

**Severn – Vyrnwy Confluence  
Community Wildlife Group**



**Bird Survey  
Results  
2021**



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## Severn - Vyrnwy Confluence Community Wildlife Group

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 area (SVC).

SOS has continued to lead the Save our Curlews campaign since 2020, and all the Community Wildlife Groups have continued with their individual surveys and projects.

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, but it was severely curtailed by Government Coronavirus restrictions in 2020. A report of results in each year was sent to participants, and can be found on the SVC pages on the Community Wild Life Groups website [www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk)

Participants in previous years 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.. However, coverage in 2021 was limited as a result of several surveyors dropping out, and a remaining ban on a public meeting to recruit new helpers, so there was a lower number of participants than in 2019. Thirteen people contributed over 110 hours and surveyed 14 squares, and 13 of the 27 squares were not surveyed

This report describes the 2021 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

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 the 22 other target species that they see, if they were confident that they could do so.

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 consists of three visits to each of these tetrads, once during each of three specified two-week periods, around 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1<sup>st</sup> May and mid-June. A practical fieldwork training meeting was held for those new helpers that wanted one.

In 2020, 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 2020”. Surveyors were requested to concentrate on Lapwing, Curlew, Kestrel and Cuckoo and any potential Red Kite breeding sites.

In 2021, recording of the Other Target Species resumed. 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, few casual records maps were received in 2021.



## 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 tetrads SJ31I and P and the adjacent area in 2021, and three additional visits were made altogether.

Three members surveyed the previous “hotspot” around Holly Banks in early May, and a training session was held there on 12 April. There were no records of Curlew on any of these visits, although all areas where Curlews have been seen previously were searched. One surveyor reported that a local farmer hadn't seen or heard any this year, and another reported the same comment from a local daily dog-walker, although both had seen and heard Curlews in previous years. There appeared to be increasing numbers of animals in the area, sheep and cattle, so the fields were being more heavily grazed.

There was a record of a lone male to the south of this area, south of the river near Cae Howell, in SJ31N in early May. It is not known if it was passing through, or stayed, or if it was part of a pair. There were three casual records of a single bird only, and no records of a pair or a breeding attempt. It is therefore likely that no pairs were present in this area in 2021, although it is possible that there was one pair.

In 2018 there were 5 pairs in this area, in 2019 4-5 pairs, and only three observations of possibly 2-3 pairs last year, but surveying in 2020 was obviously affected by Covid-19 restrictions. In 2020, there were two periods of extensive floods, in February / March and again in May and June, the former when Curlews returned to the breeding area but were unable to land, and the second after nesting. Judging by the 'tide mark' of the water on the hedges, the level of flooding covered the fields where Curlew have nested previously, and any eggs or chicks would not have survived.

Some of the fields where Curlews have been seen feeding in previous years had been ploughed following last year's late floods, and by early April 2021, they were at various stages of ploughing and reseeded (i.e., almost bare earth, or a mix of earth and very short grass), which does not provide Curlew with suitable habitat for feeding or nesting. There was a short-lived flood in mid-March, but there was a lengthy period of cold northerly winds in April and early May, followed by a period of dry weather, so there was insufficient grass cover for nests on fields used by curlews in previous years.

This is a very worrying decline, but hopefully conditions will be more suitable, and more curlews will stay to breed in the Holly Banks area in 2022.

The other breeding pair, near Pentre in SJ31T, has been potentially affected by the farm going over to a grass-fed milking herd, accompanied by additional drainage, while a neighbouring farm attempted to drain the fields two years ago. Drainage affects the diversity of the sward, affecting the availability of invertebrate food, and the increased grazing prevents the grass growing to provide enough cover for nests and increases the risk of trampling of eggs by livestock, so Curlews in the area are still under pressure from agricultural "improvement".

The survey methodology requires the analysis to produce the lowest population estimate consistent with the records, in this case 1 - 2 breeding pairs, compared with 2-3 pairs in 2020, 5-6 pairs in 2019, and seven pairs in 2018.

