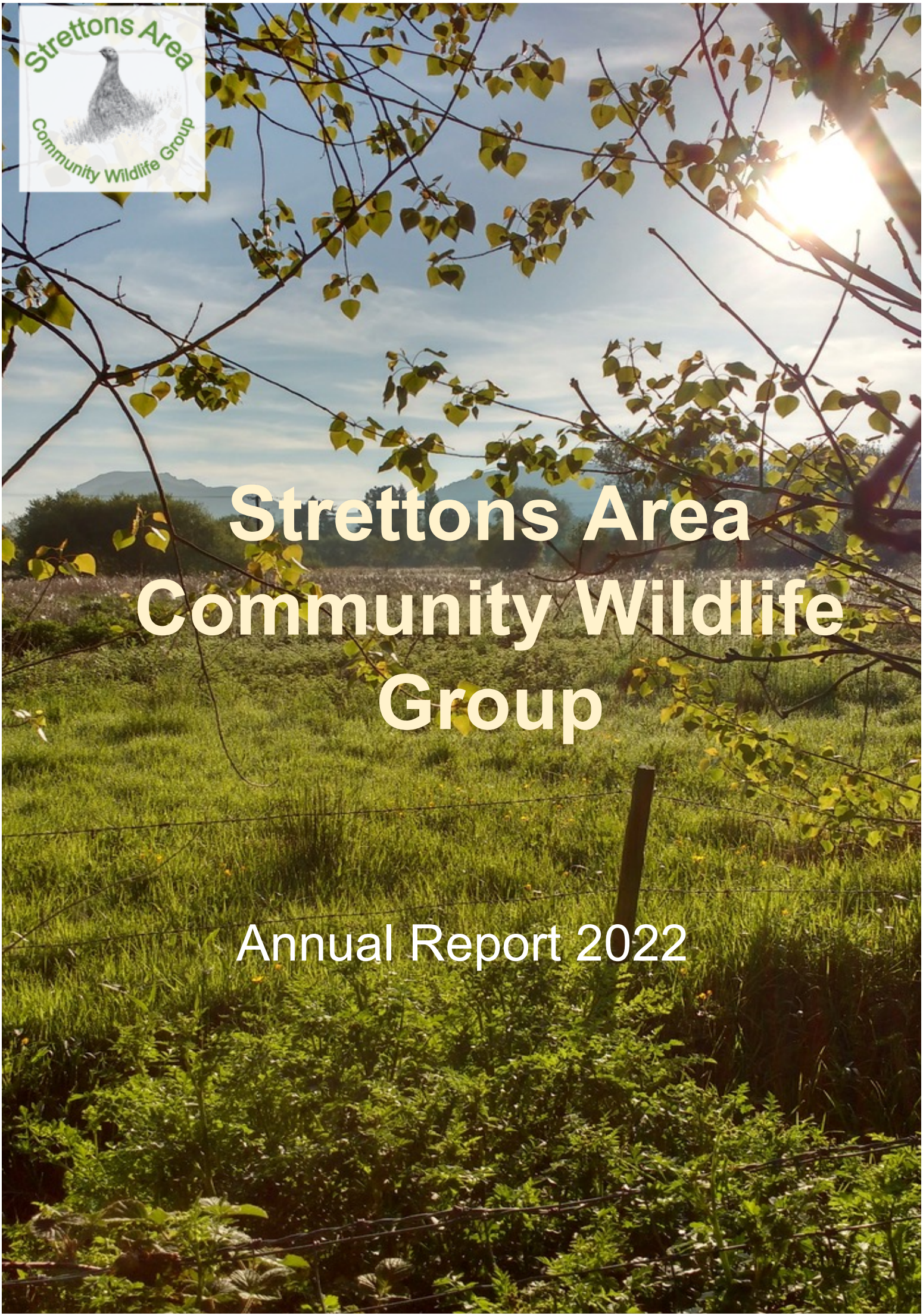

Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

Annual Report 2022

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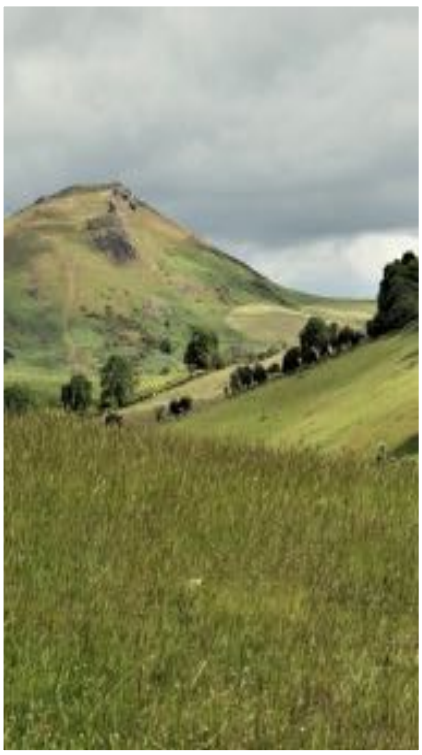
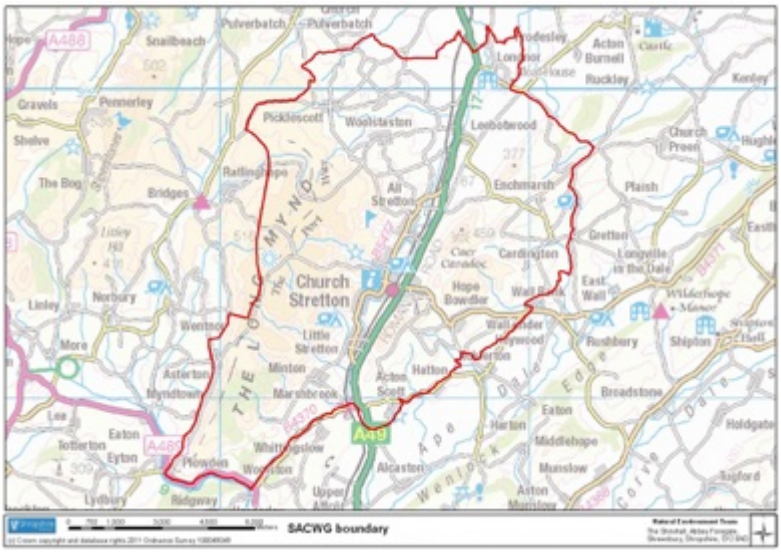


Introduction

Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group



The Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group (SACWG) was launched in February 2012, after consulting local groups and organisations. The group covers a broad area around the Stretton Hills (right). This boundary is not fixed, so activities can be extended according to the location of members and study subjects.

Since 2013 the group has been co-ordinated by a committee, elected from the membership at the Annual Public Meeting. Survey activities are adopted by members at the Annual Public Meeting, on the condition that they meet the following criteria.

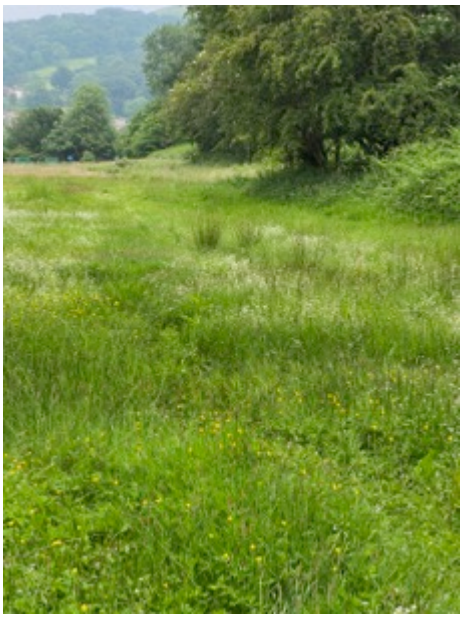
Each activity requires a leader, who will be responsible for organising surveyors, ensuring that useful data is collected, distributing survey forms (if necessary), analysing data for the SACWG annual report and submitting records to Shropshire's County Recorders. The survey manager will be responsible for ensuring that any necessary training is provided.

