

Upper Clun



Community Wildlife Group

Report 2022



UPPER CLUN COMMUNITY WILDLIFE GROUP

Report 2022

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INTRODUCTION

The *Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group* was formed in 2007, following extensive promotion and development work in the area initiated by 'Down to Earth in the Clun Forest' as part of the Shropshire Hills AONB's Blue Remembered Hills Project. This process was described in the Group's 2007 report. The first Annual Public Meeting in November 2007 agreed the Aims and Objectives, and the area of operation, and elected a Committee.

The Group aims to contribute to local knowledge and conservation of popular "flagship" wildlife species, by undertaking surveys to establish their status, and promoting conservation by working with farmers and landowners to safeguard and increase important habitats. It complements but does not duplicate the work of either *Land, Life and Livelihoods*, or the Clun and Bishop's Castle branch of the Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT). We have worked closely with both groups, which have in turn actively supported the Wildlife Group.

The Group has carried out Bird and Plant surveys each year since 2007, and Butterfly surveys since 2010. Well over 100 different people have been involved in these surveys. However, activities were severely curtailed in 2020, because of restrictions introduced by the Government to limit the spread of Coronavirus. No Annual Meeting was held, although an Annual Report was produced outlining the results of the limited activity that did take place. In 2021, survey work was resumed, although the Annual Meeting was cancelled because of a surge in infection rates in the autumn, and no Annual Report was produced. This report presents the results for 2022, updates our knowledge of wildlife in the area, and summarises results of survey work in 2021 where appropriate.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The Group will

- Undertake survey work to establish the status of key bird, plant and butterfly species and habitats
- Encourage and enhance local interest in wildlife
- Actively promote conservation.

AREA & MEMBERSHIP

The Group covers the catchment area of the River Clun west of Clun, including the River Unk and the Folly Brook, plus the part of the Bettws-y-Crwyn parish that is outside the River Clun catchment area. It includes the whole of the parishes of Newcastle, Bettws-y-Crwyn & Mainstone, and parts of the parishes of Clun, Colebatch and Llanfair Waterdine.

The Group is open to anyone who lives or works in the area, and who wants to actively contribute to local knowledge and conservation. It is for everyone in the community, not just experts. Interest in the area, and enthusiasm, are far more important than detailed knowledge. The target birds and plants are important and easy to recognise and search for. Initial training on identification and simple survey methods, and regular support and advice, is provided, so members learn a lot, and the work is very enjoyable.

The mailing list has grown each year, but all mailings are now sent by email. It now includes over 212 local people at 173 email addresses, plus representatives of various organisations.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Role of the Committee is to

- Organise survey work
- Involve more local people
- Work with local people and other groups to develop a policy for conservation action
- Seek to influence other organisations
- Obtain and manage funds to continue existing work and develop new projects.

The membership, and details of meetings in 2022, are set out in the Annexe to the Report.

PUBLICITY

To help recruit and involve new members, our activities have been publicised in the area, through posters and press releases, and articles in the *Clun Chronicle*. A recruiting leaflet is available in community centres and elsewhere. However, the two main opportunities to present our work, the Annual Public Meeting in November, and Newcastle Show in September, were both cancelled in 2021. Both resumed this year, and we put up a display as usual at the Newcastle Show.

WEBSITE

There is a website for all the Community Wildlife Groups, with separate pages for the Upper Clun Group www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk. Previous reports can be found, and future events and news will be listed. Members are requested to check the website periodically, particularly before events.

FACEBOOK GROUP

UCCWG has a Facebook group. Log into Facebook and then in the search bar, (with the magnifying glass icon), start typing the name of the group, i.e. 'Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group, (UCCWG)'. Facebook may come up with a list of suggestions as soon as you start typing in the name. Click on the group name to select the group and it should come up (the 'cover' photo is currently a picture of a Curlew), then click on '+ join group', to become a member.

The UCCWG Facebook group has attracted 58 members so far, 22 more than in 2020. The group provides timely communication with members, and they can post their wildlife sightings, photos, videos and questions.

The group is administered and moderated by Karen Mitchell and Katie Steggles and is open to the public, so anyone can find the group, see who is in the group and what they post. Anyone can request to become a member or submit posts once they are a member, but posts require approval from the administrator or moderator.

It has promoted events and activities, and requests for records of Curlew sighting have been made. It also keeps non-members informed about UCCWG.

The group has shared relevant 'posts' from other affiliated organisations, such as the SWT and the Clun & Bishops Castle branch of the SWT, about other local activities and events. Information from other appropriate organisations, such as the RSPB, 'Curlew Country' and Butterfly Conservation on wildlife identification and suggestions on how to help local wildlife have also been shared. Wildlife surveys such as the British Trust for Ornithology's 'Tawny Owl survey', Freshwater Habitats Trust's 'Spawn Survey', Butterfly Conservation's 'Big Butterfly count', Woodland Trust's 'Natures calendar' and RSPB's 'Big Garden Bird Watch' have been promoted too.

The web address for the group is:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/UpperClunCommunityWildlifeGroup/>

CO-OPERATION WITH FARMERS, LANDOWNERS & OTHER ORGANISATIONS

The vast majority of the area is farmland, and almost all of the birds, plants and butterflies that the Group wishes to conserve live on it. Close co-operation with farmers is therefore crucial to our success.

The Group has continued to actively promote conservation of popular "flagship" wildlife species by working with, and influencing, farmers, landowners, other local organisations, Government Agencies and the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, to protect and restore important habitats.

In 2010, we brought together the results of four years' survey work to identify some of the best sites for birds, plants & butterflies in the Upper Clun. These sites have survived thanks to the way they have been managed, and we have subsequently worked with some of the land owners to help ensure that they continue to be managed in the same way. We have now made personal contact with almost all the farmers who own one of these high-quality sites, and we hope the information we have collected is useful to them. We worked with both farmers and Natural England to ensure that

the best wildlife sites were incorporated into Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (HLS) agreements in 2014 or earlier, so farmers received payments to continue managing them sensitively. Most of these agreements have recently been extended for another five years, so our work will have lasting benefit.

We made a successful joint application with Land, Life and Livelihoods for a Natural England Countryside Stewardship (CS) Facilitation Fund Grant in 2017 for a three-year project to support people and organisations that bring farmers, foresters, and other land managers together to improve the local natural environment at a landscape scale. This landscape scale approach can cover land under existing agri-environment and forestry/woodland agreements, common land and land not currently covered by a scheme. It builds on the principles of partnership working to deliver environmental benefits. UCCWG is represented on the Advisory Group to the Facilitator. The grant has been extended to March 2023. For further information, see p21.

ACTIVITIES & SURVEYS

Since its launch in 2007, the Group has set out to find all breeding pairs of Lapwing and Curlew, monitor other important farmland birds and their habitats, and promote the conservation of Barn Owls, Dippers and woodland birds through provision of nest boxes. This built on local knowledge of Lapwing and Curlew gained since 2004.

In 2007, a dozen different wild flowers were also located, and a further 12 plants indicative of woodland, and 12 indicative of grassland, were included in the 2008 surveys. These results were used to highlight the most important sites, and these sites have been the subject of detailed Plant surveys in each subsequent year since 2009, with the aim of getting the best sites adopted as Local (County) Wildlife Sites.

Three Nature Reserves in the Upper Clun area are owned by Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Rhos Fiddle, Lower Shortditch and Mason's Bank. These reserves have also been surveyed in some years.

Our area was initially divided into 31 squares, 2x2 kilometre squares on the Ordnance Survey National Grid. The Group recruited a local member to survey each of these squares for birds and/or plants each year, and well over 100 people have either undertaken surveys, or provided additional useful information, since 2007. However, since 2009, only the best sites have been selected for further survey work, and many of them do not fall into single squares, so this division of the area into squares is no longer important. The map of the area, divided up into these squares, can be viewed on the website.

Butterfly surveys, supported by Butterfly Conservation and concentrating on Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, were started in 2010.

The aims and results of these surveys are described elsewhere in this Report.

COVERING OTHER TYPES OF WILDLIFE

The Group wants to expand its activities, and survey and promote conservation of other types of wildlife. These activities will be shaped by the interests of all the people who join.

FUNDING

Initially the Group was funded by the AONB's *Down to Earth* programme, and then its Sustainable Development Fund.

From October 2011 until June 2013, funding came via the "LEADER in the Shropshire Hills" programme, "part financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development 2007-2013: Europe investing in rural areas". This programme was co-ordinated by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership with Defra as the Managing Authority. The National Trust was the lead organisation and banker for our LEADER Project

The Group is not currently in receipt of any grants to fund its general work. Efforts will therefore be made to raise funds by asking people attending meetings and events to make donations, and support raffles. Members have not been asked to contribute since the Group started, and the Committee hopes to avoid having to charge a membership subscription, but hopefully members will now support the Group financially, as well as through voluntary activity.

Grant Applications will be made when the opportunity arises. A successful application was made to the Garreg Llwyd Windfarm Community Fund to help finance the Curlew Nest Monitoring and protection project in Bettws-y-Crwyn parish in 2021.

CONSTITUTION

To make Grant Applications, it is necessary to have a written Constitution, which was adopted at the Annual Public Meeting in November 2013. The Constitution can be viewed on the website.

OTHER COMMUNITY WILDLIFE GROUPS

The Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group was the second CWG to be formed, following the Upper Onny Wildlife Group, launched in 2003.

The Kemp Valley CWG started in 2011. The LEADER project funded these three Groups, and also three new groups, covering Clee Hill, the Strettons, and Wenlock Edge. However, two of these Groups, Kemp Valley and Wenlock Edge, are no longer operating.

The Stiperstones – Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS), financed by the Heritage Lottery Fund, has supported the development of two new CWGs, covering the Rea Valley and Camlad Valley, between 2014 and March 2018.

These groups all survey important wildlife in their areas, but they are developing differently. All are monitoring birds and plants, but the species being searched for are different. All the remaining groups are monitoring Lapwings and Curlews.

Until 2017, all the Community Wildlife Groups were in the Shropshire Hills, in the south-west of the County, but the Three Parishes CWG (covering Weston Rhyn, St. Martins and Gobowen, north of Oswestry) was formed in 2017, and Tanat to Perry CWG (covering the area to the south of Oswestry and the Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence CWG were both launched in 2018.

An eleventh group, Abdon District CWG, was formed by local residents in 2018. It also carries out a Lapwing and Curlew survey, but monitors other local wildlife too.

**The activities and results for each of the Groups can be found on the website
www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk**

THE BIRD GROUP

BIRD SURVEYS

Introduction

Since 2007 the Bird Group has monitored the population and distribution of Lapwing, Curlew, and other species of conservation interest. Early surveys highlighted the importance of 'wetland' areas retaining a more diverse flora, especially Soft Rush *Juncus effusus*, and such sites were given particular attention from 2010 onwards. Up to 2011 the Group attempted to survey all 31 tetrads ((2x2 kilometre squares) in the Upper Clun, focusing increasingly on Curlew as Lapwings disappeared. However, as Curlew's range contracted and its population decreased, blanket coverage was replaced by more intensive fieldwork on its strongholds.

Geographic surveys have been replaced by observations from a network of resident recorders in Curlew hotspots who are prompted to collect evidence of activity at key points in the breeding cycle, and members of the Wildlife Group are encouraged to send in all records of Lapwing or Curlew. Observers are kept informed by emailed progress reports.

The Methodology and Recording Instructions for the Bird Surveys were described fully in the 2011 Report (Appendix 1). Comparable information about arrangements in 2022 can be found in Appendix 1.

Participation and Coverage

This year 16 members reported on particular geographic areas, either by survey or, if resident, by continuous observation; 29 others contributed records by phone, email or personal contact, a total of 45 participants; 174 Curlew observations or sets of observations were received, the highest annual total to date. *Six nest box hosts sent in breeding results.*

All observers who undertook surveys or continuous recording, or submitted nest box data, live within the survey area. Several are farmers, and many other farmers provided valuable information. The co-operation of landowners who allowed access to their land is gratefully acknowledged

LAPWINGS

Fieldwork Results

There were no reports of Lapwing and there have been no breeding records since 2012. A map showing the approximate location of all breeding Lapwing found by the Group since 2007, together with the nests found previously in 2004 – 06 (Smith 2006) has appeared in previous reports, and can be found on the website.

Local Extinction

The local breeding population declined from 6 pairs in 2004 by around a pair a year up until 2010; only two pairs have been found since, both in 2012. As no young are known to have fledged since 2008, Lapwing appears to be extinct as a breeding species in this area.

CURLEW RECOVERY PROJECT

We repeated the Curlew Recovery Project, launched in 2018 and continued in 2019 and 2021, in co-operation with the Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS) "Save our Curlews" campaign. We received financial support from the Wind Farm Community Benefit Fund in 2021, and the Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund in 2020 and 2022, to pay for professional help with nest finding and protection. In 2020, Covid19 restrictions coincided with the Curlew nesting period, making it impossible to proceed with project work, but our resident participants were able to monitor Curlew activity while going about their everyday business and the breeding attempts were followed up.



Fieldwork Results

Seven-eight breeding pairs were located by CWG surveys in 2022. Project work aimed to find as many of the nests of these seven pairs as possible, and three were found and protected with an electric fence.

