# Rea Valley

# Community Wildlife Group

Celebrating wildlife in Pontesbury, Minsterley, Stiperstones and Hope Valley Area




# Annual Report

2019 -2020

# Contents

# Introduction

The Rea Valley Community Wildlife Group has now completed its second year as a fully constituted group. Within the area we are incredibly lucky to have a vast variety of wonderful flora and fauna, and a community passionate enough to carry out continued surveys and monitoring.

The collective effort that goes into these citizen science projects is immense and goes such a long way to informing local and national trends on the status of our biodiversity. At a time when all eyes are turning to the dangers that our natural world faces, this kind of work is incredibly important to continue. Monitoring these populations may give us an insight into the short- and long-term effects of a changing climate.

This report brings together information from the many different surveys which take place in the Rea Valley, for the benefit of the group's members.

Going into 2020, the Stepping Stones project is providing funding for many community groups, as well as support to help increase their capacity and capability. With this we are hoping to run some extra events in the coming year, and to engage new members to take part in our surveys.

To contact the group and find out more about getting involved please send an e-mail to reavalleycwg@gmail.com

With Thanks,

Amber Bicheno,

Rea Valley Community Wildlife Group Secretary

# Curlews, Lapwings and Other Birds Survey

## 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 are Target Species for Natural England's Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme, 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
- Red Kite
- Barn Owl
- Grey Partridge
- Snipe
- Skylark
- Meadow Pipit
- Cuckoo
- Dipper
- Swift (nest sites only)
- Yellow Wagtail
- Dunnock
- Wheatear
- Stonechat
- Spotted Flycatcher
- Tree Sparrow
- Linnet
- Bullfinch
- Yellowhammer
- Reed Bunting

A bird survey was carried out in this area for four years as part of the Stiperstones-Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) area, but from 2018 onwards the responsibility fell to the newly-formed and independently constituted Rea Valley Community Wildlife Group. It complements surveys carried out by the Upper Onny Wildlife Group since 2004, and the Camlad Valley CWG, also initiated by the LPS. 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.

## Methodology

The Rea Valley Community Wildlife Group (RVCWG) area has been divided up into 26 tetrads (2x2 kilometre squares, each made up of four of the one-kilometre squares shown on Ordnance Survey maps). A map showing these tetrads, and the reference code, is attached (Appendix 1 on page 28).

People 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.

The methodology was identical to that used each year since 2014

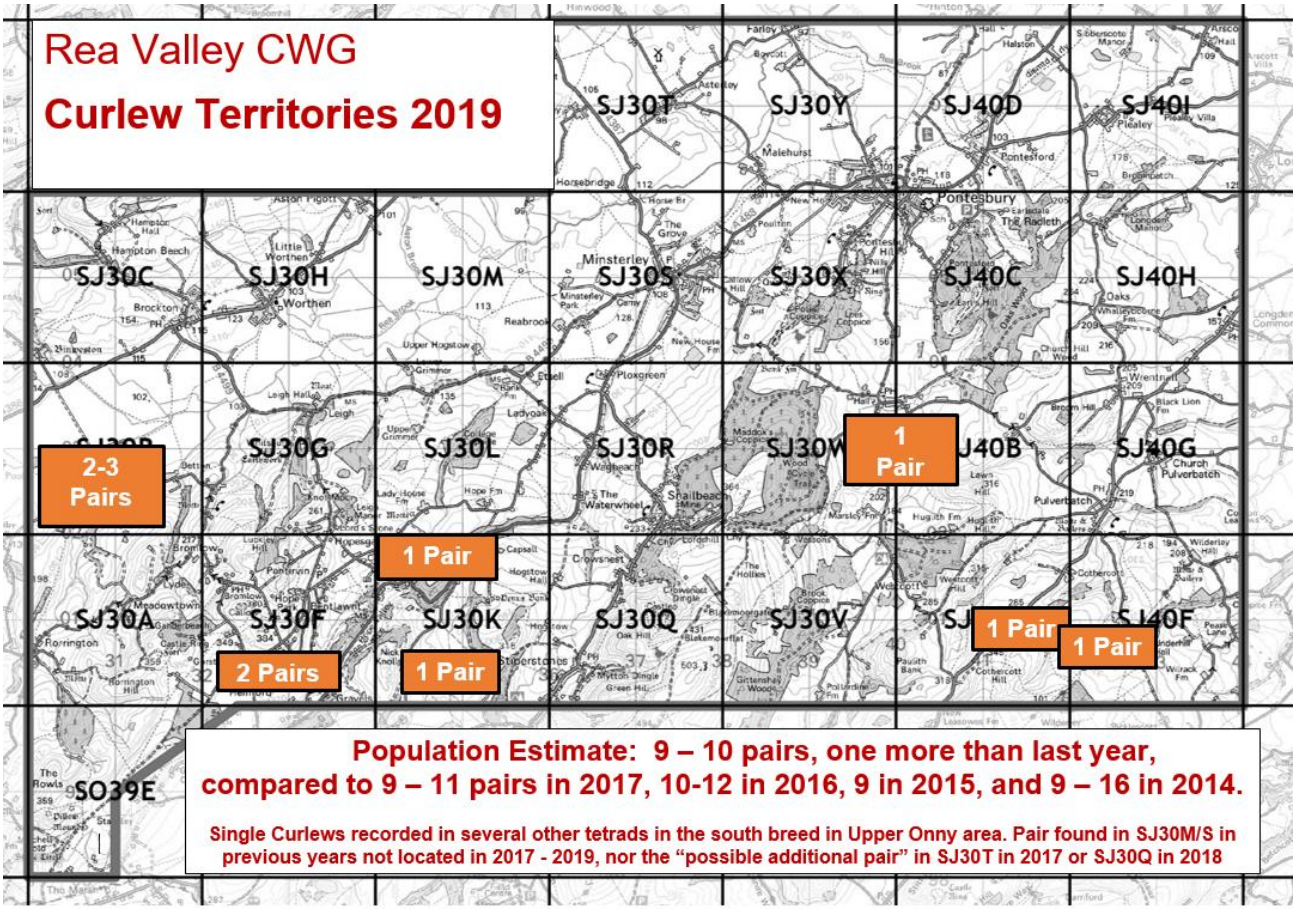
Participants were provided with detailed survey instructions, and a large-scale map of their tetrad (the map filled an A4 sheet of paper) for each survey. A fieldwork training session was provided on Sunday 31 March for people that wanted it. Most had helped with previous surveys, and so felt that a feedback meeting to discuss the results of the first two surveys, and provide clarification where necessary, was not needed.

Survey work was carried out in all except five of the 26 tetrads, and members spent over 180 hours on it, an excellent effort.

## Curlew

The map summarises the estimated number and distribution of Curlew territories in the area. The location of all Curlews found during the surveys, or reported on Casual Record maps, is shown on the map in Appendix 2 on page 29.

The methodology requires observations of a pair together, or a territorial display, or a single bird on two of the three surveys, to confirm a territory. However, Curlews often have large territories, and may be seen a kilometre or more from their nest site, so interpretation of the observations is sometimes difficult, unless singing birds are seen or heard concurrently. If that does not happen, the methodology requires the analysis to produce the lowest population estimate consistent with the records, in this case 9 - 10 pairs.




Five individuals (2-3 pairs) were found in SJ30B (near Binweston), and two pairs were found, as usual, in SJ30F (near Hemford).

However, in 2018 there was considerably less activity in SJ30W / SJ40B (around Habberley) than in previous years, and only three individuals were seen, never four, representing the loss of a breeding pair. Only two birds, a pair, were seen there in 2019, confirming the loss of a pair, but two chicks were seen with this pair about two weeks before they would have fledged. The farmer left the part of the field they were in uncut, but it is not known whether the chicks fledged or not.

The pair at Upper Cothecott (SJ40A) has been found every year except 2015. The pair in the adjacent square (SJ40F) has not been recorded previously, but this is one of the squares that has not been surveyed on a regular basis.

