

A photograph of a curlew bird standing in a field of tall green grass. The bird has a long, dark, downward-curved beak and mottled brown and white plumage. It is facing left.

Camlad Valley Community Wildlife Group

A photograph of a field of tall grass with purple flowers in the foreground. The flowers are in focus, while the grass and the background are slightly blurred. The sky is overcast.

***Annual Report
2021***

CAMLAD VALLEY COMMUNITY WILDLIFE GROUP

Annual Report 2021

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CAMLAD VALLEY COMMUNITY WILDLIFE GROUP

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR, 2021

Welcome to this report and to those attending our Annual Meeting.

In spite of the frustration of Covid restrictions, you will see from the reports below that some valuable activity did take place in 2021. I would like to thank Leo Smith and Rob Rowe for all they do to support the Community Wildlife Groups by actively leading and encouraging others to participate in the wildlife monitoring and conservation of our area. Thanks also are due to all the committee members, in particular our Secretary Sandy Scott, Treasurer Huw Prole, and Peter Fenner, who manages our publicity and web presence. Keeping things 'live' during the pandemic has not been easy so it's good to know there remains a core committed membership. As we look to increase activity in the coming year, we shall aim to increase our numbers and to see more people active as volunteers.

The funding from the National Trust's Stepping Stones project was a lifeline last year and it was excellent news when further funding (supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund) was agreed for 2022. This has enabled the committee to draft the programme of activities outlined below. If all goes well we shall see a whole range of events and training, wider participation by all age groups and a packed Annual Report in a year's time. Watch out for more details!

Planned for 2022:

Curlew, Lapwing and other birds survey – introductory meeting on 14th March

Bird-box making – late February date TBC

Monitoring of bird-boxes and training in checking for target species (NB we are looking for someone to lead on this; modest fee offered; please contact the secretary or Leo Smith)

Plant group outings: meadows, ancient trees, fungi, Marsh Violets

Training and support on river-fly monitoring, bumble bee ID, butterfly surveys

Purchase of equipment eg nets, hand lenses, brash cutters, for use by volunteers

Nature writing/storytelling/art workshops for children and adults

Winter talks on a range of wildlife-related subjects

Mary Napper-White, February 2022

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 2020 - 21

Camlad Valley Community Wildlife Group

Receipt and Payments for year ending 31/3/21

Monies Carried forward from previous year £112.30

Payments in

Date	Receipt	£
24.7.20	Credit from Nat. Trust	1500.00
11.8.20	Cash at HSBC	5.00
4.9.20	Credit from Nat. Trust	1000.00

Payments out

Date	Cheque No.	£
11.8.20	100013 to L Hutton Harrop	150.00
	100015 to R. Rowe	375.00
17.8.20	100012 to Birnbeck Finance	168.00 (insurance)
	100014 to L. Smith	375.00
13.10.20	100017 to L. Hutton Harrop	150.00
10.11.20	100019 to R. Rowe	375.00
17.11.20	100018 to L. Hutton Harrop	35.00
11.1.21	100020 to L. Smith	375.00

Payments in £2505.00

Payments out £2003.00

Monies in bank as of 5/3/21 £614.30

Huw Prole, Treasurer

PLANT GROUP REPORT 2021

Outings and Training Days

A series of outings and training days started in 2014, with backing from Natural England.

The outings are designed to record the plants at each site and provide informal training for participants to improve their knowledge and identification skills, and then, if they wish, carry out their own survey work.

The Plant Group covers the areas of the Camlad, Rea Valley and Upper Onny Wildlife Groups and is open to anyone interested in plants and fungi, whether a complete beginner or an experienced botanist.

2021 was a quiet year with just 5 visits, all of which were well attended:

On 3rd June on behalf of Natural England we recorded Mountain Pansies on Stapeley Hill. This is one of the best sites in this area for this now uncommon plant. We counted over 4000 flowering plants.

On 20th June we were at Roundton Hill looking at the early summer plants on this Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust nature reserve.

On 25th June we returned to Hogstow Meadows which is a species-rich traditionally managed hay meadow near Stiperstones village

On 28th June we visited Brackenhurst near Hanwood which has 5 acres of wildlife garden and meadow creation.

On 8th July a visit to a flower-rich meadow at Cwnd, near Bridges, where the highlight was finding several tall spikes of Greater Butterfly Orchid .

In 2022 we hope to concentrate on surveying Marsh Violet, to establish more clearly its distribution particularly along the east side of the Stiperstones. It is essential for the rapidly disappearing Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary butterfly, which needs Marsh Violet for its caterpillars to feed on.

Also we will have some visits led by site owners to hear about their involvement with their land and we will continue looking for and surveying unimproved meadows and working with the Marches Meadows group.

Invasive Plant Species

Himalayan Balsam is a non-native invasive plant that is colonising many rivers and streams. The Group secured funding for a seventh year, this time from Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

Himalayan Balsam was originally found right at the top of the West Onny, just into Wales at White Grit, in a tributary near the Bog, and there were large amounts along the Criftin Brook. Pulling it up has been the major part of the project. We have now worked downstream to the A488 bridge near Horderley, and many areas are now clear.

In 2021 work did go ahead much as planned and some volunteers were recruited to help with clearance again. There was a contribution of 7 volunteer days.

We were able to work with National Trust volunteers again on the lower reaches of the river and on the Plowden estate we again had the benefit of 2 days with large numbers of enthusiastic National Trust volunteers [total 26 volunteer days] and on another day with members of the local Plowden fishing club. [9 volunteer days].

Landowners have been sympathetic, and the problem is being kept under control with much less of the Balsam occurring now higher in the catchment. A full report can be found on the website.

We have funding for 2022 from the Stepping Stones project.

