

Gwent Breeding Atlas 2002

Al Venables, Jerry Lewis, Mary Plunkett, Ian Walker

On your marks again for lap 4! We have been here before, but it became a false start owing to the F&M outbreak. A few observers did some very valuable recording in urban areas and some others did a bit in July, but 2001 was effectively a blank year for the Atlas. For this reason we are setting the timetable back a year, and 2002 will be officially the 4th Atlas year, with 2003 as the "mopping up" year. There is still a lot to do so any new volunteers will be welcomed.

So what happens now?

Firstly, anyone who didn't return their cards this winter needs to contact me or their local organiser to confirm that they are still involved. We may not have heard from you for a year, in which case you might have emigrated for all we know. Please set our minds at rest by getting in touch and confirming that you have not lost your cards and are set to go. Any comments or suggestions we might have made last year will still be applicable for this year.

Those of you who have returned cards will soon have them sent back to you with suggestions for the coming year.

Ink colour will be GREEN again this year.

Interim analysis has shown that most tetrads have fewer species recorded this time (1998-2002) than last time (1981-85). This may be a real effect or an observer effect. If you feel that you may be missing some species that are there, and feel that you might benefit from some guidance, why not turn up for the Atlas training session on 6th April (see p8 of this issue). Also if you have not participated in the Atlas so far, why not turn up for the training session to find out what it is all about. You might be smitten!

BTO News

Jerry Lewis

Help is needed with three surveys that had to be postponed last year due to the Foot and Mouth outbreak. The Lowland Grassland survey, on randomly selected 1Km squares. Most are being covered by the same observers who undertake the winter farmland surveys but two have no observers as yet -

- SO 3018 (Pantygelli)
- SO 3621 (Campston)

The survey involves walking the fields twice between April and June, to look for birds using the grassland habitat.

Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows. This survey is to look at areas last surveyed in 1982 to find out how things have changed for waders. It involves three visits between mid April and the end of June. The following areas have no observers as yet. Can you help?

- Gwernesney (NE of Usk)
- Michaelston y Fedw
- Uskmouth (West of the River)
- St Brides Wentlooge (2 areas)
- Usk Valley, 2 areas at Llanhennock & Newbridge
- Caldicot Levels (3 Areas south of Redwick, north of Redwick and Magor/Undy)
- The Nedern (north of Caldicot).

Peregrine Survey: the latest of the 10-year surveys for this species. If anyone knows (or suspects) the presence of birds in their area, please let me know and I will let you have a form. A minimum of two visits is required. One late March to check for occupancy and one in June to check for success.

Additionally, the annual Breeding Bird Survey still has a small number of uncovered squares. This survey requires 2 visits to the square between April and June. The squares available are:

- SO 2800 (Pontypool)
- SO 2016 (Llangattock)
- ST 2484 & ST 2385 (Michaelston y Fedw)

BTO Weekend Training Courses

If you can't manage the 6 April training day at Goytre, but would like to know how to do

surveys, a course is taking place at the Preston Montford Field Study Centre, Shropshire from Friday 14th to Sunday 16th June 2002. The cost of £120 is a subsidised rate for BTO members and includes accommodation and all meals. Check with the contact below if you are not a BTO member. (You may need to join the BTO to be eligible to attend the course)

Old Dippers Wanted

Helen Parry Jones

When Graham Harris moved “up North”, he left a file of issues of The Dipper with me. However, there are some gaps and if you are a hoarder, you may be able to help me fill them. Graham’s file starts with issue 5 in June 1981, so numbers 1-4 in 1980/1981 are missing, as is number 23 in early 1987. In 1988, number 27 appears to be missing, however since there was an issue in January 1988 and again in “spring” 1988 advertising April events, it is possible that this is a numerical omission and number 27 doesn’t exist. Perhaps someone can clarify this?

With all the wet weekends we have been having, I have been having a look at old issues of The Dipper and the Annual Report. Some of you may be interested in seeing how things have changed.

