

Annual General Meeting 2004

the AGM will be held on January 17th 2004, in the Village Hall, Goytre, starting at 7:30pm

All Officers of the Society have to be elected annually and, with the exception of the Treasurer, Gareth Waite, all current Officers have indicated their willingness to stand for re-election though new nominations are always invited. Gareth announced his intention to retire at the last AGM and Keith Roylance has volunteered to stand as Treasurer though, again, further nominations are invited.

The position of Dipper Editor has remained vacant for over a year and Helen has retained the two roles of Membership Secretary and Dipper Editor simply to ensure continuity. Surely someone from our 400 members can step into the role of Dipper Editor?

The Constitution allows for up to 8 Committee members in addition to the Officers and we currently have 8. However there will be two retirements by rotation in January 2005. If you think you might like to volunteer for those positions at that time and would like to have a sneak preview of what happens at Committee meetings why not come along as an observer? Contact me for more details.

For any nomination, both the Proposer and Secunder 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 10th 2004.

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

The formalities of the meeting will be followed by our traditional Finger Buffet whilst our Vice Chairman Jeff Fisher sets up to lead us into the realms of digital photography and the amazing

effects that can be achieved by photographing through a telescope, titled “Ducks, Dunnocks and Digiscopes”. Bring your nibbles, Pixels on sticks and other finger – or should that be digital – food to enjoy during Jeff’s talk.

Annual Reports Wanted

I enjoy delving through old bird reports, but have some gaps. If you have a copy of the following that you don’t use any more, perhaps you could pass them my way?

Monmouthshire Reports Nos. 1-7;

Gwent Reports No 9 (1974 edition), 14 (1979 edition) and No 17 (1982 edition) & 1997

Helen Jones

Magor Marsh Reserve Extension

Minutes of Special General Meeting held 11/10/03 at 7.30pm, taken by Rob Moeller

Andrew Baker read out the Executive Committee’s Proposal as follows:

“The Society should donate £10,000 to the Gwent Wildlife Trust as a contribution to their recent purchase of land adjacent to Magor Marsh Reserve, on the understanding that it will be managed in a way as to encourage breeding Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe.”

Alec Moon seconded the proposal.

Before voting, Andrew Baker asked the floor for any questions.

Q. Will there be a written legal agreement? Andrew Baker said that there would be no legally binding agreement. Alan Williams explained that although there was no formal contract there had been an exchange of correspondence with GWT, setting out GOS requirements and that these had been largely agreed to by GWT. He gave an explanation of GWT's plans for the reserve. Julian Branscombe also gave an insight into what the GWT had planned for the site.

Q. Will GOS have a written agreement with GWT? Alan Williams explained that GOS will be consulted on the management plan for the site and that this will form the main part of a written agreement. Julian Branscombe agreed there will be a written plan.

Andrew Baker asked the floor to vote. The proposal was unanimously agreed.

A letter of thanks from the Gwent Wildlife Trust, received 20/11/03 is copied below:

18th November 2003

Dear Trevor

GOS donation to Magor Marsh Extension

I am writing on behalf of Gwent Wildlife Trust to offer you our wholehearted thanks for your invaluable donation of £10,000 towards the purchase costs of the Wildlife Trust's 33 acre extension to the Magor Marsh Reserve. This is a wonderful demonstration of partnership working by GOS. We are delighted that the organisation has felt it appropriate to invest in wader conservation through supporting our purchase.

In December we shall be providing you with a consultation copy of the draft management plan. We look forward to having any input you are able to offer. We greatly appreciate the service you have provided to us by having Tony Pickup visit the site and provide his

management suggestions.

I would be grateful if our appreciation could be extended to your membership. Thank you very much indeed.

Yours sincerely

Julian Branscombe

Chief Executive, Gwent Wildlife Trust

Goytre House Wood

Andrew Baker

The fires and vandalism within the Wood have ceased since the school summer holidays ended. The Triticale crop has ripened and is holding its seed. There were no birds feeding on it when I inspected it recently, but it may be worth having a look at as the winter develops, and natural food decreases. If anyone has sightings of birds feeding on the crop, perhaps they would let me know, so that the effectiveness of this bird crop can be judged.

News from the Gwent Levels Reserve

Kevin Dupé, Assistant Warden

The extended hot, dry summer lowered the water levels on the reserve to the lowest they have ever been. On most of the gauge boards we had to use a ruler to measure down to the top of the water from the bottom of the boards! This is still the case even at the end of November; we have had so little rain. Two things have compounded the problem. We haven't been able to pump water from the Nash Waste Water Treatment Works to our reedbeds because of problems with the water quality. We should also be able, by now, to pump water from the reens just before they enter Goldcliff Pill into our Transfer Ditch. Unfortunately we are still waiting for an Abstraction Licence from the Environment Agency. Perhaps we should re-name the reserve. Calling it the Gwent Levels Wetlands Reserve could get us prosecuted under the Trade Descriptions Act!

