

Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group

www.ShropsCWGs.co.uk

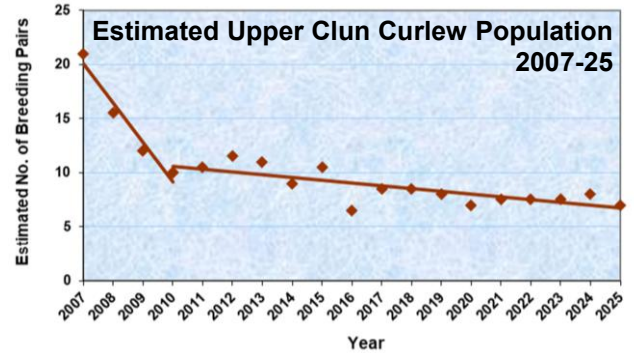


Annual Report 2025

More detail can be found on the website

Birds

We found 7 breeding pairs of Curlew, one less than last year. All are on high ground above 350m, mainly in the west. A pair from a regular territory near Rhos Fiddle was lost. One chick hatched in one nest, but no young fledged. The population has declined, by almost two-thirds, since our first survey found 20-22 pairs in 2007.



We worked with the Shropshire Ornithological Society *Save our Curlews* Campaign 2018 – 22 (apart from 2020) 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 to them. In total, 12 nests were found, and 16 chicks from 9 fenced nests were tagged. Three of these chicks fledged in 2021, but there were none from fenced nests in any of the other years. All the rest were predated, usually within a few days of hatching.



In 2022, 5 chicks were also found, from three nests that had not been fenced. All were colour-ringed, and at least 3 fledged. No fledged young were found in any other year, or in 2020, apart from the three in 2021, either by the SOS project or by Community Wildlife Group monitoring of all the pairs in the area.

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, and Lapwing appears 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. A Barn Owl nest with chicks was reported near Clun Castle for the second consecutive year..

Kestrels are declining, and only one pair was found, breeding in a nest box, which it has occupied for the last six years. Five young were ringed and are believed to have fledged successfully.

Only four Red Kite nests were found, the lowest for some years and one less than last year. Two nests were successful, each producing a single fledgling. The female at one site was tagged, but it could not be read. The tagged female tagged in 2013, who was 11 years old in 2024, did not return. Red Kite is a conservation success story. First breeding in the area was in 2007, and since then a total of 76 nests have been found; 53 were successful, producing 71-78 young.

Dippers inhabit the fast-flowing rocky streams, and many nest in boxes. In 2025, 24 previously occupied sites were monitored, mostly nest boxes under bridges. Clutches were laid in 10, and 30 chicks were ringed and presumed fledged. Colour-rings on 13 breeding adults were read.

We also operate a nest box scheme for woodland birds, with Pied Flycatcher, Tree Sparrow and Redstart as the target species. Nine members sent in reports of their boxes, used by five species. Seventy-five Pied Flycatchers fledged from 6 boxes at two sites. The average of 6+ young per nest compares with 4 in each of the last two years, a welcome increase in productivity. At least 38 young Tree Sparrows fledged from boxes at three sites, but no Redstarts were recorded. In addition, a much larger scheme (around 440 boxes along the Clun and Unk rivers and Folly Brook) is operated by the Shropshire Ringing Group. Details online.



More details of the bird survey and project work can be found on the website
If you find evidence of breeding of any of the above species, please let us know.

Plants (The Upper Clun Meadow and Botany Group)

Since loss of species-rich meadows is still occurring, it was decided that the Botany Survey Group should start an Upper Clun Meadow Group and focus on these and other diverse grasslands. The Marches Meadow Group supports this decision and have offered help if we need it. Virtually all of the meadows and rich pastures of the Upper Clun are Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and so we are not dropping our important work with these precious sites. We still focus on counting the number of axiophytes at each site as these important ecological indicator species are a good measure of the health of the LWS and indeed meadow.

In 2025 we surveyed four Upper Clun Meadows and held a Meadow Celebration at a fifth property. We did actually survey other land at these LWS and so had a good picture of general management and health at these sites. These were: Reilth Top, Brynmawr, Middle Spoad, Pound Gate and Crossways. Nine volunteers helped with the surveys, and we had twenty people participating in our Meadow Celebration at Crossways LWS. These sites are described below. A more detailed report, listing the important species found at each, can be found on the website.

A household in Clun was advised on meadow creation and found *Anacamptis pyramidalis* Pyramidal Orchid there!

Since the comment in the 2024 report about the lack of advice to farmers in the area from Natural England and Shropshire Wildlife Trust, the two organisations have launched a Clun Protected Sites Strategy, and invited farmers to participate.

Reilth Top

This site is a collection of pastures, ffrydd and meadow. Very little agricultural improvement has taken place over the many years the site has been farmed, and there is evidence of this, with very little Perennial Rye-grass and a fair number of axiophytes. The ffrydd held most of the interesting plants and axiophytes. In total, there were 10 axiophytes and 4 meadow indicator species (of which 1 was an axiophyte).

