Rea Valley

Community Wildlife Group

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

Annual Report for 2021

Contents

1. Introduction

This group was initiated by the Stiperstones-Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) in 2014, covering the area shown in Appendix 1, in order to:-

• Bring together local people interested in wildlife

• Undertake survey work to establish the status of key bird, plant and butterfly species and habitats

• Encourage and enhance local interest in wildlife, and actively promote conservation.

The LPS supported the Group over the four years 2014-17 but in 2018 it was formally established and independently constituted as the Rea Valley Community Wildlife Group.

Anyone can join who lives or works in the area, or has an interest in its wildlife, and who wants to actively contribute to local knowledge and conservation. Membership is free.

Communication with members is largely by email. To contact the group and find out how to get involved, e-mail reavalleycwg@gmail.com. A Facebook group has also been established, Rea Valley Community Wildlife Group, which can be reached at the following address, https://www.facebook.com/groups/217959798769947/.

An Annual Report is published, and posted on the Community Wildlife Groups website www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk. This report brings together information from different surveys which take place in the Rea Valley catchment area.

Several projects organised by the Group have benefitted from support received from those playing the People's Postcode Lottery.

Supported by players of PEOPLE'S POSTCODE LOTTERY

Awarded funds from POSTCODE EARTH TRUST

2. Curlews, Lapwings and Other Birds Survey

By Leo Smith, Bird Group Leader, February 2022

2.1 Background

A bird survey has been carried out in the Rea Valley Community Wildlife Group (RVCWG) area, shown in Appendix 1, since 2014. It complements surveys carried out by the Upper Onny Wildlife Group since 2004, and the Camlad Valley CWG, also initiated by the 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 26 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 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 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 of the survey squares that are usually surveyed received no coverage.

In addition, the results of several nest box schemes are included, targeted primarily at Pied Flycatcher and Redstart. One at the top of Habberley Brook started in 2020. Similar schemes, started in earlier years at Resting Hill and Pontesford Hill, are also referred to, as well as a separate scheme at Earl’s Hill SWT reserve. New schemes operated for the first time in 2021.

2021 also marked a new initiative, to locate Swift nest sites in the area.

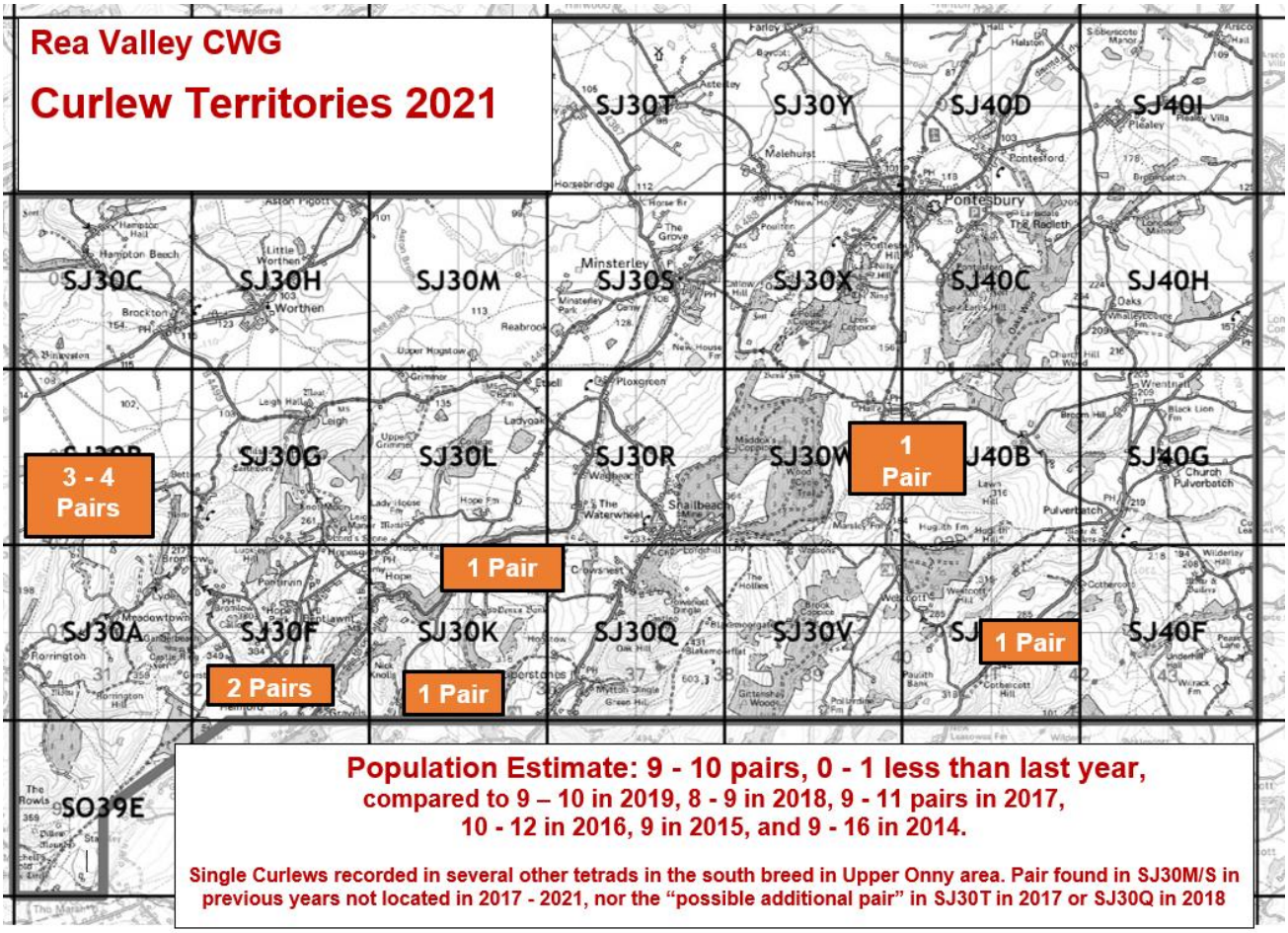
2.2 Curlew

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 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, published by Shropshire Ornithological Society in 2019.

2.21 Survey results

The map summarises the estimated number and distribution of Curlew territories in the Rea 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.

Although the area as a whole was less well covered in 2020 than usual, because of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, the areas where Curlews were found in 2019 were as well, or better, covered in 2020. The results from 2020 can therefore be compared with those from earlier years, and provide continuity into 2021.

In 2021, there were again two pairs near Hemford (SJ30F), but only one pair near Cothercott Hill (SJ40A), although Curlews that breed to the south, in the Upper Onny area, were also seen in that square.

There were two pairs near Habberley (SJ30W and SJ40B) annually until 2017, but only one in 2018 and 2019, the loss of a pair. However, there were two pairs again in 2020, but only three birds (1 pair) in 2021.

Two pairs were also located again in SJ30K, one in the south, reported frequently by a local resident between Santley and Lower Santley, while the pair at Capsall was relocated. Two pairs have occupied the square on a regular basis, although previous reports have suggested different numbers in some years.

Three-four pairs were seen in SJ30B, an increase on the two pairs usually seen there, and a Curlew was seen defending a nest from a crow.

The 2019 report stated that “None were found in any of the other areas where there were “Possible Additional Pairs” in previous years. No records have been received from any of these areas in 2020 or 2021, so there might have been “Possible Additional Pairs”, before 2019, but not since then.

Again, there is no evidence that any young Curlews fledged in the area.

2.22 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 chart is based on the mid-point of each range. The low point in 2018 is common to all the CWG surveys, attributed to the “beast from the east”, which resulted in the grass not growing to produce cover for nests, and probably made it more difficult for females to get into breeding condition.

The apparent increase in 2019 is likely to be the result of better breeding conditions, rather than a real increase in the population. The population did increase in 2020, as a second pair returned to the Habberley area, but the additional pair was not re-found in 2021.

However, 3-4 pairs, rather than the usual two, and 2 – 3 pairs in 2020, were found in SJ30B. It is not known if this is due to improved coverage by new surveyors from 2020, or a genuine increase in the square's population at excellent habitat in the vicinity of Marton Pool.

Establishing trends is not easy, as some squares have not been surveyed every year, but it is known that two pairs have been lost in the area since 2014.