Every cloud (or lack of clouds) has a silver lining, however. The dry fields have enabled us, or rather Mike Mazzoleni, to 'top' rank vegetation such as rushes. We have even been able to bale a lot of the cut vegetation and are using the big, round bales to create screening. 'Topping' the fields will make them more attractive to wigeon over the winter and to nesting lapwing in the spring. In fact wigeon are already grazing some of the topped fields, despite the low water levels. A high tide count today produced a total of 676 wigeon.

Another problem caused by the drought and hot weather was the Goldcliff Lagoons becoming hyper-saline. Salinities reached 37 parts per thousand by mid-September. Seawater is 35 parts per thousand and we aim to keep the lagoons at between 11 parts per thousand and 20 parts per thousand. Once we have our Abstraction Licence we will be able to pump fresh water into the lagoons when needed, but until then the only response is to flush the lagoons with water from the estuary. Tony did this over several tides and this successfully lowered the salinities to around 22 parts per thousand.

I carried out some nekton sampling during early October and the Lagoons were full of large numbers of common prawns. Not many birds feed on these apart from the little egrets who were fishing, apparently, co-operatively. On several occasions I saw lines of 5 or 6 little egrets slowing moving forward and snapping up prey. It's likely that the avocets were feeding on the smaller prawns as well. The remaining adult and 4 fledged young left in July. However, I saw 5 avocets in Goldcliff Pill on the October WeBS count. They didn't appear to hang on for long though. Hopefully they will come back in the spring.

The reedbeds are holding good numbers of ducks, including up to 30 gadwall. This is possibly due to the lack of water elsewhere on the Reserve. Large flocks of wigeon are also coming in, but are easily spooked. The main problem is the open nature of the ends of the deep-water channels. To alleviate this we have created earth ledges along the ends of several reedbeds. We have fixed coir matting onto these and planted reed rhizomes. Once the reeds grow tall and dense enough they will provide some screening. Until this happens, we are going to construct reed screens and fix them along the edge of the tracks that run along the ends of the deep-water channels. These will have viewing slots to see the birds.

There have been some unusual birds seen at Uskmouth over the past couple of weeks, including yellow-browed warbler (spotted by Adrian Hickman) and Dartford warbler (spotted by Helen Parry Jones & Phil Thompson). The biggest twitch, however, was for a large white bird seen flying down the Bristol Channel - Concord!

What might cause low bird counts at Goldcliff lagoons, September 2003

The following question was posted on the GOS website 20/09/03:

Goldcliff Lagoons 20th 12.30-13.30 Lagoons very quiet with just the usual duck, greenshank etc. Possibly birds were scarce because of a large number of fishermen (I counted at least 15) on the reserve foreshore between uskmouth and goldcliff pill- is this allowed, and if not who should it be reported to?

Response from Tony Pickup, Senior Reserve Manager:

Fishing is allowed on parts of the reserve foreshore, but we try to control where and when it takes place. Generally fishing on the Uskmouth to Goldcliff foreshore does not adversely affect bird numbers on the Goldcliff lagoons. In fact it can increase counts there, since birds disturbed by the anglers may retreat to the lagoons for sanctuary. The Goldcliff lagoon counts are usually only lowered by anglers (or anybody else) walking or standing on the sea walls that surround the lagoons. This we are trying to prevent.

I'm not sure why the bird counts on the lagoons are low at the moment, but have a hunch that it's to do with the extremely hot weather in August. The pools' salinities were only raised to their target levels last year, and it will take a year or two for those saline lagoons invertebrates capable of tolerating extremes of salinity and temperature, to build up. This year I suspect there was considerable invertebrate mortality of intolerant species during the very hot weather in summer. This has led to a reduced food supply for birds especially in Lagoon 1, the most inland one.

The plan is to maintain the lagoons' salinities below that of sea water, but the drought and absence of a fresh water supply have made achieving that very difficult this year. Next year we may run one of the lagoons right at the 'freshwater end' of our salinity levels, so that if we get another drought we can use it to ameliorate hypersalinity in the other two. We tried to minimise the effect of the drought this year by flushing the lagoons with sea water on the only suitable tides in August, but it is not an ideal solution as it tends to lead to increase amounts of

salt in the muds. We will have to flush this out this winter with fresh water - assuming we get any rain!

Library Update - New Additions

George Noakes, Librarian

Bird Images videos:

- Warblers of Britain and Europe
- Birds of North America
- Waders of Europe, Asia and North America
- The video guide to birdwatching (Bill Oddie): a set of 2 videos covering all aspects of birdwatching, with much to offer to new and experienced birdwatchers alike.
- Mike Lane's CD "Secrets of wildlife photography". For those interested in bird photography

The following have been added to help members to plan birding holidays at home and abroad:

- Where to watch birds in Britain
- Where to watch birds in Scotland
- Where to watch birds in Europe and Russia
- A birdwatching guide to Brittany
- A birdwatching guide to Cyprus
- Where to watch birds in Southern and Western Spain
- Finding birds in Poland
- A field guide to the birds of Sri Lanka
- Where to watch birds in Africa
- A birdwatching guide to Morocco
- A field guide to the birds of East Africa
- A birdwatching guide to Florida
- A birder's guide to Florida
- "Guardian spirit of the East Bank", an excellent biography of the well-known Norfolk bird artist Richard Richardson.