However the pair found in SJ30H (near Worthen) in 2015 has not been relocated, and the farmer reported that, in each year since, Curlews came to feed there, but not breed. This pair may well have been visiting from the vicinity of Marton Pool, to the west in the Camlad Valley CWG area.

The number of territories in SJ30K and Q (Santley and Hogstow) is becoming resolved, with two pairs found in SJ30K and none in SJ30Q. In previous years, there was evidence for two, possibly three pairs in 2018 and 2017, compared with no more than one pair in 2016 and an estimate of 2 – 3, possibly 4, pairs in 2014. It is possible that these pairs have been in different locations in previous years, or that a pair has been lost or overlooked.

None were found in any of the other three areas where there were "Possible Additional Pairs" in 2014. The single birds seen then were therefore probably foraging away from their nest sites.

The map of all Curlew records in Appendix 2 shows several at the southern edge of the area. Most of these are believed to be individuals foraging from territories in the Upper Onny area.

Table 1 shows the estimated number of pairs found in each year since 2014, and the chart shows the annual trends. In most years the number of pairs has not been established precisely, so a range has been given, and the chart is based on the mid-point of each range. The apparent increase in 2019 is likely to be a result of better survey coverage of SJ40F, rather than a real increase in the population.

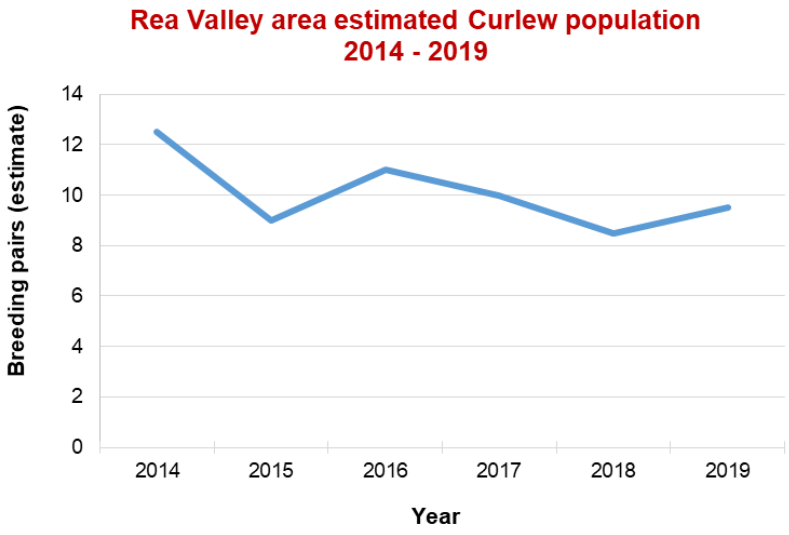



**Table 1. Curlew population 2014 - 19**

| Year | Number of Curlew pairs |
|---|---|
| 2014 | 9-16 |
| 2015 | 9 |
| 2016 | 10-12 |
| 2017 | 9-11 |
| 2018 | 8- 9 |
| 2019 | 9-10 |

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

Establishing trends is not easy, as some squares have not been surveyed every year. However, it is known that two pairs have been lost in the area since 2014. Local residents near Hemford (SJ30F) have been monitoring the return of Curlews to their breeding grounds for many years, but in 2015 only five, rather than the usual six, returned – the loss of a breeding pair. Two pairs have been found there in each year since. Similarly, only three individuals, not four, returned to the Habberly area (SJ30W and SJ40B) in 2018, and there was only one pair there in 2019. This, taken together with the trend chart, suggests a decline of around 20% since 2014.

Well over 150 Curlews have been colour-ringed at the Dolydd Hafren Montgomery Wildlife Trust Reserve on the River Severn near Welshpool since March 2015. Two were found breeding in the area, both near Hemford, in 2016, and more have been found since.

**From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Curlew population in the area in 2018 was 9 – 10 breeding pairs, a loss of at least two pairs since 2014.**

**The 2014 - 19 surveys have been the start of regular annual monitoring to establish the number of pairs actually present, better knowledge of nesting and foraging areas, and the population trend. The survey will be repeated in future years.**

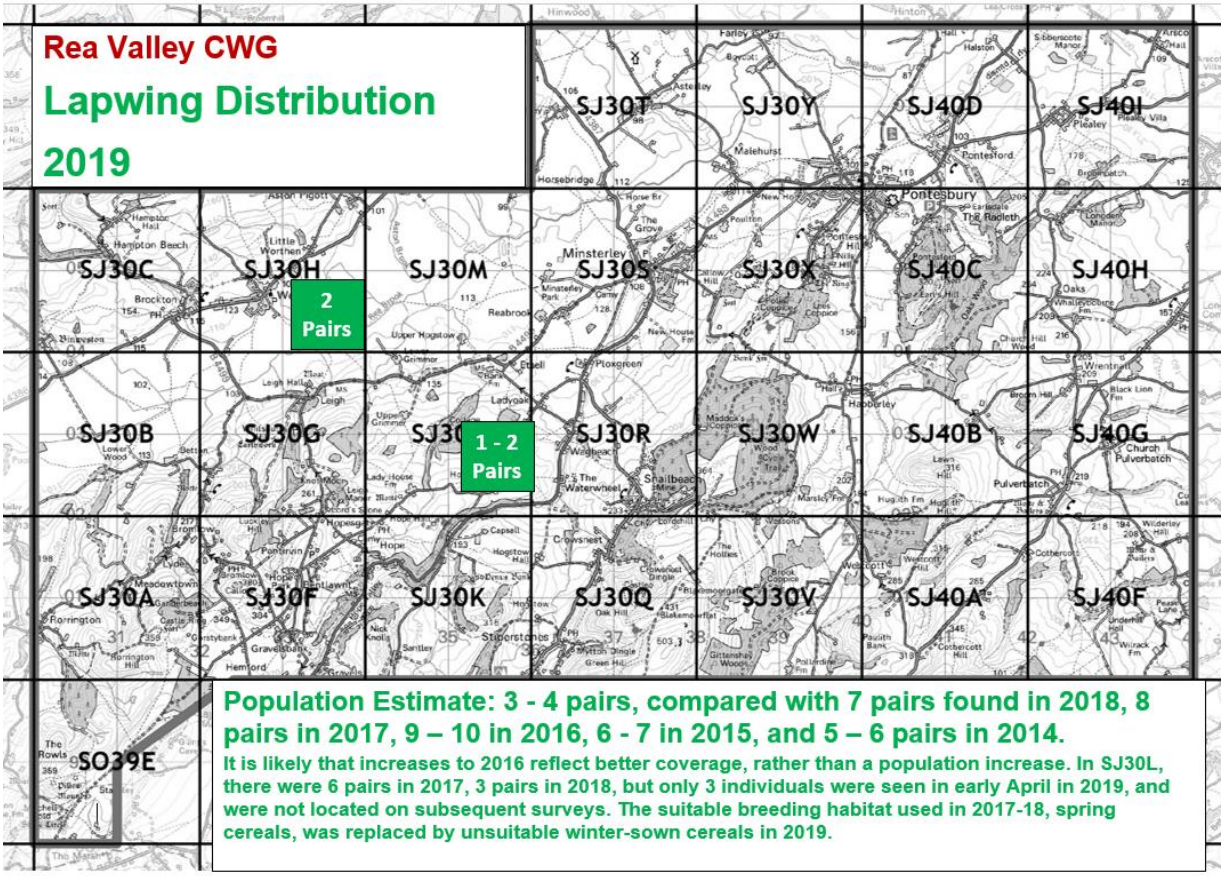
## Lapwing

The map summarises the estimated number and distribution of Lapwings. It also shows the cumulative results of all six Surveys.

Lapwings need short vegetation or bare ground to nest on, and those that nest on arable land have to move round to follow the farm crop rotation. The regular breeding site in SJ30L was initially occupied, but the Lapwings did not stay, because the spring cereals usually used for nesting had been replaced by winter cereals, which had grown too high. The site in SJ30H was re-occupied in 2019, having been vacant last year as a result of changes on the farm. A nest with four eggs was washed away by heavy rain, and a pair chased Crows off on 5 May.