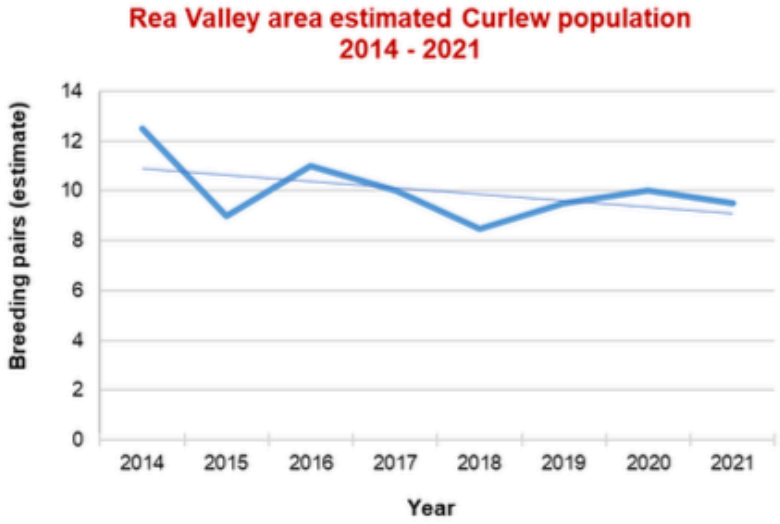
Local residents near Hemford (SJ30F) have been monitoring the return of Curlews to their breeding grounds for many years, but in 2015 only five, rather than the usual six, returned – the loss of a breeding pair. Two pairs have been found there in each year since.

Only three individuals, not four, returned to the Habberley area (SJ30W and SJ40B) in 2018, and there was only one pair there in 2019. Although a second pair returned to this part of the area in 2020, there was only one pair again in 2021.

This, taken together with the trend chart, suggests a net decline of one pair, around 10%, since 2014.

Table 1. Curlew population 2014 – 21

Year	Number of Curlew pairs
2014	9-16
2015	9
2016	10-12
2017	9-11
2018	8- 9
2019	9-10
2020	10
2021	9-10



From the observations and analysis, it is estimated that the Curlew population in the area in 2021 was 9-10 breeding pairs a net loss of at least one pair since 2014.

2.23 Recording Curlew Nest Sites

To improve the value of CWG Curlew surveys, nest site habitat data is being collected to feed into the database being developed by the South of England Curlew Forum. Observers have been requested to complete a questionnaire for every case where a nest was found, or the field containing the nest was identified beyond reasonable doubt.

2.24 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.

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

Colour-ringed wild Curlews have been found breeding in the area, at least two near Marton, and near Hemford. However, 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.

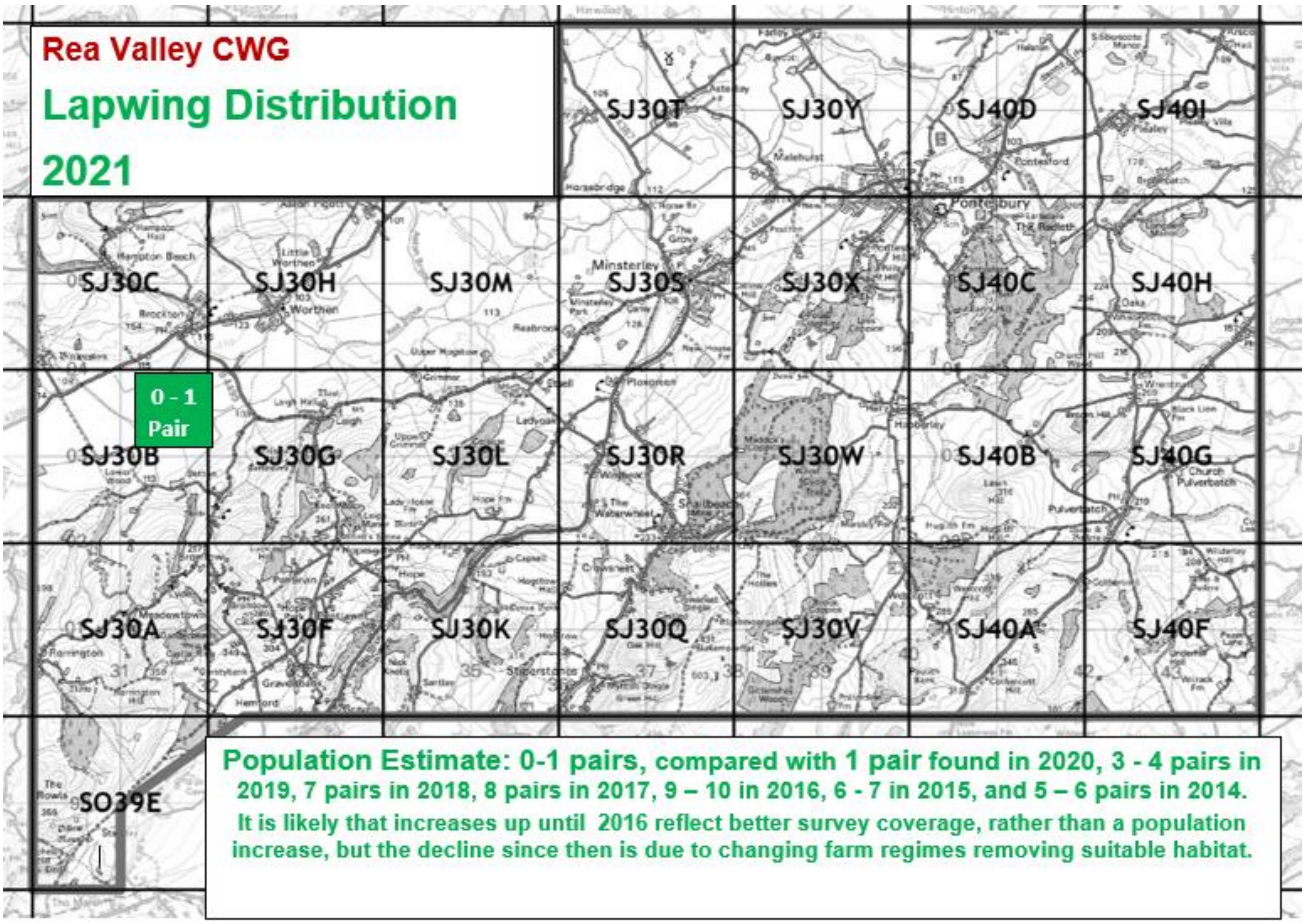
2.3 Lapwing

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.

The map below summarises the estimated number and distribution of breeding Lapwings in the Rea Valley area. It also summarises the cumulative results of all seven previous Surveys.



Lapwings need short vegetation or bare ground to nest on, and those that nest on arable land have to move round to follow the farm crop rotation. The regular breeding site in SJ30L was initially occupied by two pairs in 2020, and three pairs were seen at another site in the south- west corner of the same square, but only one pair remained to breed, displaying or defending territory at two different nest sites in adjacent fields. There was no evidence of successful breeding, and there was a lot of disturbance due to tilling and drilling crops of grain. A casual record was received of four pairs seen displaying at this site on 19 March 2021, but they had gone when the site was revisited three days later, and none were seen on the survey visit on 7 April, or subsequently.

The site in SJ30H, which was re-occupied in 2019, was again vacant as a result of land management changes on the farm, which have removed the suitable habitat.

These were the only two sites found to be occupied in the three years up until 2019. However, it is possible that other pairs were overlooked because of the limited survey effort in 2020. In particular,

pairs have been found in some years prior to 2017 north of Minsterley, but these areas were not covered in 2020. However, they were covered in 2021, and no Lapwings were found.

A single Lapwing, which may have been sitting on a nest, was found near a small pool in SJ30B on 6 May, but no Lapwings were seen on the other two survey visits.

The apparent increase in population, year on year up until 2016, is likely to be due to better survey coverage, rather than an increase in Lapwings. Some squares have not been covered every year, so establishing trends is difficult. However, it does appear that the population has declined since 2016, and the number found in 2021 was the lowest yet.

Only one Lapwing was found, which may have been part of a breeding pair. Only one breeding pair was found in 2020, the previous lowest.

2.4 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. Lapwings have apparently declined much more than Curlews.

2.5 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.