20 years ago in The Dipper, Newsletter No 7, February 1982

American Bittern in Gwent

Chris Jones first spotted this bird from the hide at Magor reserve in mid-November 1981. Up to 1973 there were just 54 records of American Bitterns in Britain and Ireland, with 75% pre-1914, and only 5 from Wales. Another was recorded in Cornwall in 1977 and in 1981 another bird was recorded in addition the one at Magor.

American Bittern differs from European Bittern by its smaller size, dark tips to the flight feathers and a black patch on the sides on the neck. However in Gwent, we get little enough opportunity to see European Bittern for comparison. In The Birds of Gwent(1) the European Bittern is described as a rare winter visitor, and the adjacent table lists sightings to date.

European Bittern Sightings in Gwent

Date	Number	Comments
1889 to 1926(1)	9	All shot birds
24 Oct. 1967(1)	1	Seen at Goldcliff
03 May 1968(1)	1	Seen at Malpas
Nov 1969(1)	1	Remains found near Uskmouth
Apr 1976	1	Llanellen (M & B Canal)

Jan 1985(2)	2	During cold weather at Undy & Peterson
09 Dec 1995(3)	1	Flushed at BSC LLanwern
24 Mar 1997	1	Peterstone Wentlooge
2001(4)	At Least 1	GLWR

1. The Birds of Gwent (1977) P. N. Ferns et al, ISBN 0 9505760 0 X
2. Gwent Ornithological Society 1985 Annual Report, (1986)
3. Gwent Ornithological Society 1995 Annual Report, (1997)
4. Adam Rowlands, GLWR Warden

10 years ago in The Dipper, No 42, April 1992 and what has happened since, with counts being taken from relevant Gwent Ornithological Society Annual Reports.

Hérons at Llandegfedd had increased from a single pair in 1989 to 5 pairs in 1991 and indications of 9 pairs in 1992. The site has continued to be occupied since then.

Counts at Llandegfedd Heronry	Year	93
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Occupied Nests	13	12	17
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2001 Annual Report Brian Gregory

Thanks to the early submission of records from many members, I may be able to deliver the report to the printers during April. Please send any additional records (via Chris Jones – details page 10), as soon as possible. Any photographs, illustrations or material for an article will be very welcome please send to me or via Chris Jones.

Library Update

George Noakes

The following titles have recently been added to the GOS library stock:

"**Birders: Tales of a Tribe**", Mark Cocker (Jonathan Cape 2001): a sometimes amusing, sometimes serious study of the birding community, its characters, its rules, its equipment and its often hilarious adventures.

"**Birds in Mallorca**", John Busby (Christopher Helm 1988): a delightful collection of paintings and drawings of the birds, wildlife and landscapes of Mallorca by one of Europe's foremost artist/naturalists.

"**Gardening for Birds**", Stephen Moss (Harper Collins 2001): an informative and reader-friendly guide that gives practical advice on all aspects of feeding and attracting birds to our gardens.

"**Finding Birds in Britain**", Lee G R Evans (Birdguides 2001): a guide to finding over 100 "difficult" species in Britain.

"**CD-ROM Guide to British Birds**" (Birdguides): a 2 disk set covering over 330 species, including over 700 video clips.

Twite in the County

Helen Parry Jones

Five Twite was recorded at Newhouse, Chepstow between 30th December 2001 and 1st January 2002. As the observer, Andy Gabriel, commented "I understand that Twite is quite a scarce bird in Gwent!" Checking through past reports, he is correct since the last record for the County was in 1991 when two birds, probably a pair, were seen at close range at Trefil on 4th May. Prior to this, Twite had been recorded in most winters/early spring from 1970 to 1987.