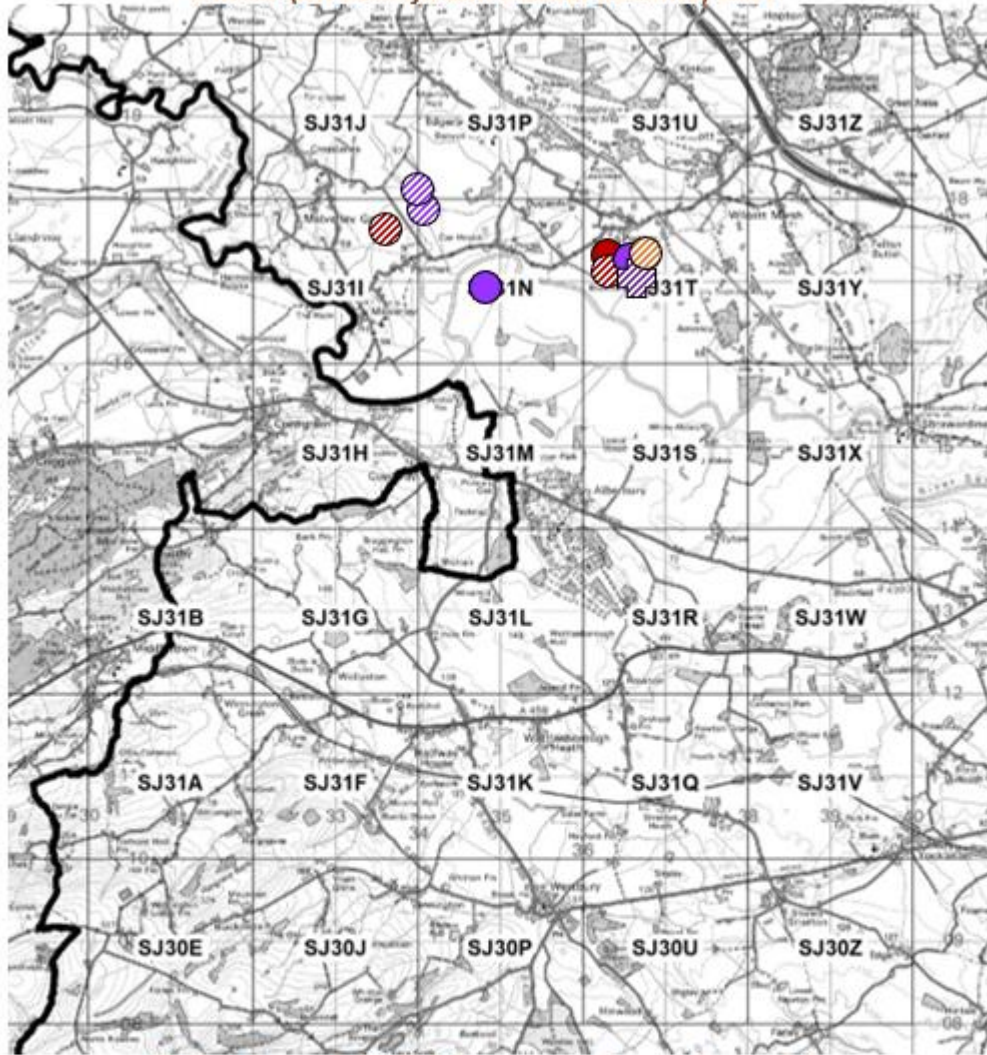
Experience of undertaking this type of survey with more long-standing Community Wildlife Groups suggests that it takes several years to get a complete understanding of the populations. Surveys in 2018 and 2019 may not have been comprehensive, and 2020 certainly was not. In future years, evidence may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

**From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that 1 - 2 pairs of Curlew were present, although more may have been found if there had been more surveyors.  
There is no evidence that any young fledged, nor was there any in 2018 or 2019.**

The surveyor of SJ31T has been visiting that area since 2002, and has seen a pair of Curlews there in each of the 20 years, due south of Pentre in most recent years. A nest with eggs has been found in five of those years.

## Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence Community Wildlife Group

### Curlew (All surveys and Casual Records) 2021



Curlew Records 2021 (all survey and casual records)

Survey Period:	First (Up to 11 April)	Second (17 April – 2 May)	Third (6-20 June)	Nest site defended
Survey Observation	●	●	●	+
Casual Observation	●	●	●	+

Nine separate surveys were carried out in late April and early May in SJ31I, J, N & P, where several pairs have been recorded in previous years, but no Curlews were recorded in 2021

**Population estimate: 1 - 2 pairs**

Two fields have recently undergone a change in ownership, resulting in 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"

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.

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.

One pair of Lapwings with a chick was found during the surveys, on the part-flooded field near Berwyn House (SJ31P), just north of Holly Banks. Three pairs were found there last year, and four pairs were reported there in early spring, but the other three could not be located, and may have passed on. There have been breeding Lapwings at this site every year since 2018. As only one site was occupied, no map has been produced.

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 again, but none were seen. Lapwings were last found there in 2018 (Simon Boyes *pers.comm.*).

**From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Lapwing population in the area is 1, possibly 4 pairs.**

**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, but 2021 was another poor year.

Only one was seen, near Shrawardine, just to the east of SJ31X, the same place where one was seen in 2020.

Kestrels forage up to about 1.5 kilometres from their nest site, and in 2020 sightings were estimated to represent two pairs, compared with three pairs in 2019, 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 16 June, the only record. One was recorded at the same place last year, together with another near Pentre, in SJ31T. 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. In 2021, Kites were seen in six squares, with two near Holly Banks, although only half the squares were covered.



There was no evidence of breeding.

Given the rapid spread and population increase (over 50 known pairs in Shropshire in 2021 – the first successful breeding for 130 years occurred as recently as 2006), it is likely that more widespread 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 22 Other Target species: Barn Owl, Bullfinch, Corn Bunting, 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 detailed results are shown in Appendix 3. A summary is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Other Target Species recorded – Summary**

Tetrad		Max. Number of Each Species Recorded								
		Kestrel	Red Kite	Snipe	Skylark	Swift (sites)	Dunnoch	Tree Sparrow	Linnet	Reed Bunting
SJ30	E	Not surveyed								
SJ30	J	Not surveyed								
SJ30	P	Not surveyed								
SJ30	U	Not surveyed								
SJ30	Z		1		2		2			
SJ31	A	Not surveyed								
SJ31	B									
SJ31	F									
SJ31	G		1							
SJ31	H	Not surveyed								
SJ31	I	Not surveyed								
Holly Banks area (parts of SJ31I, J, N & P)										
			2		2		2		2	1
SJ31	J			1						
SJ31	K	Not surveyed								
SJ31	L	Not surveyed								
SJ31	M				4					
SJ31	N						1	2		
SJ31	P									
SJ31	Q	Not surveyed								
SJ31	R	Not surveyed								
SJ31	S		1	1					2	
SJ31	T			2	2	2			2	1
SJ31	U				2					
SJ31	V	Not surveyed								
SJ31	W		1		6		3			
SJ31	X	1			2		3			
SJ31	Y	Not surveyed								
SJ31	Z	Not surveyed								
Total		1	7	4	20	2	11	2	6	2

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.

Grey Partridge, Barn Owl, Dipper and Wheatear were not recorded in any square. Meadow Pipit (SJ30Z), Cuckoo (SJ31P), Yellow Wagtail (SJ31W), Stonechat (SJ31W), Tree Sparrow (SJ31N - 2), Bullfinch (SJ31P) and Yellowhammer (SJ31P) were only recorded in one square. Swift nest sites were found at Hilley Farm (SJ31T – at least two, probably 4-5, in a farm outbuilding).