The fences protect the eggs from mammalian predators, but are less effective in keeping out avian predators, and two of these nests were predated, probably by Ravens and Crows. All three eggs hatched in the third fenced nest, and the chicks were all fitted with radio-tags, but tracking showed that they were all predated within a few days of hatching.



Colour-ringed Curlew above Newcastle

Chicks also hatched from three other nests that were not fenced. Five chicks were found when they were about a week from fledging, two in two broods and one in a third. Four were caught and colour-ringed, and at least three, possibly all five, of these chicks fledged. That includes the colour-ringed chick in the photo, which definitely did fledge.

The yellow rings each have a unique pair of letters, so each bird can be individually identified if it is seen again later in life. Finding out where they winter, and where they return to breed, is vitally important for planning effective conservation measures.

In 2021, seven breeding pairs were located, at similar locations to sites occupied in 2022. Five nests were found, and three were fenced (the other two were predated before the fencer arrived the following day). These three nests produced eight chicks, five were predated, and three fledged. One of the fledged young was colour-ringed.

Curlews are long-lived, but the breeding population will only be stable if there are enough young birds to replace the adults as they die. Until the last two years, there was no evidence that the local Curlews were producing any fledged young, let alone enough to maintain the population.

The distribution of territories in 2022 is shown in Map 1.

The estimated population found each year since 2007 is shown in Figure 1.

The rate of population decline appears to have slowed since 2010, following several years of steep decline but no young are believed to have fledged between 2017 and 2020. Productivity in those years was not sufficient to maintain, let alone rebuild, the population. However, three fledged young in 2021, and 3 – 5 in 2022, does provide grounds for local optimism.

The SOS project also worked in two other Community Wildlife Group areas. Altogether, nine nests were found and fenced, and five produced 18 chicks that were tagged, but three died of natural causes, and all the other 15 tagged chicks were predated, usually within a few days of hatching, an even worse result than last year, when all except one of 21 tagged chicks were predated. Foxes are the main predator, but Buzzard and Carrion Crow, and perhaps Raven and Red Kite, also contributed. All these predators have one thing in common – their numbers are much higher than the naturally sustainable level because they feed on the 60 million gamebirds released each year into the British countryside for shooting, only one-third of which are actually shot. SOS has called for gamebird release to be limited to the number that are actually shot. At the current rate of decline the Shropshire Curlew population will halve in 12 years, and virtually disappear in 25, so this action is urgent.

Map 1. Approximate location of Curlew Territories 2022

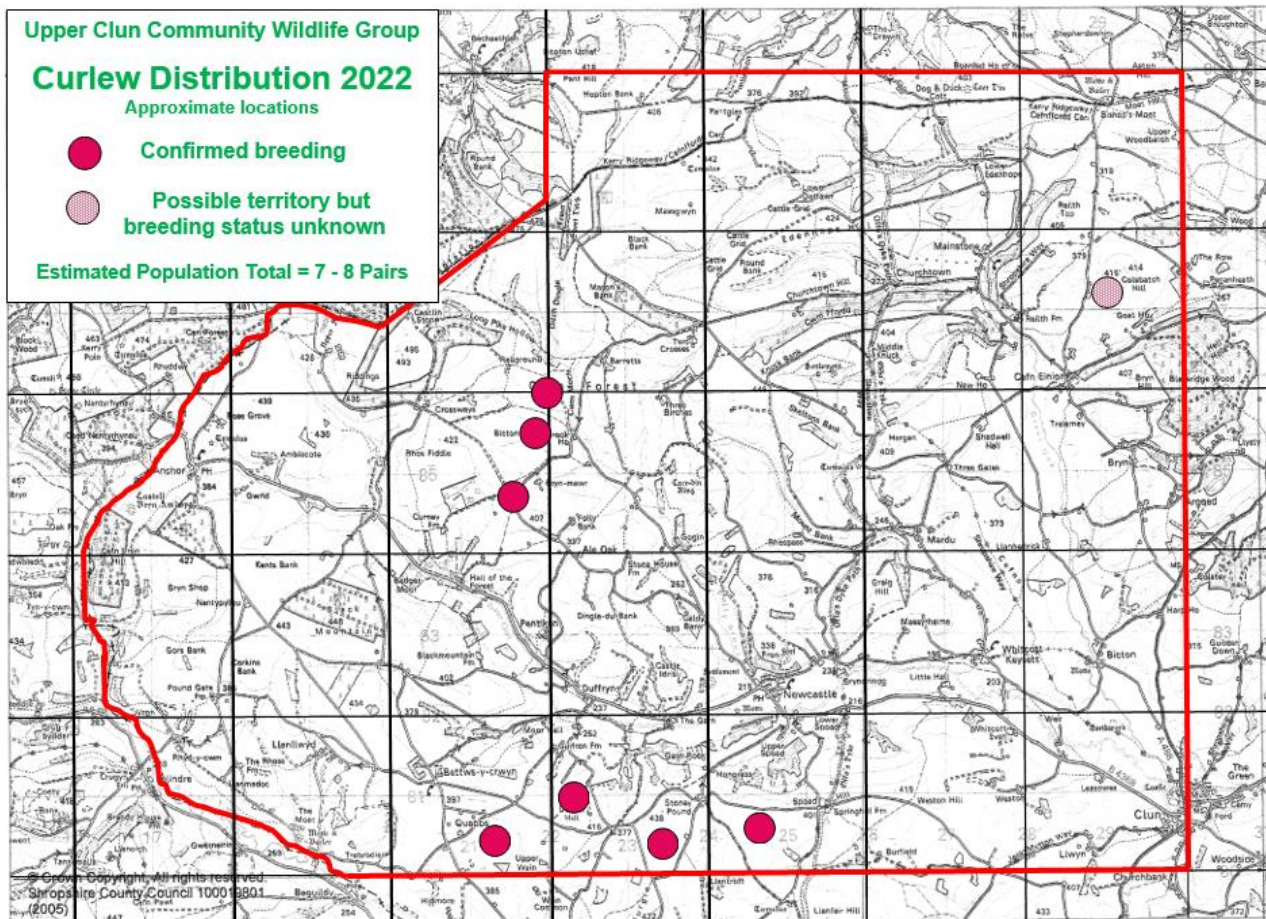
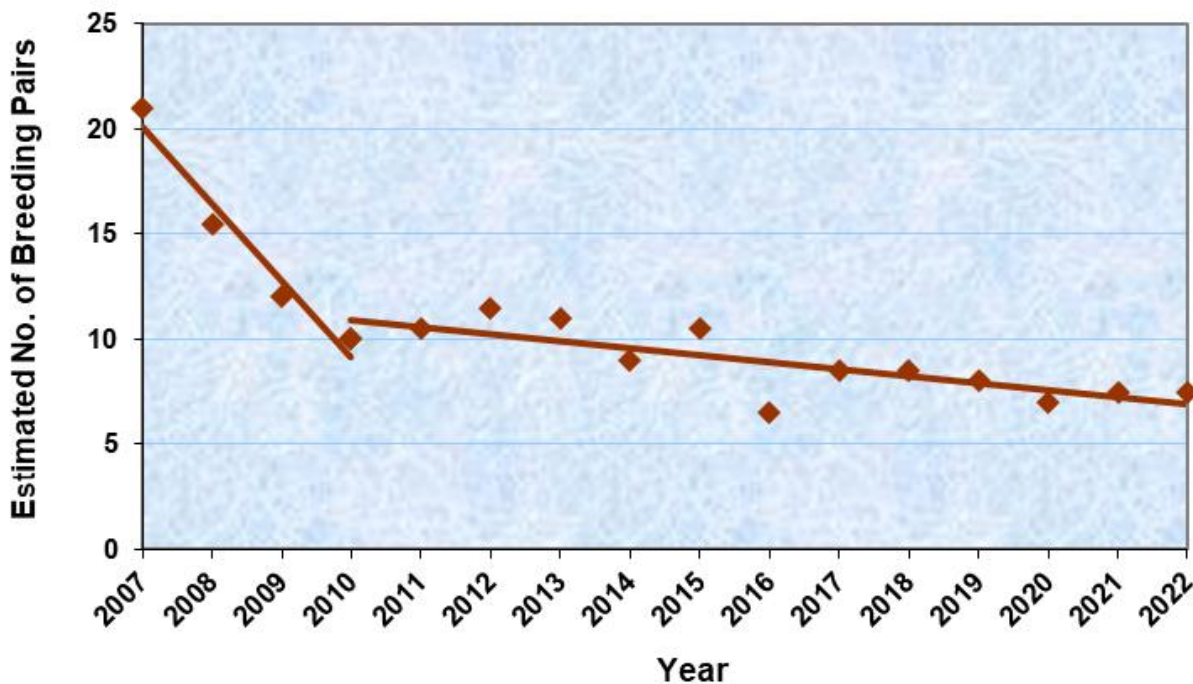


Figure 1. Decline of Curlew in the Upper Clun 2007 – 2022



The Shropshire results are submitted to the South of England Curlew Forum, the UK and Ireland Curlew Action Group, and the Curlew Recovery Partnership in England.

For more information, see the SOS website, www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

Colour-ringing

The Curlew in the photo was colour-ringed at Dolydd Hafren (near Welshpool) on its way to breeding grounds in 2017, and found in the Upper Clun a couple of months later. In 2021 and 2022 it was found again, breeding near Llanfairwaterdine Turbary. If you see a Curlew on the ground in future years, please check it for colour rings. The red/orange on the right leg is conspicuous.



Habitat Requirements and Population Decline

Curlews are ground-nesting birds, requiring rank vegetation as cover for the sitting bird and eggs. They nest on unimproved grassland and heather moorland, rushes or tussocks on rough grazing, or in grass being grown for hay or silage, and feed on damp pasture and meadows with wet, boggy areas rich in invertebrates. Since they need all-round visibility to detect approaching predators, they are found only in open landscapes.

The local decline has been accompanied by a sharp contraction of what was already a very limited range in a short space of time. The last pair of Curlew nesting in the “lowlands” of the Upper Clun has been lost: they occupied a territory north-west of Clun, in the Unk valley, but they were last recorded breeding there in 2010. The Curlew population appears now to be entirely confined to the very highest ground, with no known territory below around 350 metres.

In late 2015, Curlew, previously Amber-listed, was added to the *Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern in the UK*. It is also on the *Red List of Breeding Birds of Conservation in Shropshire*. Its national decline has been attributed primarily to agricultural intensification, in particular:

- land drainage, which reduces rank vegetation for nest sites, and the invertebrate food supply
- increased use of fertilizers, intensifying the effect of drainage
- control of 'weeds', such as rushes, which are necessary for nest cover
- rolling and chain-harrowing when it can destroy nests and chicks
- silage production, with earlier and more frequent cutting, endangering eggs and chicks
- intensive grazing, with higher stocking levels leading to an increased risk of trampling

(See *Birds of Wet Meadows Survey 2002* (Wilson et al., 2005) and the *Repeat Upland Bird Survey 2002* (Sim et al., 2005))

Curlews are loyal to nesting sites even if the habitat has changed over the years, so their choices may reflect historic conditions rather than those prevailing at present. However, the few remaining Curlew nest sites are all within 1 km of damp, rough or semi-natural areas, three of which are SWT reserves, and there is evidence that these are important for foraging. Sites which have themselves become marginal may continue to support Curlew by virtue of their proximity to such habitats.

Curlew do not have to raise many young each year to survive in an area, but no population can sustain productivity as poor as that found here. In the Upper Clun there is still a nucleus of breeding birds to work with; in other parts of the country the situation is even worse. Revival will require a long-term strategy aimed at re-establishing habitat of suitable quality on an appropriate scale.

Predation has also played a part in the decline (Grant et al, 1999). The sparse Curlew population, the reduced amount of nesting cover, and the distances involved in finding food mean nests and chicks are extremely vulnerable to predators, particularly foxes and corvids, which do very well in the current farmed landscape.

Predation has now overtaken all other causes of decline, as shown by the SOS project and several others working elsewhere in the country. The main factor is now being increasingly understood, the impact of releasing large numbers of Pheasants into the countryside for shooting (see p. 25).

The importance of Curlew conservation has been increasingly recognised in recent years, and a summary of work towards this goal, at local, regional and national level, can be found on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

It is important to continue to monitor the population and productivity of the local population. The SOS Save our Curlews nest-finding and protection project will not operate in the Upper Clun in 2023: it will move to other parts of the County, to see if the same poor productivity and high levels of predation occur there too.

We therefore need more helpers to monitor Curlews next year, particularly in June and July, to establish the outcome of all breeding attempts.

SNIPE

SWT Rhos Fiddle Nature Reserve held an important local Snipe population, and four pairs were found by the Shropshire Snipe Survey 2009, compared with 3 – 4 pairs in 2004, but there have been no breeding season records there since 2010. The site has been visited most years, at dusk, to listen for drumming males, including 2021 and 2022. The Snipe populations at Long Mynd and The Stiperstones have both increased in recent years, as a result of re-wetting work and cutting rushes, and SWT have been recommended to undertake similar work at Rhos Fiddle.

