

THE UPPER ONNY WILDLIFE GROUP

www.shropscwgs.org.uk



Report 2025

The Group was formed in 2003, to work within the local community to find out more about the local populations of Lapwings, Curlews, Skylarks and other wildlife, and to help with their conservation.

New members are welcome, and we need more people to help with our projects and surveys, please.

We cover a total area of about 125 square kilometres, between the Long Mynd and the Welsh Border (from just north of Bridges, Pennerley and Shelve, as far south as Horderley and Bishops Castle). Most of this area is within the Shropshire Hills National Landscape (previously known as the AONB).

We have carried out a Breeding Bird Survey each year since 2004, concentrating on Curlew and Lapwing. Farmers with nests on their land have been advised of their presence, and encouraged to take appropriate

conservation measures. We have helped some of them to join a Government farm payment scheme, so they are rewarded financially for conservation. Recording most Other Target Species was discontinued in 2024, but Kestrel, Cuckoo and Red Kite are still monitored.

We proposed the Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) Ground-nesting Bird Recovery Project in 2014, and provided Curlew distribution maps to help them to find and protect nests, to discover the causes of this decline, and try and reverse it.

We have carried out plant surveys, and we are identifying potential Wildlife Sites. Events are held to involve more people in this work (see back page). The project to clear invasive species continued in 2025.

The Dragonfly and Damselfly Monitoring project (see page 3) started in 2022, and has continued since.

Curlew – The Decline Continues



The bubbling call of Curlews is one of the first welcome signs of spring, and in 2004 we found close to 40 pairs. However, very few young birds fledge, and the older ones are dying off, so

the population has declined. A slight recovery in 2023 and 2024 was not sustained, and 2025 was a poor breeding season in the drought conditions in spring and early summer, and there were only 19 pairs in the core area of 30 squares. The population has declined

by 50% in 21 years.

Curlew are declining everywhere, and they were added to the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern in 2015, but our area is still very important for them – it holds perhaps one-fifth of the regionally and nationally important Shropshire population. Here they inhabit wet grassland, rushy pasture, hay meadows, and hay and silage crops.

Although land management has played a big part in the long-term decline, predation is the now biggest problem, and understanding the reasons for poor chick survival is needed before an Action Plan can be developed to reverse the decline (see Curlew on p.3).

Lapwing – Only 1 -2 breeding pairs found in 2025



In our first three years 2004 - 06, the breeding population declined from 19 to 13 pairs. If that rate of decline had continued, Lapwings would have been lost within two years.

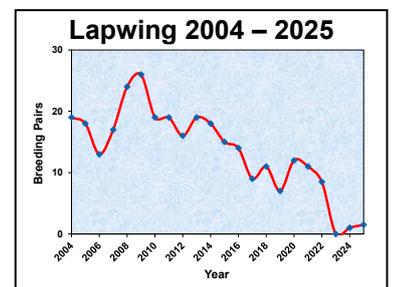
We launched a Lapwing

Recovery Project, and worked with several individual farmers and Natural England to reverse the decline. Initial success raised the population to 26 pairs by 2009, but loss of important habitat on a single farm led to a further decline, and by 2010 the population was down again to when we started.

Further decline set in again in 2015, and has continued since.

Recently, Linley Estate has created two scrapes for Lapwing, north-east of Lydham, and there was one pair with chicks, and probably a second pair, there in 2025.

In recent years, Lapwings have been restricted to very few farms, and there is very little suitable habitat left. We are still trying to work with farmers and Natural England to improve habitat and breeding success, to reverse the long-term decline.



A report of the Bird Survey can be found on our website. It includes distribution maps and population trends for Lapwing and Curlew. **Rapid and effective conservation action is needed for both species if they are not to disappear forever.**

Bird Survey (continued)

At least 3 - 4 Kestrel territories, and 7 Cuckoo territories, were located by the Bird Survey. Red Kites were seen in almost every survey square. 27 surveyors covered 30 of the 32 survey squares (tetrads), putting in a total of over 150 hours. Details and results maps can be found on the website. The Raptor Group found 5 Red Kite nests.

