

GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

NOTICE OF

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2017

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday, January 21st, 2017,

in the Village Hall, Goytre, starting at 7:30pm

Chairman, Verity Picken, retires by rotation this year, after five years in office, and as we have only received one nomination, KEITH ROYLANCE will be proposed to succeed her.

Whilst other Officers and Committee Members have indicated their willingness to stand for re-election IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT THEY CANNOT BE CONTESTED!

New nominations for any and all positions are always invited and new faces would be a very welcome sight!

All nominations should be signed by both the Proposer and Secunder with the agreement of the nominee, or e-mail me with details. (see Contacts list for details)

Nominations must be received by January 1st 2017

In the event that a position is contested selection will be made by a show of hands at the AGM.

The formalities of the AGM will be followed by a Finger Buffet where the trick is to bring some finger food to be shared by everyone and then take the opportunity to select something that looks far more appetising than your own offering.

Following the buffet Gavin Vella will repeat the talk that he was invited to present at the WOS Conference last November, "Beware what you hear; how mimicry can influence breeding success"

Trevor Russell

Secretary

COMMITTEE COMMENTARY, NOVEMBER 2016

Trevor Russell

This was the last Committee meeting to be chaired by Verity, who will retire by rotation at the January 2017 AGM after five years in office. The Committee thanked Verity very warmly for her diligence, management and administrative skills throughout her term in office. Keith Roylance has been nominated to replace her at the AGM.

We learned that STEVE ROBERTS was awarded a LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD for his services to ornithology at the recent WOS Conference, held in Myddfai, Carmarthenshire.

The committee was sure that all GOS members would join them in sending Steve our huge congratulations. Read his citation elsewhere in this edition.

GOS has been invited to give its views on proposed changes to the Liverpool Bay SPA (Special Protection Area). The proposal, by NRW, Natural England and JNCC, is to ask the UK government to link the four existing SPA's into one, enlarged SPA in view of the nationally important breeding populations of ducks and waders in the area. We will respond supporting the proposal.

Following the series of complaints about public behaviour at Llandegfedd reservoir, the most recent frustrations occurred when trying to buy Birdwatching Permits at the Visitor Centre. However, following our letter of complaint at the lack of preparedness, permits have now been printed (£8pa) and keys have been re-stocked (£5).

The hedge at Goytre House Wood has been cut but we will want to run the brushcutter through again, as we did last winter, in order to keep pathways and access routes to nest boxes free of brambles.

WOS has asked GOS to email to their members their quarterly Newsletter to publicise their activities more widely. We have agreed to forward the Newsletter to all email subscribers, but at the same time give members the opportunity to decline to receive future Newsletters should they wish.

Marcus John of Gwent Birders, has kindly agreed to allow GOS to advertise its activities on the Gwent Birders Facebook site.

It was decided to change the GOS logo (see front page) on all GOS documentation.

Al Venables will step down as Vice Chairman at the 2017 AGM. It was decided not to fill the post because a substitute would be found within the Committee members present when that eventuality arose.

We are still looking for a Dipper Editor, so if anyone would like to receive details of what is involved to produce this newsletter four times per year, please contact in the first place, Trevor Russell. Meanwhile we are very grateful to Janet Cormack who is continuing to work as the Dipper compiler.

John Coleman is looking for **help in writing Species Accounts for the Annual Report**. Please contact John if you would like to help, training is available.

All Committee members have agreed to stand for re-election at the AGM, but if you would like to bring your experience and expertise to the committee and influence the way your Society is run, please contact Trevor Russell. Fresh faces are always welcome!

The Countryside and Landscape Services will be holding a Garden Birdwatch event at Pen-y-fan ponds Oakdale on January 28th between 10am and 2pm. Activities will include bird feeder making, bird ringing demonstrations, art and craft activities and guided bird walks. Further information is available from Ageliki Politis (01495 235219, polita@caerphilly.gov.uk).

WOS Lifetime Achievement Award 2016

Steve Roberts

Steve was introduced to a lifetime of ornithology by Bert Hamar, the founder of the Gwent Ornithological Society. Steve's father had died when he was young and Bert took him on his birdwatching walks. Bert showed him a Mallard's nest full of eggs and young Steve was immediately hooked. He has spent the rest of his time seeking out and researching birds and, particularly, their nests. His work has been mainly on the rarer raptors: Hobby, Goshawk and Honey-buzzard. Steve's long-term monitoring of these species has added considerably to the accumulated knowledge of what had been thought of as difficult birds to study.

Steve, with others, has undertaken a long term study of Honey-buzzards, leading to two

landmark papers published in *British Birds* in 1999 and 2014. For decades, the secrecy surrounding this special woodland raptor made it difficult to bring together such knowledge, yet understanding of the species' habits and behaviour during the breeding season is a critical step towards their effective conservation.