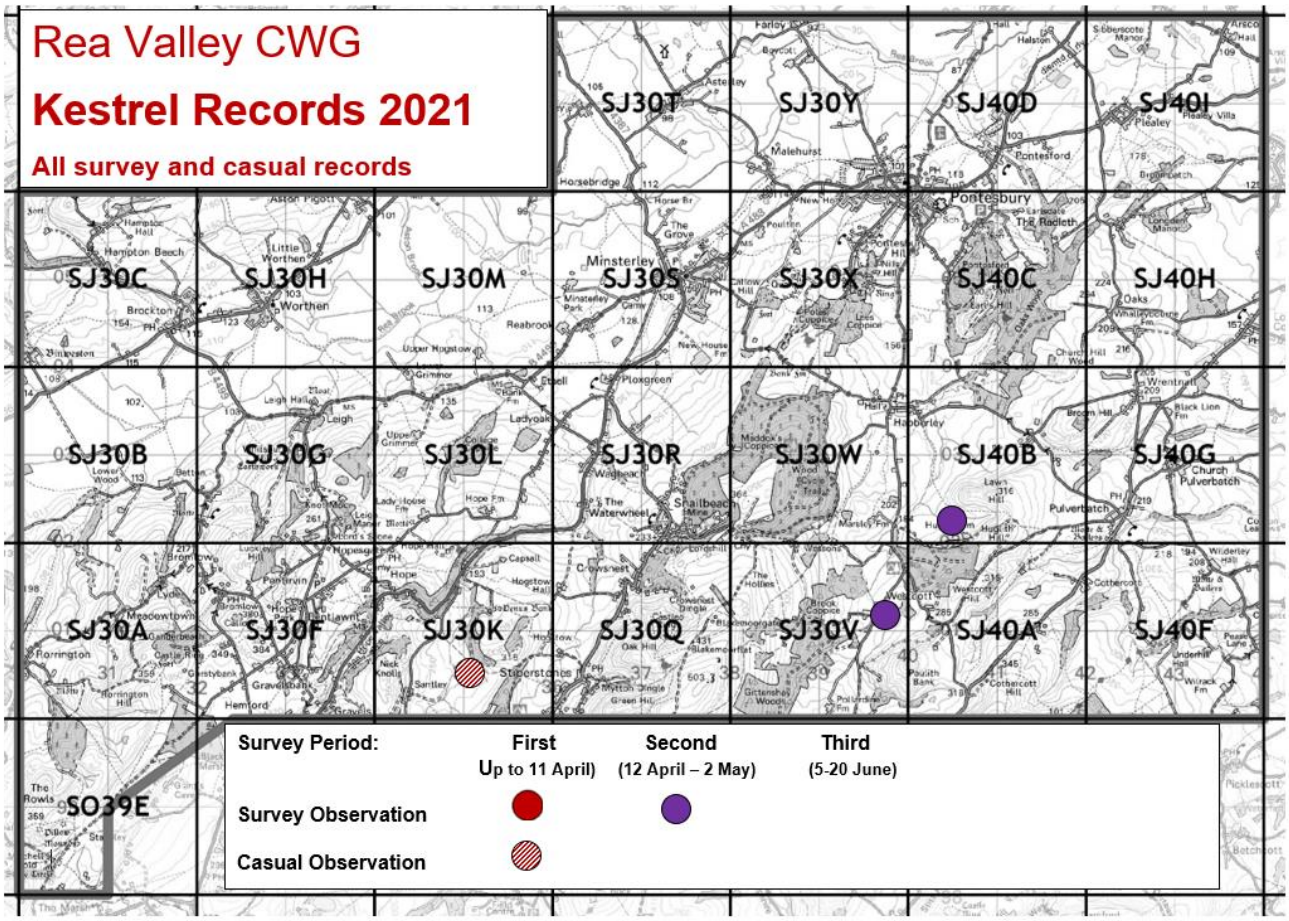
In Shropshire, records of confirmed or probable breeding declined by 46% in the 870 Atlas survey squares (tetrads) between 1985-90 and 2008-13, and the population probably halved in that time. Kestrel is on the *Red List* of *Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire.*

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 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 Rea Valley area in 2021 are shown on the map below.



It is likely that the dots represent 2-3 pairs (the records in SJ30V and 40B are close enough together to be birds in the same pair), compared to around five last year. No nest sites were found, nor were any fledged young reported, although young would not have fledged until after the main survey period ended in mid-June. None were found at traditional nest site on the western edge of SO39E.

There were two confirmed, and five probable, breeding records in these tetrads in the Shropshire Bird Atlas 2008-13.

2.6 Cuckoo

Cuckoo has declined considerably in recent years, and was added to the *Red List* of *Birds of Conservation Concern* in the UK in 2009. By 2015 the decline had reached 60% in the previous 25

years. The BTO Breeding Bird Survey has found a 71% decline in both England and the English West Midlands region between 1995 and 2018.

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

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

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

Each female lays between 10 and 25 eggs per year, each in a different nest. Each female usually selects nests of a single host species, most frequently Meadow Pipit, Dunnock or Reed Warbler.

The home range of each female varies considerably, depending on the ease of finding enough nests of the host species (i.e., parts of the home range will not be suitable breeding habitat for the host species, and the home range needs to include feeding areas for the Cuckoo as well). Thus, the females' home range might overlap the song territory of more than one male, and she will mate with each of them (an estimate of "breeding pairs" would therefore be better termed "male territories").

There were only two records, from the north-east quadrant of SJ30Q, and the adjacent south-west quadrant of SJ30W, which might have been the same bird. The population estimate in 2021 is therefore 1 – 2 territorial males, considerably less than the exceptional 6 – 7 in 2020, which was substantially more than recorded in previous years.

In 2019, a casual record was received of one heard somewhere in the vicinity of Upper Vessons Farm, in SJ30V. In 2018, only one was recorded, in SJ30F; while one was recorded in each of two tetrads in 2017, one in 2016 and two in 2015.

2.7 Red Kite

At least 12 Red Kites were seen in six tetrads, the first time more than one was seen in several squares.

The local nest site occupied for each year since 2017 was again occupied, but there was a second nest nearby for the second year, and a nest at a new site near Pontesbury. Kites were seen carrying prey to two other sites, but the nests were not located, so there were at least five nests in the area.

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.

2.8 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 detailed results are shown in Appendix 3. A summary is shown in Table 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.

Table 2. Other Target Species – Summary

Tetrad	Number of Each Species Recorded (Individual Birds)										
	Kestrel	Red Kite	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Dunnock	Wheat-ear	Stone-chat	Linnet	Bull-finch	Yellow-hammer
SJ30 A	(Square not surveyed)										
SJ30 B			2								
SJ30 C	(Square not surveyed)										
SJ30 F	(None of these target species recorded)										
SJ30 G		2	1								
SJ30 H			5								
SJ30 K			3				1		6		1
SJ30 L	(None of these target species recorded)										
SJ30 M	(Square not surveyed)										
SJ30 Q			4	29	1		3	6			
SJ30 R	(None of these target species recorded)										
SJ30 S			2								
SJ30 T			2			2					
SJ30 V	1	1		4							
SJ30 W	(None of these target species recorded)										
SJ30 X	(None of these target species recorded)										
SJ30 Y		1									
SJ40 A	1		4	1	1	1					1
SJ40 B	1		2						2		
SJ40 C	(Square not surveyed)										
SJ40 D		1									
SJ40 F	(None of these target species recorded)										
SJ40 G		4	5			4			2	1	
SJ40 H		3									
SJ40 I	(None of these target species recorded)										
SO39 E	(None of these target species recorded)										
Total	3	12	30	34	2	7	4	6	10	1	2
Squares	3	6	10	3	2	3	2	1	3	1	2

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

Ten species were not recorded at all: Barn Owl, Dipper, Grey Partridge, Reed Bunting, Snipe, Spotted Flycatcher, Swift (nest sites), Tree Sparrow, 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. A new project, to locate Swift breeding sites, was initiated in 2021 and is described later.

2.9 Nest Box Schemes

The Group initiated a Barn Owl project in 2015, with the intention of installing nest boxes at locations where owls were seen, but very few reports were received in the five years 2015-19, so the effort to systematically seek out Barn Owl records has been abandoned.

