Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

Annual Report 2025

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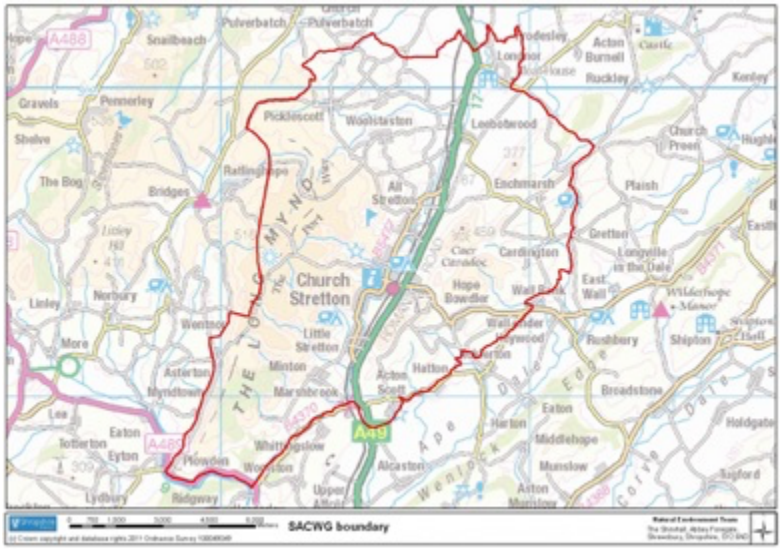
Introduction

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. Group or 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

SACWG Activities during 2025

Our group, though small in numbers, is anything but small in terms of enthusiasm for all aspects of surveying and conserving nature. Each annual report provides an example of this dedicated work by members throughout the year, for which full credit and appreciation is deserved. Further credit goes to Julie Cowley, our Swift Project lead, is now the Shropshire Ornithological Society's Swift Species Champion.

This year we bid an appreciative farewell to John Bacon, who has served as a committee member for many years. We're very grateful for all his inputs and for his valuable work on wildflower meadows.

In April SACWG set up a wildlife zone as part of Stretton Climate Change's Green Fair. The focus was all-age friendly exhibits and live freshwater tanks full of invertebrates and newts. Thanks to Steve Butler for the tanks, wildlife and microscopes which made for fascinating study, and to all the volunteers who made the most of engaging with the public.

Garden Survey

In 2005 Shropshire Wildlife Trust carried out a garden survey in the Strettons. The suggestion was made that it would be a valuable exercise to repeat this 20 years later and look at changes during that time. A small sub-committee undertook to plan and develop this idea. The aims were to:

- Survey the wildlife in local gardens
- Map wildlife distribution and habitats in Strettons' gardens
- Improve garden wildlife within five years as part of the 30 x 30 agenda by offering simple tips and ideas to make gardens more wildlife friendly
- Educate and improve identification skills at a local level
- Enthuse the next generation.

An online survey was designed which was completed by 119 respondents. In addition, a practical survey of gardens offered by respondents from the online survey, was carried out during the last weekend in June, following a training evening for volunteers. Participation (63 people) was excellent and it was a very positive exercise for all involved. Four small teams of surveyors surveyed 16 gardens and one churchyard with several people offering to survey their own gardens if they lived at a distance from the Strettons, resulting in a data from 18 gardens and one churchyard. The methodology worked well and meant that everyone who took part, whatever their prior level of expertise, was fully engaged. We were joined by two of our County Recorders, Caroline Uff and Ian Cheeseborough on the Sunday. Respondents and people who offered their gardens for surveying undoubtedly made for a self-selecting group which helped account for the encouraging nature of the responses. A detailed report was prepared, available on our website, and a well-attended and very positive evening was organised in October to share the findings. In addition, a series of articles have been written to share the findings in Focus. Individual reports of findings were sent to all the gardens surveyed.

Refreshment pause

Garden Tiger moth

Identifying specimens

Overall, participants really valued their garden wildlife. The wide range of species recorded is an important reminder of the role our gardens have in providing food and shelter.

All species of mammals, birds and amphibians recorded in 2005 are still present. All 20 species of butterfly noted in the 2005 report were still found in 2025. Most encouragingly 14 species of dragonflies and damselflies were seen this year, compared with 6 species noted in 2005.

In 2005 responses were received from 79 gardens. 27% managed their whole gardens for the benefit of wildlife while 71% of owners considered wildlife in their management. How rewarding to report that these figures have increased two decades later with most respondents in 2025 (97%) saying they garden with wildlife in mind, and 82% have a wildflower area. The number of garden ponds has increased from 51% to 63%. The numbers feeding birds and providing nest boxes has also increased.

Despite the challenges of increased building and climate change, it is reassuring to know that the residents of the Strettons are still providing a haven for wildlife to thrive.

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.

Committee members (bold) and project leaders 2025: ***Isabel Carter (chair), Julie Cowley (secretary), Penny Bienz (publicity), Sally Mawhinny (website), Will Priestley (treasurer), Leo Smith, Steve Butler,*** *Mike Carter, Maggie Bryant,* ***Jan Hegmann, Martin Hegmann****, Kate Goodman.*

Project Activities and Results

Stretton Wetlands

Cudwell Meadow


The scrape

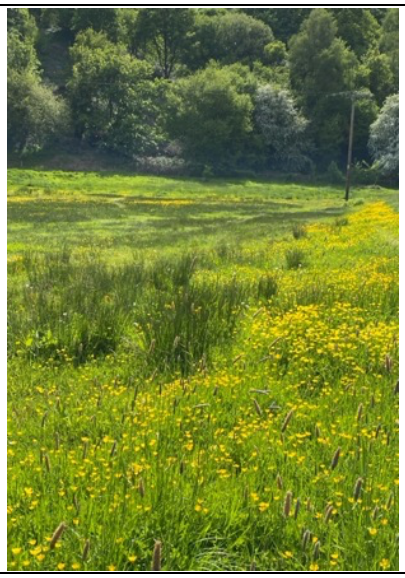
Management

Just as last year Cudwell meadow became a lake for 5 months of the year. For a few days it froze over completely.

The damp conditions meant once again, no tractor could safely be brought in for hay making. However, from the end of July to end of September, 60 sheep munched their way through the long grass.

Storm Darragh in December brought considerable damage to this area. The meadow lost a mature Hawthorn right next to the tool store. This was a sad loss given its size and maturity and with no root stock left for it to rejuvenate. This was cleared by volunteers in the February work party and two large brash piles made (one immediately used by a wren for nesting).

Our amazing volunteers are adapting to a new technique of underwater scything! If the tips of soft rush are cut and remain underwater for a couple more weeks, they are not likely to recover. Since soft rush has been thriving in the wet conditions and threatening to take over completely, this seemed a good idea and seems to have made a real difference.

		
Visit by MP Stuart Anderson	Wildflowers in June	Moving spawn to safety

The wet weather was appreciated by the amphibians and after a dearth last year, this year brought huge quantities of frog and toad spawn left stranded on the meadow as 'the lake' dried out. Industrial quantities were moved into the scrape and the stream.

In recent months otter have been regularly seen on trail camera along the brook. Egret, Heron, Buzzard and Sparrowhawk make occasional visits. It's been pleasing to note some of the benefits to wildlife in the meadow after a pretty tough year for invertebrates. There has been an increase in sightings of dragonflies and damselflies with six species observed in 2025 around the scrape and stream - including two new species for the meadow - Broad Bodied Chaser and Golden Ringed dragonfly. Monthly Bumblebee walks continue with the data submitted to Bumblebee Conservation. The summer brought reasonable sightings, particular of Buff-Tailed Bumblebee and Common Carder. A roe deer has been seen in the wood above the meadow – and within the meadow. Hopefully our young trees are now safely established and behind fences!


The Parish Paths Partnership team with gate installed

A major decision was taken to install a pedestrian gate to the meadow to give access at all times. Initially access was restricted to summer weekends because of concerns over dogs or rough campers. But now the meadow has become accepted as a wildlife area, this seemed to be the right action so that people can enjoy the meadow at their convenience. Four friends from the Parish Paths Partnership helped us install the gate in July.

Local MP Stuart Anderson came for a visit in September and was most interested to learn about management of the meadow, the work of the Community Land Trust and our volunteers. This raised an opportunity to follow up with some parliamentary questions concerning 'slow the flow' and nature recovery.

Vegetation survey

In the summer of 2025 a vegetation survey was carried out again to assess changes in the 5 years since 2020. (For more details see the Botanical Group's section of this report.)