No nest sites north of Minsterley were located, although some have been found there in previous years.

Again, a picture of breeding sites in the area is being built up, and the apparent increase in population, year on year up until 2016, is likely to be due to better coverage, rather than an increase in Lapwings. Similarly, the apparent decline in 2017 was probably due to reduced coverage. Some squares have not been covered every year, so establishing trends is difficult. However, it does appear that the population has declined since 2016, and the number found in 2019 was the lowest yet



**From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Lapwing population in the area in 2019 was only 3 – 4 breeding pairs, compared with 7 pairs in 2018, 8 in 2017, 9 – 10 in 2016, 6 – 7 in 2015 and 5 – 6 in 2014.**

## 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 Curlews are less common now than they used to be. Lapwings have apparently declined much more than Curlews.

## Other Target Species

The other Target Species recorded during the surveys are summarised in Table 1 below.

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).

The summary table shows the maximum count for each species on any one survey 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.

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 normal behaviour of each species. Thus the survey results will give an indication of the species that are present, and perhaps their habitat preferences, but only a very small proportion will have been recorded.

**Table 1. Other Target Species - Summary**

| Tetrad | Maximum Number of Each Species Recorded (Individual Birds) | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Kestrel | Red Kite | Skylark | Meadow Pipit | Dunnock | Linnet | Bull-finch | Yellow-hammer |
| SJ30 A | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 B | | | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| SJ30 C | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 F | | | | | | | 1 | |
| SJ30 G | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 H | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 K | | 1 | 1 | | 2 | 8 | 2 | |
| SJ30 L | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 M | | | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| SJ30 Q | | 1 | 5 | 32 | 2 | | 2 | |
| SJ30 R | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 S | 1 | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 T | | 1 | 6 | | 7 | 5 | | 3 |
| SJ30 V | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | | | | |
| SJ30 W | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 X | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 Y | 1 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | | 1 | 1 |
| SJ40 A | | 1 | 40 | | 1 | | 1 | 5 |
| SJ40 B | | | | 1 | | | | |
| SJ40 C | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 D | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 F | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 G | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 H | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 I | | | | | | | | |
| SO39 E | | 1 | 2 | | | | | |
| | 3 | 7 | 58 | 37 | 13 | 13 | 7 | 11 |

Only counts of Skylark on Cothecott Hill, and Meadow Pipit on The Stiperstones, were notable, and only Curlew, Red Kite and Skylark were recorded in more than one-quarter of the squares. Several surveyors made little or no attempt to record the Other Target Species.

A Kestrel was seen several times in 2018 and 2019 on wires adjacent to the A488 between Pontesford and Lea Cross, on the edge of the survey area.

Cuckoo became a *Red List* species in the *Birds of Conservation Concern 3: 2009*. Only one was recorded, in SJ30F, compared to two recorded in SJ30V in 2018, one recorded in each of two tetrads in 2017, one in 2016 and two in 2015. In 2019, a casual record was received of one heard somewhere in the vicinity of Upper Vessons Farm, in SJ30V.

Red Kites were seen in seven tetrads, compared with nine in 2018, which was three more than 2017, reflecting the spread of this species. One nest was found, at the site occupied in 2018 and 2017, which was the first since 2012. Another was reported near Pontesbury. Given the rapid spread and population increase (over 40 known pairs in Shropshire now – the first successful breeding for 130 years occurred as recently as 2006), it is likely that breeding will become a regular occurrence in the near future.

Of the Target Species, Grey Partridge, Snipe, Swift (nest sites), Yellow Wagtail, Wheatear and Tree Sparrow were not recorded on any survey. Four target species were recorded in one tetrad only: Cuckoo (SJ30F), Dipper (SJ30V), Stonechat (4 in SJ30Q) and Reed Bunting (a pair in SJ30Q). The Reed Buntings were the first recorded in that square since the survey stated.

A casual record of Swift nest sites (at least two) in Church Pulverbatch was also received.

## Barn Owl Project

The Group initiated a Barn Owl project in 2015. Nest boxes are only worth putting up in areas of good foraging habitat (rank vegetation a few inches high, where the favoured prey, voles, can be found) so a poster asking people to report sightings was widely distributed in the area.

In 2019, one was seen twice in May in the early morning in SJ30L. In 2018, one was seen near the industrial estate at Annscroft (just outside the area), and a dead barn owl found by the road at Plox Green.

Reports of a nest with fledged young near Worthen, and sightings near Plealey, were received in 2017, No reports were received in 2016. Previously, three reports have been received (near Pontesbury, Plealey and Hemford, not enough to identify potential sites for nest boxes yet.

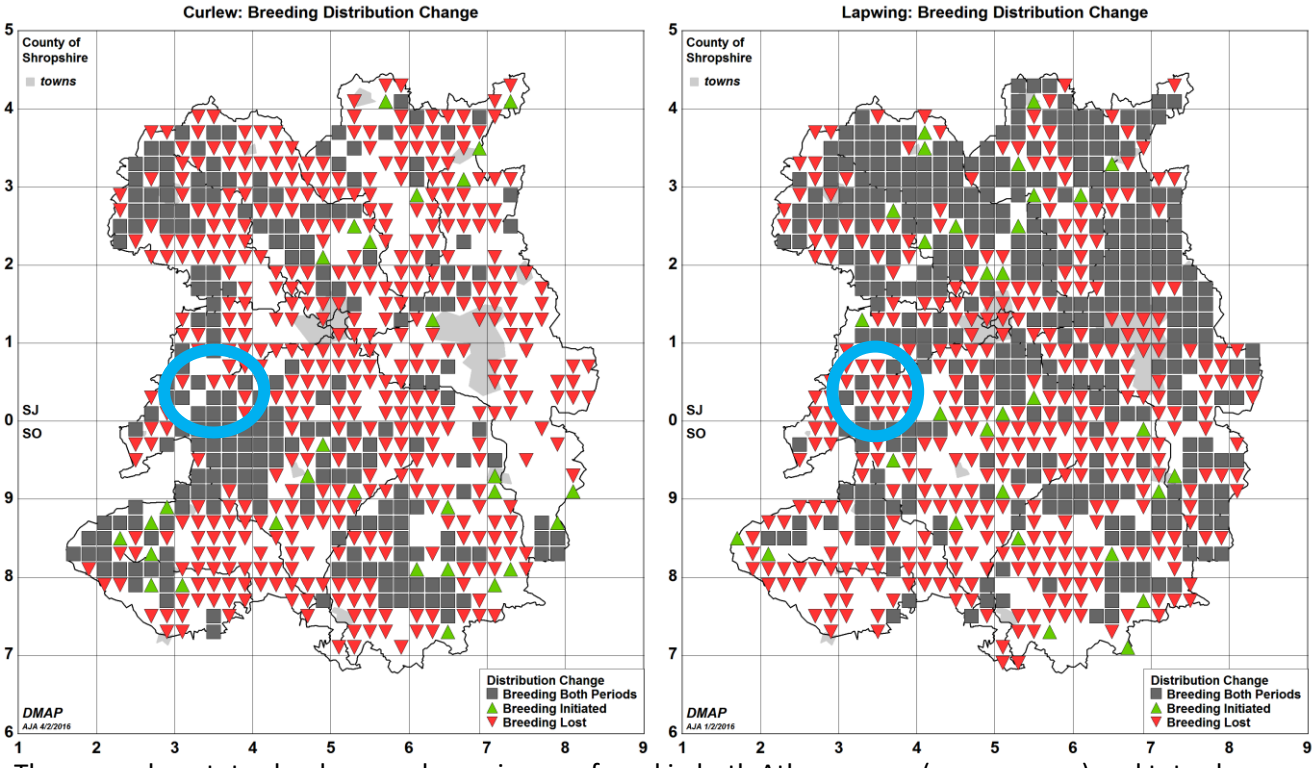
In view of the very small number of reports, and the end of the LPS which might have funded nest boxes if there was evidence that they might be used, the effort to systematically seek out Barn Owl records has been abandoned.