SACWG has its own section on the Community Wildlife Groups website, where you will be able to keep updated with survey activities and the latest discoveries. We would like to encourage all members to share their wildlife experiences and photographs. If you have seen something interesting or taken a nice wildlife photograph, please let the web manager know by emailing SACWG_WebAdmin@shropscwgs.org.uk. For those of you into social media, find us on Twitter @StrettonsWild..

Committee members (bold) and project leaders 2022 : ***Isabel Carter (chair), Julie Cowley (secretary), Penny Bienz (publicity and Stepping Stones coordination), John Baines (website), Will Priestley (treasurer), John Bacon, Leo Smith,*** *,* ***Steve Butler,*** *Mike Carter, Caroline Uff, and Sandra Whitlock.*

Survey Activities and Results

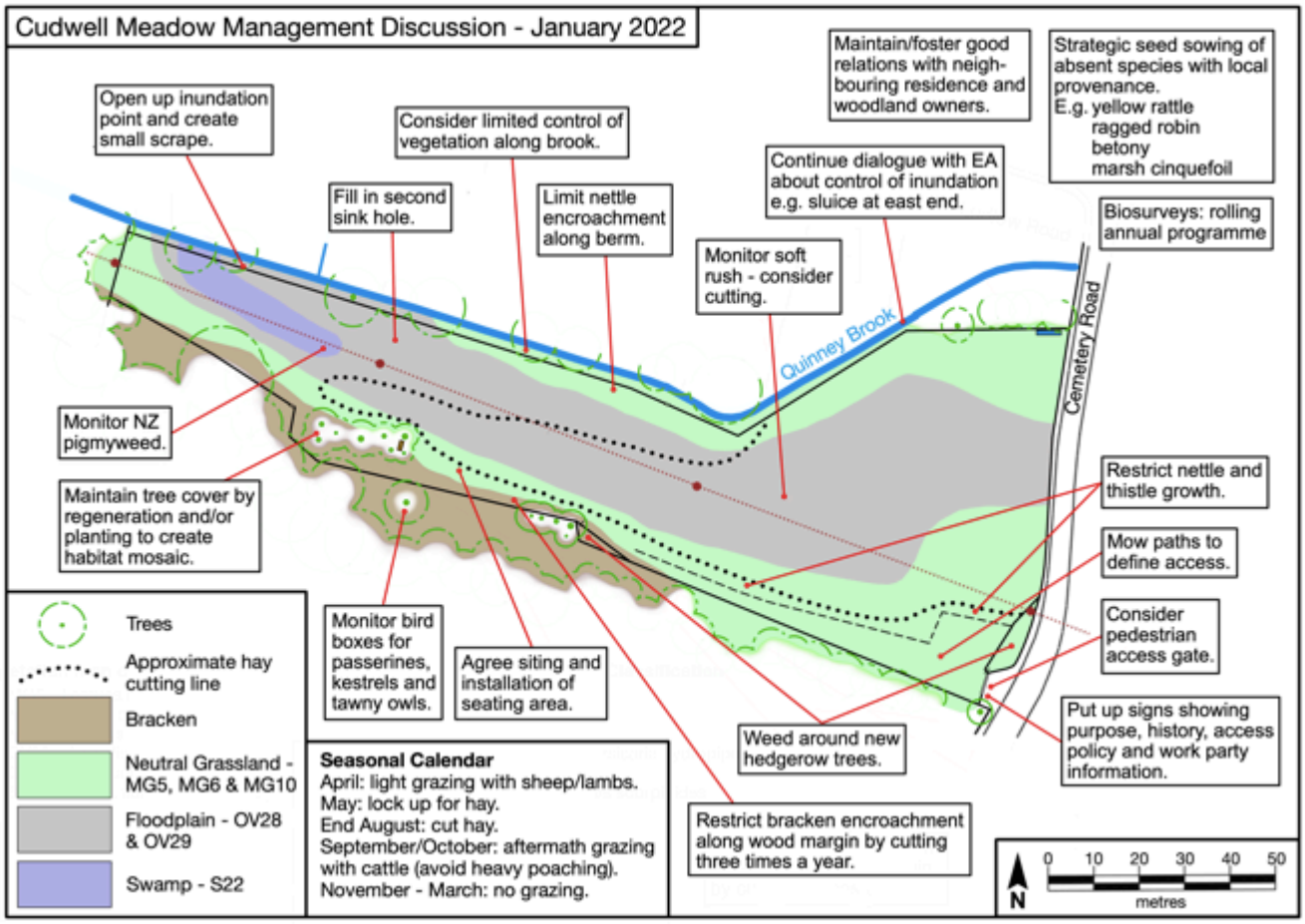
Stretton Wetlands report



Cudwell Meadow

2022 was the first full year of ownership of Cudwell Meadow. Legally the one-hectare field is owned by the Middle Marches Community Land Trust (MMCLT). The Strettons Wetlands Interest Group works in partnership with MMCLT and SACWG in managing the meadow.

Management Plan
Early in 2022 the management committee agreed a 2-year management plan; done in pictorial form rather than a long, wordy document.



The plan is to manage the field as a wetland meadow. We are collaborating with a local farmer who takes a crop of hay in late July, and then grazes sheep on the aftermath until about November, returning stock again in the spring until the field is 'closed' in late April to allow for hay growth. For several decades the field has been managed as pasture; treating it as a hay meadow is a significant change in management. So we need to monitor change over the next few years to be certain this is the right management approach.

Work parties

There are regular work parties on the first Thursday afternoon each month (aside from during the winter). We have been encouraged by a core group of volunteers, between 2 and 8, who regularly engage with tasks like bashing bracken, weeding docks and seed planting. Scythes were purchased using Green Recovery Challenge Funding and have proved invaluable. The National Trust gave four large tree trunks that were split in two to make benches.

In April we were joined by 12 Stepping Stones volunteers to manually dig a scrape at the west end of the field. The aim is to have an area with standing water 12 months of year. With so many working on the task for a day, we really 'broke the back' of a tedious job that otherwise would have taken weeks. The scrape was deepened later in the summer; parts of it remained wet even in the very hot summer period.

Opening event

Most of the GRCF grant was used for an interpretation board. Because Covid restrictions in 2021 had prevented an opening event, the unveiling of the interpretation board in June was used as an opening event during the Jubilee Weekend. Over 80 people came; local children unveiled the sign, and Mayor Andy Munro gave a brief talk. Excellent cake was cut and shared and was followed by an evening walk.

Open Sundays

The meadow was opened each Sunday from May – July when the meadow looks at its best. Paths were cut through the field to encourage people to use them and limit damage to the hay crop and this worked well. Exclusion of dogs has displeased one or two members of the public, but this policy ensures the protection of small mammals and nesting water birds.

Bio-surveying

Shropshire Botanical Society came for a field visit on an unfortunately rather wet Saturday 2nd July. They found several plant species previously not listed or mis-identified. In total 166 vascular plants species have been found in Cudwell Meadow in the last 3 years; impressive for such a small area.

Shropshire Mammal Society visited October 30th and confirmed the presence of Harvest Mice, in addition to Bank and Field Vole – a most welcome surprise. They are returning with mammal traps in the spring. Otter are known to visit and have been caught on trail camera, particularly February to April when toads are abundant.

Invertebrate surveys continue occasionally. A bumble-bee walk was established and registered with Bumble Bee Conservation Trust. This needs to be done each month during flight times. The first walk in July was very successful with 6 different species recorded including the rarer Bilberry Bumble bee feeding on hogweed and bramble – presumably foraging for alternative nectar sources once the bilberry flowering season is over. A bio blitz is planned at the end of June and the Shropshire Spider group are visiting for a survey in July. Please add your name to the mailing list if you'd like to participate in any of these surveys

Further surveying is planned for 2023 in particular to review any change in vegetation since the last detailed survey in 2020 and the transition to hay-making.

