Other Target Species - Summary

Square	Maximum Number of Each Species Recorded on Survey Visits														
(Tetrad)	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Dipper	Dunnock	Wheat-ear	Stone-chat	Linnet	Bull-finch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
57S									6						
57T									2						
57U		1							1			1			
57X			1	1	1	1			2	1	1		1		
57Y			2	2	8	5	1			6	2			2	
57Z		1	2	2	10				3	3	1	6		4	4
58Q					5	13			3				4	5	
58V				1	6				4			6	2	14	
67C						5		2	5		5	7		5	
67D		5	5	1	5	6	1		3	4	2	5			1
67E		1			3	5			2		1	3			3
67H				1	2		1	4							
67I		2	2		4	6					6				
67J		1	2			7	1				3	1			
67M	8	2	1		12		1				2	4	4	1	
67N		2			4								2	1	
67P		2	1		2		1				3				
68A															
68F									6						7
68K		1							4					1	
TOTALS	8	23	18	9	63	49	7	6	41	20	28	33	13	40	8

Not surprisingly, Barn Owl, Grey Partridge and Yellow Wagtail were not recorded, but, more surprisingly, no Swift (nest sites) Spotted Flycatcher or Tree Sparrow were recorded on surveys either. In addition to the results for 15 species shown in Table 1, a Snipe was recorded in 67E during the first survey, but it was almost certainly a passage migrant, rather than a breeding bird.

As expected in a survey of this type, the expertise of members, and the time they had available to undertake the surveys, varied considerably. The survey squares also vary considerably, in accessibility and terrain. The “detectability” of the birds themselves also varies considerably, according to prevailing weather conditions, time of day, stage in the breeding cycle, and the normal behaviour of each species. Thus the survey results will give an indication of the species present, but only a very small proportion will have been recorded.

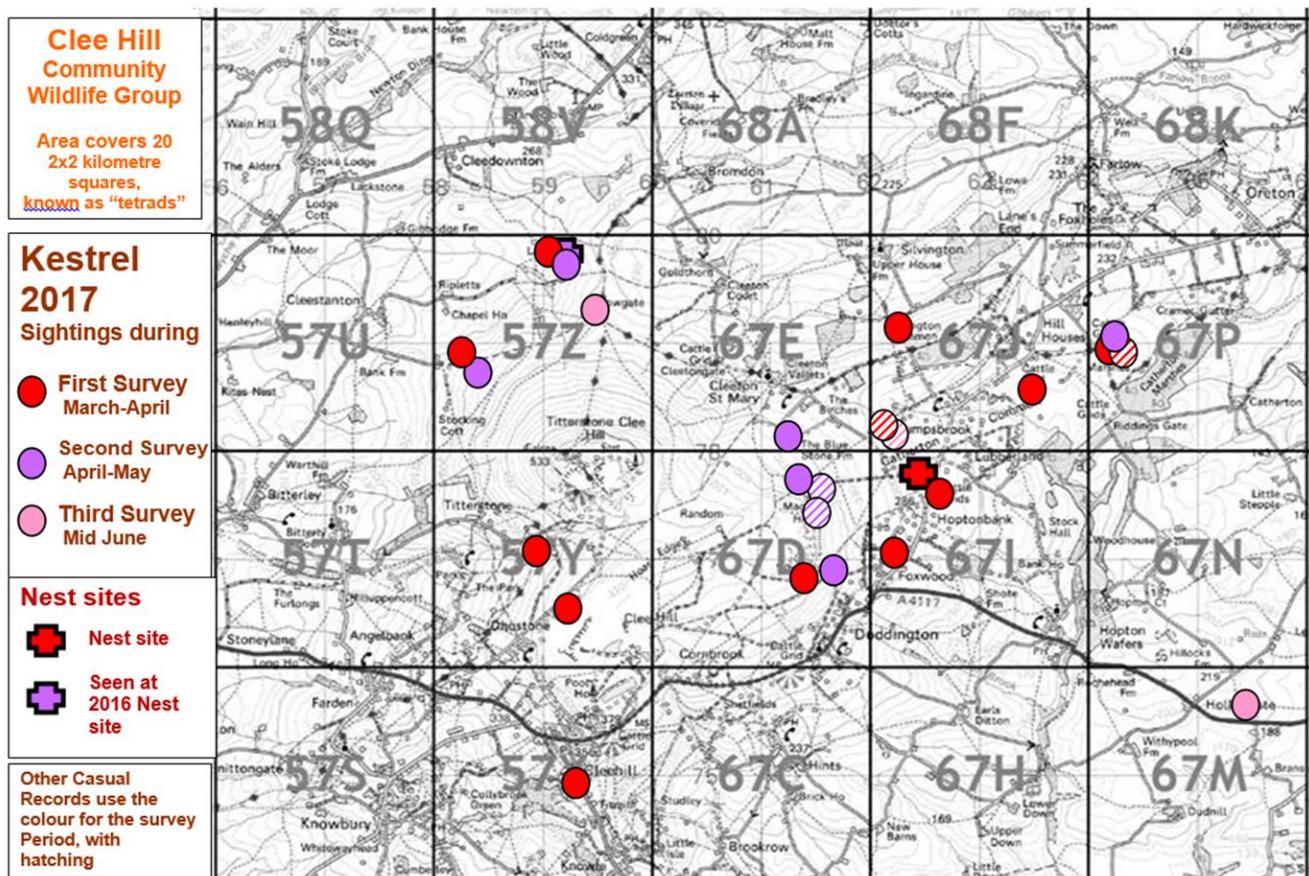
It will be seen that Skylark, Dunnock and Yellowhammer are widespread and numerous, Meadow Pipit are numerous in restricted parts of the area where suitable habitat still exists (the hills and Commons), and the remaining species that were found are present only in their specific habitats, and in small numbers.