2.91 Resting Hill

A nest box scheme for woodland birds, particularly Pied Flycatcher, in the Stiperstones valleys at Resting Hill, has been developed since 2015, initially with funding from the Landscape Partnership Scheme. A full separate report on this project appears elsewhere in this Annual Report.

2.92 Pontesford Hill

Another nest box scheme has operated on Pontesford Hill since 2016, which is now supported by the Friends of Pontesbury Hill and Earls Hill, but is run by those doing the work.

There were 10 weekly checks made in Spring 2021 with the first on 6th April. There were 17 boxes remaining from the original 20. Two of the 17 were found to have been knocked or levered off the trees and were damaged. Fortunately, the damage was repairable, and they were re-sited the next week. The following week both were found to contain nests, one with an egg. Another box contained a partial nest for 7 weeks and the next week had a bird sitting on the nest. The following week the box was found completely destroyed with no sign of the contents. There are now 16 boxes, but we hope to install replacements for the ones lost and possibly a few more.

The early Spring was mild which encouraged nest building, but April then turned cold and some birds delayed egg laying whilst others laid, but covered the eggs with the feathers in the nest and delayed incubation. Despite the odd weather pattern and the other problems mentioned above, it was the most successful year so far in terms of numbers of young fledged.

Results were as follows:–

- 17 boxes, 12 occupied.
- 10 pairs of Blue Tits – 7 pairs successfully fledged 43 young.
- 1 pair of Great Tits – successfully fledged 6 young.
- 1 pair of Wrens – 6 eggs laid; nest deserted.

2.93 Habberley Brook area

In 2020, a new nest box scheme was initiated alongside the upper reaches of Habberley Brook and The Rea, primarily aimed at Pied Flycatcher and Redstart. Fifty-six boxes were made and installed. A further 16 boxes were installed before the start of the 2021 season.

Agreement was reached last year with three more landowners to extend the scheme along the Habberley Brook and in adjacent areas, with around 80 new boxes, and another site was added. The results of all these schemes are shown in the table below:-

Site	Bank Farm	Huglith Farm	Meadow House	New Barns	Pollardine Farm
Species					
Blue Tit	9	7	6	3	10
Great Tit	3	2	4	5	7
Pied Flycatcher	1	2	0	0	9*
Redstart	2	0	0	0	4
Marsh Tit	0	2	0	0	0
Robin	0	0	1	0	0
Occupancy					
Total no of boxes	24	40	40	16	72
Total occupied	15	13	11	8	30
Occupancy (%)	62.5	32.5	27.5	50.0	41.7
Ringing					
Pied Flycatcher Adults	2	1			7
Pied Flycatcher Chicks	5				27
Redstart Adults	0				1
Redstart Chicks	11				13
Last survey date	07/06/2021	07/06/2021	02/06/2021	07/06/2021	07/06/2021

* including 2 dead adults

The occupancy rate has been excellent, and presence of Pied Flycatcher at three sites, Redstart at two sites, and two pairs of Marsh Tits using boxes, is very gratifying.

2.94 Earl's Hill SWT Reserve

There is another nest-box scheme in the area, on the SWT reserve at Earl's Hill, operated by a different ringer. The CWG has no direct involvement in this scheme, but some members help with this scheme too. Its results, for 35 boxes, were summarised in the 2020 report for completeness. Thirty-five boxes were available.

All species are down on pairs from last year, leaving rather a lot of empty boxes! Great Tits all but disappeared with just 2 pairs using the boxes producing just 7 young, a very poor breeding season. Blue Tits did well with all but one of six pairs fledging young. The Trust's decision not to clear dead wood from the site has provided numerous natural nest sites for the tits, resulting in the complete petering out of occupied boxes in the deeper parts of the wood The occupancy this year was just 37%, compared with around 50% most seasons.

Pied Flycatchers continue to hold on with 5 pairs found breeding this year all of which were successful. They appear to like the more open woodland on the slopes with 4 out of 5 being found in this area.

A female ringed as an adult the previous year was retrapped at the same box this year just showing how good these birds are at navigation! Only one was caught at another scheme, which is slightly disappointing considering how many box schemes there are; it was ringed as a chick from a brood of 8 in May 2019 and caught as a breeding male at Brynderwen Powys some 25km away. This reflects previous experience; they tend to come back to the Mid Wales/Shropshire area in which they hatched, and none have turned up in other parts of the country from this scheme.

2.10 RVCWG 'Swift Watch'

The Swift (Apus apus) is a rapidly declining breeding bird in the UK and is now listed on the Birds of Conservation Concern 5: the Red List for Birds (2021) and has been red-listed in Shropshire.

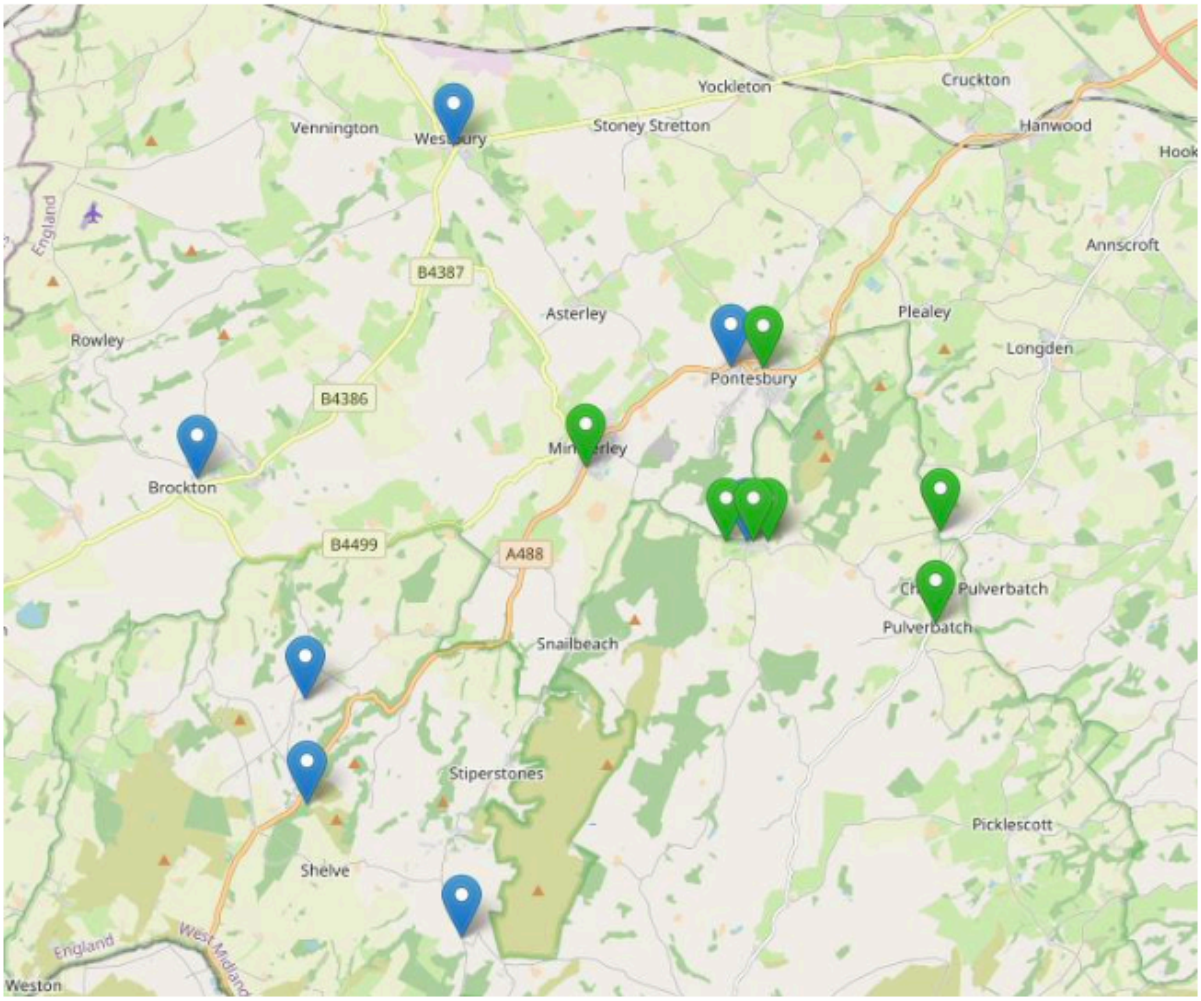
In partnership with the Shropshire Swift Group, the RVCWG recruited volunteers to act as 'Swift Champions' for four areas in the Rea Valley catchment: Worthen & Brockton; Minsterley & Snailbeach; Pontesbury; Pulverbatch. As this was the first year that the scheme had been run locally, the main ambition was to survey for Swifts, and in particular, find and report evidence of nesting.

