Severn – Vyrnwy Confluence
Community Wildlife Group

Bird Survey Results 2020

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The Group was established in February 2018, primarily to look for Curlews as part of the Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) and Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS) *Save our Curlews* Campaign. There were already Community Wildlife Groups surveying Lapwing and Curlew in most of the areas in the County where several pairs of Curlew had been found during Bird Atlas surveys carried out in 2008-13, but there was no previous coverage of the important Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence.

Both Lapwing and Curlew have suffered a massive contraction in range and population decline in the last 20 years or so, nationally and locally.

The aim of the Group is therefore to involve local people in surveying the area for Lapwing and Curlew, to see if the populations have continued to fall here following the Bird Atlas survey. The survey aims to locate the territories of breeding pairs, estimate the population, and if possible pin-point the fields with nests. No attempt is made to look for nests.

The launch meeting was well attended, by 19 people, most of whom agreed to help. Several other people, who were unable to come to the meeting, also volunteered to help. In total, 21 people, including four couples, and one of the Shropshire Wild Teams, did survey work. Seven pairs of Curlew, and 7 – 8 pairs of Lapwing, were found.

The survey was repeated in 2019. Participants in 2018 were encouraged to help again, a poster was put up round the area, and articles were placed in community newsletters and parish magazines, with an appeal for volunteers. A briefing meeting was held on 19 February. Eighteen of the 21 surveyors continued, and five new ones were recruited. The

results were summarised in articles in the local community press, and a report was sent to participants, and is available on the website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk.

It was intended to repeat it again in 2020, and this report describes the 2020 results in detail.

CURLEWS, LAPWINGS AND OTHER BIRDS SURVEY

Introduction

A bird survey has been carried out in the Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence Community Wildlife Group (SVCCWG) area shown in Appendix 1 since 2018. The area has been divided up into 27 “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

It is intended to repeat the survey annually, to monitor long-term population trends for the two main species, as well as establish the current population and distribution, and use the results to promote conservation and attempt to reverse the decline.

The survey normally consists of three visits to each of these tetrads, once during each of three specified two week periods, around 1st April, 1st May and mid-June. Plans were made to carry out the surveys in 2020 as normal, but the public meeting to recruit and brief new surveyors was disrupted by severe flooding leading to local road closures. A practical fieldwork training meeting is usually held for those that want one, but this was abandoned because of restrictions to limit the spread of Coronavirus.

Most squares were initially allocated to participants from previous years, or volunteers who responded to early publicity, but some squares were not allocated. However, the first and second surveys were cancelled, after the Government’s advice to people to stay at home to help prevent the spread of the virus

No surveys were done in the first or second survey periods, but the restrictions in England were eased in mid-May, including allowing car journeys for travel to exercise, and no limit on the time spent exercising each day, so surveyors were requested on 15 May to consider resuming survey work, and do a survey of their square(s) as soon as possible (the early May survey, a couple of weeks late), and the mid-June survey as usual. However, it was recognised that some of them would not be able, or willing, to do so, for various personal reasons. At the same time, members were advised that “there have been more Cuckoo records than usual; it’s not clear whether there are more Cuckoos about, or we’re better able to hear them in the peace and quiet of staying at home”, so they were asked to submit all records of Cuckoo as well.

In the event, few late second surveys were done, and only six of the squares were surveyed in the third period. Up until mid-May, only a few casual records from a local resident were received, plus records phoned through by a local farmer to the surveyor in SJ31T.

All participants were also asked to send in records of any Lapwing, Curlew, Kestrel and Red Kite seen or heard in their own survey squares when not actually doing their survey, and any others seen elsewhere in the area at any time. These “casual records” usually supplement the survey records, and are very helpful in the analysis to locate and separate territories. However, no casual records maps were received in 2020.

Previous reports have included a table, listing the square surveyors, the time spent on the surveys, and all records of all target species, together with an estimate of total time spent. In view of the limited coverage in 2020, this information has not been collated. For comparison,

in 2019, survey work was carried out in all except two of the 27 tetrads, and 21 members spent just over 176 hours on it (including the double time spent when couples or friends surveyed a square together). This represented an excellent effort.

This report therefore summarises the records of Curlew, Lapwing, Kestrel and Cuckoo. The list of Other Target Species surveyed in a normal season is shown on page 9.