Kestrels are conspicuous, and forage over large areas, so an assessment can be made of their population. The records from 2017 are shown in the map.

Kestrel Observations 2017

The new nest box near Pot house Farm in SO67I was occupied, and one chick was ringed on 30 June and fledged on 16 July. The nest in SO57Z was apparently occupied again (outcome unknown).

The number and distribution of records was very similar to 2016, apart from a new cluster of records on Magpie Hill. Casual records of family parties in 2016, at the top of Clee Hill in 57Y and near Botany Bay in 67P, were not repeated, but several records from both sites suggest that these pairs were present again in 2017. The analysis in 2014, when there were more records, suggested perhaps nine pairs, and these still appear to be present, except perhaps in 57U. The estimate made in 2016, of 8 – 9 pairs, still seems reasonable.



Cuckoo was recorded in 6 squares, compared with 5 in 2016, 7 in 2015 and 5 in 2014. Each pair ranges far and wide, so an estimate of two breeding pairs seems reasonable. The population has been estimated at this level, or just one pair, each year since 2012.

Red Kites were recorded in six squares during surveys, more than the two last year, and the same as the previous highest, the six in 2015, five in 2014, and four in 2013, but there were also several casual records. There was no evidence of breeding.

There was a report of a pair of Kites going in and out of a wood throughout the 2013 breeding season, suggesting an active nest in the area, but it was received too late to check. Such a nest would be the most easterly found in Shropshire since successful breeding recommenced in 2006, following a gap of 130 years. However, the pair have not returned to this site in subsequent years. Across the County, more nests were found in 2017 (28) than in any previous year.

Dippers were seen in two squares on surveys, and several active Dipper nests were found in the area (Jon Lingard, *pers.comm.*).

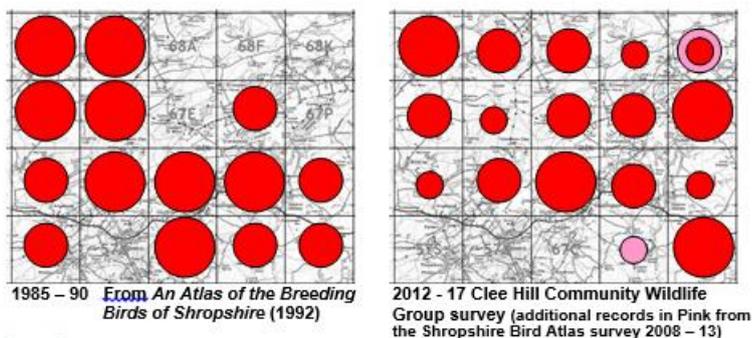
Decline of Lapwing and Curlew

Lapwing and Curlew are in decline, nationally, here, and elsewhere in Shropshire. Nationally, both have recently been added to the *Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern*, Lapwing in 2008 and Curlew in 2015, because of the magnitude of the decline

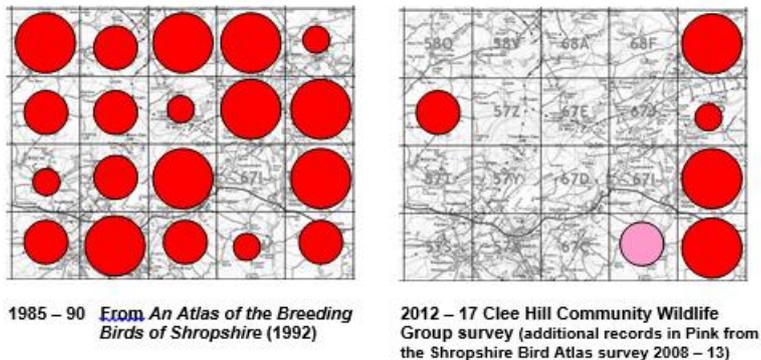
The decline in the Cleve Hill area is shown graphically in Figure 1. This compares the distribution maps representing the results of the current survey in 20 tetrads with the relevant parts of the maps shown in *An Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Shropshire*, based on six years fieldwork 1985-90, and published in 1992. Both maps have been compiled on the same basis and it is likely that more fieldwork has taken place in the current period, so the decline is undoubtedly real.

Figure 1. Distribution of Curlew and Lapwing in the Cleve Hill area: Comparison between 1985-90 and 2008 – 17

Curlew



Lapwing



A large dot indicates that breeding was proved in the tetrad (usually a nest was found, or a bird was seen incubating, or dependent young were seen), a middle size dot indicates probable breeding (usually a pair was seen, or territorial behaviour was observed), and a small dot indicates possible breeding (a bird was seen or heard in the breeding season).