The total number of flora species recorded has increased from 145 to 169, suggesting more diversity. However some species may have been lost; for example Changing Forget-me-not (*Myosotis discolor*) from the hard-standing area by the gate. A mystery is the apparent disappearance of New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*), an invasive alien recorded and verified present in 2020, but not found in 2024 and 2025. Grazing, flooding times and ingress of Reed Canary-grass and others may account for this. Whatever the reason, we are fortunate if this alien has disappeared.

Longer periods of flooding have had multiple effects. For example, soils take longer to warm up in the spring. Inevitably there appear to be 'winners and losers' in flora (and fauna). Winners with greater coverage include Common Spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*), Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Creeping Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens) and* Hairy Sedge *(Carex hirta).* Losers with less coverage include grasses in general in the flooded areas, Marsh Bedstraw (*Galium palustre*), several of the Bistorts (*Persicaria* spp) and water Forget-me-nots (*Myosotis* spp).

Work Parties
The monthly work parties in Cudwell Meadow will begin again from February onwards – with the first meeting on Thursday February 5th from 1.30 to 3.30. All very welcome.

Bioblitz 2026 – Another bioblitz with various activities including small mammal traps, moth traps and insect ID - will be held on **Saturday 11th July 2026** from 10am onwards. All most welcome

Isabel Carter
February 2026

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 and, importantly, 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 will be 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 of swift populations in the county.

RESULTS

General Observations of Swifts in the Strettons

- The warm spring of 2025 saw swifts arriving early, with the first recorded sighting on 26 April 2025 (although anecdotally they were seen nearby as early as 19 April 2025). As breeding adults they are keen to reclaim their nest site and bond with their partner. The average age of a swift is 7 years and as they pair for life swifts invest a lot of time in each other; preening, foraging and mating.

- The fine weather continued throughout May to August and insects appeared to be in plentiful supply. Juvenile, non-breeding adults started returning in June but these birds did not appear to increase the population greatly. Screaming parties (which are typically juvenile birds with a few breeding adults amongst them) were evident throughout this time and continued into late July.

- Weekly surveys commenced in early June. Findings showed swifts breeding at most of their regular sites although at a few established sites the breeding pair did not return. The final nest site count for the season was 45, of which 9 were in nest boxes (Figure 1) - a record year!

- The last observation was a pair on 7 September 2025 – the presumption is that they were late breeders and as the weather remained warm and calm they stayed in Church Stretton to raise their young.

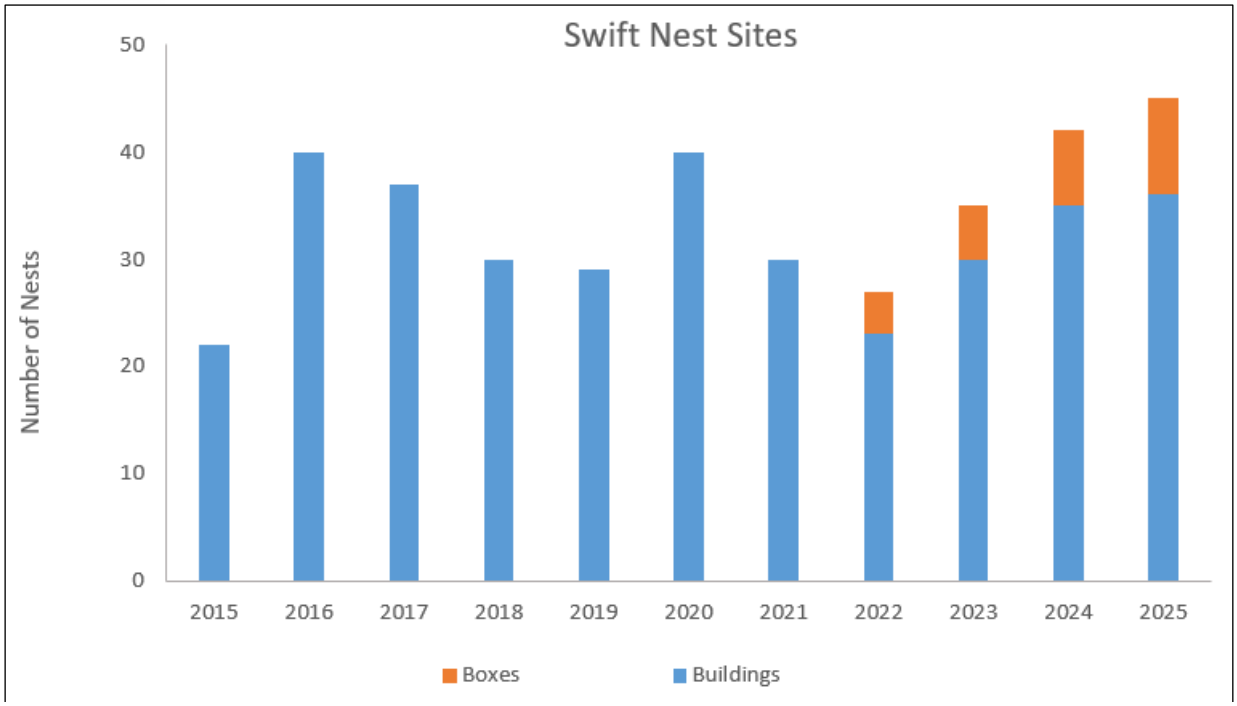


Figure 1. Number of swift nest sites year on year in the Strettons since 2015.

CONCLUSIONS

2025 was a record year for the number of swift nest sites recorded. It is difficult to surmise why this is so, especially as 2024 was a poor year weather wise and the expectation was that fewer birds would return and breed this year. It will be interesting to observe the swift population over the next few years as it may help determine whether weather conditions during the breeding season play a significant role in the stability of the population. Swifts are quite long-lived and so any effect on the breeding population may take time to develop.

The uptake of nest boxes on Essex Road has been interesting. It demonstrates the impact the blocking of nest sites by the housing association company has had. It has taken several years for swifts to return to the houses and we will never know the full extent of the breeding habitat lost.

Unfortunately the incident at Caradoc House, where 4 nests were destroyed because of re-roofing work, has left Little Stretton with a much-diminished population. It is far too easy for swifts to lose their breeding site and no doubt this situation occurs throughout the country. No wonder we are losing so many birds!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

Julie Cowley
21 October 2025.

Butterfly Surveys

Following up on the very successful butterfly ID training days last year, a small group was formed to undertake butterfly surveys, headed up by Martin and Jan Hegmann. We were particularly keen to repeat a transect established by Heather Hathaway in Batch Valley in 2015. We thought that it would be very interesting to compare butterfly species and numbers on the same transect ten years apart.

The transect starts just outside the NT car park at Batch Valley and follows the stream up the valley where it takes in a managed NT field, in which there is a small conservation flock of Hebridean Sheep. After this, it returns back to the main path up the valley and continues up the side of the stream before climbing up to the left into gorse with rocky outcrops, before heading back down to the main path. The principal habitat is dry semi-unimproved acid grassland, grazed by sheep and ponies all year. The second main habitat is dry scrub/shrub thickets.

The UKBMS (United Kingdom Butterfly Monitoring Scheme) provides all the record sheets and gives full instructions on how to carry out a transect walk. These transects form the core of the UKBMS with over 2,000 transects being surveyed over the last 30 years. Each transect is walked weekly during the 26-week period between 1st April and 29th September. Carried out yearly, this allows the UKBMS to calculate robust measurements of changes in the butterfly population for over 50 species. Transect walks are done by walking slowly along the route with an imaginary 5m cube in front of you to record the butterflies. They should only be carried out between between 10:00 and 17:00 hours, although butterfly activity may drop off rapidly during the late afternoon. They should also be done in warm and at least bright weather, with no more than moderate winds and not when it's raining - minimum criteria 13-17°C with at least 60% sunshine or, if there's no sunshine, then the temperature must be 17°C or above. Naturally, with our Shropshire weather these criteria are not always easy to meet!

		
Small Skipper	Ringlet	Green Veined White

Two training sessions were held in April - a number of the people who had attended last year's ID courses met together to walk the transect and to find out how to record the butterflies that were present. After the training sessions, a small group of surveyors walked the transect weekly until the end of September. The weekly recording sheets were then entered onto the UKBMS website so that the results could be collated with all the other transects carried out across the country.