### ***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, or in 2021.

## 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.

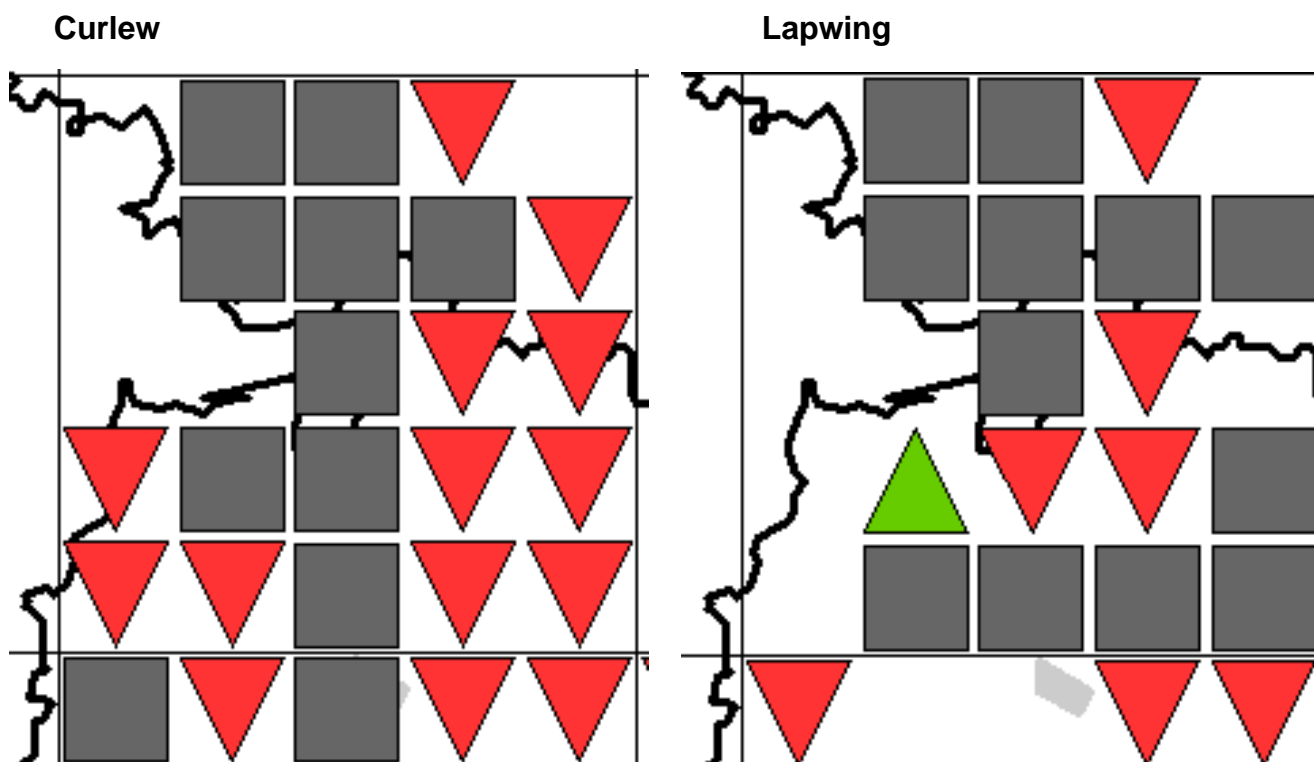
The resulting breeding distribution change maps for the survey area are shown below. Each symbol represents a tetrad (2x2km square on the OS grid), with 25 tetrads in the 10km square, but four in Wales are excluded. Five squares along the northern edge of SJ30 are included at the bottom. These squares 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)





Other evidence for the decline of Lapwing and Curlew can be found on the website of the British Trust for Ornithology [www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)