Table 1

Latin Name/Behaviour	Town/village	Observer	Date	Number observed
Feeding parties				
Apus apus	Pontesbury	Steve Oates	23/05/2021	2
Apus apus	Gravels	Steve Oates	26/05/2021	4
Screaming Parties				
Apus apus	Bentlawnt	Steve Oates	27/05/2021	3
Apus apus	Bentlawnt	Steve Oates	01/06/2021	6
Apus apus	Bentlawnt	Steve Oates	02/06/2021	5
Apus apus	Westbury	Kevin Heede	15/06/2021	6
Apus apus	Bentlawnt	Steve Oates	16/06/2021	2
Apus apus	Bentlawnt	Steve Oates	28/06/2021	8
Apus apus	Brockton	Steve Oates	13/07/2021	9
Apus apus	Wagbeach	Julian Livsey	30/07/2021	5
Apus apus	Pulverbatch	Siobhan Reedy	09/07/2021	>15
Apus apus	Pulverbatch	Siobhan Reedy	17/07/2021	>25
Apus apus	Wrentnall	Siobhan Reedy	17/07/2021	9 - 10
Potential nest sites				
Apus apus	Minsterley	Geoff Brown	18/06/2021	3
Apus apus	Pontesbury	Sam Mytton	21/06/2021	2
Apus apus	Pulverbatch	Siobhan Reedy	17/07/2021	3
Apus apus	Wrentnall	Siobhan Reedy	17/07/2021	1
Apus apus	Habberley	Siobhan Reedy	Not known	3
Apus apus	Habberley area	Siobhan Reedy	Not known	4

The table opposite shows the locations of Feeding Parties, Screaming Parties and Potential Nest Sites reported in 2021.

The results have also been plotted on a map (See below) to show the spatial distribution of the records. The blue pins show where 'feeding' and 'screaming' parties were seen and the best evidence of nesting is shown by green pins.



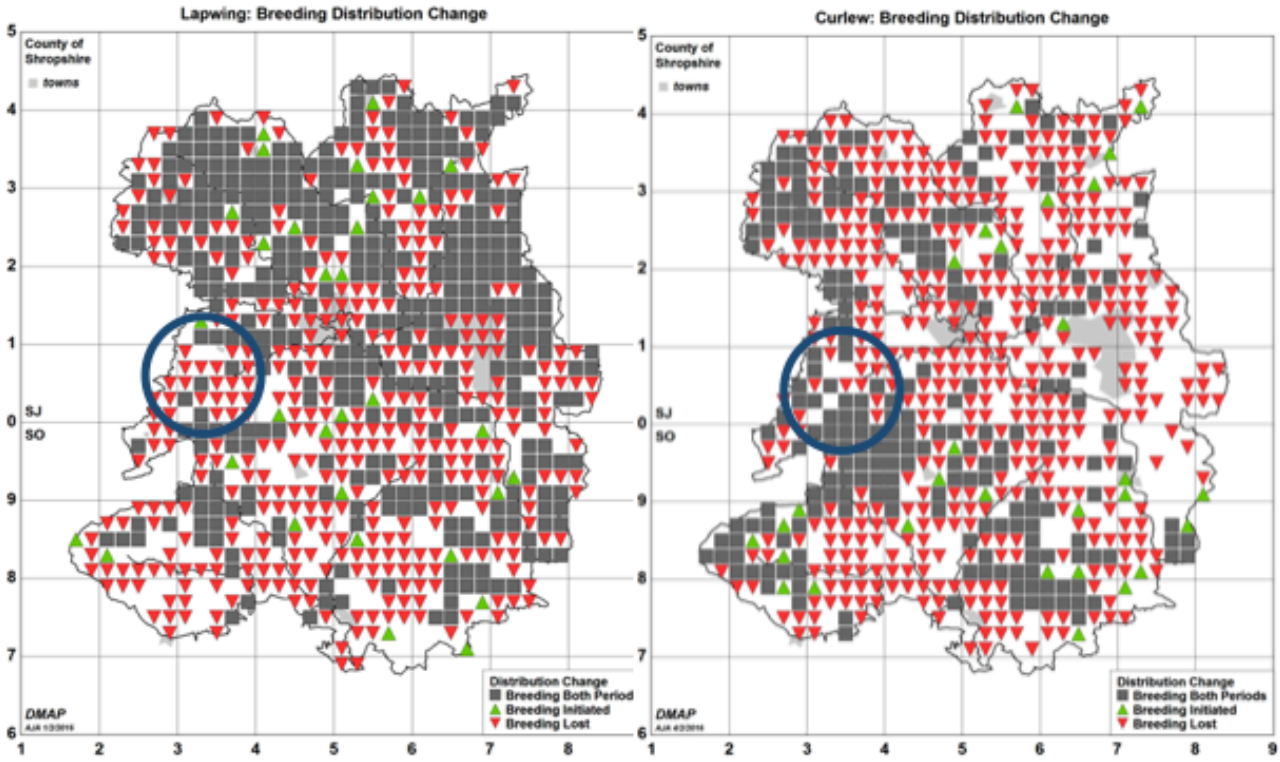
What the map may be showing is that a wider network of volunteers is required and increased observation of potential nest sites to confirm occupancy and numbers.

For 2022, the exercise should be repeated with more publicity and more emphasis on identifying and protecting nest sites in use.

2.11 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 (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.

2.12 Recommendations

Natural England is recommended to encourage farmers with breeding Lapwing or Curlew on or near their land to join Countryside Stewardship, utilising the appropriate options to maintain and enhance the habitat for these priority species

2.13 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*) (i.e., 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 but there is no evidence from the 2021 surveys of the three groups that the predicted number of Curlews has come back to the area, so the 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.

2.14 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 for 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

2.15 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 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/.

2.16 Curlews and Pheasant Release

The RSPB announced last October 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 game-birds 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 game-bird 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 Red 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/

2.17 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.

2.18 Acknowledgements

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

Richard Allen, Rod Bacon, Julian Bromhead, Geoff Brown, Emma Bullard, Lorna Farnsworth, Ray Harper, Kevin Heede, Alison Holmes, Jerry Hughes, Howard Key, Tony Legg, Julian Livsey, Steve Oates, Bridgett Pugh, Janet Radford, Siobhan Reedy, Clive Sinclair, Mark Sulway, Sam Thurston, Luke Walker, Adam Weston and Paul Wilcox.

Andy Spencer, a qualified BTO bird ringer, organised the Pollardine Farm (Habberley Brook/ The Rea) Nest Box Scheme: he made the boxes, obtained permission from the landowner to put them up, monitored their use, and ringed the Pied Flycatchers and Redstarts. Thanks to Jane and Lizzie Hulton-Harrop for permission to install these boxes, and for help in putting them up.

Thanks to Siobhan Reedy for co-ordinating the other four new nest box schemes, and collating the results, and to landowners Lorna Farnsworth, Tony Jones, Siobhan Reedy and Stephen Williams for funding the boxes, and monitoring them.

Thanks to Geoff Brown for the report on the Pontesford Hill Nest Box Scheme, and to Gill Wilson and Helen Critchley for their valuable assistance there; and to Gareth Richardson for the data in the report on the nest box scheme in Earl's Hill SWT reserve.

Thanks to Steve Oates for organising the Swift project, to the six members who contributed the Swift records: Geoff Brown, Kevin Heede, Julian Livsey, Sam Mytton, Steve Oates and Siobhan Reedy, and Julian Livsey for providing the technical know-how to prepare the Swift Map.

2.19 Plans for 2022

The Bird Group intends to repeat the Bird Survey in 2022. New participants are needed, so we hope to recruit new members. Anyone interested in birds will be very welcome.

A Bird Group meeting will be held at 7.30pm on Tuesday 22nd March at Minsterley Village Hall, primarily to plan the bird survey. New members will be very welcome.
An outdoor training meeting will be held in late March or early April 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).

The nest box schemes will also carry on, and new helpers will be recruited for the Swift project.