Such an observation needs to occur at least (but perhaps only) once in the whole Atlas / survey period, and it gives no indication of the number of breeding pairs. These distribution maps therefore probably overestimate the population:-

- Lapwings have specific nesting habitat requirements, which in this area usually mean they nest on arable fields planted with spring crops, which get moved each year by crop rotation on farms. Therefore one pair, or a small colony, may breed in several different tetrads over a period of years.
- A pair of Curlews may also move their nest from place to place within their large territories, so again one pair may nest in several tetrads in the Atlas period. Nests are difficult to find, but pairs and territorial display are relatively easy to find, but may be observed anywhere within the large territory, so one pair may be recorded in several tetrads.

Even so, it is clear from the distribution maps in Figure 1 that both species are now absent from places where they were found 20 – 25 years ago. The decline of the Curlew population by 30% between 2012 and 2017, and the absence of Lapwing altogether in 2015 and 2016, shows that the decline is continuing.

Action to attempt to reverse these declines is being taken. 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 Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (part of the system of payments to farmers through the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union) included provision to reward farmers for sensitive management of habitat on their farms, and providing other environmental benefits. Farmers applying to join the scheme had to take into account the breeding habitat requirements of a number of birds, including Lapwing and Curlew, if they breed on or near the farm, or use land there for feeding. HLS includes specific prescriptions, and payments, for Lapwing and Curlew habitat, if the farmer wants to take them up. The data provided by Community Wildlife Groups, on the location and habitat of these priority species, helped Natural England (the Government Agency responsible both for achieving the Biodiversity targets, and administering the Environmental Stewardship Scheme) to target its limited resources more effectively to achieve this objective.

At least two farms were able to join HLS as a result of the Group's survey results.

HLS has now come to an end, and has been replaced by a new Scheme, Countryside Stewardship, part of the EU Common Agricultural Policy for 2015 - 22, with similar objectives. However, it is intended to focus the new scheme more, to help achieve the Government's Biodiversity 2020 targets, and overcome the fragmentation of habitats that has led to so much of the decline of wildlife.

A Targeting Statement and Criteria have been approved, and new applications have been invited from 2016 onwards. As a direct result of evidence supplied by the Upper Onny Wildlife Group, Curlew has been added to Lapwing as a Target Species for Countryside Stewardship. However, the new scheme is more bureaucratic and less generous, so it is not likely to be particularly effective in halting the decline, and "Brexit" makes its future uncertain

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

Use of Clee Hill CWG Survey Results

Most importantly, the Clee Hill CWG 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 Natural England with objective evidence to judge individual farm applications to join Countryside Stewardship, and information 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 now covers the five years 2014 – 19.

The records at tetrad level were also supplied to Shropshire Ornithological Society for incorporation into the Shropshire Bird Atlas, based on six years fieldwork 2008-13, and

results should be published in a new county Avifauna, *The Birds of Shropshire*, around the end of 2017.

Comparison of the Atlas maps from the current project with those from the 1985 – 90 Atlas, for the whole of Shropshire, show that Curlew, Lapwing and Kestrel are all declining rapidly. Our survey results show that Curlew and Kestrel are still well established here, and this area is therefore very important to them.

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

Barn Owl Nest Box Scheme

The Bird Group initiated a Barn Owl nest box scheme in the area in 2013.

Barn Owl was on the *Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern 3 (2009)*, because of a long term population decline caused by loss of foraging habitat and nest sites. Conservation action (nest boxes and field margins through agri-environment schemes) led to Barn Owl being moved to the Green List in 2015, but there is no evidence that any recovery has

occurred in this area. Provision of nest boxes will help reverse this decline locally. Nest boxes are more likely to be used, and help increase the population, if they are put near to existing Barn Owl territories and foraging areas.

These specially designed nest boxes can be provided free of charge to farmers and landowners with suitable habitat in the Cleve Hill area. This requires-

- An isolated farm building, or large isolated tree or pole more than 400 metres from nearest woodland
- Four hectares (10 acres) of permanent rough grassland nearby, several inches tall to provide cover for voles and other prey



A poster advertising the scheme has been put up around the area. Several landowners have responded and potential sites have been assessed by Chris Bargman and Anton Schooley, together with John Lightfoot from the Shropshire Barn Owl Group.

Several boxes have now been installed, like the one at Mahorall Farm pictured, and it, and an indoor box at the same site, have both been used for roosting in 2016 and 2017,

but there has been no evidence of breeding.

No new boxes were installed in 2017, and there are one outdoor and one indoor box unallocated from the first batch made, for installation if suitable sites are identified.

A Barn Owl has been seen occasionally over the Catherton Marshes common, but otherwise no positive sightings have been reported.