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

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

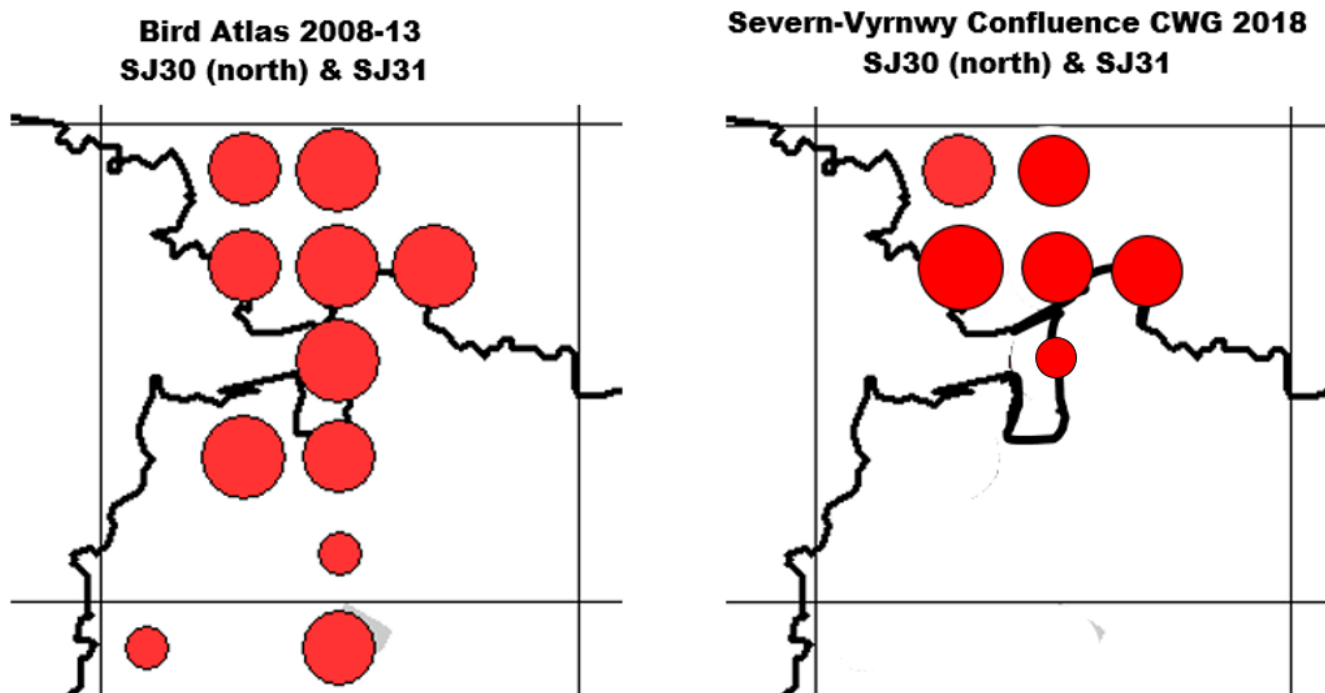
### ***Comparison of Severn – Vyrnwy Confluence CWG Bird Survey Results with the Shropshire Bird Atlas 2008-13***

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

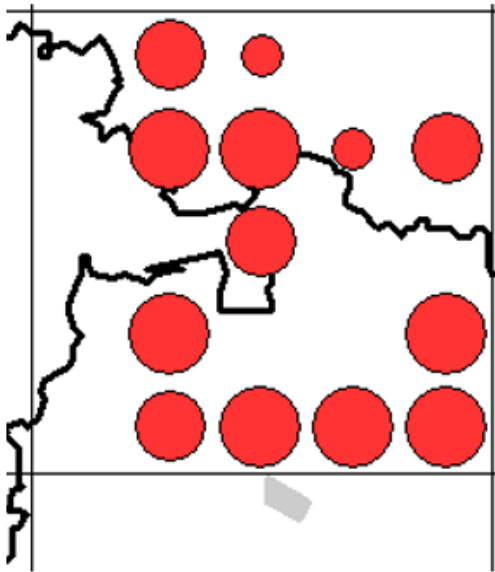
There were no observations in 2019, 2020 or 2021 which result in any changes to the CWG Curlew results map, but confirmed breeding of Lapwing in SJ31P in 2020 has been added to the Lapwing map.

