

Membership News & Subscription Update Renewals

Many thanks to those of you who have already renewed/signed Gift Aid/ updated Deed of Covenant payments. As of 11th December, 4 members have switched to standing orders and there have been 38 cash /cheque renewals. However, as these are subscriptions for 2003, I shall not be paying the money in until the beginning of January, so don't panic if your cheque hasn't been cashed yet.

Subscriptions; how to delay an increase in rates

The proposal to be taken to the 2003 AGM is that rates will not increase in January 2004 despite increasing copying charges resulting in a slight loss against membership income. If you are a standard rate tax payer paying tax equal to or greater than your current GOS subscription, we can treat your subscription to GOS as a donation, and claim back tax that you will have paid on your subscription at a rate of 28%. Gift Aid costs you nothing, but increases the value of your GOS subscription as follows:

- £7.00 becomes £8.96
- £10.50 becomes £13.44
- £13.00 becomes £16.64

So, the more of you who sign Gift Aid declarations, the longer we keep our current membership rates.

If you don't pay tax, we cannot claim the tax back, so you should not sign a Gift Aid Declaration. Similarly, if you stop paying tax we will be unable to claim tax, so please notify the treasurer.

Annual General Meeting 2003

The Annual General Meeting will be held in the Village Hall Goytre at 7:30pm on Saturday 18th January 2003

All Officers of the Society have to be elected annually.

Change of Officers:

Vice Chairman (currently vacant): Jeff Fisher has volunteered for this post.

Membership Secretary: Gill Jones stepped down during 2002. Helen Jones has volunteered for 2003 and is willing to continue beyond that. However if you would like to be Membership Secretary from January 2004 she is as willing to step down at the end of 2003, so nominations for 2004 are welcome for consideration at this AGM.

Dipper Editor: Would anyone like to take over The Dipper for 2003 in the first instance but for longer if Helen continues as Membership Secretary beyond 2003?

Field Secretary: Brian King steps down at the end of the 2002 programme. Steve Butler has volunteered for 2003, and has produced the programme for 2003. As above, he is willing to continue beyond 2003, but if you would like to be Field Secretary from January 2004, nominations for 2004 are welcome for consideration at this AGM.

Jeff, Helen & Steve need to be nominated and elected for their roles in 2003 at the AGM.

All other Officers have indicated their willingness to stand for re-election, though new nominations are always welcome.

Committee Members (3-year term)

Steve Williams retires but has been invited to remain on the Committee as a co-opted member due to his role as Policy Officer, Sustainable Development, with Merthyr Tydfil CBC. Brian King has been invited to remain on the Committee as a co-opted member. (Co-opted members advise but do not have voting rights at Committee)

The Constitution allows for up to 8 Committee members in addition to the Officers. Due to changes outlined above, we need 4 more Committee members. Nominations have so far been received for:

Verity Picken (Llangybi), Chris Hatch (Abersychan) and Rob Moeller (Abergavenny)

If you would like to volunteer and make a contribution to the way your Society is run, or would like more information, please contact:

Trevor Russell, The Pines, Highfield Road, Monmouth, NP25 3HR

Both the Proposer and Seconder should sign nominations with the agreement of the nominee, or e-mail me at the above address with details.

Nominations must be received by January 11th 2003

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

The AGM will be followed by a "Members' Evening" which will be an opportunity for you to get rid of those mince pies and sausage rolls left over from Christmas, and to show and discuss your birding slides and experiences.

Reports of Outdoor Events

Brian King & George Noakes
Along The Canal, Sunday 13th October, Steve Williams.

The section of the canal from Upper Cwmbran provided a walk with rural and urban settings, and was accompanied with light rain. It was interesting to note the change in habitat along the route. Although fairly quiet, several Grey Herons were seen, and Mallard and Moorhens were present in good numbers. Steve pointed out the possible presence of Otters and noted the invasive nature of foreign water plants in the canal. Finches and tits were present in trees and a pair of Grey Wagtails was seen briefly.

Collister Pill, Saturday 26th October, Chris Jones.

A good number met for this coastal walk in reasonable weather (does this mean that Chris' directions in the September Dipper were useful? [Ed.]).

