



## Dipper Project

### Dipper Habitat

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

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

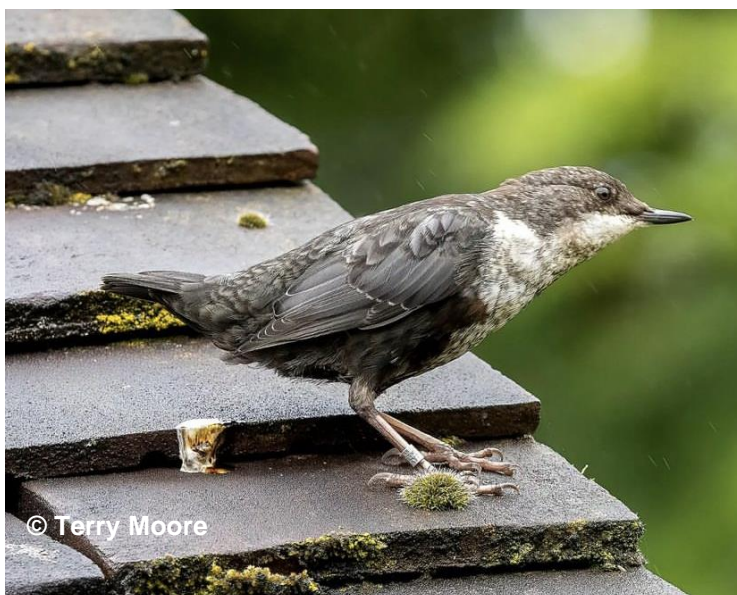
### SACWG Project

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

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

### 2022

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



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

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

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

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

## Rings

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



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

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

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

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

## Plans for 2023

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

## Acknowledgements

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Leo Smith  
Project Coordinator  
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