#### **Curlew**

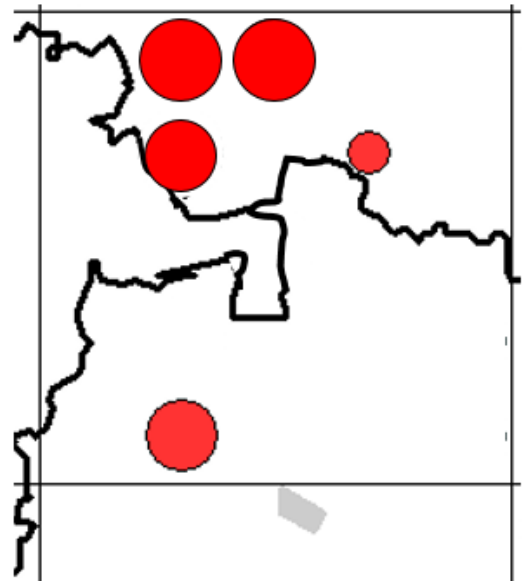


## Lapwing

**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 2018-21 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 in 2020 or 2021. 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 2022 if nest sites are located.

## 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*

### **Lessons Learnt, to be Applied in 2022**

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.

## **CURLEW CONSERVATION**

### **Other Community Wildlife Groups**

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

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

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

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

In 2020, 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](http://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/](http://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/](http://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/](http://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](http://www.rspb.org.uk/gamebirdreview)

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

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

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

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

In 2014 there were an estimated 44,000 pairs of breeding pheasants, 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/](http://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.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, REFERENCES AND FUTURE PLANS

## Acknowledgements

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

Tony Comley	Steve & Yvonne Mancey	Nicola Strudwick
Warwick Davies	Mike & Jenny Masterson	Michael Wallace
Tony Hill	Andrew Morton	Kate Woolley
Jamie Maclauchlan	Rick Robson	

Thanks in particular to Warwick Davies, Jamie Maclauchlan, Andrew Morton and Kate Woolley, for making additional survey visits to look for Curlews in the Holly Banks area.

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. Michael has now passed this responsibility to Tony Comley. Thanks a lot, Michael, for all you've done to support and co-ordinate the Group since it started in 2018.

Thanks also to:-

- Richard Hammerton, Shropshire Council Biodiversity Data Officer, who provided the survey maps.
- Kate Mayne, for advice on contacting farmers.
- Leo Smith, for the Curlew photo, and Celia Todd, for the Lapwing photo, on the cover.
- Credits for other photos: Celia Todd (Curlew and Lapwing), Eric Davies (Cuckoo) and Mark Hamblin (Red Kite),
- Tony Comley, for taking over as Group administrator

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## **Report**

A copy of this report has been supplied to all people who contributed to the surveys in 2021 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](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk)

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

## **Summary 2021**

*This report summarises the fourth year for the Group, which was again 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 2021, or any of the previous three 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 2022**

The Group intends to repeat the Bird Survey next year. New participants are needed, so we hope to recruit new members. We therefore need to develop new ways of promoting our work in the local community. New members, anyone interested in birds, will be very welcome.

A Group meeting will be held at 7.30pm on Tuesday 22 February at Alberbury Village Hall, primarily to plan the bird survey. New members will be very welcome.

An outdoor training meeting will be held in late March for new members who feel that it would be helpful. If you are interested in helping with the Bird Survey, please contact Leo Smith ([leo@leosmith.org.uk](mailto:leo@leosmith.org.uk)).

Details can also be found and downloaded from the joint website for all the Community Wildlife Groups in the Shropshire Hills, [www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk).