Mixed groups of finches and tits were seen on the walk to the sea wall, and Redwings were also present. Large numbers of Curlew were feeding but numbers of other waders were generally low. Kestrels were seen and four late Swallows passed up the estuary to give a final reminder of summer.

Llanelli WWT, Saturday 2nd November.

A few very dedicated members braved the terrible weather conditions and made it to the reserve. Conditions kept them within the hides all day but they were able to report seeing Spoonbills and a Long-billed Dowitcher; ample reward for braving the elements and a lesson that it pays to get out whatever the conditions. A complete list recorded by Steve Butler, Rob Moeller, George Noakes and Tony White follows.

Llanelli WWT trip species list

1.	Little Grebe	6
2.	Cormorant	3
3.	Grey Heron	2
4.	Little Egret	8
5.	Spoonbill	2
6.	Whooper Swan	5
7.	Shelduck	6
8.	Wigeon	800

9.	Gadwall	4
10.	Teal	35
11.	Mallard	20
12.	Shoveler	4
13.	Pochard	2
14.	Tufted Duck	2
15.	Sparrowhawk	1
16.	Buzzard	1
17.	Kestrel	1
18.	Merlin	1
19.	Water Rail	1
20.	Moorhen	5
21.	Coot	12
22.	Oystercatcher	80
23.	Lapwing	27
24.	Black-tailed Godwit	22
25.	Curlew	75
26.	Spotted Redshank	4
27.	Redshank	100
28.	Greenshank	3
29.	Snipe	8
30.	Long-billed Dowitcher	1
31.	Dunlin	12
32.	Curlew Sandpiper	2
33.	Common Gull	1
34.	Herring Gull	4
35.	Lesser Black-backed Gull	1
36.	Black-headed Gull	35
37.	Wood Pigeon	2
38.	Collared Dove	1
39.	Kingfisher	1
40.	Pied Wagtail	1
41.	Meadow Pipit	2
42.	Wren	1
43.	Dunnock	3
44.	Stonechat	1
45.	Blackbird	3
46.	Fieldfare	17
47.	Redwing	10
48.	Mistle Thrush	1
49.	Long-tailed Tit	4
50.	Coal Tit	1
51.	Great Tit	2
52.	Blue Tit	4
53.	Chaffinch	1
54.	Greenfinch	5

55.	Bullfinch	1	
56.	House Sparrow		4
57.	Starling	200	
58.	Magpie	1	
59.	Jackdaw	30	
60.	Carrion Crow		6
61.	Raven	1	

Steve, Rob, George and Tony filled a car so went straight to Llanelli. We understand that at least one other member went to Abergavenny Bus Station for car sharing, but as no one else turned up, they were unfortunately disappointed. We can only offer our apologies for this and to say that in future, a leader will turn up at meeting points whatever the conditions. If you are in doubt about a trip going ahead in 2003, phone Steve Butler or George Noakes for advice – Details on page 12. (HPJ [Ed.]).

The Gobion, Sunday 17th November, Brian King & Gary Saunders.

A small group met at the bridge in quite pleasant conditions after a spell of heavy rain. Erosion of the riverbank was noted. Grey Heron, Green Sandpiper, Goosander and Cormorant were seen. Mixed groups of tits and finches, together with Redwing, Fieldfare and Mistle Thrushes moved to feed in the trees. On our return, a Treecreeper and Great Spotted Woodpecker were viewed briefly.

A note of thanks.

As you know, I have decided to pass on the preparation of the Outdoor Programme to Steve Butler and George Noakes, in the main feeling that fresh ideas and expertise were needed after my five years in harness.

At the outset, I was concerned that my novice status would be inadequate to the task. However I did not appreciate the wealth of support that would come to me from walk leaders who were happy and enthusiastic to help when asked. It was always heartening to enjoy the support of members attending the walks, often in very poor conditions, and you all deserve my thanks and appreciation.

Finally, I am grateful for the friendship given to me and the skills you have taught me, and I am sure that you will support the “new management” in new measure, and they may be sure I’ll be along!

Thanks again, Brian King

I am sure that you will want to thank Brian for his Outdoor Programmes over the last five years, assisted by Gary Saunders, and to wish them both well in their “retirement” from the task. As a past Field Secretary, I know that the task, though rewarding, is very demanding of time and effort, so thanks Brian & Gary and happy birding! (HPJ[Ed.]