All items are available for loan at indoor meetings, and any suggestions of books, videos, CDs or DVDs that might be of interest to members are very welcome.

Reports for Outdoor Trips

Exe Estuary/Dawlish Warren 20th September, George Noakes:

Undeterred by the very early start 8 members headed down the M5 to the Exe Estuary. Our first port of call was the reserve at Dawlish Warren, which we reached several hours before high tide. Here a good variety of common migrants, waders and gulls were seen. The next destination was the RSPB reserve at Bowling Green Marsh. As the RSPB was holding an Open Day, the hide was very crowded so we moved to the nearby observation platform from where we hoped to spot one of the Ospreys seen in the area. This we failed to do but excellent compensation was provided by the arrival of the long staying Glossy Ibis, flying past the platform. Returning to the hide, we searched carefully for one of the Pectoral Sandpipers that had been coming to Bowling Green Marsh in recent days. No luck this time, but we enjoyed excellent views of other waders. We then decided to move to the Exminster village area to try to locate a local speciality, the Cirl Bunting. Searching likely habitat very carefully we were eventually rewarded by a series of good views of a small party of these attractive birds. This provided an excellent finale to the day. Here is the trip list:

Dawlish Warren:

1. Little Grebe
2. Gannet
3. Cormorant
4. Shag
5. Little Egret
6. Grey Heron
7. Mute Swan
8. Wigeon
9. Teal
10. Mallard
11. Common Scoter
12. Moorhen
13. Oystercatcher
14. Sanderling
15. Dunlin
16. Bar-tailed Godwit
17. Curlew
18. Redshank
19. Greenshank
20. Common Gull
21. Herring Gull
22. Great Black-backed Gull
23. Sandwich Tern
24. Wood Pigeon

25. Swallow
26. Grey Wagtail
27. Pied Wagtail
28. Wren
29. Dunnock
30. Robin
31. Stonechat
32. Wheatear
33. Blackbird
34. Chiffchaff
35. Willow Warbler
36. Long-tailed Tit
37. Coal Tit
38. Blue Tit
39. Jackdaw
40. Crow
41. Starling
42. Greenfinch
43. Goldfinch
44. Linnet

Additional at Bowling Green Marsh & Exminster Lanes

1. Glossy Ibis
2. Spoonbill
3. Canada Goose
4. Barnacle Goose
5. Buzzard
6. Kestrel
7. Peregrine
8. Coot
9. Avocet
10. Grey Plover
11. Lapwing
12. Knot
13. Little Stint
14. Curlew Sandpiper
15. Ruff
16. Black-tailed Godwit
17. Whimbrel
18. Common Sandpiper
19. Kingfisher
20. Magpie

21. House Sparrow

Exminster

1. Stock Dove
2. Green Woodpecker
3. Cirl Bunting

Lavernock Point Sunday 8th October, Keith Roylance:

This was the second of two field trips to well known sites in Glamorgan and thanks to Keith Roylance who kindly agreed to lead this trip at late notice and provided the following report:

The walk at Lavernock point went off as planned. Only 4 hardy souls braved the rather cold (6°C) start, but it did warm up later to 12°C. It was a very quiet day for birds and we spoke with some local birders that we met who commented on how little activity there was. From the car park we walked up the road and took the public footpath to the entrance of the Wildlife Trust Reserve, meandered our way through until we reached the coastal path close to St Mary's Well Bay. We then traversed the coastal path eastwards until it turned inland and brought us back to the reserve entrance. From there back along the road past the church to pick up the coastal path towards Penarth, until we reached the outskirts of Penarth at which point we turned to retrace our steps back to the start at the car park. Here is our list:

1. Grey Heron
2. Pheasant
3. Oystercatcher
4. Curlew
5. Black Headed Gull
6. Lesser Black-backed Gull
7. Herring Gull
8. Wood Pigeon
9. Collared Dove
10. Swallow
11. House Martin
12. Wren
13. Dunnock
14. Robin
15. Blackbird
16. Chiffchaff

17. Long-tailed Tit (5/6)
18. Coal Tit
19. Blue Tit
20. Great Tit
21. Jay
22. Magpie
23. Crow
24. Starling
25. House Sparrow (20+)
26. Chaffinch
27. Greenfinch
28. Goldfinch
29. Bullfinch

And last but not least – Ring-neck Parakeet! Whether it was a recent escape from the chalets by the road or a more long term 'resident' we don't know, but it was a talking point when there was little else to see. We had a total of 30 species, and not one raptor.

