

# *Clee Hill*



*Community  
Wildlife  
Group*

*Bird Group  
Report  
2020*



# Bird Group Report 2020

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## CLEE HILL COMMUNITY WILDLIFE GROUP

The Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group was launched at a well-attended public meeting at the end of February 2012. It was one of three new Community Wildlife Groups promoted by a European Union LEADER project, delivered by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership.

The group is centred on the open hill land of Titterstone Clee and Clee Hill Common, extending approximately as far as Knowlegate and Knowbury to the south, Bitterley to the west, Cleedownton and Bromdon to the north, and Catherton Common and Doddington to the east.

There are several different wildlife survey groups, co-ordinated by the committee and involving around 100 volunteers. Further information about the Group and its activities can be found on the relevant pages of the Community Wildlife Groups collective website, [www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk)

# **CURLEW, LAPWING AND OTHER BIRDS SURVEY**

## ***Introduction***

A bird survey has been carried out in the Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group (CHCWG) area shown in Appendix 1 since 2012. The area 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 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).

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 survey normally consists of three visits to each of these tetrads, once during each of three specified two week periods, around 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1<sup>st</sup> 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 after the coronavirus restrictions were introduced, so 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 from previous years, or volunteers who responded to early publicity, but some squares were not initially 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, while 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. Some new surveyors joined the survey late, responding to local publicity, particularly in the “Cleobury Clarion”, and they were provided with the survey instructions, and a briefing as necessary, by email. New and existing surveyors were provided with a large scale map of their tetrad(s), and a casual records map covering the whole area, as necessary, to record their observations. Records were submitted 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 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 personal 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, or actually lived in such an area. It will be seen that no records were received from 10 of the 30 squares, and only casual records were received from a further two. However, all 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 four of the 20 tetrads, and 23 members spent over 180 hours on surveys (including the double time spent when couples or friends surveyed a square together).

In addition, four tetrads to the west were added to the survey area in 2019, as they were known to also hold breeding Curlews. These tetrads (reference code 58A, F, G and K) are shown in the map in Appendix 3. It was intended to survey these four squares again in 2020 as well, and the coverage achieved in them is also shown in Table 1.

The list of Other Target Species surveyed in a normal season is shown on page 16.

**Table 1. Coverage in 2020**

Square (Tetrad)	First	Second	Second (late)	Third	Good Casual Coverage
57S					
57T					
57U					
57X					Yes
57Y		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
57Z			Yes	Yes	yes
58Q					
58V					
67C			Yes	Yes	
67D			Yes	Yes	Yes
67E		Yes			Yes
67H					
67I					Yes

Square (Tetrad)	First	Second	Second (late)	Third	Good Casual Coverage
67J			Yes	Yes	Yes
67M	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
67N	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
67P	Yes	Yes			Yes
68A					
68F					
68K					
<b>Extension</b>					
58A	Yes		Yes	Yes	
58F	Yes		Yes	Yes	
58G	Yes		Yes	Yes	
58K					

## 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 (BBS) 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 location of all Curlews found during the surveys, or reported on Casual Record maps or by email, is shown on the map in Appendix 2.

The methodology requires observations of a pair together, or a territorial display, or a single bird on two of the three surveys, to confirm a territory. However, Curlews often have large territories, and may be seen a kilometre or more from their nest site. 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 addition, the Curlew records in 2020 from the four tetrads to the west that were added to the survey area in 2019 are shown in the map in Appendix 3.

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. In particular, a resident living at the edge of the common just north of Hopton Bank, and another living near Silvington Common, each sent a regular commentary on the location and behaviour of pairs near them, several other casual records were followed up by site visits, and a birder from Stourbridge was able to spend more time in the area than usual.

Numerous records from the first of these four observers, coupled with her observations from late May – early June 2019, together with re-interpretation of an observation of displaying Curlews seen on the 2019 training day, clarified one of the boundaries drawn on the 2019 territory map and allowed the grouping of other observations into another territory (this didn't affect the 2019 population estimate, but located the territory more accurately).

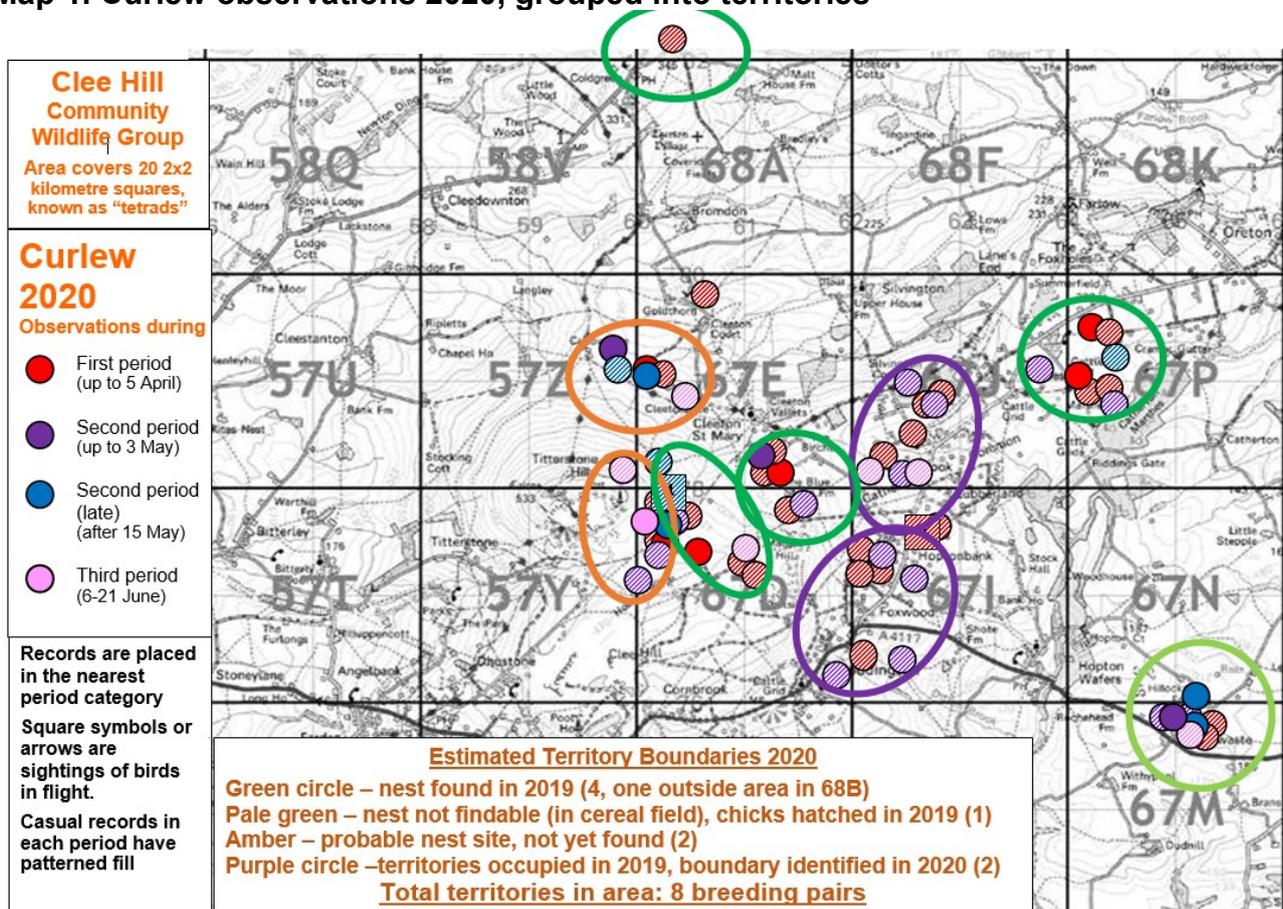
There were two separate observations of three pairs between Cleeton St. Mary and Random, on Magpie Hill, and identification of the boundaries between pairs was helped by two separate observations of four Curlews together.

