



**Strettons Area  
Community Wildlife  
Group**

**Annual Report 2024**



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Geoff Hall

Cover illustration by Geoff Hall





# Introduction

## Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

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

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

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



[SACWG has its own section](#) on the Community Wildlife Groups website, where there are updates on survey activities and the latest discoveries. We encourage all members to share their wildlife experiences and photographs. If you have seen something interesting or taken a good photograph, please let the web manager know by emailing [SACWG\\_WebAdmin@shropscwgs.org.uk](mailto:SACWG_WebAdmin@shropscwgs.org.uk)

*Committee members (bold) and project leaders 2024: Isabel Carter (chair), Julie Cowley (secretary), Penny Bienz (publicity), Sally Mawhinny (website), Will Priestley (treasurer), John Bacon, Leo Smith, Steve Butler, Mike Carter and Sandra Whitlock.*

## Birdfest 2024

This year saw the very successful Birdfest in March. This brought in over 250 visitors, many of them our key target group of youngsters. Funding from Focus and the Town Council to enable the Birds of Prey speaker, hire of Mayfair, generous prizes, refreshments and speaker fees, undoubtedly resulted in a lot of extra visitors. The quality of the various speakers was excellent. The talk by the lady from the Birds of Prey Centre in Battlefields drew a huge crowd with a Barn Owl flying around the room. Younger children loved the crafts room and building nest boxes. Dave Pearce led a bird walk during the event with a follow-up event a



week later – designed to encourage younger birders. Both were well attended. There were stalls from SWT, SACWG bird surveys, Swifts in the Strettons, bird feeder hygiene, a bird song quiz and a wonderful rolling screen presentation of bird photos from Geoff Hall.



The refreshment area was busy all day, providing free refreshments to all speakers and volunteers as a small way of expressing our appreciation, and also resulting in a good profit for SACWG too. Our thanks to all the speakers and volunteers who helped make it such a success.

## Nature in the Strettons

The ‘Nature in the Strettons’ cooperation, steered by SACWG, continues - with improved communications between all the various local organizations and the added benefit of a shared website where members can share information about forthcoming events and meetings (managed by Joan Arnfield). The [website](#) provides an easy way for local residents to learn about all that is going on and make contact with the different groups. Two new groups have joined in the past year – High Leasowes and Wild about Westhope.

## Garden survey and Bioblitz 2025 - Saturday 28th June

This year SACWG is planning to undertake a garden survey, replicating one done in 2005. This will comprise an online survey followed up by a Garden Bioblitz at the end of June with small groups visiting gardens to carry out a more detailed survey of birds, butterflies, bumble bees, mammals and dragonflies. We plan to provide training to encourage the use of data recording apps, including one for children. The overall aims are to:

- Map wildlife habitats in the Strettons’ gardens
- Educate and improve identification skills
- Improve garden wildlife within five years (in line with the 30 x 30 focus)
- Enthuse the next generation

**Isabel Carter, Chair, February 2025**



# Project Activities and Results

## Stretton Wetlands

### Cudwell Meadow

#### Management

Just as last year, this year brought an abundance of rain and storms so that the meadow became a lake for 5 months of the year. There was concern over possible sewage pollution with a large growth of brown algae. The Environment Agency responded quickly and sent out someone to check. We were reassured that this was a false alarm.



No sheep could be brought in before May and indeed the damp conditions meant that for the first time in five years, no tractor could safely be brought in for hay making. It will be interesting to assess the repercussions of this on the flora and fauna. However, from the end of July to end of September, a good-sized flock of sheep munched their way through the long grass. By way of thanks the farmer topped the meadow, helping to keep down unwanted weeds.



Recovery from the flooding was surprisingly fast once warm dry weather began in April. This year the meadow was opened every weekend with a gentle flow of visitors. We held two open evenings in July; this time encouraging fauna ID as well as flora walks. This proved very popular with around 15-20 visitors each time, finding a good range of grasshoppers, beetles and birds.

An owl box was donated by a neighbour adjacent to the meadow and positioned high in the woods. Funding from the Civic Society was used to purchase and erect a seat and a bench, both with excellent views over the meadow and surrounding hills.

In October flooding returned again. Volunteers tried out a new approach - underwater scything – in the hope of controlling the growth of Common Rush. The scrape was cleared out and vegetation cut back in November when a short break of dry weather permitted access.

### Wildlife observations

There have been regular sightings of Otter along the brook, particularly during the colder months. In the spring there was an almost complete dearth of frog and toad spawn, but tiny frogs are still frequently seen in the area around the scrape.

There has been an increase in sightings of dragonflies and damselflies with reports submitted to i-Record of Common Darter, Golden Ringed, Southern Hawker, Azure damselfly, Broad Bodied Chaser and Large Red damselfly. The scrape has definitely helped.



A Redstart was seen for the first time in the meadow and Little Owl heard calling in the adjacent woods.



Monthly Bumble Bee walks continue with the data submitted to Bumble Bee Conservation. May was a particularly good month with a good number of bee and species, including the first sighting of Bilberry Bumble bee in the meadow. But the summer months were poor, as they were nationwide with cool wet weather. Sightings picked up in the autumn a little. If more volunteers are interested, we could consider setting up a bee walk in another area.

### Changes in the flora

Prolonged inundation during the past two winters raise questions about the future management of the meadow and whether future hay crops can be taken. Dock and rush continue to encroach. A full botanical survey will be done in 2025. One new plant species was identified; Water Plantain, bringing the total to 167.

Isabel Carter, February 2025



# Swifts in the Strettons

## Purpose and objectives of the project

The swift (*Apus apus*) is red listed as a bird of conservation concern (due to falling population numbers) and it is thought that the loss of nest sites due to modern building methods and materials has played a key role in their decline. By recording known nest locations, it is possible to monitor whether these sites continue to be used in subsequent years or whether new sites are selected. It is also important to liaise with residents, builders and planners when work to improve properties is carried out to ensure the preservation of nesting opportunities. Surveying also indicates where it might be worthwhile installing artificial nest boxes to increase colony size – the birds are sociable and tend to nest within close range of each other.

Swifts are commonly observed in and around the Strettons but there was no formal recording of the locations of nest sites or the number of birds until 2014, when the first “Swifts in the Strettons” was inaugurated by the Stretton Area Community Wildlife Group, under the leadership of Peta Sams. Observations were carried out in 2015 and 2016 which enabled the earlier study to be built on and extended. Nest sites have been recorded annually since then, and results are presented in this report.

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

## RESULTS

### General Observations of Swifts in the Strettons

Early May saw the return of a few swifts to the Strettons, and by 9 May birds were observed entering existing nest sites. These birds are breeding adults, having travelled thousands of miles to return here to breed. They will familiarize themselves with their lifelong mate and rest and recuperate from the journey before embarking on an intense, short breeding season of just three months.

The 2024 season appeared to start slow, with few confirmed sightings of nest sites until June. Inclement spring weather will send the adult birds away in search of food, returning to their nest site late in the evening and this makes surveying challenging.

Once the weekly surveys took place in June, the numbers recorded improved and by the end of the season a total of 35 natural nest sites were confirmed, as well as seven nest box sites.

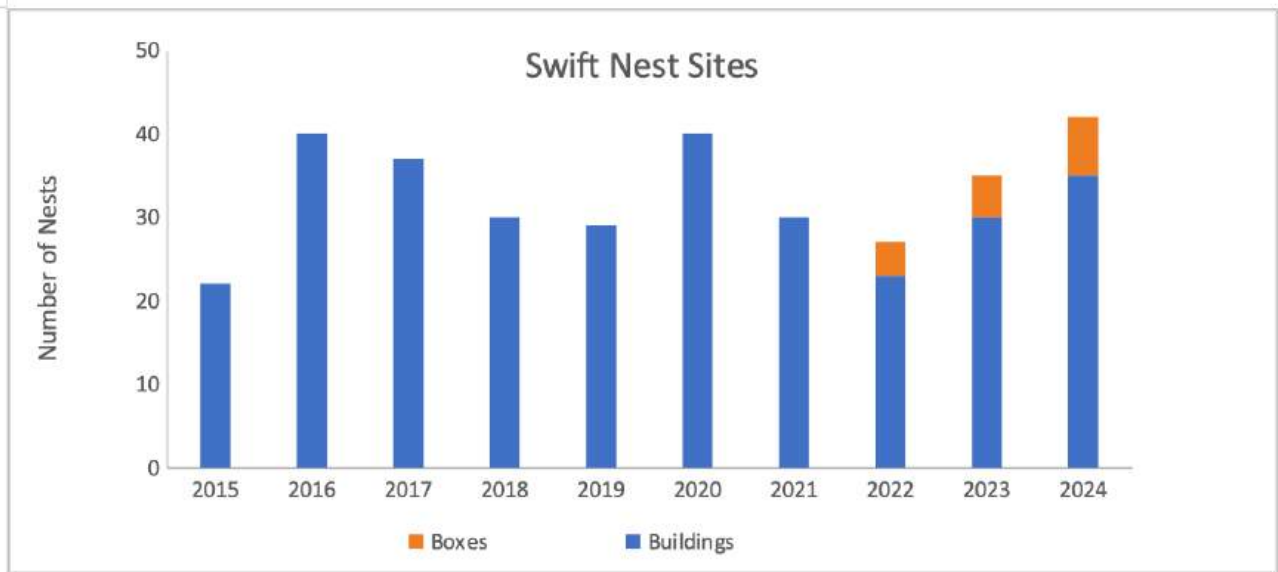
The total number of nests recorded was up compared to 2023. The past two years have seen just one nest site on Essex Road (a former stronghold) however this year three nest boxes were also occupied as well as a natural site. Unfortunately, Watling Street South did not fair so well, and just one breeding pair was recorded on a longstanding site. The Sandford Nursing Home has lost all its breeding swifts for the second year running, and the area has a distinct lack of swifts flying around when previously screaming parties of 8-10 birds could be observed each evening. The last date of observation of a swift was 8 August 2024.

The graph depicts the trend for active nest sites observed; it is not possible to know how successful a breeding pair has been, this only becomes apparent over time, shown in how stable the local breeding population remains. This ten-year period (2015-2024) shows a fluctuation in the population, typically seen in a predator/prey relationship but as swifts are insectivorous birds the population may be responding more





to climatic changes, the impact of pesticide usage, and/or the loss of insect habitat, or simply the nuances of the survey methodology. Regardless, it is evident that in the past three years the installation of swift boxes has provided nesting opportunities that might otherwise not be available.