Nest Box Schemes

The Group operates three nest box schemes, for Barn Owls, small woodland birds and Dippers. Breeding success varies from year to year, depending on weather conditions at different stages of the breeding cycle, and the availability of food.

Barn Owls

The Group has provided special Nest Boxes to Farmers and Landowners with suitable habitat, mostly by 2010, and over 30 have been installed altogether.

A review of the results over the 12 years to 2022 showed that there has been a fairly regular breeding population of around 6 pairs in the area, with some annual fluctuations, and some pairs use more than one box. Seven pairs is the most that has been recorded, with 16 fledged young in 2017. The review can be found on the website.

Results are shown for 2025, and preceding years.

Few chicks were ringed, due to early fledging of two broods and a third brood being too small.

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Boxes checked	13	9	12	16	11	15	14
Nesting attempts	5	5	3	6	3	5	4
Chicks ringed	14	7	6	14	8	5	4

Thank you once again to all the accommodating land owners for helping to provide these boxes and allowing us access to monitor them.

No natural sites are known.

For more information about Barn Owls please see

www.shropshirebarnowlgroup.org.uk/



If you have a suitable site for a box, or if you see a Barn Owl, we'd like to know, please.

Small Woodland Birds



We have provided well over 300 nest boxes to people in our area, who agreed to maintain them and provide us with a report, but many have been subsequently incorporated into the prime locations monitoring scheme. This includes over 500 boxes mainly

installed on the banks of the East and West Onny.

Pied Flycatcher (left), a summer visitor from Africa, is the main target species, and Redstart and Pied Flycatcher chicks in these boxes have been ringed as part of the BTO scheme.

Pied Flycatchers occupied 70 boxes in 2025, a record year: 269 chicks and 27 adults were ringed.

Redstarts occupied 8 boxes, and 2 adults and 12 chicks were ringed.

Pied Flycatcher is on the *Red List of Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern in Shropshire*, and is a priority bird species in the forthcoming Shropshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (to be published in April).

Full results for 2025 will be published on the website.

If you would like to participate, please let us know.

Dippers

Dippers feed almost exclusively on larvae that live on the stony beds of fast flowing streams, and the Upper Onny has been one of their strongholds in Shropshire. Some build nests on ledges on bridges, and they take readily to nest boxes. Since 2005, over 50 boxes have been installed, under most bridges. Over several years, we have shown that the nest box scheme has increased the population – there are more potential nest sites, and the pairs that nest in boxes produce more fledged young. This work is part of a wider project, *Dippers in the Teme Catchment*.

There have usually been about 14-16 breeding pairs, but numbers were very low in 2025 because the very dry spring resulted in low water levels in the rivers.

Three nests on each of the West Onny and East Onny were successful, and 10 chicks were ringed on the former, and 12 on the latter. Two nests failed on the East Onny, but other usual sites were not occupied.

Only 5 Dippers were caught at winter roost above the confluence in 2025, compared with 10 last year, and 29 in 2017. Dippers are doing very badly on the Onny.

We want to involve more local people. Enthusiasm and interest in wildlife is more important than expertise. Training is provided for anyone that wants it. We have proved that local people can make a difference, and we can do even more with your support. Please help.

Curlew Country

For several years, the “Curlew Country” project has concentrated on the trialling of “headstarting”, which involves removing eggs from Curlew nests, incubating them artificially, rearing chicks in captivity, and then releasing them into the wild after they fledge. It is considered to be a short-term measure to boost the population while discovering measures to improve breeding success to the level needed for recovery.