As a breeding bird in Britain & Ireland, Twite is associated with treeless areas of the moorlands of the Highlands and N England, and the crofting lands of the N and W seabords of Scotland and

Ireland. It also breeds, but is less widespread, in the Southern Uplands and in the Welsh Uplands around Snowdonia(1). In the Breeding Atlas of 1968-1972, possible breeding was reported in just four 10Km squares in Wales(2). However by the 1988-1991 Atlas, possible breeding was reported in five 10Km squares and evidence of breeding was reported in a further seven 10Km squares in Wales(1).

In the 2000 Breeding Bird Survey, 2,248 1km squares were covered, 244 of which were in Scotland. Twite was recorded in only 22 squares(3), so it is not an easy species to monitor. Twite is designated as a Red List Species, being a species of global conservation. Although estimates were given in the two Breeding Atlases, a survey was carried out in 1999 to provide baseline information on the status of Twite, along with other relatively scarce and less well-known species in the UK. Fewer than 11,600 pairs of Twite were recorded in a survey of marginal, moorland and coastal habitats. Although comparable historic data are not available, the decreasing range of this poorly known species is of concern(5).

Scottish and Irish Twite appear to be mainly sedentary, whereas those breeding on the English moors move to the coast for winter(6). Most Welsh records of Twite in winter come from North Wales.

If you happen to find Twite in summer, the male has a pink rump and the song is very distinctive. Unfortunately in winter, the birds are not advertising themselves by their song, so how do you recognise Twite in winter? With call, otherwise with difficulty! The contact call of Twite is described as a harsh nasal chatter and the flight call bouncing 3-5 syllable chululut(7). For comparison, the flight call of Linnet is described as rather hurried 2-5 notes sound somewhat like a repeated chop-chop or chit-chit(8). By sight, Twite are inseparable from Linnet at a distance. The bill of Twite is pale yellow in winter compared with grey/pale in Linnet. Closer to, concentrate on the face and throat which are orangey-buff in Twite but much paler/duller in Linnet(9). Also the tail is longer than in Linnet, but if you are not familiar with Linnet, this isn't helpful. If in doubt, phone the County Recorder (see page 10), the gap between 1991 and 2001 may be genuine but it may be due to not picking them out.

Date	Number	Comments
Twite Sightings in Gwent Since 1970		
1970 12 April	1	"pair"
1970 27 Jan.	Several	Glascoed
1972 1-2 Feb.	6	Tredeggar Park, Newport
1974 30 Aug	3	Abersychan
1974 26 Sep.	4	Abersychan
1974 27 Nov	8	Usk, in a garden

1974 18 Dec	1	Waun-y-pound, Ebbw Vale
1975 24-25 Oct	2	Mardy
1975 19 Apr	2	Llangwm
1975 10Sep	4	Rogiet
1977 10 Sep	1	Peterstone Wentlooge
1977 26 Dec	4	Chain Bridge, garden
1979 23 Feb	1	Parc Seymour, garden
1979 24 Jan	1	Magor Reserve
1982 7 Jan	2	Undy
1983 29 Dec	< 25	Sluice Farm (15 originally, numbers inc)
1983 22 Nov - 2 Apr 1984	2	Collister Pill
1984 1 Apr	9	Sluice Farm
1985 11 Jan - 11 Mar	5	Sluice Farm
1986 1 Feb	1	Llangybi
1986 24 Jan	5	Sluice Farm
1986 2 Jan	5	West Pill
1987 8 - 15 Jan	<3	Sluice Farm
1991 4 May	2	Trefil Quarry