Rob Rowe

CURLEWS, LAPWINGS AND OTHER BIRDS SURVEY

Introduction



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

The aim is to locate the territories of breeding pairs of

Lapwing and Curlew, and record behaviour, to estimate the population. No attempt is made to locate nests. Although the survey concentrates on the two main target species, and their habitats, surveyors are asked to also record on their maps any of 23 other target species seen, if they were confident that they could do so.

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

The survey consists of three visits to each of these tetrads, once during each of three specified two-week periods, around 1st April, 1st May and mid-June. with visits concentrating on habitats where the main target species might be found, and lasting around three hours each. The surveys are conducted from Public Rights of Way, unless individual surveyors obtained landowners permission to leave them. Survey maps and recording instructions were supplied. A practical fieldwork training meeting was held for those that wanted one.

In 2021, coverage was limited due to Government restrictions to limit the spread of coronavirus. 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 [in Shropshire]. There are 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 2021”. Surveyors were requested to concentrate on Lapwing, Curlew and Kestrel, and any potential Red Kite breeding sites. Coverage of Curlew was probably better than usual, with people exercising from home, but coverage of Lapwing was less good than usual.

Participation in 2021 was similar to what was achieved in earlier years, and 23 members spent over 150 hours on the survey. Recording of the Other Target Species resumed. Only two survey squares received no coverage.

Curlew

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



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

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

Survey results

The map summarises the estimated number and distribution of Curlew territories in the Camlad Valley area in 2021.

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 7 - 8 pairs.

A pair has been found in SO29Y every year since 2014 (except 2015), but in 2020, two pairs were found for the first time. Only one was found in 2021

Apart from that, Curlews were found at all the sites except one where they were found last year. There were definitely two pairs in SJ20K, where one was found in 2020 and 2019 (the first year this square was covered.)

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

The northern part of SO39B was again covered thoroughly by new members who sent in several records of a pair in the north-west corner of the square. The pair was recorded by Group surveys 2014-16, but not 2017-19, when this part of the square was not covered.

Again, there were only two records from local residents in SO29S, of one heard near Rhiston (but in England), and again the pair did not stay to breed. It is believed that this pair has been lost.

Judging from their behaviour, it is likely that the pairs in SJ20K had chicks, but there is no evidence that any young Curlews fledged in the area.

From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Curlew population in the area in 2021 was 7 - 8 breeding pairs, 3 – 4 in England and 4 in Wales

The 2014 - 21 surveys have been the start of regular annual monitoring to establish the number of pairs actually present, better knowledge of nesting and foraging areas, and the population trend. The survey will be repeated in future years.

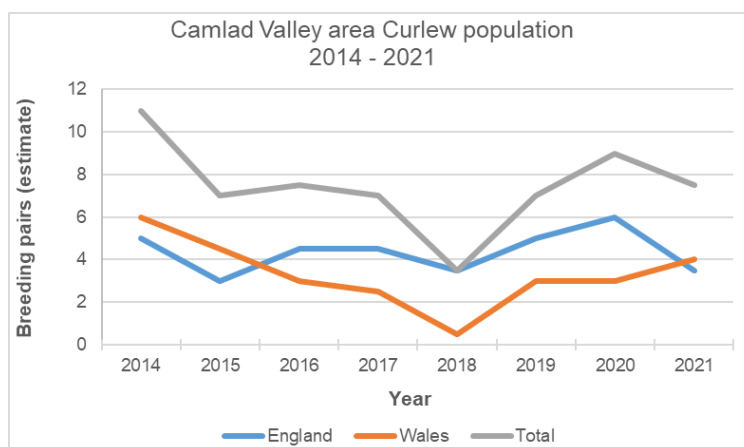
Population Trend

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

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

Table 1. Curlew population 2014 – 21

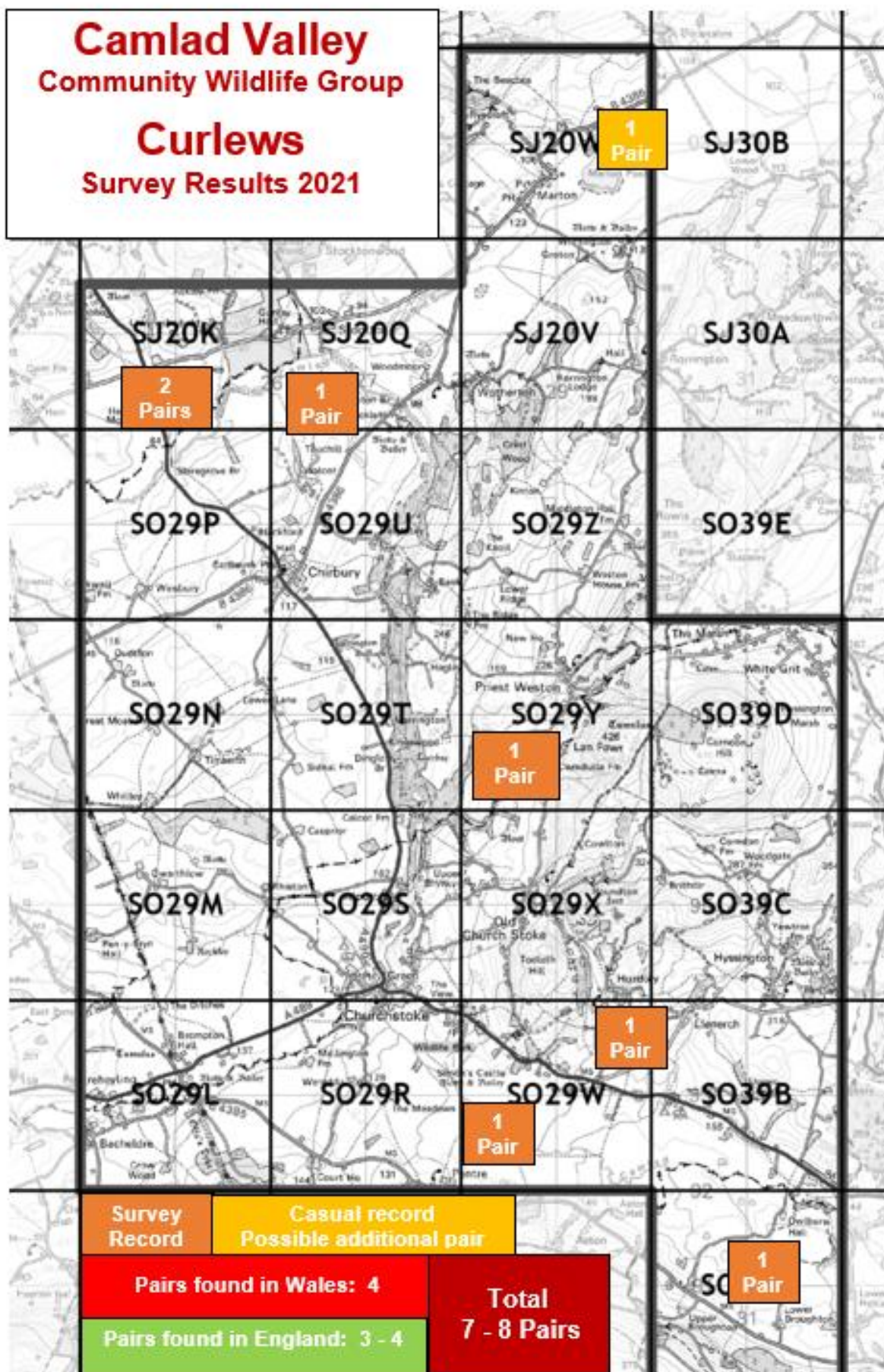
Year	Number of Curlew pairs		
	England	Wales	Total
2014	4 - 6	5 - 7	9 - 13
2015	2 - 3	4 - 5	6 - 8
2016	4 - 5	2 - 4	7 - 8
2017	4 - 5	2 - 3	7
2018	3	0 - 1	3 - 4
2019	5	3	7
2020	5 - 7	3	8 - 10
2021	3 - 4	4	7 - 8