If you see a Barn Owl, we'd like to know, please

For further information, or to report a Barn Owl sighting in the Clee Hill area, please contact Chris Bargman 01299 270514 helpbarnowls@gmail.com

Bird Walks

Two walks were held, for members and the general public

1. Sunday 19 April, starting at Cleeton St Mary, and visiting the Common up to Magpie Hill. This walk also provided practical training for people who wanted to help with the Bird Survey
2. Saturday 13 May at The Novers woodland, specifically to learn about identifying birds by their song (Joint Meeting with Clee Hill Heritage Trust)

A wide variety of birds were seen and heard, and there were 6 participants on the first and 10 on the second.

Acknowledgements

Most importantly, thanks to the Group members who undertook the survey work:-

Chris Bargman	Peter Johnson
Bob Braddock	Ian King
Beth & Lionel Bridge	Angela & Iain Mackirdy
Simon Brown & Shropshire Wild	Chris Neal
Team volunteers	Carl Price & family
Barbara Daniels	Peta Sams
Rachael Davenhill	Gareth Thomas
Eric Davies	Linda Webb
Ian Ferguson	Marian Wootton
Ewan & Celia Gibb	Kate Wyke

Particular thanks to the surveyors who also submitted casual records.

Thanks also to:-

- Angela MacKirdy, for maintaining a diary of Curlew and kestrel observations
- Chris Bargman and Anton Schooley, for organising the Barn Owl nest box scheme
- John Lightfoot, of the Shropshire Barn Owl Group, for help and advice
- Jonathon Lingard for additional records and information.
- Geoff Wookey, for Curlew records
- Gareth Thomas, for leading the Bird Song walk
- Matt Cotterill of Natural England, who provided the survey maps.

Report

A copy of this report has been supplied to all people who contributed to the surveys, or supplied additional records, and to Natural England.

Copies can be downloaded from the Clee Hill part of the Shropshire Community Wildlife Groups website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

Alternatively, copies are available (electronic .pdf versions or paper copies) from Leo Smith, The Bryn, Castle Hill, All Stretton, Shropshire SY6 6JP. Phone: 01694 720296 email leo@leosmith.org.uk.

Summary 2017

This report summarises a successful sixth year for the Bird Group. Members showed a high level of commitment in carrying out the surveys.

All 20 tetrads were surveyed, and we now have an even better understanding of the population and distribution of Lapwing and Curlew, and the status of the Other Target Species. Comparison of results over the six years suggests a loss of four pairs (31%) of Curlew. This is valuable information to promote its conservation. At least two pairs of Lapwing were found.

Further survey work in future years will continue to establish population trends in the area. In particular, the tetrads where Curlew have apparently disappeared will be checked carefully.

Two Bird Walks were held, and the Barn Owl nest box scheme was developed.

SWT / SOS “Save our Curlews” Campaign

Curlews have also declined nationally, and in other parts of the County. Shropshire Wildlife Trust and Shropshire Ornithological Society have launched a “Save our Curlews” Campaign, funded by an appeal. More details can be found on the SOS website, <http://www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/> .

It is hoped to start work on a project with landowners in the Clee Hill area to find and protect Curlew nests.

Plans for 2018

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

Participants with Curlews in their square will be asked to make a special effort to locate territories at the end of April, to help the “Save our Curlews” Campaign find and protect nests.

The Barn Owl nest box scheme will be developed, and a programme of local bird walks and other activities will be held if there is a demand.