Records Wanted for the 2002 Gwent Bird Report

Chris Jones

It's that time of the year again and I'm making my plea for your records for 2002. It is only by the continued support of all members that the society is able to produce an annual report. For guidance on what records should be submitted, see the section on Submission of Records on pages 42-43 of the 2001 report. Hopefully, with your help, we can avoid producing a report on just the scarce and rare species recorded in 2002. This I believe would be a major backward step for the Society.

Many of you are aware that the work involved in the production of each annual report is extremely time-consuming for both the County Recorder and the Report Editor. However, you may not be aware that because of the late submission of records, it means that many sections of the systematic list have to be re-written to incorporate them, thus making the task even more time consuming. So to ensure that your records appear in the 2002 Gwent Bird Report, and to help those giving up their time to produce the report, please submit your records by the end of January.

Record Slips / Scarce bird report forms can be obtained from Chris Jones either or by post – 22 Walnut Drive, Caerleon, Newport, NP18 3SB, 01633 423439, or from the Library at indoor meetings. Four slips are included with this Dipper

Records can be handed in at an indoor meeting or posted [address as above].

Thank you for your support.

BTO News

Jerry Lewis

During the first quarter of 2002, 208 different species of bird were found on the 102 sites taking part in the BTO-Hanson Business Bird Challenge. New sites can always be registered and each one highlights how important business and industrial sites are for birds. Members will probably recall that Llandegfedd Reservoir was highly rated in the inland water site category.

A year or so ago, a national newspaper offered a reward of £5000 for the first definitive explanation as to why the House Sparrow had declined, as over 10 million birds have been lost in the last 30 years. For 2 years the BTO has been analysing its archive of data but because the House Sparrow was often disregarded in earlier surveys (too common), the gaps in our knowledge do not help us to understand the problem. Also the declines are not uniform across the country, those in gardens have occurred later than on farmland, the changes have been more rapid in suburban gardens than in urban ones and in some parts of the country (northern England and Wales) House Sparrows are actually doing well. The key questions to answer are whether birds in some areas/habitats breed more successfully than in others, or is it simply a problem of too many birds dying each year?

The BTO has now launched a new appeal to raise funds for further research to answer these questions. You can help in 3 ways:

- donate to the new appeal
- look out for (and help with) future surveys
- register for Garden BirdWatch (GBW).

If we can learn anything from the House Sparrow's decline it should be not to take the common species for granted.

During the 2001/02 winter, Garden Bird Feeding Survey (GBFS) recorded seven species visiting garden feeders in record numbers; Great Tit, Coal Tit, Goldfinch, Wood Pigeon, Great-spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch & Pheasant. The reasons are three-fold; lack of key wild fruits in our hedgerows and woodlands, increasing reliance on gardens for winter food, and the improved seed mixes and food provisioning during recent years. Four species (House Sparrow, Starling, Reed Bunting and Black-headed Gull) were however recorded in their lowest numbers during 32 year history of the GBFS. During that time a total of 162 species has been recorded taking garden food and Red Kite was added to the list last winter.

Finally an Oystercatcher recently caught by the Wash Wader Study Group has set a new longevity record for the species. Ringed as a young bird on 13 August 1967, it was 35 years old when caught and was older than most of the ringers present (that wouldn't have been the case in Gwent!). Most Oystercatchers that winter on the Wash originate from Norway, so this bird had probably returned each spring to breed adjacent to a recently ice-free Norwegian fjord.

Two Garden Bird Surveys have been mentioned above. GBW is an all-year-round survey, started in 1995, with no limit to the number of participants. There is an annual registration fee, currently £12, for which you get vouchers for CJ WildBird Foods products, newsletters etc. It is a simple survey to do from the comfort of your own home, and new registrants receive an 80-page Garden Bird Handbook.

GFBS started in the winter of 1970/71 and observations are made between October and March. Gardens are selected centrally and are limited to 300 sites per winter.