In addition, at least one pair, possibly two, were found in SJ20K in 2019. A pair had not been recorded there before, but the part of the square where it was found had not been surveyed previously, so this pair may have been present every year. Two pairs were found there in 2020, but only one again in 2021.

Camlad Valley Community Wildlife Group

Curlews Survey Results 2021



There were definitely two pairs in SJ20K, the first year this has been proved. Two pairs were found in SO29Y in 2020, for the first time, but only one was found in 2021. A pair found in SO29S in previous years was included in the 2020 results, but local residents say Curlew was recorded occasionally in April but did not stay to breed.

The population apparently increased in 2020, compared to 2019, as a second pair was found south of Priest Weston, in SO29Y, but again this second pair was not found in 2021.

Overall, since 2014, it appears that the population in both the English and Welsh part of the area has declined.

Colour-ringing



Around 200 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, mainly on spring migration as they make their way back to breeding sites. All the “headstarted” chicks released by Curlew Country near the Stiperstones since 2017, and a large number at autumn and wintering sites in Wales, have also been colour-ringed.

An example of the colour-rings can be seen in the photo, taken in the Upper Clun in 2017.

Prior to 2020, four colour-ringed wild Curlews had been found breeding in the area, one near Owlbury, one near Hockleton and two near Marton. In 2020 both birds in the pair in SO29W, and one in each of the pairs in SO29Y, were colour-ringed, and three of these four were seen again in 2021, but most individuals were not observed closely enough to see whether they were colour-ringed or not. All these Curlews were caught and ringed at Dolydd Hafren MWT reserve near Welshpool, in March on their way back to their breeding areas. No headstarted Curlews have been found.

Lapwing

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



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

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

In 2020 four breeding pairs were found about one mile east of Churchstoke, very close to the border, but in Wales. In 2021, two Lapwing were seen at the same site on 8 March, and one was seen there on 30 March. It is likely that at least one breeding pair was present, but they were not seen on subsequent visits to the site.

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

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

**From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that the
Lapwing population in 2021 was one breeding pair,
in Wales**

Anecdotal Evidence for the Decline of Lapwing and Curlew

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

Lapwings have apparently declined much more than Curlews.

Kestrel

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

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



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

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

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

The population varies from year to year, depending on prey abundance, mainly voles, but Kestrels are much more likely to be observed in good breeding seasons, when they have to spend more time hunting for food for chicks, and travelling to and from the nest. In 2019, the numbers of Kestrels seen were much lower in all the CWG areas than in 2018, suggesting that 2019 was a very poor year for them. 2020 appears to have been generally better, but 2021 has been another very poor year, probably due to the persistent cold and dry northerly winds in April and May, which delayed the growing season and reduced the availability of prey.

Observations in the Camlad Valley area in 2021 suggested three pairs, near Priest Weston, Roundton and Hyssington, compared with four pairs last year.

Cuckoo

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

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

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

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

It is one of the Other Target Species that members have been asked to record each year, but in 2020 there were more Cuckoo records than usual. It was not clear whether there were actually more Cuckoos about, or that people were better able to hear them in the peace and quiet, or were at home rather than work, because of the coronavirus lockdown. Members were therefore specifically encouraged to submit Cuckoo records, which probably represented around six territorial males, substantially more than recorded in previous years, when records have come only from Corndon Hill (SO39D). In 2021, there were no records on surveys, but there was one casual record from Priest Weston, near the usual area.

Red Kite

The number seen each year has steadily increased, and 17 were seen in 10 squares in 2019. In view of the limited coverage in 2020, no direct comparison could be made, but in 2021, 20 were seen in 10 squares (half the survey area).

A nest was found in the Welsh part of the area in 2020, in an oak tree in SO39C, and two young fledged. No nest was found in 2021. In the English part of the area, nests have been found occasionally since 2012.