Curlew

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

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

Survey results

In addition to the regular tetrad surveys, a "Curlew Territories Map", centred on the SWT reserve at Holly Banks, has previously been supplied to surveyors, requesting additional visits to record Curlew. The most useful records are of two singing or displaying males or pairs seen or heard concurrently, and it was hoped that these additional visits would increase the records of concurrent observations of birds from different pairs, to help establish the population, and territory boundaries.

The boundary between the two territories will be between the two concurrent observations. The analysis in 2018 was greatly helped by observations in the vicinity of Holly Banks on the training sessions, when birds were seen or heard concurrently on several occasions, as summarised in the map on page 5 of the 2018 report This allowed the dense cluster of records shown in SJ31I, J, N and P to be separated into five territories, as shown on page 6 in that report. A found nest, and observations of defence of probable nest sites from potential predators, indicated the locations of the centre of the territory of four of them.

This "Curlew Territories Map" was used for survey visits to cover tetrad SJ31P and the adjacent area in 2020, and five additional visits were made altogether on 19 April, 19 May, 7, 8, 14 and 15 June. Three surveyors made these visits between them, and the total additional time spent on them totalled 21 hours 20 minutes. There were no observations of Curlew on

any of the five visits made from 19 May onwards, although all areas where Curlews have been seen previously were searched. No sets of concurrent observations were made.

There were only three observations of Curlew in this area:-

- five Curlews flew over Holly Banks on 31 March. They were not seen to land, but they may have been 2-3 breeding pairs in the area.
- a pair was seen on the ground just north of Holly Banks at SJ341186 in SJ31P on 19 April, where a pair has been found in each of the last two years.
- at least two (probably one pair) at SJ 347185 on 6 May

Because there were so few records, no map has been prepared.

A farmer in the south of SJ31P, a couple who live on the Edgerley road and a dog-walker near Holly Banks, all reported that they had not seen or heard Curlew this year. No Curlews were seen on any of the four visits to the Holly Banks area from 19 May, or on a square survey to SJ31N in mid-June. Curlews are quiet while sitting on eggs, but noisy and conspicuous once chicks hatch, usually from early June onwards. The absence of Curlew records on any of the four visits from early June onwards strongly implies that, if any Curlews did nest in the area, any chicks they might have produced did not survive for very long.

The floods early in the season were followed by a prolonged period of fine dry weather, resulting in insufficient ground cover for nests, and some fields that have previously held Curlews were ploughed and rolled for grass or cereal crops. It is therefore possible that fewer pairs of Curlew stayed and attempted to breed.

In addition to any pairs near Holly Banks, there was again another pair near Pentre (SJ31T), reported by the local farmer, but the pair were last seen on survey on 9 June, and tetrad surveys on 19 May and 15 July found no Curlews either. Again, if the pair did lay, any chicks did not survive for long.

The survey methodology requires the analysis to produce the lowest population estimate consistent with the records, in this case 3-4 pairs, compared with 5-6 pairs in 2019, and with seven pairs in 2018.

Experience of undertaking this type of survey with more long-standing Community Wildlife Groups suggests that it takes several years to get a complete understanding of the populations. Surveys in 2018 and 2019 may not have been comprehensive, and 2020 certainly was not. In future years, evidence may be found to confirm a higher population.

From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that 3-4 pairs of Curlew were seen, although more may have been found if surveys had been carried out at the most productive time, during April. There is no evidence that any young fledged, nor was there any in 2018 or 2019.

The surveyors of SJ31T has been visiting that area since 2002, and has seen a pair of Curlews there in each of the 19 years, due south of Pentre in most recent years. A nest with eggs has been found in five of those years.

Two fields have recently undergone a change in ownership, resulting sheep grazing in one of them, and drainage in the other. This has been accompanied by an increase in cattle grazing around one of the farms: ”not good news for Curlews”

Over 150 Curlews have been colour-ringed since 2016, mainly at Dolydd Hafren Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust Reserve on the River Severn near Welshpool during March, when they are passing through on their way to their breeding sites. Each of these Curlews is individually identified by the two letters on the yellow ring on the left leg. Several of them have been found at breeding sites elsewhere in Shropshire. Surveyors in this area were asked to check any Curlews that were seen on the ground at breeding sites for rings, but none were seen.

Lapwing

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

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

Lapwings need short vegetation or bare ground to nest on, and those that nest on arable land have to move round to follow the farm crop rotation.