A pair nested close to the Tree Nursery, but not in it.

The observations have been analysed, and the apparent number of territories is shown on the map below. Curlews are generally site faithful, and the analysis was helped by the nest-finding work in 2019. The estimated territory boundaries are colour-coded, to show the knowledge gained in 2019, as well as the new information in 2020.

It will be seen that all last year's territories were re-occupied.

**Map 1. Curlew observations 2020, grouped into territories**



Comparison of the 2020 distribution with that in previous years is described in the next section of the report.

There was no evidence of any fledged young, and several indications that most if not all pairs had their nests predated:-

- A flock of 8 Curlews were seen near Doddington on 12 May, flying north-north west, when pairs that still had an active nest would have been guarding it, suggesting that at least four pairs had already failed.
- A small piece of curlew egg shell was found near Random on 24 May, suggesting that nest was predated.
- On 31 May, 4 were seen flying around together, with lots of calling and displaying, mostly around the Random/Shirley Farm area, suggesting these two pairs no longer had an active nest.
- A small group of 7 Curlews was seen in fields to the east of 67N on 6 June. The behaviour gave no indication that a nest or chicks were present, and this was almost certainly a post-breeding flock (although not necessarily of birds from within the survey area).

- Curlews with chicks are very active and noisy while safeguarding the chicks, but local residents who live close to five of the eight pairs all said there was no calling or activity after late May or early June, indicating failure of those pairs.
- The territories of the other three pairs were visited by other members in June, but no behaviour suggestive of surviving chicks was observed. Local contacts reported that no Curlews were seen or heard after mid-June.
- There are several observations from the final survey period on the map of all records in Appendix 2, but none were of behaviour that suggested the presence of young.

Breeding success in the area is undoubtedly very poor, and the only known fledged young, in 2016 and again in 2017 were protected from mammalian predation by being inside a rabbit (and hence fox and badger) proof fence at a tree nursery, but this pair failed in 2018, and nested outside the tree nursery fence in 2019 and 2020, on Catherton Marshes (see above). However, the Curlew Conservation Project (see below) reported that at least one, probably two, chicks from the same brood fledged in 2018, and a brood of three from the same territory on Random Hill all fledged in 2019. Apart from these 6-7 fledged young, there is no evidence that any other young have fledged in the survey area since 2012. This fledging rate of less than one per year is nowhere near enough to sustain the population.

**From the above observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Curlew population in the core area of twenty tetrads is eight breeding pairs, with another pair again located in the adjacent tetrad 68B.**

### **Curlew Population Change 2012 – 20**

In general, Curlews are site faithful, and return to the same nesting area, often the same field, for as long as the pair are alive. One year old birds spend their first summer on their wintering grounds, and return to their natal area to breed when they are two. New pairs have to establish a territory, but 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.

As well as the pairs breeding in the area, up to three, possibly four, pairs have nested just outside it, but one or both of the birds in each of these pairs have sometimes been recorded on our surveys.

In the light of this knowledge, the distribution maps included in all the Group's reports in the nine years from the launch in 2012, including the 2020 results referred to above, have been reviewed and compared. Interpretation has been helped by the observations of several members of the Group who live near where some pairs, and interactions between pairs, have been seen frequently over the years.

The results are as follows:-

57T – occasional records of a single bird recorded in 2015, and in each of the three earlier years, in 57T, with no evidence of breeding, suggests this is part of an additional territory of a pair believed to have nested outside the area, to the west (probably in 57N), but the absence of records since suggest it is no longer there, although 57T was not actually surveyed in the three years 2018-20.

57U – found in three years up until 2014. The square was not surveyed in 2015, and a pair was found on the first survey in 2016 but not seen again, and no evidence of breeding was found. A calling bird was heard twice in 2017, but the square was not

surveyed in 2018-20. 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. One was heard twice in the square by local residents in 2018, and seen three times by them in 2019, but if there was a nest in this square, it would have almost certainly have been heard much more frequently. It is therefore shown on the territories map as “lost in 2016”. The sporadic records since then are probably due to foraging birds from the north. No observations were made in this square in 2020.

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, apart from in the early survey period, when birds are returning to, and passing through, the area.

57Z – a pair present every year, but it probably breeds on the farm grassland in 67E.

58V and 68A – a pair nest just outside the area, to the north of 68A at a known site in 68B. They have been there many years, including the whole of the period 2012-20. Records in these two squares in previous years, but not in 2017-20, are probably due to the pair in 68B. 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 all, years.

67D, 67E, 67I and 67J – these four squares have been the regular hotspot. 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 from 2017. 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. Conversely, the pair at Cleetongate, present every year up until 2016, was not found in 2017 or subsequently, leaving four pairs again. There were four again, perhaps with a fifth, in the area in 2018, but observations in 2020, and re-interpretation of the 2019 records, suggests two pairs were present in 67I and J in both those years. The 2018 report noted possible additional pairs in those two areas.

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 has apparently been only one in 2016 and each subsequent year. Records from Little Stepple (67N) in 2015, and from further south between there and Hollywaste in 2016, 2017 and 2018, may have been foraging from a territory to the east, or may have been foraging from the territory near Hollywaste. There were no similar records in 2019. In 2020, a small group of 7 Curlews were seen in fields to the east of 67N on 6 June. While this will have been a post-breeding flock, the local farmer reported that he has seen Curlews in the area most years, so this may be the origin of records from 67N in previous years.

67P – the pair in the north-west of the square, near Cramer Gutter, were present every year up until 2018, and they fledged young in 2014 (2) and 2016 (1). The pair to the south of them in this square were first present in 2015, and were also there in 2016, when the northern pair produced one fledged young, while the nest of the new pair was found predated (proof that there were two pairs). The southern pair was again present in 2017, but not 2018, when two pairs interacted at the site, then one flew off towards Cramer Gutter, and the other towards Hollywaste. The arrival of the new pair in 2015 resulted in many more observations in 67P, and 68F and 68K that year, and more than in any previous year. There was only one pair again in 2019, and their nest was found on Catherton Marshes, but they were probably the pair that nested in the

tree nursery in previous years, as they took their chicks there after hatching. The tree nursery site was not usual habitat, and became steadily less suitable over the years as the trees became established and then grew taller. As Curlews are site faithful, it is likely that the trees were planted on a field where the Curlews had nested regularly for many years, but finally became too tall in 2019. Again, there was only one pair in the square in 2020, which nested on the common close to the nursery.