Anyone interested in taking part in GBW can contact The BTO

tel.: 01842 750050 OR

visit their website: www.bto.org, OR

send your details and a cheque for £12, payable to BTO to
Garden Birdwatch, BTO, FREEPOST, Thetford, IP24 2BR

The Plight of House Sparrows, and how you might help

Helen Jones

Not long before Jerry sent me his latest "BTO News" contribution, I came across an encouraging article – "How to house sparrows – colonial nest boxes boost House Sparrow numbers", Tony Jenkins Natur Cymru No. 5, Winter 2002: 27-31.

House Sparrow decline has been attributed to a number of possible causes. In rural areas these include crop spraying, selective herbicide application and changes in farming practice - particularly the change to autumn sown cereals. In urban areas, predation, disease, garden

pesticides, traffic pollution and a lack of nest sites are thought to be major contributors to the decline.

To be successful, House Sparrows need buildings for nest sites and open spaces to provide an adequate food supply. Nest sites are reduced with modern house design and renovation of older buildings. At the National Wetlands Centre Wales (NWCW) at Penclacwydd (Llanelli), House Sparrows are breeding successfully in a “sparrow terrace” placed on the rear of the Flamingo House in 1998.

The terrace comprises 24 boxes in two banks of twelve (dimensions 140mm high x 195mm wide x 210mm deep for each compartment) sited 2 metres above ground level, and 37mm entrance hole in each compartment. To provide access for monitoring, the compartments have hinged fronts that open from the centre line between the two rows. After a slow start, the terrace has proved successful as shown below.

Numbers of: 1998	Breeding Season		
	1999	2000	2001
Occupied boxes	2	1	15
Nesting attempts	4	2	21
Eggs laid	12	8	80
Young fledged	4	5	45
% breeding success*	33.3	62.5	56.3

*number of successfully fledged young relative to eggs laid.

The conclusion is that in gardens where house sparrows are regular visitors, nestboxes with entrance holes of 32-37mm diameter may encourage them to breed. If you want to help sparrows by providing suitable nesting sites, you can make your own terrace, or purchase one that can house up to 3 families from the suppliers below

- Schwegler Woodcrete Sparrow Terrace available from Jacobi Jayne @ £34.95 to house 3 families. Overall dimensions 245 x 430 x 200mm and weight 13kg, so not suitable for fences and sheds. Free order line 0800 072 0130, www.wildbirdnews.com
- Wooden House Sparrow Terrace available from Garden Bird Supplies @ £20 to house 3 families. Tel: 01939 232233, www.gardenbird.com
- Exterior plywood House Sparrow Terraces available from CJ Wildbird Foods @ £19.95 to house 3 families. Overall dimensions 300 x 380 x 145 mm (h, w, d). Freephone 0800 731 2820, www.birdfood.co.uk

Other possibilities might be:

- Haiths, 0800 298 7054, www.haiths.com
- Or Ernest Charles 0800 7316770, www.ernest-charles.com

Garden Bird Watch (GBW)

Mick Bailey

In the last Dipper Jerry Lewis made a plea for more people to join the GBW scheme. I must confess to having been a bit snooty about the GBW for many years, considering it to be merely a ploy by the BTO to inveigle inexperienced birders into organised surveys: definitely not the sort of thing for hardened Common Bird Census (CBC) workers like me! How wrong I was. Since joining the scheme in Jan 2001 I realise that it is a valuable complement to other surveys (as Jerry pointed out) and, moreover, is great fun.

My garden backs on to a wood and one of my neighbours, like many on our estate, runs a veritable restaurant for the birds, while I do not feed them at all. You've guessed it: many birds simply overfly my garden as they commute between wood and feeding station. Others just stay in the wood. After a few months, I decided that as well as the GBW records that I send to the BTO, I would keep personal records of the species seen or heard near but not in my garden. I merely note their presence, because counting is not feasible. I store both the GBW "in garden" and this "nearby" data on an Excel spreadsheet to facilitate long-term comparisons.

I wonder if any GOS members who are existing or prospective GBW participants do, or would consider starting to, collect “nearby” data. I would be glad to hear from them. If we cover enough gardens, we may be able to throw further light on the relationship between gardens and their surrounding bird populations.

Mick put his idea to Mike Toms of the BTO and received an encouraging response so if you can help Mick in his venture, please do. (HPJ, Ed.) If you want to join GBW, see page 6 of this issue.