Editor's note: the remains of a Red-neck Parakeet were seen at Aberthaw earlier in the season

Portland Bill Friday 18th October – Sunday 20th October, George Noakes:

To take full advantage of the weekend all 11 members managed to arrive at the Observatory on Friday. After settling in to what proved to be excellent accommodation, we watched the activity around the Observatory garden, where the main interest was a continental Coal Tit. A leisurely stroll out to the Bill produced sightings of a number of common species on land and at sea. In the evening, we enjoyed an excellent meal and some convivial chat at the Pulpit Inn. An early rise for some on Saturday started with an unproductive sea watch but on returning to the Observatory for breakfast we were able to see recently netted Firecrests in the hand – a real delight. The prevailing strong easterly wind was making it very difficult to find birds and after a walk around the Top Fields the party headed for Ferrybridge. Here there was a good variety of waders to study along with Brent Geese and a lone Sandwich Tern. We then moved on to Radipole Lake RSPB reserve where our target species was Bearded Tit, several of which were glimpsed and heard during our circuit. Early risers on Sunday again headed for a sea-watch from the Bill, but this proved as disappointing as the previous day's. Frustratingly, a Bunting spotted by Ruth Brown near the Observatory Quarry flew off before it could be accurately identified but might well have been a Lapland Bunting. The rest of the morning was spent partly at the Observatory garden where we enjoyed superb close views of Firecrests, then after a fruitless search for a Yellow-browed Warbler that had been heard calling in the grounds of the local primary school, we explored Tout Quarry, hoping that the areas sheltered from the wind

might produce something of interest. Indeed, the cliff slopes with their scree and bushes provided an excellent feeding area for a small number of Ring Ouzels. After a visit to the Observatory bookshop, we set off back to South Wales in the early afternoon and called in at Chew Valley Lake en route. Although we did not see any of the possible October rarities, everyone agreed that it had been a thoroughly enjoyable trip, worth repeating next year, perhaps in September.

National Wetlands Centre Wales 15th November, George Noakes:

Our annual visit to Llanelli was well supported and again provided a full and enjoyable day's birdwatching. Much of the morning was spent in the British Steel hide observing the roosting waders and ducks, including a Spoonbill, Spotted Redshanks and the now ubiquitous Little Egrets. The peaceful scene was occasionally enlivened by attacks from a Merlin and Peregrine. We then made a tour of the other hides before retiring for lunch in the well-appointed cafeteria, from which we kept a close eye on the bird feeders. In the afternoon we moved over to explore the newer part of the centre and finished our day watching hunting Barn Owl. Once again the centre provided an excellent opportunity to study a variety of species in very comfortable and congenial surroundings. In total 70 species were observed during the trip.

Forest of Dean and Monmouth Area Sunday November 23rd, Trevor Russell:

A small but select band of 7 were presented with three routes, two in the Monmouth area and the third, A Hawfinch Quest, in the Forest of Dean near Speech House. However such was the interest around Monmouth that we timed out and the Hawfinch in the forest of Dean will have to wait for another occasion to see us.

The first loop took us from the Waitrose car park towards the old Mitchell Troy Station area, walking along the Monnow to its confluence with the Wye. The Alders failed to attract Redpoll but a mature Willow yielded Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Treecreeper and Chiffchaff! Fieldfare, Redwing and Blackbirds were flushed as we walked towards the old railway viaduct which afforded unusual elevated views over the Wye. A Sparrowhawk dismissed us as being too large a prey and settled in a conifer across the river to resume its vigil. Cormorant, Heron and Buzzard were oblivious of the Sparrowhawk. The return route gave close-up views of the new bridge construction which will allow the medieval stone bridge to retire into a gentle footpath.

The second loop started near The Forge in Osbaston. On a good day the weir has seen salmon leaping but not today with the water level so low. Instead we consoled ourselves with Song and Mistle Thrush, which at least completed our Thrush family set (and my target) for the day. A seeming feeding frenzy of about 50 Siskin in an Alder held our attention until a couple of

Nuthatches and Kestrels reminded us that it was lunchtime.

BTO News

Jerry Lewis

There is only one survey needing volunteers this winter, a Gull Roost Survey involving a single count on the weekend of 17/18 January. The only sites in our area are Llandegfedd Reservoir and the Severn Estuary coastline. At present no one has volunteered for the coast between Goldcliff and the second Severn Crossing so any offers appreciated; also, if anyone wishes to help others with a co-ordinated count they can also contact me.

Next spring/summer there will be a Nightjar survey, postponed from this year when Adrian Thomas, Vaughan Thomas and I found 33 singing males in the forests of Trelleck and Wentwood, so there are plenty of birds out there to be found. This species seems to have expanded considerably since the surveys undertaken in 1981 and 1991, and next year's figure is likely to be a new County record. They are now found mainly on forest restocks between 2 and 5 years old (with some on older restocks). Anyone who wants to help should be as precise as possible as to which bit of forest they are able to cover.

There are also a small number of Breeding Bird Survey squares available for those who are looking for some constructive birding now that our own breeding atlas fieldwork is over. Just 2 visits are needed to the chosen square between April and June, currently the following are available for 2004: -

- SO 3621 (Campston Hill),
- ST 4799 (Devauden),
- SO 5119 (Welsh Newton),
- SO 3929 (Ewyas Harold),
- ST 2385 (Michaelston-y-Fedw).