We certainly saw more butterflies in our gardens in 2025 compared to 2024, which was a very poor year for them, the fifth worst year recorded by UKBMS. So what did we find in Batch Valley and how did that compare with Heather's findings in 2015?Overall, there were fewer individual butterflies recorded: 1,175 seen in 2025, compared with 1,621 seen in 2015. Comparing the number of different species seen, there were 20 in 2025 and 22 in 2015, which isn't so different.

Small Copper

However, looking at individual species: the results show a dramatic drop in Small Skipper numbers with only nine seen in 2025 compared with 239 in 2015! Ringlets also showed a dramatic decline with only nine seen in 2025 compared to 131 seen in 2015.

On the flip side, Green-veined White and Small Copper both fared better in 2025 than in 2015, with 358 Green-veined White against 154, and 101 Small Copper against 53, so both of those have nearly doubled in numbers.

One species we were particularly hoping to see was the Grayling, but although this photo was taken on our transect, they were unfortunately not recorded during our survey time.

In general, we noticed that butterflies were out earlier - by about two weeks compared to 2015. This trend was confirmed across the country by UKBMS. 2025 was the sunniest year on record and spring was also the driest in more than 50 years. This had a significant stress on plants, causing them to mature too quickly and finish flowering earlier, which was particularly noticeable with the thyme in the NT field. Also the lack of grass meant sheep were grazing on flowering plants in the more sensitive wet areas.

Grayling

We are keen to keep on monitoring this site which will give us a better understanding of trends. We will be happy to welcome anyone who is interested in helping with the surveying. With more people we could start a second transect too.

Martin and Jan Hegmann
February 2026

Toad Patrol

In February 2025 SACWG ran the first toad patrol along the B4577 between Montgomery Waters Ltd and Starr Lane in All Stretton. During the six weeks of patrolling over 900 toads, 73 frogs and 101 newts were rescued – an amazing effort from everyone! These amphibians are migrating to the field owned by Mr Parkes, to breed in a large pool dug a few years ago. Before the pool was created they were probably breeding in smaller numbers in the wetland area nearby.

Toads migrate to their ancestral breeding ponds between January and April, remaining there for a short time. They then start to migrate back to land, where they spend most of their lives.

The toad patrol found that the migrating toads encountered a few additional hazards besides the high risk of being squashed by cars:

- The kerbstones were too high for them to climb up quickly, so they get trapped along the edges, prolonging the risk of being run over
- The application of road salt is also extremely detrimental to them. Shropshire Council spread salt during the colder evenings in March despite no rain being forecast. This meant the salt remained on the roads and got pushed to the kerbside. Because the toads could not climb onto the pavements easily many died due to desiccation.

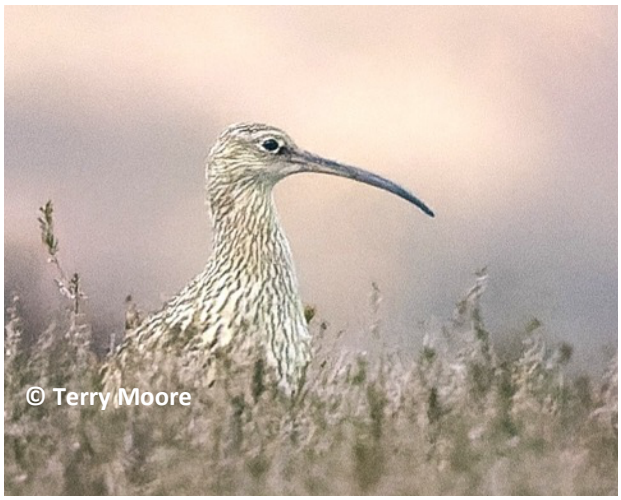
In June 2025 toadlets and froglets were observed moving away from the pool and attempting to cross the B5477. Unfortunately it was not possible to rescue many of them because they were very small, and there were so many of them.

The toad patrol will continue in 2026.

Julie Cowley
January 2026

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.

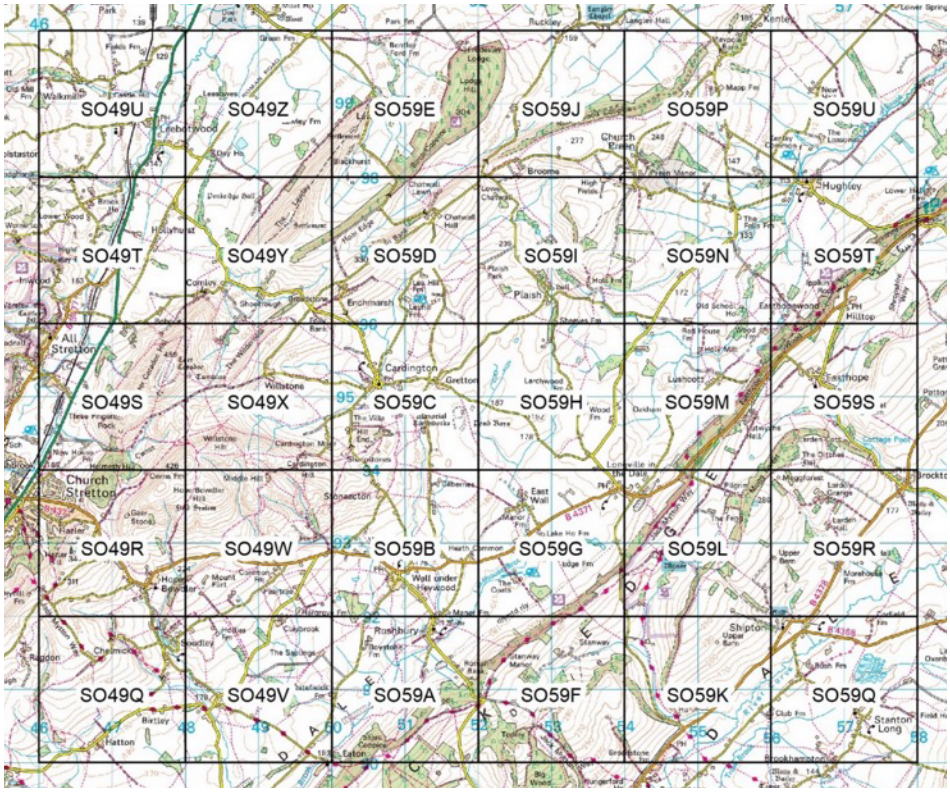
The Strettons area Community Wildlife Group agreed to conduct a Lapwing and Curlew survey in 2017, to complement similar surveys carried out by other Community Wildlife Groups in different parts of the Shropshire Hills.

An area was selected to the east of Church Stretton 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 23 other target species, 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 have been surveyed each year since. 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.

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 less than 100 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 2025

- Almost all squares were surveyed (27 out of 32)
- There were 36 participants.
- They put in over 230 hours of survey effort
- Five new participants attended the practical outdoor training session

This is a similar, but slightly lower, level of coverage, compared to that 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. It was added to 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.


© Leo Smith

The BTO Breeding Bird Survey has found a 51% decline in the UK, and a 32% decline in England, over the 28-year period 1995-2022 (the most recent figures available).