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

### CONCLUSIONS

Whilst 2024 appears to have been a positive year as far as the number of nest sites recorded is concerned, the weather throughout spring and summer was poor. Moreover, it is well recognized that insect populations are declining (UK Parliament, 2024), and both these factors will influence the local swift population in future years. As food productivity is down fewer swiftlets will have fledged and therefore fewer birds will return to breed in the future. The adult birds will also have been affected, for example, an adult swift that was taken into Cuan Wildlife Rescue in August should have weighed 35g + for it to survive the return journey to Africa, it was 27g. Adult swifts leave for Africa as soon as their young have fledged and unlike a lot of migratory birds, they do not remain here to fatten up, preferring to commence their journey immediately.

It is imperative that providing nest sites and suitable habitat for insects is taken seriously to improve the chances for the Strettons swift population and help secure it for the future. Installing ponds, creating flowering habitats (gardens, meadows, and verges), and maintaining our tree canopy will all help in providing habitat for insects, thus providing foraging opportunity for swifts.

The townsfolk of the Strettons are keen to support the local swift population, and 2024 saw the Co-op and Focus jointly pay for the installation of a three-nest swift box on the Co-op building and a solar panel enabled call attraction system to be run during the breeding season to attract juvenile swifts to the box. It will be interesting to see if swifts do breed there in the future.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This survey would not have been possible without the efforts of Steve Mellor, June Holloway, Tony Jones, Isabel Carter, Kate Hudson, Richard Bacon, Gay Walker, Sandra Whitlock, Will Priestley, Barbara Hall, Anne Cronin, Yvonne Bairstow, Janet Longstaff, Darren Hall, and Andrew Morton.





## REFERENCES

UK Parliament. 2024.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmsctech/326/report.html#heading-4> [Accessed 18/11/2024].

**Julie Cowley**

**18 November 2024**

### **IMPORTANT: Confidentiality**

**This is an edited version of the report without specific site information. Should you need to know further information please pass your request to Julie Cowley (email: [juliecowley463@gmail.com](mailto:juliecowley463@gmail.com) or phone: 07580159183), who will consider whether this is appropriate.**



# Bat survey report

## INTRODUCTION

The focus of the 2024 survey season concentrated on four primary areas: Little Stretton - as it has not been formally surveyed to date, Coppice Leasowes nature reserve, the town park, and Snatchfields – to provide data to feed into the Church Stretton Neighbourhood Plan. Surveys were carried out by Sue Rooney, supported by Julie Cowley.

## METHOD

The initial plan was to repeat the surveys twice at each of the sites but poor weather during the summer limited the number of survey evenings. Bat species were recorded using an Echometer Touch 2 bat detector, a Full Spectrum device which features GPS, sonogram recording and Auto ID. Although the Auto ID is a useful real-time indicator of possible bat species present, it cannot be relied upon to be correct. The sonograms were further analysed using the BTO Acoustic Pipeline and then individual sonograms inspected to confirm and verify down to species level, particularly in the case of less common species. This work was carried out by Sue Rooney.

## RESULTS

Results for the three survey evenings are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Bat species recorded at the four sites.**

SPECIES	LITTLE STRETTON	RUSSELLS MEADOW	COPPICE LEASOWES	RECREATION PARK	SNATCHFIELDS
Common pipistrelle	Y	Y	Y		Y
Soprano pipistrelle	Y	Y	Y		Y
Myotis sp (Daubenton's)	Y				Y
Myotis sp (Natterer's)					Y
Noctule		Y	Y		Y
Brown long-eared		Y			Y

## CONCLUSIONS

### LITTLE STRETTON

The results for Little Stretton were surprisingly low on species and abundance recorded. However, the evening was chilly and overcast so conditions were not ideal. There is suitable breeding and roosting habitat within the village such that it warrants a visit to survey this area again in the future.

### RUSSELLS MEADOW

There is a riparian corridor lining the stream at Russells Meadow and four bat species were observed feeding along the tree line. Roosting habitat is also available, emphasising the importance of this narrow strip of woodland.

### COPPICE LEASOWES

Coppice Leasowes has suitable wetland and some associated trees although the site is mainly open. Sandford town park has an assortment of mature deciduous trees including oak. Nevertheless, the survey



results for these two locations were disappointing; perhaps foraging at these contiguous sites is affected by the number of streetlights in the area and the proximity to road noise.

#### **SNATCHFIELDS**

The barns at Snatchfields are clearly habitat for a variety of bat species and the whole site was encouraging, with six species recorded. The adjacent woodland will also provide foraging, breeding and roosting habitat and perhaps the regular presence of sheep in the field means there are more insects present.

**Author/Project Lead: Julie Cowley, Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group, 20 November 2024.**

**Data collection and analysis: Sue Rooney.**



## Butterfly Group

### Butterfly ID

A very successful butterfly ID training day was held in June in All Stretton Village Hall, led by Mike Williams of West Midlands Butterfly Conservation. 14 people attended. We were all troubled by the lack of butterflies this summer, highlighted by the afternoon's practical session in Jinlye meadow which only yielded 3 species of butterfly, though there was plenty of other interest.

Two opportunities for surveying followed in July; the first also disappointing, but the second, with Jenny Joy from West Midlands Butterfly Conservation, proved very successful. We had the opportunity to visit the NT meadows in Batch Valley as well as the valley itself. The first meadow in particular proved very fruitful with good numbers of five species plus the joy of a rarer butterfly that posed helpfully for photos - a White Letter Hairstreak. Jenny Joy was full of interesting information on lifecycles and foodplants.

As a follow-up a small group hopes to form to undertake occasional surveys together and discuss more regular transects. Martin and Jan Hegmann are willing to take on the leadership of the SACWG butterfly surveys which is a great encouragement. Peter and Jane Howsam continue to do regular Grayling surveys on the Long Mynd and report reasonable numbers. West Midlands Butterfly Conservation are helping with habitat improvements in suitable areas of the Long Mynd; generally removing excess growth of gorse to expose the rocky soils which the Grayling favour.



Please email if this is something you would like to be part of: [SACWG\\_Chair@shropscwgs.org.uk](mailto:SACWG_Chair@shropscwgs.org.uk)



# Strettons Meadows Group

## Eastern Ragleth Meadows Management Report for 2024.

My daughter (Jacqui Brooks of Dryhill Farm, next door) and I (John Bacon of Clemcroft) are continuing to manage our 'SO49.41 County Wildlife Site' – a 3+ hectare meadow for flowers, butterflies, invertebrates and other wildlife. We additionally manage the adjoining Ragleth Meadow on behalf of the NT as part hay meadow and part wood pasture meadow. This all involves monitoring and looking after the wildlife in spring, summer and autumn, collecting and broadcasting hay seeds and then managing and grazing / mowing the grass swards through autumn, winter and spring with our small flock of Badger Face sheep. The changes in our climate, with such a huge amount of wet weather - over 42 inches of rain in 2024! - continues to make it quite a challenge!

### Contacts: East Ragleth Meadow Group

John Bacon: [baconjohn48@gmail.com](mailto:baconjohn48@gmail.com)

MMG: <https://www.marchesmeadowgroup.com/>

MMCLT: <https://middlemarchescommunitylandtrust> Shropshire Hills National

Landscape: [www.shropshirehills-nl.org.uk](http://www.shropshirehills-nl.org.uk)

Stepping Stones Project [kate.nixon@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:kate.nixon@nationaltrust.org.uk)

## The National Trust's Ragleth Meadow (RM) and Ragleth Wood (RW) activity report.

October 2023 to 15<sup>th</sup> January 2025

(Activities actioned by volunteer John Bacon (JB) unless otherwise noted).

- 10/10/23. Flower seeds collected from Dryhill triangle and Clemcroft garden spread on NT meadow hay area – Burnet Saxifrage, Betony, Harebells, Cowslips, Hardheads.
- 16/10/23. Planted 60 cowslip plants (from Clemcroft herb garden) in middle of hay area.
- 24/11/23. E mailed NT staff re waxcaps to be identified. Rob Rowe offered 25<sup>th</sup>.
- 13/12/23. Typed and submitted annual report November 22 to October 23.
- 15/2/24. E mailed NT staff re hay crop plans for 2024; and Jeremy Dale 27<sup>th</sup>.
- 19/3/24 & 26/3/24. Spear thistle rosettes removed using Laze Dog Tool. (circa 400 rosettes, 5 bag fulls!).
- 16/5, 27/5, 4/6, 11/6, 21/6. Emerging bracken fronds invading along western boundary pulled out.
- 28/6. E mailing Jeremy Dale /Patrick re Tom Powell hay making proposal.
- 28/6, 29/6, 8/7, 17/7, 31/7. Roguing scattered thistles, docks, ragwort and hogweed prior to hay cut.
- 19/7, 30/7. Butterfly transect walk. (Dark Green Frits, Marbled Whites (5), Small Skippers, Small Heath, Ringlets, Meadow Browns, Six Spot Burnet Moths; 60 Bumble Bees (including Bilberry [D Viver]).
- 26/7. Walk with Rob Lee re possible Hay Rattle seed collection. (Seed capsules mostly emptied).
- 5/8, 6/8. Tom Powell made and carted hay on 'hay area'.
- 7/8, 8/8. Repaired Dryhill's track to NT field after hay extraction damage.
- 15/8. E mailed Libby and Jeremy re hay payments.
- 11/11. Trimmed hedge branches back from entrance gateway.
- 13/12. E mailed Dominic to welcome and make contact.
- 30/12. Flower seeds collected from Clemcroft native lawns spread on molehills in middle of hay area and raked in.