## **Further Information**

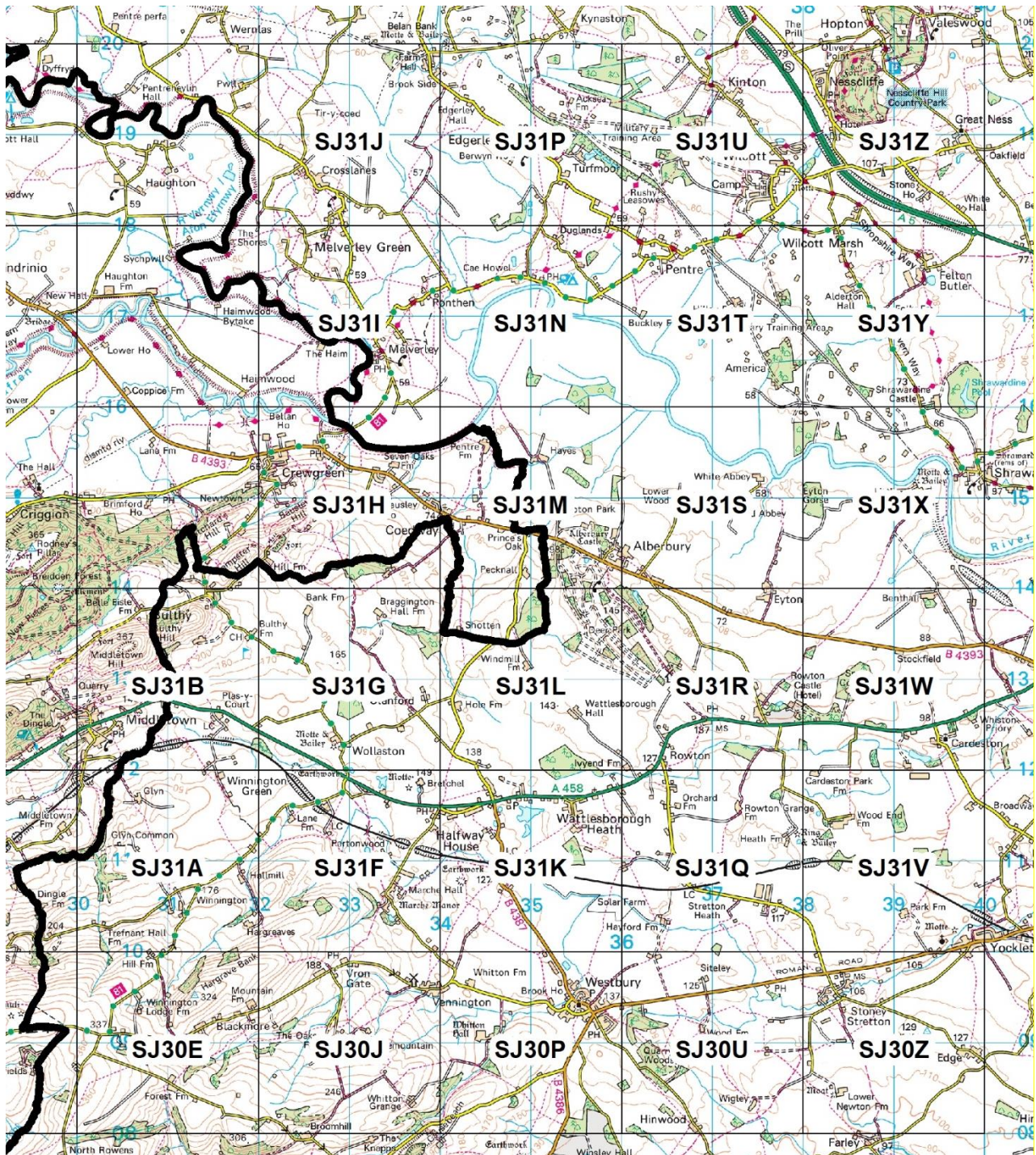
- Leo Smith [leo@leosmith.org.uk](mailto:leo@leosmith.org.uk) 01694 720296
- Tony Comley [tcomley55@btinternet.com](mailto:tcomley55@btinternet.com) 079408 17300

This report can be downloaded from the Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence CWG part of the Community Wildlife Groups website, [www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk).