1. Gibbons, D W, Reid, J.B. and Chapman, R.A. (1993) The New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland: 1988–1991. ISBN 0 85661 075 5
2. Sharrock, J TR (1976). The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland. ISBN 0 85661 018 6
3. Noble, D G, Raven, M. J. and Baillie, S.R. (2001). The Breeding Bird Survey 2000. BTO
4. Anon (1996). Birds of Conservation Concern in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man. RSPB et al.
5. Gregory, R.D et al. (2001). The state of the UK's birds 2000. RSPB, BTO and WWT, Sandy.
6. Winter Atlas
7. Couzens,D, Wyatt,J (1994). Teach Yourself Bird Sounds Number 6: Heaths and Moors (Tape, Waxwing Associates)
8. Couzens,D, Wyatt,J (1993). Teach Yourself Bird Sounds Number 3: Farmland and Scrub (Tape, Waxwing Associates)
9. Harris, A, Tucker, L and Vinicombe, K. (1989). The Macmillan Field Guide to Field Identification p 210-212. ISBN 0 333 42773 4

Reports of Outdoor Events, October to November.

Brian King & George Noakes

Llandegfedd Reservoir, Sunday 6th January:

There was a good turnout for the first meeting of the new year, but foggy conditions prevailed for the walk which we restricted to 2 hours. Two Water Rails watched from the Greenpool hide provided the highlight of the day and were present for some time. Wigeon, Tufted Duck,

Pochard, Heron, Snipe, Moorhen, Coot and Cormorant were noted from the waterside and Bewick's Swans and Canada Geese were heard. In the trees, a Treecreeper was seen together with groups of tits and finches. Returning to the car park, a Kingfisher was sighted over the water, ending a pleasant morning.

Forest of Dean, Sunday 20th January:

A small group met and travelled to Speech House on a damp morning and walked a circuit along the forest paths. Few species were seen and were usually as single birds. True to form, Gary saw a Great Spotted Woodpecker. Other species included Goldcrest, Treecreeper, Long-tailed Tit, Jay, Robin, and Chaffinch. Worsening weather made us to decide to miss Nags Head reserve and we were invited to a Whitebrook house to verify Marsh Tits at garden feeders. With the rain quite heavy it was pleasant to watch, from the warmth of a kitchen, Nuthatch, Coal Tits, Blue Tits, Great Tits and Jays feeding, and to see the Marsh Tits at close quarters.

Llanwenarth, 23rd February:

A small group of 8, led by Steve Butler, braved a biting north wind and squally showers to walk the bank of the Usk from Llanwenarth Church. A quick visit to the cemetery provided good views of 3 Goldcrests. Along the river all the expected species were noted except Goosanders. The highlights of the walk were 11 Stock Doves feeding in a stubble field, a flock of over 200 Fieldfares with some Redwings and 5 Pheasants noted unusually on the shingle bend. At the end of the walk a small group walked up Llanwenarth Breast but found few birds active. However, a party of 5 Bullfinches, within feet of our cars in the car park, lifted our spirits.

Llandegfedd Reservoir, Saturday, March 9th:

During this walk led by Tim Griffiths, we sighted a diver sp. in the middle of the reservoir, as we scanned from the fisherman's hut. It re-appeared close to the fish tanks and gave better views. The consensus was that it was a Black-throated Diver. Other sightings included 1 Tree Sparrow, a small flock of Redpolls and at least 6 Snipe.

Mute Swan Survey 2002, Volunteers required

Chris Jones

This survey was postponed from 2001 due to the foot & mouth restrictions.

It is organised by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust in conjunction with the Swan Study Group,

Scottish Ornithologist's Club, BTO and various other bodies and individuals interested in this species. It follows the same format of the previous survey in 1990 - random allocation of 10km squares. We have been allocated two squares within the county ST28, south-west Newport and Wentloog Levels

ST39, north Newport, lower Usk valley – Llanbadoc - Newport and the southern 2/3rds of Llandegfedd Reservoir.

The survey requires at least two visits to be made during April and May to locate both breeding and non-breeding birds. All suitable waterways need to be covered so that an accurate count of the total number of birds can be made, including the total number of breeding pairs. As Mute Swans are large white conspicuous birds, they should be relatively easy to locate and record.

Any members who are willing to participate in the survey please contact Chris Jones for further information and to discuss the area you wish to survey (see page 10 for contact details).

