

# Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group

www.ShropsCWGs.co.uk



## Annual Report 2023 Summary

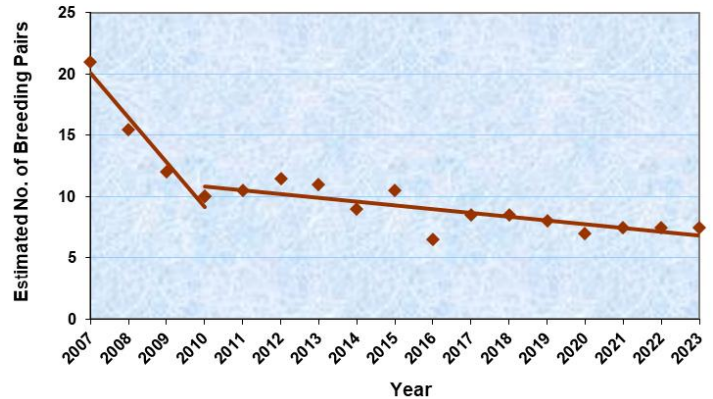
The full report can be found on the website

### Birds

We found 7-8 breeding pairs of Curlew. All are on high ground above 350m, mainly in the west. The population has declined steadily since our first survey found 20-22 pairs in 2007. There was no evidence that any young fledged.

We worked with the Shropshire Ornithological Society *Save our Curlews* Campaign 2018 – 22 to find nests and protect them with electric fences, then attach radio tags to chicks when they hatched, to see how they used the landscape and what happened

Estimated Curlew population 2007-2023



Colour-ringed Curlew chick 2022

to them. In total, 12 nests were found, and 16 chicks from 9 fenced nests were tagged. Three chicks fledged in 2021, but none in any of the other years. All the rest were predated, usually within a few days of hatching.

Last year, 3 - 5 chicks from three unfenced nests also fledged, including the colour-ringed chick in the photo. No fledged young were found in any other year, or 2020, apart from the three in 2021. Curlews don't return to their breeding sites until they are two, so we hope last year's chicks will return next year to give the local breeding population a welcome boost.

Lapwings 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. No young are known to have fledged since 2008, so Lapwings appear to be extinct as a breeding species.

Snipe have disappeared too, with four pairs on Rhos Fiddle in 2009, but the last known breeding evidence from that site was in 2010.

Kestrels are declining, but two successful nests with 8 young were found.

Eight Red Kite nests were again found this year, including three at sites that had been used previously but were unoccupied last year. Seven were successful, producing at least 8 young. Red Kite is a conservation success story. First breeding in the area was in 2007, and since then a total of 67 nests have been found, 47 were successful, producing 63-70 young.

Dippers inhabit the fast-flowing rocky streams. Many nest in boxes put up by the Group. Twenty-seven potential sites were monitored, 12 active nests were found, and 26 chicks were ringed and are believed to have fledged.

We also operate a nest box scheme for woodland birds, with Pied Flycatcher and Redstart as the target species. Five members sent in reports of their own boxes. In addition, a much larger scheme (over 700 boxes) is operated by the Shropshire Ringing Group. Altogether, almost 400 Pied Flycatcher chicks fledged.



Female Pied Flycatcher with eggs

## Plants

Nine volunteers, including one new member, variously carried out the surveys in 2023, collecting valuable information on three sites. Good species lists were compiled along with useful information about the sites.

The Group particularly looks for the Shropshire 'axiophytes', plant 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 Riddings, Anchor

This extensive Local Wildlife Site (LWS) used to boast the most axiophytes in the Upper Clun. Sadly, the various habitats appear to have declined along with many of the axiophytes.

### The Cote, Beguildy

The site has a good mix of farm habitats including rush pasture, both acid and neutral grassland, flush, pond, stream and river. The habitats all looked to be in good condition.

Some of the other axiophytes recorded included: *Achillia ptarmica* Sneezewort, *Alchemilla xanthochlora* Intermediate Lady's-mantle, *Carex echinata* Star Sedge, *Carex panicea* Carnation Sedge, *Dactylorhiza maculata* Heath Spotted-orchid, *Danthonia decumbens* Heath-grass, *Hypericum humifusum* Trailing St John's-wort, *Pedicularis sylvatica* Lousewort, *Polygala serpyllifolia* Heath Milkwort, *Prunus padus* Bird Cherry, *Senecio aquaticus* Marsh Ragwort and *Sucissa pratensis* Devil's-bit Scabious.

### Pound Gate Meadows

Only one of the two meadows forming this LWS was surveyed. It was in a favourable condition, with good species distribution and richness, and very few weedy species, Six meadow indicator species were recorded at high frequencies, meaning that the meadow satisfies the criteria for a species-rich meadow and as an LWS.



Devil's-bit Scabious

In 2023 a total of 54 different axiophytes was recorded on the 3 sites, including those which are in decline across the UK: *Alchemilla xanthochlora* Intermediate Lady's-mantle, *Galium uliginosum* Fen Bedstraw, *Leontodon hispidus* Rough Hawkbit, *Leontodon saxatilis* Lesser Hawkbit, *Sucissa pratensis*, *Achillia ptarmica* Sneezewort, *Myosotis dubia* Meadow Forget-me-not, *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* Marsh Pennywort, *Dactylorhiza maculata* Heath Spotted-orchid and *Carex paniculata* Greater Tufted Sedge.

The Group has been surveying since 2007,

and the main focus has been on the Local Wildlife Sites. Much of the work has concentrated on rush pasture, bogs and unimproved grassland habitats. These wetlands support vulnerable and threatened species like the Curlew and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary butterfly, as well as important plants.