## Nest Box Scheme

A nest box scheme for woodland birds, particularly Pied Flycatcher, in the Stiperstones valleys at Resting Hill, has been developed. A report of this project is given on p15.

## Decline of Lapwing and Curlew

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




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

Surveys including counts complement these maps. The county Lapwing population has fallen from about 3000 pairs in 1990 to only about 800 now The Curlew population has fallen from about 700 pairs in 1990 to about 160 pairs in 2010 (a decline of over 73% for both species).

Other evidence for the decline of Lapwing and Curlew can be found on the website of the British Trust for Ornithology www.bto.orgConservation Action is also being taken nationally to reverse the decline of these two species. Both have been designated as UK Biodiversity Priority Species by the Government, as part of its commitment to international biodiversity targets, precisely because of the rapid decline, and both species are now on the *Red List* of *Birds of Conservation Concern 4*, published in December 2015.

Both species nest on farmland, and recent and current agri-environment schemes (part of the system of payments to farmers through the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union) included rewards for farmers for sensitive management of habitat on their farms, and providing other environmental benefits. Farmers applying to join had to take into account the habitat requirements of a number of birds, including Lapwing and Curlew, if they breed on or near the farm, or use land there for feeding. Many farms in the area will benefit from HLS agreements for 10 years from the date of signing, the last in 2014.

However, the funds available for current agri-environment schemes have been reduced, and the procedures are more bureaucratic, proving fewer benefits for birds. Future arrangements to protect birds and their habitats on farmland, when the current EU programme ends in 2020, are not clear.

## Curlew Country

The Stiperstones-Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) operated a Curlew Recovery Project in the area from 2014 to 2017. Fieldwork research established that most nests were predated (more than half by foxes), and when the nests were protected with electric fencing, most nests survived but almost all chicks were predated before fledging.

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

The location of any pairs of Curlew found by the Bird Survey will be passed on to the Curlew Country fieldworkers.

## Use of CWG Survey Results

In addition to helping the Curlew Country fieldworkers, the survey results are made available to Natural England.

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

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

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

## Recommendations

***Natural England is recommended to encourage farmers with breeding Lapwing or Curlew on or near their land to join Countryside Stewardship, 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. Stretton Hills 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, 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. The Curlew distribution map from the County Bird Atlas 2008-13, overlain with the Community Wildlife Group areas, can be found on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

In 2019, these Groups 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.

Further information can be found on the joint website for all the Community Wildlife Groups in Shropshire, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

## Acknowledgements

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

Richard Allen, Rod Bacon, Michael Bell, Amber Bicheno, Julian Bromhead, Geoff Brown, Lorna Farnsworth, Ray Harper, Kevin Heede, Alison & Paul Holmes, Jerry Hughes, Tony Legg, Julian Livsey, Angela & Steve Marsh, Steve Oates, Janet Radford, Siobhan Reedy, Luke Walker, Paul Wilcox, David Wilson and Anne Yeeles.

Thanks also to:-

- Joe Penfold, LPS Community Officer, who organised all the Bird Group meetings, distributed information to members, and nurtured the Community Wildlife Group through to its launch as an independent constituted body in November 2017.
- Amber Bicheno, for co-ordinating the Barn Owl project.

## Plans for 2020

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

The next Bird Group meeting will be held at 7.30pm on Monday 16th March at Minsterley Village Hall, primarily to plan the bird survey. New members will be very welcome.

Everyone interested in birds is welcome at all meetings and events.

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

Leo Smith

February 2020

# Resting Hill Nest Box Scheme2019 Results

By Amber Bicheno and Gary Price

## Introduction

Resting Hill Wood is located on the slopes of the Stiperstones National Nature Reserve (NNR) above Snailbeach village. It is an actively managed, coppiced oak woodland and as such has some sections that are much more open than others.

The scheme is aimed at providing nesting opportunities in the form of nesting boxes in the wood for pied flycatcher (*Ficedula hypoleuca)* and redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus)*, two species of migratory bird that usually rely on cavities to nest in. Pied flycatchers are on the British Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern, whilst redstarts are on the Amber list. Loss of habitats with suitable mature trees is one of the main causes of decline for these two species.

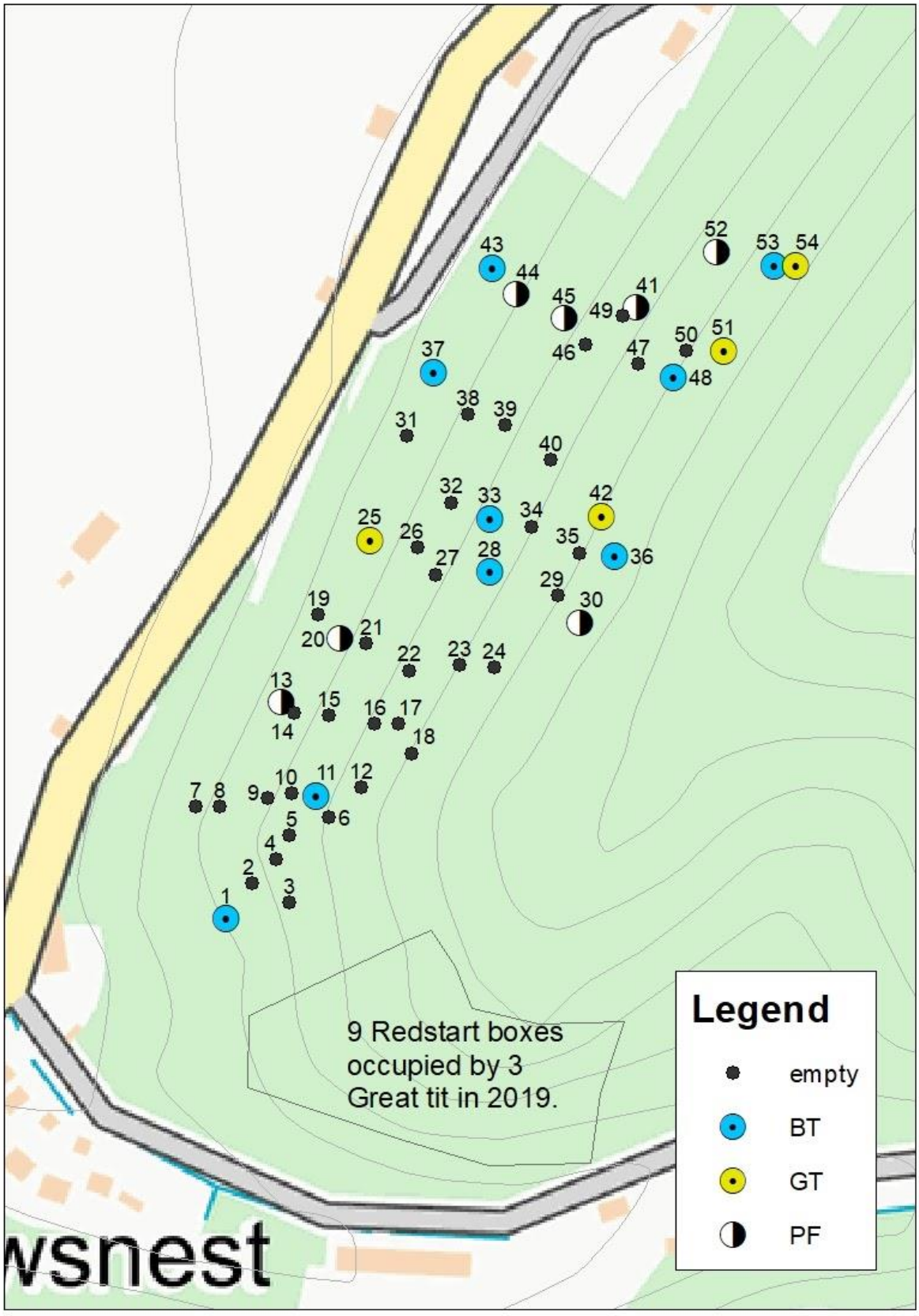
These boxes also provide homes for other native species such as; blue tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus)*, great tit (*Parus major*) and both recorded on this site. coal tit (*Periparus ater*), marsh tit (*Poecile palustris*), and nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*) have been known to use similar nest boxes in the area, though never on Resting Hill. Since the scheme's inception in 2015, 10 more boxes have been added to the site bringing the total up to 64.