Undertaking this survey will also provide the perfect opportunity to search for further records for the Gwent Breeding Atlas.

Recent Bird Highlights

Compiled by Chris Hatch from information received on the GOS / Hamdden Bird Line

December: A Great Northern Diver was present at Llandegfedd reservoir all month, as were up to 3 Water Rail. Other sightings at the reservoir included a Slavonian Grebe on the 8th, 6 Bewick's Swans on the 14th, a Jack Snipe from the 16th to the 22nd, a female Hen Harrier on the 26th, and a Merlin and a Goshawk on the 28th. Sightings at other locations in the county included a Ring-necked Duck at Goldcliff, which was present for most of the month, 3 Short-eared Owls at Uskmouth on the 9th, 3 Brambling at Sudbrook on the 11th, a Great Northern Diver and a Mediterranean Gull at Goldcliff on the 20th, a Whooper Swan, female Hen Harrier and Water Rail at Uskmouth on the 29th, 35 Bewick's Swans in the Usk valley to the north of Llangybi on the 30th and 5 Twite at New House, Chepstow on the 31st.

January: Sightings will appear in the June issue of The Dipper

February: Strong winds early in the month brought 3 Kittiwakes past the second Severn crossing on the 2nd. Two Bramblings were present on the same date at the same location. A Black-throated Diver was discovered at Llandegfedd reservoir on the 3rd and stayed until at least the 15th. A Bittern was observed at Magor Marsh, also on the 3rd. At Uskmouth, up to five Short-eared Owls and a female Hen Harrier were present on the reserve from the 3rd and stayed into early March. Also on 3rd at Uskmouth, a Barnacle Goose and Water Pipit were present. On the 5th, a Tree Sparrow was reported from Llandegfedd Reservoir, and a Barn Owl was seen at Great Triley near Abergavenny. A Black Redstart remained at Caldicot Pill from the 7th until the 16th. Strong winds on the 8th brought a Little Gull, five Kittiwakes and a Petrel species past the second Severn crossing. Fifty Brambling were also present. A Kittiwake was observed at Peterstone on the 8th. A Water Rail was present at Llandegfedd on the 10th, as were Goshawk and Merlin on the 13th. Up to eight Little Egrets were present at Goldcliff for most of the month. Other sightings included a Mediterranean Gull at Llandegfedd on the 15th, a Black-necked Grebe at Ynysyfro on the 16th, several Cetti's warblers at Uskmouth throughout the month, a Long-tailed Duck at Llandegfedd on the 18th and a Ring-necked Duck and Whooper Swan at Uskmouth on the 24th.

March: A Little Egret was seen at Gobion on the 2nd, Merlins were present at Sluice Farm and Goldcliff on the 3rd, and a Bittern was observed at Uskmouth on the 5th.

News from the Gwent Levels Wetlands Reserve

Adam Rowlands, CCW Warden

We continued to make up for the delay in some of our management work as a consequence of the Foot and Mouth precautions earlier in the season. We re-excavated approximately 1750 metres of ditch in the Saltmarsh grasslands. This involved removing the scrub along the banks, which had been drowned out by the raised water level management. This management will benefit the plant and invertebrate assemblages associated with the ditches. It will also benefit wintering wildfowl and breeding waders such as Lapwing, by creating a more open landscape. We also planted approximately 600 metres of hedgerow on the boundary at Goldcliff and along the cycle track at Saltmarsh Lane. The hedge along the cycle track will act as a visitor screen and help to reduce disturbance to birds using the wetland either side of the lane. We also began excavating the last section of the Reserve transfer ditch, which will enable us to abstract water from Monk's Ditch and Chapel Reen, just before it is discharged to the Severn, to assist with raised water levels on the Saltmarsh grasslands in spring and autumn.