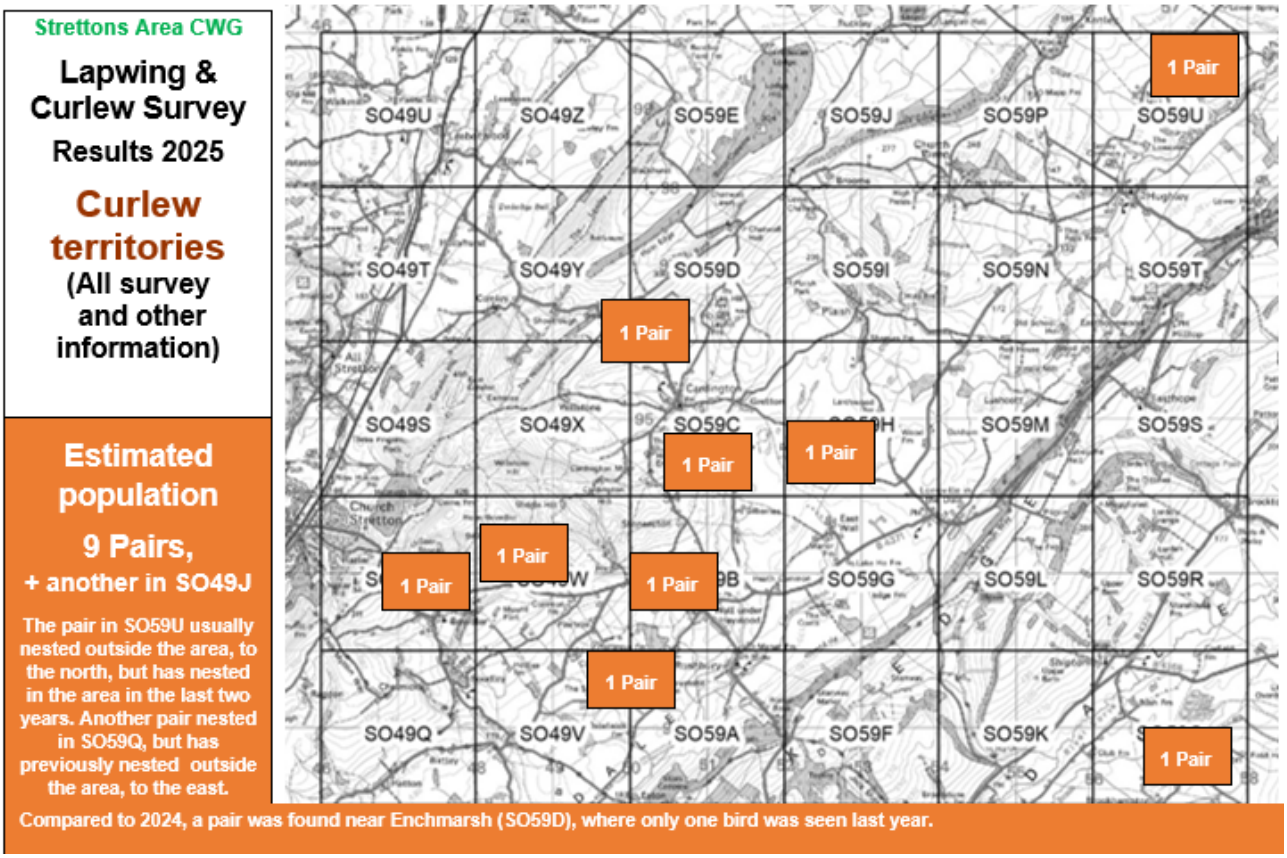
In Shropshire, it declined from about 700 breeding pairs in 1990 to 160 in 2010 (a loss of 77%), and it disappeared from 62% of the Atlas survey squares (tetrads) between 1985-90 and 2008-13.

The decline has continued, and there were less than 100 pairs left in the whole of the County in 2025. 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 11 years, and become virtually extinct in 22, by 2047. 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 - 25. 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.

Nine breeding pairs (territories) were located in 2025 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.



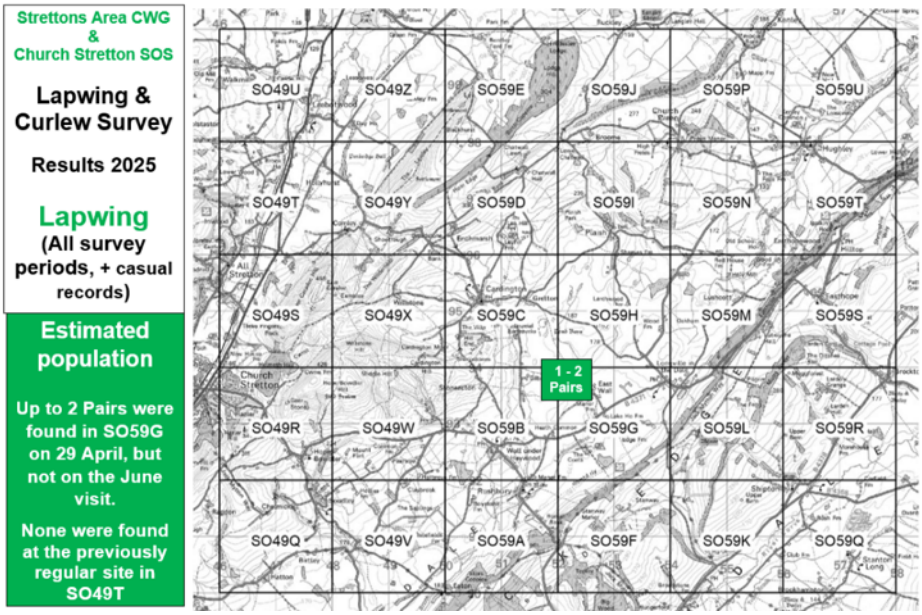
Adult Curlews are generally site-faithful, so it is possible to compare results year on year, and the results since 2017 have been assessed:-
The pair in SO49R was found for the first time in 2024, but was apparently present for the preceding three years at least.
The pair in SO59D was new in 2020, but there was only bird, not a pair, in 2024.
The pair in SO59Q have been present each year, but usually nested outside the area, to the east.
The pair in SO59U also nest in that square in some years (in 2021, 2024 and 2025), but to the north of the area in most years.
Four pairs have been lost, in SO49X, and in SO59A, SO59B and SO59 H (all second pairs in those three squares).

This summary excludes the squares added to the area in 2022 (SO49J and P). A pair was found in each of those squares in 2022, but only in one, SO49J, in each of the three years since.

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 53% in the UK, 43% in England and 48% in the English West Midlands, over the 28-year period 1995-2023. In Wales, Lapwing no longer occurs in sufficient survey squares for BTO to be able to produce a population trend.

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. Lapwing is on the *Red List* of *Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire*. The decline is largely obscured to the casual observer 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.

Three birds (2 pairs, if a sitting female was on the ground out of sight) were seen by a pool at East Wall on 29 April, but they were no longer present on the third visit, on 13 June, so the breeding attempt was presumably unsuccessful.

No Lapwings were seen at what was, until this year, a regular breeding site near Botvyle (SO49T).

Other Target species

Curlew and Lapwing were the main target species for the survey, but participants were also asked to record Kestrel, Cuckoo, and possible Red Kite breeding sites 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 37% in the UK, 24% in England and 37% in the English West Midlands region, over the much shorter 28-year period 1995-2023.

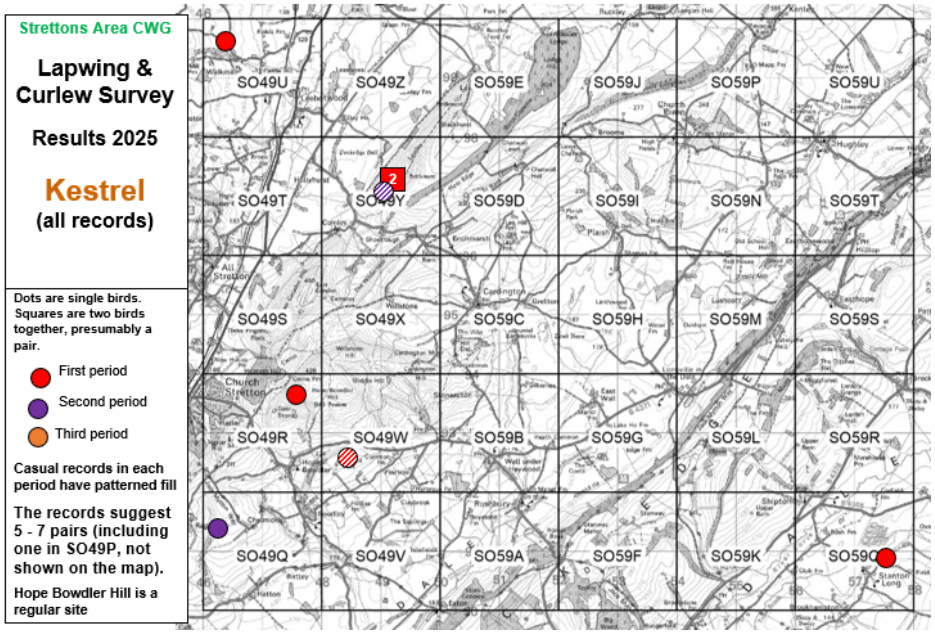
In Shropshire, records of confirmed or probable breeding declined by 46% in the 870 Atlas survey squares (tetrads) between 1985-90 and 2008-13, and the population probably halved in that time. Kestrel is on the *Red List* of *Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire.*

Kestrels defend a small territory around the nest, but their home range, where they find most of their food, is at least one kilometre square, but can be as large as 10 kilometres 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 2025 are shown on the Map, an estimated 5 - 7 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.

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.