**Grazing License 23/24:**

- 17/10/23. Paid NT grazing license for November 23 to October 24.
- 23/11/23. Strimmed electric tapes prior to grazing sheep.
- 26/11/23 to 11/2/24. 8 sheep on hay area and 'wood pasture' area. 77 days x 8 sheep = 616 sheep days.
- 9/3/24 to 15/3/24. 8 sheep on hay area and 'wood pasture' area. (One sheep removed with gid and put down by F. M. Caine). 7 days x 8 sheep = 56 sheep days.
- 16/3/24 to 17/3/24. 7 sheep on hay area and 'wood pasture' area. 2 days x 7 sheep = 14 sheep days.
- 18/3/24 to 30/3/24. 7 sheep to hay area; 1 pony to wood pasture. 12 days x 7 sheep = 84 sheep days + 12 pony days.
- 30/3/24 to 5/4/24. 7 sheep to wood pasture. 1 pony to hay area. 7 sheep days x 7 sheep = 49 sheep days + 7 pony days.
- 5/4/24 to 20/4/24. 7 sheep to all of meadow. 15 sheep days x 7 sheep = 105 sheep days.
- 20/4/24. Sheep feet trimmed; 2/6/24. Sheep shorn and feet trimmed; 26/8 feet trimmed.
- 29/10. License signed and payment made for period November 24 to October 25.

Total Grazed days 23/24 License: 924 sheep days + 19 pony days.

**Grazing License 24/25 ongoing:**

10/11 to 15/1/25. Feet trimmed and 7 sheep to NT Meadow hay area and wood pasture on rotation according to grass growth and weather conditions. 66 sheep days x 7 sheep = 462 sheep days.

**Report written by John Bacon.** E mail: [baconjohn48@gmail.com](mailto:baconjohn48@gmail.com) Tel: 01694 723112.





# Curlews, lapwings and other bird surveys

## Introduction

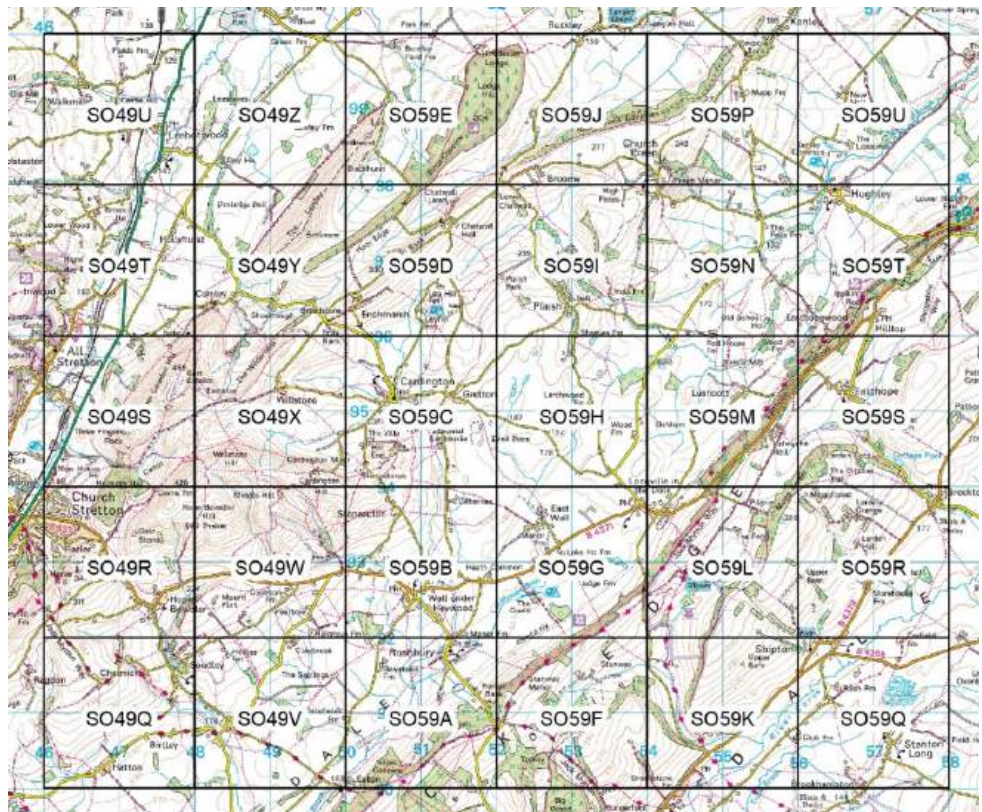


Lapwing and Curlew have both suffered a massive contraction in range and population decline in the last 20 years or so, nationally and locally. Curlew has been described as the UK's highest bird conservation priority, as we have an estimated 28% of the European breeding population, and 19 – 27% of the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

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

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

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



Surveyors were recruited for all of the 30 squares, and were asked to make three visits, around 1

April, 1 May and mid-June, at times convenient to them, with visits concentrating on habitats where the main target species might be found, and lasting around three hours each. The surveys were conducted from

Public Rights of Way, unless individual surveyors obtained landowners permission to leave them. Survey maps and recording instructions were supplied. A practical fieldwork training meeting was held for those that wanted one.

The survey was a success, and all 30 squares were covered. It has been repeated each year since 2018, using the same methodology and aiming to cover the same 30 squares, but coverage was limited in 2020 due to coronavirus restrictions. In 2022, two squares to the west, SO49J and P, were added to the survey area, and these were surveyed in 2023 and 2024 as well. Recording of the 23 Other Target Species, monitored up until 2023, was discontinued in 2024. Surveyors were requested to enter records of all species onto BTO BirdTrack. Eight new participants came on the training meeting.

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

In 2024

- Almost all squares were surveyed (28 out of 32)
- There were 46 participants.
- They put in over 330 hours of survey effort
- 10 new participants attended a practical outdoor training session

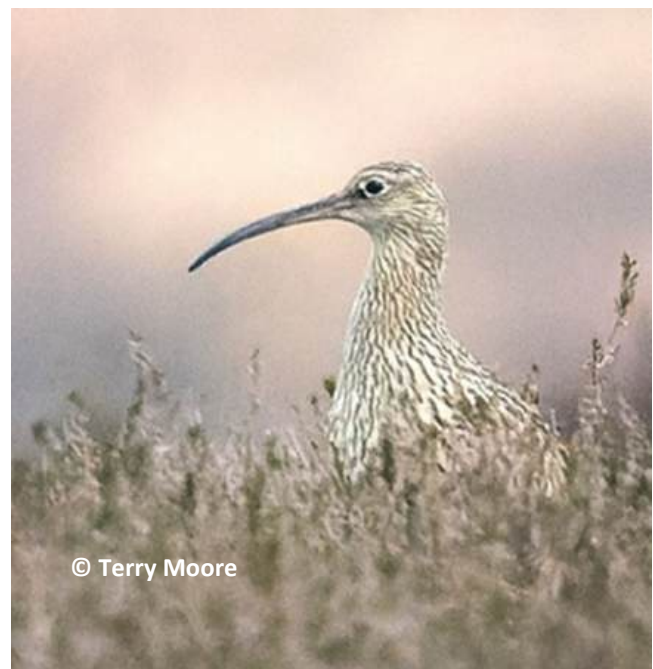
This is a similar level of coverage as in the previous years since 2021.

## Curlew

Curlew is the “most pressing bird conservation priority in the UK” (Brown *et al*, *British Birds* 2015), because the UK has an estimated 28% of the European, and 19-27% of the world population and is on the national *Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern 4* (Eaton *et al*, *British Birds* 2015), because of a decline of 62% in the UK between 1969 and 2014. It remained on the revised *Red List* published in 2021.

The BTO Breeding Bird Survey has found a 50% decline in the UK, and a 32% decline in England, over the 27-year period 1995-2022 (the most recent figures available).

In Shropshire, it declined from about 700 breeding pairs in 1990 to 160 in 2010 (a loss of 77%), and it disappeared from 62% of the Atlas survey squares (tetrads) between 1985-90 and 2008-13.



The decline has continued, and there were probably less than 120 pairs left in the whole of the County in 2024. This is over 20% of the total in southern England, south of a line from the Dee estuary to The Wash (*Saving England's lowland Eurasian Curlews* Colwell *et al* *British Birds* 2020). At the current rate of decline, the County population will halve in about 12 years, and become virtually extinct in 24. Curlew is on the *Red*

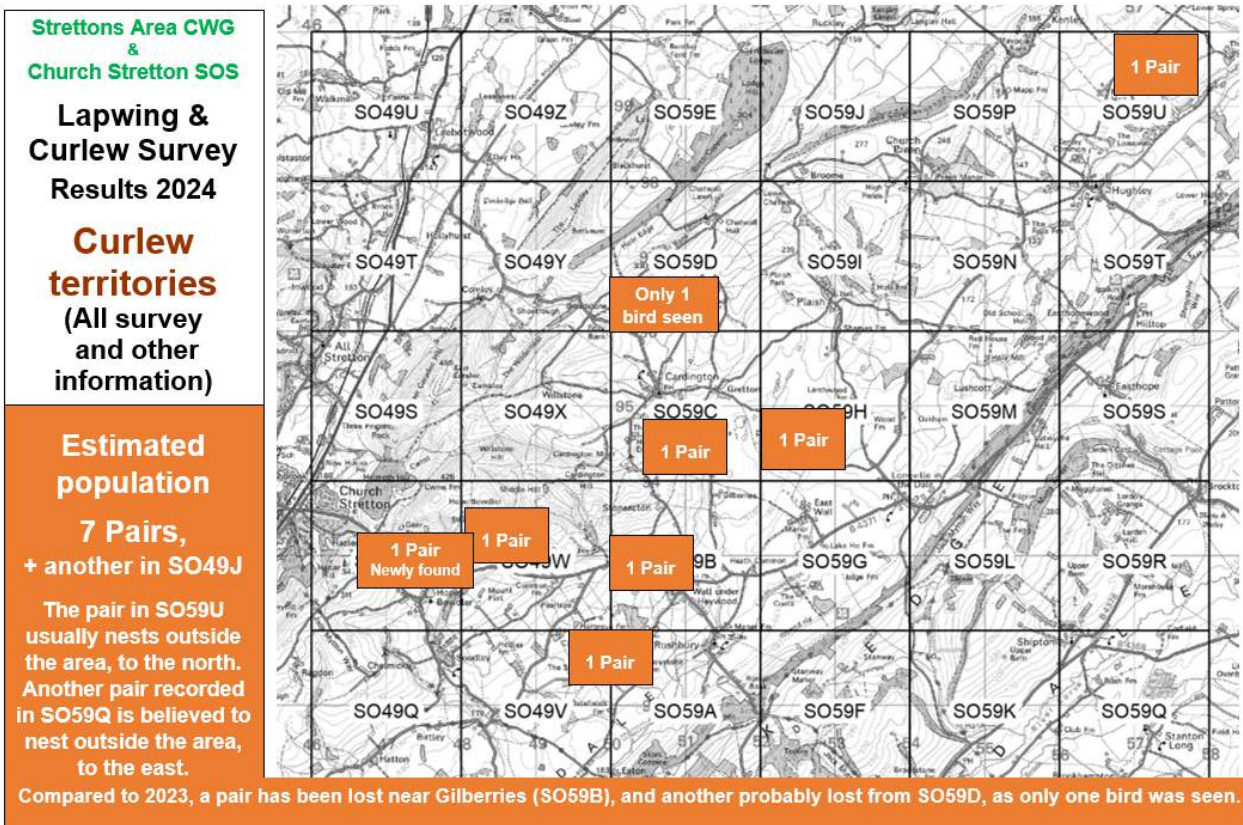




List of Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire, published by Shropshire Ornithological Society in 2019.