Isabel Carter, January 2023

Dormice in the Strettons

There are known to be small, fragmented populations of dormice in the Strettons area. One of the ways in which we monitor them is using dormouse nest boxes. In 2022 we secured funding from The People's Postcode Lottery (via the Stepping Stones Project) and Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS) to replace old damaged boxes as well as installing boxes in two new sites with the potential to support dormice.

All existing dormouse boxes were checked for signs of activity, and nut searches carried out on several sites. (For some private sites, the full location name is not given.)

Michele and Andy installing boxes

Site (owner)	Results
All Stretton (Private)	Nut searches positive for dormouse along a public right of way. Six new dormouse boxes installed on adjacent land. Linking boundary identified for hedge restoration.
Bushmoor Coppice (SOS)	Twenty boxes checked (8 replaced). Nut search also carried out but no definitive signs.
Comley Quarry (Shropshire Wildlife Trust)	Ten boxes checked and several replaced. Nut search also carried out but no signs.
Cwm Head (Private)	Nut searches positive for dormice along old trackway.
Gulley Green (Private / Local Wildlife Site)	Thirty three boxes (mainly bird boxes) checked. Dormouse nests or evidence of dormouse activity in 7 boxes. Nibbled nuts were also recorded in nearby woodland.
Horderley (Private)	Dormouse nibbled nuts in several location as well as a wild nest in honeysuckle tangle. Six new boxes installed.
Ragleth Wood (National Trust)	20 boxes checked and a nut search. No confirmed signs but stripped bark in one 'mixed' nest indicative of dormouse activity.
Ward's Coppice (SOS)	10 boxes checked (7 replaced). Nut search. No confirmed dormouse signs, but unusual woven grass nest in one box.

It was particularly rewarding to find continued good numbers of nests in boxes at Gulley Green, including one which appeared to have had two nests in. It is rare to find a nest in the wild, but one was recorded in a tangle of honeysuckle in the Horderley area.

'Double decker' nest from nest box (left) and 'wild' nest (right)

All records have been shared with the Peoples Trust for Endangered Species who lead the 'National Dormouse Monitoring Programme', and Shropshire Mammal Society.

Thanks to Steve Butler, Gill Silk, Richard Craven, John Arnfield, Howard Davies, Michele Gannon and Andy Gannon for their help.

Caroline Uff, January 2023

Swifts in the Strettons

Purpose and objectives of the project

The swift (*Apus apus*) is amber-listed as a bird of conservation concern (due to falling population numbers) and it is thought that the loss of nest sites due to modern building methods and materials has played a key role in their decline. By recording known nest locations, it is possible to monitor whether these sites continue to be used in subsequent years or whether new sites are selected and, importantly, to liaise with residents, builders and planners when works to improve properties is carried out to ensure the preservation of nesting opportunities.

Surveying also indicates where it might be worthwhile installing artificial nest boxes to increase colony size – the birds are sociable and tend to nest within close range of each other.

Swifts are commonly observed in and around the Strettons but there was no formal recording of the locations of nest sites or the number of birds until 2014, when the first 'Swifts in the Strettons' was inaugurated by the Stretton Area Community Wildlife Group, under the leadership of Peta Sams. Observations were carried out in 2015 and 2016 which enabled the earlier study to be built on and extended. In 2022 the same methodology was again used, but observations were on a more ad hoc basis. Any reports by members of the public were also followed up.

The location of the nest sites recorded will be passed to Shropshire Council, Church Stretton Town Council, Church Stretton Civic Society, RSPB swift survey and the county bird recorder for use when proposals for maintenance or modification of buildings occupied by swifts are filed with planning authorities and to establish the presence of swift populations in the county.

RESULTS

General Observations of Swifts in the Strettons

The first confirmed sighting of swifts within the Strettons was 9 May 2022, 7 days later than the previous year. During the months of May and June more sightings were observed. As in previous years, some of the key locations that had been recorded in the early years of the survey (2014-2020) did not produce records in 2022. Additional sites have also been lost, most likely due to a re-roofing programme on Essex Road. As the season progressed returning juvenile swifts swelled the numbers of birds observed as aerial counts. 23 nest sites were confirmed (ie birds entering a consistent location two or more times, or feeding young, or presence of young), see Figure 1.

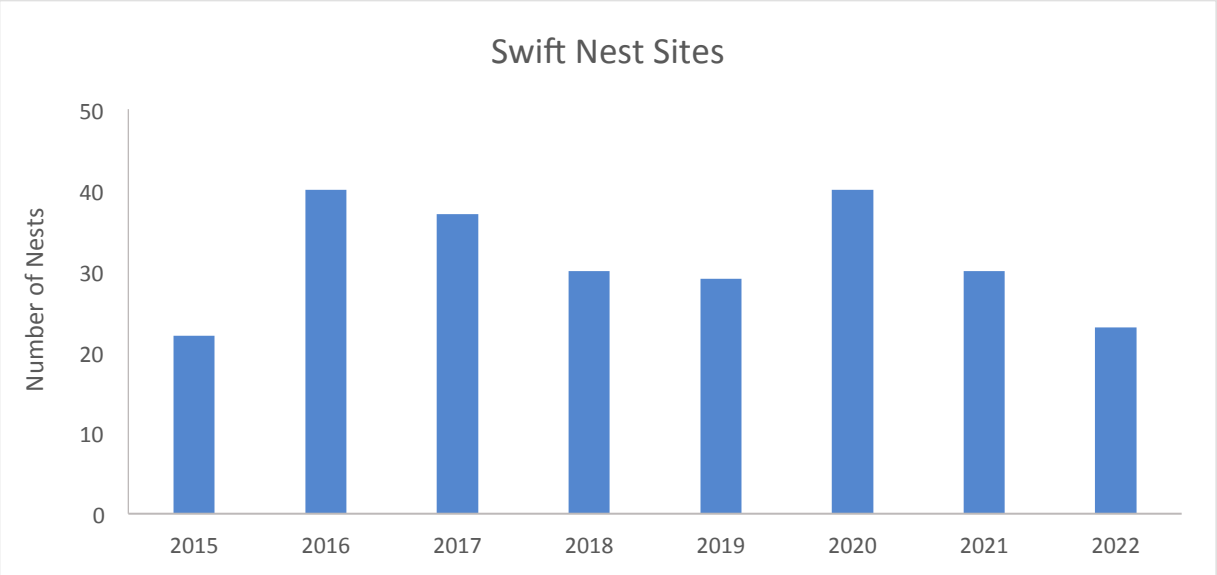


Figure 1. Number of swift nest sites year on year in the Strettons since 2015.

The last date of observation of a swift was 29 August 2022.

Swift Nest Site Locations

Nest aspect is varied although the general trend has been that a westerly aspect is the least preferred (see table 1).

Table 1: Nest Aspect for Confirmed Nest sites (where known) in 2022.

ASPECT OF NEST	CONFIRMED SITES
N	7
S	4
E	11
W	1

Of the confirmed nest sites 19 buildings were used, mainly in Church Stretton. All Stretton reported one site and no sites were recorded in Little Stretton.

SUMMARY

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from the confirmed nests recorded in the 2022 survey season:

- Nest observations were down compared to 2021
- The original hotspot area(s) in the town centre continues to see a decline in nest observations
- Certain post War buildings have a high occupancy rate

- Multiple nest boxes installed at one location in Church Stretton has resulted in a high occupancy rate (four boxes out of seven occupied). Installation of two boxes on a neighbouring property resulted in a probable breeding occupancy in one of the boxes. Note. These data are not included in the reported results.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The 2022 survey saw a reduction in recorded nest sites overall and this is of concern as one of the prominent locations has undergone a programme of re-roofing. These sites will be lost to swifts unless action can be taken. Swift boxes were installed but there was no occupancy in 2022 and the works continued after the swifts had returned to breed. It also highlights the importance of the surveys as a way of providing evidence of wildlife occupation and the opportunity to discuss with the homeowners/landlords mitigation measures.