Given the rapid spread and population increase (over 50 known nests in Shropshire in 2021 – the first successful breeding for 130 years occurred as recently as 2006), it is likely that breeding will become a regular occurrence in the near future.



Other Target Species

Apart from the five main Target Species listed above, members were also asked to resume recording 19 Other Target species: Barn Owl, Bullfinch, Dipper, Dunnock, Grey Partridge, Linnet, Meadow Pipit, Red Kite, Reed Bunting, Skylark, Snipe, Spotted Flycatcher, Stonechat, Swift (nest sites only), Tree Sparrow, Wheatear, Whinchat, Yellow Wagtail and Yellowhammer. The results are shown in Table 1.

Tetrad	Number of Each Species Recorded (Individual Birds)										
	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Dunnock	Wheat-ear	Stone-chat	Tree Sparrow	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer
SJ20 K		1					2				1
SJ20 Q	(None of these target species recorded)										
SJ20 V											
SJ20 W											
SO29 L	(Square not surveyed)										
SO29 M			2								
SO29 N	(Square not surveyed)										
SO29 P			2								
SO29 R	(None of these target species recorded)										
SO29 S		2	1		7			6			2
SO29 T	(None of these target species recorded)										
SO29 U											
SO29 W		1	1		2				8		3
SO29 X	1	2		5	2		1				
SO29 Y		1		3	1						
SO29 Z		3									
SO39 A		1	1					1			1
SO39 B		1									
SO39 C	2	2			1					1	
SO39 D		2	15	6		2	2				
Totals	3	20	23	15	15	2	6	7	8	1	8
Squares	2	10	6	3	5	1	3	2	1	1	4

Table 1. Other Target Species - Summary

Nine species were not recorded at all: Barn Owl, Dipper, Grey Partridge, Reed Bunting, Snipe, Spotted Flycatcher, Swift (nest sites) Whinchat, and Yellow Wagtail

No Swift Nest Sites were reported, but the habitats visited by surveyors, to look for the main target species, do not hold many suitable Swift breeding sites. Swifts are on the *Red List of Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire*, and a Species Recovery Action Plan has been drawn up. Swifts are known to breed in Hyssington, Churchstoke and Chirbury, and almost certainly do so in other towns and villages. The Group would welcome a volunteer to be Swift Species Champion in the area, to recruit local volunteers to try and locate breeding sites.

Nest Box Schemes

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

Barn Owl

The Montgomeryshire Barn Owl Group has been active in the Welsh part of the Group's area for many years, and has installed a number of nest boxes.

To support MBOG, and with the support of the Shropshire Barn Owl Group, the Community Wildlife Group intends to install some boxes in the English part of its area. The boxes are more likely to be used if they are put up in places with suitable habitat, where Owls are already present.

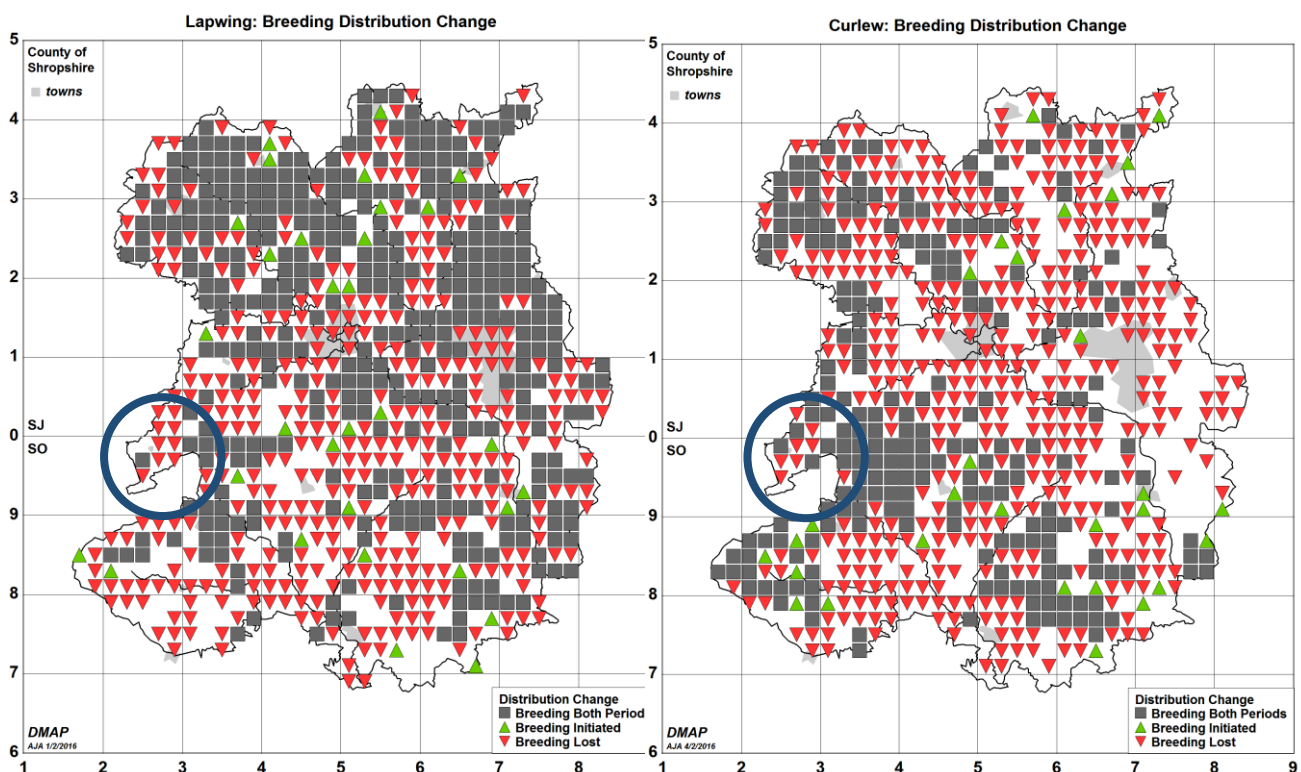


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An appeal for sightings has been launched. (See Appendix 2).