SOS “Save our Curlews” Campaign

Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS) continued its “Save our Curlews” Campaign and appeal, which funded a nest finding and protection project in three other Community Wildlife Group areas. Tracking the chicks to find out how they use the landscape, their fate, and the reasons for low levels of chick survival, is the key to an effective conservation plan. No chicks

Curlew monitoring by other Community Wildlife Groups

There are now 10 Community Wildlife Groups in Shropshire, including UOWG, monitoring local populations in the areas where most were found during the 2008-13 Bird Atlas. Collectively the groups found

If headstarting does work it may lead to a significant short-term increase in the local Curlew population, and it is important to evaluate the trial, particularly by assessing whether any young Curlews do come back. So far there is no evidence that many do.

Continued monitoring of the size of the local population by UOWG is important for this evaluation.

fledged from fenced nests, mainly due to predation. .

Details, reports on the projects, and how the work feeds into national and regional work to convince the Government of the need for effective Curlew conservation measures, can be found on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

68-81 breeding pairs, but the estimated total population fell below 100 pairs in 2024, and declined further in 2025. At the current rate, the population will halve in 11 years, and become locally extinct in 22 years, in 2047.

Dragonfly and Damselfly Monitoring



Large Red Damselfly

The county recorder for dragonflies and damselflies, Sue Rees-Evans, has kindly provided a list of all the records submitted to iRecord for the UOWG area by January 2026. In total 18 species were recorded in 2025 – one species (Ruddy Darter) fewer than in 2024 (see chart). It might be expected that the sunny summer in 2025 would have led

to more records than the often-cool and cloudy weather in summer 2024, but for many species there were similar numbers of records in the two years. Possibly there was less need for dragon- and damsel-flies to bask in 2025, with more individuals on the wing, making identification harder for relative novices.

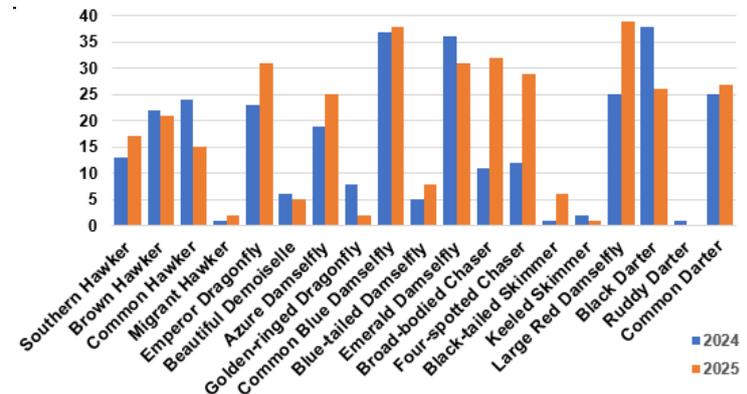
Seven species did have noticeably larger numbers of records in 2025: Southern Hawker, Emperor, Broad-bodied Chaser, Four-spotted Chaser, Black-tailed Skimmer dragonflies, Azure and Large Red damselflies. Golden-ringed and Keeled Skimmer dragonflies had fewer records in 2025, but both have few records in both years. Of course, number of records is not necessarily a guide to absolute abundance; for example, one record of Common Darter was for nine individuals (three pairs ‘in-tandem’ and three singles); all were around a large puddle in which the in-tandem females were ovipositing.

Annual Report

This short report summarises our work in 2025. It will be widely distributed in the area. Previous Reports, and a Bird Survey report, other activity reports, a list of Committee members, and the Accounts, can be found on the website.

Support

We have the support of the Protected Landscapes Partnership, Natural England, RSPB, National Trust



Perhaps most important of these species are the upland species such as Golden-ringed Dragonfly and Black Darter that may be under threat from climate change, and the nationally declining Common Hawker and Emerald Damselfly; although records from two years are not indicative of a trend, there were fewer records of all four species in 2025. Sue will produce a more detailed report for the whole of Shropshire, and this will be published on her website <http://shropshiredragonflies.co.uk/>, hopefully in February.

If you want to help with this project, please contact Richard Small at the email address on the website.

and the Stepping Stones project, and Shropshire Wildlife Trust, all of whom who have previously funded our work.