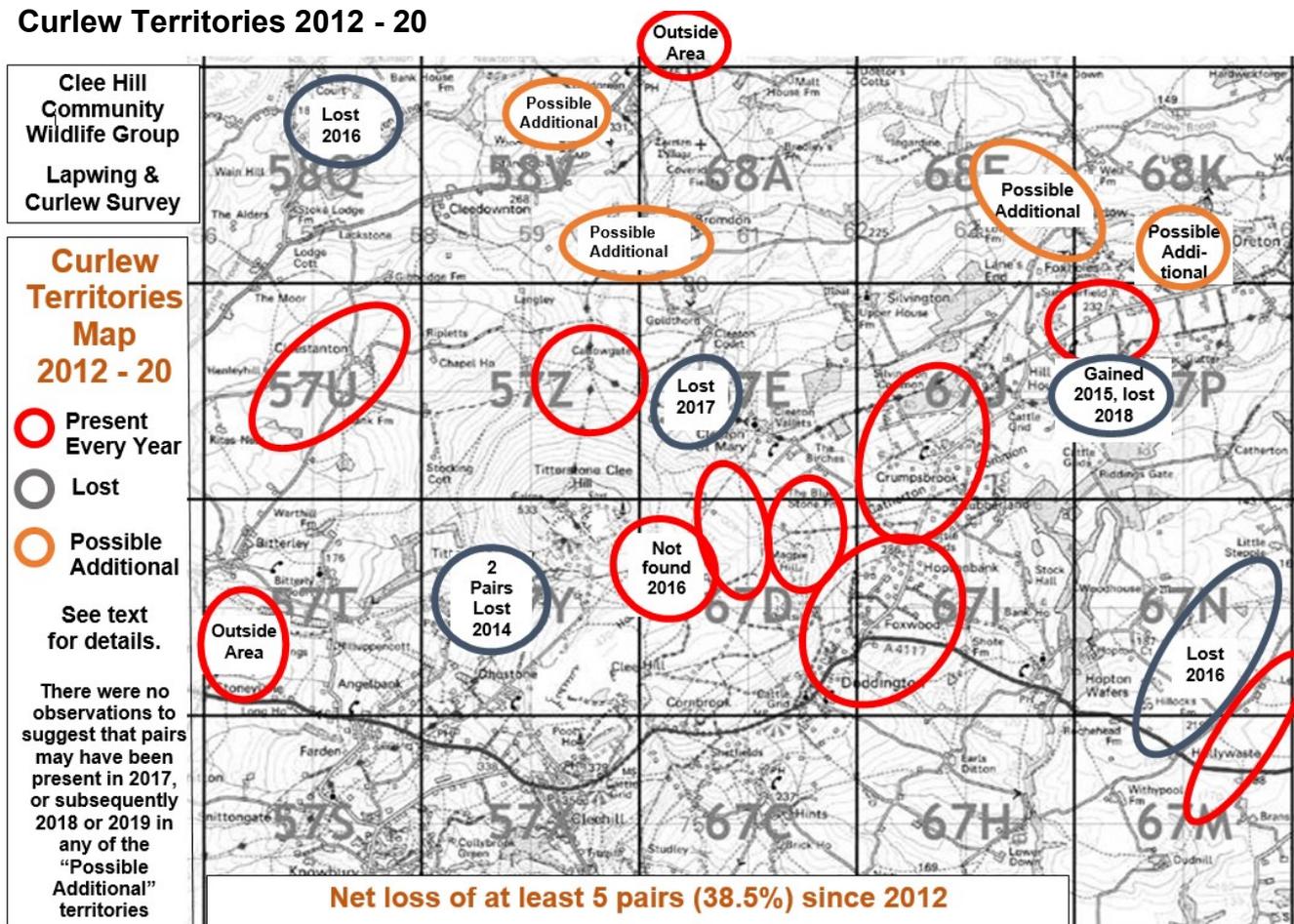
**68F** – sporadic records over the years, particularly in 2015, were likely to reflect the pair near Cramer Gutter using feeding areas further north, displaced by their new neighbour to the south, which would also encourage the pair further north still, from outside the area near Stottesdon, to come to the southern edge of their territory to defend it. The territory of the new neighbour was not occupied in 2018, and there was only one record from 68F or 68K, and there were none in 2019 or 2020.

**68K** – there were several records in the north of the square in 2012, attributed to “a pair [breeding close to] Stottesdon (in 68L)”. There have been no records from the north of this square since. There were no records in the south of the square until 2015, and again in 2017, which are also likely to reflect the pair near Cramer Gutter using feeding areas further north, away from their new neighbour to the south (see 68F above). The former pair was reported still present near Stottesdon in 2018 and perhaps in 2019, but absent in 2020 (see below).

Based on this analysis, it will be seen that five pairs were lost between 2012 and 2018, and the one gained in 2015 was lost in 2018. 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 not been counted as lost. There were no observations (or absence of them) to suggest any changes in 2019 or 2020.

This analysis is summarised on the Curlew Territories 2012-20 map.

### Curlew Territories 2012 - 20



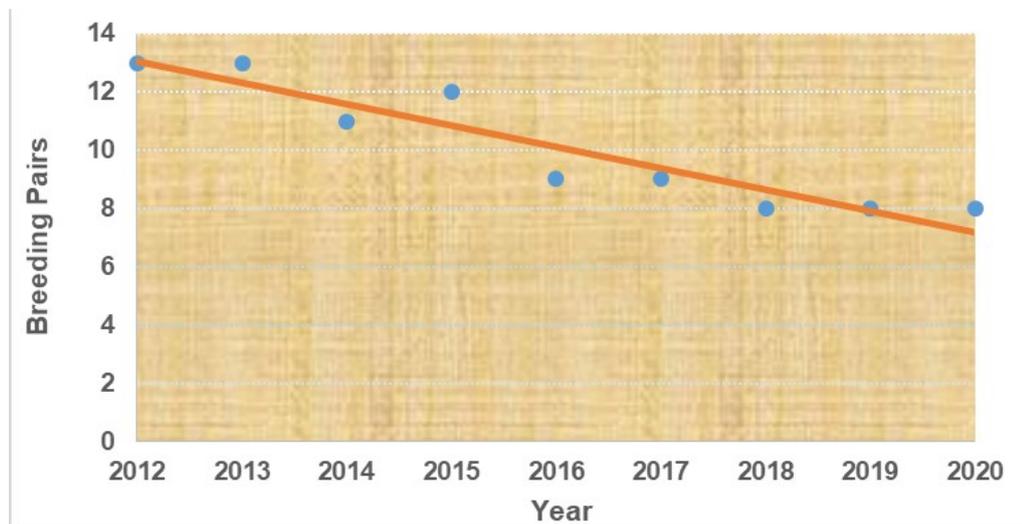
There were no observations to suggest that pairs may have been present in 2018, 2019 or 2020 in any of the “Possible Additional” territories, and, as indicated above, the records that suggested these “possible additional territories” have all been subsequently attributed to other pairs, including some territories outside the area, which were occupied in the years when the possible additional pairs were noted.

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.

### **Curlew Population Trend**

The revised annual population in the core area, and the population trend, excluding possible additional pairs, is shown in the chart (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Curlew Population and Trend 2012 - 2020**



**It will be seen that the net population loss is five pairs, a decline of 36.5% in only nine 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 improve breeding success. This process may be starting already, with the apparent loss of three pairs in 2016, and another one in each of 2017 and 2018. However, there has been no apparent further loss since 2018.

### **Curlews in the Area Extension**

Four tetrads that are known to contain Curlews were added to the Survey area in 2019, and an estimated six pairs were found. Three of these squares were covered as thoroughly in 2020, and all observations are shown on the map in Appendix 3. Six pairs were found again, but one of the pairs may have moved just outside the area, to the south into square 57E. The nest of one of these pairs was found, as shown on the map.

### **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. Around 20 of them have been found breeding in the area to the west of the Long Mynd, covered by the Upper Onny, Rea Valley and Camlad Valley Community Wildlife Groups.



A nest on farmland at the top of Magpie Hill was found and fenced in 2018 and 2019 by the “Save our Curlews” project (see pp. 20-21). The chicks were radio-tagged and tracked, and in 2018 definitely one, probably two, chicks fledged successfully, and in 2019 all of a brood of three successfully fledged. These 4-5 fledged young were all colour-ringed.

All the “headstarted” chicks released by Curlew Country near the Stiperstones since 2017 have also been colour-ringed.

The colour-rings can be seen in the photo of one of the chicks ringed in this area in 2018.

No colour-ringed birds were seen in 2020. 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 3, as a cross.

### **Curlews adjacent to the Clee Hill area.**

Three pairs are believed to have nested close to the survey area, and been recorded within it, as described in the section on “Curlew Population Change” above.