Anecdotally there appeared to be fewer swifts early in the season but as the summer progressed numbers rose. Juvenile birds (non-breeding) are likely to have returned to their natal area to speculate for a future nest site hence the increase in aerial observations and screaming parties.

The 2022 swift breeding season in the Strettons saw exceptionally hot, dry weather conditions and it is surmised that this was beneficial for chick growth. However, breeding success and the survival of the swift population is also dependent upon available nesting sites, amongst other factors.

Swifts are known to nest in colonies and the generosity of a group of neighbours in providing nesting sites for swifts on their homes may help stave off a decline in the Strettons swift population due to a of loss of nesting sites elsewhere. Other factors such as food availability and climatic conditions in the UK, Europe and Africa remain unknown pressures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

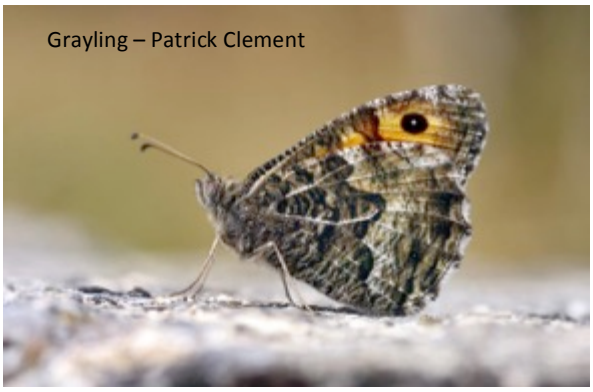
This survey would not have been possible without the efforts of Richard Bacon, Gay Walker, Sandra Whitlock, Will Priestley, Janet Longstaff and Andrew Morton.

Julie Cowley
5 October 2022

IMPORTANT: Confidentiality

This is an edited version of the report without specific site information. Should you need to know further information please pass your request to Julie Cowley (email: grahamandjuliecowley@gmail.com or phone: 01694 722310), who will consider whether this is appropriate.

Butterfly report


Grayling – Patrick Clement

This year we have no butterfly report owing to the sad loss of Heather Hathaway who died in July. She was a committed butterfly recorder for many years. We hope to find someone who will continue this valuable work on behalf of SACWG.

However a butterfly identification ID course was held in All Stretton. It combined classroom work and practical ID. There was very positive feedback with participants telling us they had now downloaded the iRecord app and were trying to improve their ID skills.

The course aimed give local people the skills to identify and report their findings, building up the body of wildlife knowledge in the area. The funding also provided for the purchase of 10 butterfly nets used in the training and also by several other local groups during surveying in the summer months.

Our Common Cause is spearheading a three year project which includes the Long Mynd and is focusing both on habitat conservation and recording for lesser-recorded species including Dark Green Fritillary, Grayling, Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary, Green Hairstreak

Common Blue © Peter Withers (left) and Dark Green Fritillary by Bob Eade (right)

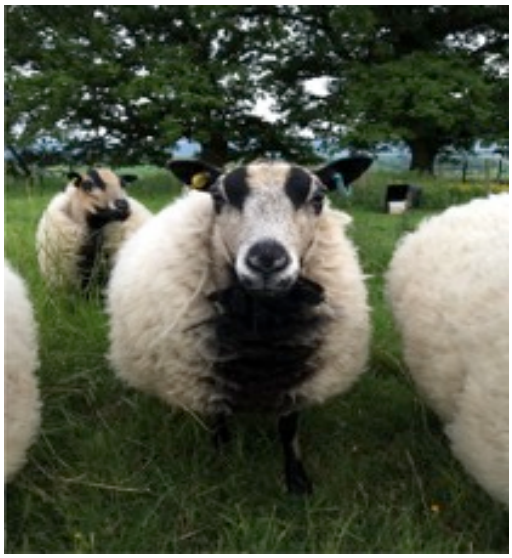
Strettons Meadow Group

Eastern Ragleth Meadows Report for 2022.

Management of the eastern Ragleth Group of meadows has continued throughout 2022. The six meadows with surrounding hedges totalling almost 3 hectares include the County Wildlife Site SO49.4.1. They are managed especially for their wildlife and as 'stepping-stones' within the landscape of the AONB. Wildlife includes over 100 species of meadow plants, 22+ species of breeding butterflies, lots of moths, bumble bees, grasshoppers and reptiles; whilst not forgetting the meadows value as open and scrub habitat for feeding, breeding and migrating birds.

Management included:

- Periodic autumn, winter and early spring grazing by Badger Face sheep to get the grass really short by the spring so that from late April through to September the breeding insects can enjoy the flower nectar harvest.
- Control of invasive agricultural grassland weeds in May using the 'lazy-dog tool'.
- Harvesting of wild-flower seed in July, August and September to spread on adjacent meadows using Marches Meadow Group's (*) brush harvester.
- Followed by taking of a hay crop and removal of sward by the end of September.
- Winter gaping up and planting of new hedges along with fence line maintenance.



We are grateful to SACWG and the National Trust for their funding support of the meadow management and through the Green Recovery Challenge Fund.

East Ragleth Meadow Group contact: baconjohn48@gmail.com

MMG: https://www.marchesmeadowgroup.com/ Secretary: richard.w.small@gmail.com

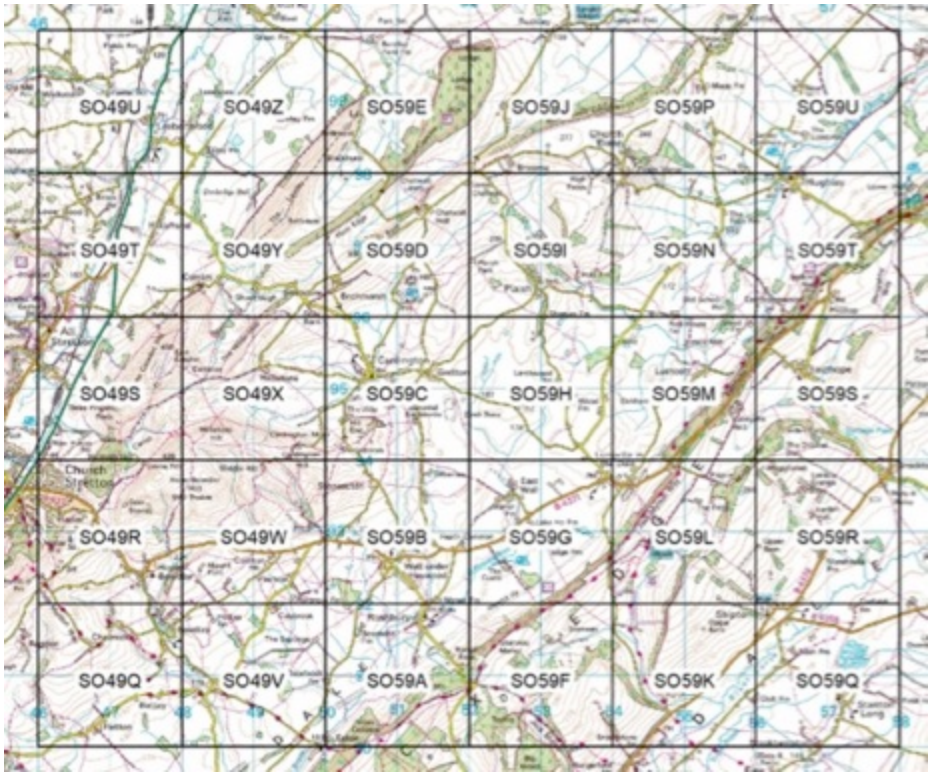
Curlews, lapwings and other bird surveys

Introduction

Lapwing and Curlew have both suffered a massive contraction in range and population decline in the last 20 years or so, nationally and locally. Curlew has been described as the UK's highest bird conservation priority, as we have an estimated 28% of the European breeding population, and 19 – 27% of the world population.

The Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group agreed to conduct a Lapwing and Curlew survey in 2017, to complement similar surveys carried out by other Community Wildlife Groups in different parts of the Shropshire Hills. The Church Stretton branch of the Shropshire Ornithological Society also agreed to participate in the survey.

An area was selected where these species were found breeding in the 2008-13 Shropshire Bird Atlas, comprising 30 2x2 kilometre squares on the Ordnance Survey National Grid, known as "tetrads", shown here.



The aim was to locate the territories of breeding pairs, and record behaviour, to estimate the population. No attempt was made to locate nests. Although the survey concentrated on the two main target species, and their habitats, surveyors were asked to also record on their maps any of 23 other target species seen, particularly Kestrel and Cuckoo, if they were confident that they could do so.

Surveyors were recruited for all of the 30 squares, and were asked to make three visits, around 1 April, 1 May and mid-June, at times

convenient to them, with visits concentrating on habitats where the main target species might be found, and lasting around three hours each. The surveys were 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.

The survey was a success, and all 30 squares were covered. It has been repeated each year since 2018, using the same methodology and aiming to cover the same 30 squares, but coverage was limited in 2020 due to coronavirus restrictions.

Particular efforts have been made to record Curlews, as the Curlew situation is critical, with a 77% decline between 1990 and 2010, and a further decline since. There are probably only 120 pairs left in the whole of the County now, and there is not much time left to save them from local extinction. The Shropshire Curlew population is about one-quarter of the estimated 500 pairs in England, south of a line from the Dee estuary to the Wash, so it is regionally important.

In 2022

- Two squares to the west, SO49J and P, were added to the survey area
- Almost all squares were surveyed (30 out of 32)
- There were 42 participants.
- They put in 360 hours of survey effort
- All except 4 target species were found (Grey Partridge, Snipe & Spotted Flycatcher): Swift (nest sites) are monitored by a different project.

This is almost as good a result as 2021.

Results

The following maps show the distribution of Lapwing and Curlew territories found in 2022.
The Curlew population is estimated at 7 pairs, and Lapwing at 3-6+.

The Curlew estimate is lower than the 8-9 pairs estimated in 2021.The pair of Curlews in SO49W was relocated, but none were found at East Wall (SO59H) or Hughley (SO59U).

The number of Lapwing is uncertain because one pair probably moved after failing at its first nest site, which probably held two pairs, and a single Lapwing was seen at another site, where possibly a mate was out of sight sitting on a nest. The pair that moved into SO49V, near Ticklerton, laid four eggs which all hatched, and all four chicks fledged.

No Curlew nests or chicks were found by the Bird survey, and it is believed that none fledged in the area in 2022 or 2021. In 2020,one pair had chicks, but there was no evidence of any fledged young. There was no evidence that the Curlews produced any chicks, let alone fledged young in 2019, but there were at least two chicks (outcome unknown) in 2018.

Strettons Area CWG
&
Church Stretton SOS

Lapwing & Curlew Survey

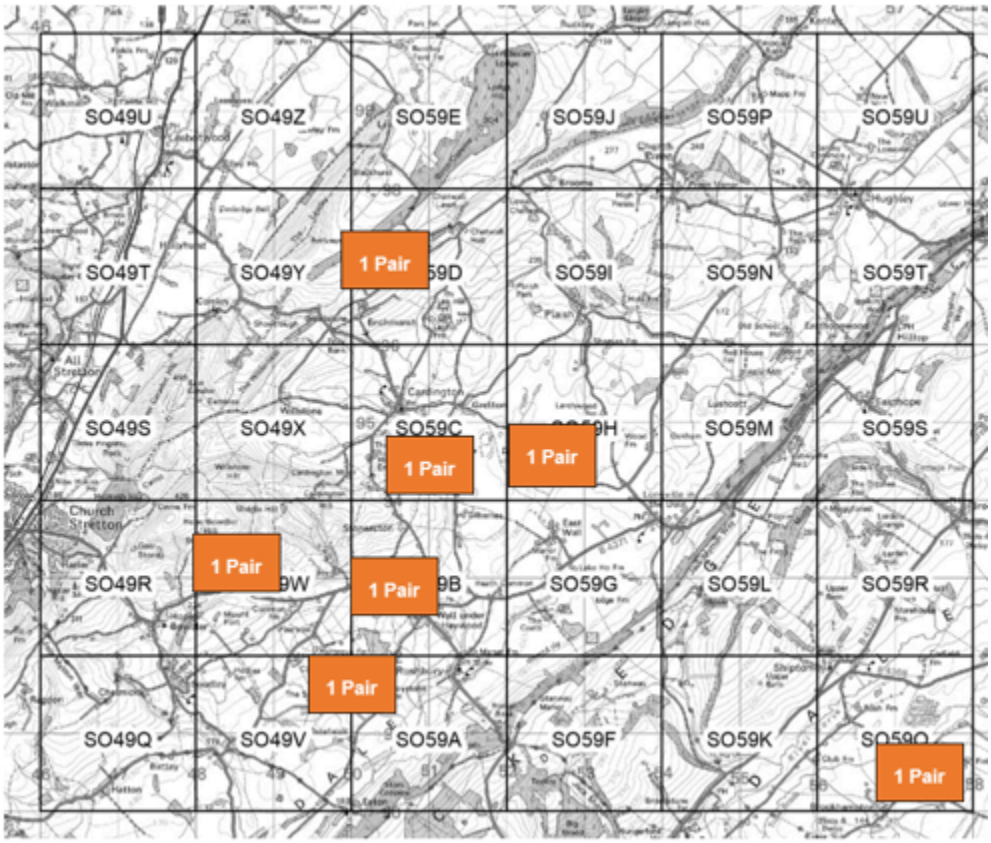
Results 2022

Curlew territories
(All survey and other information)