The boxes were erected and are monitored in accordance with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Nest Record Scheme methodology. Data is submitted to the BTO as part of the scheme to contribute towards their long-term population trends.

## Summary Headlines


The project continued in 2019, monitoring the nesting success of 3 species within the woodland; pied flycatcher, blue tit and great tit.

- Overall box uptake down by 4%
- Pied Flycatcher numbers up by 2 nests
- Blue Tit numbers down by 7 nests
- Great Tit numbers up by 3 nest
- Redstart were not found in the wood this year.
- Overall success rate for pied flycatcher 86% (nests with at least 1 fledged young), 57% were complete successes.
- Blue tit nest success rate 44%
- Great tit nest success rate 71%
- Further dormouse record obtained from site


9 Redstart boxes occupied by 3 Great tit in 2019.
Legend
empty
BT
GT
PF
wsnest

# Results

## Box Uptake

*Figure 1: Proportional uptake of boxes by species*

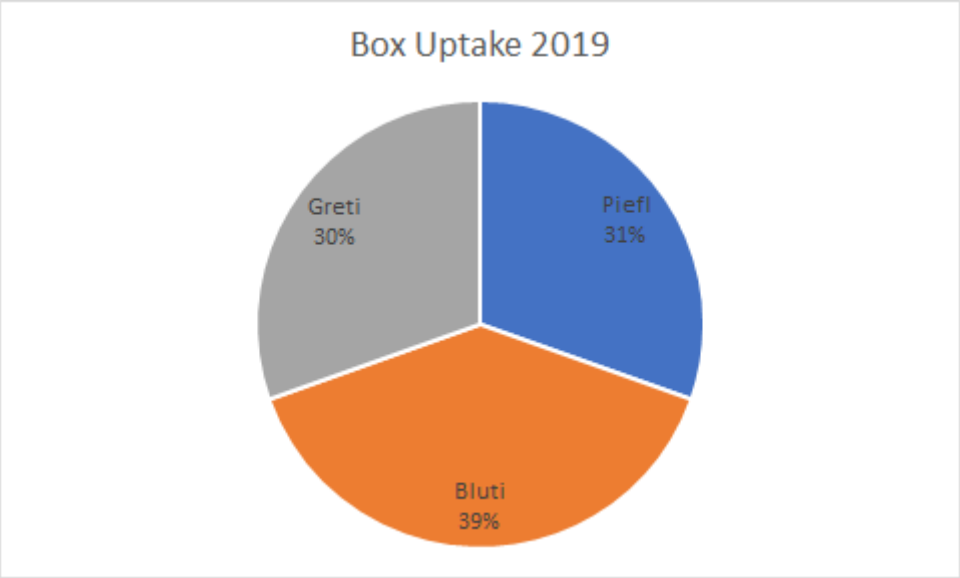
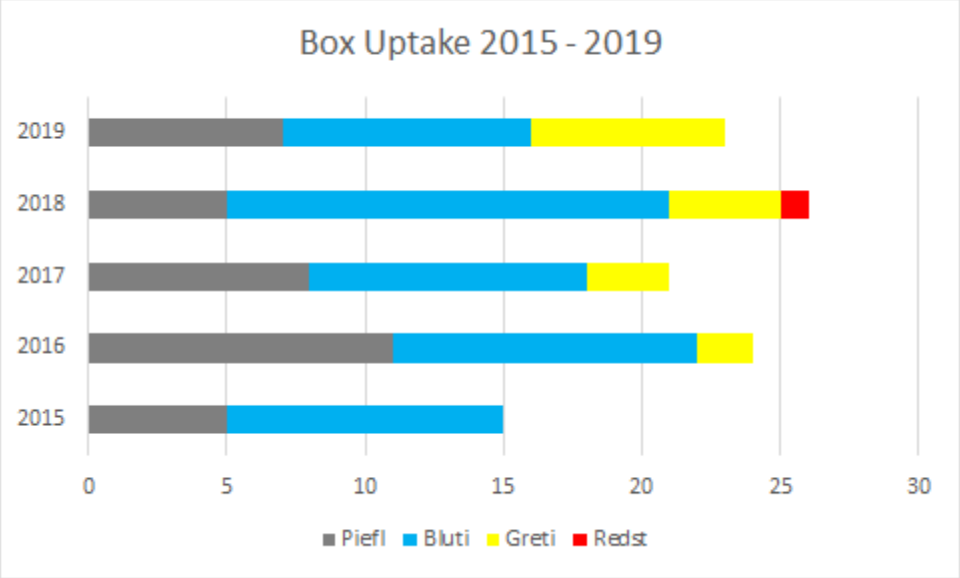



Figure 1 shows the uptake of boxes by each species. This has become a relatively even split, with blue tit still having the highest box uptake, but only 9% more than the lowest uptake of flycatchers. Figure 2 shows how this has changed over the schemes duration. 2018 had the highest numbers of blue tits compared to any other species, as 16 of the 26 boxes occupied were blue tit.

*Figure 2: Species breakdown of box uptake 2015 - 2019*



**Nest Success Rates**

2019 had a much higher failure rate for blue tit with a much lower uptake from the species as well. The other two species found on site in 2019 showed a much more normal success rate for the site, though this is still high for the national average. Table 1 shows the overall and complete success rates for each species. Overall success is measured as any nests that fledged at least one chick, complete success is measured as nests where all young successfully fledged.

*Table 1: Species Nest Success Rates*

| Species | No. of clutches | Overall Success | Complete Success |
|---|---|---|---|
| Blue Tit | 9 | 44% | 22% |
| Great Tit | 7 | 71% | 29% |
| Pied Flycatcher | 7 | 86% | 57% |

**Blue Tit Productivity**

Blue tits on site had a hard year, with the majority of nests failing and out of the successful nests, only 22% of them fledged all their young. The box uptake from blue tits was also down in 2019 despite more boxes being available with a lower overall box uptake. Nesting attempts from the species were earlier, similar to the 2018 season. During spring we had long bouts of very wet weather, which may account for the low success rate seen. The average clutch size has slightly increased from 2018, up to 8.8 eggs, as shown in table 2.

**Great Tit Productivity**

Great tits remained on site in 2019 and improved on their uptake from 2018, with 7 nests in total. Although their success rate is down by 4%, table 2 shows that their complete success and overall success rates have both increased by 4%. With the Higher box uptake taken into account, great tits have had their most productive year on site with 29 fledged young out of 7 broods.

**Pied Flycatcher Productivity**

After a slight decline in 2018, pied flycatchers returned to their average of 7 nests in 2019, however their overall success dropped by 11%. This is in contrast with blue tits whose numbers decreased this season. It is possible that due to the later arrival of pied flycatchers, they managed to avoid the poor weather conditions at the start of the year. Clutch sizes stayed at their 2018 levels, however their overall productivity dropped possibly due to higher mortality rates in nests that had failures.