A pair have nested for many years just outside the area, north of 68A, at a known site in 68B near Wheathill. The square was incorporated into the newly- formed Abdon District Community Wildlife Group in 2019. The nest was found and fenced, but the eggs went beyond their full term, and did not hatch. The nest was located nearby in 2020, but when it was visited on 14 May, prior to fencing, it was empty, presumably predated.

A pair nested in Stottesdon, north of square 68K, for many years and is believed to partially account for records of a “possible additional pair” in 68F and K in years when the pair in 67P foraged northwards when it had a near neighbour to its south. However, in 2019 a local resident reported that “in 5 or 6 years of observing them sadly I had less sightings this year than in any previous year”, and in 2020 “Sad to report that despite lockdown and being at home I did not see or hear a single Curlew in Stottesdon this year, I think in the 18 years I have lived here that is the first year I have not seen and heard them.... a sad reflection on their demise”.

A third pair is believed to have nested in 57N. Curlews were recorded in 57T in 2013-15, attributed to this pair, but not since. However, the square was not surveyed in the three years 2018-20.

There may also be one or more pairs at the farm in 67N, referred to above. This square will be monitored in 2021.

### **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.

In 2020, four reports were received of a single pair of Lapwing seen between the beginning of April and mid-May in fields near the Hollywaste crossroads, on the border between squares 67M & N. The absence of any later reports suggests the pair nested, but were not successful.

### **The population is estimated at one breeding pair.**

There were at least five breeding pairs of Lapwing at the same location in 2019, compared with 2 – 4 breeding pairs in 2018 and 2017. None at all were found anywhere in the area in 2016 or 2015, while in 2014 there were two, in 2013 there were 1-2, and in 2012 three pairs were found. 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, in 2019 and in previous years, 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 such anecdotal evidence were quoted in the reports in previous years. Because of the health risks, no efforts were made to engage with farmers in 2020.

## ***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.



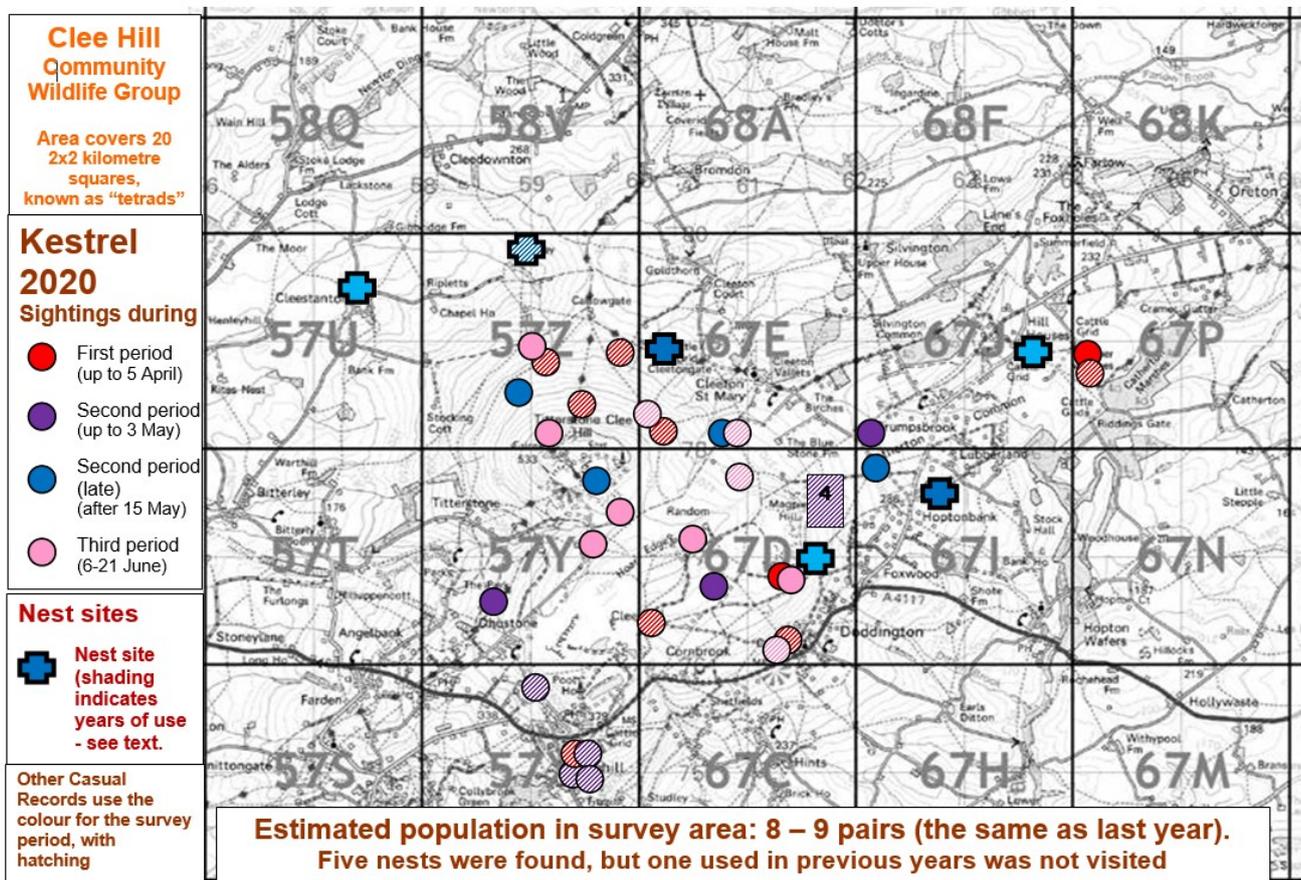
In Shropshire, records of confirmed or probable breeding declined by 46% in the 870 Atlas survey squares (tetrads) between 1985-90 and 2008-13, and the population probably halved in that time. Kestrel is on the *Red List of Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire*.

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, probably because of the long period of cold wet windy weather that lasted until their nesting time, followed by a drought. The number of records in 2018 and 2019 was considerably less than in the previous couple of years, but the distribution was similar. The analysis in 2014, when there were more records, suggested perhaps nine pairs, and these still appear to be present, with a record from a new site in 57U in 2020. In general, 2020 appears to have been better than 2019.

Observations in 2020 are shown on the map.



A pair near Pot House Farm in SO67I bred in an exposed hole in a tree in 2015, and a nest box was erected there before the start of the 2016 season. The box has been used each year since, and four young fledged from it in 2020.

As in previous years, a pair near Upper Marshes were seen frequently during the season, but in 2020 the nest was located in one of the Group's Barn Owl nest boxes, shown in the photo.



The nest site in SO57Z, known since 2012, was not visited, due to coronavirus restrictions, but observations of Kestrels seen on Clee Hill suggest that it was probably occupied again (outcome unknown).

A nest was found above Cleeton Gate in 2019, and the same site was occupied in 2020, but the nest was in an old crows' nest, not in the hole used last year. The nests were in different oak trees about 100m apart. Three young fledged.

Another nest was found in a hole in a big oak tree, only 8 feet above the ground, near Cleestanton. Three young fledged

The fifth found nest was in one of the boxes put up last year, in an ash tree on land belonging to members in Whatshill. Four young were ringed in the nest, and they all fledged. The photos show three of the chicks on the edge of the box, with a Wood Pigeon, and a recently fledged female perched on a wall near the nest.



A pair were seen several times over Clee Hill village, another was seen visiting the church tower in Doddington, and several individuals were seen near the quarry at the top of Titterstone Clee. These are all likely nest sites, but the analysis is made more difficult by the presence of non-breeding immature birds. Less than half of one-year-olds breed.