Estimated population

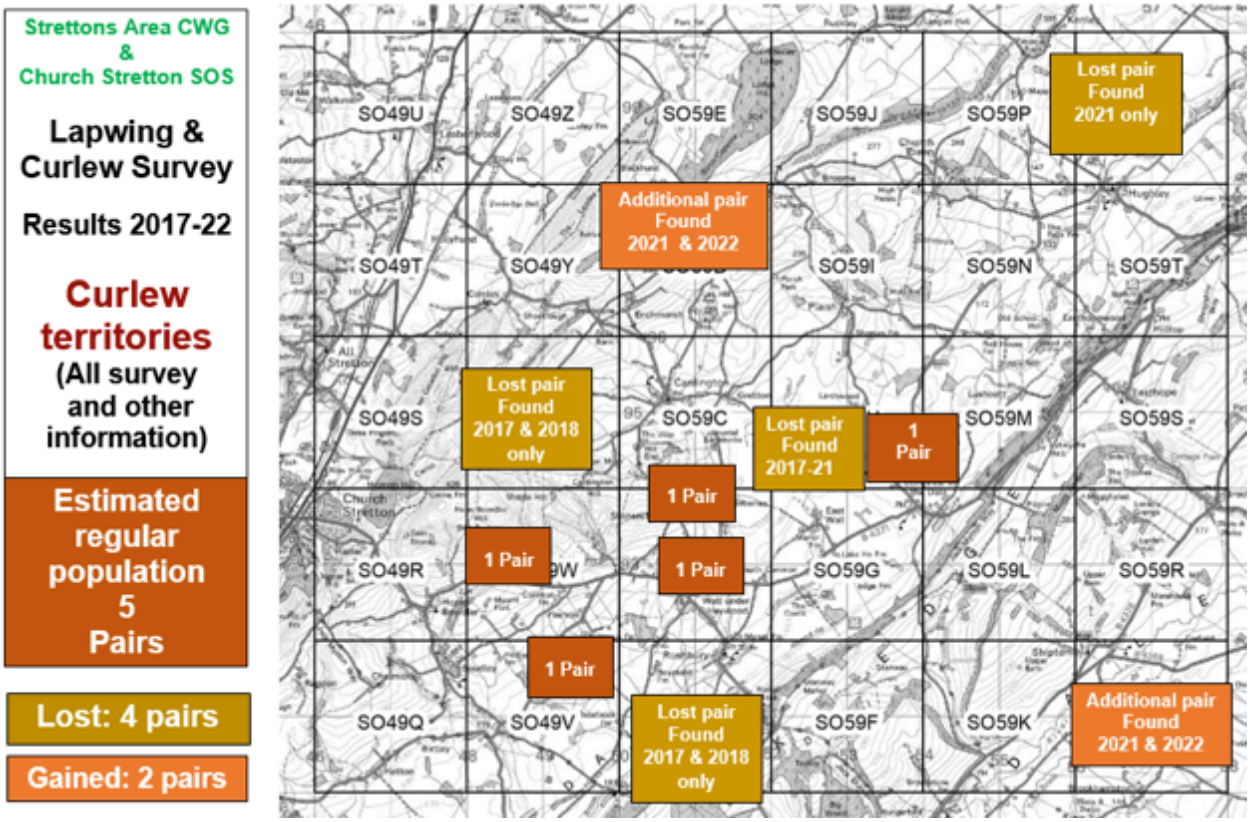
7 Pairs

Compared to 2021, pairs have been lost near Hughley (SO59U) and near East Wall (SO59H), but the pair near Hope Bowdler Hill (SO49W) has been re-found.



Adult Curlews are generally site-faithful, so it is possible to compare results year on year. The Curlew results since 2017 have been assessed, and the results are shown on the third map. The initial apparent increase in the population is probably due to better coverage year on year, as surveyors got to know their squares better, then in 2020 as a result of people exercising from home.

Most pairs present in 2022 have been present each year since 2017, but it appears that two pairs were lost in 2019, two pairs were gained in 2021, and two more were lost in 2022.



Curlew and Lapwing were the main target species for the survey, but participants were also asked to record other Target Species if possible, and most did so. They were requested to make a particular effort to record Kestrels, as they too have declined considerably in recent years, and a nest box scheme and colour-ringing project is being undertaken across Shropshire to try and find out why. The records suggest at least 6 pairs, with another in SO49P (one of the two new squares, not shown on the map). This compares to only four pairs in 2020, 7-9 pairs in 2020, 4 – 5 pairs in 2019 (another very poor year for them), and up to 10 pairs in 2018, perhaps a few more than the 6 – 8 estimated in 2017.

Cuckoo has also become increasingly rare – the BTO Breeding Bird Survey has found declines of 34% in the UK, 71% in England, and 81% in the English West Midlands region, between 1995 and 2020. Members were advised in 2020 that there were more Cuckoo records than usual, but "it's not clear whether there are more Cuckoos about, or we're better able to hear them in the peace and quiet of staying at home [due to coronavirus restrictions]". The population estimate of 7 territorial males in 2020 was substantially more than recorded in previous years, and slightly more than the 6-7 in 2022, and 5 in 2021. In 2019, up to three males were recorded, and probably only one in 2018 and 2017.

The first successful breeding of Red Kite in Shropshire for 130 years occurred as recently as 2006, but 58 nests, and another nine breeding pairs, were found in the County in 2022, mainly in the south-west hills, but there have been nests north of Shrewsbury each year since 2017, and the most easterly nest to date was reported in 2019 from near the Staffordshire border.

In the Strettons area too, Red Kites have increased rapidly. The first nest east of the A49 road was found in 2012, and, in 2022, five nests were found: two failed, but the other three were successful, fledging at least five young. The female at one of the failed nests was wing-tagged in north Dorset, 186km, two years previously, the only known example of a Kite from outside of the Wales/Shropshire/Herefordshire tagging

scheme breeding in Shropshire.. There are likely to be other pairs nesting at unknown locations, as wing-tagged birds that are old enough to breed have been photographed in the area.

On the bird survey, at least 17 Red Kites were recorded in 13 squares, more than in all previous years except 2021, also reflecting the spread of this species.

Apart from the five main Target Species listed above, members were asked to record observations of 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.

Table 1. Other Target Species - Summary

Tetrad	Max. Number of Each Species Recorded											
	Red Kite	Barn Owl	Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Cuckoo	Dunnock	Wheat-ear	Stone-chat	Tree Sparrow	Linnet	Bullfinch	Yellow-hammer
SO49 J	None of these species recorded											
SO49 P	1					4					2	
SO49 Q												
SO49 R	1		6		2	3	1	3		10		
SO49 S												
SO49 T					1							
SO49 U												
SO49 V	3	1	8			6			6		2	5
SO49 W	1		2	4	1	1		3		5	1	2
SO49 X	2											
SO49 Y				8	1	1		7		3		4
SO49 Z	1				2	1		1				1
SO59 A			3		1	2					3	2
SO59 B	1	1				1					2	1
SO59 C	1		1								2	
SO59 D	1		3								2	
SO59 E			3		1		2				2	
SO59 F	None of these species recorded											
SO59 G	None of these species recorded											
SO59 H	2											2
SO59 I	None of these species recorded											
SO59 J	Square not surveyed											
SO59 K	1											1
SO59 L	None of these species recorded											
SO59 M			2									
SO59 N		2	10		1	7					1	8
SO59 P	1		13		1	6						3
SO59 Q	None of these species recorded											
SO59 R	Square not surveyed											
SO59 S	1		2			3			4			3
SO59 T			5			6				2		2
SO59 U			3		1	2					1	1
Birds (Max)	17	4	61	12	12	43	3	14	10	20	18	35
Tetrads	13	3	13	2	10	13	2	4	2	4	10	13

Four species were not recorded at all: Grey Partridge, Snipe, Swift (nest sites) and Spotted Flycatcher. Two species were found in one square only, Dipper in SO59U and Reed Bunting in SO49R. The results for the other species are shown in Table 1.

Save our Curlews Campaign 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.

This innovative research was extended to the Strettons area in 2021, with land-owners help. The project is expensive, and has been funded by Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS), the Strettons area Curlew Appeal (featured in several Stretton Focus articles), and several grants, including substantial ones from the Stepping Stones project and the Stretton Focus Community Awards Scheme. The Green Recovery Challenge Fund financed the whole project in 2022, via a grant from the Stepping Stones project.

Almost all the landowners we approached were pleased to have Curlews on their land, supported our efforts to protect them, and gave permission for us to look for, and fence, the nests. We are grateful for their support.

Three nests were found and fenced. The fences worked well, but one of the nests was abandoned. Four chicks hatched in each of the other two, and all eight were radio-tagged. All died within 8 days, three of natural causes, and 5 were predated.

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. 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.

There is a full description of the project 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. The project is continuing in 2023, partly funded by the Strettons area Save our Curlews appeal. You can find more information, including details of how to make donations and where to send them, on our website www.shropscwgs.org.uk/all-events/save-our-curlews-strettons-area-2023-appeal/

The campaign is also encouraging a network of 10 Community Wildlife Groups across Shropshire, including ours, to monitor Curlews. The Groups cover 137 tetrads where the vast majority of the County's Curlew population was found in the recent 2008-13 Bird Atlas project. A map showing the area covered by each group, overlain on the Curlew distribution map, can be found on the SOS website. Around 90-110 pairs were found altogether in 2022. Over 270 people participated, and put in nearly 2,300 hours, a clear indication of the commitment of local people to saving our Curlews.

Participants

Thanks to the following people, who undertook the survey work and / or supplied records:-

Chris Amass, John Arnfield, Meg Bacon, Steve Baker, Alison Bennett, Cathy Bowler, David Bowler, Lucy Callwood, Phil Constable, Belinda Cousens, Mags Cousins, Julie Cowley, Adrian Cullis, Gill

Davies, Ruth Dennis-Jones, Alistair Edie, Greg Forster, Sue Forster, Beth Furlong, Rob Furlong, Joe Gomme, Alyson Harrison, Jackie Harrison, Melanie Houlder, Pat Houlder, Peter Houlder, Helen Howes, Jim Jarrett, Tony Jones, Claire Kelly, Denis Kelly, John Knowles, David Matthews, Andrew May, Shirley McNichol, Andrew Morton, Ron Parnell, Adrian Pickles, Sue Pinsent, Ian Plumridge, Jill Plumridge, Robert Plumridge, Jane Potts, Will Priestley, Anne Schofield, Ray Slack, Dee Snape, Carol Thickens, Caroline Uff, Dick Ward and Dan Watkins.