Decline of Lapwing and Curlew

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Recommendations

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

Curlew Country

The Stiperstones-Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) operated a Curlew Recovery Project in the area from 2014 to 2017. Fieldwork research established that almost all nests were predated (more than half by foxes), and when the nests were protected with electric fencing, most nests survived but productivity didn't improve because the chicks were predated before fledging.

The LPS ended in March 2018, but the Curlew project has continued, under the name "Curlew Country". It has concentrated on the trialling of "headstarting". This involves removing eggs from Curlew nests, incubating them artificially, rearing chicks in captivity, and then releasing them into the wild after they fledge, at or near a potential breeding site.

It is considered to be a short-term measure to try to boost the Curlew population while discovering the appropriate measures to improve breeding success to the level needed for recovery. Under a Natural England licence, seven Curlew chicks were reared and released in 2017, 21 in 2018 and 33 in 2019. While this has been a successful technique for other species, it is not known whether our local Curlew chicks will survive and return to their natal area to breed. However, if it does work it is expected to lead to a significant short-term increase in the local Curlew population.

Curlews generally stay on their wintering grounds during their first year, and return to their natal area to breed when they are two years old, and wild Curlew survival rate to two years old is 36% (Rob Robinson, BTO, *pers.comm*) (ie we could reasonably expect 36% of the 60 headstarted birds (i.e. 21 birds) released 2017-19 to return by 2021).

The whole of the Curlew Country area is within the area covered by three CWGs, Upper Onny, Rea Valley and Camlad Valley, and there is no evidence from the 2021 surveys of the three groups that that number of Curlews has come back to the area, so results so far are not encouraging. The location of any pairs of Curlew found by the Bird Survey will be passed on to the Curlew Country fieldworkers to check for colour-rings.

Other Community Wildlife Groups

The first Group, the Upper Onny Wildlife Group, first surveyed Lapwing and Curlew in 2004, and has done so every year since. Upper Clun CWG started in 2007, Kemp Valley in 2009, Clee Hill CWG in 2012, and Rea Valley and Camlad CWGs (part of the Stiperstones-Corndon HLF-funded Landscape Partnership Scheme) in 2014. Strettons Area CWG was launched in 2012, and surveyed Lapwing and Curlew for the first time in 2017. The Three Parishes CWG, covering Weston Rhyn, St. Martin's and Gobowen (north of Oswestry), also undertook a Bird Survey in 2017. All these groups continued with a Lapwing and Curlew survey in 2018, when they were joined by new CWGs covering Oswestry south (Tanat to Perry) and Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence. A further Group, centred on Abdon (near Brown Clee), also started in 2018, the initiative of a local resident.

All these groups (except Kemp Valley, which has no breeding Curlews) continued with their surveys in 2019. Clee Hill and Abdon extended their areas, to close the gap between them and monitor known additional Curlew territories. Between them, the 10 groups cover around three-quarters of the County's breeding Curlews. They covered 267 survey squares (tetrads), totalling 1,048 square kilometres. There were 320 participants, who spent a total of more than 2,350 hours on survey work, and 94 - 115 Curlew territories were identified. This is a clear indication of the concern that local people have for the decline of Curlew, and their willingness to support action to do something about it.

The Curlew distribution map from the County Bird Atlas 2008-13, overlain with the Community Wildlife Group areas, and their 2019 results, can be found on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

The Groups all also survey Lapwing, but they monitor a much smaller proportion of the County population, which is concentrated in north and north-east Shropshire.

In 2020, the survey work was truncated because of the Coronavirus restrictions. However, an effort was made to monitor the Curlew populations, and better coverage was achieved than usual in some areas, because people were working, and exercising, from home. It is believed that only one of the 100 or so pairs monitored produced any fledged young.

Results for 2021 are still being compiled, but again around 100 pairs were monitored. Results will be posted on the website as they become available.

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

The SOS Save our Curlews Campaign and Nest Finding and Protection Project

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

The project is expensive, and has been funded by Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS), an Appeal, and several grants..

Sixteen nests were found, 12 were fenced, and 21 chicks from 8 nests hatched, and were radio-tagged. Tracking the tagged chicks aims to show how they use the landscape, and what happens to them. Failure of chicks to survive and fledge is a major cause of the Curlew population decline, locally and nationally, and we need a better understanding of the reasons so we can develop effective conservation measures.

All except one of the chicks were predated, and they lived for an average of only 5.65 days. Chicks usually leave the nest within a couple of days of hatching, and are on the ground for 5-6 weeks before they can fly. They are vulnerable for the whole of this period.

You can read more about what has been done on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/. This describes the results in detail, our future plans, and the overwhelming evidence that predation by foxes and other predators is the main cause of Curlew's continuing decline. It is clear that the annual release of millions of pheasants for shooting, only a third of which are actually shot, results in an over-abundant food supply which maintains the numbers of the Curlew's main predators well above naturally sustainable levels.

You can find more information about the Appeal, including details of how to make donations and where to send them, on our website www.shropscwgs.org.uk/strettons-area-news/2021-curlew-fundraising-appeal/

The work is part of the SOS "Save our Curlews" Campaign: see www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

Curlews and Pheasant Release

The RSPB announced the results of the review of its policy on game bird shooting, which it undertook partly because of the effect of releasing large numbers of Pheasants on the landscape and other wildlife, in November 2020. 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 18 months to bring about this change. If substantial reform is not forthcoming in this period, then the RSPB will press for tighter regulation of large-scale gamebird releases. For further information see www.rspb.org.uk/gamebirdreview

The number of Pheasants and Red-legged Partridges released in the UK EACH YEAR has increased from 4 million in 1961, the first year for which there are figures, to almost 60 million now. Only 35% are shot, and the remainder don't live very long, so they provide a year-round supply of food for every other predator and scavenger. While the number of Pheasants released since 2004 has increased by one-third, the number shot has not increased since the 1990s.