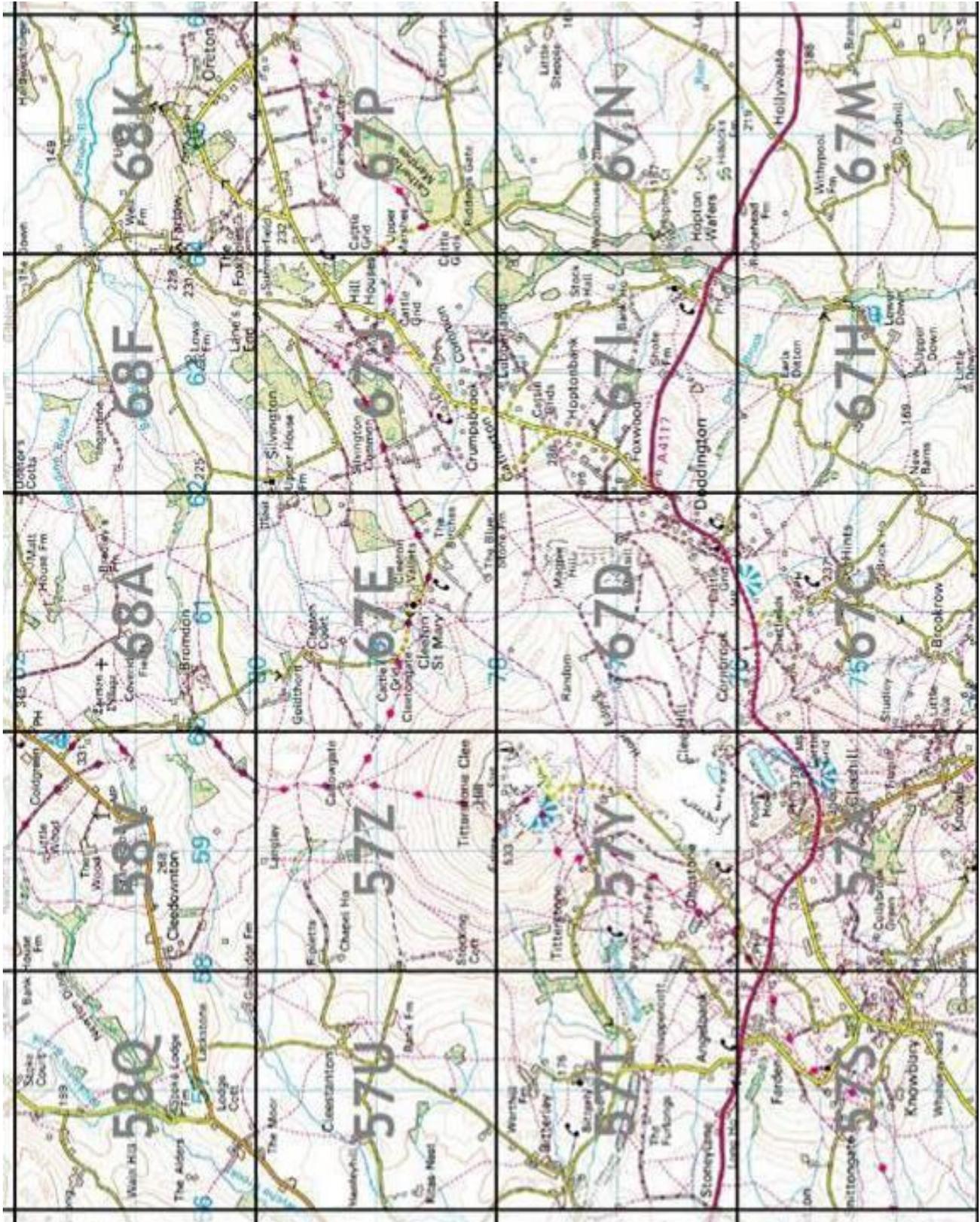
Further consideration will be given to these plans, and any other proposals people want to make, at the Group meeting on Tuesday 27 March 2018. This meeting will plan the survey, allocate survey squares to participants, and arrange and publicise the other activities.

Everyone interested in birds is welcome at all meetings and events. A Programme will be published after the meeting. Details can also be found and downloaded from the Clee Hill part of the joint website for all the Community Wildlife Groups in the Shropshire Hills, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

Leo Smith
February 2018

Appendix 1. Map of Survey Area, showing Square Boundaries and Tetrad Codes

The prefix SO (defining the 100 km square on the OS National Grid) has been omitted, as this is common to all the squares in the area.



Appendix 2. Bird Survey - Outline Instructions



CLEE HILL COMMUNITY WILDLIFE GROUP



Recording Instructions Curlews & Lapwings Survey

Objectives

1. To find out where Curlew and Lapwing occur in the breeding season
2. To record behaviour indicative of breeding (e.g. song, display, the making of nest scrapes, alarm calls, chicks)
3. In doing the above, to pin-point areas for a separate and more intensive survey
4. To record, in passing, other easily recognised species of nature conservation importance

Survey Unit

The basic unit is the tetrad, a square made up of four of the one kilometre squares shown clearly on Ordnance Survey maps (with pale blue grid lines). You will be allocated one or more tetrads, and requested to survey it three times – around 1st April, 1st May and mid June.

You are also requested to send in "Casual Records" of Lapwing and Curlew seen in your tetrad(s) outside the periods when the three tetrad surveys are being carried out, and at any time in the rest of the area.

Appropriate Maps will be provided.

Between them, members are surveying up to 20 tetrads which cover the area of the Clee Hill Partnership. A map showing all tetrads in the area, with the Tetrad Reference code, is attached. You don't need to know where this code comes from. However, for those that are interested, it includes a number, which is the number of the 10 kilometre square on the Ordnance Survey national grid, and a letter (A – Z, excluding O), which defines the 25 tetrads in the 10km square, from bottom left to top right. Technically the tetrad reference is preceded by the two letters SO, which is the 100 kilometre square on the Ordnance Survey national grid, but this has been omitted as all squares in the area are SO squares

Survey Periods

There are three recording periods, each of two weeks. The dates vary from year to year, and are printed on the back of the Casual Records map as part of the Recording Instructions. You can do the surveys at any time convenient to you within each two week period, but you will be requested to do it as close as possible to particular dates.

1. The first period (a two week period at the end of March and Beginning of April) follows the arrival of Lapwing and Curlew back on the breeding grounds. This is the best time to find breeding Lapwing (first egg date is usually around 1st April), so you will be asked to do the Tetrad survey as close as possible to 1st April
2. The second two week period is at the end of April and beginning of May. This is the best time to find breeding Curlew (first egg date is usually around 30th April), so you will be asked to do the Tetrad survey as close as possible to 1st May.
3. The third period, in the middle of June, is timed to find any Curlews that have successfully hatched and still have chicks. It is also the best time to find the Other Target Species.