Snipe appear to have been lost as breeding birds throughout the area, although they are still regular winter visitors. A site on Black Mountain, occupied in 2004, was surveyed in 2009 and 2010, but no Snipe were recorded. Rush management and the creation of a scrape may have improved the habitat for Snipe, and the site should be revisited, but the prognosis is poor if the much better and more extensive habitat at Rhos Fiddle is vacant.

BIRDS OF THE “WETLANDS”

The Wetlands Project, launched in 2010, aimed to identify and survey all bogs, mires, flushes, wet meadows and rush pasture in the Upper Clun area in order to assess their condition and census the birds, plants and butterflies they support.

A baseline survey of the major 'wetland' sites and their bird communities was made in 2010 and 2011, with the aim of resurveying the sites at approximately five-year intervals to monitor breeding species and assess the effectiveness of any conservation measures. Initially, priority was given to privately-owned farmland with potential for inclusion in HLS.

All survey records, and the maps based on them (Maps A2.1 and A2.2 in the 2011 Report, Appendix 2) were submitted via Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS) to the Local (County) Wildlife Sites committee, co-ordinated by SWT. It was agreed that, where sites have been shown to support Lapwing, Curlew or Snipe, or at least four of the additional target species (Kestrel, Cuckoo, Barn Owl, Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Stonechat, Linnet, Yellowhammer & Reed Bunting), they qualify for adoption as County Wildlife Sites (CWS).

(This work is described in the Chapter on Conservation Action later in the Report.)

The sites owned or managed by SWT (Lower Short Ditch, Masons Bank & Rhos Fiddle) are now included in the survey as a standard of comparison, and, since they are more extensive than the other sites, as a means of assessing the importance of site area.

Records were submitted annually to SOS, as evidence of the extent to which the sites continue to justify their status as Wildlife sites, but this work was disrupted by covid 19, and has not resumed.

RED KITE

Eight Red Kite nests were monitored in the Clun Forest this year, including three at sites that had been used previously but were unoccupied last year. Five were successful, producing a total of six or seven young (in one case the exact number could not be confirmed). The productivity of kite nests in the area appears to have declined in recent years: where formerly nests tended to produce two, occasionally three, young, in the last few years the majority have produced one.

Three of this year's nests failed from unknown causes; in two cases the continued presence of adults near the site when nestlings would have been expected suggested that the failure had occurred late in incubation or after hatching.

A tagged female in the Clun Valley has bred successfully at the same site for five years, producing one chick each year. She fledged from a nest in the Teme Valley in 2014, and at the age of eight has now attained double the typical lifespan for Red Kite, though she has some way to go to take the longevity record that stands at over 25 years.

Please continue to report sightings of a Kite in the same vicinity on several occasions, or of two together, or of one going into a wood between January and July, which may indicate a nest site.

Such locations should be kept strictly confidential, as Kites are still persecuted, but should be reported immediately to Leo Smith or Michelle Frater (each of whom has a monitoring licence).

KESTREL PROJECT

The state of the Kestrel population has given rise to increasing concern in recent years, and in response the Raptor Study Group and the Shropshire Ringing Group have begun a county-wide programme of nest monitoring. Nest boxes are being installed in areas of suitable habitat, such as rough grassland, heath and rushy areas, which have surviving Kestrel populations, in order to supplement scarce natural sites and to gather data on breeding and productivity.



There are now eight Kestrel nest boxes in the Upper Clun and surrounding area. One has been occupied for three successive years, and this year produced three fledged young. At a further site the nest box had been taken by squirrels, but a Kestrel pair found a suitable alternative and fledged at least two, possibly three, young. No activity was recorded at the other sites, where most of the boxes were appropriated by other species, especially Jackdaw.

Very few sightings of Kestrel were reported this year and most of those were probably connected with the active sites above. Its local status remains very precarious. While it is encouraging to have had two cases of successful breeding, the loss of potential nest sites – natural as well as boxes – to other species may well be inhibiting further attempts.

Kestrel fortunes fluctuate according to the peaks and troughs in the vole cycle, so they can recover from bad years, but the overall trend is not encouraging.

**Please report all Kestrel sightings to Michelle Frater,
via 01588 640234 or email UCCWG@shropscegs.org.uk**

DIPPERS

Dippers are restricted to, and dependent on, fast-flowing streams and rivers with stony beds. The headwaters of the River Clun, including the River Unk and the Folly Brook, are one of the County strongholds. The average length of the fiercely-defended territory, approximately 1km in the Upper Clun, is closely related to water quality. The health of the Dipper population, assessed by nest monitoring, ringing, and trapping or re-sighting ringed adults, is therefore an important indicator of changes in the river environment.



Nests are located directly above flowing water; natural sites are used, but man-made structures are preferred where available, and Dippers take readily to nest boxes. With landowners' permission, specially-designed nest boxes have been installed under bridges in the Upper Clun to increase nesting opportunities and breeding success, and facilitate population monitoring.

2022 Monitoring Results

Dipper nest boxes deteriorate over time; five boxes were replaced over the winter, and one installed at a new site.

- 26 potential nest sites were monitored, almost all nest boxes under bridges
- 18 sites were, or had been, occupied and 8 were vacant
- 14 active nests were found; breeding was also confirmed at a natural site
- 32 chicks and one adult were ringed
- 15 colour-rings on breeding adults were read
- disruption since 2020 was reflected in a higher number of unringed adults

Occupancy was comparable with recent years but still well below the peak of 25 sites in 2016. Productivity was rather low; unlike last year, when three pairs went on to rear second broods, there was only one case.

Tony Cross has been monitoring Dippers in the Teme catchment since 1987, by ringing chicks at nest sites, and counting birds at winter roost sites. Colour-ringing of adults started in 2011, and since then as many colour-rings as possible have been read during the breeding season, giving an important measure of adult movements and survival. The oldest dipper so far in the Upper Clun was seven years old when he disappeared; the national record is 8 years 9 months. Three dippers ringed as nestlings at sites on the River Ithon in Powys have bred in this area, and a recent ringing report included a dipper that fledged at Bicton and moved to a site near Ratlinghope, 40km away.

The study suggests that the local population declined in the 20 years prior to the start of the nest box scheme in 2006, then increased until 2010, as the boxes created more nesting opportunities. Productivity is slightly higher in boxes as they tend to be less vulnerable to predation. The highest number of chicks so far fledged in 2015, with the number of breeding pairs peaking the following year before declining to the present. Natural fluctuations are normal for species inhabiting dynamic environments, and long-term trends will become apparent only after years of monitoring.

**If you see Dippers regularly, or know of an existing nest site,
please contact Michelle Frater,
via 01588 640234 or email UCCWG@shropscwgs.org.uk**

NEST BOXES FOR WOODLAND BIRDS

The aim of the Nest Box scheme is to increase the number of suitable nests sites, reduce the likelihood of predators taking eggs and young birds and to collect data on different species breeding successes.

UCCWG was able to provide boxes for members with suitable garden habitat in the past, but this has not been the case for some years now. Grant funding is however being sought to purchase new boxes and to attract new members to the monitoring scheme.

Results were submitted from three sites, although species were not always differentiated at one site. Boxes were occupied by three species: Blue Tit (*11+), Great Tit (*3+) and Pied Flycatcher (6). *indicates higher numbers as one member had: "10 boxes occupied by Blue Tit and Great Tit".



The total number of young birds fledged is as follows:

Species	Blue Tit	Great Tit	Pied Flycatcher
Number young fledged	*49	*16	30

*These figures are actually higher as Blue and Great Tits were not separated by species in 10 of the boxes.

In 2022 there were several spells of very cold weather during the nesting season. One member reported that they had never counted so many dead young. These were mostly Blue Tit but in one Pied Flycatcher nest, 4 of the young died and in a second nest all 7 perished. The cold weather may have led to a shortage of insect food sources.

Ringling at UCCWG nest box schemes at Woodbatch and Mainstone was transferred from Andy Spencer to Shropshire Ringing Group (Bob Harris and Rachel Bromley). Both sites were visited by them prior to the breeding season and were effectively restarted with many new boxes erected, some moved and some repaired (now 75 boxes at Woodbatch, 20 at Mainstone). The siting of boxes was important in order to place them at a reasonable height for checking, and then not too low to present them as scratching boxes for cattle. In some cases we got this wrong and nest records were incomplete as a consequence. The cattle were also problematic when checking nest boxes alone.

Site	Species	Complete Clutches	Eggs	Mean Clutch Size	Chicks Hatching	Chicks Fledged	% Eggs hatching	% Chicks hatching which fledged	% Chicks fledging from Eggs Laid	Nests with at least one chick fledged	% nests with one or more chicks fledging
Woodbatch (75 boxes)											
	Pied Fly.	6	33	5.5	31	27	93.9	87	81.8	5	83.3
	Blue Tit	11	46	4.18	36	32	78.2	88.8	69.5	10	90.9
	Great Tit	5	43	8.6	36	29	83.7	80.5	67.4	3	60
	Redstart	4	23	5.75	18	15	78.2	83.3	65.2	3	75
Mainstone (20 boxes)											
	Pied Fly.	7	50	7.14	33	29	66	87.8	58	7	71.4
	Blue Tit	1	8	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The metal rings, fixed to the leg, are inscribed with a unique number recorded by BTO. If the bird is caught again or found dead and the ring details reported, the age of the bird and its movements can be worked out. Almost all we know about bird migration and longevity, is as a result of ringing.

If you live in the Upper Clun area and are interested in monitoring your own nest boxes (we may in future be able to provide boxes) or if you would like to help monitor Pied Flycatchers at other sites, please ring Fiona Gomersall on 07539 752897 e mail fiona@eadstudio4.co.uk

BARN OWLS

Barn Owl was removed from the *Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern* in 2015, but remains scarce locally. Loss of rough grassland rich in prey is the major factor, but lack of suitable nest sites has contributed. The Shropshire Barn Owl Group (SBOG) installed a few nest boxes in the Upper Clun, and UCCWG many more, mostly in isolated farm buildings or large trees 400m or more from woodland, near at least 4 ha (10 acres) of permanent rough grassland.



In 2017 and 2018 there were active nests at two sites, though the final outcomes are unknown. No results of monitoring by the license holder have been received since 2018, and the individual has not been in contact with the Group. If he cannot be found, we will need to find someone else with a licence to monitor the boxes.

If you see a Barn Owl, especially if you suspect it may be breeding, please tell Michelle Frater, via 01588 640234 or email UCCWG@shropscwgs.org.uk

OVERVIEW

Our survey work over 15 years has made a detailed assessment of the bird populations in the Upper Clun. During this period Lapwing appears to have become extinct as a local breeding species, and Curlew appeared to be heading the same way, although fledged young in the last two years has provided some grounds for optimism. The status of the other target species is more secure, largely because their habitat requirements are less exacting, and are met on the three SWT reserves and a few other sites of comparable quality.

The data has helped us to identify key Local (County) Wildlife Sites, and support several farmers in applications to join Environmental Stewardship HLS; Natural England made use of our data in identifying priorities for new agreements. Future surveys will continue to monitor the populations of the target species, especially in relation to changes in land management under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Their fortunes will be an important measure of its effectiveness.

The Bird Group has evolved over the years and the contribution of our network of resident recorders and other local people who send in records of the bird activity they see around them has greatly increased. Information is exchanged via an email distribution list. Records are submitted to the County Bird Recorder, and, where relevant, to BTO.

We will increase our efforts to monitor the Curlew population, particularly in June and July, to establish the outcome of all breeding attempts. We therefore need more helpers, please.

**If you can help, or want further information, please contact
Brian Angell
07790325007 UCCWG@shropscwgs.org.uk**

THE PLANT GROUP

THE HABITAT AND BOTANY SURVEY GROUP

INTRODUCTION

The Upper Clun and Teme Valley botany group (SO18, SO27 and SO28) has been active with its stalwart membership for sixteen years. The group focuses on recording and condition monitoring of local wildlife sites (LWS) of which there are numerous in south-west. The wildlife sites are important ecological strongholds for species and habitats, often linking with nearby nature reserves through hedgerows, streams and forming good ecological networks.

The wildlife site survey work was supported by Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) in the past, but the Trust changed its focus recently to look at 'the land between'. The Upper Clun botany group therefore pick up the much-needed site recording and monitoring but are limited in how many sites they can take on. The group responds to requests from farmers and land managers but otherwise chooses sites which have not been visited for some years. Five sites were visited in 2022.



Around 100 target species are usually recorded each year. These plants are the Shropshire 'axiophytes', the species which are good habitat indicators as they are relatively uncommon and indicate an unimproved and relatively unspoilt habitat. As a rule of thumb, the higher the number recorded, the better the site. The *axiophyte* lists cover the three key habitats: Rush Pasture/Purple Moorgrass, Blanket Bog and Meadows, and are shown in Appendix 2.

Species-rich hay meadows are measured using a different set of indicators since they may have few axiophytes but are nonetheless important priority habitats.

Since the start of the Community Wildlife Group in 2007, around 40 LWS are either completely new or are significant extensions to existing sites. These are included in the total of around 70 LWS in the Upper Clun and Teme), many of which have been surveyed since 2015. Around 70% are in a reasonably good condition, with this figure remaining relatively consistent year on year. The concern now is that due to SWTs lack of funding, the healthy cycle of LWS surveys will decline along with the support and advice given to farmers and landowners.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The Upper Clun and Teme have a core group of seven to eight skilled volunteers who over the years have carried out the LWS surveys. The group was supported by SWT but is now working independently.