Year	No. of Breeding Pairs
2020	7
2021	5
2022	6
2023	4 - 5
2024	4
2025	5 - 7



The 5 – 7 pairs shown on the 2025 map compares to 4 pairs in 2024, 4 – 5 pairs in 2023, 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, because 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.

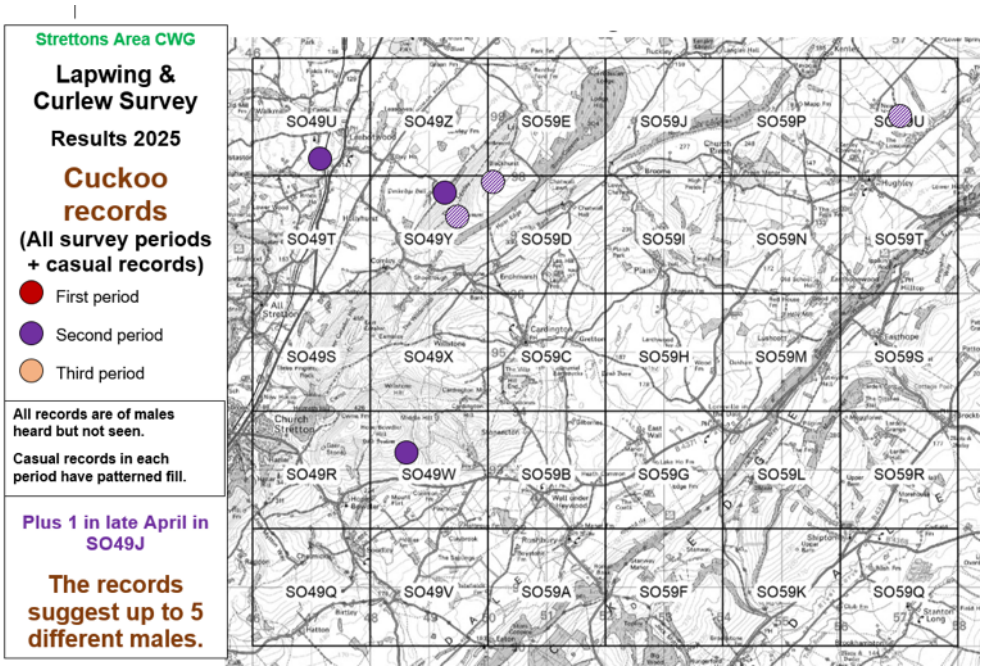
Cuckoo

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 33% in the UK, 71% in England, and 79% in the English West Midlands region, between 1995 and 2023.

In Shropshire, comparison of the 1985-90 and 2008-13 Bird Atlas 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 2025, all of calling males, probably from 4 5 territories (including one in SO49P, not shown on the map).

Year	No. of Territorial Males
2020	7
2021	5
2022	6 - 7
2023	4 - 5
2024	upto 7
2025	4 - 5



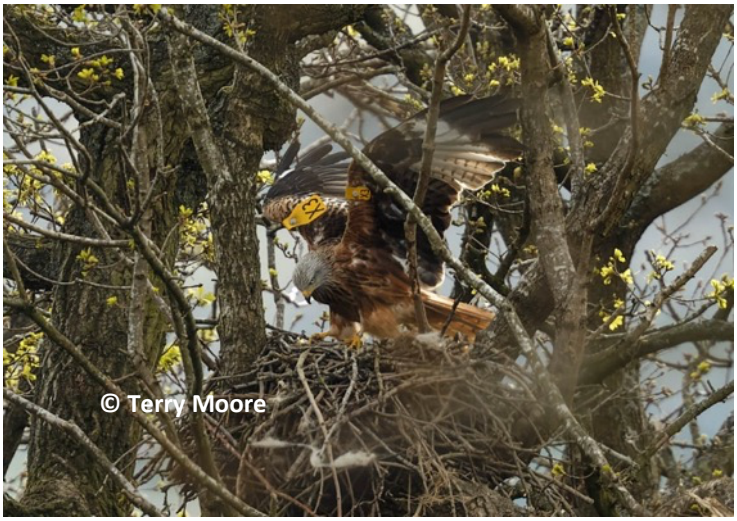
The population estimate of 7 territorial males in 2020, when "we were better able to hear them in the peace and quiet of staying at home [due to coronavirus restrictions]", was substantially more than recorded in previous years. In 2019, up to three males were recorded, and probably only one in 2018 and 2017. However, emphasis on recording Cuckoo amongst the Other Target species has increased considerably since 2020.

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 by the Shropshire Raptor Group 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 and 2025, but this is likely to reflect changes in monitoring effort, 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 in the area, all successful, but the number of fledged young was unknown. In 2025, three nests were found (all successful, with 7 fledged young), two other nests were not found (one successful and one failed), and a further nest was suspected, but not found, and was presumably unsuccessful.

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 tagged Kite from outside of the Wales/Shropshire/ Herefordshire scheme breeding in Shropshire. She has been seen in the local area several times since, and has nested in the same wood each year up to and including 2025, The nest was found in 2024, but not 2025, although one fledged young was seen with the tagged adult in both years.



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 in previous years.

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 24 Kites in 13 tetrads were seen in 2025, considerably more than the previous maximum of 14 Kites in 9 tetrads.in 2024.

Remaining Target Species

From 2024, 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 have been made for the Environmental Land Management System (ELMS) scheme introduced in 2025, but they are likely to change again following publication of the Land Use Review (results of the public consultation, which ended in April 2025, are still being assessed). The review addresses the fixed and limited land amount of land with growing demands being made of it (to restore nature, support food production, improve climate resilience and deliver new housing and infrastructure).

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 2025, four nests were found and fenced. Only one of these nests produced chicks, but all four were predated in a few days.

Since 2021, the project has found a total of 22 nests, 19 were fenced, 10 produced chicks, 32 chicks were tagged and tracked, but all 32 were lost, almost all predated. There have been no fledged young in the five-year period.

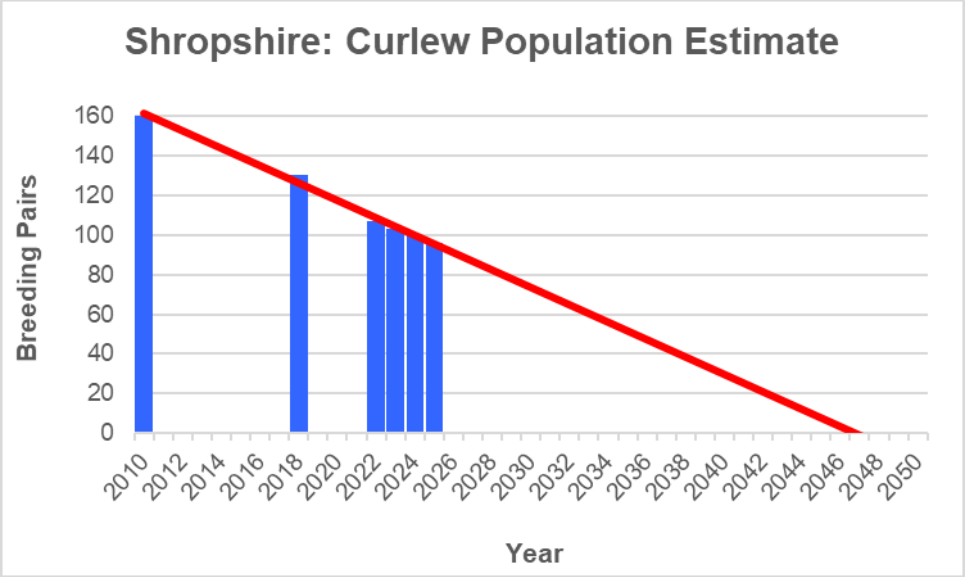
SOS has therefore concluded that it cannot justify continuing with this expensive work in 2026 and beyond. Thanks to all the people who have contributed.

There is a full description of the project on the SOS website 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.

Monitoring the County Curlew Population

The SOS 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, over 180 people participated in 2025, and put in over 1,100 hours, a clear indication of the commitment of local people to saving our Curlews.

The County population was estimated at 160 pairs in 2010, based on Bird Atlas Fieldwork and Timed Tetrad Visits organised by BTO as part of the national Bird Atlas 2007-11, published in *The Birds of Shropshire* (Liverpool University Press 2019). A revised estimate of 130 pairs was made in 2018. The Wildlife Groups have almost all found a declining population in the last four years, and projections forecast that the County Population will halve in 11 years, and disappear altogether in 22, with local extinction occurring by the year 2047.