In Shropshire, 726,000 Pheasants were released in 2018 alone, so predation of Curlews (collateral damage from foxes hunting Pheasants) is very high, and the Curlew population is heading for extinction (down 80% since 1990). Conversely, the feral breeding population of Pheasants increased by 62% between 1997 and 2014 (County BBS results), and it is now the tenth most common breeding species in the County (and far and away the biggest in terms of biomass). They have spread from the release sites to virtually every part of the County now.

BTO has published research showing a disproportionate increase in the Buzzard and Crow population in areas with a high number of released Pheasants (Pringle *et al* 2019).

The massive increase in Pheasant carrion has allowed Buzzard and Raven to spread eastwards across most of England since 1990 and is undoubtedly the food source that has allowed Kites to spread into, and right across, Shropshire in only 15 years.

In 2014 there were an estimated 44,000 pairs of breeding pheasants, all descended from previous releases (Pheasant is an introduced species), compared to 160 pairs of Curlew and 800 pairs of Lapwing.

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

Use of CWG Survey Results

In addition to feeding into the monitoring of the County population by SOS, the reporting of Curlew results to the South of England Curlew Forum, the UK and Ireland Curlew Action Group and the Curlew Recovery Partnership, and helping the Curlew Country fieldworkers, the survey results are made available to Natural England.

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

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

Coupled with the results of other surveys, the results may also contribute to the identification of potential new Local (County) Wildlife Sites. These sites are monitored by

Shropshire Wildlife Trust, which encourages the landowners to manage them so they retain their value for wildlife.

The report is also sent to the Montgomeryshire County Bird Recorder

Acknowledgements

Most importantly, thanks to the Group members who undertook the survey work, or sent in casual records:-

Simon Boyes, Ros Burns, Hazel Cribb, Sally Currin, John & Jacqui Davies, Stuart & Avril Dickinson, Martin Fenn, Peter Fenner, Bernard Gillespie, Ian Kidd, Tony Lennon, Mary Napper-White, Steve Pastfield, Huw Prole, Chris Radford, Rob Rowe, Paul & Libby Russell, Mark Sulway, Jackie Thomas, Neil Willcox and Steve Wright.

The photos are individually credited (where necessary). Thanks to the photographers for permission to use them.

Plans for 2022

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

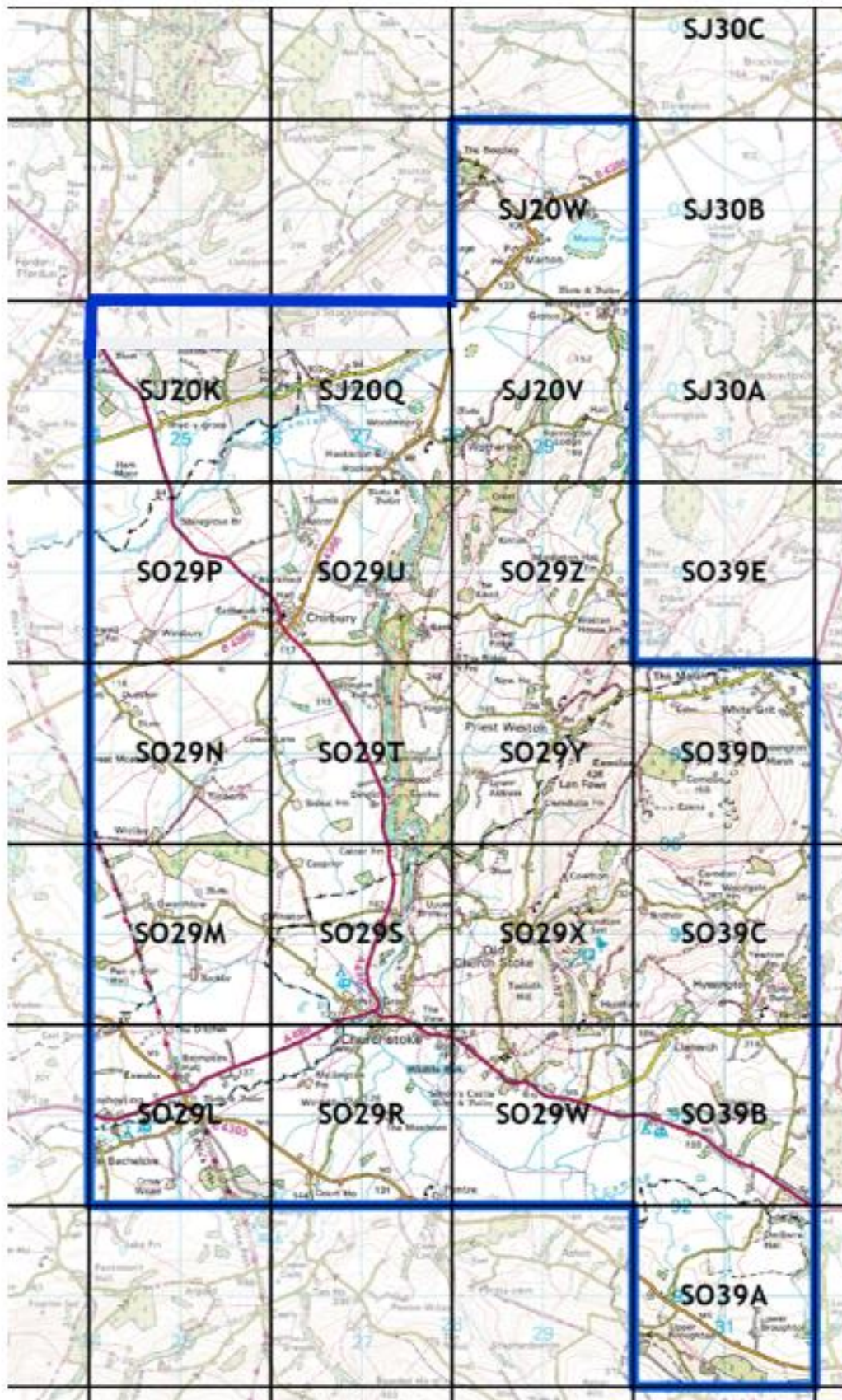
A Bird Group meeting will be held at 7.30pm on Tuesday, 14 March, at The Horse and Jockey, Churchstoke, primarily to plan the bird survey. New members, anyone interested in birds, will be very welcome.