Maps, network survey cards and botanical record cards were provided by Fiona Gomersall along with permission for site access. All surveyors used recommended floras (listed under References).

The Local Wildlife Site or 'Nature Recovery Network (NRN)' survey form was used to record data, along with the species recording card used. (NRN forms for Woodland were also used).

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Seven volunteers, including two new members, variously carried out the surveys in 2022, collecting valuable information on the five sites. Good species lists were compiled along with useful information about the sites.

Some of the good ecological indicators (or axiophytes*) recorded were: *Dactylorhiza purpurella* Northern Marsh Orchid, *Chrysosplenium alternifolium* Alternate-leaved Golden Saxifrage,

Hypericum humifusum Trailing St John's-wort, *Montia fontana* Blinks, *Viola lutea* Mountain Pansy, *Viola palustris* Marsh Violet, *Narthecium ossifragum* Bog Asphodel, *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved Heath, *Carex binervis* Green-ribbed Sedge, *Carex curta* White Sedge, *Eriophorum vaginatum*, Hare's-tail Cotton-grass, *Trichophorum germanicum*, Deergrass, *Luzula pilosa* Hairy Wood-rush, *Melica uniflora* Wood Melick, *Dryopteris carthusiana* Narrow Buckler-fern, *Oreopteris limbosperma* Lemon-scented Fern, *Sphagnum capillifolium* Red Bog-moss and *Sphagnum papillosum* Papillose Bog-moss.

In 2022 a total of 66 different axiophytes were recorded on the 5 sites.

Using these axiophytes as indicators of good health, along with other attributes like vegetation (species) richness and low levels of docks, nettles and thistles, the volunteers were able to locate good, healthy habitat.

Cwm Frydd

This was our first site visit of the year, and we were joined by Mervin Mullard, its owner and welcomed a new member, Moira Hurley. Mervin owns half of this large wildlife site, a mostly south-facing bank with numerous anthills, both neutral acid grassland, scrub, open woodland and a small stream in a very steep dingle. Mervin cuts encroaching scrub from the acid grassland and grazes with cattle which keep the site in a very good condition. Due to the recent wet weather, the grassland was poached in places, but some poaching is good, since it allows new plants to colonise in what may otherwise be a tight and species-poor sward.



Plant Group at Cwm Frydd

Twenty-two axiophytes were recorded on the day including *Viola lutea* Mountain Pansy, with Cwm Frydd being a new site for this species which has declined massively in the Shropshire Hills since the 1970s.

Other good species recorded were: *Aira praecox* Early Hair-grass, *Aphanes australis* Slender Parsley-piert, *Carex caryophyllaea* Spring Sedge, *Erophila verna* Common Whitlowgrass, *Hypericum humifusum* Trailing St John's-wort, *Pimpinella saxifraga* Burnet Saxifrage, *Thymus polytrichus* Wild Thyme, *Chrysosplenium alternifolium* Alternate-leaved Golden Saxifrage, *Luzula pilosa* Hairy Woodrush and *Oreopteris limbosperma* Lemon-scented Fern.

Black Mountain 1



Sphagnum Capillifolium

We had a good turnout of volunteers to this site and welcomed Katie Steggles, another new member. One of our stalwart recorders, Ros Gillard was unable to join us this year, but we hope to see her during surveys in 2023.

One of the original LWS adopted in the 1980s Black Mountain continues to hold on to its Purple Moor-grass and Rush Pasture and Blanket Bog habitats. This is despite its remoteness and relative isolation in the midst of improved farmland. It is thanks to the 'extensive' management by the owners of this and their other LWS in the Clun and Teme catchment that the site survives.

Twenty-six axiophytes were recorded on this wildlife site on the day including a number of *Sphagnum*s, bog mosses which indicate good habitat and the presence of peat. The weather had been very dry, but the bog areas were mostly thankfully still wet. Other species of interest recorded, included: *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved Heath, *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, *Narthecium ossifragum* Bog Asphodel, *Ranunculus hederaceus* Ivy-leaved Crowfoot, *Carex binervis* Green-ribbed Sedge, *Carex echinata* Star Sedge, *Eriophorum vaginatum*, Hare's-tail Cotton-grass, *Trichophorum germanicum*, Deergrass, *Dryopteris carthusiana* Narrow Buckler-fern, *Sphagnum capillifolium* Red Bog-moss and *Sphagnum papillosum* Papillose Bog-moss.

Speyeria aglaja, the Dark-green Fritillary Butterfly was also recorded here on the day.

Black Mountain 2

This site was adopted as a LWS much more recently (2010) on account of its location in an important curlew area. *Boloria silene*, the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary butterfly (SPBF) was recorded here around that time. Although the habitat is similar to the older Black Mountain LWS, it has drier areas and is not as species-rich. There is though Purple Moor-grass and Rush Pasture and Blanket Bog habitat but also acid grassland and scrub. *Saxicola torquata* Stone chat, which nest in gorse scrub was recorded on the day. Following the last survey around 6 years ago, advice was given to dig a pond in an area of species-poor rush and nettle. The landowner did create a pond, which holds water and different aquatic species in wetter weather but on this day was completely dry.

It was heartening though to record eight different species of sedge including the uncommon *Carex curta* White Sedge. This number of sedge species indicates very good habitat. In the drier parts of the site there were swathes of *Carex pilulifera* Pill Sedge and in the wetter areas, *Carex demissa* Common Yellow-sedge and *Carex echinata* Star Sedge.

In previous years *Comarum palustre* Marsh Cinquefoil has been recorded but was not found this time. We were though delighted to find a good patch of *Viola palustris* Marsh Violet, the foodplant of the SPBF caterpillar, but no adult butterflies were recorded.

Other good indicator species noted included: *Myosotis secunda* Creeping Forget-me-not, *Lythrum portula* Water Purslane, *Pedicularis sylvatica* Lousewort, *Silene flos-cuculi* Ragged-Robin, *Eriophorum angustifolium* Common Cotton-grass, *Agrostis canina* Velvet Bent, *Danthonia decumbens* Heath Grass and *Luzula multiflora* Heath Woodrush, Twenty-two different axiophytes were recorded on the day.

Llanfair Hall Wood

This too is one of the original LWS adopted in the 1980s and comprises a large sessile oak woodland rising steeply from the Teme Valley. We were asked to look at this site by the landowner and SWT kindly unearthed previous records for the site. This was useful for everyone as time was short and we were not able to cover the whole site that afternoon.

The top of the wood, which is separated from the main woodland site, is open and even- aged with little understory, indicating past or current grazing. The banks here though are very rich in bryophytes and vascular species like *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Luzula pilosa* Hairy Woodrush, *Hypericum pulchrum* Slender St John's-wort and *Lathyrus linifolius* Bitter vetch.

Over the road, there is a good hazel understory but once more the sessile oaks are even- aged. The survey was not carried out at an ideal time of year and so indicator species may well have been missed and in terms of ground flora, much of what we saw was species-poor and dominated by *Holcus mollis*, Creeping Soft-grass, occasional *Lonicera periclymenum* Honeysuckle and frequent *Dryopteris affinis* Golden Male Fern. In places *Rubus fruticosus* Bramble, was dense where stock had not grazed.

Parts of the wood are fenced at the top though to exclude stock. The wood changes to the south- the trees are further spaced and there is more hazel coppice. There are also *Ilex aquifolium* Holly thickets. Patches of richer ground flora appear further south with *Melica uniflora* Wood Melick, *Millium effusum* Wood Millet and *Anemone nemorosa* Wood Anemone, all ancient woodland indicator species.

The understory improves closer to the road and an old hedge appears to run along the bottom of the wood. Much of the hedgebank below this is rich in species like *Hypericum pulchrum* Slender St John's-wort and *Betonica officinalis* Betony, but in places there are dense stands of bracken. Nine different axiophytes were recorded at the time of survey but species like *Orchis mascula* Early Purple Orchid will have been missed. As stated above, the woodland surveys are best carried out earlier in the year.

Interestingly, nine axiophytes were also recorded in 2013 although a number of them were different species.

Gors Bank and Bryn Shop

This LWS was adopted in 2006 on account of its SPBF populations recorded by Butterfly Conservation. The site was at the time much larger at around forty hectares, but following the end of the Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) payments, it began to shrink as fields were improved or planted with spruce. The site has though had areas added on over the years with the extension of survey work in the catchment.

The fritillary butterflies are found in three different locations, the largest population frequenting a series of large flushes below a Christmas tree plantation at Bryn Shop.

Only two fields were surveyed this year, two south-facing banks running down to a rich flush where three hundred *Dactylorhiza purpurella* Northern Marsh Orchid were counted. This species is at its southern most limit and is rare in Shropshire.

The banks are populated by numerous anthills and plant species typical of both acid and neutral grassland grow in profusion on the dry banks. The floral diversity is extremely rich with species like *Euphrasia officinalis* Eyebright, *Linum catharticum* Fairy Flax, *Carex caryophylllea* Spring Sedge, *Danthonia decumbens* Heath Grass, *Leucanthemum vulgare* Ox-eye Daisy, *Thymus polytrichus* Wild Thyme and *Galium verum* Lady's Bedstraw.

A wide flush snakes its way along the bottom of the slope and widens out where it meets the Nant Rhuddwr brook. A narrow stream runs down the slope becoming a rill as it passes through the rush pasture. Within the flush besides the frequent *Dactylorhiza purpurella* Northern Marsh Orchid, there is also frequent *Valeriana dioica* Marsh Valerian, *Achillia ptarmica* Sneezewort, *Succisa pratensis* Devil's-bit Scabious, *Hypericum tetrapterum* Square-stalked St John's-wort, *Potamogeton polygonifolius* Bog Pondweed, *Viola palustris* Marsh Violet, *Galium uliginosum* Fen Bedstraw, *Equisitum fluviatile* Water Horsetail, *Briza media* Quaking-grass, *Carex hostiana* Tawny Sedge, *Carex pulicaris* Flea Sedge and *Eriophorum angustifolium* Common Cotton-grass.

In the two fields surveyed a total of thirty-four axiophytes were counted and at high frequencies. A SPBF butterfly was also seen during the site survey.

The site is clearly of high ecological value but could be under threat from new ownership.



DISCUSSION

Cwm Frydd

Cwmfrydd is a rich wildlife site of unimproved habitat, grading from species-rich grassland through scrub to scattered trees and a small stream within a steep-sided dingle. Its owner Mervin Mullard works extremely hard to keep back the scrub, which although important in its own right for small birds and invertebrates, would rapidly invade and smother the rich grassland. The site is unusual for its cattle grazing, which contributes massively to its richness since the large animals browse the scrub, keep the grassland open and unlike sheep, do not take all of the grassland herbs.

Cwmfrydd is linked to another rich site with the same name and so does not sit in isolation.

Black Mountain 1

This much older wildlife site is threatened by its isolation in a sea of improved farmland and its distance from the home farm, meaning that under grazing could reduce its conservation value. In addition, although quite wet at the time of survey, due to its isolated position and the increasing frequency of summer droughts, the rich bog flora is in danger of decline.

Under NELMS, neighbouring land could perhaps be re-wetted to save the biodiversity of this site and to satisfy other elements of a new scheme, like carbon sequestration since this is a peatland site.

Black Mountain 2

This more recently adopted LWS would in the past, have once been part of Black Mountain 1. Now two roads separate the site from the latter and from a further wildlife site, Black Mountain 3, so it again has a degree of isolation. It does however have a good count of axiophytes with a healthy flora in places, *Saxicola torquata* stonechat and it may well still support SPBF butterflies on account of the good population of *Viola palustris* Marsh Violet on the site. It is therefore important that the site is grazed, preferably by cattle to keep the rush open and that the gorse scrub is left for *Saxicola torquata* stonechat.

There is semi-improved grassland on either side of the rush pasture and perhaps under NELMS the site could be managed in a way that increases the extent of the richer habitat type. It is recommended that the pond is made wider with at least one shallow edge.

Marsh Violet, an axiophyte typical of rush pasture, and the food plant for the caterpillar of the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary Butterfly



Llanfair Hall Wood

This is a good-sized stand of woodland in a landscape where there is a fairly strong network of other sessile oak woods. Parts of the wood have a poor ground flora, little understorey with even-aged oaks. The wildlife site would benefit from controlled grazing, so that bramble and bracken do not dominate, and tree seedlings are able to take hold. The suggestion is therefore made that the wood is properly fenced, and that (preferably) cattle graze the wood in late summer and autumn, but before the wet weather arrives. Some parts of the wood suffer from too much shade and these areas could be opened up, by for example, rotational coppicing. Holly tickets could be thinned in places. It is also likely that bracken will need to be controlled in places to stop it encroaching further into the woodland.

Gors Bank and Bryn Shop

As stated previously, this once large wildlife site has suffered from a number of fates including conifer planting, increased grazing pressure, drainage, herbicide use and re-seeding. Parts of the site are now separated as a result of these activities. Under the ESA the fields were protected, but when these payments came to an end, some of the farms did not enter new into agreements.