In the Strettons area, no Curlew nests or chicks have been found by the Bird survey, and it is believed that none fledged in the area in the four years 2021 - 24. In 2020, one pair had chicks, but there was no evidence of any fledged young. There was no evidence that the Curlews produced any chicks, let alone fledged young in 2019, but there were at least two chicks (outcome unknown) in 2018.

Seven breeding pairs (territories) were located in 2024 in the area surveyed since 2017, as shown on the Map. A further pair was located in SO49J, to the west of Leebotwood, one of the two squares added to the survey area in 2022. Only an unpaired bird was found in SO59D, in a territory previously occupied since 2020.

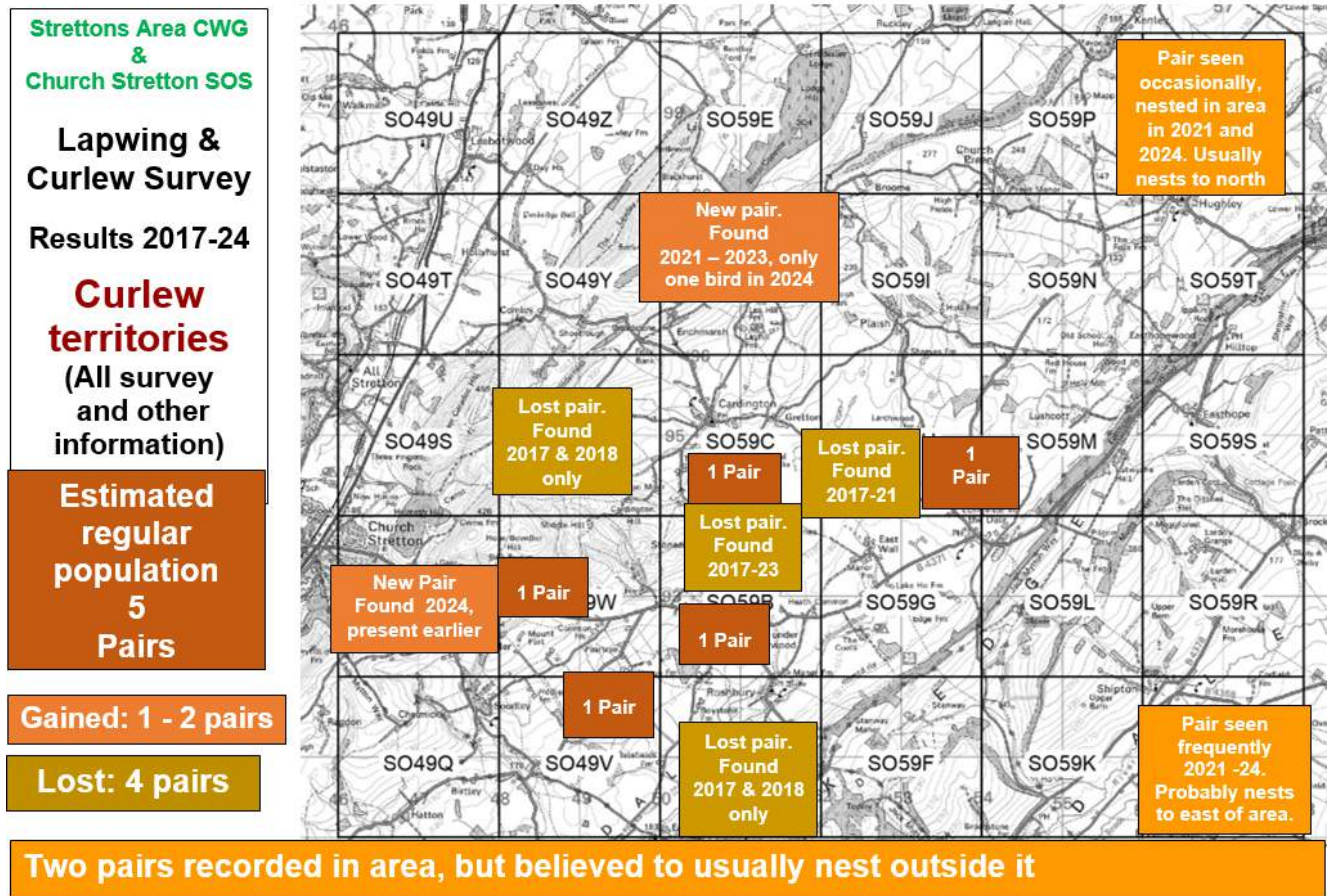


Adult Curlews are generally site-faithful, so it is possible to compare results year on year. The Curlew results since 2017 have been assessed, and the results are shown on the following map. The initial apparent increase in the population is probably due to better coverage year on year, as surveyors got to know their squares better, then in 2020 as a result of people exercising from home, as a result of covid-19 restrictions, rather than being away at work, or on holiday.

Most pairs present in 2024 have been present each year since 2017, but it appears that two pairs were lost in 2019, a pair was gained in 2021, and another was lost in 2022. Two other pairs have been recorded in the area on a regular basis, but records received in 2023 indicate that these pairs usually nest just outside the area, although the one north of SO59U nested in the area in 2021 and 2024 only. Only one bird, not a breeding pair, was found in SO59D. A new breeding site was found in SO49R, but local residents confirmed that this pair has actually been present for some years



This analysis excludes the squares added to the area in 2022 (SO49J and P). A pair was found in each of these squares in 2022, but only in one, SO49J, in 2023 and 2024.



## Lapwing

Lapwing was added to the national Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern in 2009, and this status was confirmed in 2015 (Eaton et al, British Birds 2015), because of a decline in the UK of 63% between 1969 and 2014, and 57% over the previous 25 years. The BTO Breeding Bird Survey has found declines of 51% in the UK, 39% in England and 51% in the English West Midlands, over the 27-year period 1995-2022.

In Shropshire, it declined from about 3,000 breeding pairs in 1990 to 800 in 2010 (a loss of 73%), and it disappeared from 46% of the Atlas survey squares (tetrads) between 1985-90 and 2008-13. The decline has continued, certainly in the areas monitored by several Community Wildlife Groups.



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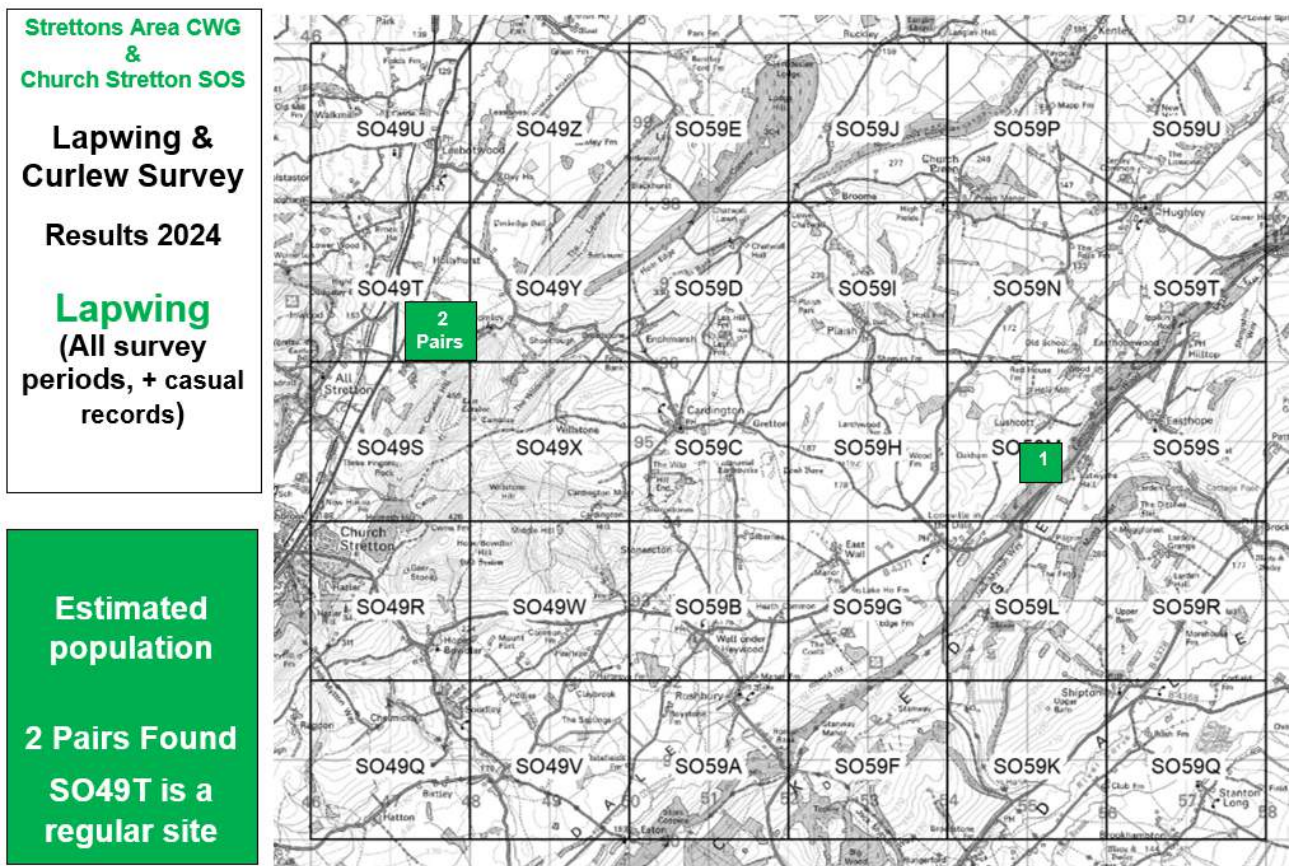
Lapwing is on the *Red List of Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire*. The decline is partly obscured by the much larger numbers seen in



passage or winter flocks, which comprise birds escaping from the frozen ground in northern Europe in autumn, or returning there in spring.