Library Update

George Noakes, Librarian

I have recently received the following titles as a donation from one of our members, Gillian Capper, whom I would like to thank on behalf of the society. The books will be displayed and available for loan at the next indoor meetings.

Bird quest	James Steel
Bird behaviour	Robert Burton
The birds of Israel	Uzi Paz
Antarctic wildlife	Eric Hosking
The year of the Greylag Goose	Konrad Lorenz
Birds of prey	Leslie Brown
Ethiopian episode	Leslie Brown
Encyclopedia of birds (7 volumes)	Orbis
A wealth of wildfowl	Jeffrey Harrison
Watching seabirds	Richard Perry
A field guide to Australian birds	Peter Slater
A field guide to Australian birds	Peter Slater
Birds of Australia	Peter Rowland
Ornithology: an introduction	Austin L. Rand
Last of the curlews	Fred Bodsworth
Birds in peril	John P.S. Mackenzie
The Birds of Gwent	GOS
Wading birds of the world	
A paddling of ducks	Dillon Ripley

Since the last update I have also purchased “The North American Field Guide”, written and illustrated by David Sibley (Pica Press).

News from the Gwent Levels Wetlands Reserve

Kevin Dupé, Assistant Warden

The report from this year's Breeding Bird Survey, carried out by Henderson Ecological Consultants, makes interesting reading. Numbers of pairs include: little grebe 12 pairs, shelduck circa 17 pairs, mallard 85-129 pairs, lapwing 37 pairs, oystercatcher 3 pairs, little ringed plover 8 pairs, ringed plover 2 pairs, redshank 22 pairs, skylark 31 pairs, Cetti's warbler 13 pairs and linnet 39 pairs. Next year a lot more effort will be put into monitoring productivity.

Over the winter several surveys are being carried out by Voluntary Wardens to help assess the number and territories of predators. Corvids are being closely watched, as are foxes. I have been monitoring mink and otters for over a year and we have decided to control the large number of mink. Four have been caught in the first month of live trapping at the Uskmouth Reedbeds.

We obviously cannot, and have no wish to, control otters. They take some birds and will prey on wader chicks. However, their favoured prey is eels and we are working with the Environment Agency to improve the numbers of elvers coming into the Reserve. The idea is that if there are plenty of fish for them to eat, they will leave the birds alone. The EA will also be carrying out a survey to see what fish are already in the reedbeds and some of the ditches. The remains of an eel eaten by an otter were found next to one reedbed a few weeks ago. The eel must have been around 50cm long before being eaten!

Goldcliff seems to be the current hot spot for otter sightings. Otters have been seen twice there by GOS members recently and I saw one myself there one Friday afternoon. It was only 7m away from us and actually came towards us to get over a sluice board before diving under the water. Andy Peat, our new Temporary Assistant Estate Worker, was with me. Despite being from Scotland this was the first otter he had seen. Fifteen minutes later he also saw his first short-eared owl flying over one of the saline lagoons. Not a bad way to round off his first week at work with us!

A bittern was seen feeding in the grass next to Reedbed 5 at Uskmouth on 25th November by Voluntary Warden Chris Hurn. It was presumably eating earthworms or other invertebrates as little egrets and herons will also do. The work to improve the elver runs will also benefit bittern. The reedbeds at Uskmouth have been designed to attract breeding bittern. They were planted up in 1999 with locally sourced 1m² reed turfs placed at 10m intervals. Three years later and

they have totally closed over. This winter we will be cutting channels and small pools into the reed beds to increase the 'edge' available for bitterns to hunt along. It is hoped that the pools will also attract ducks and improve the bird watching at Uskmouth.

The old 'dry' reed bed at Farmfields is now wet! This is because we re-instated the sluice last spring. We have just installed a re-cycled plastic boardwalk in this reedbed so that the Goldcliff Ringing Group can still ring here safely. We will also be carrying out some experimental reed cutting to create pools to see if ducks will use this reedbed. With its high bund this reedbed has excellent potential to provide good bird watching opportunities.

Late Update:

Adrian Hickman watched an otter hunting and feeding for several minutes at the Goldcliff Lagoons on Sunday 8th December. This was on the same lagoon that I saw an otter on the week previously.