The location of Lapwings found during the surveys is shown on the map on page 7.

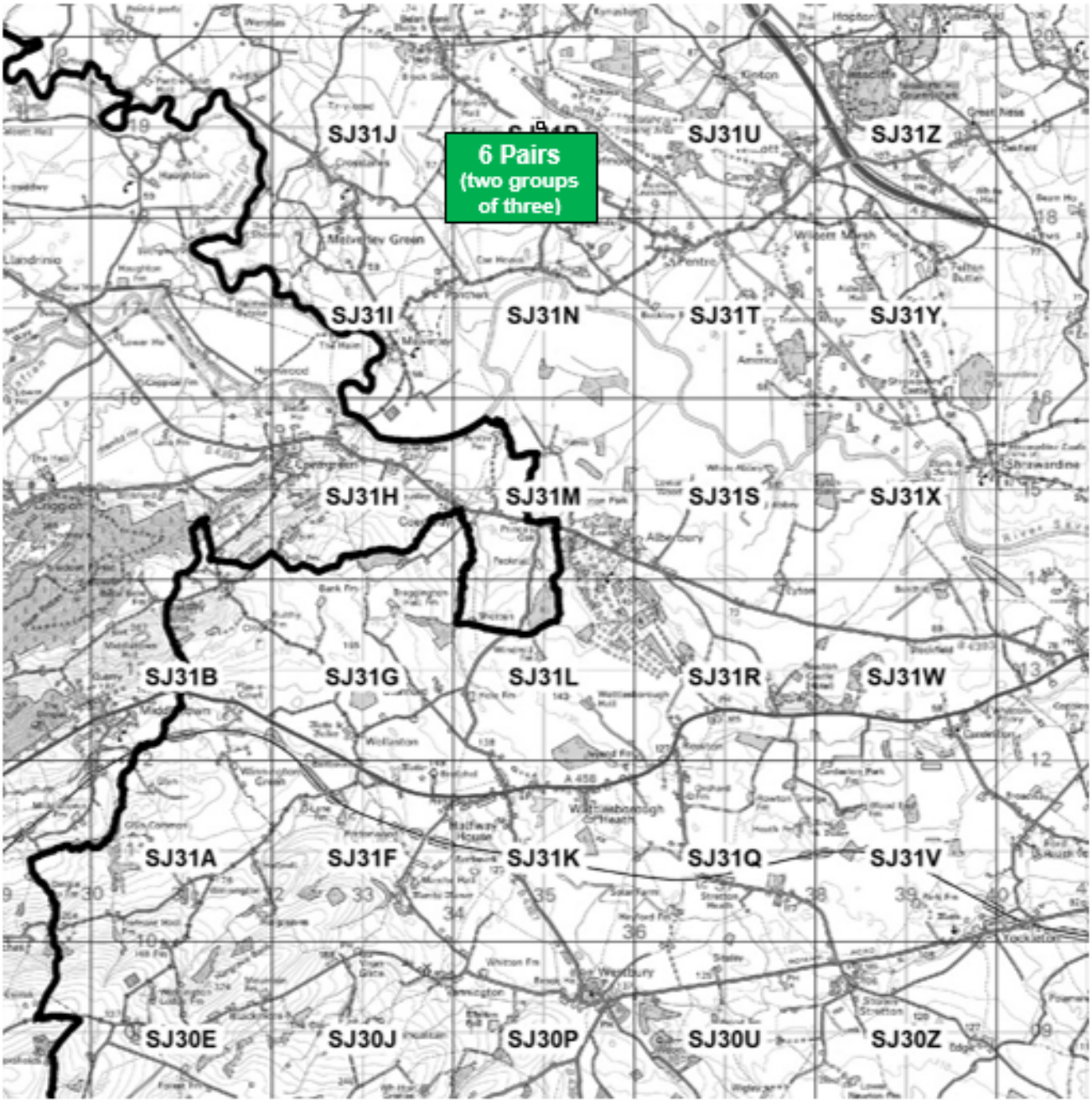
Two small colonies, each of three pairs, were found. One was observed on several dates before 9 April, but the site was planted with maize shortly afterwards. The Lapwings stayed and nested after cultivation was complete, but then they abandoned the field because of harassment and probable predation by carrion Crows. Probably four individual from the same group were seen nearby on 6 May, with one sitting on a nest. The second colony was not observed until 7 June, on the first visit to that part of the area, but a chick probably around 10 days old was seen. The incubation period is about four weeks, so it is very unlikely that at least the pair with the chicks was part of the colony seen in May. It is therefore believed that the two colonies consisted of different pairs.