Thanks also to:-

- Gill Davies, for making several additional survey visits to monitor the Curlews, and helping with the training of new participants.
- Terry Moore, for information about the successful Lapwings near Ticklerton.
- Lorna Taylor, for making contact with landowners with breeding Curlews, to seek permission for nest finding.

Full Report

A detailed report of the methodology and results has been supplied to all the participants, and can be found on the website, www.shropscwgs.org.uk/strettons-area-wildlife-group/lapwing-and-curlew-survey/

Acknowledgements

The *Save our Curlews* Nest Finding and Protection project received a grant from the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, via Stepping Stones.

Plans for the Future

The survey will be repeated in future years, so we can get a better picture of the population and distribution of Lapwing and Curlew. In 2023, we will also continue to work with the SOS Save our Curlews campaign, which, in co-operation with farmers, will continue to promote conservation, and organise nest protection for Curlews. New participants are needed for the survey in 2023. It's easy and enjoyable and simple instructions will be provided.

A joint meeting of the Strettons area Community Wildlife Group and the Church Stretton SOS branch will be held at 7.30pm on Wednesday 22 March, at the Methodist Church Hall, Watling St., Church Stretton, for a presentation of the 2022 results, and plan the 2023 survey. New members, and anyone interested in birds, will be very welcome.

For those that want to come, there will be a practical training session, explaining how to go about the survey, and record what you see, around the end of March.

Leo Smith
February 2023

Dipper Project

Dipper Habitat
Dippers inhabit fast flowing streams with rapids, small waterfalls and gravelly beds, and the Shropshire Hills, particularly in the Teme catchment, is the County stronghold. They feed largely on larvae collected on the stream bed (they do not take invertebrates from bankside vegetation, like Grey Wagtails do), and, to a lesser extent, on small fish.

They take readily to carefully sited nest boxes over water. Several other Community Wildlife Groups have put up boxes, and shown that they help increase the population, partly by providing new nest sites on suitable stretches of stream which otherwise lack them, and partly by protecting the eggs and chicks from predators, so the average number of fledged young per nest increases.

SACWG Project
The Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group started its own Dipper Project in 2020, covering the Cound Brook north to Longnor, and the Quinney Brook south to Marshbrook, and their tributaries.

In 2020, the population in the area was estimated at 9 – 11 pairs. The population fluctuates, according to breeding success in the previous year, and water levels and flow rates in the streams, which affects over-winter survival. In 2021, the population was estimated at 8 pairs. Only four young are known to have fledged, considerably fewer than in 2020. Water levels were high at the start of the season, and the weather was cold, probably resulting in less invertebrate food in the streams, perhaps accounting for the unoccupied sites and the fewer breeding pairs.

2022
Members were again asked to report sightings, and another appeal for information appeared in Stretton Focus. Sites occupied last year, or known to have been occupied previously, were revisited, but several were not occupied.

Seven nests were found. Two sites occupied in 2021 were not occupied, and there is no evidence that any other pairs nested. Five of the seven were probably successful, but the number of fledged young is unknown. One nest definitely failed, and another lost two broods before fledging.

An un-ringed juvenile was photographed in Cardingmill Valley, and a ringed juvenile was photographed near Cardington, but the nest sites are unknown.

Four nests were in nest-boxes installed before the Strettons area project started. The project installed several new nest boxes in 2021. One was used (successfully), and another held roosting Dippers in winter.

Water levels in the streams were very low because of prolonged very dry weather, so it is likely that breed success and survival rates were poor.

Rings

Ringing has been going on for many years, across the whole of the Teme Catchment, but also on the Cound Brook around Leebotwood and Longnor, but the colour-rings to identify individual birds in the field were only introduced in 2014.

A colour-ring on the left leg is shown in the lower photo. The letter and two numbers on each ring are unique, so if the ring can be read it will add to what is known of the life history of the bird. The smaller ring looks silver, and in silhouette it looks like a small wellington boot (the leg appears thicker at the bottom than the top).

The Dipper in both photos has a small metal (BTO) ring on the right leg. Members were asked to report colour-rings and the smaller metal rings, and an attempt was made to read the former, by photography with a long lens, or a telescope.

Unfortunately, no ringing was allowed at winter roost sites over the winter 2020-21 period, because of covid-19, so far fewer ringed Dippers were seen in 2021 than in the 2020 breeding season. Ringing resumed at winter roost sites in 2021-22. Three colour-rings were read in the 2022 breeding season, another was reported, and one did not provide a good enough view.

By carrying on with the project in future years, it will be possible to build up an understanding of how long Dippers live, how far they move between fledging, roosting and nesting, and fidelity.

Plans for 2023

The Dipper project will continue. If you see a Dipper, please try and see if it has a ring and colour-ring, and report it, with the location, to Leo Smith (01694 720296 leo@leosmith.org.uk).

Acknowledgements

Thanks for records and information about Dippers in 2022 to:-

Pauline Adcock, John Arnfield, Steve Butler, Julie Cowley, Bernard Ford, Greg and Sue Forster, Sarah Freeman, John and Anne Hanley, Helen Howes, Andrew Morton, Paul Nottingham, Dave Pearce, Sue and Steve Rooney, Andy Trifonoff, Paul Westall, Dan Watkins, Sandra Whitlock and Karen Wright, together with several readers of Stretton Focus.

Leo Smith
Project Coordinator
February 2023

Red Grouse Counts on the Long Mynd

Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group and the Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project, supported by the National Trust and Church Stretton Branch of the Shropshire Ornithological Society, have organised a Red Grouse count each year since 2011.

Red Grouse are restricted to heathland, and the Long Mynd (and Stiperstones) hold the only population in England between Dartmoor and the Peak District. Nationally, the population is falling, and it is on the *Amber List* of *Birds of Conservation Concern*. The results help the National Trust's management of the heathland to provide suitable habitat.

Good results were obtained in most years up until 2019. Unfortunately counts since then have not produced reasonable estimates. Previous experience has shown that there is no point in holding counts if the weather is very cold, rainy, or the wind-speed is greater than 10mph. If the weather forecast predicts that these conditions will prevail when a count is due, it is cancelled and rearranged.

- All 2020 planned counts had to be cancelled because of the Government's coronavirus restrictions.
- In 2021, the whole survey period was dominated by cold, windy weather, and four of the seven planned counts were cancelled because of poor weather forecasts. Two additional counts were arranged on the very late dates of 18 and 27 May. Several attempts were made to arrange counts on other dates, but these too had to be abandoned because of the weather. The weather conditions meant that there was little grouse activity on any of the five counts that were held, and most observers recorded no grouse on all five dates.
- In 2022, 49 volunteers were recruited for seven planned counts around sunset on Thursday evenings between 31 March and 12 May. Again, three of these counts had to be cancelled and rearranged, but the weather was not much better when counts were actually held. Seven counts were held, but 60 survey returns (out of 176 received – 34%) reported no Grouse seen or heard.

The methodology requires concurrent observations of displaying males, to mark territory boundaries, but there were virtually none of these in 2022, so again it has not been possible to produce a population estimate.

Participants

Thanks are due to the following participants

Carolyn Anstey, Katie Appleby, John Arnfield, Conor Aynsley, Adrian Bell, Charlie Bell, Rachel Bromley, Keith Burton, Sandy Burton, Chris Cooke, Judith Darling, Gill Davies, Pam Dicer, Alastair Edie, Raelene Edwards, Roger Evans, Greg Forster, Sue Forster, Jeremy Freeland, Beth Furlong, Rob Furlong, Joe Gomme, Andrew Gould, Richard Halahan, John & Heather Hathaway, Pat Holbourn-Williams, David and Alison John, John Knowles, Liz Knowles, Sarah Lane, Isabella Laurie, Edward Marvin, Andrew May, Anna McCann, Andrew Middleton, Bob Milward, Sophie Mitchell, John Munro-

Derry, Paul Nottingham, Adrian Pickles, Steve Rooney, Sue Rooney, Leo Smith, David Stafford, Mike Streetly, Geoff Taylor, Lorna Taylor, Harriet Trevor-Allen and Wendy-Jane Walton.