Recent Bird Highlights

Compiled by Chris Hatch and Helen Jones from information received on the G.O.S./Welsh Water Bird Line and on the website

Location	Date	Species & Comments
September		
Llandegfedd Res.	7-9th10th26th	1 Osprey1 adult Yellow-legged Gull, also
Monmouth area	7th	Hobby hunting over Osbaston
Llanwenarth	8th	Great, Lesser & Green Woodpeckers vi
GLWR Goldcliff	11th14th19th 20th	1 Hen Harrier; 20 Little Egret2 Hobby, a
The Bryn	13th	1 Little Egret, 2 Green Sandpiper, 2 Yel
Abergavenny	16th	1 Red Kite
GLWR Uskmouth	18th	8 Cetti's Warblers, also 2 on 11th
High Cross	28th	1 dark phase juv Honey Buzzard flying t
October		
GLWR Uskmouth	1st	14 Cetti's Warbler
GLWR Goldcliff	3rd5th 31st	2 Knot, 4 Black-tailed Godwit, 1 Golden
Abergavenny	4th7th22nd	1 juv GoshawkLesser Spotted Woodpe
Bloreng	5th	1 Red Grouse, 50+ Goldfinch
GLWR	6th	4 Green Sandpiper, 6 Snipe, 2 Little Eg
Peterstone Gout area	8th12th	6 Spotted Redshank1 Goshawk; 1 Shor
Newport	10th31st	4 Crossbills over Patent OfficeWhite Ja
Ynysfro Res.	14th25th31st	1 juv Red Crested Pochard present unti
Llandegfedd Res.	19th	2 Golden Plover amongst Lapwings, 1 F

Caldicot Pill	27th	1 Great Skua
Usk	28th	1 Merlin
November		
Monmouth	2nd	Male Blackcap, about 1 week earlier than
Pontypool Park	4th	1 Ring-necked Parakeet
GLWR Goldcliff	9th10th15th	Fieldfare & Redwing flocks, 1 Little Egret
Sluice Farm	9th	1 Mediterranean Gull; 1 Merlin
Abersychan	17th	20+ Crossbill
GLWR Uskmouth	17th 25th28th30th	Great Spotted Woodpecker; Kestrel, Merlin
December		
GLWR Uskmouth	2nd	2 Red-breasted Merganser flying over farm
Pontypool	3rd	1 Little Grebe Pontymoile Basin

Committee Commentary 10th October

Goytre House Wood. The October meeting learned that the 'bat potential' of the wood has been assessed as "excellent" by local bat expert Ian Rabjohns and a successful grant application was made to M.C.C. for 27 bat boxes and 1 Kestrel box. (An update to this is that the boxes have been received and will be put up shortly)

The Hendre. The planning proposal for a second golf course plus accommodation facilities at The Hendre, Monmouth is not now expected to be submitted until mid-2003.

GLWR. Activities at the Reserve provoked a long discussion. It was reported that the use of dogs and 4WD's to inspect livestock was causing disturbance of birds at the Goldcliff Lagoons. This is particularly damaging at high tides when the birds are concentrated at their feeding/roosting sites. Not only is this practice bad for the birds it also very frustrating for bird watchers some of whom travel long distances from out of county. Chris Jones, GOS representative at the Reserve, will write to the new warden, Tony Pickup, and also to CCW, to gain support to try to change the practice to minimise bird disturbance. Birdwatching facilities, particularly at Goldcliff, are continuing to receive much criticism, as are facilities for disabled visitors. Chairman Andrew Baker will speak to Tony Pickup to attempt to try to understand his attitude towards the disturbance, birdwatchers and our seeming inability to influence birdwatchers' interests. Watch this space!

The Dipper. Helen reported that changing the font size of September Dipper to Arial 11 had received many positive comments whilst Arial 14 had been found to be too large. A larger print version has been offered to members at indoor meetings, and a request for one has been received. Please let Helen know if you would like a larger print version.

Bird Sightings in Gwent. John Davies had noticed that there were no reports of bird sightings from Gwent in the popular birding magazines. Discussion revealed that too often, sources of information had dried up. John will attempt to resurrect reports from Gwent to see whether regular reports can put us back on the bird reporting map.