We also hope to find a volunteer to co-ordinate the systematic recording of the use of nest boxes, and another to act as a Swift Species Champion to recruit other local volunteers to try and locate breeding sites.

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 2022*

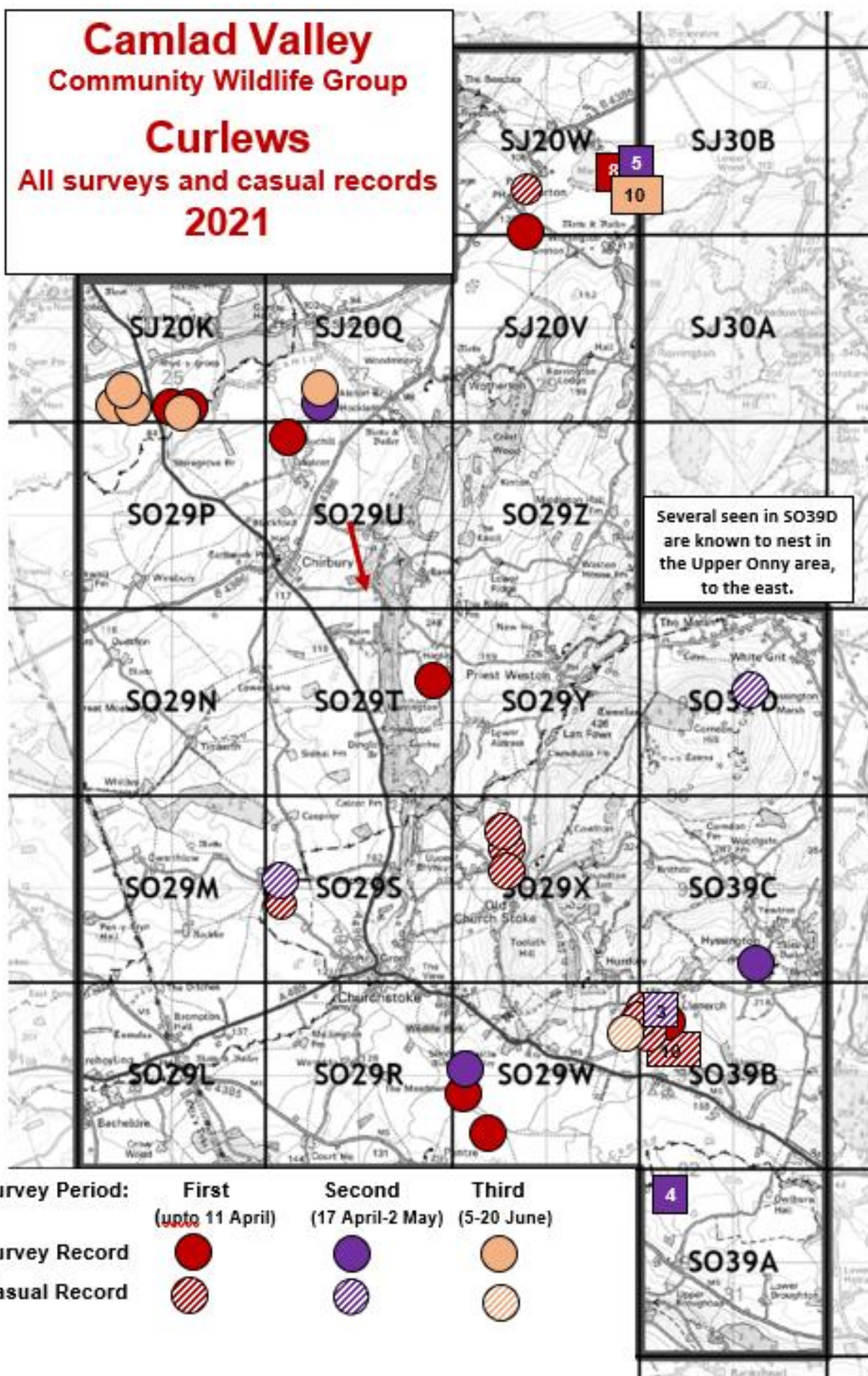
Appendix 1. Map of the Camlad Valley Community Wildlife Group Survey Area, showing Square Boundaries and Tetrad Codes