One of the remaining and richest parts of the site could now be under threat too as there is likely to come under new ownership. A change in land use could involve any of the above-mentioned threats, plus a new one, tree planting to meet Government targets or carbon offsetting by companies willing to pay for the service.

It is imperative that these wildlife rich fields do not meet the same fate as many others on this important site. The new owner will need to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment if they are considering a change in land management.

Much of the work of the three groups: Bird, Butterfly and Botany has focused on rush pasture, bogs and unimproved grassland habitats of the Clun Forest. There are around 15 good rushy pastures where conservation work still needs to be focused for vulnerable and threatened species like the *Numenius arquata* Curlew and *Boloria silene* Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary butterfly.

The Botany group has continued to work closely with farmers which is essential if habitat conservation and restoration is to be successful.

2021

Last year, six volunteers variously carried out surveys on five sites

- Treverward
- Upper Duffryn
- East of Quabbs
- Bettws Church
- Black Mountain Chapel

Good species lists were compiled along with useful information about the sites. Some of the good ecological indicators (or axiophytes*) recorded were: *Alchemilla filicaulis* Hairy Lady's Mantle, *Lathyrus linifolius* Bitter-vetch, *Lamiastrum galeobdolon* Yellow Archangel, *Carex echinata* Star Sedge, *Carex spicata* Spiked Sedge, *Senecio aquaticus*, Marsh Ragwort, *Dactylhoriza maculata* Heath Spotted Orchid, *Moenchia erecta* Upright Chickweed and *Betonica officinalis* Betony.

The full report can be found on the website.

Conclusion

It is heartening that that the Upper Clun Botany group is still going strong (with new members joining) and that some LWS continue to receive a health check from time to time. Where possible the group is happy to give advice to farmers on site management. The landowner involvement, interest and cooperation is excellent and I am sure the data collected this year will be put to good use. We would like to thank the various farms for inviting or allowing the botany group on to their land this year. As always, the surveying was rewarding and the habitats beautiful and enjoyed by everyone who took part.

FURTHER WORK

Site survey work by the Upper Clun Botany group will continue in 2023. The group remains enthusiastic and welcomes new members. There is an element of training during the site surveys for those who are new to botany. The group is also open to requests from farmers and parish communities for help and advice on habitat management. Landowners have been approached and plans made for surveying The Riddings and The Cote in 2023. Other site surveys will be fitted in if possible.

Fiona Gomersall has supported the Plant Group since UCCWG was founded in 2007, and is now co-leader. Jacky Harrison is the other co-leader.

If you want to get involved with the Plant Group, please contact

Jacky Harrison

01588 630666

jackyharrison51@hotmail.com

THE BUTTERFLY GROUP

INTRODUCTION

Press headlines of 'Insect Armageddon' do not, unfortunately, seem to be the usual media hyperbole, and reflect widespread concern regarding a steep fall in insect numbers. Lepidoptera, being relatively visible and identifiable can serve as a useful 'canary in the mine'. Butterfly Conservation's National Butterfly Count attracted record numbers of participants but most of the butterfly (and moth) species targeted showed a decline in numbers recorded.

Members continue to record both butterflies and moths in the area, with particular focus on two butterfly species whose local populations are nationally significant.

SMALL PEARL-BORDERED FRITILLARY

The Upper Clun valley is an important location for the Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary in Shropshire. This fritillary is a UKBAP Priority Species, of High Conservation Priority, which has suffered long term decline across the UK. In our area the species is associated with rush pasture, where the caterpillars feed on Marsh Violet, *Viola palustris*. The most important sites in the Upper Clun are: Barretts West (Masons Bank West Wildlife Site), Pant-y-Lidan LWS and Gors Bank LWS. Surveys of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries started in 2010 and have continued to be conducted annually.

Unfortunately, 2021 and 2022 were not good surveying years, mostly due to a combination of unfavourable weather conditions and the continuing disruptive effects of the pandemic. Two known sites were surveyed, Barretts West LWS and Rhos Fiddle NR. The Barretts West population continues to be strong, with good numbers on the wing and some individuals seen beyond the site, along the valley. Two site visits to Rhos Fiddle failed to provide any sightings of adults, although caterpillar feeding damage was observed on Marsh Violet plants in different wet areas on the reserve.

In 2022 a second brood Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary was recorded in our area. A small number of butterflies regularly have a second brood in the south of England, but this is extremely unusual here. This atypical appearance was presumably a result of the equally atypical weather. A new site for the butterfly was reported, via iRecord, from Panpunton, near Knighton, in the extreme south of our area.

WOOD WHITE

This delicate beauty is a Nationally Endangered species whose population is increasing, against the trend, in the West Midlands. Bury Ditches and the neighbouring woodlands just east of our area are home to a flourishing population of Wood Whites, nurtured by sensitive habitat



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – upper wings



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – under wing



management by Forestry England and Butterfly Conservation volunteers. Blakeridge Wood, in our area, continues to support a healthy colony of the butterflies and there is reason to be optimistic that the species can continue to spread into other nearby woods, provided there is sufficient bird-foot trefoil along the forest tracks and edges.

UNEXPECTED VISITOR

The abnormal weather conditions this summer were probably responsible for a very unusual sighting in July when a male Chalkhill Blue butterfly dropped in to visit a meadow in the Clun Forest. This was the first record of the species in Shropshire since 1916! It is likely that the movement of warm air from the south had carried the butterfly from its normal breeding grounds, the closest of which are in the Cotswolds in Gloucestershire.

ANOTHER NEW MOTH FOR SHROPSHIRE

A Cypress Pug (*Eupithecia phoeniciata*) was recorded in the Clun Forest area in August 2021. Two other sightings were recorded elsewhere in the county over the next week or so, but the Clun Forest record is the first for Shropshire. The caterpillars of this attractive moth feed on non-native cypress trees, including the infamous 'Lawsonia', so there should be plenty of potential foodplant in gardens locally if this new arrival chooses to stay.



LEPIDOPTERA RECORDS ON IRECORD

An Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group recording 'activity' was set up on iRecord at the end of 2019. Twenty-two observers recorded lepidoptera sightings via iRecord between January 2021 and September 2022, more than double the number recording in 2020. Many thanks to all who recorded their observations. A total of 1055 records were received, comprising 27 butterfly species and 232 moth species. iRecord is very easy to use, working on both computer or smartphone, and all records are important, even the most common species.

SAFEGUARDING HABITAT

Rush Pasture is an important habitat for Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries, and the food plants they need, and it is also an important habitat for wetland birds. A UCCWG leaflet on the management of Rush Pasture for its characteristic wildlife was included in the 2013 Report, and can be found on the website www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

A similar document, but concentrating on the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and its needs, has also been produced. This is available on the website of the West Midlands Branch of Butterfly Conservation www.westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk

FUTURE PLANS - VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

We need more surveyors to monitor all the important sites in the area.

If you can help, please contact

John Lyden

01686 671263 jalyden59@gmail.com

MAMMALS

For a number of reasons the intention to get a new Mammal Group up and running has not proved possible. Hopefully, new volunteers will come forward and help with that. If you want to help, please tell Rob Harris, phone 01588 640234, email wilksharris@hotmail.com

CO-OPERATION WITH FARMERS

The Wildlife Group needs, and wants, to work closely with the farmers in the area. The vast majority of land in the Upper Clun area is farmland. Therefore, if we are to gather a worthwhile picture of local wildlife, and then undertake effective action to increase populations and habitat, we need the active cooperation of local farmers. We will therefore continue to work with farmers, individually and generally, on conservation issues in future.

We also encourage members of the Group who are not farmers to do whatever they can to develop good relations with individual farmers while carrying out surveys. This often includes discussion while seeking permission to carry out surveys on farmland.

There are now many examples of where this co-operation has produced results, for the benefit of wildlife and farmers, as we have helped farmers with good wildlife habitat to secure an Environmental Stewardship HLS Agreement with Natural England, so they are rewarded for managing these habitats sensitively and effectively. More details are given in the next Chapter.

CONSERVATION ACTION

The Group was set up in 2007 to monitor nationally or locally threatened bird, plant and butterfly species and their habitats, and to encourage interest in, and actively promote, conservation in the area. Annual Reports have documented the results of the surveys, and the data have been used to underpin Conservation Action, particularly in relation to the steeply-declining Curlew population.

The Group has successfully

- formed a good estimate of the breeding population, distribution and habitat use of Lapwing, Curlew and other target Bird Species
- identified plant sites which contain axiophytes, indicators of high habitat quality, and produced complete species lists in support of their adoption as Local Wildlife Sites
- identified important Butterfly sites, two of which are regionally important

LOCAL (COUNTY) WILDLIFE SITES

Survey results presented in previous reports demonstrated that 'Wetland' sites which support many of the target birds are also key habitats for plants and butterflies. Data were collated across the three survey groups, and used to make the case that sites that were not already Local Wildlife Sites should if possible be adopted. These sites of wildlife interest in the Upper Clun in 2018 are shown in the Local Sites Map on page 19. They include Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Sites and Candidate Sites. All the proposals have been accepted in principle by the LWS Committee, but formal adoption requires landowners' consent, and this is still being sought in some cases, shown as "Candidate Sites" on the map. The map also shows the deleted (red) sites. The wildlife attributes of these sites were lost when they were ploughed, fertilised, built on, planted on, felled or destroyed in some other way, usually more than 10 years ago.

HLS AGREEMENTS

Until 2014, the national and local strategies to reverse the declines of local priority species and habitats, and meet Government Biodiversity targets, were based on using Environmental Stewardship (particularly Higher Level Scheme - HLS) agreements between Natural England and landowners to safeguard and enhance the habitats. Such agreements aimed to mitigate the long-term agricultural changes which have led to the decline of many bird, plant and butterfly species, including "improvement" of grassland by ploughing, reseeding and / or draining.

Most farmland in the Upper Clun was previously covered by Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) agreements, but these all expired in 2014 or earlier. Natural England (NE) had to consider which of

the land covered by ESA Agreements should be incorporated into HLS Agreements. The Group's strategy was therefore to identify the best wildlife sites, make survey information freely available to the land owners and to Natural England, and ask for the species-rich habitats most likely to benefit bird, plant and butterfly species to be included in the scheme. Our detailed proposals to Natural England have been described in previous Reports. The strategy was successful, as our data was taken into account.

New HLS agreements between Natural England and individual Landowners in the Upper Clun were entered into in 2013 (21) and 2014 (a further 11), covering more than 10 sq. km altogether. These agreements initially run for up to 10 years, so they are still safeguarding some of the best wildlife habitat in the area. The Government has recently announced that all HLS agreements will continue for another five years.

However, while HLS has been a major benefit, it protects only a small proportion of the area, so the Group still needs to monitor key wildlife species, monitor the impacts of HLS, positive or negative, and promote conservation

COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP

HLS has now been replaced by a Countryside Stewardship Scheme, which, although it is supposed to be more simple than HLS, is much more bureaucratic and less well funded. It aims to implement the proposals of the Lawton Report, which recommended reducing habitat fragmentation through a more integrated approach to land management. It is administered by Defra, rather than Natural England.

FUTURE AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SCHEMES

All agri-environment schemes for many years were part of the European Union Common Agricultural Policy. Given the Government's decision to leave the EU, the future arrangements for farm payment schemes and benefits for wildlife are very uncertain. It is likely that any new scheme will not be operational for many years.