Steve has not worked alone. Jerry Lewis is often his collaborator and Steve has shared his knowledge with others willing to help, including WOS President Iolo Williams. Steve is an accomplished and apparently fearless climber. The work at the nest is almost always Steve's. This makes him a much sought-after specialist and he travels worldwide to climb to, study and photograph iconic species, however fearsome their reputation.

Steve is also an accomplished artist, having taught art at a local comprehensive school, and his line drawings and paintings appear in many bird reports and books. This award is to a man who has pushed the boundaries of our knowledge, usually from high in the canopy of a tree.

Autumn Newport Wetlands NNR Tom Dalrymple

Birds

It has been a dry autumn and it seems as though most wildfowl have been slower than usual to find the flooded areas of the reserve. We often see lots of Shoveler in autumn often as early as September. In 2015 the peak count was 184, so far this autumn it's only 74. Teal numbers are also quite low. Strangely it has been a very good time for Wigeon. The autumn peak count is 1266 this is only about 100 birds of the peak count for the 2015/16 year.

Richard Clarke and Kevin have been monitoring Water Rail with a tape lure, so far the peak count is 59 which is about typical for the time of year.

There have been a number of unusual sightings this autumn including Scaup in the reedbed ponds and 2 Bewick swans at Goldcliff the first for several years. A Ring Ouzel and a Wryneck at Uskmouth, Spotted Crake, Great White Egret and Pectoral Sandpiper at Goldcliff.

Management

Every year we aim to create some flooding in the fields in September for the early winter migrants. This is usually achieved by letting water from the reedbeds into the grassland ditches via a large pipe. Water is then pumped from the ditches onto the fields. This year because of the dry weather water was initially fed by gravity using the new pipe from reedbed 11 as well. A lot of this water was just absorbed by the dry soil, we compensated for this by attaching a pump to the reedbed 11 pipe and drawing the water faster.

By October we had still had no rain so resorted to pumping water onto another field block. Finally in November the heavens opened and all the fields are now flooded. Salinities were low in the lagoons in September, so we winched open the tidal flap to let the sea in for 3 weeks. We have drastically reduced the amount of sea water we allow on the lagoons because of the huge volume of silt that is left behind.

In August Jamie Williams won a contract to cut bale and remove rush from 62 hectares of grassland. During September he came back and mowed the whole area again, hopefully this will knock it back. Rush mowing is an annual job, we will monitor to see how effective cutting twice a year proves to be.

Most hedges are cut on a rotation to try and ensure that there are always plenty of flowers and fruit in the hedgerows. In any year there are usually about 10km of hedgerow to trim. I prefer to cut hedges at the end of the winter but logistically this isn't possible. Hedges in the wetter fields have to be cut in early autumn, our colleagues from Operations Delivery spent 3 weeks this autumn hedge trimming.

Kevin organised a contract to hay cut and remove vegetation from 12 km of reedbed paths and 1.4ha in two separate areas of the wider reedbed area. The main reason for this is that it helps promote the flower rich habitat necessary to sustain shrill carder bees which are now a SSSI feature of the site. Cutting the paths back also helps to act as a fire break should we ever experience a fire in the reedbed again.

Encouraged by the obvious rudd population and the booming bittern last spring, we have cut more reed than ever before. The idea is to try to encourage fish deeper into the reedbed and create secluded areas where bittern can feed. We have cut 2.3 ha in total in reedbeds 4,5 and

6. These cut areas will hopefully benefit wildfowl as well as bittern.

This winter in addition to our WeBS counts and our own high tide counts we are assisting the BTO low tide counts of the reserve and estuary. We wouldn't be able to do all this monitoring without the help of our volunteers.

Gwent UKBS Report for September 2016

Chris Hatch

Highlights

A Cory's Shearwater was seen offshore at Peterstone (9th). A Wryneck was present at Newport Wetlands (9th to 15th). A Pectoral Sandpiper was also present at this site (14th to 18th). A Quail was seen on the Skirrid (14th). A Bittern was reported from Newport Wetlands (20th). (Wyvern photographs Keith Roylance)



ensure you have your permit with you, if you want to leave the public footpaths and access the banks of the lower pool.

Llandegfedd Reservoir keys and permits

During the winter months (from 1 October to 1 March) a permit is required to access the north end of the reservoir. This may be bought at the Visitor Centre near the dam at the south end of the reservoir (ST328986) at a cost of £8. Keys to the gate, which is locked during this period, are now available again and may also be obtained here – a key costs £6. Centre Opening Times are available from Welsh Water on 01495 769281.



Recent Additions to the Library

The GOS library is open during all indoor meetings.

Fingers in the Sparkle Jar by Chris Packham has recently been donated by Keith Roylance and the Society has received copies of the 2015 Bird Reports for Avon and Glamorgan.