The second location was close to the part-flooded field near Berwyn House (SJ31P), just north of Holly Banks, where the only breeding colony in 2019, of five pairs, was found. The same site was occupied by two pairs in 2018.

Evidence from other bird surveys carried out in this area for over 30 years has shown that Carrion Crow is a major predator of Lapwing (Michael Wallace, *pers.comm*.).

Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence Community Wildlife Group

Lapwing Records 2020 (all surveys and casual records)



Breeding sites

Three pairs were seen displaying near Royal Hill (SJ31N) on several dates between 30 March and 9 April. The field, initial cereal stubble, was being tilled to plant a maize crop on the last date, and the Lapwings were being harassed by numerous Carrion Crows. The farmer reported that the three pairs nested after cultivation was complete, but were later disturbed by the Crows, and abandoned the site. Three individuals seen from Holly Banks, at SJ345182, and one apparently on a nest at SJ344181, on 6 May, were probably the same birds.

One pair was seen at SJ347185, south of Berwyn House off the Kinnerley - Edgerley road on 7 June. On the same date, two pairs were at SJ 349182. One pair was seen with two juvenile chicks. The same three pairs were seen on 14 June.

None were found at previously used site in SJ31F, near Halfway House, which has not been occupied since 2018.

Population estimate 6 pairs

There has also been a regular site at a water meadow in SJ31F near Halfway House, but it is

over grazed and full of crows, and Lapwings no longer try to nest in the arable field next to it. The site was checked in 2020, but none were seen. Lapwings were last found there in 2018 (Simon Boyes *pers.comm.*).

Five individuals calling and feeding around the margins of a flash flood pool in SJ31T on 21 July included some juveniles (with undeveloped crests and unclear markings), Although they were not seen earlier, and therefore probably didn't nest in the square, they probably bred nearby, perhaps but by no means certain, in the survey area.

From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Lapwing population in the area is 6 pairs, in two colonies of three each.

There may have been more in parts of the area not surveyed, but none were found in those areas in 2018 or 2019.

Kestrel

Kestrel is on the national *Amber List* of *Birds of Conservation Concern* 4 (Eaton *et al*, 2015), because of a decline in the UK of 46% between 1969 and 2014, and 33% over the previous 25 years. The BTO Breeding Bird Survey has found a 35% decline in the UK and a 21% decline in England over the 23 year period 1995-2018.

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

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

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

The population varies from year to year, depending on prey abundance, mainly voles, but Kestrels are much more likely to be observed in good breeding seasons, when they have to spend more time hunting for food for chicks, and travelling to and from the nest. In 2019, the numbers of Kestrels seen were much lower in all the CWG areas than in 2018, suggesting that 2019 was a very poor year for them, probably because of the long period of cold wet windy weather that lasted until their nesting time, followed by a drought. In general, 2020 appears to have been better than 2019.

A pair was reported at a nest in SJ31J, near Holly Banks, and another was seen near Shrawardine, just to the east of SJ31X.

Kestrels forage up to about 1.5 kilometres from their nest site, and in 2019 sightings were estimated to represent three pairs. Kestrel had a very poor breeding season last year, with a shortage of prey, so activity in 2019 was considerably less than in 2018, when the survey results suggested around seven pairs.

Kestrels have also declined considerably 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.

Cuckoo

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

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

In spite of the low number of survey returns, one was recorded in SJ31P, near Holly Banks, on 8 June, and another a kilometre south of Pentre in SJ31T on 9 June. The only Cuckoo record in 2019 came from the latter square.

Red Kite

Red Kites were seen in several tetrads, reflecting the spread of this species.

In 2018, Red Kite was seen in five squares, and sightings were the first time some of the observers have seen them in the area, reflecting the rapid spread of Kites in recent years. The increase continued in 2019 and Kites were seen in eight squares, but there was only one record of two seen on the same survey. In 2020, in spite of the much more limited coverage, two Kites were seen on the same survey in two squares, SJ30Z and SJ31W. In the former square, up to six have been seen together at fields being ploughed.

There was no evidence of breeding.