It has been decided that the Steering Group Partnership, comprising CCW, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Newport County Borough Council will take forward the development of access and interpretation on the Reserve. The partnership is currently drawing up an outline project brief, based on the recommendations made by the Wetlands Advisory Service of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, following the consultation workshops in 2001. All consultees from the workshops will be kept informed and involved once firm proposals have been determined.

There was a great deal of media interest involving the Reserve, with numerous articles in the press, and several radio and television pieces.

Numbers of wintering wildfowl built up steadily during the winter, with a noticeable arrival of some species following the Christmas and New Year spell of cold weather. Peak counts included 15 Bewick's Swan, 450 Shelduck, 1019 Wigeon, 61 Gadwall, 1110 Teal, 271 Pintail and 168 Shoveler. Up to 31 Golden Plover, 1200 Lapwing, 500 Knot and over 2000 Dunlin added to the spectacle. Other highlights included the resident Whooper Swan, wintering Hen Harrier and male Ring-necked Duck, single Grey Phalarope, Barn Owl and Water Pipit, up to 22 Little Egret, 5 Goldeneye and at least 9 Short-eared Owl giving good views at Uskmouth. The sighting of a Bittern at the Uskmouth creation reedbeds in early January was an auspicious moment for the Reserve and was followed by several sightings from across the site. It is assumed that more than one individual was present during this time. Another Bittern appears to have taken up temporary residence at the Uskmouth lagoons in early March.

Finally, this is my farewell contribution for the Reserve. I have accepted a new post with RSPB at Titchwell Marsh on the north Norfolk coast and will be moving on at the end of March. I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the GOS members I have met during the last two years and hope to bump into you on the Norfolk coast in the future.

Visiting Goldcliff?

There is provision for parking to visit the Gwent Levels Wetland Reserve, at Uskmouth, but there is no such provision at Goldcliff, and members are unsure as to where to park.

I have spoken with Brad Jenkins, Landlord at The Farmers Arms in Goldcliff. He is happy for me to publicise in The Dipper that you are welcome to use their facilities – car parking, toilets and refreshments if you want them.

They are open all day and serve a variety of snacks (soup, baguettes etc) and meals from 12 to 2:30 and again from 6 to 9:30. They have a board in the Lounge with maps and information regarding the reserve and may well set up a logbook there.

This is a very welcome offer. Please show your appreciation by parking and behaving in a way to minimise any inconvenience to customers at The Farmers Arms.

Be warned though that there will be some disruption over the next few weeks whilst refurbishment takes place, but they will be open and you will be welcome throughout (Editor).

Committee Commentary, November Meeting

Trevor Russell

Alan was able to announce that at last we are registered as a Charity and are now able to take ownership of Goytre House Wood.

Helen Jones and Chris Jones are working on a project to gradually archive bird sightings in the county onto a MapMate database that can be interrogated by species, location (i.e., O.S. map reference) and/or date.

Once testing is complete, Helen will be putting recent records on first. Transfer of all records will take some years to complete.

The BTO requested that we allow them to advertise BTO Legacies in The Dipper. It was agreed to do so, and to charge them £25 for a half-page advert.

Reports received suggest that the Semtex Pond site has been virtually destroyed with the development work locally.

Nominations for Committee member have been received from Tony White and Steve Butler whilst Ian Smith and Chris Hatch will be proposed to be seconded onto the Committee at the AGM in January.

AGM Summary

Trevor Russell

Attendance: 73 members attended the 2002 AGM, perhaps encouraged by the prospect of a finger buffet and members' slideshow after the formalities.

Treasurer's Report: Gareth Waite presented the Treasurer's Report, different format this year because of the requirements of the Charity Commissioners.

The big news was that we now own Goytre House Wood, thanks to the legacy of £30,000 from our late President Betty Morgan. The balance after interest had been applied to the capital sum less the purchase price and associated expenditures was £16560.

We no longer have access to free photocopying of The Dipper, which is likely to cost around £600 pa at commercial rates. If anyone works for an employer who would be willing to help us in this direction (perhaps with an acknowledgement in each Dipper) please let any Committee member know.