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,

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3. Resting Hill Nestbox Scheme 2021

Amber Bicheno, RVCWG, and Jonathan Groom, BTO Regional Representative for Shropshire, Feb 2022.

Year 7

3.1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

During 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic was continuing, however thanks to more relaxed rules and the vaccine rollout we were able to monitor the site in a relatively normal manner. We were pleased as well to have help from the local Young Rangers group for some box maintenance and checks within the season.

3.2 Summary Headlines

The project continued in 2021 thanks to our volunteer recorders, monitoring the nesting success of 3 species within the woodland; pied flycatcher, blue tit and great tit.

- Overall box uptake 41%
- Pied Flycatcher numbers down by 6 nests
- Blue Tit numbers were the same as 2020
- Great Tit numbers up by 1 nest
- Redstart were not found in the wood again this year
- Overall success rate for pied flycatcher was 75% (nests with at least 1 fledged young), with 38% complete successes
- Blue tit nest success rate 58%
- Great tit nest success rate 78%

3.3 Results

3.31 Box Uptake

Figure 1: Proportional uptake of boxes by species

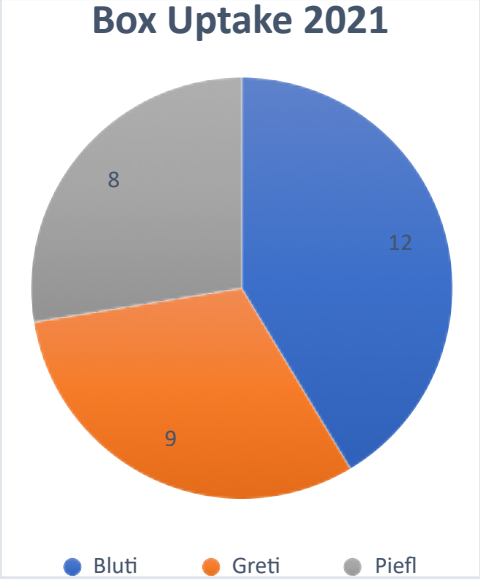


Figure 1 shows the uptake of boxes by each species. This season saw the highest box uptake from Blue Tits, followed by Great Tits and then Pied Flycatchers. The number of flycatcher nests in 2021 has dropped since 2020, from 14 nests down to just 8. Two other pied flycatcher nests were recorded but were never used. Figure 2 shows how box uptake has changed over the scheme's duration. 2020 had the highest overall box occupation since the scheme began, 2021 had a lower overall box uptake, with flycatcher levels closer to those seen in 2019.

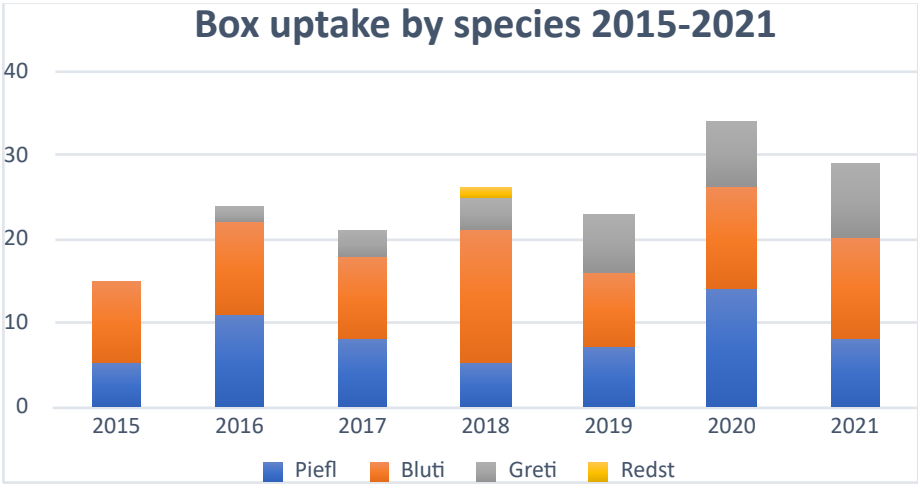


Figure 2: Species breakdown of box uptake 2015 - 2020

3.32 Nest Success Rates

The success rate for all species during 2021 has dropped from the relatively high results in 2020, as can be seen in table 1 below. Success is measured as any nests that fledged at least one chick; complete success is measured as nests where all young successfully fledged. The complete success rate for Blue Tits and Great Tits dropped this season, but rose slightly for Pied Flycatchers.

Table 1: Species Nest Success Rates

Species	No. of clutches	Success	Complete Success
Blue Tit	12*	58%	17%
Great Tit	9	78%	22%
Pied Fly	8	75%	38%

* This includes a mystery clutch of tit eggs that failed before species could be identified. Blue tit is most likely.

Table 2: Change from 2020 by species

Species	Bluti	Change from 2020	Piefl	Change from 2020	Greti	Change from 2020
Total Broods	12	0	8	-6	9	+1
Total successful	7	-5	6	-6	7	0
Success rate	58%	-42%	75%	-11%	78%	-10%
Complete successes	2	-1	3	+1	2	+2
Complete success rate	17%	-16%	38%	+24%	22%	+22%
Total Eggs laid	87	-5	56	-46	66	+3
Average clutch size	7.3	-0.5	7	-0.3	7.3	-0.6
Total Eggs hatched	61	-10	37	-49	47	-3
Total young fledged	46	-20	35	-22	38	-4
Overall Success rate	53%	-19%	63%	+7%	58%	-9%

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

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

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

3.33 Blue Tit Productivity

Blue tits on site did not have a great year, with the same occupancy as 2020, but the overall success rate lower. As seen in table 2 above, only around half of their nests fledged at least one chick, and their overall success rate dropped by 42% from the previous year. 17% of nests managed to fledge all their young, a decrease of 16%. Many nests were seen to provide evidence of early laying in the season, but when weather changed for the worse, the eggs were covered and left until conditions improved. The average clutch size has declined again, down to 7.3, although this may be skewed by the presence of some nests that failed after only 1 or 2 eggs were laid.

3.34 Great Tit Productivity

Great tits remained on site in 2021 and improved on their uptake, with 9 nests in total, 1 more than in 2020. Although their complete success rate is up by 22%, table 2 shows that their success and overall success rates have both decreased. Although the number of nests increased, the number of fledged young was lower than 2020. This may also be due to adverse weather conditions early in the season.

3.35 Pied Flycatcher Productivity

The year 2021 sadly did not see the extraordinary high numbers of the previous season, with 8 nests numbers have returned closer to lower 2019 levels. The nest success rate has also seen a decrease, down by 11% since 2020. However, in better news the complete success rate has increased once again, meaning that overall more of the eggs laid successfully resulted in fledged young.

3.36 Redstart Productivity

Redstarts did not return to the site in 2021. This means 2018 remains the only year where redstarts have been found using nest boxes on site.

3.37 Ringing

Unfortunately, due to a lack of availability, ringing of the pied flycatcher broods did not go ahead in 2021. We hope that we will be able to get the broods of 2022 ringed and to gather more important data on the adults returning to Resting Hill each year.

3.38 Resting Hill Long-term trends

We now have 7 years of data for this fantastic project which has shown the effectiveness of nest-box schemes in the right area. It also allows as a fantastic opportunity to see the trends in breeding success of the species on site.

Although this season has seen a drop in numbers at the site, with overall box uptake lower than the previous season, the numbers at the site are still relatively high and the boxes continue to be of benefit to multiple species. There is annual fluctuation and surely the climatic events, certainly of the past three years or so, must have had an effect on each season's success.

Although there were much lower numbers of Pied Flycatchers in 2021, it is encouraging to see that their overall success rate has increased, and perhaps the lower numbers this season are related to the lower success rates in 2020.