Many thanks are due to participants for their continued support to this national monitoring scheme, but every year one or two have to reluctantly give up. If any existing volunteer thinks that they may be unable to complete their usual square in 2004 please give me plenty of notice so that I have a chance to find someone else. As the results are based on year to year changes for the individual squares, continuity is very important.

A new round of BTO-Hanson Business Bird Challenge will be launched in 2004, to find the best business sites for birds (see earlier Dippers). There is a range of type and size categories to enable like sites to be compared. In previous years the only Gwent site has been Llandegfedd Reservoir, but perhaps this year one of the sites in the Newport area (Solutia perhaps) could be persuaded to enter.

During the dry summer/autumn many lawns must have looked pretty sad and their owners may have thought it better to convert to hard standing (given the glut of garden makeover programmes on the television). The lawn however is a living carpet, and will already have sprung back to life with the rain and mild weather we are now getting. Gardens are becoming more and more important for wildlife and Blackbirds and Song Thrushes find much of their food from lawns. Don't be persuaded by those decking adverts, but stick with your lawn - even cut parts of it less frequently, and get much more pleasure from all the wildlife it will attract.

Other Sightings

Non-bird sightings that may be of interest, taken from the website **Location**

Peterstone	02/09	1 Clouded Yellow
Tredegar Park	16/09	Horseshoe & Pipistrelle Bats
Usk	20/09	2 Hummingbird Hawk Moth on Valerian
Tintern	28/09	Hummingbird Hawk Moth on Salvia
Llanfair Discoed	29/09	Hummingbird Hawk Moth on impatiens
GLWRU	11/10	30+ Clouded Yellow. Unspecified number
Abergavenny	11/10	Hummingbird Hawk Moth on Lavender

Recent Bird Sightings

Compiled by Helen Jones from information received on the website

Species		Locations & Comments
Swift	Aug.	2 at Abergavenny on 23rd
Swallow	Sep.	Steady passage at C/WP on 12th; "thou
Mixed Hirundines	Sep.	c300 mixed House Martin, Sand Martin
Wood Lark**	Nov.	1 flying south at The Hendre on 5th,
Tree Pipit	Aug.	

Sep.

4+ at GLWRG on 30th; 2 at Collister Pill on 30th

1 at C/WP on 12th

Yellow Wagtail

Aug.

Sep.

9 at GLWRG on 24th; 7 on 25th (1 with blue head) and 2 on 30th; 2 at Gobion/The Bryn on 29th;
4 at Gobion on 1st; 12 at C/WP on 4th, 2 on 7th; 2 at GLWRG on 13th,

White Wagtail

Sep.

5 at Gobion on 1st

Black Redstart*

Nov.

1 ?/imm on farm buildings near Goldcliff

Common Redstart

Sep.

1 at Collister/West Pill on 4th, 7th & 12th

Whinchat

Aug.

Sep.

Oct.

5 at GLWRG on 24th & 3 on 25th,
1 juv. At LR on 1st, 1 at C/WP on 7th & 4 on the 12th; 2 at GLWRG on 13th; 1 at Ynysyfro on 14th
2 at GLWRG on 11th

Northern Wheatear

Aug.

Sep.

7 at GLWRG on 24th; 10 at Collister Pill on 30th
1 at LR on 1st; 1 at PW on 2nd; 7 C/WP on the 4th; 10 on 7th, 12 on 12th; 3 at GLWRG on 5th

Fieldfare

Sep.

Nov.

1 at LR on 4th

700+ at Gobion on 4th; 1000 at West Pill on 7th

Redwing

Oct.

Nov.

1 near Llangybi on 4th

200 + at Llanwenarth on 3rd; 600+ Gobion on 4th; c299 at West Pill on 7th

Reed Warbler

Sep.

1 at C/WP on 4th, 3 on 7th & 12th; 1 at

Dartford Warbler*

Nov.

1 imm. At GLWRU east of lighthouse 23

Lesser Whitethroat

Aug.

Sep.

2 at Llanwenarth on 24th; 1 at Collister Pill on 30th

4 at GLWRG on 5th; 1 at Gobion on 15th; 2 at C/WP, 1 on 12th

Common Whitethroat

Sep.

3 C/WP on 4th

Garden Warbler

Sep.

At LR on 4th; 1 at C/WP on 7th; 1 at Yn

Blackcap

Aug.

Sep.

Nov.

1 at GLWRG on 28th

at Gobion on 15th

? at Llanwenarth on 3rd & Tintern on 16th; 1? & 2 ? at Osbaston on 16th

Yellow-browed Warbler* Oct. 1 at GLWRU on 26th
Chiffchaff Aug.

Sep.

1 at GLWRG on 28th

at LR on 4th; movement at Gobion on 3rd and 15th; 7+ at C/WP on 4th, 8 on 7th & 13 on 12th; 5 at

Willow Warbler Aug.

Sep.