The estimate made in 2016, of 8 – 9 breeding pairs, still seems reasonable.

There is another known long-standing nest in a box near Wheathill, in 68B, to the north of 68A. Two young fledged.

Clee Hill has a relatively high density, with the distance between two nests only about 1km.

## **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.



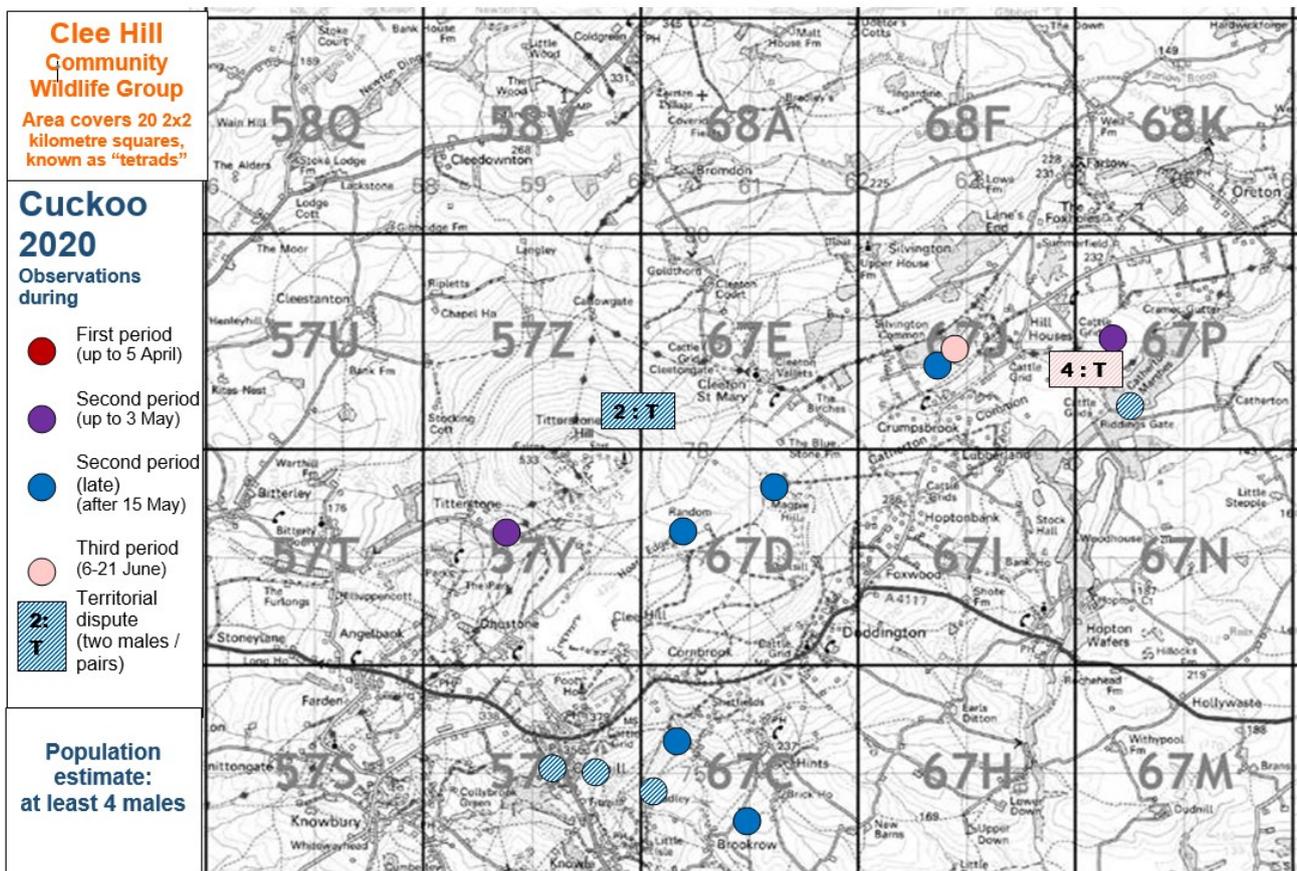
It is one of the Other Target Species that members have been asked to record each year, but in 2020 there were more Cuckoo records than usual. It was not clear whether there were actually more Cuckoos about, or that people were better able to hear them in the peace and quiet, or were at home rather than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

Observations in 2020 are shown on the map.



One cuckoo was heard calling but two chasing each other were seen on the north side of Titterstone Clee on 24 May, which may have been a pair, but this behaviour is more typical of

one male chasing another out of its territory. The observations from 57Y and 67D may be the same birds or different ones.

Territorial aggression was seen amongst four Cuckoos present together on Catherton Marshes on 3 June, while being mobbed by Meadow Pipits. This was probably two pairs, but may perhaps have been more than two males. The other observations in 67J and 67P were probably the same birds.

It is likely that the observations between Clee Hill village and Hints (57X – 67C) were all the same male.

There were therefore at least four males present, and records came from eight squares. This compares with records from 5 squares in 2019, only 3 in 2018, 6 in 2017, 5 in 2016, 7 in 2015 and 5 in 2014. As each pair ranges far and wide, an estimate of two territorial males seems reasonable for 2019 and previous years, except there was perhaps only one in 2018. The population has been estimated at this level, or just one pair, each year since 2012, apart from the higher number in 2020.

## **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. The number reported on the Bird Survey has risen steadily since 2012, and in 2019, 13 individuals were reported from eight squares.



It is believed a pair nested (unsuccessfully) in the area in 2012, but no evidence of breeding has been found since. However, nests have been found in previous years just to the west and just to the north of the area, both within two kilometres of the boundary, and in 2020 there was a successful nest which fledged three young only three kilometres to the north.

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	

However, a colour-ringed female Stonechat was photographed on Silvington Common at the beginning of June (Right leg, red over white: left leg turquoise over BTO metal ring). She had been caught at a nest by the Chelmarsh Ringing Group at the same place only two weeks earlier, and had presumably started a second nest.



### ***Decline of Lapwing and Curlew***

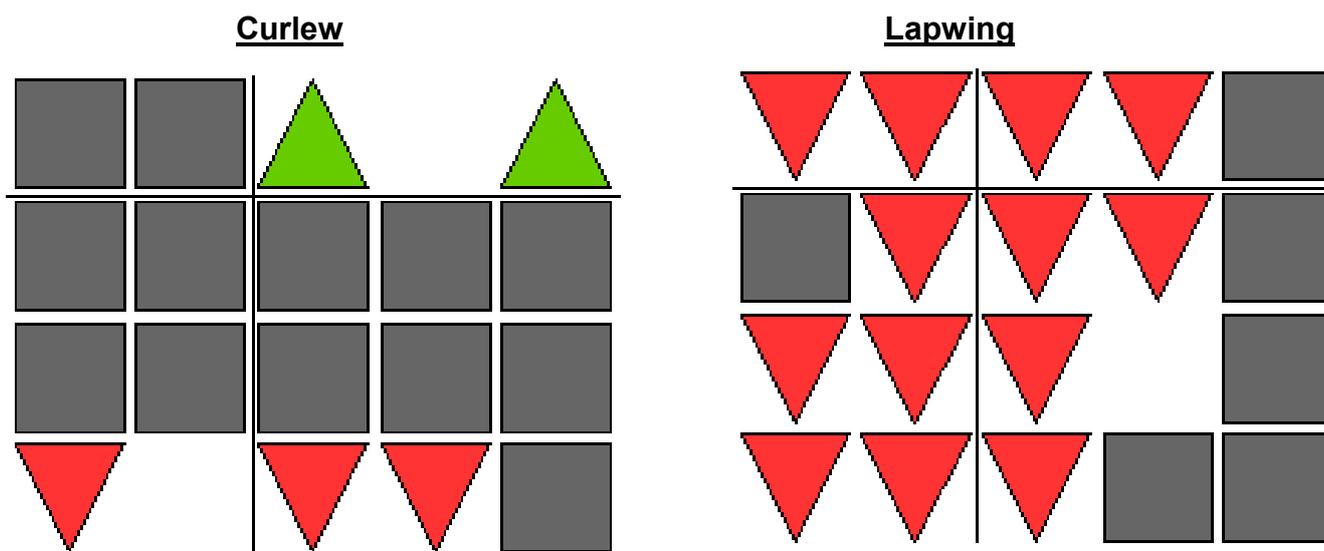
In England, Lapwing and Curlew are in decline, nationally, and in Shropshire. Objective evidence for this comes from Bird Atlas work, and the Breeding Bird Survey carried out each year by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), and the summary tables in the annual *State of the UK's Birds*. Figures 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 SO57, SO58, SO67 and SO68 on the Ordnance Survey National Grid, and each symbol represents a tetrad (2x2km square on the OS grid, 25 tetrads in each 10km square). These squares are the same as those used for this survey.