Table 4: Long-term trends at Resting Hill 2015-2021

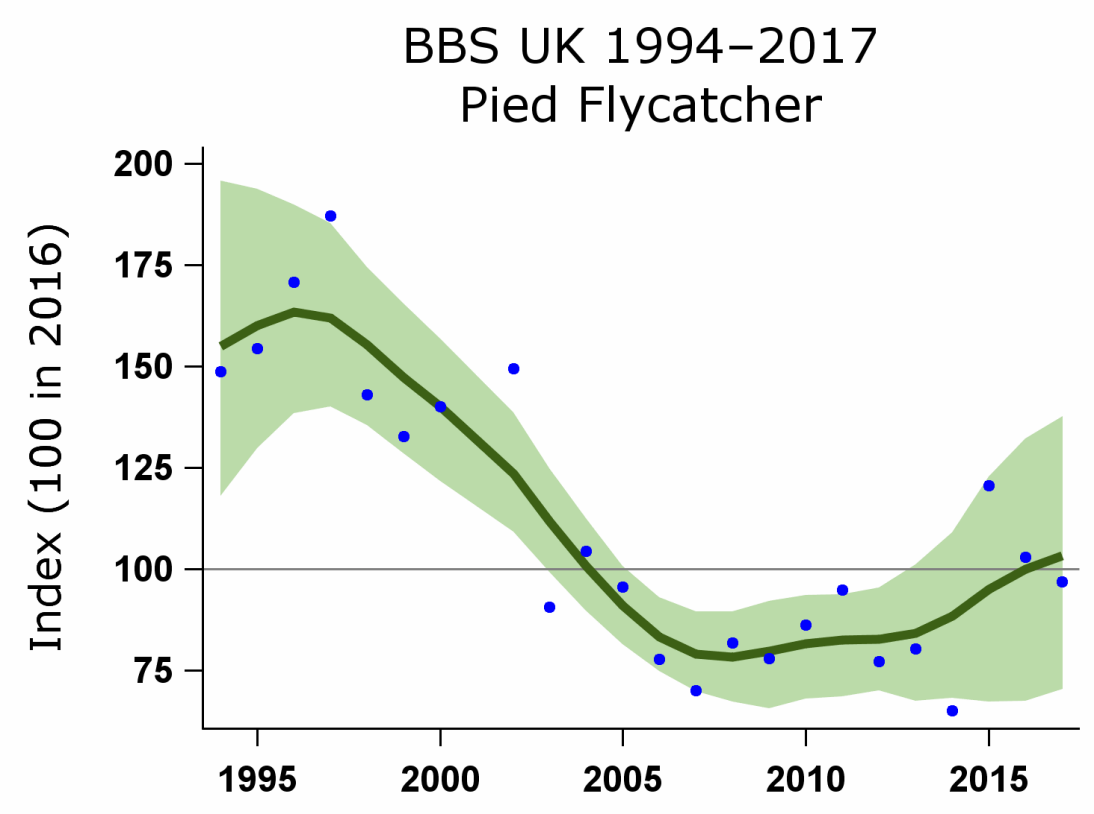
Species	Statistic	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
All	Total number of boxes occupied	15	24	21	25	23	34	29
Blue tit	No. of nests	10	11	10	16	9	12	12
	Overall success rate	63%	61%	90%	52%	39%	72%	53%
	Average clutch size	9.3	8.6	8.6	7.6	8.8	7.7	7.3
	Fledged young	59	58	79	33	31	66	46
	Average fledged per nest	5.9	5.3	7.9	2.1	3.4	5.5	3.8
Great tit	No. of nests	0	2	3	4	7	8	9
	Overall success rate		71%	86%	55%	59%	67%	58%
	Average clutch size		7	7	8.3	7	7.9	7.3
	Fledged young		10	18	18	29	42	38
	Average fledged per nest		5	6	4.5	4.1	5.3	4.2
Pied flycatcher	No. of nests	5	11	8	5	7	14	8
	Overall success rate	91%	73%	85%	85%	74%	56%	63%
	Average clutch size	6.4	7.1	7.25	6.8	6.7	7.3	7
	Fledged young	29	52	50	29	35	57	35
	Average fledged per nest	5.8	4.7	6.3	5.8	5	4.1	4.4

Blue tits seemed to have taken a step back since the improvements of 2020, although the success rates are still higher than the very low levels of 2019. Great tit numbers continue to slowly increase at the site, although their success rates remain variable.

3.4 BTO Long Term Population Trends

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

BTO/ JNCC



BirdTrends Report

3.5 Acknowledgements

Thank you to all our volunteers for their continued help:-

- With special mention to Julian Bromhead, Joe Penfold and the Young Rangers for their help on site this season.
- Natural England for allowing access to their site.
- Jonathan Groom for his continued guidance and support with this project.

4. Plant Group Report 2021

By Rob Rowe, Plant Group Leader, February 2022

4.1 Introduction

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.

4.2 Plant Group visits in 2021

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

- On 3rd June on behalf of Natural England, the number of Mountain Pansies was recorded on Stapeley hill. This is one of the best sites in this area for this now uncommon plant. Over 4000 flowering plants were counted.
- On 20th June Roundton Hill was visited, to look at the early summer plants on this Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust nature reserve.
- On 25th June the group returned to Hogstow Meadows which is a species-rich, traditionally managed hay meadow near Stiperstones village.
- On 28th June the group 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 was carried out where the highlight was finding several tall spikes of Greater Butterfly Orchid.

4.2 Future Plans

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

Also there will be some visits led by site owners to hear about their involvement with their land and the group will continue looking for and surveying unimproved meadows and working with the Marches Meadow Group.

4.3 Invasive plant project

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 the SWT. 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.