*Table 2: Change from 2018 by species*

| Species | Bluti | Change from 2018 | Piefl | Change from 2018 | Greti | Change from 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total broods | 9 | -7 | 7 | +2 | 7 | +3 |
| Total successful | 4 | -7 | 6 | +1 | 5 | +2 |
| Success rate* | 44% | -25% | 86% | -14% | 71% | -4% |
| Complete successes | 2 | Insufficient data | 4 | +2 | 2 | +1 |
| Complete success rate** | 22% | Insufficient data | 57% | +17% | 29% | +4% |
| Total eggs laid | 79 | -5 | 47 | +13 | 49 | +16 |
| Average clutch size | 8.8 | +1.2 | 6.7 | -0.1 | 7 | -1.3 |
| Total eggs hatched | 49 | +8 | 45 | +16 | 45 | +26 |
| Total young fledged | 31 | -2 | 35 | +6 | 29 | +10 |
| Overall success rate*** | 39% | -13% | 74% | -11% | 59% | +4% |

**Success rate is measured as nests with at least 1 fledged young*

*** Complete success rate is measured as the number of nests where all young fledged*

****Overall success rate is measured as total eggs that made it to fledge chicks*

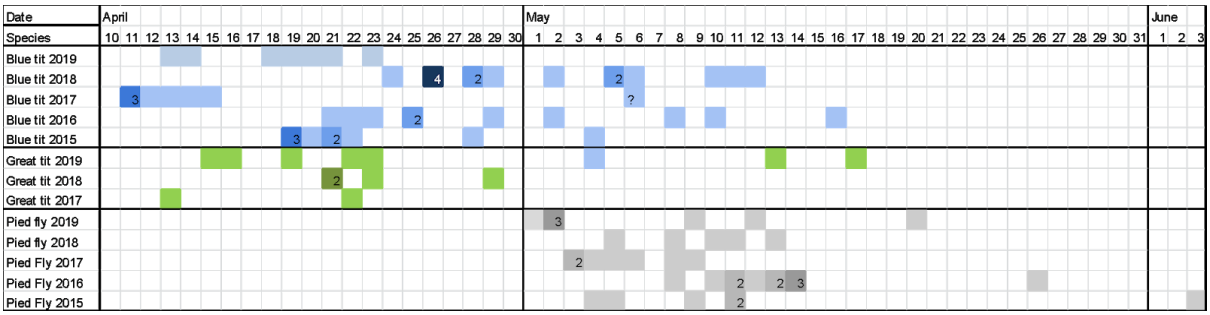
**Redstart Productivity**

Redstarts did not return to the site in 2019. This means 2018 remains the only year where redstarts have been found using nest boxes on site.

**Timing of Nesting Attempts**

Birds tend to time their nesting attempts to coincide with the greatest abundance of food, particularly invertebrates. The 2019 timings of nesting attempts, for all three species, were earlier than in 2018. Pied flycatcher timings were the closest to previous years, with nesting attempts just 1 or 2 days earlier. Table 3 shows the nest timings of each species across the past 5 years. 2017 remains the year with earliest nesting attempts for blue tit and great tit.

*Table 3: Timing of nesting attempts 2015 - 2019*




**Distribution of Nests**

BTO Research has shown pied flycatchers will often choose boxes based on their proximity to active blue tit nests and their success is higher when closer to them, however resting hill has not yet repeated this trend. Though the sample group is small, Resting Hill has frequently shown the opposite to be true.

## Ringing

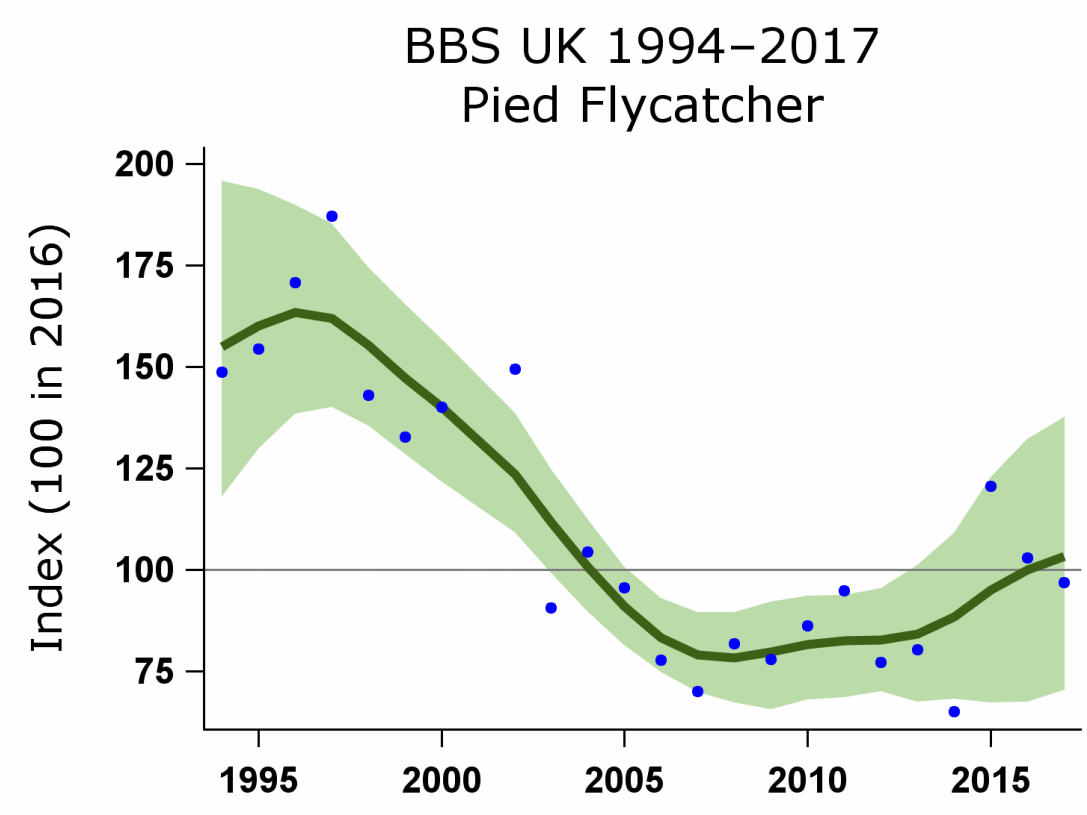
During 2019's season we were once again joined by Andy Spencer of the BTO to ring our pied flycatcher broods and adults. The ringing data goes towards the long-term population monitoring. Catching the adults feeds into adult survival rate knowledge.
In total 6 broods of flycatchers were ringed, with ages ranging from 4 to 11 days old. Unfortunately, the final flycatcher nest had not yet hatched by Andy's visit. 7 adult flycatchers were trapped which was a good result, two of these were controls, meaning that they had already been fitted with a ring. One of these birds was a female originally ringed at a wood near Leominster, and this is the second year that she has been found returning to Resting Hill.

## Other notable species

Bird nest boxes can also be used by mammals as well as birds. The last few years have seen wood mouse nests in certain locations and suspected hazel dormouse nests though autumn as well. During June 2019, one female dormouse was found in torpor in a box. This record was taken by a licence holder and sent in to the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme run by the People's Trust for Endangered Species. Both Amber and Gary are now licence holders for hazel dormice and will continue monitor the site for them.

## BTO Long Term Population Trends

The BTO's Nest Record Scheme is the largest and longest running of its type in the world. They now hold over 1.3million nest records, of which the Resting Hill results are a part! The primary aim of these schemes is to gather breeding performance data, with reports periodically published by the BTO.




*BTO/JNCC BirdTrends Report*

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to all our volunteers for their continued help;

Natural England for allowing access to their site;

Johnathon Groom for his continued guidance and support with this project;

Bird ringer Andy Spencer

# Pontesford Hill (Lower Camp and Woodland) Nest Box Scheme 2019 Report

By Geoff Brown

## Introduction

2019 was the fourth year that the boxes have been in place.

The 18 boxes now remaining were monitored weekly during the nesting season by a small group of volunteers, following BTO methodology. The data collected is then submitted to the BTO to contribute to their long-term population trends and nest records.

The nesting season started about two weeks earlier than the previous year due no doubt to the mild weather in early Spring. However a cold spell in the middle of April brought things to a halt and eggs laid were left covered. Cold spell over, nesting resumed but the end result was that a good number of eggs did not hatch.

Species this year were the usual Blue Tits, Great Tits and a Marsh Tit but the Pied Flycatcher did not return.

## Results

TABLE: Number of pairs of each species per year

Number of nesting pairs per year

| | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Blue Tit | 4 | 5 | 6 | 6 |
| Great Tit | - | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| Pied Flycatcher | - | - | 1 | 0 |
| Marsh Tit | - | - | - | 1 |

All nests produced some fledglings.

Blue Tits 27 fledged, down 6 on last year

Great Tits 6 fledged, down 9 on last year

Marsh Tits 5 fledged, up 5 on last year

Pied Flycatcher 0 fledged, down 5 on last year

Total fledged at 38 was a decrease of 15 from last year.