The first successful breeding in Shropshire for 130 years occurred as recently as 2006, but there are around 40 known pairs now, still mainly in the south-west hills, but a nest north of

Shrewsbury was reported in 2017, with others in 2018 and 2019, so it is likely that breeding will become a regular occurrence here in the near future.

Other Target Species

Apart from the four main Target Species listed above, and Red Kite, members are normally asked to record observations of 19 Other Target species. Very few records of any of them were received in 2020, because of the limited extent of the survey work.

The Other Target Species usually recorded are:-

Barn Owl	Grey Partridge	Snipe	Wheatear
Bullfinch	Linnet	Spotted Flycatcher	Whinchat
Corn Bunting	Meadow Pipit	Stonechat	Yellow Wagtail
Dipper	Reed Bunting	Swift (nest sites only)	Yellowhammer
Dunnock	Skylark	Tree Sparrow	

Swift nest sites were found at Hilley Farm (SJ31T – at least two, probably 4-5, in a farm outbuilding, and at Shrawardine (SJ31X).

Anecdotal Evidence for the Decline of Lapwing and Curlew

Members of the Bird Group who live in the area, and other local residents, say that Lapwings and Curlews are less common now than they used to be. Some members talked to local farmers in the course of their surveys, in 2018 and 2019, and they too said that Lapwings and Curlew are less common now than they used to be. Lapwings have apparently declined much more than Curlews. Because of the health risks, no efforts were made to engage with farmers in 2020.

Objective Evidence for the Decline of Lapwing and Curlew

In England, Lapwing and Curlew are in decline, nationally, and in Shropshire. Objective evidence for this comes from Bird Atlas work, and the Breeding Bird Survey carried out each year by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), and the summary tables in the annual *State of the UK's Birds*. Figures for the decline of each species are summarised at the beginning of the respective species counts above.

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

The resulting breeding distribution change maps for the survey area are shown below. Each symbol represents a tetrad (2x2km square on the OS grid), with 25 tetrads in the10km square, but four in Wales are excluded. Five squares along the northern edge of SJ30 are included at the bottom. These squares are the same as those used for this survey.

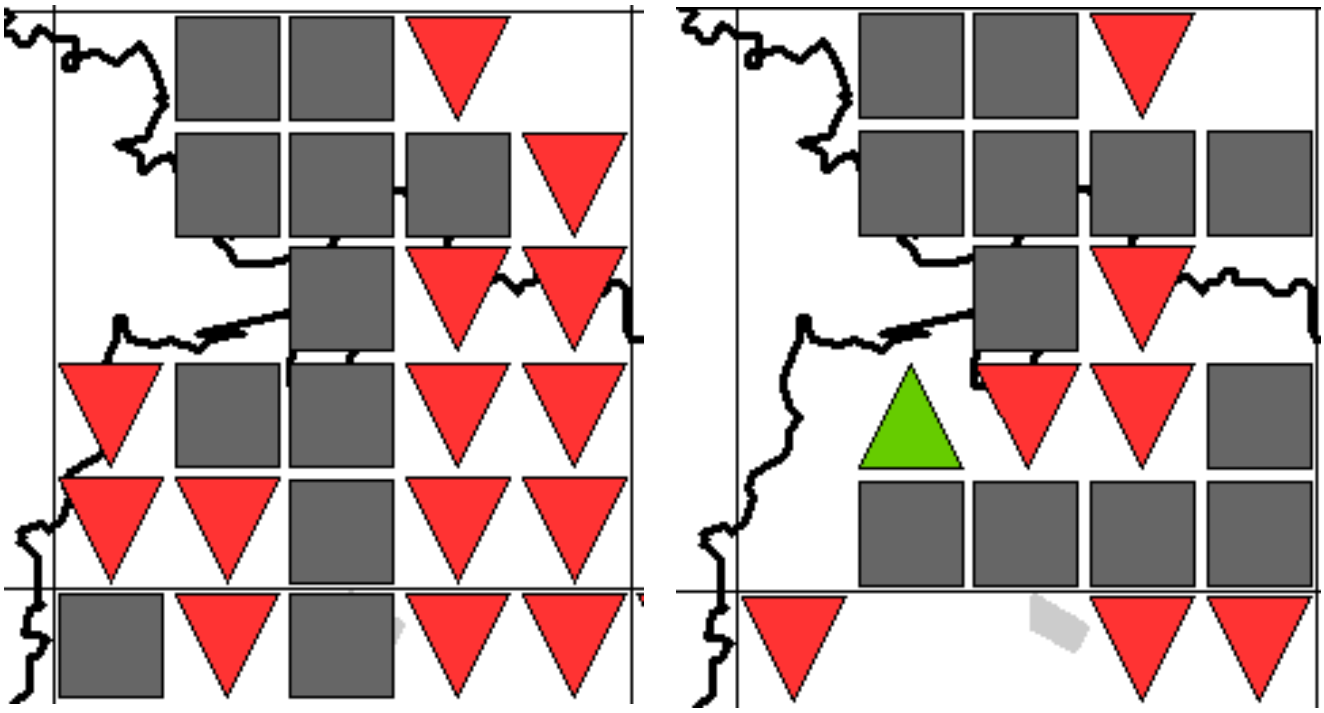
Tetrads where each species was found in both Atlas surveys are shown as grey squares, and tetrads where it was found in the earlier period, but not the more recent period are marked with red downward triangles. It was not found in either period in the blank squares, and a gain in the later period is shown as a green upward triangle