Lapwing are not site faithful. They need very short vegetation or bare ground for a nest. The main reasons for the large population decline is the switch from spring-planted to autumn-planted cereal crops, which are already too high for Lapwing to nest in by the beginning of April, together with the disappearance of mixed farms (both arable and pasture) They therefore need to find spring crops, which may mean following the farm rotation on arable farms, or moving somewhere entirely different where arable crops have disappeared. They also need to be able to find invertebrate food, for the nesting adults, and later for the chicks to feed themselves. Insect-rich damp ground helps. Land drainage and pesticides do not. There is very little suitable habitat in the Strettons area now.

Two pairs were found in early April near Botvyle (SO49T), and a single near Longville (SO49M), all in suitable breeding habitat. There was no evidence of confirmed breeding, or chicks, in spite of further searching.



### Other Target species

Curlew and Lapwing were the main target species for the survey, but participants were also asked to record Other Target Species if possible, and most did so.



## Kestrel

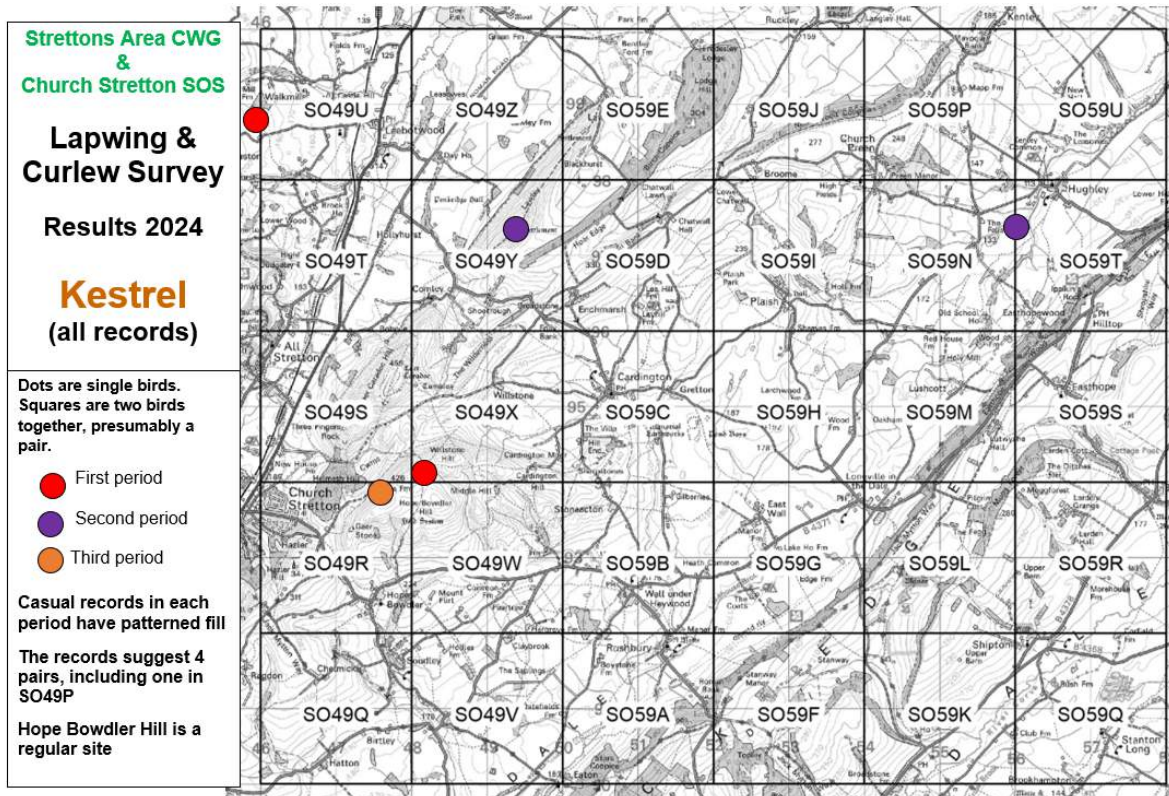
Kestrel is on the national *Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern 4* (Eaton *et al*, 2015), because of a decline in the UK of 46% between 1969 and 2014. The decline has continued since, and the BTO Breeding Bird Survey has found declines of 40% in the UK, 26% in England and 39% in the English West Midlands region, over the much shorter 27-year period 1995-2022.



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

Kestrels defend a small territory around the nest, but their home range, where they find most of their food, is at least 1 km square, but can be as large as 10 km square. Most hunting is carried out within 1.8km of the nest, but the home range is often partly shared with neighbouring pairs.

The local decline appears to have continued in recent years, and the Shropshire Ringing and Raptor Groups have launched a nest box scheme to help improve breeding success, and try and find out the reasons for the decline. To help get a better understanding of the population and distribution, members doing CWG surveys have been asked to make a special effort to record Kestrels. Observations in the Strettons area in 2024 are



shown on the Map; an estimated 4 pairs. No nest sites were found, nor were any fledged young reported, although young would not have fledged until after the main survey period ended in mid-June.

Year	No. of Breeding Pairs
2020	7
2021	5
2022	6
2023	4 - 5
2024	4

The population varies from year to year, depending on prey abundance, mainly voles, but Kestrels are much more likely to be observed in good breeding seasons, when they have to spend more time hunting for food for chicks, and travelling to and from the nest. The records in 2023 suggested 4 – 5 pairs, compared to at least 6 pairs in 2022, only four pairs in 2021 (another very poor year, probably due to the persistent cold and dry northerly winds in April and May, which delayed the growing season and reduced the availability of prey), 7-9 pairs in 2020, 4 – 5 pairs in 2019 (another very poor year for them), and up to 10 pairs in 2018, perhaps a few more than the 6 – 8 estimated in 2017.

The apparent population varies from year to year, depending on prey abundance, mainly voles, but Kestrels are much more likely to be observed in good breeding seasons, when they have to spend more time hunting for food for chicks, and travelling to and from the nest.

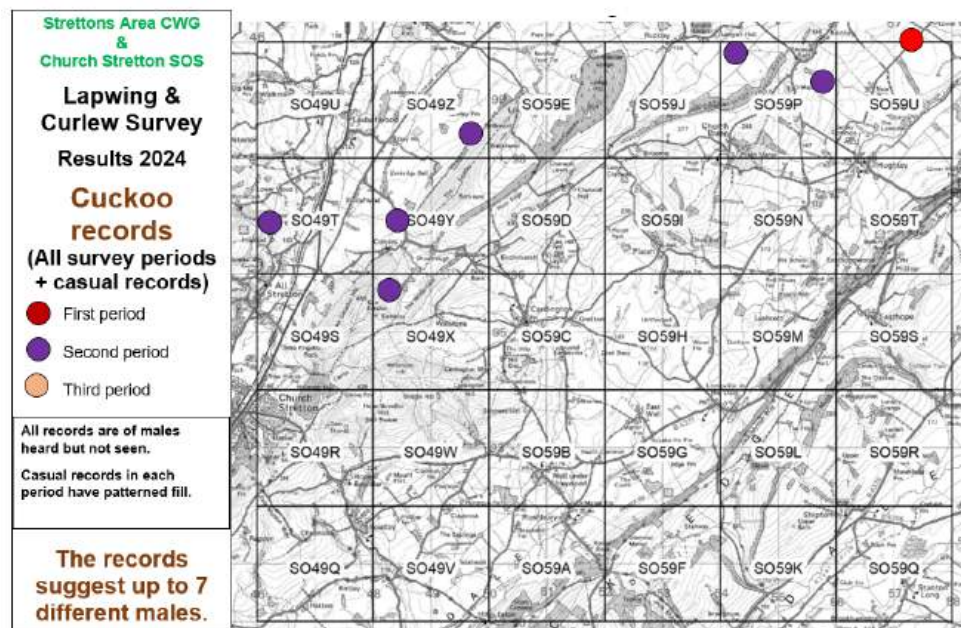
### Cuckoo

Cuckoo has declined considerably in recent years, and was added to the *Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern* in the UK in 2009. By 2015 the decline had reached 60% in the previous 25 years. The BTO Breeding Bird Survey has found declines of 35% in the UK, 72% in England, and 80% in the English West Midlands region, between 1995 and 2022.



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

There were seven records in 2024, all of calling males from widely scattered locations, and equal to the previous maximum in 2020, when “we were better able to hear them in the peace and quiet of staying at home [due to coronavirus restrictions]”. The population estimate of 7 territorial males in 2020 was substantially more than recorded in previous years, and slightly more than the 6-7 in 2022, and 5 in 2021. In 2019, up to three males were recorded, and probably only one in 2018 and 2017.





## Red Kite

The first successful breeding of Red Kite in Shropshire for 130 years occurred as recently as 2006, but 60 nests, and another six breeding pairs, were found in the County in 2023, mainly in the south-west hills, but there have been nests north of Shrewsbury each year since 2017, and the most easterly nest to date was reported in 2019 from near the Staffordshire border. There was a slight dip in the number of nests found in 2024, but this is likely to reflect changes in monitoring, rather than in the number of breeding Kites.



In the Strettons area too, Red Kites have increased rapidly. The first nest east of the A49 road was found in 2012, and in 2024 three nests were found, all successful, but the number of fledged young is unknown. In 2023, only two nests were found (both were successful, fledging at least three young), compared with five found nests in 2022.

In 2022, the female at one of the failed nests near Church Stretton was wing-tagged Yellow X3 in north Dorset, 186km distant, two years previously. This is the only known example of a Kite from outside of the Wales/Shropshire/Herefordshire tagging scheme breeding in Shropshire. She has been seen in the area several times since, including after the 2023 breeding season, so she probably nested again in 2023, but was not found. In 2024, she was again found nesting in the same wood as in 2022, and at least one chick fledged.