Local Nature Recovery Strategy

A Shropshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), one of 48 local plans covering the whole of England, was published for consultation between 6th August and 15th October 2025. Comments are now being analysed, and the final version is due to be published in the next couple of months.

One-third of the total bird population in the UK has disappeared since 1970. The LNRS aims to reverse the decline of species threatened with local extinction, mainly by improving habitats, but 25 species (including 8 bird species) have been prioritised that need actions in addition to habitat improvements to reverse their decline.

The eight breeding bird species are Curlew, Dipper, Nightjar, Pied Flycatcher, Red Grouse, Swift, Wheatear and Willow Tit.

Three other bird species dependent on specific habitats, Snipe, Tree Pipit and Whinchat, are also listed.

Most of these species can be found in the Strettons area, and four (Curlew, Dipper, Red Grouse and Swift) are monitored by SACWG. The Group can therefore make an important contribution to the LNRS.

For further information, see the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/LNRS

Participants

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

John Arnfield, Dawn Bainbridge, Phil Constable, Belinda Cousens, Julie Cowley, Gill Davies, Alistair Edie, Joe Gomme, Jan & Martin Hegman, June Holloway, Melanie Houlder, Helen Howes, Kate Hudson, Jim Jarrett, Kay Jarvie, David John, Jana Kaminski, Chris & Carol King, Sarah Lane, David & Moira Matthews, Shirley McNichol, Steve Morgan, Ron Parnell, Adrian Pickles, Ian & Jill Plumridge, Will Priestley, Ray Slack, Dee Snape, Jon Taylor, Carol Thickens, Dick Ward and Dan Watkins.

Thanks also to:-

- Gill Davies, for making several additional survey visits to monitor the Curlews, helping with the training of new participants, and reporting a Red Kite nest.
- Terry Moore, for supplying photos and reporting two Kite nests.

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, in previous years, but not in 2025. 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.

New participants are needed for the survey in 2026. It's easy and enjoyable, and simple instructions will be provided. The target species are easy to recognise, and often draw attention to themselves by loud calling. Anyone interested in birds will be very welcome.

If you want further information, or you are interested in helping, email leo@leosmith.org.uk
All arrangements, including which square to survey, will be sorted by email.

For those that want to come, 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
January 2026

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.

- In 2020, the population in the area was estimated at 9 – 11 pairs.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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).
- In 2024, Seven pairs nested. Another regularly used site was not visited.

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

2025

Members were again asked to report sightings, and another appeal for information appeared in Stretton Focus. Reports were received only from CMV and Little Stretton.
(see below). Most members reported seeing no Dippers in 2025, because most of the streams had little or no water because of the drought conditions in the spring.

Rings

Ringing 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 first introduced in 2014.

These photos were all taken in Carding Mill Valley.

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 all three 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.

Dipper U21 Credit: John Hanley

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 she was ringed. She bred successfully in 2024, and the male she was paired with was caught and colour-ringed 00T in CMV on 26 October 2024, roosting with 26N.

Dipper 26N Credit Angela Ellis

26N was last seen on 4 February, and 00T was last seen on 5 May 2025, and the photos were taken on those dates..

No Dippers have been reported from CMV since 5 May 2025.

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 and 2025, and the ring was read on 21 April and 6 June in 2025.. A fledged young was seen on 12 June.

A colour-ringed Dipper was also seen on the Cound Brook at Longnor on 5th March 2025, but the ring was not read.

Dipper OOT Credit: Sue Rooney

Regular nest sites

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

In 2025, all these regular sites were checked by the Shropshire Dipper project. There was a nest at five of them, but all except one of these nests failed. There was a second attempt at one site, but that too failed. There was no nest at three of the regular sites, as the streams were very low because of the drought conditions in the spring.

There was also a nest at an occasionally used site near Leebotwood, which was not monitored (outcome unknown)

Acknowledgements

Thanks for records and information about Dippers in 2025, most of whom reported seeing no Dippers in the year.

Pauline Adcock, John Arnfield, Steve Butler, Beverley Carey, Julie Cowley, Bernard Ford, Steve Forster, Jane Fallows, David Lee, Sue and Steve Rooney, Carol Swales, and Peter Teague.

Special thanks to

1. Angela Ellis and Sue Rooney, who sent several photos of two different colour-ringed Dippers in Cardingmill Valley up to and including 5 May
2. Karen Wright, who reported a nest with young, and a colour-ringed adult, and Sandra Whitlock, who saw a juvenile waiting to be fed just by the road bridge by Green dragon, in Little Stretton.

In addition, thanks to the following people who have reported Dippers in previous years, but not in 2025:

Laura Beardsmore, Greg and Sue Forster, Sarah Freeman, Sara Howes, Gill Isherwood, John and Anne Hanley, Andrew Morton, Dave Pearce, Roger Thorpe, Dan Watkins and Sandra Whitlock, together with several readers of Stretton Focus.

Thanks to Tony Cross for details of the breeding attempts at all the nest sites, and the ringing and colour-ringing.

Plans for 2026

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.

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).

Leo Smith
Project Coordinator
February 2026

Red Grouse Counts on the Long Mynd

Strettons area Community Wildlife Group and the Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project, supported by the National Trust, have organised a Red Grouse count each year since 2011. Church Stretton Branch of Shropshire Ornithological Society helped organise it up until 2024.

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 was removed from the national *Amber List* of *Birds of Conservation Concern* in 2021. The results of our count help the National Trust's management of the heathland to provide suitable habitat.

The methodology requires concurrent observations of displaying males, to mark territory boundaries. 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, as there is little grouse activity, and what there is cannot be located accurately. If the weather forecast predicts that these conditions will prevail when a count is due, it is cancelled and rearranged.

Good results were obtained in most years up until 2019. Unfortunately subsequent counts up to and including 2022 did not produce reasonable estimates. 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 bad weather, and most of the planned counts were cancelled and rearranged. The number of counts when no grouse were recorded was higher than before 2020, and there were few concurrent observations of displaying males, to mark territory boundaries, 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 were 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. Analysis of survey returns suggested 32-33 territorial males (half the maximum estimates of 5-10 years ago).

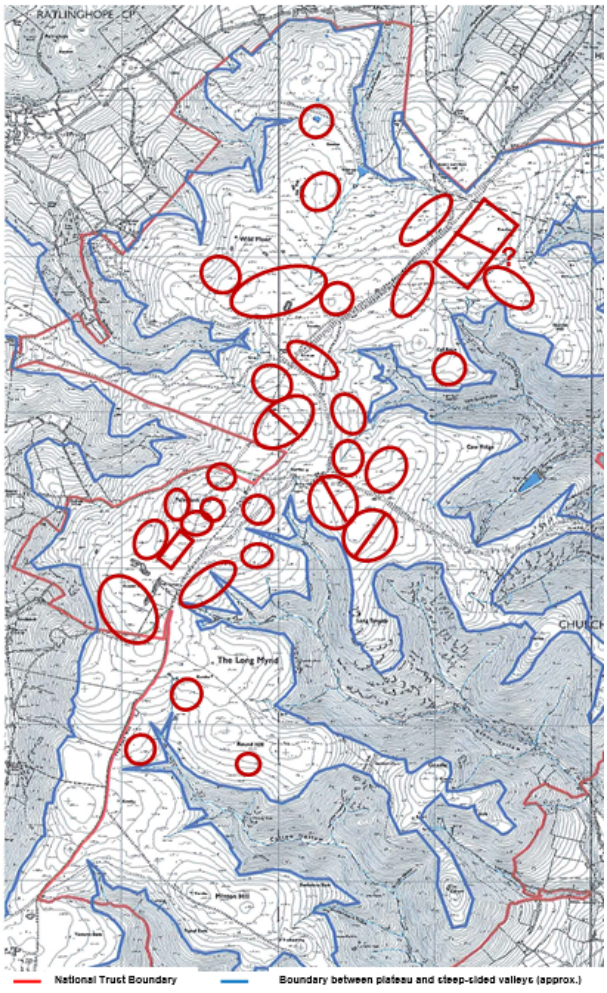
In 2024, coverage was better, with 152 survey visits made, with fewer counts of zero (52, compared with 71 in 2023), 416 records of Grouse, and an average of 2.7 grouse recorded per visit. However, this is only half the 2018 average. The population estimate was the same as 2023.