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 in this area in only 20-25 years, Lapwing substantially so.

#### **Breeding Distribution Change Maps for the Cleve Hill CWG survey area (1985-90 to 2008-13)**



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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 populations have 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](http://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 Clee Hill 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 Clee Hill CWG Bird Survey Results with the Shropshire Bird Atlas 2008-13**

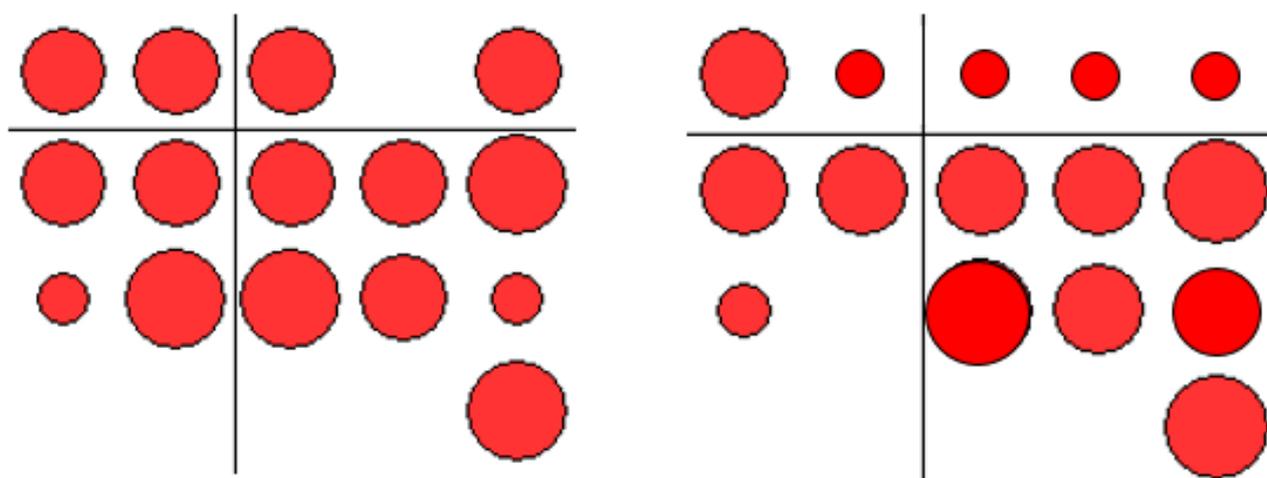
The next two pairs of maps show, on the left, the results of the Bird Atlas 2008-13 for the 30 tetrads covered by the survey, and, on the right, the results of the survey in the Clee Hill area as shown on the maps on pages 5 and 6. Each dot represents at least one observation during the Atlas period,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

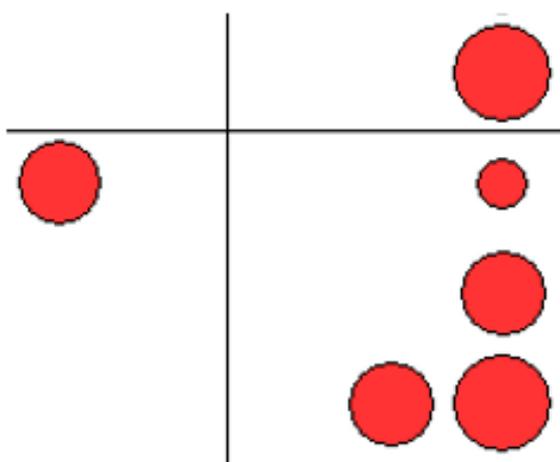
**Bird Atlas 2008-13**

**CHCWG survey 2015-20**

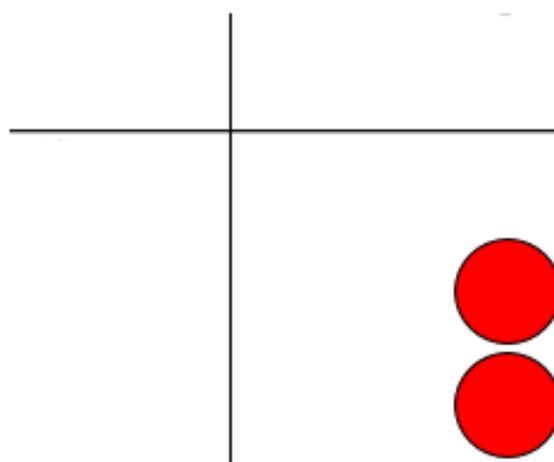


## Lapwing

Bird Atlas 2008-13



CHCWG survey 2015-20



It must be stressed that the Atlas map includes survey work over six years, 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. To allow a direct comparison, only the Clee Hill survey results for the most recent six years, 2015-20, have been included. Most squares have been visited in all six 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 since 2013, as Curlew has disappeared from one square and almost disappeared from four more, and Lapwing has disappeared from all except two.

The breeding distribution change maps above show that both species are now absent from places where they were found 20 – 25 years earlier. The decline of the Curlew population by 38.5% between 2012 and 2020, and the absence of Lapwing altogether in 2015 and 2016, and presence in only 1-2 tetrads since 2017, shows that the decline is continuing. Both species are now absent from tetrads where they were found less than 10 years ago.

### ***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 (see below).

### ***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/](http://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](http://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 largely monitor and map their populations, the nest protection and radio-tracking project had to be abandoned because of Coronavirus restrictions.

The campaign has taken over the earlier joint work with SWT. In Clee Hill in 2018, three nests were found and fenced. None of these nests were wholly predated, although 2 eggs were lost from one nest, presumably to Crows. Fences were totally successful in protecting nests from mammalian predators, including foxes. Definitely one, probably two, of the chicks from one brood fledged, but none of the other three radio tagged chicks are believed to have fledged: one was definitely predated by a Buzzard, and two were probably predated, but the

tags were carried out of range or underground. They may have been taken by either avian or mammalian predators. If the latter, fox is most likely, although not the only possibility.

There was evidence of hatched young at one further site from the CWG bird survey, but no evidence of any other fledged young.

In 2019, the Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group found 7 – 8 pairs in the area that has been monitored since 2012, and another one just to the north. Four nests were found and fenced. One clutch of 4 eggs went full term, but didn't hatch, and another clutch was destroyed after sheep with thick coats (which protected them from the fence) were released in the field and trampled part of the fence down.

Two clutches hatched. Radio tags were fitted to six chicks, and they were tracked.

The first pair, on SWT land at Catherton Common, were presumably the pair that used the tree nursery in previous years, as they took the chicks there after hatching. Three of the 4 chicks were tagged. Two were predated. The third lost its tag, which was found, but it appears this too was predated.