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

The number of Kites seen on the Bird survey, and the number of tetrads in which they have been seen, has steadily increased year on year since it started in 2017, reflecting the population increase and spread of this species. At least 14 Kites were seen, in a total of 9 tetrads.

## Remaining Target Species

Members were no longer asked to record observations of 19 Other Target species: The list of them was drawn up in 2014, when farmers had to take most of them into account when making agri-environment scheme applications. The agri-environment scheme regulations have changed several times since, and the list is no longer useful. New arrangements are being made for the Environmental Land Management System (ELMS) scheme due to open for applications in 2024, but it has been delayed yet again following the recent General Election, and details are not yet available.

There is a separate Swift project, and details can be found elsewhere in the Community Wildlife Group's Annual Report.



## **Save our Curlews Campaign Nest Finding and Protection Project**

The Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS) has been carrying out research with other Community Wildlife Groups to find nests, put an electric fence around them to protect the eggs from predators, and then fix radio-tags to the chicks and track them to see how they use the landscape, and what happens to them. Not enough young birds fledge to replace the older birds dying off. We need to know why.

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



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

In the Strettons area in 2024, six nests were found. Two were predated before they could be fenced, but one of these pairs laid a second clutch, which was found and fenced. There was a delay in obtaining landowners permission to fence another nest, during which time the nest was partially predated, and the interference was probably responsible for the remaining eggs not hatching. Three other nests were found and fenced (including the re-lay), and a total of 10 eggs hatched. Nine of the chicks were tagged, but three lived only for a couple of days, and the other six (and the untagged chick) lived for no more than nine days.

There is a full description of the project on the SOS website [www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/](http://www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/). This describes the results in detail, our future plans, and the overwhelming evidence that predation by foxes and other predators is the main cause of Curlew's continuing decline. It is clear that the annual release of millions of pheasants for shooting, only a third of which are actually shot, results in an over-abundant food supply which maintains the numbers of the Curlew's main predators well above naturally sustainable levels.

The project is continuing in 2025, partly funded by the Strettons area Save our Curlews appeal. You can find more information, including details of how to make donations and where to send them, on our website [www.shropscwgs.org.uk/all-events/save-our-curlews-strettons-area-2024-appeal/](http://www.shropscwgs.org.uk/all-events/save-our-curlews-strettons-area-2024-appeal/)

The campaign is also encouraging a network of 10 Community Wildlife Groups across Shropshire, including ours, to monitor Curlews. The Groups cover 137 tetrads where the vast majority of the County's Curlew population was found in the recent 2008-13 Bird Atlas project. A map showing the area covered by each group, overlain on the Curlew distribution map, can be found on the SOS website. Though numbers vary each year, around 300 people participate annually, and put in around 2,300 hours, a clear indication of the commitment of local people to saving our Curlews.



In 2018, the 10 CWG surveys found a total of 94 – 115 breeding pairs of Curlew. In 2021, the number had fallen to 88-106, 90-110 in 2022, 88-98 in 2023 and # in 2024. These numbers include the pairs whose nests were found by the SOS project.

There were a total of up to three known fledged young in 2024 from all these pairs.

## Participants

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

Sue Barker, Molly & Barbara Breakwell, Steve Butler, Phil Constable, Belinda Cousens, Julie Cowley, Richard Dale, Gill Davies, Deborah Eaglestone, Alistair Edie, Jane Edwards, Joe Gomme, Vicky & Mark Greening, Jan & Martin Hegman, June Holloway, Melanie Houlder, Helen Howes, Jim Jarrett, Kay Jarvie, David John, Chris & Carol King, Angela Kitson, Sarah Lane, David Lee, David Matthews, Shirley McNichol, Glyn Morgan, Ron Parnell, Adrian Pickles, Ian & Jill Plumridge, Will Priestley, Ray Slack, Dee Snape, Ann Taylor, Jon Taylor, Carol Thickers, Dick Ward and Dan Watkins

Thanks also to:-

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

## Acknowledgements

The *Save our Curlews* Nest Finding and Protection project received grants from the Shropshire Hills AONB (now the National Landscape), and from Stretton Focus Community Awards. Thank you.

## Plans for the Future

The survey will be repeated in future years, so we can get a better picture of the population and distribution of Lapwing and Curlew together with Kestrel, Cuckoo and Red Kite. In 2025, we will also continue to work with the SOS Save our Curlews campaign, which, in co-operation with farmers, will continue to promote conservation, and organise nest protection for Curlews.

New participants are needed for the survey in 2025. It's easy and enjoyable and simple instructions will be provided. If you are interested in helping, email [leo@leosmith.org.uk](mailto:leo@leosmith.org.uk)

A joint meeting of the Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group and the Church Stretton SOS branch will be held at 7.30pm on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> March, at the Methodist Church Hall, Watling St., Church Stretton, for a presentation of the 2024 results, and to plan the 2025 survey. New members, and anyone interested in birds, will be very welcome.

For those that want to participate, there will be a practical training session, explaining how to go about the survey, and record what you see, around the end of March (date to be arranged to suit participants).

Leo Smith  
February 2025



# 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. 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.

1. In 2020, the population in the area was estimated at 9 – 11 pairs.
2. 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.
3. In 2022, seven nests were found. Two sites occupied in 2021 were not occupied, and there is no evidence that any other pairs nested. Water levels in the streams were very low because of prolonged very dry weather, so it is likely that breeding success and survival rates were poor.
4. In 2023, seven nests were found again, one site was not revisited, and two sites occupied in 2021 were not occupied for the second year. 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. Only one fledged young was seen, from a late nest in Carding Mill Valley (CMV).



Several specially designed nest boxes were already installed in the area before the start of the SACWG project, which has installed several more.

## 2024

Members were again asked to report sightings, and another appeal for information appeared in Stretton Focus. Most sites occupied last year, or known to have been occupied previously, were revisited.

Seven pairs nested. Another regularly used site was not visited.

## 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.

In 2023, seven chicks in two nests south of Church Stretton were ringed in the nest, and probably fledged, but four nests north of Church Stretton all failed twice (i.e. a second clutch was laid after the first nest failed). The first nest in CMV also failed.

A colour-ring on the left leg is shown in the first 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.

The Dipper in the first photo (U21) was caught and colour-ringed in the winter of 2018-19 in CMV, and nested near-by from 2019 until 2022. She was last seen in autumn 2022, inactive, and is believed to have succumbed to the drought.

No colour-ringed birds were seen for a year in CMV, then 26N was photographed there at the end of November 2023, the day after it was ringed. It was seen again on several occasions in 2024, including at a nest site with a recently fledged young on 19 June, then feeding an unspecified number of young near Light Spout Hollow waterfall, and most recently two were seen on 2<sup>nd</sup> October

Both adults in the breeding pair at Little Stretton were caught and colour-ringed there in 2022, and were both present there again in 2023. Only one, X04, was seen in 2024, on several occasions, most recently on 15 December. A fledged young was seen on 24 May.



Yellow 22F was seen near Longnor on 5 May.

Ringling information for 2024 is not yet available.

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.



## Regular nest sites

There has been a nest at eight sites every year since 2020. Three other sites have been used at least once, but not more than twice.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks for records and information about Dippers in 2024 to:-

Pauline Adcock, John Arnfield, Laura Beardsmore, Steve Butler, Beverley Carey, Julie Cowley, Bernard Ford, Greg and Sue Forster, Sarah Freeman, Sara Howes, Gill Isherwood, John and Anne Hanley, David Lee, Andrew Morton, Dave Pearce, Sue and Steve Rooney, Carol Swales, Roger Thorpe, Dan Watkins, Sandra Whitlock and Karen Wright, together with several readers of Stretton Focus.

Thanks to Tony Cross for details of the ringing and colour-ringing.

## Plans for 2025

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 ([leo@leosmith.org.uk](mailto:leo@leosmith.org.uk)).

Leo Smith  
Project Coordinator  
February 2025

## Crayfish Survey

A grant of £500 was obtained from Midlands Cooperative which enabled two kits of eDNA material to be used on 2 feeder streams of the Cound River system. These kits target the presence of 1) Native White Clawed Crayfish or 2) Signal Crayfish.

eDNA surveys were carried out on Comley Brook at Longnor SO48439 99608 and Cound "Brook" at Leebotwood SO47521 98473 in July 2024. The surveys were processed by SureScreen Scientifics Ltd, Derbyshire.

Sadly there was no evidence of native crayfish (*Austropotamus pallipes*) at either site, but fortunately neither was there any trace of either alien crayfish: (*Pacifastacus leniusculus*) or of the disease (*Aphanomyces astaci*). The rather expensive cost of running these valuable tests means that this otherwise time and manpower saving facility cannot easily be funded by a small, however dedicated team and SACWG itself.

Stephen Butler & Julie Cowley





## Red Grouse Counts on the Long Mynd



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

Red Grouse are restricted to heathland, and the Long Mynd (and Stiperstones) hold the only population in England between Dartmoor and the Peak District. Nationally, the population is falling, although it has been removed from the national *Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern*. The results help the National

Trust's management of the heathland to provide suitable habitat.