In 2025, the weather was much warmer and drier, with little wind, and all counts except one went ahead on the dated planned. However, fewer surveyors were available, and the number of counts was the lowest yet, only 127, but the number of Grouse records was the highest since 2019, 455. The average number of records

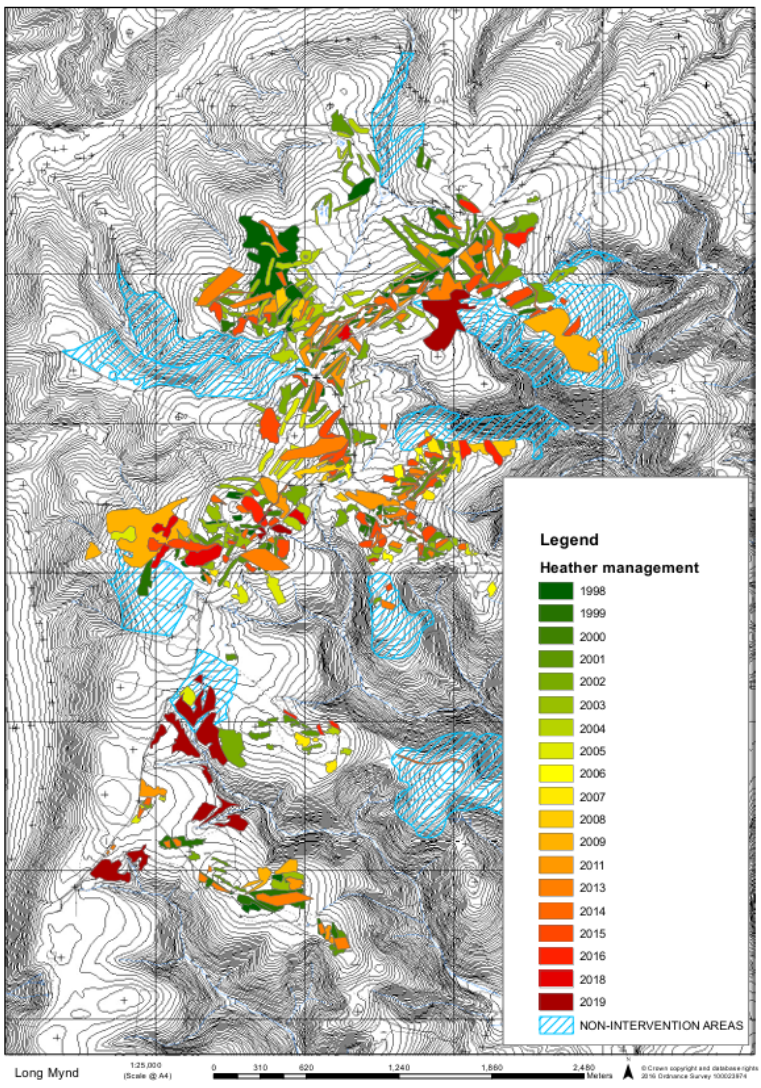
per count was 3.6, and there were only 33 counts with no Grouse recorded, also the best results since 2019, but poorer results than any in the period 2011 – 19, reflecting the rapid population decline around 2020. For the first time there were no Grouse recorded south of Callow Hollow, but there were a few more in the northern third of the area, probably reflecting a slight increase in the population, but possibly due to better weather conditions encouraging Grouse to display even in areas of low density.

The notional territories found by the analysis are shown on the left-hand map below. The right-hand map shows the heather management, where the heather has been cut or burnt to promote regrowth of young plants. 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. All observations fit into one of these “territories”, but the individual birds may roam over much larger territories than those shown on the map.

Long Mynd
Red Grouse: Schematic Distribution Map of 35 – 36 Territories 2025



Areas of heather management since 1998



Checking the Survey Results
It is possible that a combination of poor weather conditions and less territorial 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. This method is not reliable for counting the population, as it tends to over-estimate numbers, because unpaired males follow and 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. This method was not tried again in 2025.

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 was reduced in quality and extent 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*.), and probably still covers a smaller area.
- 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 was managed from 2019 until 2025, when a few small areas were cut or burnt. This has resulted 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 was managed up until 2019.
- Bracken is encroaching onto the heathland plateau. Much less purple heather has been visible in the last three years, compared with what 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)
- The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (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, which GWCT represents, as Kites have spread across Shropshire in a very short period (since the first nest in modern times, in 2005), thanks to carrion from dead Pheasants being available to them in vast quantities across the County.

The National Trust was recommended in 2024 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. This recommendation is reiterated.

Red List

As a result of the large decline on Long Mynd since 2018, and a similar large decline in the only other population in Shropshire, on the Stiperstones, Red Grouse was added to the Red List of *Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire* in 2025.

Participants

Thanks are due to the following participants

Carolyn Anstey, John Arnfield, Sam Bishop, Rachel Bromley, Harriet Burrell, Gill Davies, Alastair Edie, Aiden Foster, Jeremy Freeland, Beth Furlong, Joe Gomme, Adam Gornall, Sarah Lane, Anna McCann, Andrew Middleton, Mike Mullen, Rebecca Murcott, Sue & Steve Rooney, Christine Shipman, Simon Sholl, Ray Slack, Leo Smith, David Stafford, Mike Streetly, Roger Thorpe, Caroline Uff, Wendy-Jane Walton and Edward Wood.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks are due to Joe Gomme, for organising all the counts and training.

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	2025
Population Estimate	N / a	N / a	N / a	32 - 33	32 - 33	35 - 36

Full report 2025

A more detailed report will be sent to project participants, and the National Trust, in due course. It will be available on the Community Wildlife Group's website, www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

Plans for 2026

The count is being repeated in 2026. Counts will be held around sunset on seven Thursday evenings 2 April to 14 May. We want as many helpers as possible, please. People who have helped previously will be emailed in February, to ask if they will help again. New volunteers should contact Joe Gomme (contact details below).

A project briefing meeting for new participants will be held at 7.30pm on Thursday, 26 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/, or contact Joe Gomme (email: joegommegrouse@gmail.com, phone 07779 664394)

Leo Smith
Project organiser
January 2026

Botanical surveys

The Botanical 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 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. Any species of particular note we record on iRecord.

Hopes Wood SO44509330

Hopes Wood is a mixed deciduous woodland with a bridleway, Cunnery Road, running more or less N-S through it. Wood to the East of the bridleway belongs to householders along Ludlow Road. In December 6-7, 2024 Storm Darragh devastated an area of about 1ha in the mid-section of the wood. 100 or more trees fell. The bridleway has since been cleared at considerable expense.

Aerial view of Hopes Wood showing storm damage; Google

We hope the survey will help provide a baseline to measure regeneration and change following the storm. We compiled a species list of all vascular plants; ground flora, shrubs and trees. We also carried out a Woodland Condition Assessment using a questionnaire app developed for the Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust and others. A detailed report was given to the owner.


Storm damage

In summary:

a) The wood was probably heavily felled during or soon after WW1. It appears there was no systematic replanting; rather natural regeneration happened without subsequent thinning, resulting in dense stands of single-age, etiolated trees competing for light, in particular of faster-growing species like ash and sycamore.

b) In roughly equal measure the storm felled trees either by 'ground failure' or by stem breakage. Soils are thin and loose overlying fractured Stretton Shale. Ground failure resulted in many trees upended with root plates entire.

c) Tree and shrub flora: Of the canopy trees, Sycamore and Ash are abundant[1], dominant in places; Sessile Oak are frequent, Beech, Birch and Wild Cherry are occasional. Of the mid-storey and shrub species, Yew, Rowan, Hawthorn, Holly, Hazel, Elder and Wych Elm are frequent, and Field Maple and Laurel are occasional. The upper slopes of the wood are more diverse than the lower; historic extraction was easier close to the bridleway.

d) The ground flora is moderately species-rich; it includes some nice ancient woodland indicators like Ramsons and Bluebell (abundant) and

[1] Botanists use a rough DAFOR scale: Dominant, Abundant, Frequent, Occasional, Rare

Dog's Mercury and Yellow Archangel (frequent), Scaly Male Fern and Wood Melick (rare). But we did not find other typical ancient wood indicators such as Wood Anemone, Wood Sorrel, Hard Fern or Hartstongue.
e) Pests and disease. We saw evidence of squirrel, deer and rabbit damage. There are several badger setts. Ash die-back is prevalent and added considerably to the stem-breakages.
f) Non-natives and invasives. Laurel is an escalating problem, Rhododendron less so. Variegated Yellow Archangel and Green Alkanet are frequent in places.