1 at GLWRG on 28th

at LR on 4th; 1 at Ynysfro on 14th; at Gobion on 15th

Spotted Flycatcher Aug.

Sep.

1 at Llanwenarth on 24th; 2 at GLWRG on 25th

1 at C/WP on 7th

Bearded Tit Nov Male & female at GLWRU on 30th,
Great Grey Shrike* Nov. 1, possibly 2 at Cadira Beeches/Nine W
Chaffinch Nov. c300 passing West Pill on 7th in 1 hour
Brambling Oct.

Nov.

6 at West Pill on 24th

5 at West Pill on 7th; 1 at the Moorings Newport on 10th

Snow Bunting* Nov 1 near cairn along ridge path, SO30220

Other sightings by location

Location

Date

Species & Comments

August

Gobion/The Bryn 20

27

29

5 Green Sandpiper, 2 on 29th; 2 Little Egret; 40 Linnet

1 Hobby, also on 29th; 1 Sparrowhawk, also on 29th;

2 Greenshank; 3 Common Sandpiper; 8 Grey Wagtail; 11 Goosander

Newport 23

Llanwenarth 24

GLWR Goldcliff 24

Hobby harassing Swallows by the Moor

3 Green Sandpiper; 1 Common Sandpiper

28

30

31

2 Peregrine; 6 Greenshank, also on 30th; 3 Ruff, 4 on 30th; 2 Common Sandpiper; 1 Golden Plover;
2 Avocet, also on 30th; 154 Black-tailed & 40 Bar-tailed Godwit; 4 Little-ringed Plover; 12 Ringed Plover;

9 Little Egret; 300+ Black-tailed Godwit; 2 Hobby; 4 Snipe; 1 Curlew Sandpiper; 2 Sanderling;

Marsh Harrier (fem/juv); 1 Golden Plover

Usk	28	4 Common Sandpiper; 4 Greenshank; 1
Ynysyfro	29	1 female type Merlin stooped at by another
Collister Pill	30	2 Grey Wagtail; 1 Green Sandpiper

September

Llandegfedd Res. 01

02

1 Greenshank; 1 Ruff; 1 Common Sandpiper (all also on 4th); 1 Little Egret;

Waders as above, plus 1 Green Sandpiper; Marsh Tit

Gobion 01

03

04

29

30

1 Greenshank, also on 3rd; 1 Peregrine; 6 Grey Wagtail, 15 on 3rd; 35 Pied Wagtail, 70 on 3rd; 4
3 Hobby; 1 Green & 1 Common Sandpiper, also on 4th; 150 Linnet; warblers on the move, also on 1

1 Wood Sandpiper; 1 Peregrine; 1 Hobby; 1 Sparrowhawk & 2 Buzzard

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker with tit flock; 1 Hobby

4 Green Sandpiper; 1 Common Sandpiper

Peterstone Gout 02

06

1 Kingfisher; 1 Ruff; 3 Greenshank; 1 Sanderling;
4 Golden Plover; 1 Ruff;

Collister/West Pill 4-12

04

12

Plenty of passerines on the move, see table above.

2 Stock Dove

8 Red-legged Partridge;

GLWR Goldcliff 05

06

11

13

16

25

1 Short-eared Owl; 1 Hobby; 200+ Black-tailed Godwit; 50+ Knot (92 on 6th); 2 Ruff; 2 Greensha

1 probable Common Tern; 2 Ruff; 2 Ringed Plover

13 Bar-tailed Godwit

3 Little Stint, 1 on 28th; 1 Spotted Redshank, 2 on 21st & 28th; Little-ringed Plover;

2 Black Tern

6 Green Sandpiper

Ynysyfro	14	Passerines, see above
St Brides	16	1 Black Tern
Bulmore Lakes	18	1 Green Sandpiper, possible Osprey he
Newhouse/Mathern	25	300 + Redshank

October

Gobion	01	Marsh Tit; 3 Green Sandpiper; 1 Comm
GLWR Goldcliff	02	

06

11

27

1 juv Curlew Sandpiper

16 Little Egret

1 Tree Sparrow

57 sp incl. 18 Ringed Plover, 13 Grey Plover; 3 Ruff; 3 Green Sandpiper;

The Bloreng
GLWR Uskmouth

05
06

6 Red Grouse

11

26

Female Ruddy Duck

Drake Ring-necked Duck to 23rd November

Merlin; Redpoll; impressive Starling Roost

Ynysyfro

08

19

Grey Phalarope

1 male Ruddy Duck

Wernyrheolydd
Lower Beaufort Pond
Bwlch
Bassaleg
Bulmore Lakes
West Pill, Undy
Osbaston

9-10
14
15
18
23
24
28

Barn Owl
Male Ruddy Duck
Red Kite
55 Stock Dove
1 dead Barn Owl – no sign of injury, loo
18 Red-legged Partridge
Redpoll in garden

November

Usk	1	Hen Harrier flying over
Llanwenarth	3	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker; Little Owl;
Gobion	4	1 Merlin
The Hendre	5	1 Goshawk; 4 Marsh Tit; 1 Tawny Owl;
West Pill, Undy	7	Female Merlin; 18 Red-legged Partridge
Llandegfedd Res.	08	Marsh & Willow Tit at feeding station
Peterstone	12	

18

c1400 Common Redshank; c800 Dunlin; c400 Knot; c130 Black-tailed Godwit, 250+ on 18th,
2 Little Egret, one of which was an imm.