Time of day and duration of survey

You may survey at any time of day. You are requested to spend a minimum of 45 minutes in each one kilometre square of suitable habitat in each of the three Tetrad Survey Periods. So, if the entire tetrad is composed of suitable habitat, you will need to spend a minimum of three

hours surveying in each period, but if there is only one kilometre square of suitable habitat the requirement drops to 45 minutes in each period.

Survey Maps

You are asked to record your observations on a Tetrad map, which will be provided.

However, for the purpose of planning your route, and in particular for determining Public Rights of Way and open Access areas, we strongly suggest you refer to the Ordnance Survey map at the scale 1: 25,000. *Explorer 203, Ludlow*, covers the southern three-quarters of the area. Almost all of the northern quarter is on *Explorer 217, The Long Mynd and Wenlock Edge*. Unfortunately the eastern half of tetrad 68K is on *Explorer 218. Kidderminster & Wyre Forest*.

Preparation

You should do a preliminary recce so as to plan your route with a view to attempting to visit all likely habitat within the tetrad during your survey. It may well be worth scanning the area from high points to pick out what look like good areas. Clearly there are some habitats, notably woodland and villages, which can be missed out. The two main target species are likely to be on relatively flat ground, and associated with grassland but also with any arable that there may be. In particular, areas of damp ground, as indicated on the OS map, should be covered.

Survey Method

You are asked to walk through your Tetrad concentrating on looking for Lapwing and Curlew.

It is important that we all follow the same standard recording technique repeatable for comparative purposes in the future. Therefore please:

1. Mark the route you have followed.
2. Record the amount of time you spend surveying potential habitat. So if, e.g., your route takes you through a forestry plantation, 'stop the clock' and start it again the other side.
3. Enter your observations directly onto the map using the standard symbols shown on the front and back of the recording form.
4. Return your recording forms on the date shown on them to Leo Smith, The Bryn, Castle Hill, All Stretton, Shropshire SY6 6JP

Permissions

You need to cover the ground systematically; so you may need to deviate from public rights of way (or Access Land). You must seek permission before doing so. Be up-front about the survey and the fact that it being done on behalf of a community group. These birds are 'farmers' friends', farmers like to have them around and may well be able to point out where they are, or used to be. We suggest you share your findings with them and make a record of any information they provide on past distribution and numbers.

Safety

If you are surveying on your own, take special care. Ideally you should take a mobile phone with you. Whether or not you have a phone, be sure to advise someone as to where you are going and when you will be back and ask them to raise the alarm should you fail to show up.

Other Target Species

We would also like you record Other Target Species as well, please. The species selected are also listed on the form. They are all quite easy to recognise, and are mostly of nature conservation importance (i.e. they are Target Species for Natural England's Higher Level Scheme, and are on the *Red List* or *Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern*).

However, if there are species here that you are unsure of, don't worry – only record what you are certain of. On the other hand by all means add to this list if you wish.

Further Information: Contact Leo Smith 01694 720296, email leo@leosmith.org.uk

Appendix 3. Bird Survey Instructions on Survey Maps

PLEASE USE THE FOLLOWING SPECIES, ACTIVITY AND HABITAT SYMBOLS TO RECORD BIRDS ON THE MAP

Objectives

1. To help locate Curlew, Lapwing and other species of Conservation Concern in the breeding season
2. To record in particular any behaviour indicative of breeding (e.g. song, display, nests, chicks)
3. To record, in passing, other easily recognised species of nature conservation importance

Recording periods

There are four recording periods. The dates are:-

1. 25th March - 9th April
2. 22nd April - 7th May
3. 10th June - 25th June
4. 8th July - 23rd July (only if Curlews were recorded during the second or third survey)

1. The first is the best time to find breeding Lapwing (first egg date is usually around 1st April)
2. The second is the best time to find breeding Curlew (first egg date is usually around 30th April), and to locate any Lapwings that have moved to re-lay if the first clutch has failed.
3. The third is timed to find young Lapwing and Curlew chicks, and most of the other target species

Maps for Recording

Please mark on the map the location of all sightings of the Target Species, using the Species Symbols below. Write the estimated number of each species seen next to its name in the table below.

If you see Lapwing or Curlew in your Squares outside the Survey Periods, or see them anywhere else in the area at any time, please email the details, including Grid Reference, to leo@leosmith.org.uk (or ring 01694 720296)

If you locate any Swift Nest Sites in your Squares outside the Survey Periods, or find them anywhere else in the area at any time, please email the details, including Grid Reference (or preferably building address) to shropshireswifts@gmail.com or phone 07941 654869

SYMBOLS FOR TARGET SPECIES

CU	Curlew	L.	Lapwing	BO	Barn Owl	S.	Skylark
CK	Cuckoo	DI	Dipper	K.	Kestrel	KT	Red Kite
P.	Grey Partridge	SN	Snipe	SI	Swift (nest sites only)	SF	Spotted Flycatcher
MP	Meadow Pipit	YW	Yellow Wagtail	D.	Dunnock	W.	Wheatear
SC	Stonechat	TS	Tree Sparrow	Li	Linnet	BF	Bullfinch
Y.	Yellowhammer	RB	Reed Bunting				

ACTIVITY SYMBOLS:

Please use the following recording conventions:

1. We need to distinguish between breeding and other activity. So if, for example, the bird is simply feeding or flying over just enter the species letter e.g. L (or 2L for two Lapwings together)
2. If the bird is singing or displaying, put a circle round the letter e.g. (L)
3. If you happen to notice a bird sitting on a nest, or chance upon a nest with eggs please put an asterisk beside the letter e.g. L*
4. If you notice chicks, enter the species letter plus fam (family) e.g. L fam
5. Show movement of birds, and definitely different birds, using the following symbols:

CU ——— CU Same Curlew in two different locations – circle if singing/displaying

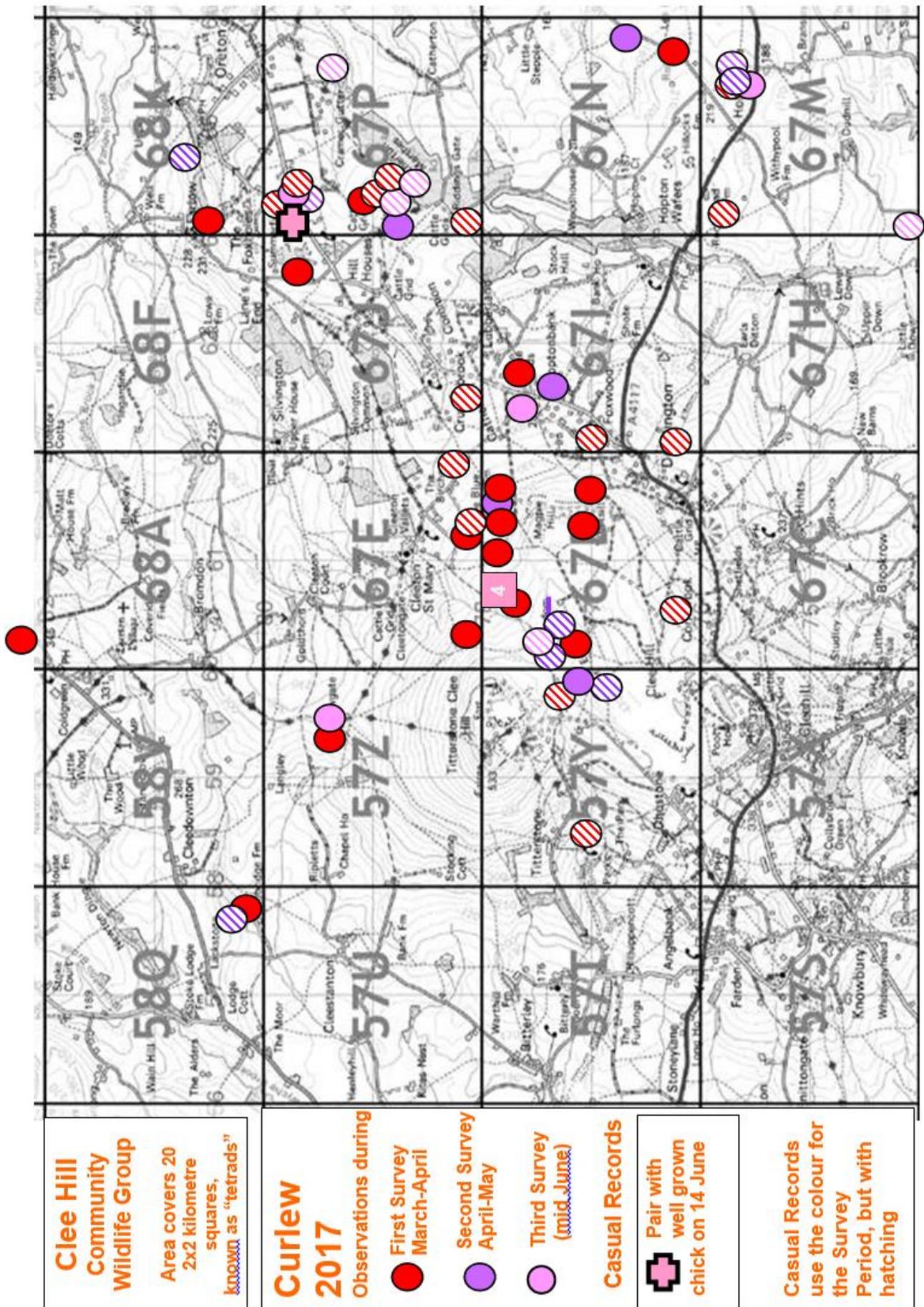
(CU) - - - - - (CU) Definitely two different Curlews in song at same time

CU → Direction of flight – circle if singing/displaying

Please return the completed survey Maps as soon as possible after the end of each Recording Period, to **Leo Smith, The Bryn, Castle Hill, All Stretton SY6 6JP**

Please summarise the number of different Curlews (pairs and individuals) recorded overleaf. Also, if you see any other wildlife of interest, mark it on the map, and record the details here:-

Appendix 4. All Curlew Observations 2017



Appendix 5. Bird Survey – Results from each of the Three Survey Periods

First Period Survey: 25 March – 9 April (approx)