It will be seen that the range of both species declined substantially in this area in that 20-25 year period. Curlew was still present in 11 tetrads, but lost from 14, while Lapwing was still present in 12, lost from 7 and gained in one.

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

Breeding Distribution Change Maps for the Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence (1985-90 to 2008-13)

Curlew **Lapwing**



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

Action to reverse the declines must start by improving the breeding success of the remaining pairs, so conservation action in the areas where they are still found, such as the Clee Hill area, is vital. Such action is being taken, nationally and locally. Both species have been designated as UK Biodiversity Priority Species by the Government, as part of its commitment to international biodiversity targets, precisely because of the rapid decline.

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

Comparison of Severn – Vyrnwy Confluence CWG Bird Survey Results with the Shropshire Bird Atlas 2008-13

The next two pairs of maps show, on the left, the results of the Bird Atlas 2008-13 for the 27 tetrads covered by the survey, and, on the right, the results of the survey in the Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence as shown on the maps on pages 4 and 8 in the 2018 report. Each dot represents at least one observation during the Atlas period, or during the 2018 survey, in the appropriate tetrad.

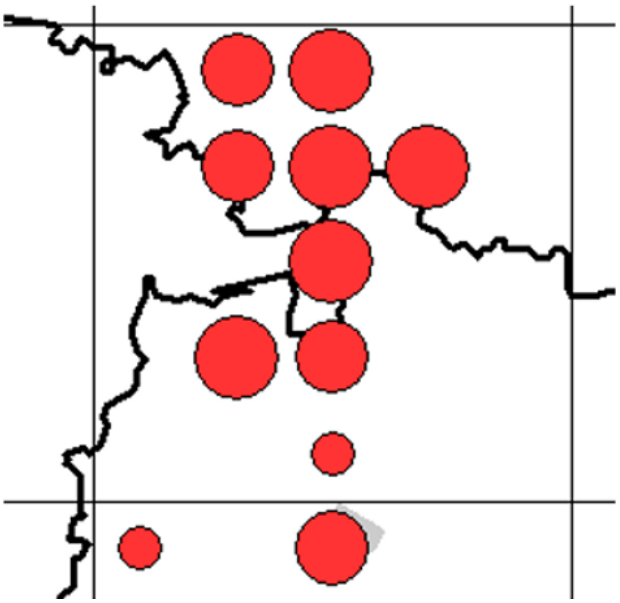
- Large dot = Confirmed Breeding (Bird seen sitting on nest, or eggs or chicks seen)
- Middle dot = Probable Breeding (Pair or display seen)