GLWR Goldcliff 14

17

1 Diver sp in 1 hour's sea watching at Goldcliff Point

Merlin and Peregrine seen from Farmer's Arms car park

Ynysyfro	15	Female Ruddy Duck, also on 19th,
Newhouse Mathern	16	2 Merlin; 1 Sparrowhawk
GLWR Uskmouth	23	

24

1 Short-eared Owl

1 Merlin; 30 Stock Dove;

Newport	23	1 Short-eared Owl at The Moorings, also
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Historical details of the less common species listed in the passerine table on page 9

Wood Lark has bred in Gwent, with last confirmed breeding records in 1967 and 1974 and suspected in 1971, all at the same location 1. More recently there were records of single birds in spring/summer in 1975 to 1977, 1985(1) and 1987 (1), and of singles or small groups in the winter months in 1982(1), 1984 (1), 1993 (6), 1994 (up to 10), 1995 (7 & 2), 1998 (1) and 1999 (1). In the winter months from 1993, four of the sightings have been at Dingestow 2.

The species is Red Listed having had a rapid ($\geq 50\%$) of UK breeding range over the last 25 years, though apparently is making a come-back 3. The species was found in 73 10km squares for the 1988-1991 Breeding Atlas. To put this into perspective, Skylark was found in 2729 10km squares 3! It will be interesting to see its position in the new BTO Breeding Atlas Survey due in the next couple of years. It is currently considered a scarce species in Wales, defined as "occurring on average 5 times or fewer annually in Wales". As such, descriptions of sighting must be submitted to the Welsh Records Panel (WRP) for assessment 5.

Dartford Warbler is also considered a scarce species in Wales 5, with just 5 previous records in Gwent 2. It is described as "a rare migrant to coastal areas of south Wales. Bred in 1998" 6. If accepted by the WRP, this will be the sixth record for the County.

03/12/84 – 01/01/85

28/11/92- 13/03/93

25/05/98-09/12/98

15/03/99

1 ?, Peterstone 1st County Records

2 successful broods 1st confirmed in Wales

Though breeding has not been confirmed in Gwent since 1998, breeding was confirmed at 2 sites in neighbouring Glamorgan in 2000 and at 1 of these sites in 2001, with a singing male present there on 16th February 7. In 2002, birds were present at at least 6 sites in Glamorgan, with breeding taking place at one of them and at 6 sites in Gower 5.

It is an Amber List Species with a historical population decline 1800-1995, but recovering; population size has more than doubled over last 25 years 4. The species was found in 45 10km squares for the 1988-1991 Breeding Atlas. It is an insectivorous bird and after the cold winters of 1961/62 & 62/63, the population was down to 10 pairs. However a national survey in 1994 found 1600 pairs 3.

Yellow-browed Warbler was first recorded in the County 14th October 1988. It is described as a “scarce to uncommon, but rapidly increasing, autumn passage migrant”⁷. This is a visitor from the Siberian taiga, with most records in late September-October in trees and scrub along coasts⁸. Between 1975 & 2000, there were just 2 records in Gwent and 68 on Bardsey Island! Neighbouring Glamorgan had 16 records⁶. This appears to be the 3rd record for the County, the second being at St Brides 03/10/93. So though it is not “scarce in Wales”, it is scarce in Gwent, and a description is required.

Snow Bunting is “a regular autumn passage migrant and winter visitor in small numbers”⁶. However whilst there have been over 700 in North Wales and 386 in Pembrokeshire from 1975 to 2000, there has been just 1 in Gwent⁶ – at Twmbarlwm 30th October-1st November 1997. So as for Yellow-browed Warbler whilst it is not counted as a scarce species in Wales, it is a scarce bird in Gwent, and a description is required.

Historically, inland records were from Abergavenny, of 1 shot in 1890, and 3 seen in January 1968. Otherwise, birds seen on or close to the coast between October & March were 3 between 1912 & 1930, and 13 records between 1964 and 1975. Most sightings were at Undy and Peterstone Wentlooge. The largest numbers recorded were at Undy with up to 10 in March 1964 and up to 8 in November 1967

Bearded Tit is described as “an erratic breeding species in one or two locations in very small numbers from the mid-1960’s to the late 1980’s; otherwise a rare autumn and winter visitor to reedbed areas”⁶. The first record for the County was in 1966, when up to three birds were seen from January to March in a reed-bed at Newport Docks. Subsequently a 14 were seen Minnetts Wood in October 1971, and a male and two females were at Uskmouth in December 1974. Further Sightings at Uskmouth were 3 on 2nd December 1979, 1981, a male 4th November 1986 and 1st April 1988, 1 heard 28th Nov 1992, at least 2 on 14th March and 4 27th-30th November 1993. In 1997, one was heard at Magor Marsh Reserve².