The Group works closely with farmers and other land-owners, who are offered advice on managing their sites.

It is concerning that there is no dedicated Natural England adviser for the Clun area and no SWT Conservation Officer to advise on LWS management and take-up of farm subsidies. Good advice may well have averted some of the issues contributing to the decline of The Riddings site.



The Group surveying at The Cote, Beguildy



Sneezewort

## Butterflies

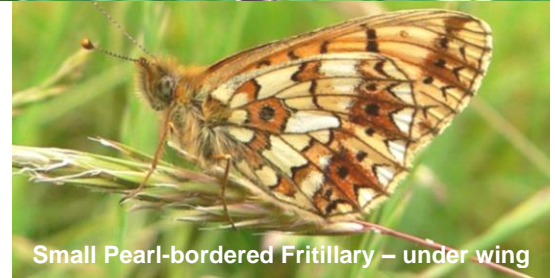
Surveys of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries started in 2010 and have been conducted annually. This is a UKBAP priority species, which has suffered long term decline across the UK. There are several local sites where it is found, including five good ones and two that are regionally significant. The most important sites are Barretts West (Masons Bank West Wildlife Site), Pant-y-Lidan and Gors Bank.

Numbers recorded at Barretts West were healthy, the largest single count (50 individuals) recorded at the site. In addition, a healthy population was recorded at a new site at Cwm, near Llanfair Waterdine.

Another Fritillary species, the Dark Green Fritillary, occurs regularly in our area, generally spotted flying strongly and rarely seeming to stop. Like the Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary, the caterpillars feed on violet plants, in this case Dog Violets, *Viola riviniana*, which are pretty widespread in woods, hedgerows and permanent pasture in the Upper Clun Valley.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary at Barratt's West



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – under wing

A third species, the Silver Washed Fritillary, may also be colonising the upper Clun



Wood White

The Wood White is a nationally 'Endangered' species whose steady recovery is being successfully managed by Butterfly Conservation volunteers and Forestry England at Bury Ditches and elsewhere in the Marches. It is found in Blakeridge Wood, in the extreme east of our area. The species appears to be spreading and has been recorded from a number of local woods. There have been no Wood White records this year, although there has been an anecdotal report of a sighting near Cefn Einion.

A rather unusual migrant from North Africa and the Mediterranean was recorded this year, coinciding with the arrival of Saharan sands on the wind, coating cars and washing. The Olive Tree Pearl moth *Palpita vitrealis* has only been recorded in Shropshire a handful of times in the past hundred years.

An Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group recording 'activity' was set up on iRecord at the end of 2019. Between January and mid-November 2023, 29 butterfly species and 244 moth species had been reported by 13 recorders from 23 widely distributed sites around the Upper Clun Valley. iRecord is very easy to use, working on both computer or smartphone, and all records are important, even the most common species. Please add your records.

The Wildlife Group wants to work closely with local farmers.

The vast majority of land in the 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 farmers' active cooperation and support.

In 2018, Land, Life & Livelihoods secured a 3-year "Facilitation Fund" grant from Natural England, through a joint application with the Wildlife Group. This aims to help farmers to work together to find ways to conserve soil, water, wildlife and landscape, and improve farm viability, by going beyond what could be delivered by individual holdings acting in isolation. The area covered comprises the parishes of Mainstone, Newcastle, Bettws-y-Crwyn and Llanfair Waterdine.

Bringing farmers 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.

For example, several "Curlews need Farmers" events have been held, and an Information and Discussion Paper has been prepared to help farmer groups discuss ways of helping to improve Curlew breeding success.

**The Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group has been surveying iconic birds, plants and butterflies since 2007.**

**We will be doing so again in 2023, and we'd like more help, please.**

## **Participants**

Nineteen people helped with Curlew surveys, and another 12 sent in Curlew Records; 9 helped with plant surveys, 1 submitted butterfly and moth records, and there are 10 on the Committee. Thank you, one and all.

Over the years, well over 100 people have contributed, a very high proportion of the local population. Interest and enthusiasm are more important than expertise, so please join in.

## **Area of Operation**

We cover the catchment area of the River Clun west of Clun, including the valleys of the River Unk and the Folly Brook, plus the part of the Bettws y Crwyn parish that is outside the River Clun catchment area. This is around 110 square kilometres.

## **Aims & Objectives**

We

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

## **Membership**

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

## **Constitution**

We have a Constitution, an elected Committee, and a bank account.

## **Website and Facebook Group**

Keep in touch through our website, [www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk), and join our Facebook Group (log into Facebook, enter the Group's full name in the search, and click on it when the name comes up: 68 members so far).

## **Conservation Action**

We not only survey species of conservation concern, we also work to increase their population and improve their habitats. We work closely with other statutory bodies and community organisations, and have published four advice leaflets on habitat management. There is an extensive chapter on Conservation Action in the full report.

You can find more information about the *Save our Curlews* project to protect nests and track chicks on the SOS website, [www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/](http://www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/) There is increasing evidence that the release of large numbers of Pheasants for shooting, 726,000 in Shropshire in 2018 alone, is fuelling a big increase in the numbers of predators that eat Curlew eggs and chicks.

**The full Annual Report can be viewed on, or downloaded from, our website  
[www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk)**

**If you want to go on our mailing list, or you want to help with a survey, or get more information, please ask the Secretary**

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**Contact Jacky or any other Survey Leader or Committee Member via the Group's email address  
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