- Small dot = Seen or heard in suitable habitat
- No dot = Not found

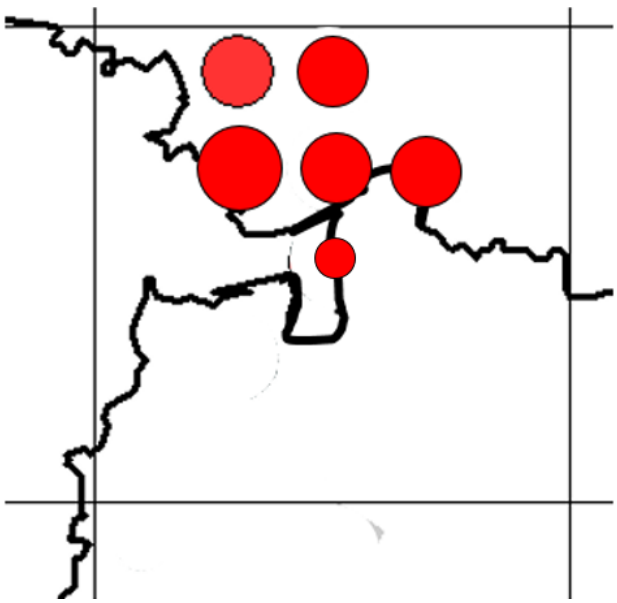
There were no observations in 2019 or 2020 which result in any changes to the CWG Curlew results map, but confirmed breeding of Lapwing in SJ31P in 2020 has been added to the Lapwing map.

Curlew

Bird Atlas 2008-13
SJ30 (north) & SJ31

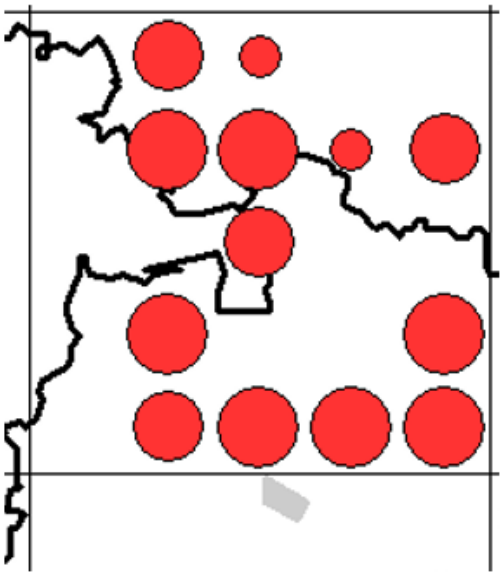


Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence CWG 2018
SJ30 (north) & SJ31

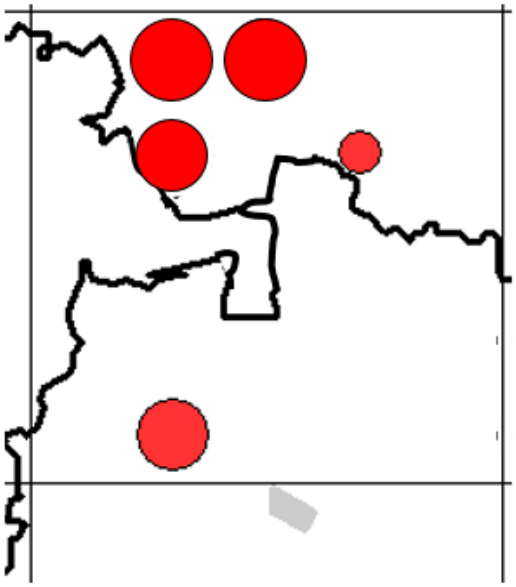


Lapwing

Bird Atlas 2008-13
SJ 30 (north) & SJ31



Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence CWG 2018-20
SJ 30 (north) & SJ31



It must be stressed that the Atlas map includes survey work over six years, not three, but most tetrads will not have been visited every year, and it was only necessary to find the highest level of breeding evidence once in the six years, and the surveyors were looking for breeding evidence for all species. Even so, it is unlikely that the 2018-20 surveys found all the pairs, and results should improve as surveyors get to know their squares better, and

more people find out about the survey and contribute records or information. It is likely to take another 2-3 years to build up a complete picture.

However, the two target species are conspicuous and noisy, so most will not have been overlooked, and these maps suggest strongly that the decline of both species has continued since the Atlas finished in this area too.

Work With Individual Farmers

The Lapwing and Curlew populations in the area nest on private farmland. The active support of farmers is therefore essential if the declines are to be reversed. Several members talked to local farmers while conducting their surveys, who were friendly and helpful. As our knowledge builds up, efforts will be made to work with individual farmers to safeguard their habitats.

A Curlew nest with eggs was found in 2018 near Ponthen. The farmer who owned the field was identified, and visited to advise him of the presence of the nest. It was in a grass (silage) field, which he said was about to be mowed. This would have destroyed the nest if no action was taken to save it, so the farmer was advised of where the nest was, and he agreed to mow round it. This positive response from the farmer, in that he went out of his way to avoid the nest, is welcome and something to build on.