Chairman's Report: This was to be Alan Williams' last Chairman's Report, having completed his 5-year stint. His review noted the devastating effect on bird surveys and the Outdoor Programme that the foot and mouth outbreak had had.

Conservation interest has increased because Local Authorities are now drawing up Biodiversity Action Plans that will put a demand on the information of records that we as a Society hold.

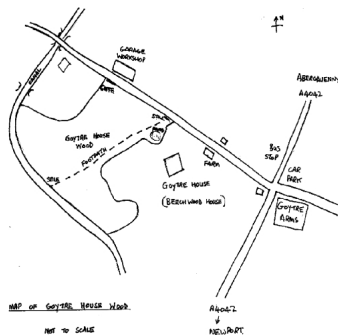
The Birds of Gwent project is progressing well though foot and mouth caused the postponement of survey work. Publication is now planned for 2004.

In his vote of thanks for Alan's contribution to the Society, President Ian Walker made particular reference to Alan's work on the purchase of Goytre House Wood and his dealings with the Charity Commissioners which was a legal requirement before ownership could be transferred.

Committee Changes: Andrew Baker succeeds Alan as Chairman, though the position of Vice Chairman remains vacant. All other officers were re-elected.

Thanks were expressed to outgoing Committee Members Norman and Rosetta Lawrence, Muriel Hamar and Chris Hatch who all retired by rotation having completed 3 years service. Tony White, Steve Butler, George Noakes and John Davies were elected to the Committee, whilst Chris Hatch and Ian Smith were seconded.

A Members Evening followed the AGM and comprised a finger buffet to accompany the showing of members' holiday slides.



Goytre House Wood

The Society took ownership of Goytre House Wood in December 2001.

The initial work of pond clearance and erecting nest boxes has been completed. The fencing contractor has been instructed to erect the boundary fence between the wood and the adjoining field. This will deny access to grazing animals so that the ground flora can regenerate. Other than that it is proposed that we undertake no further management for the time being.

If you intend visiting the wood, please keep to the footpath, particularly during the nesting season. Many of the nestboxes can be seen from the path and good views of the whole wood can be obtained from the canal towpath. This will ensure that disturbance is kept to a minimum during the breeding season.

The map shows the location of the wood. Access to the footpath is by the way-marked stile at SO 318049 (Landranger Map 171). The nearest car park is opposite the Goytre Arms pub. Walk up the lane opposite for about 500 meters until you get to the stile and follow the path into the wood. When you get to the canal towpath turn right and after passing under the second bridge the gate brings you back on to the lane.

Migration Watch: the new spring migration project: BTO News (2002) issue 238

“Despite huge interest in birdwatching, surprisingly little is known about how migrants flow through the country each spring. Bird reports up and down the country are filled with first arrival dates but we do not really when the majority of migrants have arrived in the country.”

“Migration Watch will use rapid recording and presentation of results via the Internet. It will then be possible to follow the arrival of the first migrants through the country and see how quickly sites fill-up with migrants”

Whether you watch birds in your garden, or you are a keen birder or twitcher then Migration Watch will suit your birdwatching interests.

The BTO want records from places that you visit regularly, and when you see summer migrants, but also when you don't – it will be just as important to record the fact that Swallows haven't yet arrived in your area. There will be three recording levels:

- Short list of 10 species
- List of all migrants
- List of all species

There will also be the facility to record casual records

Migration Watch will be fun, easy to take part in and suited to all levels of ability and interest. You can find out how to get involved with Migration Watch by looking at the BTO website www.bto.org.

From 1st March 2002 you can register as a Migration Watch user and start contributing your records. The BTO are keen to log the pattern of early arrivals over the coming weeks and will also be able to track the departures of three key winter visitors: Redwing, Fieldfare and Brambling.

It's not too early to be looking out for summer visitors. Early migrants to look out for over the next few weeks are Wheatear, Sand Martin and Little Ringed Plover.