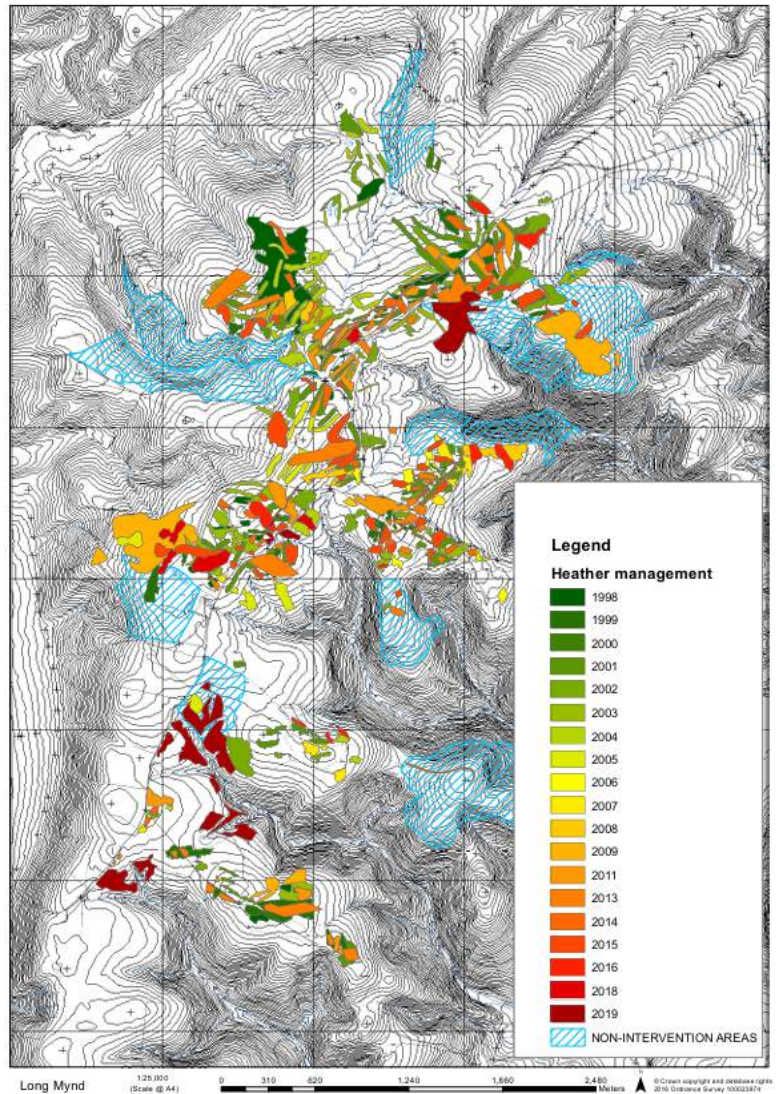
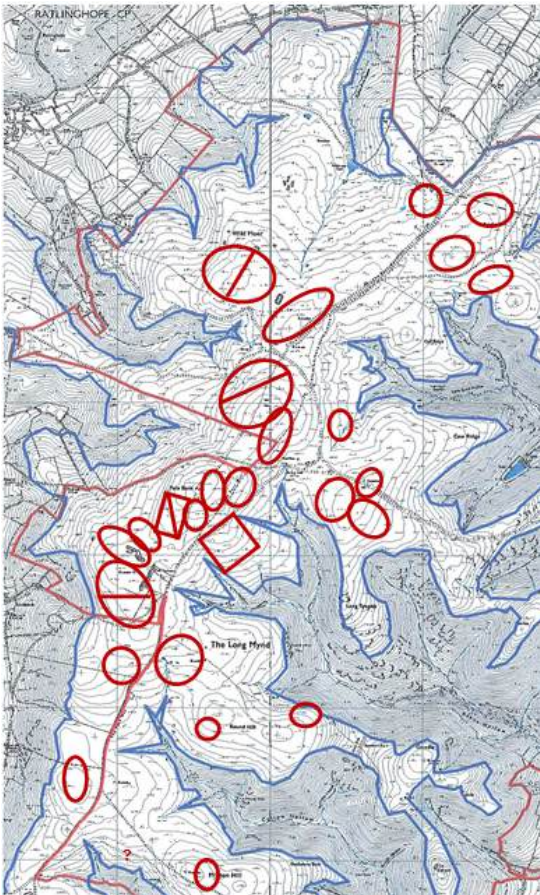
Good results were obtained in most years up until 2019. Unfortunately subsequent counts up to and including 2022 did not produced reasonable estimates. Previous experience has shown that there is no point in holding counts if the weather is very cold, rainy, or the wind-speed is greater than 10mph. If the weather forecast predicts that these conditions will prevail when a count is due, it is cancelled and rearranged.

All 2020 planned counts had to be cancelled because of the Government's coronavirus restrictions. In 2021 and 2022, the whole survey period was dominated by poor weather, and most of the planned counts were cancelled and rearranged. The weather conditions meant that there was little grouse activity on any of the counts that were held, and the number of counts when no grouse were recorded was higher than before 2020. The methodology requires concurrent observations of displaying males, to mark territory boundaries, but there were virtually no such observations, so it was not possible to produce a population estimate.

In 2023, conditions were not much better. A total of 132 survey returns were received, but 71 recorded no Grouse seen or heard: there were a total of 164 records of Grouse. The results may have been influenced by poor weather, and they are probably less robust than those up to 2019, because there is less need for grouse to display to defend their territories if densities are lower, but analysis suggested 32-33 territorial males (half the maximum estimates of 5-10 years ago).

In 2024, coverage was better, with 152 survey visits made, with fewer counts of zero (52, compared with 71 in 2023), 416 records of Grouse, and an average of 2.7 grouse recorded per visit. However, this average is only half the 2018 average.

The notional territories found by the analysis are shown on the left-hand map below. On the right-hand map, the territories in 2023 are overlaid on the heather management map. It will be seen that most territories are associated with areas of managed heather.



Note that the "territories map" does not show the area actually occupied by each territorial male, and the sizes of the territories vary considerably. – the survey methodology is based on there being a territory boundary somewhere between each of the locations of grouse seen or heard concurrently, but it is not known where precisely the boundaries are.

## Checking the Survey Result

It is possible that a combination of weather conditions and less competition from a reduced population led to a population underestimate in 2023. Therefore a count was made in April 2024 using a different method. Male Grouse are highly territorial, and respond strongly to a tape recording of the display call. The whole area occupied by Grouse was surveyed on six visits in April, when two surveyors visited almost all watchpoints, playing a tape through powerful speakers at each watchpoint, and while walking between them. This method is not reliable for counting the population, as it tends to over-estimate number, because unpaired males display against the tape over large distances, and might be counted several times over. However, using the tape, and watching carefully where the Grouse came from, and went to, produced the same population estimate as the dusk count, 32 territorial males.

## Possible reasons for a decline

There are several possible reasons for a decline,

- Heather beetle and heather die-back, which were very prevalent in 2018 and 2019, were followed by a drought in 2020. It is estimated that the drought year saw a 40% apparent die-back of heather.





Subsequently about half of this has come back to life, but in the meantime this heather has shed foliage, removing food and shelter for the grouse, so their habitat quality was reduced for a year or two. Although it has come back to life, some of it is topiaried – an indication of poor condition (Peter Carty, *pers.comm.*). The heather is generally still in poorer condition than it was in 2018, with less foliage (Andy Perry, *pers.comm.*).

- The Long Mynd management plan aims to cut or burn about 40% of the heather on a 15-year rotation, and not intervene in the other 60%. However, the management is now a long way behind this plan, due to poor weather, staff capacity and general workload of the ranger team, and (apart from fire-breaks) no heather has been managed since 2019, resulting in more old mature heather and less young shorter heather for grouse to feed on.
- Localised high grazing levels in the south eastern sections of the plateau have reduced the amount of flowering heather, and grazing generally may have slowed down the recovery of the areas of heather that has been managed.
- Bracken is encroaching onto the heathland plateau. Much less purple heather was visible in 2023 and 2024 than was apparent 5-10 years ago. The reduction may be due to the heather disappearing, or being hidden by an increase in bracken.
- There is a regular cyclical population growth and decline of grouse populations (see BTO BBS report 2022, p.21), which might have played a part in the decline here. Disease plays a part in the cycle, but there is no evidence that the ticks on sheep have spread to Grouse on Long Mynd (see <https://www.gwctknowledge.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/diseasecontrol.pdf>)
- GWCT are also flagging now that the growing Red Kite population is a threat to chicks of ground-nesting birds, based on their hunting technique. This is an own-goal for the shooting industry, as Kites have spread across Shropshire in a very short period, thanks to carrion from dead Pheasants being available to them in vast quantities across the County.

The National Trust has been recommended to investigate these possible causes of decline, particularly the suggestion that grazing levels have limited the regrowth of the heather, and to re-introduce an appropriate heather management regime.

## Red List

As a result of the large decline on Long Mynd since 2018, and a similar large decline in in only other population in Shropshire, on the Stiperstones, Red Grouse has been added to the Red List of *Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire*.

## Participants

Thanks are due to the following participants:

Carolyn Anstey, John Arnfield, Conor Aynsley, Sam Bishop, Rachel Bromley, Emma Bullard, Sandy Burton, Chris Cooke, Gill Davies, Deborah Eaglestone, Alastair Edie, Jane Edwards, Roger Evans, Greg Forster, Sue Forster, Aiden Foster, Beth Furlong, Rob Furlong, Joe Gomme, Adam Gornall, Geoff Hall, Helen Howes, David John, Sarah Lane, Edward Marvin, Anna McCann, Andrew Middleton, John Munro-Derry, Adrian Pickles, Sue & Steve Rooney, Christine Shipman, Simon Sholl, Ray Slack, Leo Smith, David Stafford, Mike Streetly, Roger Thorpe, Caroline Uff, Wendy Jane Walton, Louise White and Edward Wood.

## Acknowledgements

Special thanks are due to Joe Gomme, for organising all the counts and training, and Pete Carty, for helping with the count using the tape recording.





## Results from previous years

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Population Estimate	60 - 63	63 - 66	52 - 54	56 - 58	57 - 59	42+	49+	64 - 66	54

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Population Estimate	No count (Covid-19)	Insufficient observations		32 - 33	32 - 33

## Full report 2024

A more detailed report will be sent to project participants, and the National Trust, in due course

## Plans for 2025

The count is being repeated in 2025. Counts will be held around sunset on seven Thursday evenings 3 April to 15 May. We want as many helpers as possible, please.

A project briefing meeting for new participants will be held at 7.30pm on Thursday, 27 March at the National Trust tea rooms in Cardingmill Valley.

A practical training session will be held for those that want it on the first survey date they can attend.

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

Leo Smith  
Project organiser

## Botanical surveys

The Botanical Group visited 4 survey sites during the summer months of 2024. The group is about ten in number. Our botanical skills are only moderate; we enjoy learning from each other, working through keys to identify not-so-easy species, sometimes using a phone plant-ID app to help. For each site we simply compile a list of vascular plant species found, noting especially any Shropshire axiophytes – notable (not necessarily rare) species ‘worthy of protection’ which are typically only found in a particular habitat. Lists are passed to the owner, perhaps with comments and management suggestions. We are also trying to submit lists to iRecord.

### **Villa Farm SO437977**

Our first outing of the season proved to be the most extraordinary. Villa Farm is a 10ha smallholding on the northern slopes of the Long Mynd, at the south-east end of the Betchcott Hills, with High Park Hollow and Brook along its SE boundary. It includes areas (some just small patches) of a variety of habitats including acid grassland, heath, stream, flush and mire, rocky slopes, hedgerow and deciduous woodland.