It was agreed that similar contacts would be made with farmers in 2019, if the group identified any fields with Curlew (or Lapwing) nests or chicks, but unfortunately no nest sites were located in that year, or 2020. Almost all group members are willing to visit farmers to discuss the presence of nests, preferably with someone familiar with farming and the farmers in the area, and this will be pursued in 2021 if nest sites are located.

Lessons Learnt, to be Applied in 2021

More emphasis will be placed on noting the behaviour of Lapwing and Curlew, to try and ascertain whether birds are part of the same breeding pair, or different ones, and whether they were defending nests or chicks, indicating the nesting field and level of breeding success.

Recommendations

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

Other Community Wildlife Groups

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

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

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

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

In 2020, all these groups did some Curlew survey work, but it was truncated because of the Coronavirus restrictions. These results are still being analysed, and will be supplied separately to Bird Group members when they are available.

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

The SOS Save our Curlews *Campaign*

Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS) launched its *Save our Curlews* campaign in February 2020, with the intention of building on, and supporting, the Curlew monitoring work of the CWGs, and working initially with CWGs in the Upper Clun, Clee Hill and Strettons area to find nests, put an electric fence round them to protect the eggs, and then attach radio tags to the chicks just after they hatch, to track them to see how they use the landscape and what happens to them. Unfortunately, although the CWGs were able to monitor and map their populations, the nest protection and radio-tracking project had to be abandoned because of Coronavirus restrictions.

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

This is a long term campaign, and it is hoped to extend the nest protection and chick monitoring work to other CWG areas in future years.

The project work is expensive, and SOS has launched an Appeal to help pay for it. Members are requested to consider contributing.

A lot more information can be found about the Appeal, and Campaign (including project work in Shropshire and elsewhere to find out the causes of the decline, and reverse it), on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

A contributory factor to the decline is now being increasingly understood, the impact of releasing large numbers of Pheasants into the countryside for shooting.

Curlews and Pheasant Release

The RSPB has just announced the results of the review of its policy on game bird shooting, which it undertook partly because of the effect of releasing large numbers of Pheasants on the landscape and other wildlife. It is now seeking improved environmental standards, a reduction in the number of gamebirds released and better compliance with existing rules about reporting releases. The RSPB is committed to working with the shooting industry over the next 18 months to bring about this change. If substantial reform is not forthcoming in this period, then the RSPB will press for tighter regulation of large-scale gamebird releases. For further information see www.rspb.org.uk/gamebirdreview

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

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

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

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

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

Again, further information can be found at www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

Use of CWG Survey Results

In addition to feeding into the monitoring and conservation of the County Curlew population by SOS, the survey results are made available to Natural England.

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

The 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 SWT which encourages the landowners to manage them so they retain their value for wildlife.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, REFERENCES AND FUTURE PLANS

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Steve & Yvonne Mancy	Andrew Morton	

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Sally Gwilliam and Nicola Strudwick also looked for target species.

Special thanks to Michael Wallace, who publicised the meeting, wrote articles for the local community press, distributed information to members, and co-ordinated the work.

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Report

A copy of this report has been supplied to all people who contributed to the surveys in 2020 or previous years, or supplied additional records, and to Natural England.

Copies can be downloaded from the Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence part of the Shropshire Community Wildlife Groups website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

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

Summary 2020

This report summarises the third year for the Group, which was severely disrupted by Coronavirus restrictions.

We now have a better understanding of the population and distribution of Lapwing and Curlew, and the status of the Other Target Species. There is no evidence that any young Curlews fledged in 2020, or either of the previous two years. This is valuable information to promote its conservation.

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

Plans for 2021

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

It will not be possible to hold the usual Group meeting in February or March, primarily to plan the bird survey, as current Covid-19 restrictions are unlikely to have been eased by then. We will therefore need to develop new ways of promoting our work in the local community. New members, anyone interested in birds, will be very welcome.

We hope to be able to hold a training session for new participants in late March or Early April.

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,

Further Information

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- Michael Wallace michaelwallace47@gmail.com 01743 369035

This report can be downloaded from the Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence CWG part of the Community Wildlife Groups website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk.

Further copies of the report can be obtained from Leo Smith

Leo Smith
February 2021

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