The second pair (at the same site where definitely one, probably two, young fledged in 2018) had three eggs that all hatched, and all the chicks were tagged and tracked. All three young were colour-ringed and fledged, an excellent result.

Another nest, in a cereal crop which made it unfindable, definitely produced chicks, but they were not re-sighted. No evidence was found that any other nests produced chicks, let alone any fledged young.

The main aim of the project in 2019 was to gain more information about how the chicks behave and forage, and the threats they face, and that was achieved on Clee Hill. The project report on work in Clee Hill was sent to all members of the CWG Bird Group, and it can be found on the Clee Hill part of the Community Wildlife Groups website, [www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk) More information about the aims and other work of the campaign, including results from the Upper Clun, can be found on the SOS website [www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/](http://www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/)

We want to repeat the project in Clee Hill in 2021, but we will only be able to if the appeal raises some more money. If you want to donate to the appeal see the SOS website [www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/](http://www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/)

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

This is a long term campaign, and it is hoped to extend the nest protection and chick monitoring work to other CWG areas in future years. A lot more information can be found about the Campaign, including project work in Shropshire and elsewhere to find out the causes of the decline, and reverse it, on the SOS website [www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/](http://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 announced the results of the review of its policy on game bird shooting in October 2020, 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](http://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, see the SOS website [www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/](http://www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/) for more information.

## ***Use of CWG Survey Results***

In addition to feeding into the monitoring of the County population by SOS, 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 area was covered by an Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme up until 2014, and data from the early years of the Clee Hill survey 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 Clee Hill Group's survey results.

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 help identify potential new Local (County) Wildlife Sites. These sites are monitored by Shropshire Wildlife Trust, which encourages the landowners to manage them to retain their value for wildlife.

Defra is now organising trials for a new post-Brexit agri-environment scheme, but it will be some years before this can be introduced. In the meantime, farmers with existing agreements are likely to be able to get them extended. CWG results will continue to make the case for conservation of the target species to be included in schemes

## ***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 were provided free of charge to farmers and landowners with suitable habitat in the Cleve Hill area. A poster advertising the scheme was put up around the area for several years. Several boxes have now been installed, like the one at Mahorall Farm pictured, and it, and an indoor box at the same site, were both used for roosting in 2016 and 2017, but there has been no evidence of breeding. Kestrels bred in this box in 2018.



No new boxes have been installed since 2017, no reports of any box being used by breeding Barn Owls have been received, and there have been very few Barn Owl reports in the last few years. The Barn Owl project has therefore been suspended, until more owls are seen.

There were no reports in 2020, apart from a Barn Owl seen and heard on a few occasions during September and early October 2020 over Upper Marshes (67P). The timing suggests this was a juvenile, having dispersed from its natal site elsewhere.

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

***To report a Barn Owl sighting in the Cleve Hill area, please contact Chris Bargman  
01299 270514 [chcwg@shropscwgs.org.uk](mailto:chcwg@shropscwgs.org.uk)***

## **Other Nest Boxes**

The Group successfully applied to the Ludlow Rotary Club "Rotary Cares" fund in September 2017 to acquire 26 nest boxes for several other species: Kestrels, Pied Flycatchers and Redstarts, Swifts, Swallows and House Martins. These were offered to people within the area who had suitable locations for the target species, and they were almost all installed before the 2018 season.

Two Kestrel boxes have been installed, one on Catherton Common (see photo) and one at Whatshill. The latter was used in 2020 (see above). One further box is available when a suitable location has been found.

Seven Swallow, seven House Martin and three Swift boxes have been installed at suitable locations where the target species have been seen or have previously nested. Some of the Swallow cups were used again in 2020.

Six boxes have been installed for Redstart and Pied Flycatcher. Feedback to date shows that some of these were used but unfortunately not by target species – Blue Tits and one wasp nest. One box is waiting to be allocated when a suitable location where the target species have been seen can be identified.



**A volunteer is wanted to collate information each year on the use made of all these nest boxes, please.**

## **Bird Walks**

The planned Bird Walks, for members and the general public, were cancelled because of Coronavirus restrictions. It is hoped to resume them in 2021. Details will be posted on the website, [www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk)

## **Acknowledgements**

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

Chris Bargman  
Sally Barnaby  
Bob Braddock  
Beth & Lionel Bridge  
Mike Broad  
Andy Chapman  
Clare Chapman  
Barbara Daniels

Rachel Davenhill  
Eric Davies  
Eric Evans  
Celia & Ewan Gibb  
Helena Hale  
David Harper  
Jon Lingard  
Kate Maxwell

Mark Porter  
David & Ginny Seckerson  
Margaret Shaw  
Peter Simon  
Gareth Thomas  
Emma Tipton  
Kerryn Wynn

Sue Crichton monitored the pair out of the area, in 68B, and Wade Muggleton sent the reports of Curlews near Stottesdon.

Jon Lingard found three of the Kestrel nests, and Gerry Thomas of the Shropshire ringing Group ringed the Kestrel chicks.

A further five members, who have helped with the survey in previous years, or who wanted to help for the first time in 2020, also undertook to survey squares in 2020, but were unable to do so because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Thanks also to:-

- Chris Bargman, for co-ordinating the Bird Group work locally, and receiving records; co-ordinating the nest box schemes; and posting information on the web-site
- The various farmers and landowners who provided information
- Caroline Dahn, for landowner liaison
- 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.
- Jim Reynolds, for including articles about our work in the “Cleobury Clarion”
- Margaret Shaw, for publicity in Clee Hill “Viewpoint”, and on Clee Hill Facebook page
- Gareth Thomas, for monitoring the Curlew in the area Extension.
- Matt Cotterill of Natural England, who provided the original survey maps.
- Ludlow Rotary Club, for a grant for new nest box schemes in 2018.
- Gareth Thomas, for the Curlew photo, and Eric Davies, for the Lapwing photo, on the cover.
- Credits for other photos: Leo Smith (Curlew), Poppy Pritchard (age 12 - Curlew nest), Tim Lewis (colour-ringed Curlew chick), Celia Todd (Lapwing), Celia Gibb (Kestrel chicks) Eric Davies (Cuckoo), Mark Hamblin (Red Kite), John Harding (Barn Owl) and Chris Bargman (nest box photos).

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## **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](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk)

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

## **Summary 2020**

*This report summarises the ninth year for the Bird Group, which was severely disrupted by Coronavirus restrictions. However, monitoring of the main Target Species, Curlew, was probably better than usual, and the same applied to Kestrel and Cuckoo.*

*We now have a good understanding of the population and distribution of Lapwing and Curlew, and the status of the Other Target Species. Comparison of results over the years suggests a net loss of five pairs (38.5%) of Curlew since 2012, and there is no evidence that any young fledged in 2020. This is valuable information to promote its conservation.*

*Four more tetrads to the west were added to the survey area in 2019, and six pairs of Curlew were again found in them.*

*Only one pair of Lapwing was found.*

*Six Kestrel nests were found, and chicks in two of them were ringed and colour-ringed*

*Further survey work in future years will continue to establish population trends in the area.*

*The Barn Owl nest box scheme has been suspended, but nest boxes for other species have been provided.*

*The planned Bird Walks were cancelled.*

## **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.

Consideration will be given in March to holding Bird Walks in April and May.