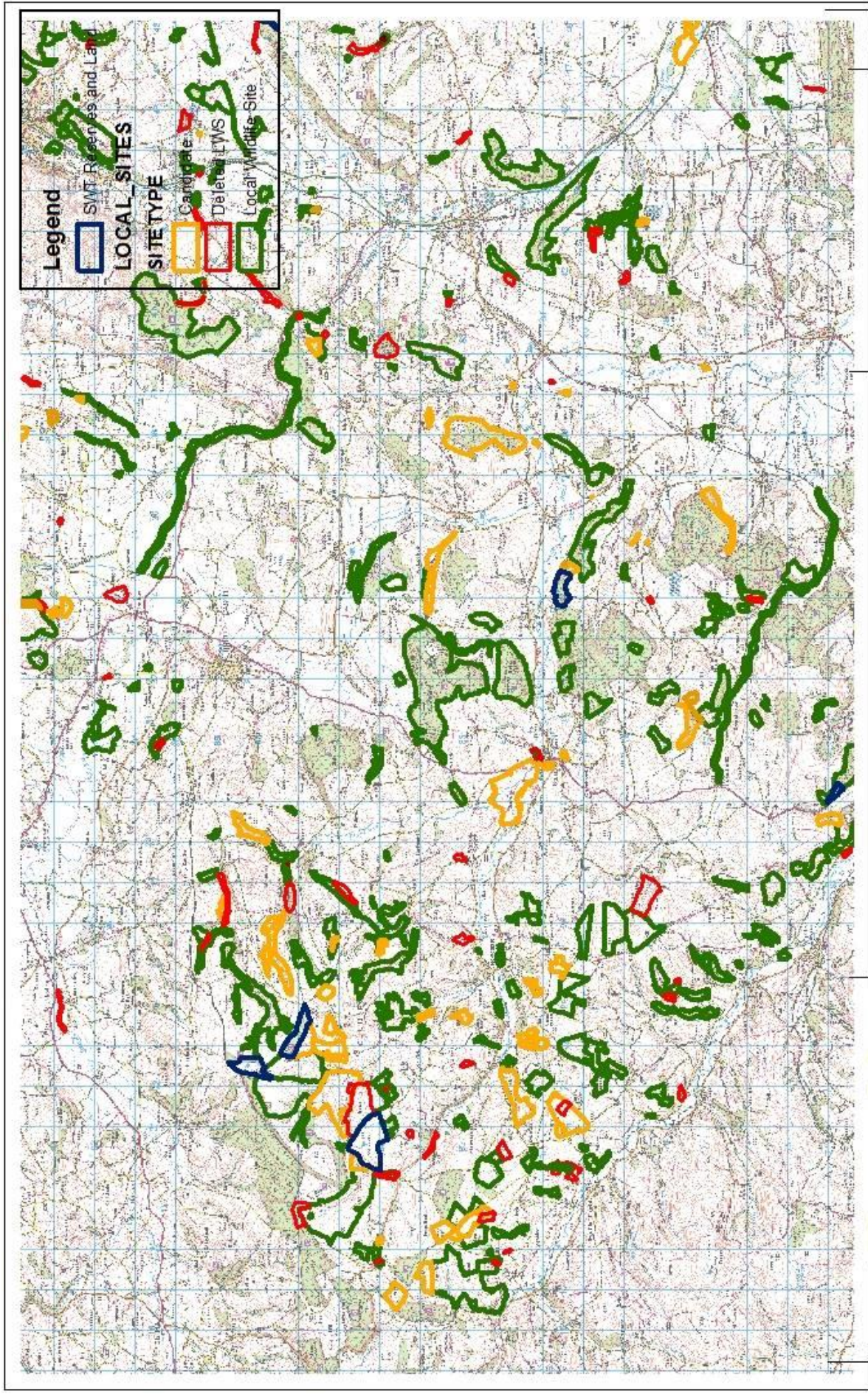
We hope that future arrangements will help farmers and wildlife, and we will continue to work with local farmers to ensure that both benefit from any new schemes.

CLUN FOREST FARMERS FACILITATION FUND



In 2018, Land, Life & Livelihoods secured a 3-year grant from Natural England Countryside Stewardship (through a joint application with the Wildlife Group) to help farmers and other land managers to work together and find ways to conserve soil, water, wildlife and landscape and to improve farm viability. The project period has been extended until March 2023.

Funding is awarded to successful applications through a competitive process. Priority is given to approaches which show partnership and a collective approach across holdings to deliver shared environmental outcomes that go beyond what could be delivered by individual holdings acting in isolation. The area covered by the Clun Forest project comprises the parishes of Mainstone, Newcastle, Bettws-y-Crwyn and Llanfair Waterdine, and is shown on the map.



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 Date: 12/11/2018
<http://www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk>

Local Sites in Upper Clun area 2018



The Fund is to help farmers and land managers in the Clun Forest to come together to find ways in which they can manage their land to conserve, enhance and link up valuable areas for nature:

- Protect and manage land, soil, and water, and conserve rare and threatened plants and animals, e.g. white clawed crayfish, mountain pansy, small pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly, curlew, haymeadows and wet flushes
- Link up areas across the catchment that are important and valuable for wildlife, biodiversity & flood/water management
- Increase farm viability and care for our special landscape
- Achieve new and improved environmental schemes
- Meet together to discuss, problem-solve and act
- Obtain encouragement, technical, and personal support
- Find funds, advice and practical help so that these aims/objectives can be achieved

The Fund provides free specialist advice on farm practices that help to conserve soil and biodiversity, and prevent water pollution, which may attract future financial support, particularly important in challenging upland areas like our own. This will include assistance with existing grant schemes and helping shape new schemes to combine high quality livestock and food production with environmental benefits, or, in the new jargon, “public goods”.

By demonstrating the ability of our area to meet the government’s aims, we may also help influence the development of future incentive schemes so that they are more suitable to our unique hill circumstances.

Bringing farmers and other landowners together in this way provides an ideal opportunity to try and meet the needs of many of the Group’s priority wildlife species and habitats.

A “Curlews need Farmers” event was held in February 2019. At the event, the Trustees of Llanfairwaterdine Turbarry made some management suggestions to help Curlews, and a site meeting was held in March to discuss them. It was agreed that livestock, removed for the winter, would not be put out again until mid-May to allow the grass to start growing early to provide more cover, and give the Curlews chance to nest without disturbance. An electric fence would be put up around any nest and a poster requesting that dogs were kept on a lead was displayed at the Open Access site. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic the nest protection project was postponed, but it is hoped the agreement will operate in 2021.

A leaflet, “Curlews Need Farmers” drawn up using information and comments from the February 2019 curlew event was drafted and edited through the year and will be distributed to all farmer/landowners in due course. The current version is attached as Appendix 3 on p37.

A second Curlews need Farmers was held on 10 March 2022, at which Tony Cross and Tim Lewis discussed their work as contactors to the Save our curlews campaign.

Lack of information on the future of environmental schemes and agricultural support after Brexit has limited the initiatives and commitments that farmers and other landowners are willing to make, and meetings and events were not possible for a lengthy period after March 2020 due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

More information can be found on the relevant part of the Land, Life and Livelihoods website www.landlifeandlivelihoods.org.uk/

HABITAT REQUIREMENTS FOR TARGET SPECIES

If the various threatened species are to be saved from local extinction, it is necessary to protect them where they breed now, and improve breeding success so their populations can increase and spread. The loss of Lapwing as a breeding species underlines the urgency of this work. The habitat requirements for Curlew, Lapwing, Snipe, the other Target Bird Species and Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary have been included in previous reports.

Unfortunately, little management work has been carried out in recent years to ensure that sites retain their value for wildlife, but now that some land is being managed under HLS, with funding for such work, it is hoped that this will lead to beneficial changes in farming practice such as rush management, growing hay rather than silage, creating shallow pools and muddy patches, and managing livestock in the vicinity of nest sites.

The Group will continue to monitor these species and sites, particularly the wetlands and Wildlife Sites, to see if our aspirations are borne out in the future.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT LEAFLETS

Based on the results of our local surveys, four leaflets have been published

1. *Please Conserve our Curlews*, requesting farmers to make changes in the way in which grassland is managed and grazed, in 2007. This is based on a similar leaflet produced by the Upper Onny Wildlife Group.
This leaflet was superseded by a replacement, *Curlews Need Farmers*, produced following the Facilitation Fund event in February 2019. This replacement is included as Appendix 3.
2. *Please Help Hedgerow Birds*, requesting all landowners to make small scale changes to the management of hedges, verges, field margins and scrub, in 2008.
3. *Managing Wetlands for Wildlife*, to benefit birds, plants and butterflies, in 2009.
4. *Management of Rush Pasture*, also to benefit birds, plants and butterflies, in 2013.

All these leaflets have been endorsed by the AONB, Natural England, RSPB, Shropshire Wildlife Trust and, while it still existed, Shropshire FWAG.

Each leaflet was published in the appropriate Annual Report, and further copies are available on request. They can also be viewed and downloaded from the website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

SURVEYING WILDLIFE SITES

'Local Wildlife Site' is not a statutory designation. It provides no protection, and does not limit landowner activity. It recognises the wildlife value of a piece of land based on the species it supports. Sites have to meet published criteria drawn up by Shropshire Wildlife Trust in consultation with Statutory Bodies such as Natural England, the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission, and other Organisations such as Shropshire Ornithological Society and Butterfly Conservation. Applications have to be approved by a committee representing most of these bodies, and adoption needs landowner consent.

Fieldwork associated with current or potential Local Wildlife Sites was done in consultation with landowners, whose permission has been sought both for the survey, and for any subsequent adoption of sites. Landowners are given all survey results, and information about any rare or unusual plants at sites.

RIVER CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

Water quality in the River Clun and its tributaries has declined as a result of silting up of the river bed and pollution from people, transport and farming practices. This is being addressed by statutory organisations in compliance with the EU's Water Framework Directive (WFD), which has now been incorporated into UK law, under which The Environment Agency (EA) is charged with getting all rivers into 'good ecological condition'. None of the waterbodies in the Clun catchment are currently in "good condition" – all are "moderate".

Part of the lower Clun is designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the EU Habitats Directive, also now incorporated into UK Law. It is one of only three such designations in England, because it supports a threatened population of Freshwater Pearl Mussels. The designation requires the statutory organisations to protect the mussel population. The pearl mussel remains in a critical situation, and action is urgent: the population is less than 1000, and monitoring suggests that if the current rate of decline continues, the population will be extinct within the very near future. A translocation project is being attempted at two sites, but they are still sub-optimal and translocation is now dependent on reducing pollutants from upstream.

Initiatives now underway include:

- AONB practical work in the Clun Catchment continues through an EA funded “Unmuddying the Waters” project, and tree planting through Woodland Trust funding. Work continues to address problems at source, restore/naturalise riparian habitats, wetland creation, and intercept runoff pathways.
- A Water Environment Grant (WEG), hosted by AONB and delivered by Severn Rivers Trust, is funding Teme, Clun and Onny Farm Advisors to assess the impact of individual farms on water quality and freshwater habitats. Each farm receives a plan which highlights issues and recommends methods to address them. Soil health assessments are also undertaken.
- The Clun is a High Priority area for the Catchment Sensitive Farming initiative, a partnership between Defra, EA and NE, which provides training, advice and grant support for farmers and land managers to reduce water and air pollution from agriculture.
- A Clun Nutrient Management Plan is being implemented by EA and NE (in partnership with farmers, conservation agencies, water companies and other bodies)
- A Crayfish Survey has been completed. No non-native signal crayfish were identified. A new Crayfish Ark site has been secured and a number of crayfish translocated to it by EA.
- Dippers in the Teme Catchment project, with UCCWG involvement, collects data on a species with similar habitat requirements to the Mussel

The Wildlife Group supports these initiatives, and will seek to become involved in them wherever possible.

SHROPSHIRE HILLS AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN

The AONB has a statutory obligation to produce a Management Plan every five years. Conservation and enhancing Biodiversity are important elements of the Plan. The current plan for 2019-24 can be found on the AONB website.

CONSERVATION ACTION

UCCWG recognizes that most land in the area is farmland in private ownership, and the Group needs to work closely with farmers to achieve our conservation objectives, although other landowners, householders with gardens, the County Council (responsible for verges and public open space), Welsh Forestry and the Wildlife Trust, among others, should also be involved. Declines in habitat quality and species richness have occurred slowly over many years, and it will take many more years of sustained, incremental habitat improvement if the populations of the “flagship” species are to return to their former levels.

The Group will continue to promote its vision of a diverse, wildlife-rich landscape, and to collect the evidence that enables it to make authoritative representations for inclusions in Parish Plans, the AONB policy and Management Plan, Natural England’s Countryside Stewardship, the Environment Agency’s work on river habitats, the Statutory Planning Process, and the policies of other statutory and voluntary organisations. Such influence is necessary if we are to help make a difference to the quality and diversity of wildlife habitats.

CURLEW ACTION PLAN, & THE SOS “SAVE OUR CURLEWS” CAMPAIGN

The Wildlife Group has been surveying the Upper Clun for 17 years now, and working to reverse species declines by promoting the protection and restoration of habitat. It remains committed to such an approach as the only means of sustaining healthy species populations in the long term.

However, Curlew has now declined so severely that it may follow Lapwing into local extinction before such measures can take



effect. In an effort to prevent this, the Group launched an emergency *Curlew Action Plan* at the 2016 Annual meeting



Fieldwork suggests that fewer Curlew pairs are settling to nest, and the habitat at many of the traditional breeding sites is now marginal and requires landscape-scale conservation

measures. Where pairs do manage to breed, nest and chick survival is extremely poor, and falls so far below the productivity needed to maintain the population that the situation is has become critical.

It has been shown that predation is now the major cause of breeding failure, although agricultural activities sometimes play a part; and the same is likely to apply in the Upper Clun. Fencing nests has been shown to increase the chance of eggs hatching. Breeding success will not improve unless the immediate causes of failure are tackled directly, with close landowner involvement at all stages. Therefore, as part of the *Action Plan*, more effort was made in 2017 to locate nest sites, rather than territories. One nest was found, and protected by an electric fence. The eggs hatched, increasing the chances that young would fledge, although they did not.

The Group has worked with the SOS Save our Curlews campaign since 2018, to find and fence nests, and radio-tag and track chicks to find out what happens to them. Similar work was carried out in the Clee Hill CWG area in 2018-22, and the Strettons area since 2021, and detailed reports can be found on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/.

Monitoring of Curlew populations by other Community Wildlife Groups has shown a similar rate of decline elsewhere.