5. Treasurers Report for year end 31st March 2021

By Geoff Brown, Treasurer, February 2022

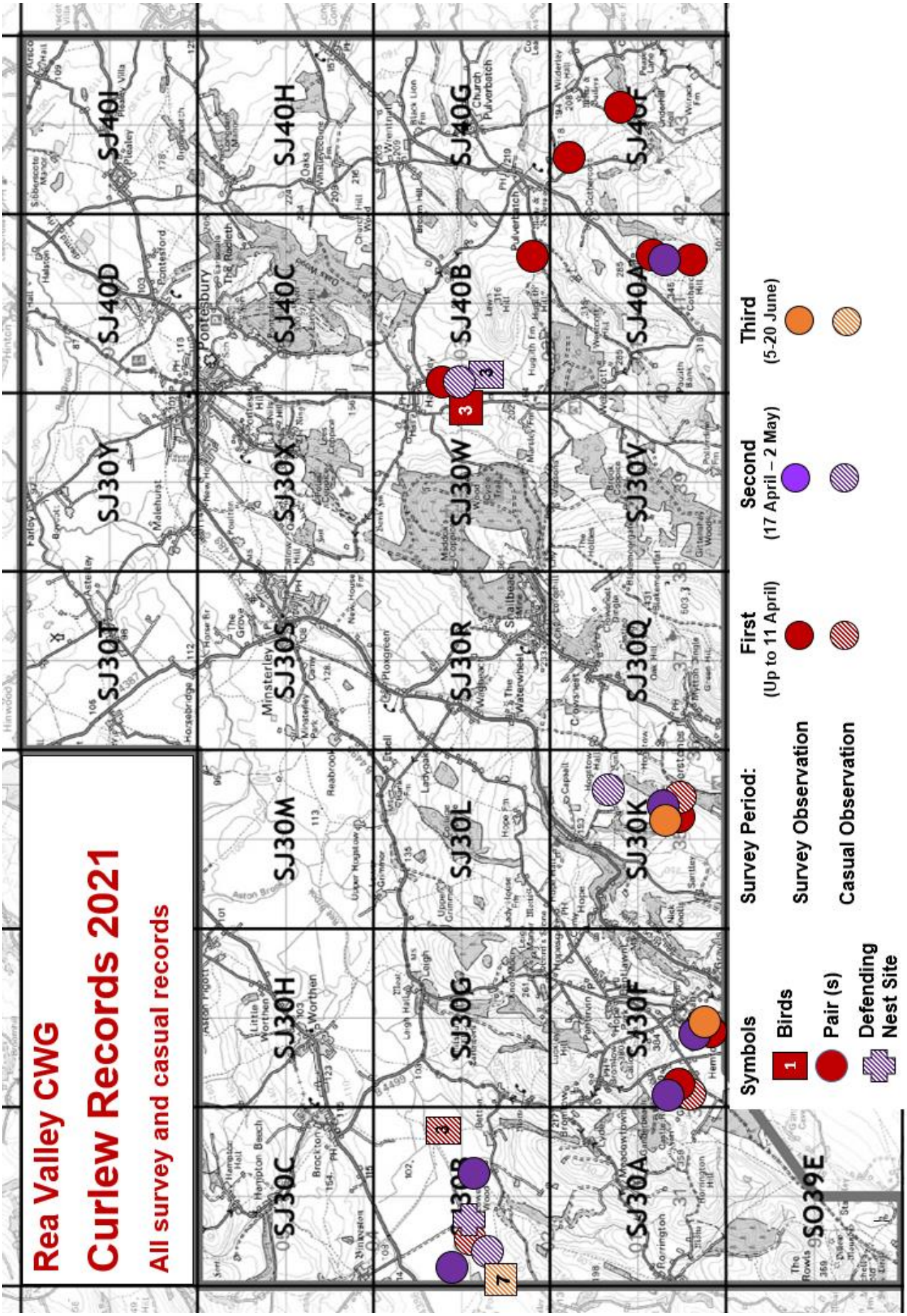
REA VALLEY COMMUNITY WILDLIFE GROUP

Year end accounts to 31st March 2021

INCOME		EXPENDITURE	
HSBC BALANCE @ 08/04/2020	208.36	Late cleared cheque (2019/20)	20.00
Grants for Stepping Stones Project	3000.00	Insurance Premium	168.00
Insurance Premium refund (NT)	168.00	Room hire (Bird group)	10.00
		Bird Surveys work	750.00
		Plant Surveys work	750.00
		Website work	300.00
		Website communications training	35.00
		Bird nest boxes, supply, erection, monitoring at Habberley	100.00
Totals	3376.36		2133.00
NET BALANCE		1243.36	
HSBC statement balance @ 08/04/2021		1243.36	

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

Appendix 2: Curlew observations 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	Grey Partridge	Snipe	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Dipper	Swift (sites)	Yellow Wagtail	Dunnock	Wheatear	Stone-chat	Tree Sparrow	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
SJ30 A	(Square not surveyed)																						
SJ30 B	Mark Sulway	2	41		3					2													
SJ30 B	Paul Wilcox & Howard Key	2	0		1																		
SJ30 C	(Square not surveyed)																						
SJ30 F	Richard Allen	2	15		3																		
SJ30 F	(Training Session				4																		
SJ30 G	Jerry Hughes	2	30				2																
SJ30 H	Jerry Hughes	2	0	(No target species recorded)																			
SJ30 K	Bridgett Pugh	3	0		2												1						
SJ30 L	Rod Bacon			(No target species recorded)																			
SJ30 M	(Square not surveyed)																						
SJ30 Q	Julian Bromhead	2	30							4	20							4					
SJ30 R	Richard Allen	2	15																				
SJ30 S	Emma Bullard	2	0							2													
SJ30 T	Geoff Brown	2	15							2						1							
SJ30 V	Julian Bromhead	2	15								2												
SJ30 W	Janet Radford & Luke Walker	3	0	(No target species recorded)																			
SJ30 X	Alison Holmes			(No target species recorded)																			
SJ30 Y	Ray Harper	3	0				1																
SJ40 A	Steve Oates	2	1		4																		
SJ40 A	Julian Livsey	3	40		1					4	1					1						1	
SJ40 B	Siobhan Reedy	3	0		2					2													
SJ40 B	Janet Radford & Luke Walker	3	0																				
SJ40 C	(Square not surveyed)																						
SJ40 D	Ray Harper	3	30				1																
SJ40 F	Steve Oates	1	6		2																		
SJ40 G	Adam Weston	4	0		2		2									1					1		
SJ40 H	(Square not surveyed)																						
SJ40 I	Tony Legg	2	45	(No target species recorded)																			
SO39 E	Kevin Heede	1	30	(No target species recorded)																			
Totals (26 Tetrads)		**56**	**13**	**0**	**24**	**0**	**6**	**0**	**0**	**16**	**23**	**0**	**0**	**0**		**3**	**1**	**4**	**0**	**0**	**1**	**1**	**0**

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	Grey Partridge	Snipe	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Dipper	Swift (sites)	Yellow Wagtail	Dunnock	Wheatear	Stone-chat	Tree Sparrow	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
SJ30 A	(Square not surveyed)																						
SJ30 B	Mark Sulway																						
SJ30 B	Paul Wilcox & Howard Key	2	45	1	7																		
SJ30 C	(Square not surveyed)																						
SJ30 F	Richard Allen	2	30		4																		
SJ30 F	(Training Session																						
SJ30 G	Jerry Hughes	1	45				1																
SJ30 H	Jerry Hughes	1	45																				
SJ30 K	Bridgett Pugh	3	0		2																		
SJ30 K	Clive Sinclair	3	0		3					3										6		1	
SJ30 L	Rod Bacon																						
SJ30 M	(Square not surveyed)																						
SJ30 Q	Julian Bromhead	2	15							4	29	1					3	6					
SJ30 R	Richard Allen	2	30	(No target species recorded)																			
SJ30 S	Emma Bullard																						
SJ30 T	Geoff Brown	2	5							1						2							
SJ30 V	Julian Bromhead	2	30			1	1				4												
SJ30 W	Janet Radford & Lorna Farnsworth	3	0	(No target species recorded)																			
SJ30 X	Alison Holmes																						
SJ30 Y	Ray Harper	2	40	(No target species recorded)																			
SJ40 A	Steve Oates	2	25			1						1											
SJ40 A	Julian Livsey																						
SJ40 B	Siobhan Reedy	2	30			1				2										2			
SJ40 B	Janet Radford & Lorna Farnsworth			(No target species recorded)																			
SJ40 C	(Square not surveyed)																						
SJ40 D	Ray Harper	2	30	(No target species recorded)																			
SJ40 F	Steve Oates	1	17	(No target species recorded)																			
SJ40 G	Adam Weston	5	0				1			1						4							
SJ40 H	Sam Thurston	5	0				3																
SJ40 I	Tony Legg	1	45	(No target species recorded)																			
SO39 E	Kevin Heede	1	30																				
Totals (26 Tetrads)		**51**	**42**	**1**	**16**	**3**	**6**	**0**	**0**	**11**	**33**	**2**	**0**	**0**		**6**	**3**	**6**	**0**	**8**	**0**	**1**	**0**

Third Period (5-20 June)

Tetrad	Surveyor(s)	Time Spent		Number of Each Species Recorded (Individual Birds)																		
		Hrs	Mins	Lapwing	Curlew	Kestrel	Red Kite	Grey Partridge	Snipe	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Dipper	Swift (sites)	Yellow Wagtail	Dunnock	Wheatear	Stone-chat	Tree Sparrow	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer	Reed Bunting
SJ30 A	(Square not surveyed)																						
SJ30 B	Mark Sulway																						
SJ30 B	Paul Wilcox & Howard Key	2	25		7																		
SJ30 C	(Square not surveyed)																						
SJ30 F	Richard Allen	2	30		3																		
SJ30 F	(Training Session																						
SJ30 G	Jerry Hughes	1	45							1													
SJ30 H	Jerry Hughes	1	15							5													
SJ30 K	Bridgett Pugh	2	0		1																		
SJ30 K	Clive Sinclair																						
SJ30 L	Rod Bacon			(No target species recorded)																			
SJ30 M	(Square not surveyed)																						
SJ30 Q	Julian Bromhead																						
SJ30 R	Richard Allen	2	30	(No target species recorded)																			
SJ30 S	Emma Bullard			(No target species recorded)																			
SJ30 T	Geoff Brown	2	5							2													
SJ30 V	Julian Bromhead																						
SJ30 W	Janet Radford & Lorna Farnsworth			(No target species recorded)																			
SJ30 X	Alison Holmes																						
SJ30 Y	Ray Harper	3	0	(No target species recorded)																			
SJ40 A	Steve Oates	2	22		4																		
SJ40 A	Julian Livsey																						
SJ40 B	Siobhan Reedy																						
SJ40 B	Janet Radford & Lorna Farnsworth				5																		
SJ40 C	(Square not surveyed)																						
SJ40 D	Ray Harper	2	20																				
SJ40 F	Steve Oates																						
SJ40 G	Adam Weston	5	0				4			5										2			
SJ40 H	Sam Thurston																						
SJ40 I	Tony Legg																						
SO39 E	Kevin Heede																						
Totals (26 Tetrads)		**27**	**12**	**0**	**20**	**0**	**4**	**0**	**0**	**13**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**		**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**2**	**0**	**0**	**0**