In conclusion: there are encouraging signs of regeneration, of tree, shrub and ground flora. Seed-parent trees remain. Already Ramsons, Bluebell and Male Fern have colonised cleared areas. No doubt Sycamore and Ash will re-establish quickly; the young Ash will probably die within a decade through dieback. Sessile Oak and Beech may slowly establish; neither tends to grow well under the parent tree, but, given time, they may establish in the open space. Hopefully deer and squirrel damage will not be critical. The wood will need management however and, in particular, thinning. Planting of some mid-storey species such as Field Maple, Wych Elm, Yew, Rowan, Small-leaved Lime, Hawthorn, Hazel, Guelder Rose and Crab Apple may help. Without management, laurel is likely to spread rapidly; and spindly ash and sycamore may dominate, vulnerable, once again, to future storms.

Yellow Pansies on the Portway, Betchcott Hill SO42769797

We planned to visit the Portway for two reasons: primarily to look for Mountain Pansy *Viola lutea,* but also to view from the Portway the new Shropshire Wildlife Trust reserve at Betchcott Hill. We did not plan to walk around the reserve because in mid-June we could be disturbing breeding curlew. The Shropshire Botanical Society field visit programme included an open-to-all survey at the end of July.

Our visit had to be cancelled unfortunately. But several members walked to the Portway on or soon after the date. Mountain Pansies were found by Frances and Frank Hay at SO4297497249. *Viola lutea* is one of the 12 Stepping Stones 'target' species with action plans for recovery. The Hays also recorded them on Caer Caradoc. A third known population of the yellow pansy is known on Stretton Golf Course.


Mountain Pansy on the Portway

Roman Bank Meadows SO51189039

This is a special site of species-rich meadows on Wenlock Edge belonging to the Millichope Estate. The purpose of our visit was to recce for the annual evening flower walk open to the public a week later, organised by the Strettons Branch of SWT.

In a brief visit we recorded 82 vascular plant species including some more unusual ones such as Betony, Fairy Flax, Dyer's Greenweed, and Common Gromwell. We only found one orchid species, *Dactylorhiza fuchsii,* the Common Spotted. Managing species-rich meadows is not easy; the meadows did not appear as rich as in previous visits. We wondered whether several fields have a build-up of thatch on the soil surface, that would benefit from more aggressive harrowing. Track verges along the bridleway have also become overgrown with bramble and the like, crowding out more timid species.

Cudwell Meadow SO44889317

The purpose of this visit was to review changes in vegetation over the last 5 years since Cudwell was purchased by the community. A flora and vegetation survey was carried out in July 2020; see the SACWG

Annual Report 2020, p.33. A paper was also written for the Shropshire Botanical Society Newsletter Spring 2021, available here SBS News Spring 2021.

Key changes in management and environmental conditions 2020-2025

A number of management operations and changes in environmental conditions have happened during the 5 years;

1. in the summers of 2021, 2022 and 2023 a local farmer took a crop of haylage from 70% of the field area, (the remainder being inaccessible to large machinery); sheep were grazed on the aftermath for about 8 weeks Sept-Oct. No haylage crop was taken in 2024 (too wet for heavy machinery) and in 2025 (farmer not interested, with adequate winter fodder from elsewhere). Instead, in 2024 and 2025, the meadow was mob grazed August-Sept with many more sheep.
2. in April 2022 a scrape was dug in the swamp area at the west end to increase the likelihood of year-round water within the meadow.
3. the periods of meadow inundation have lengthened each year. In the winter of 2024-2025 much of the meadow was under water for 5 months from November to March. This we surmise to be because of extreme weather events, of high rainfall in stronger storms; and because the rest of the wetlands and the Onny Brook have not drained as effectively as in previous years and have themselves flooded for longer.
4. volunteers during monthly work parties have reduced the presence of, or at least checked the spread of, 'weeds', in particular docks (*Rumex obtusifolius, R. crispus* and *R. conglomeratus)*, Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*) and bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*).
5. volunteers have introduced several species appropriate to the conditions either as seed or plug plants: e.g. Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*), Water Plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*) and Vipers Bugloss (*Echium vulgare*). Some introductions seem to have failed (or at least not established yet): e.g. Ragged Robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*), Common Spotted Orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) and Southern Marsh Orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*).

Findings of the 2025 survey

The total number of flora species recorded has increased from 145 to 169, suggesting more diversity. Several 'new' aquatic plant species have appeared as a result of digging the scrape; e.g. Water Plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*), Branched Bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum)*. However some species may have been lost; for example Changing Forget-me-not (*Myosotis discolor*) from the hard-standing area by the gate. A mystery is the apparent disappearance of New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*), an invasive alien recorded and verified present in 2020, but not found in 2024 and 2025. Grazing, flooding times and ingress of Reed Canary-grass and others may account for this. Whatever the reason, we are fortunate if this alien seems to have disappeared.

Branched Bur-reed

Longer periods of flooding have had multiple effects of conditions and biota. For example, soils are more anoxic and they take longer to warm up in the spring. Inevitably there appear to be 'winners and losers' in flora (and fauna). Winners with greater coverage include Common Spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*), Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Creeping Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens) and* Hairy Sedge *(Carex hirta).* Losers with less coverage include grasses in general in the flooded areas, Marsh Bedstraw (*Galium palustre*), several of the Bistorts (*Persicaria* spp) and water Forget-me-nots (*Myosotis* spp).

The area of bracken encroachment from the woodland margin into the grassland has decreased markedly. Dock coverage has probably decreased a little but remains a problem. Rank grasses and Meadowsweet are perhaps a problem along the bank and at the west end; these are areas that have never been cut by tractor and mower and where mob-grazing by sheep has limited effect. Occasional cutting with a heavy-duty pedestrian mower and clearing may be necessary.

Ley Gardens SO45959418

Some members of the group visited Ley Gardens individually in 2020; individually because of covid restrictions in place at the time. We revisited as a group in July 2025. It is a small nature reserve of 0.5ha sandwiched between the Ley Gardens housing development and the Shrewsbury to Hereford railway line. It is really part of what is now Coppice Leasowes Nature Reserve cut off by the railway in 1850, Ley Gardens to the west and Coppice Leasowes to the east.

Skullcap

99 vascular plant species were recorded in 2020; an additional 24 in 2025. 123 species in such a small area is impressive, in part due presumably to the range of small habitats, scrub, dry bank, scrape, paths. This includes 8 axiophytes:

I) Sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*
ii) Small-fruited Prickly-sedge *Carex muricata subsp. pairae*
iii) Marsh Willowherb *Epilobium palustre*
iv) Water avens *Geum rivale*
v) Water dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*
vi) Grey Willow *Salix cinerea*
vii) Skullcap *Scutellaria galericulata*
viii) Small-leaved Lime *Tilia cordata* (planted).

Well worth a visit.

Finally

We plan to continue meeting in 2026. 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, Anne 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

Treasurer's Report

ANNUAL BALANCE SHEET

Year ending 31 December 2025

INCOME			**EXPENDITURE**	
Carry forward from 31.12.24	1,123.91		SHI hire Nature in Strettons	12.00
APM 2025 donations	103.50		Strettons Climate Care Mayfair	10.00
Donation for owl boxes	29.64		SOS Hall hire (half)	12.00
Toad Patrol			Owl boxes plysheets	29.64
Donation	103.81			
CS Town Council grant	150.00			
Sale swift boxes	125.00		Birnbeck Insurance	188.35
Dawn chorus walk	25.00		L Smith curlew project-	100.00
Bumblebee course income	330.00		All Stretton hall hire for APM Feb 26	30.00
Garden Survey income from Library event 15 October	156.00		Toad signs	353.81
Donation from Mayfair craft stall profits	40.00		SWT donation for Betchcott Hill	100.00
			Bumblebee ID Training	
			URC Hall x2	65.00
			Bumblebee trainer	250.00
			Garden Surveys	
			URC hall x4	135.00
			Library hire	30.76
			Wildflower seed plugs	108.00
			BALANCE IN BANK 31.12.25	762.30
TOTAL	**£2,186.86**			**£2,186.86**

MONIES HELD AS FOLLOWS	**31.12.25**	**31.12.24**
Wetlands	-	62.28
Tree Planting Project	206.80	206.80
Swifts	-	110.31
Undesignated funds	555.50	744.52
TOTAL	**762.30**	**£1,123.91**

L W Priestley, Treasurer
January 2026