Website

There are now seven Community Wildlife Groups in the Shropshire Hills, and three more in the north-west, that all share a website. The Upper Onny Programme, including Bird and Plant walks, and Notice of Events and Meetings, are posted on the website. Please look at it.

www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

Plants and Wild Flowers, and Wildlife Sites

UOWG initially concentrated on Birds, but it has also carried out a considerable amount of survey work on Wild Flowers and plants. A separate Plant Group was established in 2013, to organise and develop this work. When the LPS started promoting Community Wildlife Groups (CWGs) in the Rea and Camlad Valley areas in 2015, it was decided to run the three CWG plant groups together, and this has continued since.

Plants & Wild Flowers



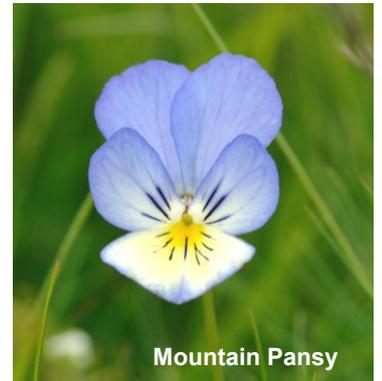
Marsh Violet

Outings and training days started in 2014, with backing from Natural England. The outings were designed to record the plants at each site, and provide informal training for participants to improve their knowledge and identification skills.

Species Action Plans (SAPs) have been produced by Natural England and the Stepping Stones Project for 12 species that rely on particular habitat types, and efforts were made to find the 3 plant species (Cowberry, Devils bit

scabious and Mountain pansy), together with Marsh violet, the food plant of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary butterfly.

Activities in 2025 centred around these Action Plans and surveys of sites being purchased by Middle Marches Community Land Trust (website <https://middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk/>), particularly Minsterley Meadows, and this will continue in 2026.



Mountain Pansy

Roadside Verges

Surveys of these verges started in 2015, and around 170km. of verges in this area had been covered by 2018. The results have been entered on the Council's GIS data base.

The *Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project*, which works with volunteers, other local organisations, and Shropshire Council, aims to transform roadside verges

into wildlife-rich habitats for native wildflowers, pollinators, and small mammals, by managing them as valuable green corridors.

For more details, and to get involved, see the new Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project website www.restoringshropshirevergesproject.org.uk, or contact shropsverge@gmail.com

Himalayan Balsam clearance

For the past 11 years we have been clearing Himalayan balsam on the River West Onny. It is an invasive plant which not only outcompetes the native plants but destabilises the river banks. Although the amount of HB is much reduced we have been unable to eradicate it completely so continuing work is needed in the future.

In 2025 only about 60% of the river length was cleared compared to some previous years. This was due to lack of funding, and the work was almost all carried out by volunteers. The lengths not cleared, particularly through Linley estate, were known to be the area that

was least effected in the past.

Himalayan balsam was managed by pulling by hand on 4 stretches of the River Onny totalling 10 kilometres and about 30 days of volunteer time were contributed. Thanks to Plowden estate, the Onny fishermen and to Severn Rivers Trust for their help as well as the individual volunteers.

Funding has now been secured from Severn Trent Water Authority Boost for Biodiversity for the next 4 years, so the project will continue.

A full report can be found on the website.

Meadows

In 2025 Marches Meadow Group (MMG) celebrated its tenth anniversary. There are concentrations of species-rich meadows in the Upper Onny, particularly in the Pennerley / The Bog and White Grit areas.

These meadows support a wide range of plant species. More detail can be found on their website, <https://www.marchesmeadowgroup.com/>.

Plant activities, and a Bird Walk on the Stiperstones, will be held in 2026 to introduce new people to the fascinating wildlife of our spectacular area.

All welcome.

If you want any further information about these events, or about the Group, or a copy of the Group's previous Annual Reports, look on the website www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk

You can contact us, or join, through the website or via the Secretary Pippa Middlemiss, Nant Argoed, Argoed, Clun, Craven Arms SY7 8NW middlemisspippa@gmail.com