## Conclusions

Only 8 boxes were used this year, 2 less than last year. The non-return of the Pied Flycatchers was disappointing but compensated by the appearance of the Marsh Tit pair. Some of the boxes have never held nests and could be removed, although they may not be in a suitable condition for resiting. It would be good to be able to add new boxes to the site to widen the area.

Thanks are due to Gill Wilson, Jan Pursail, Helen Critchley and Geoff Brown for their efforts in maintaining and checking the boxes.

# Plant **Group** Report 2019

By Rob Rowe

**These ten events took place within the areas of the Camlad, Rea Valley and Upper Onny Wildlife Groups and were open to anyone interested in plants, whether a complete beginner, an experienced botanist or somewhere in between.**

**A leaflet was produced with the help of Cassy Clayton from Natural England.**

**These were distributed as hard copies and electronically and the events were advertised through the Community wildlife groups and the Shropshire Hills AONB.**

**I am particularly grateful for funding from the AONB Conservation trust Fund.**

**The events were all well attended with a mixture of 'old hands' and some new recruits. This combination meant that there were always several experienced botanists to help the newcomers.**

**As well as plants we recorded birds and insects where possible**

**These sessions were popular, with a total of eighty attendees made up of forty-two different people putting in a 264 hours of recording time.**

**Sunday 7th April**

**Ancient Trees, Linley**

Our first walk of the year was to visit the wood pasture called Old Mores wood near Linley. This is a hillside area of ancient oaks which were revealed some 10 years ago upon felling after having been hidden in a Spruce plantation for 50 years. Some had died due to being shaded out, but many survived and form a remarkable and unusual habitat. We walked from Lydham to Linley looking at other ancient trees in the landscape and then measured and recorded some of the old pollards.

**Saturday 27th April**

**Gittinshay Wood is a private woodland managed by the Forestry Commission situated to the east of the Stiperstones**

After a night of torrential rain and gale force winds this event was nearly cancelled but five people turned up and we went ahead and the day was dry.

This was a session on woodland plant identification, and we produced a botanical list for this woodland which was species rich. The young Habberley Brook runs through it and there is an understory of Bird cherry and also several small ponds containing

blunt leaved pondweed

**Early grasses, Hurdley**

**Wednesday 15th May**

An introduction to early grasses following on from a request from last year. We looked at woodland and meadows paying particular attention to grasses but also looking at early flowering Spring ephemerals on Roundton Hill and in a nearby wooded dingle.

**Wildflower Verges, Prolley Moor**

**Wednesday 22nd May**

Identifying the plants to be found in roadside verges. This turned out to be a very large group bolstered by a further party of 12 National Trust volunteers who helped monitor the progress of last year's verge management.

**Meadows and Grassland, Stapeley**

**Monday 10th June**

Exploring and recording some of the flower rich SSSI grasslands in the area.

Species rich fields with unusual plants such as Dyers greenweed and a profusion of Heath spotted orchids.

**Rush pasture, east side of the Stiperstones**

**Monday 24th June**

We were looking at area adjoining the Stiperstones national nature reserve

A day surveying species-rich grassland and rush pasture and looking out for the Small pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly. The east side of the Stiperstones is a stronghold for this rapidly disappearing species. They need Marsh violet for the caterpillars to feed on and we found it here in large quantities and saw a few of the butterflies on the wing and feeding on Marsh thistle.

**Tuesday 9th July**

**Rush pasture, east side of the Stiperstones**

A day surveying species-rich grassland and rush pasture further north than the last site. This was a local wildlife site but had not been surveyed for some years. Eight keen eyed botanists found several new species and it was in excellent condition.

**Grasses, Sedges and Rushes, Stapeley**

**Wednesday 17th July**

An ID day, looking at grasses, sedges and rushes. Met at the car park near Mitchell's Fold and slowly worked our way down into the valley to the west over several hours**.**

The ten species of sedge found reflects the richness of the area.

**Fungi foray on Roundton Hill Sat 12th October.**

It was still rather dry at this point so not a huge number of fungi [apart from parasols which were in great profusion] around but enough to keep people interested.

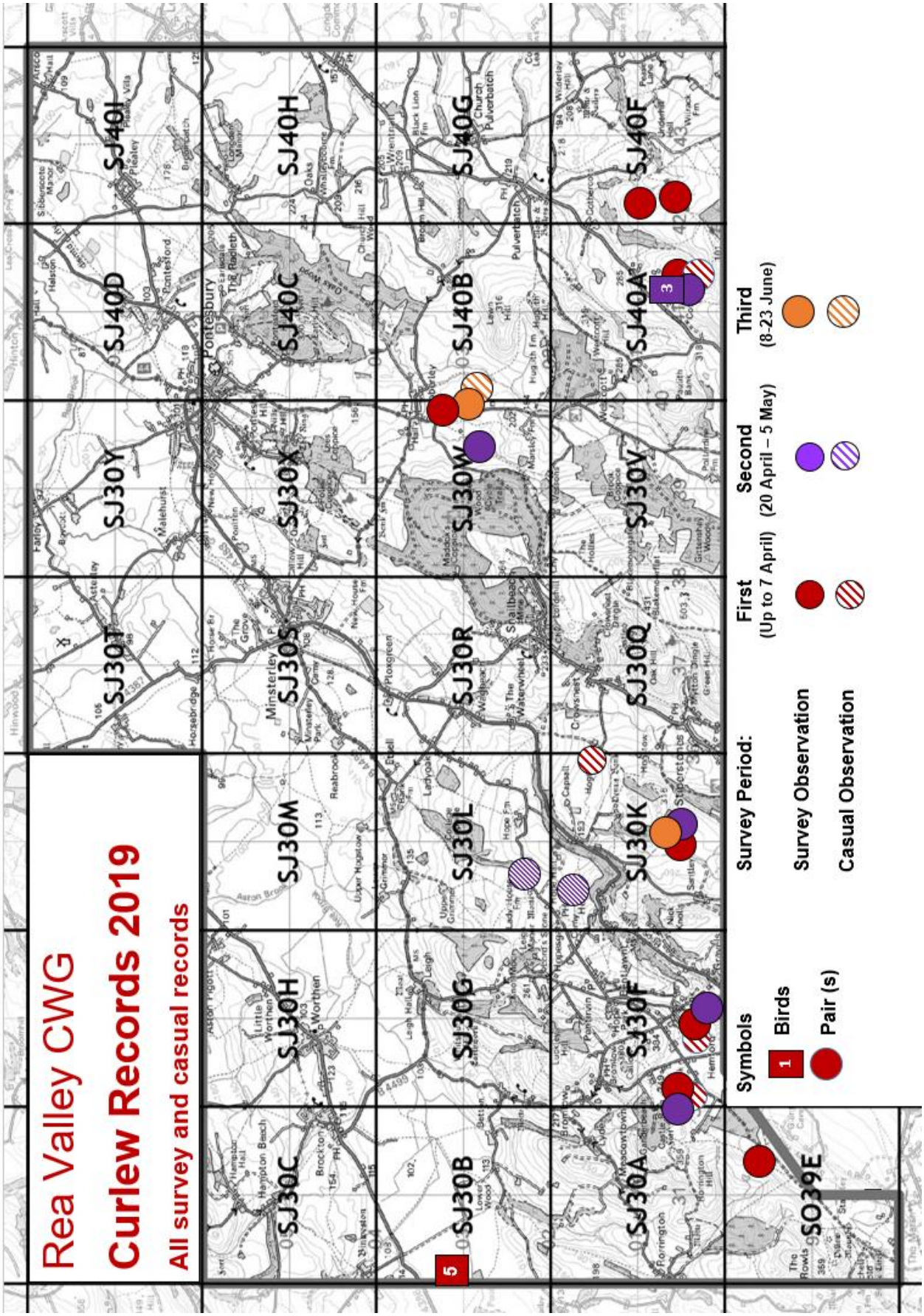
**The Bog Fungi Foray Sunday 20th October.**

A joint outing with Shropshire fungi group. This area always seems to turn up new species and this visit was no exception with a Bolete called Xerocomus chrysonemus being a first county record**.**

Records were sent to Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Shropshire Fungi Group and Montgomery Wildlife Trust and the survey results and species data from the training sessions will also be shared with NBN and other projects, such as Stepping Stones and Restoring Shropshire Verges Project.