Brynmawr

This LWS too comprises a mix of pastures, some rushy, others drier and meadows. There is also a large pond inside an area fenced off as a beaver enclosure where we carried out a baseline survey. We surveyed the meadows too, but there were some areas of the LWS we didn't manage to reach.

The most species-rich areas are the wet pastures, but the meadows were disappointing with frequent *Lolium perenne* Perennial Rye-grass, very few meadow indicator species and only two small patches of axiophytes. In total, there were 17 axiophytes and 5 meadow indicator species (of which 2 were axiophytes).

Middle Spoad

This series of meadows and pastures either side of the River Clun have become richer over the years as a result of sympathetic management.

A pond was dug on the site many years ago and this site is holding its axiophyte score well. In total, there were 13 axiophytes and 10 meadow indicator species (of which 6 were axiophytes).

Pound Gate

This meadow has changed ownership, and now has a new manager who is keen to maintain the species-richness of the meadow. He was accompanied around the site, and shown the various indicator species while discussing meadow management. In total, there were 3 axiophytes and 7 meadow indicator species (of which 3 were axiophytes).

Crossways



The meadow event was held at this site and 20 people joined us to celebrate. A brief talk was given about the aims of the Meadow Group, why species-rich grasslands need to be celebrated and the urgency now to conserve them. The owner led a tour of the meadow with a synopsis of its management, and, in total, there were 20 axiophytes and 12 meadow indicator species (of which 5 were axiophytes).

In 2026 the Botany Group will continue to survey meadows along with other species-rich grasslands, and plan to hold a meadow celebration at New Invention



Pyramidal Orchid

Butterflies

Surveys of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries in the area started in 2010 and have been conducted annually since then. This is a UKBAP priority species, which has suffered long term decline across the UK. In our area, it occurs in wet locations such as rush pasture. 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, Gors Bank and The Wain.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary

After last year, which was pretty disastrous for insect life, there was a hope that 2025 would be better and, thankfully, it was. Despite the prolonged drought both butterfly and moth numbers showed a recovery, although not yet to the levels pre-2024. The flight season for many species started sooner and lasted longer.

Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries were on the wing three weeks earlier than in 2024. They were recorded from three sites, two sites fewer than last year. They are dependent on the Marsh Violet and there was concern that their season may have been affected by the drought, with some of their sites drying out completely.

The Marbled White colony at Clun Castle increased, and a small population has become established, with numbers steady in the low double figures. Future management of the site should ensure that this habitat is retained. It was recorded near Wain this year and suitable grass habitats should be investigated in July 2026.



Wood Whites courting

The Wood White is a delicate, Nationally Endangered butterfly, which is bucking the national trend in the West Midlands, and Bury Ditches and the adjoining woods are strongholds for the species. There is a colony in our area, in Blakeridge Wood. Numbers were down in 2024 but recovered strongly in 2025, with a significant expansion in range. Courtship and egg-laying was observed in two of the new sites, indicating colonisation. Suitable woodlands should be investigated in 2026. The Forestry Commission and Natural Resources Wales have committed to managing their woodlands to help the species and are keen to do so.

Cinerosus Pearl moth is believed to have been present again, at its only known site in Shropshire.

An Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group recording 'activity' was set up on iRecord at the end of 2019. It is very easy to use, working on both computer or smartphone. Many thanks to the people who submitted lepidoptera records via iRecord. There is a clear pattern of recovery from the dismal year in 2024, although not yet to the level of 2023. 13 people submitted records (2024: 8, 2023:13) of 28 butterfly species (2024: 22, 2023: 29) and 173 moth species (2024: 112, 2023: 244).

All records are important, even for the most common species. Please add your records.

Rush Pasture is an important habitat for Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries and the food plants they need, particularly Marsh Violet. It is also an important habitat for wetland birds. A UCCWG leaflet on the management of Rush Pasture for its characteristic wildlife can be found on the website.

A similar document, but concentrating on the Fritillary and its needs, is available on the website of the West Midlands Branch of Butterfly Conservation www.westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk

The Wildlife Group is working closely with local farmers, and wants to continue to do so. 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 "Facilitation Fund" grant from Natural England, through a joint application with the Wildlife Group. This aimed 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. This work will continue, although the funding has finished.

Bringing farmers together in this way helps 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 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 2026, and we'd like more help, please.

Participants

Eighteen people helped with Curlew surveys, and several more sent in records of individual sightings; 9 had nest boxes on their land, and provided results; 9

helped with plant surveys, 13 people submitted records of 28 butterfly and 173 moth species, 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

Our main area of operation is 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. The Plant and Butterfly Groups also cover the Teme catchment to the south of the main area.

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, 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. The Group continues to grow, and there are 98 members now.

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 has been an extensive chapter on Conservation Action in previous full annual reports (see website).

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/ There is increasing evidence that the release of large numbers of Pheasants for shooting, officially 726,000 in Shropshire in 2018 alone, but probably over 2 million, is fuelling a big increase in the numbers of predators that eat Curlew eggs and chicks.

Additional information can be viewed on, or downloaded from, our website
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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