Acknowledgements
Special thanks are due to Lorna Taylor, for organising all the counts and training..

Results from previous years

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
60 – 63	63 – 66	53 – 54	56 – 58	57 - 59	42+	49+	64 – 66	54	No count	Insufficient observations

Plans for 2023
The count is being repeated this year. Counts will be held around sunset on seven Thursday evenings 30 March to 11 May. We want as many helpers as possible, please.

A project briefing meeting for new participants will be held at 7.30pm on Thursday, 23 March at the National Trust tea rooms in Cardingmill Valley.

For further information, including reports from previous years, see the Community Wildlife Groups website www.shropscwgs.org.uk/strettons-area-wildlife-group/long-mynd-red-grouse-project/, or contact Joe Gomme (email: joegomme@gmail.com, phone 07779 664394)

Leo Smith
Project organiser

Botanical surveys

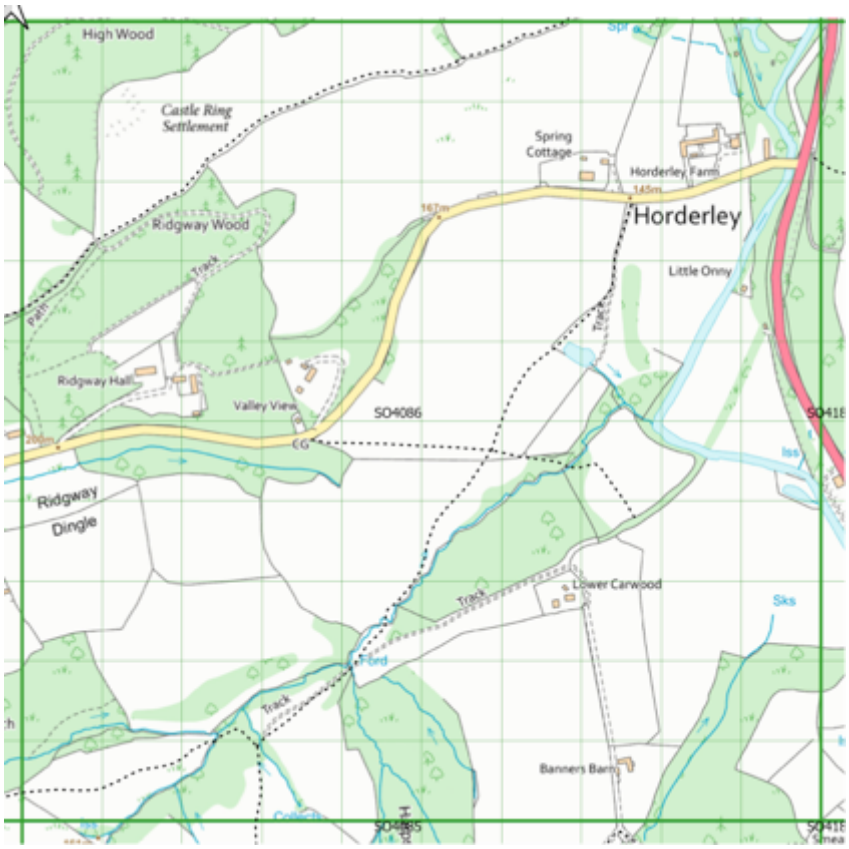
Nature Recovery Network Habitat Mapping

The Botanical Group is coordinated by the Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT). In 2022 the group continued habitat mapping as part of SWT's Nature Recovery Network programme that aims, in partnership with other agencies, to collect habitat data for the whole of the county. Why?

Long awaited details are slowly emerging of ELMS, government environmental land management schemes to pay landowners and farmers for environmental work and sustainable ways of food production; likewise of the government's intention to roll out Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs) to identify areas to create and restore habitat. A key government commitment is 'to protect 30% of our land by 2030'. In time Local Plans should reflect LNRSs so that opportunities for nature recovery can be integrated in the land use planning system. The Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) condition (forthcoming in Nov 2023) for planning permissions should make funds available for nature and the environment.

UK conservation partners including the Wildlife Trusts are together seeking in each county to gather the necessary data to prioritise nature recovery actions for when BNG and other funds come on-stream. Some 50 HoPIs (Habitats of Principal Importance) are recognised; many are coastal or marine. About 20 different HoPI types are found in Shropshire (listed in the SACWG 2021 Report).

The Strettons area covers about 400sq km, 400 monads (squares of 1kmx1km). Data for many monads is already available and strong; data held by groups like the National Trust, AONB, Stepping Stones, Natural England and many others. Shropshire Wildlife Trust, in discussion with partners, has listed priority monads in our area for which the data is weak or non-existent.



Blank map of monad SO4086

Some members of the Botanical Group have been trained in NRN surveying, how to identify HoPI types and to record them using an agreed coding system called UKHabs. Working singly or in pairs, members choose a priority monad that hasn't yet been surveyed. They receive a blank .pdf map of the monad, a 1 km sq, with 100 metre grid lines, showing roads, paths, field boundaries etc. Surveyors walk all the public rights of way recording habitats visible. If the landowner is known and access permission obtained, good, but this is often not possible or practical.

Volunteers don't map everything. We are specifically looking for HoPIs, or potential HoPIs, habitats which, with a small change in management, could be restored, and become more species rich. We are looking for connections; where perhaps two HoPIs could be joined together with habitat restoration in between. We make notes of important features; a species-rich, mature hedgerow; an area of grassland where bracken encroachment is shading out ground flora; a woodland with a particularly rich ground flora, etc.

Completed map for monad SO4086:

Some areas of the monad are inaccessible by public right of way. These are marked on the map as such.

In 2022, 30 monads were surveyed in the Strettons area. Completed maps are uploaded onto a portal on the SWT website. They are then digitized.

The intention is then to analyse completed maps so that opportunities can be prioritised, ready to commence as and when funding streams such as ELMS and BNG become available.

If you are interested in further details, please get in touch.

Mike Carter
Botanical Group Leader
email: misawa47@gmail.com

Treasurer's Report

ANNUAL BALANCE SHEET

Year ending 31 December 2022

INCOME			**EXPENDITURE**	
Carry forward from 31.03.22	£3097.55		Swift box (built in)	£42.50
Dawn chorus walk	£28.00		Tree Planting (bracken bashing)	£20.00
			Village Hall for APM	£22.00
			Green Recovery Challenge Fund:	
			• Birnbeck Insurance	£183.00
			• Red Grouse Training	£150.00
			• Dormouse boxes	£195.09
			• Bird surveys (Curlew, lapwing, Kestrel, presentations & Reports)	£375.00
			• Mailchimp training	£150.00
			• Training (Butterfly ID)	£78.00
			• Insect ID training	£155.89
			• Events – Nature in the Strettons	£107.60
			• Equipment (bat detector)	£239.00
			• Equipment (house martin nests)	£39.97
			BALANCE IN BANK 31.12.22	£1367.50
TOTAL	**£3125.55**		**TOTAL**	**£3125.55**

MONIES HELD AS FOLLOWS	**31.12.22**	**31.03.22**
Wetlands	£62.28	£62.28
Tree Planting Project	£206.80	£226.80
GRCF	£531.92	£2205.47
Undesignated funds	£566.50	£603.00
TOTAL	**£1367.50**	**£3097.55**

L W Priestley, Treasurer
January 2022

Acknowledgements

Some of SACWG's 2022/23 activities were supported by the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, via the Stepping Stones Project for which we are very appreciative.