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

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

Appendix 2. Curlew – all observations 2021



Appendix 3. Bird Survey results 2021

First Period 27 March - 11 April

Tetrad	Surveyor(s)	Time Spent		Number of Each Species Recorded (Individual Birds)												
		Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Duncock	Wheat-ear	Stone-chat	Tree Sparrow	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer
SJ20 K	Steve Pastfield	6	0				1									1
SJ20 Q	Simon Boyes	3	0	(No target species recorded)												
SJ20 V	Neil Willcox	3	0		2											
SJ20 W	Mark Sulway	2	41	(No target species recorded)												
	Gemma & Martin Fenn	3	0		8											
SO29 L				(Square not surveyed)												
SO29 M	Steve Wright															
SO29 N				(Square not surveyed)												
SO29 P	Sally Currin	3	30					2								
SO29 R	Mark Sulway	3	0	(No target species recorded)												
SO29 S	Ros Burns	2	30				2	1		7			1			
SO29 S	Bernard Gillespie	3	0				2			2						
SO29 T	Tony Lennon			(Square not surveyed)												
SO29 U	Tony Lennon	5	30		5											
SO29 W	Mark Sulway	3	0	1	2			1						8		1
SO29 W	Hazel Cribb	3	0		2		1			1						
X	Mary Napper-White, John & Jacqui Davies	7	15		1		2			2						
X	Peter Fenner	3	15		1	1			5			1				
SO29 Y	Chris Radford	2	0		3				1							
Y	Peter Fenner	2	15				1		3			1				
SO29 Z	Jackie Thomas	3	30				3									
SO39 A	Huw Prole	1	50				1	1					1			1
SO39 B	Paul & Libby Russell	2	45				1									
SO39 C	Stuart Dickinson	2	30				2			1					1	
SO39 D	Ian Kidd	4	30				2	15	6		2					
Totals (20 Tetrads)		71	1	1	24	1	18	20	15	13	2	2	2	8	1	3

Second Period 17 April - 2 May

Tetrad	Surveyor(s)	Time Spent		Number of Each Species Recorded (Individual Birds)												
		Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Duncock	Wheat-ear	Stone-chat	Tree Sparrow	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer
SJ20 K	Steve Pastfield	3	0		2											
SJ20 Q	Simon Boyes	3	0													
SJ20 V	Neil Willcox	3	0	(No target species recorded)												
SJ20 W	Mark Sulway			(Square not surveyed)												
SJ20 W	Gemma & Martin Fenn	2	45		5											
SO29 L				(Square not surveyed)												
SO29 M	Steve Wright	2	10					2								
SO29 N				(Square not surveyed)												
SO29 P	Sally Currin	2	0					1								
SO29 R	Mark Sulway			(Square not surveyed)												
SO29 S	Ros Burns	2	20				1			7			6			2
SO29 S	Bernard Gillespie	2	10		2					1						
SO29 T	Tony Lennon			(No target species recorded)												
SO29 U	Tony Lennon			(No target species recorded)												
SO29 W	Mark Sulway															
SO29 W	Hazel Cribb	5	30		2		1			2						3
X	Mary Napper-White, John & Jacqui Davies			(No target species recorded)												
X	Peter Fenner	2	45				1									
SO29 Y	Chris Radford	4	0				1			1						
Y	Peter Fenner	2	45						3							
SO29 Z	Jackie Thomas	3	10	(No target species recorded)												
SO39 A	Huw Prole	2	5		4		1	1								
SO39 B	Paul & Libby Russell	1	30	(No target species recorded)												
SO39 C	Stuart Dickinson	1	30		2	2	1			1						
SO39 D	Ian Kidd	3	5		1			6				2				
Totals (20 Tetrads)		48	45	0	18	2	6	10	3	12	0	2	6	0	0	5

Third Period 5 - 20 June

Tetrad	Surveyor(s)	Time Spent		Number of Each Species Recorded (Individual Birds)												
		Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Duncock	Wheat-ear	Stone-chat	Tree Sparrow	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer
SJ20 K	Steve Pastfield	3	0		4											1
SJ20 Q	Simon Boyes	3	0		1							2				
SJ20 V	Neil Willcox	3	0	(No target species recorded)												
SJ20 W	Mark Sulway															
SJ20 W	Martin Fenn	2	15		10											
SO29 L																
SO29 M	Steve Wright															
SO29 N																
SO29 P	Sally Currin															
SO29 R	Mark Sulway															
SO29 S	Ros Burns	1	20				2			3						
SO29 S	Bernard Gillespie	1	0				1			2						
SO29 T	Tony Lennon			(No target species recorded)												
SO29 U	Tony Lennon			(No target species recorded)												
SO29 W	Mark Sulway															
SO29 W	Hazel Cribb	2	10				1	1		2						1
X	Mary Napper-White, John & Jacqui Davies															
X	Peter Fenner	4	0				1									
SO29 Y	Chris Radford															
Y	Peter Fenner	4	0				1									
SO29 Z	Jackie Thomas	2	30				1									
SO39 A	Huw Prole	1	45	(No target species recorded)												
SO39 B	Paul & Libby Russell															
SO39 C	Stuart Dickinson															
SO39 D	Ian Kidd															
Totals (20 Tetrads)		28	0	0	15	0	7	1	0	7	0	2	0	0	0	2

Camlad Valley Community Wildlife Group



Please Help Barn Owls!!

Special Nest Boxes provided free

to Farmers & Landowners with suitable habitat, and where Barn Owls have been seen, in the Camlad Valley area -

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

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

Barn Owls control pests such as rats and mice, but the population has been in long-term decline. Loss of habitat - rough grassland for hunting prey - is the major factor, but loss of suitable nest sites has also contributed. Traditional open barns have been enclosed, replaced by different types of barns, or converted into houses. Other suitable nest sites - holes in large, isolated trees - have also disappeared from the landscape in recent times, as trees have died off or been removed. The local population is still around only half that found by a survey in 1932.

Barn Owl was on the *Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern 3 (2009)*, but the decline has been reversed by provision of nest boxes. Locally this has been done by the Shropshire and Montgomeryshire Barn Owl Groups, with help from Community Wildlife Groups.

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.



*For further information,
or to report a Barn Owl sighting in the Camlad Valley area, please contact*

Peter Fenner

(email: camladvalley@shropscwgs.org.uk)

We need an accurate location, please

Thanks to the Stepping Stones project (funded by Heritage Lottery) for funding the development of Community Wildlife Groups. This initiative to help Barn Owls in the Camlad Valley complements similar work by several other Groups. See the Community Wildlife Groups website www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk for further information about how to get involved.