Data input is via the Internet. If you don't have a computer, most libraries now have Internet access, and most of you will know someone with a computer. If not, send your details of migrants to me, Helen Parry Jones, and I can input your data.

If you are interested in climate change and its effect on seasons, log on to www.phenology.org.uk. where you can submit any information you have.

Nest Boxes at Blaenau Gwent Cemeteris

Rodney Morris

The day I visited Cefn Golau to erect nest boxes on a very cold windy day in March, I didn't think anything could survive, let alone breed. It was 1250 feet above sea level and so cold and desolate. Nevertheless I placed five nest boxes on various trees and over the next week or so put up boxes in four more cemeteries. Grant Herbert and I then monitored the birds breeding in the cemeteries and box usage.

Fifteen species were confirmed as breeding in these cemeteries, with 9 species in both Cefn Golau and Ebbw Vale. This is the total number of species confirmed breeding. Other species

were present but breeding was not confirmed. Of the 18 boxes erected, 8 were occupied by three species – Robin, Blue Tit & Great Tit. Wood Mice were also found to be present at Ebbw Vale cemetery.

The most inhospitable sites can be a haven for wildlife, even in or near towns, and they remain essential for maintaining Biodiversity.

Cemetery	No. of boxes	Boxes occupied (and species)	Other species
Blaina	2	0	Robin, B
Cefn Golau	5	2 (Blue Tit & Robin)	Robin, Black
Cwn	3	2 (Blue Tit & Robin)	Blackbird, S
Dukestown	3	2 (Blue Tit & Great Tit)	Carrion Crow
Ebbw Vale	5	2 (Blue Tit & Great Tit)	Kestrel, Wre

An article on the importance of churchyards appeared in a recent issue of BTO News(1). Fifteen churchyards in England were studied in detail at various times during churchyards of less than 1 hectare, to larger grounds of up to 21.5 ha. As a result, a list of the top 25 breeding birds of churches and churchyards was drawn up.

Overall, 43 species held territory between these 15 churchyards, with a range in species number of 6 to 24, and an average of 17 species. A further 30 species were noted as passage migrants, or casual visitors such as Buzzard, Hobby, Woodcock, Firecrest and Hawfinch. With the decline of many common bird species on 1971-1998, ranging in size from small parish farmland and woodland, churchyards become an even more important habitat for birds.

If anyone is interested in keeping their local churchyard a wildlife haven, an information pack is available(2).(Editor)

Rank	Species	No. Churches Present	Average
Top 25 Breeding Birds of Churches and Churchyards		1	Black
2	Robin	15	6.0
3	Blue Tit	15	5.0
4	Greenfinch	12	4.9
5	Song Thrush*	14	4.7
6	Wren	12	4.6
7	Starling	15	4.1
8	Dunnock	12	3.5
9	House Sparrow	12	3.2
10	Great Tit	14	2.9
11	Chaffinch	12	2.3
12	Woodpigeon	9	1.9
13	Goldfinch	9	1.3
14	Spotted Flycatcher*	7	0.8
15	Bullfinch*	9	0.7
16	Carrion Crow	8	0.7
17	Willow Warbler	8	0.6
18	Linnet*	7	0.6
19	Swift	6	0.6

20	Blackcap	5	0.6
21	Stock Dove	2	0.6
22	Coal Tit	10	0.5
23	Goldcrest	9	0.5
24	Mistle Thrush	8	0.5
25	Collared Dove	6	0.5

* Biodiversity Action plan species

1. Glue, D. and Greenoak, F. "God's acres" live on as local nature reserves. BTO News (2001) No. 233: 8-9

2. The Living Churchyard: A DIY Information Pack. Send cheque for £5.00, payable to "The Arthur Rank Centre" to Patricia Broderick, Church and Conservation Project, National Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh, Kenilworth, Warks, CV8 2LZ.