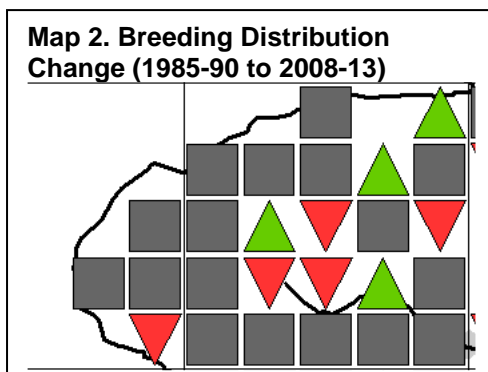
SOS Save our Curlews Campaign

The identification of Curlew territories by the Community Wildlife Groups is the foundation of the campaign strategy – nests can only be protected once they are found. As and when enough have been located for a professional ornithologist to find several in a CWG area, it is intended to find them and protect them with an electric fence, and then radio tag the chicks that hatch, to gain information on how they feed, and the threats they face. This is a long-term project, so funding will be needed for many years.

The UCCWG Curlew Action Plan will continue in future years, as part of the wider campaign. Anyone who wants to help with locating Curlews next April and early May should contact Brian Angell via the Group's website. If you see or hear a Curlew next spring, please tell Michelle immediately.

Decline in the Upper Clun since 1985-90

Figure 1 on p.7 shows a 66% decline in the Upper Clun Curlew population since 2007 found by UCCWG. There are no population estimates from before that date, but the Shropshire Bird Atlas 2008-13 repeated the 1985-90 Atlas work, and achieved similar levels of coverage across the County as a whole. *The Birds of Shropshire* (2019) published a breeding distribution change map, comparing the results of the two Atlases.



In this area, the recent Atlas benefitted from the increased coverage provided by the Group's more intensive survey work. The Atlases did not count the Curlews in each square, but recorded the level of breeding evidence found. Map 2 shows the change in breeding distribution for the same survey squares shown in Map 1 on p.7 (the Curlew distribution in 2019). In the grey squares, there was breeding evidence of Curlew in both Atlas periods, in the green upward triangles, Curlews were found in 2008-13 but not 1985-90, almost certainly as a result of the Group's intensive efforts. In the red downward triangles, Curlews were found in 1985-90, but not 2008-13, in spite of the Group's efforts to find them. It will be seen that Curlew had apparently disappeared from five of the 22 squares (23%, almost one-quarter) where it was found in 1985-90.

It will also be seen from Map 1 that there was evidence of breeding Curlew in nine of these squares in 2019, so the range has decreased by 59% since 2008-13, comparable to the reduction in population of 66%.

Curlews and Pheasant Release

Local fieldwork research by the Stiperstones-Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme 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 almost all chicks were predated before fledging (i.e. protecting nests makes little difference to productivity in some areas - it results in the chicks getting eaten, not the eggs). So why are there so many foxes?

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

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

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

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

In 2014 there were an estimated 44,000 pairs of breeding pheasants, all descended from previous releases (Pheasant is an introduced species, not a native one), compared to 160 pairs of Curlew and 800 pairs of Lapwing.

The RSPB announced the results in October 2022 of the review of its policy on game bird shooting, because of the effect of releasing Pheasants on the landscape and other wildlife. It is now seeking improved environmental standards, a reduction in the number of gamebirds released and better compliance with existing rules about reporting releases, through tighter regulation of large-scale gamebird releases. For further information see www.rspb.org.uk/gamebirdreview

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

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) have continued with their surveys since 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 have been around 300 participants each year, apart from 2020 when coronavirus disrupted the work, and participants have spent a total of over 2,000 hours each year on survey work, and 94 - 115 Curlew territories have been 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 results, can be found on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

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

In 2022, all these groups did Curlew survey work, but the results are still being analysed, and will be supplied separately when they are available.

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & DISTRIBUTION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most importantly, thanks to all the people who undertook the Survey work, and contributed additional information. None of the work would have been possible without their effort and commitment. Their names are listed below

Bird Surveyors

Brian Angell
Michelle Frater
Tim Lewis
Mark Measures
Karen Mitchell
Peter Morris
Katie Steggles
Delphine Whatley
Richard Whatley

Plant Recorders

John Clayfield
Maira Hurley
Susan Gardner
Tess Pearson
Rob Rowe
Katie Steggles
Janet Watkin
Fiona Gomersall

Butterfly Recorders

John Lyden

Casual records of Curlew and other species were provided by Steve Abbott, Glenis Adams, Duncan Adkins, Jenny Barker, Nicole & Eddie Davies, Steve Ferris, Martin Fittall, Shirley Giles, Jacky Harrison, Mark July, Cath Landles, Susie Meeks, Heather Moody, Alan Sedgwick, Robyn Smith, Judd Spears, Dave Tomlinson, Lucy Trench, Helen Upson, Clun Valley blacksmiths, Mike Wagg and Paul Westwood.

Brian Angell organised the Curlew recording, liaised with the surveyors and kept them informed with an e-newsletter, and. She also undertook additional Bird Survey work, particularly in determining the Curlew population.

Michelle Frater wrote the sections on Red Kite, Kestrel and Dipper in the work of the Bird Group

Allan Bernau photographed the ringed Curlew at Llanfair Hill in 2017

Andrew Beavan arranged the meeting with the Llanfair Waterdine Turbary Trustees,

Thanks a lot too to all the farmers and owners who gave permission to the Curlew project to look for Curlews on their land, erect fences, and track the radio-tagged chicks.

The Small Woodland Birds Nest box Scheme was run by Fiona Gomersall, who collected the information for the Report. Hosts who provided data were Gill Binks, Fiona Gomersall, Jackie Harrison, Mervin Mullard and Marie Zenick.

Bob Harris and Rachel Bromley maintained the nest boxes at Woodbatch and Mainstone, and undertook the Bird Ringing.

John Swift made and installed the Dipper and Woodland Bird nest boxes up until 2011. Vince Downs has made the nest boxes since then.

Tony Cross carried out the Dipper nest monitoring and ringing.

The Chapter on the Plants Group was written by Fiona Gomersall

Sarah Jameson provided the content for the Clun Forest Farmers Facilitation Fund,

John Arnfield, who set up the website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk, and trained the members of the Group who manage the UCCWG pages: this role has now been taken on by Chris Bargman. Rob Harris posted the UCCWG material on the website. The website was upgraded by Lizzie Hulton-Harrop in 2021.

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- Cath Landles (Community Officer at the AONB), for continued support of the Group's work
- Shropshire Wildlife Trust, for the input of Robin Mager, the Planning & Data Systems Officer (who provided the map of Sites of Wildlife Interest)
- The farmers and landowners who helped facilitate the survey work, and provided information about land ownership

- Farmers and landowners who accepted nest-boxes on their land, for their cooperation and hospitality
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- Karen Mitchell, for publicising the Group's work, particularly via Clun Chronicle and posters, and the Facebook Group
- Clun Chronicle, for publicising the Group's work
- The National Trust, for admin support.

THANK YOU ONE & ALL

DISTRIBUTION

This report has been posted on the Community Wildlife Groups website www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

An electronic version of this Report, in .pdf format, will be supplied to the organisations listed below.

- **Natural England**
- **Environment Agency**
- **Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership**
- ***Land, Life and Livelihoods in the Clun Forest***
- **Shropshire Wildlife Trust**
- **Shropshire Council**
- **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds** (Conservation Officer, Shropshire and Staffordshire)
- **British Trust for Ornithology** (Shropshire Regional Representative)
- **Shropshire Ornithological Society (County Bird Recorder)**
- **Severn Rivers Trust**

THE REPORT

A short report will be presented to the Public Meeting on 24 November 2022, and will be circulated to the membership, and interested individuals and Agencies.

Copies can be downloaded from the website www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

Additional Copies (either paper or electronic .pdf files), or copies of any of the Reports since 2007, can be obtained from Leo Smith *Ornithological Surveys & Consultancy*; The Bryn, Castle Hill, All Stretton SY6 6JP (01694 720296, email leo@leosmith.org.uk)

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References and fieldguides used by the Plant Group for survey work include:-

The Wildflower Key (second edition): Francis Rose & Clare O' Reilly

Wildflowers of Britain and Ireland: Marjorie Blamey, Richard Fitter and Alastair Fitter

The Vegetative Key to the British Flora: John Poland and Eric Clement

New Flora of the British Isles: Third Edition Clive Stace

Sedges of the British Isles Jermy, A.C., Simpson D.A., Foley M.J.Y., Porter M.S.

Guide to Grassland Plants 1: FSC (Field Studies Council) publications

Guide to Moorland Plants FSC Publications

Guide to Woodland Plants FSC publications

Guide to Orchids FSC publications

Mosses and Liverworts of Britain and Ireland. A Field Guide. 2010. Atherton, I., Bosanquet, S., Lawley, M. (eds.).

CONCLUSION

The Group has covered the whole Upper Clun area with Bird and Plant Surveys since 2007, and knowledge of the numbers and distribution of target species is increasing. Butterfly Surveys have been carried out since 2010.

Some of the best grassland and wetland sites in the area, which contain good habitat for scarce Birds, Plants and Butterflies, have been identified. The Group has now started working with land owners to safeguard these sites. Most have been adopted as Local (County) Wildlife Sites.

The information we collected helped land owners apply for Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme agreements, and helped Natural England target these agreements for maximum benefit for wildlife in our area. Most of the best wildlife habitat in the area has been safeguarded through HLS Agreements that have 10 years to run, mainly from 2013 or 2014, and these agreements have now been extended for a further five years.

We have also worked with the local community, land owners, and the relevant Statutory and Voluntary Organisations, to raise awareness of conservation issues and influence decision-making bodies.

Planned survey work in 2023 will build on this knowledge, and enable us to extend the action to promote conservation of our target species and their habitats.

We will continue to implement our Curlew Action Plan, to try and save Curlew from local extinction as a breeding species, and work as part of the SOS "Save our Curlews" campaign.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Bird Survey

Appendix 2. Plant Survey - Target Indicator Species (Axiophytes)

Appendix 3. Curlews need farmers leaflet, produced for discussion with farmers through the Facilitation Fund Project

Annexe 1: The Management Committee

Appendix 1. Bird Survey

There were no instructions for Bird surveys in 2022,. Curlew recording was by informal submission of records to Brian Angell, who compiled maps of records, which identified the occupied territories.

There were no reports of breeding Lapwings, so there is no Table of Lapwing Survey Results.

No wetland surveys were carried out, so there are no records or map of “Other Target Species” (Snipe, Cuckoo, Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Stonechat, Linnet and Yellowhammer)

Appendix 2 Target Plant Indicator Species in the Upper Clun (The "Axiophytes")

Rush Pastures

Scientific name	Common name
<i>Achillea ptarmica</i>	Sheezwort
<i>Anagallis tenella</i>	Bog Pimpernel
<i>Briza media</i>	Quaking Grass
<i>Carex curta</i>	White Sedge
<i>Carex demissa</i>	Common Yellow Sedge
<i>Carex echinata</i>	Star Sedge
<i>Carex hostiana</i>	Tawny Sedge
<i>Carex panicea</i>	Carnation Sedge
<i>Carex pilulifera</i>	Pill Sedge
<i>Carex pulicaris</i>	Flea Sedge
<i>Comarum palustre</i>	Marsh Cinquefoil
<i>Dactylorhiza incarnata</i>	Early Marsh-orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza maculata</i>	Heath Spotted-orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza purpurella</i>	Northern Marsh-orchid
<i>Dryopteris carthusiana</i>	Narrow Buckler-fern
<i>Epilobium palustre</i>	Marsh Willowherb
<i>Equisetum sylvaticum</i>	Wood Horsetail
<i>Erica tetralix</i>	Cross-leaved Heath
<i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i>	Common Cottongrass
<i>Eriophorum vaginatum</i>	Hare's-tail Cottongrass
<i>Galium uliginosum</i>	Fen Bedstraw
<i>Isoplepis setacea</i>	Bristle Club-rush
<i>Juncus foliosus</i>	Leafy Rush
<i>Menyanthes trifoliata</i>	Bogbean
<i>Molinia caerulea</i>	Purple Moor-grass
<i>Myosotis secunda</i>	Creeping Forget-me-not
<i>Narthecium ossifragum</i>	Bog Asphodel
<i>Pedicularis sylvatica</i>	Lousewort
<i>Pinguicula vulgaris</i>	Common Butterwort
<i>Polygala serpyllifolia</i>	Heath Milkwort
<i>Pulicaria dysenterica</i>	Common Fleabane
<i>Scutellaria minor</i>	Lesser Skullcap
<i>Succisa pratensis</i>	Devil's-bit Scabious
<i>Trichophorum cespitosum</i>	Deergrass
<i>Triglochin palustre</i>	Marsh Arrowgrass
<i>Valeriana dioica</i>	Marsh Valerian
<i>Veronica catenata</i>	Pink Water-speedwell
<i>Veronica scutellata</i>	Marsh Speedwell
<i>Viola palustris</i>	Marsh Violet