Sneezewort

We recorded 148 plant species including 36 axiophytes, too numerous to list them all here. But the highlights included Sneezewort, Bird’s-foot, Wood Anemone, Quaking Grass, Golden-scaled Male Fern, Marsh Willowherb, Fen Bedstraw, Fairy Flax, Blinks, Marsh Valerian, Marsh Speedwell and Devil’s Bit Scabious. We found 10 species of Carex sedge, 5 of them axiophytes.



Common Spotted Orchid

The owner is doing a great job managing this smallholding for diversity. As is often the case she struggles to find graziers with conservation cattle breeds interested in putting stock, and making hay, on relatively small parcels of meadow / pasture.

This site is about 1km east along the north end of the Long Mynd from the new Betchcott Hill nature reserve recently acquired by the Shropshire Wildlife Trust. The richness of Villa Farm augurs well for the new nearby reserve. And there may well be opportunities for collaboration between the two sites.

### **High Leasowes Nature Reserve SO462941**

Our visit in early June coincided with a visit by Joy of Wildlife, a group that surveys for more or less anything living. We focussed only on the grassland, not the hedgerows, scrub or woodland.

In the late summer of 2023 following the hay-cut, volunteers broadcast seed of Yellow Rattle plus about 15 target species not, according to previous surveys, present. There was no prior seed bed preparation other than the low hay cut opening the sward somewhat. Our visit was in part to gauge whether any of the broadcast species had established.

The germination of Yellow Rattle was moderately encouraging; occasional and patchy in all four fields of High Leasowes. Six broadcast species not recorded in 2023, were recorded by us: Eyebright, Ox-eye Daisy, Imperforate St John's Wort, Smooth Hawksbeard, a single Broad-leaved Helleborine and 4 plants of Common Spotted Orchid. Of course these may not have derived from the seed broadcast; they may have been present as seed in the soil and not developed the previous year, or they may have been missed in survey, or they have recently blown in. It seems unlikely that the orchids and helleborine would develop from seed in the first year following broadcasting. Nevertheless it suggests the conditions are right, with the necessary mycorrhiza in the soil.



Broad-leaved Helleborine

We recorded 107 species including 6 axiophytes; Common Sedge, Eyebright, Bluebell, Changing Forget-me-not, Yellow Rattle and Yellow Oat-grass. The Yellow Oat Grass was a nice-to-find; known to some as 'bad hair-do' grass with untidy hairs and awns, once common, it likes dry neutral or calcareous grassland, but doesn't compete well where fertilisers are added or grazing is heavy.

The Joy of Wildlife group recorded 240 species; 148 of invertebrates and 92 of plants. Their plant list included 10 species not recorded previously on High Leasowes. It's useful to have a fresh pair of eyes to survey a site; sometimes the large and obvious are missed. This has taken the total number of vascular plants recorded at High Leasowes since it was purchased by the community to 147.

### **Gulley Green SO487961**

This wonderful nature reserve is regularly visited by survey groups, including SACWG, for flora and fauna. It includes such a variety of habitats, that you can't do it justice in just the couple of hours we had available.

We recorded 140 vascular plant species including 10 axiophytes; Ramsons, Hard Fern, Golden-scaled Male Fern, Marsh Willowherb, Broad-leaved Helleborine, Fen Bedstraw, Changing Forget-me-not, Wood-sorrel, Yellow Rattle and Wood Speedwell.

The meadow is so abundant with Common Spotted Orchid (where once there were none) that it is used by Stepping Stones as a green hay donor site.

### **Nant Valley SO496934**

This 3.6 ha smallholding in Wall-under-Heywood on the slopes of Cardington hill is fast becoming an important nature reserve. It includes grassland, scrub, woodland with glades, stream, dammed pond and more besides. About 0.2ha of grassland on the valley floor is managed as new meadow; in 2022 the topsoil was skimmed and meadow species sown.



Brittle Badder-fern

We recorded 127 species including 15 axiophytes – and that was mainly in the grassland. The meadow flora is settling down; highlights include Betony, Kidney Vetch, Viper's Bugloss, Trailing St John's Wort, Eyebright,





Fairy Flax, Salad Burnet and Yellow Rattle. Elsewhere we found Broad-leaved Helleborine and Slender St John's Wort; and two unusual ferns, Royal Fern (planted) and Brittle Bladder-fern.

## Future plans

We plan to continue meeting in 2025. If you are interested in joining us, and / or if you've suggestions of sites to visit, please get in touch.

**Thanks** to our visit hosts, and to Angela Middleton, Ann Cronin, Sue Rooney, Frances and Frank Hay, Vivienne and Peter Thorpe, Di Long, Kate Hudson, Janet Martin, Margaret Westhead, Gill Silk and Gay Walker.

**Mike Carter**

**Botanical Group Leader**

**email:** [misawa47@gmail.com](mailto:misawa47@gmail.com)

## Stepping Stones update

It has been a year of change for Stepping Stones. Andrew Hearle left the National Trust at the end of 2023, with Charlie Bell stepping up to the project manager role. Kate Nixon joined the team as project officer in June.

### Species Recovery Project

The main work we have been involved in delivery this year has been funded by Natural England under their Species Recovery Programme. We have had packages of work focused on four species, with actions lifted from the Species Action Plans. This work wraps up at the end of March. The work we've undertaken has been:

#### Dormouse

7.5km of new hedgerow and woodrow is currently being planted by volunteers across four sites in the project area: one National Trust site (Barns Farm) and three farm holdings farmed by members of the Upper Onny Farmers Group (Meadow View, Medicott; Upper Stitt, Ratlinghope; and The Firs, Pennerley). This planting helps to implement the hedgerow management plans developed for these farms under our previous Green Recovery project funding.





### Small pearl-bordered fritillary

Nearly 20,000 marsh violet plugs have been planted by volunteers across various sites including Norbury Hill, The Hollies, Darnford and Coppice Farm. This is the food plant for small pearl-bordered fritillary caterpillars. Some habitat management to support this has also happened, mainly rush/bracken cutting and raking.

### Willow Tit

We have established and trained a new willow tit monitoring group who between them surveyed 413 points in Feb/March 2024. This led to 13 records of Willow Tit and 40 records of Marsh Tit. Analysis suggests 7-8 territories within the Stepping Stones area have been identified. This is excellent - many were previously unknown. The core area is clearly the line of mixed forestry sites from Pontesford Hill down along the west side of the Stiperstones to Linley Estate. We also installed ten nest sites which were monitored by camera traps at Barns Farm, and habitat enhancement work for willow tit is currently underway in the wet woodland there. A willow tit habitat enhancement workshop for landowners and land management advisors happened on 22<sup>nd</sup> February.



**Otter:** Three holts were installed across the project area, monitored by camera trap. Two young otters were filmed exploring the area outside one of the holts.

### The future

Currently all external funding for Stepping Stones delivery ceases on 31<sup>st</sup> March. The team are currently busy working on an application to Landscape Connections which, if successful, will fund ten years of work in the Shropshire Hills. The fund has three themes: Connecting People with Nature, Connecting Wildlife and Habitats and Building a Sustainable Local Economy. The content of the project is still being developed, by a project development group currently consisting of the National Trust, Shropshire Hills National Landscape, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Severn Rivers Trust and the Upper Onny Farmers Group. The geographic area of the project is likely to be much larger than Stepping Stones, and the scope of the project greater. The fund cannot be used to continue current projects so if successful, Stepping Stones will be brought to a close and replaced by the next phase which builds on everything that has gone before: 'Shropshire Hills Landscape Connections.'

**Charlie Bell**  
Stepping Stones



# Treasurer's Report

## ANNUAL BALANCE SHEET

Year ending 31 December 2024

INCOME		EXPENDITURE	
Carry forward from 31.12.22	1,079.93	Crayfish Sure Screen	480.00
APM 2024 dpnations	68.00	Library hire Nature in the Strettons	15.00
Birdfest (see annexed)		Birdfest payments (see annexed)	866.48
• Stretton Focus grant	540.00		
• Town Council grant	530.00	Swifts payments (see annexed)	709.69
• On the day	331.50		
Swifts (see annexed)		Swallow cups	15.00
• Stretton Focus grant	420.00	Birnbeck Insurance	188.35
• Co-op grant	400.00	SOS Hall hire for bird surveys (half)	12.00
Sale swift boxes	70.00	All Stretton hall hire for 28.06.24	44.00
Dawn chorus walk	50.00	All Stretton hall hire for APM Feb 25	35.00
		BALANCE IN BANK 31.12.24	1,123.91
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£3,489.43</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£3,489.43</b>

MONIES HELD AS FOLLOWS	31.12.24	31.12.23
Wetlands	62.28	62.28
Tree Planting Project	206.80	206.80
Co-op crayfish grant	-	500.00-
Swifts	110.31	
Undesignated funds	744.52	310.85
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£1,123.91</b>	<b>£1,079.93</b>

L W Priestley, Treasurer  
January 2024





## BIRDFEST on 16 March 2024 at Mayfair Community Centre

Receipts :-		
Stretton Focus grant		540.00
Church Stretton Town Council grant		530.00
On the day:		
Sale badges		55.00
Bird box making and swift boxes		105.00
Profit from refreshments		110.00
Tombola		52.00
Donations		9.50
		<hr/>
		1,401.50
Less payments:-		
Birds of Prey	300.00	
Mayfair hire	235.00	
Bird walks	100.00	
Badge machine hire	35.00	
Children's prizes	110.63	
Birdbox wood	54.85	
Poster design	30.00	
		<hr/>
		866.48
Profit		<hr/>
		£ 535.02

### SWIFTS

Stretton Focus grant		420.00
Co op grant		400.00
		<hr/>
		820.00
Less payments:-		
Swift callers	113.00	
Ply for boxes	56.40	
Sounders x 3	65.00	
Market stall	20.00	
Wildlife Services cement boxes x 2	240.00	
Solar panel and electronics	185.29	
Erection of boxes	30.00	
		<hr/>
		709.69
Balance		<hr/>
		£110.31



## Acknowledgements

In 2024 SACWG received substantial financial support from three sources, for which we are very grateful:

- the Church Stretton Town Council
- the Stretton Focus
- the Midcounties Co-operative Community Fund.



# STRETTON FOCUS