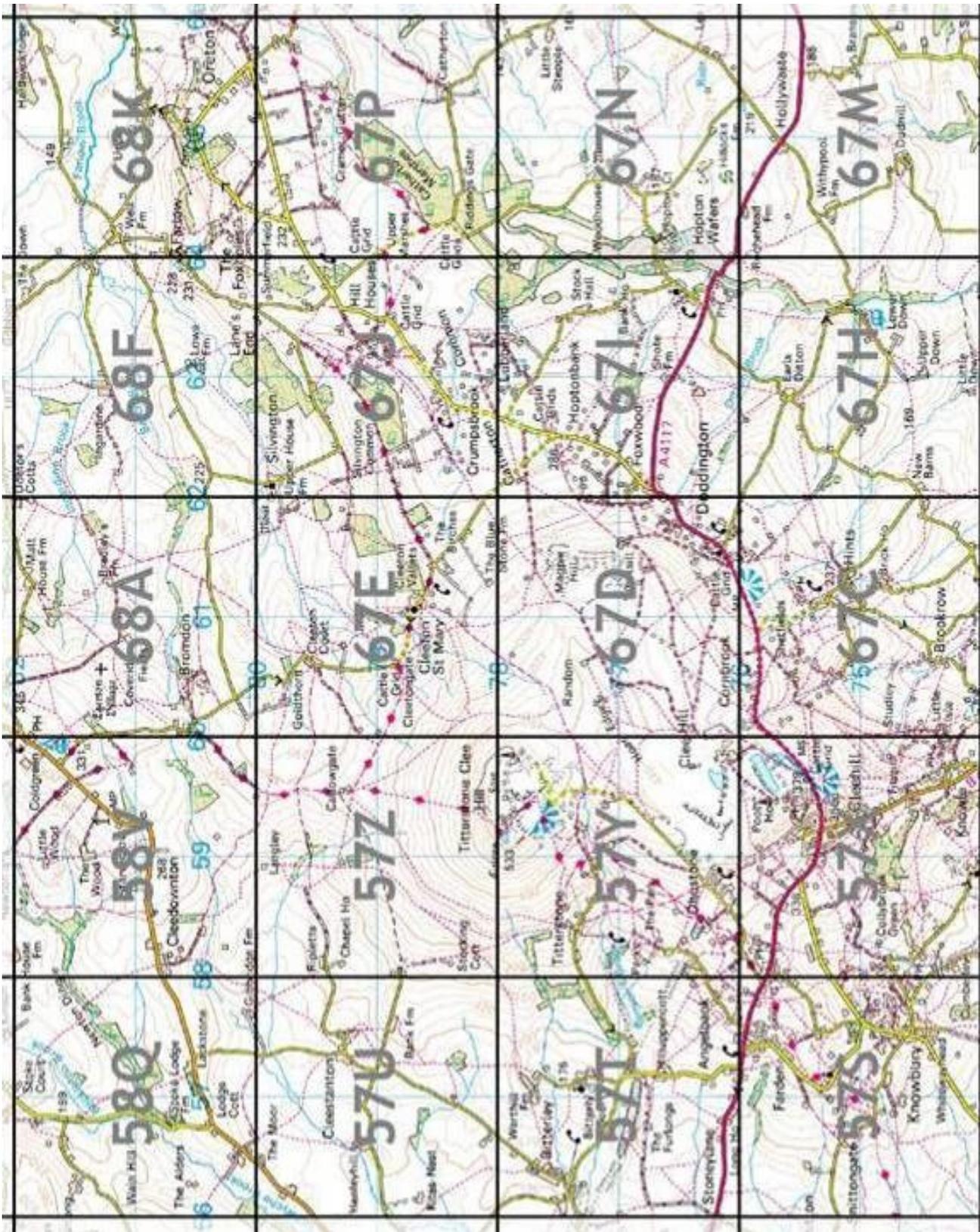
The Save our Curlews project will get underway, subject to raising the necessary funds.

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](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk).

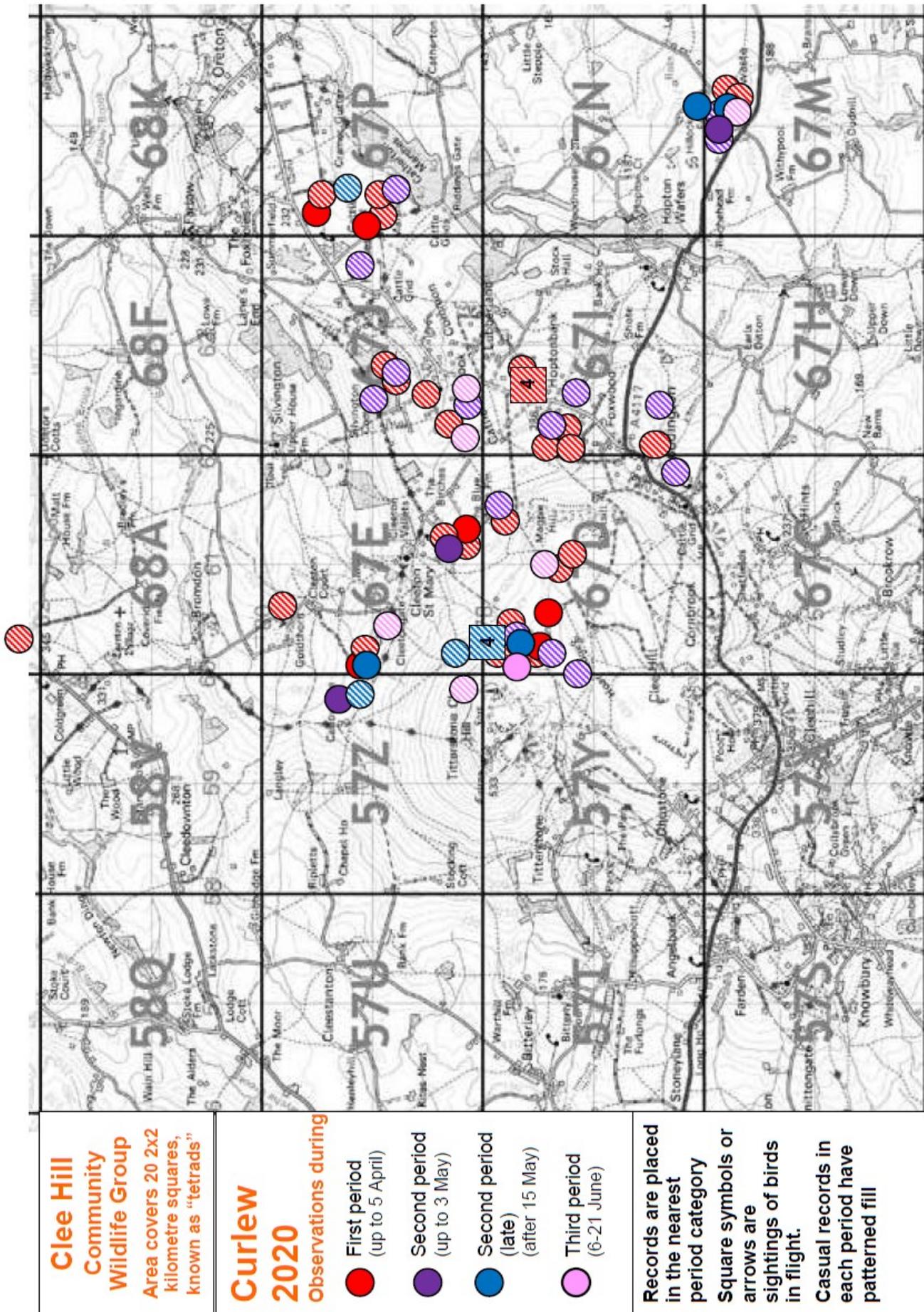
Leo Smith  
January 2021

## 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. All Curlew Observations 2020 (Main area)



Appendix 3. All Curlew Observations 2020 (Extension to area)

**Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group**

Survey area extension 2020

Curlew records

2020