Blanket Bog

Scientific name	Common name
<i>Anagallis tenella</i>	Bog Pimpernel
<i>Apium inundatum</i>	Lesser Marshwort
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	Heather
<i>Carex demissa</i>	Common Yellow Sedge
<i>Carex dioica</i>	Dioecious Sedge
<i>Carex echinata</i>	Star Sedge
<i>Carex laevigata</i>	Smooth-stalked Sedge
<i>Carex pilulifera</i>	Pill Sedge
<i>Carex pulicaris</i>	Flea Sedge
<i>Dactylorhiza incarnata</i>	Early Marsh-orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza purpurella</i>	Northern Marsh-orchid
<i>Drosera rotundifolia</i>	Round-leaved Sundew
<i>Eleocharis multicaulis</i>	Many-stalked Spike-rush
<i>Eleocharis quinqueflora</i>	Few-flowered Spike-rush
<i>Erica tetralix</i>	Cross-leaved Heath
<i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i>	Common Cottongrass
<i>Eriophorum vaginatum</i>	Hare's-tail Cottongrass
<i>Hypericum elodes</i>	Marsh St. John's-wort
<i>Isoplepis setacea</i>	Bristle Club-rush
<i>Juncus bulbosus</i>	Bulbous Rush
<i>Juncus foliosus</i>	Leafy Rush
<i>Lythrum portula</i>	Water Purslane
<i>Melampyrum pratense</i>	Common Cow-wheat
<i>Menyanthes trifoliata</i>	Bogbean
<i>Molinia caerulea</i>	Purple Moor-grass
<i>Myosotis secunda</i>	Creeping Forget-me-not
<i>Narthecium ossifragum</i>	Bog Asphodel
<i>Pedicularis palustris</i>	Marsh Lousewort
<i>Pedicularis sylvatica</i>	Lousewort
<i>Pinguicula vulgaris</i>	Common Butterwort
<i>Potamogeton polygonifolius</i>	Bog Pondweed
<i>Ranunculus omiophyllus</i>	Round-leaved Crowfoot
<i>Scutellaria minor</i>	Lesser Skullcap
<i>Trichophorum cespitosum</i>	Deergrass
<i>Valeriana dioica</i>	Marsh Valerian
<i>Veronica scutellata</i>	Marsh Speedwell
<i>Viola palustris</i>	Marsh Violet

Species-rich Meadows

Scientific name	Common name
<i>Alchemilla filicaulis</i>	a lady's-mantle
<i>Anacamptis morio</i>	Green-winged Orchid
<i>Betonica officinalis</i>	Betony
<i>Botrychium lunaria</i>	Moonwort
<i>Briza media</i>	Quaking-grass
<i>Carex caryophyllaea</i>	Spring Sedge
<i>Carex pallescens</i>	Pale Sedge
<i>Carex panicea</i>	Carnation Sedge
<i>Carex spicata</i>	Spiked Sedge
<i>Colchicum autumnale</i>	Meadow Safron
<i>Euphrasia officinalis</i> agg.	Eyebright
<i>Filipendula vulgaris</i>	Dropwort
<i>Genista tinctoria</i>	Dyer's Greenweed
<i>Linum catharticum</i>	Fairy Flax
<i>Myosotis discolor</i>	Changing Forget-me-not
<i>Myosotis ramosissima</i>	Early Forget-me-not
<i>Neottia ovata</i>	Common Twayblade
<i>Ophioglossum vulgatum</i>	Adder's-tongue
<i>Pimpinella saxifraga</i>	Burnet-saxifrage
<i>Rhinanthus minor</i>	Yellow-rattle
<i>Serratula tinctoria</i>	Saw-wort
<i>Silauum silaus</i>	Pepper-saxifrage
<i>Succisa pratensis</i>	Devil's-bit-Scabious
<i>Trisetum flavescens</i>	Yellow Oat-grass

Curlews need farmers - Information & Discussion Paper

This note has been prepared to help farmer groups discuss ways of helping to improve Curlew breeding success, which is the first step in reversing their population decline. It follows discussions at a Facilitation Fund event on 27th February 2019 for farmers to find out more about what is being done to protect and encourage Curlews to nest in the Clun Forest, and how they can help. The ideas in this note need adapting to reflect the experience of the farmers concerned, and to fit into the regime and terrain on their farms. Curlews have big territories, so hopefully farmers will be able to co-operate to produce suitable conditions over a sufficiently large area.



Curlews are slowly heading for extinction here because of poor breeding success. Adults live for many years, so the decline is slow, but not enough young birds fledge to replace the older ones as they eventually die off. In the Upper Clun, the population has declined from 20-22 pairs in 2007 to 6-10 in 2019. Most Curlews nest on farmland, so the help of farmers is vital if this decline is to be reversed.

Curlews nest on the ground. Eggs take around 4 weeks to hatch, and another 5 - 6

weeks before the chicks are able to fly, from late June onwards at the earliest. If nesting is delayed by the weather, or pairs have re-laid after losing their first clutch, many chicks can't fly until late-July or even later.

***Nesting Time***

Curlews usually return to their breeding areas in March, and start laying eggs towards the end of April. Laying is usually delayed if stock are present on the chosen nest field, to avoid the risk of eggs being trampled. Nests are usually in fields with damp patches, which are being used as rough pasture, or for growing grass to make hay or silage. Cattle pasture is preferred to sheep fields, as the uneven sward provides better cover and camouflage for nests, and retains moisture better, providing better feeding habitat. Laying is usually delayed until the grass is at least 6" (15 cm) tall.

Nests are destroyed if rolling or harrowing occurs after eggs are laid. Occasionally, some farmers find nests and mark their location, so they can avoid them later. Unfortunately, there is a risk that an obvious marker placed close to a nest, or a small part of a field which is treated differently from the rest, will attract inquisitive predators. It's not possible to pick up the eggs, and then put them back in the nest, as Curlews are very sensitive to disturbance, and will desert such nests. Also, it's illegal.

Farmers can help by:

- *Removing stock by mid-April from fields that will not be cut (or grazed) until July*
- *Leaving stock for as long as possible on fields that will be cut earlier, to encourage Curlews to nest elsewhere*
- *Grazing fields suitable for nesting Curlew with cattle, rather than sheep*
- *Completing rolling, harrowing and any other field preparation by mid-April, or as soon as possible thereafter, and certainly before late April*
- *Retaining and restoring damp areas.*

Reducing Predation

Nest monitoring and radio tracking of chicks, in the Upper Clun and elsewhere, has shown that predation of nests and chicks, mainly by foxes but also by Crows, is now the biggest threat to Curlew survival. Finding the nest, and putting an electric fence round it, protects the eggs from mammalian predators (and trampling by livestock).

Farmers can help by:

- *Controlling predators through legal means*
- *Reducing the availability of sheep carrion and afterbirth, which is a rich food source for foxes and avian scavengers and predators*
- *If a nest is found, erecting a 20m square electric fence around it, with the lowest strand only 11cm off the ground, to stop foxes getting underneath it*
- *Otherwise, calling Tim Lewis, who lives in the Upper Clun, and has extensive experience of fencing Curlew nests, who will do it for you (01588 640102, mobile 07966 180289, email: tim.p.lewis@gmail.com)*
- *If fencing is not possible, leaving any found nest undisturbed, and leaving the surrounding area the same, so the nest is not advertised to potential predators.*

Curlew chicks are not fed by their parents. They leave the nest within a day or two of hatching, and feed themselves, mainly on insects, spiders and worms. They may move several hundred metres. They are then vulnerable to Buzzards and other avian predators, as well as foxes and crows. They may stay in long grass or rushes, or move onto shorter pasture. It is important that there is lots of food, so chicks don't have to spend a lot of time in the open, and energy, looking for it, and plenty of cover for them to hide in when necessary.

Farmers can help by:

- *Using little or no pesticides or veterinary medicines, which reduce the insects and invertebrates which the chicks feed on*
- *Planting a greater diversity of leys*
- *Grazing less intensively, so there is plenty of cover*
- *Increasing the size and number of damp patches, to provide more food and avoid chicks being concentrated in a few small areas.*

Grass Cutting Time

Chicks feed mostly in the wetter areas of a field, and usually stay in deep cover. Unfledged chicks will be killed if they are in a field when the grass is cut, perhaps only a few days before they are able to fly to safety. Farming has become much more efficient, so fields are often cut earlier than they used to be, and modern machines complete the job in a day or two, rather than taking several days or weeks. Fewer chicks escape now. There is research evidence to show that this has been one of the main reasons for the decline in breeding success.

If Curlews are known to be in the area, farmers can help by:

- *Delaying grass cutting as late as possible, preferably into early August or later*
- *Checking for the presence of alarming adults in fields about to be cut, and, if they are present, delaying or calling for assistance.*
- *Cutting each field over several days, to allow the chicks to move*
- *Leaving the wetter areas uncut.*

Longer Term Action

Curlews often nest in the same places year after year, so the best way of helping them is by planning to avoid agricultural operations in known nesting areas between early April and mid-July or into August.

Farmers can help by:

- *Preparing potential or known nest sites by removing stock early, so the grass is long enough for nesting by mid-April*
- *Delaying grass-cutting in known nesting areas until mid-July*
- *Joining (or amending) an appropriate Agri-environment Scheme, to get financial help for management changes which benefit Curlews.*

Financial Help, and Advice

Farmers with a current HLS agreement can request an extension in the year prior to it expiring, while others can apply for Countryside Stewardship to fund action to help Curlews on their land. The Rural Payments Agency (RPA), Natural England and the Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group will all provide advice. Trials are underway to make future schemes more Curlew-friendly.

Annexe 1. The Management Committee

Membership

No Annual Meeting was held in 2021, because of Coronavirus..

The following people were elected for one year by email vote of the membership in November 2021

- Leo Smith (Chair)
- Jacky Harrison (Secretary)
- Mervin Mullard (Treasurer)
- Fiona Gomersall (Plant Recorder)
- Rob Rowe
- Joy Greenall
- Rob Harris
- John Lyden
- Karen Mitchell (Publicity Officer / Facebook Group)
- Katie Steggles

The Committee, and the Bird and Plant Group, have the support of Professional Advisers

- Fiona Gomersall (previously Conservation Officer Shropshire Wildlife Trust) actively supports and co-ordinates the Plant Group
- Leo Smith actively supports and helps co-ordinate the Management Committee and the Bird Group

Meetings

The Committee met once, on 22 September, mainly to plan the Annual Meeting. Some decisions earlier in the year, were taken via email correspondence, and recorded in the minutes of the September meeting.

The Group is represented on the Advisory Committee to the Land, Life and Livelihoods Facilitation Fund project by Leo Smith, Jacky Harrison and Fiona Gomersall. Rob Harris is also involved through his work with LLL, and Joy Greenall is facilitator. The project aims to encourage farmers largely on the high ground in the area to work together to provide “joined up management” to improve key upland habitats.

Otherwise, most of the practical work of the Group is carried out by the Bird and Plant Groups, and the organisers report to, and are overseen by, the Management Committee. In practice this means that it is not necessary to have frequent meetings of the Committee.

Most of the issues discussed at Committee meetings normally relate to the conduct and results of surveys, mailings to members, publicity and getting more people involved, engaging with farmers and landowners, relations with Land Life and Livelihoods and the Clun & Bishop’s Castle SWT branch, Conservation Action & *Wildlife Habitats & Landscape Policy*, the increasing attention being paid to land management issues in the whole catchment, as they affect the water quality in the river, and other matters which are fully described in this Report.

Minutes of Committee meetings have been kept, and can be obtained from the Secretary.

Funding and Bank Account

The Group had a Bank Account with HSBC, originally at the Bishop’s Castle branch, and then, following closure of that branch, in Newtown. HSBC notified the Treasurer that they would start charging a fee on the account, which was previously free. The fee would have wiped out the balance in less than a year. The Committee looked into several other possible banking arrangements, but none were found which were free, and allow for cheque to be signed by two signatures from four nominated Committee members: the current Officers, and Katie Steggles.

Up until 2011, all the costs of the Group were met through various grants to Leo Smith. From October 2011 to June 2013, all costs were met by the LEADER Community Wildlife Groups Project, administered by the Shropshire Hills AONB and part financed by the European Union Regional Development Fund, with the National Trust as Banker. These grants were listed in the Acknowledgements in the various Reports, and all of them were accounted for to the funding body.

Most grants are for the financial year ending 31st March, so the Constitution has set the financial year as 1st April – 31st March, and accounts will be audited accordingly.

Financial Report and Accounts

In 2020-21 there was no Annual meeting, and therefore no income or expenditure, apart from UCCWG's share of the cost for the website. There are no longer expenses for Group mailings (mainly postage), as these are sent by email.

After the Accounts published in the 2020 Annual Report, the only transaction during 2019-20 was the payment of the Curlew project grant to Shropshire Ornithological Society, who operated the project, resulting in the Opening Balance shown below.

Income and Expenditure for 2021 -22

OPENING BALANCE	01/10/21	459.87
INCOME	0.00	
TOTAL INCOME	0.00	
EXPENDITURE		
WEBSITE	10.00	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	10.00	
CLOSING BALANCE	31/03/22	449.87

OPENING BALANCE	01/04/22	449.87
INCOME	0.00	
EXPENDITURE	0.00	
CLOSING BALANCE		449.87

Audited by Cath Landles (AONB Community Officer) 19/10/2022

Members

Any volunteers for membership of the Committee over the next year will be very welcome.

All the current Committee members are willing to stand for re-election, apart from Rob Rowe. Rob no longer works in the area. He has been thanked for his contribution to the Group over many years.

Members of the Committee are elected at the Public Meeting,

Leo Smith (Chair)
Mervin Mullard (Treasurer)
November 2022