Square (Tetrad)	Surveyor				Number of Each Species Recorded															
	First Name	Surname	Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Dipper	Duncock	Wheatear	Stone-chat	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting	
57S	Beth & Lionel	Bridge	2	35									2							
57T	Linda	Webb	1	30									1							
57U	Gareth	Thomas	1	0		1														
57X	Kate	Wyke					1	1	1	1			2	1	1		1			
57Y	Chris	Neal	5	0			2	2		1				3	2			2		
57Y	Bob	Braddock	4	30			1	1	8	5			6							
57Z	Barbara	Daniels	3	0		1	1		10	lots			2	1		2		1	3	
58Q	Peta	Sams							5	13			3				4	1		
58V	Carl	Price	4	35					6				3				2	14		
67C	Beth & Lionel	Bridge	3	40								2	5		4	3			2	
67D	Ian	King	2	0		5			5	6			3			5				
67D	Ewan & Celia	Gibb	2	45		5	1		1					2					1	
67E	Eric	Davies	3	15		1			2	5			2	1					3	
67H	Kit	Smith	4	15				1	2			4								
67I	Angela & Iain	Mackirdy	5	0		2			1	2				6						
67J	Simon	Brown / SWT	4	0		(1)														
67J	Ian	Ferguson	4	30		1	2			7										
67M	Peter	Johnson	2	0					8											
67N	Peter	Johnson	3	0		2			4								1			
67P	Chris	Bargman	3	30		2	1								2					
68A	Simon	Brown / SWT	2	0	No target species recorded															
68F	Marian	Wootton	1	0																
68K	Eric	Evans	3	20		1							4							
TOTALS			61	325	0	21	9	5	53	40	0	6	27	11	18	10	8	20	7	

Second Period Survey: 16 April - 1 May (approx)

Square (Tetrad)	Surveyor				Number of Each Species Recorded														
	First Name	Surname	Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Dipper	Duncock	Wheatear	Stone-chat	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
57S	Beth & Lionel	Bridge	2	35									6						
57T	Linda	Webb	4	0									2						
57U	Gareth	Thomas	2	0									1			1			
57X	Kate	Wyke																	
57Y	Chris	Neal																	
57Y	Bob	Braddock	3	30					3	4	1			2					
57Z	Barbara	Daniels	4	40			2	2	7	lots			3	3	1	6		4	3
58Q	Peta	Sams	2	30					4				2					5	
58V	Carl	Price (& family)	4	15				1	6							6	2	6	
67C	Beth & Lionel	Bridge	3	10						5			4		5	7		2	
67D	Ian	King	3	0		1	1	1	1	5	1			3		3			
67D	Celia Gibb & Rachael	Davenhill	3	0		1	5				1			4	2				
67E	Eric	Davies	2	50	No target species recorded														
67H	Kit	Smith	3	15		(1)		1	2		1	1							
67I	Angela & Iain	Mackirdy	4	0			2		4	6					6				
67J	Simon	Brown / SWT	2	0	No target species recorded														
67J	Ian	Ferguson	4	30						7	1								
67M	Peter	Johnson	2	30	5				12		1				2	4	4	1	
67N	Peter	Johnson	3	0		2			3									1	
67P	Chris	Bargman	3	0		2	1				1								
68A	Simon	Brown / SWT	3	30	No target species recorded														
68F	Marian	Wootton	1	0									6						7
68K	Eric	Evans																	
TOTALS			57	315	5	6	11	5	42	27	7	1	24	12	16	27	6	26	3

Third Period Survey: 10 - 25 June (approx)

Square (Tetrad)	Surveyor				Number of Each Species Recorded														
	First Name	Surname	Hours	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Dipper	Duncock	Wheatear	Stone-chat	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
57S	Beth & Lionel	Bridge			Survey not done														
57T	Linda	Webb			No survey return received														
57U	Gareth	Thomas			No survey return received														
57X	Kate	Wyke			No survey return received														
57Y	Chris	Neal			No survey return received														
57Y	Bob	Braddock	4	10					5	3					2				
57Z	Barbara	Daniels	3	45			1	2	8	lots				1		4		3	4
58Q	Peta	Sams			Survey disrupted by bullocks in fields														
58V	Carl	Price (& family)	3	0					3										
67C	Beth & Lionel	Bridge	3	0						3		1	2					5	
67D	Ian	King			No survey return received														
67D	Celia Gibb & Rachael	Davenhill	2	30		4			lots	lots									1
67E	Eric	Davies	3	20					3	5						3			
67H	Kit	Smith	3	0		(1)		1	2			1							
67I	Angela & Iain	Mackirdy	3	30		1			1	1					1				
67J	Simon	Brown / SWT			No target species recorded														
67J	Ian	Ferguson	4	15						6					3	1			
67M	Peter	Johnson	5	0	8	2	1		lots										
67N	Peter	Johnson	3	0													2	1	
67P	Chris	Bargman	3	0		2			2						3				
68A	Simon	Brown / SWT			Survey not done														
68F	Marian	Wootton	1	0															
68K	Eric	Evans	3	45															1
TOTALS			43	195	8	9	2	3	24	18	0	2	6	1	9	10	4	13	5

Appendix 6. References

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