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

# Appendix 2. All Curlew Records Received 2019



# Appendix 3. Detailed Bird Survey Results 2019

**First Period (23 March - 7 April)**

| Tetrad | Surveyor(s) | Time Spent | | Number of Each Species Recorded (Individual Birds) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Hrs | Mins | Lapwing | Curlew | Kestrel | Red Kite | Skylark | Meadow Pipit | Cuckoo | Dipper | Dunnock | Stone-chat | Linnet | Bullfinch | Yellow-hammer | Reed Bunting |
| SJ30 A | (Square not surveyed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 B | Michael Bell | 4 | 30 | | 5 | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 C | (Square not surveyed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 F | Richard Allen | 2 | 30 | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 F | (Training Session | | | | 4 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 G | (Square not surveyed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 H | (Square not surveyed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 K | David Wilson | 2 | 30 | | | | | | | | | 2 | | | | | |
| SJ30 L | Rod Bacon | 2 | 30 | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 M | Kevin Heede | 3 | 0 | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 Q | Julian Bromhead | 2 | 30 | | | | 1 | | 24 | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 Q | Anne Yeeles | 3 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 R | Richard Allen | 1 | 30 | (No target species recorded) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 S | Paul Wilcox | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 T | Geoff Brown | 1 | 50 | | | | | 6 | | | | 7 | | | | 1 | |
| SJ30 V | Julian Bromhead | 2 | 15 | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 W | Amber Bicheno | 2 | 0 | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 X | Alison & Paul Holmes | 4 | 30 | (No target species recorded) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 Y | Ray Harper | 3 | 30 | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 Y | Angela & Steve Marsh | 3 | 15 | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | |
| SJ40 A | Janet Radford & Lorna Farnsworth | 5 | 0 | | 1 | | 1 | 40 | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 A | Steve Oates | 3 | 19 | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 A | Julian Livsey | 4 | 0 | | 1 | | 1 | 40 | | | | | | | 1 | 5 | |
| SJ40 B | Siobhan Reedy | 2 | 25 | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 C | Susan Lockwood | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 D | Ray Harper | 3 | 30 | (No target species recorded) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 D | Amber Bicheno | 1 | 30 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 F | Janet Radford & Lorna Farnsworth | | inc. | | 4 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 G | (Square not surveyed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 H | (Square not surveyed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 I | Tony Legg | 2 | 35 | (No target species recorded) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SO39 E | Luke Walker | 4 | 10 | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| **Totals (26 Tetrads)** | | 65 | 49 | 0 | 22 | 2 | 5 | 90 | 25 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 |

Barn Owl in SJ30L

**Second Period (20 April - 5 May)**

| Tetrad | Surveyor(s) | Time Spent | | Number of Each Species Recorded (Individual Birds) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Hrs | Mins | Lapwing | Curlew | Kestrel | Red Kite | Skylark | Meadow Pipit | Cuckoo | Dipper | Dunnock | Stone-chat | Linnet | Bullfinch | Yellow-hammer | Reed Bunting |
| SJ30 A | (Square not surveyed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 B | Michael Bell | 5 | 20 | (No target species recorded) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 C | (Square not surveyed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 F | Richard Allen | 2 | 30 | | 3 | | | | | 1 | | | | | 1 | | |
| SJ30 F | (Training Session | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 G | Jerry Hughes | 1 | 30 | (No target species recorded) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 H | Jerry Hughes | 1 | 15 | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 K | David Wilson | 2 | 30 | | 1 | | | 1 | | | | | | 8 | 1 | | |
| SJ30 L | Rod Bacon | 2 | 0 | (No target species recorded) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 M | Kevin Heede | 2 | 30 | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 Q | Julian Bromhead | 2 | 15 | | | | | 3 | 22 | | | 2 | 3 | | | | 2 |
| SJ30 Q | Anne Yeeles | 3 | 0 | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 R | Richard Allen | 1 | 30 | (No target species recorded) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 S | Paul Wilcox | 3 | 0 | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 T | Geoff Brown | 2 | 5 | | | | 1 | 1 | | | | 3 | | 5 | | 2 | |
| SJ30 V | Julian Bromhead | 2 | 30 | | | | | | 4 | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 W | Amber Bicheno | 2 | 0 | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 X | Alison Holmes | 1 | 45 | (No target species recorded) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 Y | Ray Harper | 3 | 30 | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | 1 | |
| SJ30 Y | Angela Marsh | 2 | 0 | | | | 1 | | | | | 1 | | | | | |
| SJ40 A | Janet Radford & Lorna Farnsworth | 5 | 0 | | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 A | Steve Oates | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 A | Julian Livsey | 3 | 0 | | 2 | | 1 | 20 | | | | 1 | | | | 1 | |
| SJ40 B | Siobhan Reedy | 3 | 35 | (No target species recorded) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 C | Susan Lockwood | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 D | Ray Harper | 3 | 0 | (No target species recorded) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 D | Amber Bicheno | 1 | 30 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 F | Janet Radford & Lorna Farnsworth | | inc | (No target species recorded) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 G | (Square not surveyed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 H | (Square not surveyed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 I | Tony Legg | 2 | 45 | (No target species recorded) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SO39 E | Luke Walker | 3 | 10 | | | | | 2 | | | | | | | | | |
| **Totals (26 Tetrads)** | | 63 | 10 | 2 | 12 | 2 | 3 | 28 | 26 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 3 | 13 | 2 | 4 | 2 |

# Appendix 3 (continued)

**Third Period (8-23 June)**

| Tetrad | Surveyor(s) | Time Spent | | Number of Each Species Recorded (Individual Birds) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Hrs | Mins | Lapwing | Curlew | Kestrel | Red Kite | Skylark | Meadow Pipit | Cuckoo | Dipper | Dunnock | Stone-chat | Linnet | Bullfinch | Yellow-hammer | Reed Bunting |
| SJ30 A | (Square not surveyed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 B | Michael Bell | 4 | 10 | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | |
| SJ30 C | (Square not surveyed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 F | Richard Allen | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 F | (Training Session | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 G | Jerry Hughes | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 H | Jerry Hughes | 1 | 30 | 5 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 K | David Wilson | 2 | 30 | | 1 | | 1 | | | | | 1 | | 2 | 2 | | |
| SJ30 L | Rod Bacon | 1 | 30 | (No target species recorded) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 M | Kevin Heede | 3 | 0 | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | 1 | |
| SJ30 Q | Julian Bromhead | 3 | 30 | | | | 1 | 5 | 32 | | | | 4 | | 2 | | |
| | Anne Yeeles | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 R | Richard Allen | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 S | Paul Wilcox | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 T | Geoff Brown | 2 | 15 | | | | | 3 | | | | 2 | | 1 | | 3 | |
| SJ30 V | Julian Bromhead | 2 | 30 | | | | | | 4 | | 1 | | | | | | |
| SJ30 W | Amber Bicheno | 2 | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 X | Alison & Paul Holmes | 1 | 30 | (No target species recorded) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 Y | Ray Harper | 2 | 30 | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ30 Y | Angela & Steve Marsh | 2 | 15 | | | | 1 | | | | | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| SJ40 A | Janet Radford & Lorna Farnsworth | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 A | Steve Oates | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 A | Julian Livsey | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 B | Siobhan Reedy | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 C | Susan Lockwood | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 D | Ray Harper | 2 | 30 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 D | Amber Bicheno | 1 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 F | Janet Radford & Lorna Farnsworth | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 G | (Square not surveyed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 H | (Square not surveyed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SJ40 I | Tony Legg | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SO39 E | Luke Walker | 2 | 30 | (No target species recorded) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Totals (26 Tetrads)** | | **35** | **10** | **5** | **2** | **0** | **3** | **10** | **36** | **0** | **1** | **4** | **4** | **3** | **5** | **5** | **0** |