Further copies of the report can be obtained from Leo Smith

Leo Smith  
February 2022

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





## Appendix 2. Bird Survey results 2021

First period (26 March - 10 April)

Tetrad	Square Surveyor	Time		Maximum Number of Each Species Recorded															
		Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Snipe	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Yellow Wagtail	Dun-nock	Stone-chat	Tree Sparrow	Linnet	Bull-finch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
SJ30 E	Not surveyed																		
SJ30 J	Not surveyed																		
SJ30 P	Not surveyed																		
SJ30 U	Not surveyed																		
SJ30 Z	Mike & Jenny Masterson																		
SJ31 A	Not surveyed																		
SJ31 B	Rick Robson			Not surveyed															
SJ31 F	Tony Hill	1	50	No target species recorded															
SJ31 G	Rick Robson			Not surveyed															
SJ31 H	Not surveyed																		
SJ31 I	Not surveyed																		
Holly Banks area (parts of SJ31I, J, N & P)																			
	Jamie Maclauchlan	3	0						2				2						1
SJ31 J	Tony Comley	3	0					1											
SJ31 K	Not surveyed																		
SJ31 L	Not surveyed																		
SJ31 M	Michael Wallace																		
SJ31 N	Michael Wallace	4	40												2				
SJ31 P	Warwick Davies																		
SJ31 Q	Not surveyed																		
SJ31 R	Not surveyed																		
SJ31 S	Andrew Morton (north of river)	1	0					1											
SJ31 S	Not surveyed																		
SJ31 T	Andrew Morton	5	15		2			2											
SJ31 U	Nicola Strudwick																		
SJ31 V	Not surveyed																		
SJ31 W	Steve and Yvonne Mancey	2	40				1		2				2						
SJ31 X	Tony Hill	2	50			1			2				3						
SJ31 Y	Not surveyed																		
SJ31 Z	Not surveyed																		
Total		24	15	0	2	1	1	4	6	0	0	0	7	0	2	0	0	0	1

Second period (23 April - 8 May)

Tetrad	Square Surveyor	Time		Maximum Number of Each Species Recorded															
		Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Snipe	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Yellow Wagtail	Dun-nock	Stone-chat	Tree Sparrow	Linnet	Bull-finch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
SJ30 Z	Mike & Jenny Masterson	2	10				1						1						
SJ31 B	Rick Robson	3	0																
SJ31 F	Tony Hill			Not surveyed															
SJ31 G	Rick Robson	7	0				1												
Holly Banks area (parts of SJ31I, J, N & P)																			
	Jamie Maclauchlan	2	25										1					1	1
	Warwick Davies	7	30	3			1		1								1		1
	Andrew Morton	2	45													2			
SJ31 J	Tony Comley			Not surveyed															
SJ31 M	Michael Wallace	2	10						2										
SJ31 N	Michael Wallace	3	10		1								1						
SJ31 S	Andrew Morton (north of river)	1	15																
SJ31 T	Andrew Morton	10	30		2														1
SJ31 U	Nicola Strudwick	4	10						2										
SJ31 W	Steve and Yvonne Mancey	2	45				1		6			1	3	1					
SJ31 X	Tony Hill			Not surveyed															
Total		48	50	3	3	0	4	0	11	0	0	1	6	1	0	2	1	1	3

Third period (4-19 June)

Tetrad	Square Surveyor	Time		Maximum Number of Each Species Recorded															
		Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Snipe	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Yellow Wagtail	Dun-nock	Stone-chat	Tree Sparrow	Linnet	Bull-finch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
SJ30 Z	Mike & Jenny Masterson	2	50				1		2	1			2						
SJ31 B	Rick Robson			Not surveyed															
SJ31 F	Tony Hill			Not surveyed															
SJ31 G	Rick Robson			Not surveyed															
Holly Banks area (parts of SJ31I, J, N & P)																			
	Jamie Maclauchlan																		
	Warwick Davies	4	0				1		1		1						1		1
	Andrew Morton																		
	Kate Woolley	6	50				2						2					1	
SJ31 J	Tony Comley			Not surveyed															
SJ31 M	Michael Wallace	2	0	Not surveyed					4										
SJ31 N	Michael Wallace	4	10	No target species recorded															
SJ31 S	Andrew Morton (north of river)	1	15				1									2			
SJ31 T	Andrew Morton	4	30		2				2							2			
SJ31 U	Nicola Strudwick			Not surveyed															
SJ31 W	Steve and Yvonne Mancey	2	15						3										
SJ31 X	Tony Hill			Not surveyed															
Total		27	50	0	2	0	5	0	12	1	1	0	4	0	0	4	1	1	1