Great Grey Shrike is “scarce but annual winter visitor, occasionally recorded on passage”⁶. Early records were of one at Peterstone 9th April 1933, 2 at Trelleck in April 1954, one at Magor January 1966, and 1 at the Nedern Brook December 1970. Since then, there have been sightings in each of the following years: 1973 to 1977, 1982, 1985, 1989 to 1995, 1997 and then in January 2003. Locations were Peterstone, Llandegfedd Reservoir, Llanvair Discoed, Abergavenny, Bal Mawr, Chepstow Park Wood, Pontypool Park, the Monnow Valley, Broad Meend, and Cadira Beeches, Nine Wells and Little Oak in Wentwood^{2,9}. All sightings were between November and April, and whilst some birds stayed around for a few months, the majority were seen very briefly.

1. Ferns, P.N. et al (1977), The Birds of Gwent
2. Annual Reports of the Gwent Ornithological Society
3. Mead, C (2000), The State of The Nations' Birds
4. The Population Status of Birds in the UK. Birds of conservation concern 2002-2007
5. Welsh Ornithological Society Newsletter (2003), No. 29; Scarce and rare birds in Wales 2002
6. Green, J (2002) Birds in Wales 1992-2000
7. Eastern Glamorgan Bird Reports
8. Mullarney et al (1999) Collins Bird Guide
9. Gwent Ornithological Society website: www.gwentbirds.org.uk

Committee Commentary

Trevor Russell

Membership subscriptions were discussed at the October meeting. Whilst it was agreed that there was no need to increase fees for 2005, changes will be proposed at the next fee change to simplify the fee structure. These would allow the Senior Citizens fee to increase in steps to match the Adult rate whilst Under 18's would be allowed to join free of charge.

The Birdline facility has now been withdrawn and our thanks go to Chris Hatch and his team, and to Welsh Water for providing such a useful service since September 1994. Sightings can be recorded, and read, on our website.

Magor Marsh Reserve Extension: Preparations were made for gaining approval for the donation of £10,000 at the SGM on October 11th. (This was subsequently approved. See p3 in this edition for a report)

Barn Owl shooting: Since the report in September issue of The Dipper, the Police have been informed and when Cwmyrnyscoy Quarry near Griffithstown gains Local Nature Reserve status, it is hoped that an increased numbers of wardens will stop such incidents. Should anyone witness further incidents please report them to Andrew Osborne, Head of Countryside, Torfaen County Borough Council.

The 'Birds of Gwent' project is reaching the end of the data-gathering stage. The next steps include agreeing the style of presentation, what maps to use for which species and whether to

publish in hardback and/or paperback. Publication may yet be a couple of years away.

GOS Recording Area: The GOS reporting boundary for GOS was discussed again and it was recommended that we should extend our western boundary to the River Rhymney, providing we can reach agreement with our colleagues in the Glamorgan Bird Club. Any change will require AGM approval so watch this space.

Goytre House Wood: The November meeting heard that a management plan for the wood will be ready in December.

Bert Hamar Bursary 2004: This has been awarded to Steve Williams to assist funding his work at the Dunlop Semtex Pond, monitoring trends in wildfowl and breeding bird numbers. His report will be published in the Annual Report in due course.

Dipper Editor: We urgently need a Dipper Editor. Helen has carried on for 12 months beyond her desired retirement date simply to ensure continuity. Surely among the 400 members there is someone who is willing to take on the task? You would be working with wonderful people! Please contact Helen if you are interested.

2004 Committee: All members of the Committee expressed a willingness to stand for 2004. See the page 1 for more detail.

Chasing Wild Geese (in Eastern Romania and the Danube Delta) Al Venables

I have always thought Red-breasted Geese to be the most beautiful of the geese, and to see their wintering flocks along the western coast of the Black Sea coast has long been an ambition. November 2003 turned out to be a convenient time for me and also for several friends, so all we needed was a bird-tour company to take us.

When considering a bird tour in Romania, Ibis is the company that springs to mind – a long-established company with a very good reputation. However, several of our small group had

done an autumn trip to Romania in 2002 with Burton Expeditions and had been led very successfully by a young guide named Diana Vulpe. On hearing that Diana had set up her own tour company, Diana Travel, we decided to give her a chance to show what her company could do. We were not disappointed.

We were met at Bucharest airport by Diana, the tour organiser, Alexandru Dorocencu (Andu for short) our bird guide, and Georghe who proved to be a most helpful and obliging driver of our minibus. By the time we had exited Bucharest at about 4pm, the light was already fading so the remainder of our day was spent driving to our hotel at Constanta on the west coast of the Black Sea.

Next day (Friday) we started our birding, going south to lakes Tasaul and also lake Techirghiol where we were thrilled by the sight of 170 White-headed ducks (probably a record for the site), around 300 Black-necked grebes, 150 Mediterranean Gulls and an astounding flock of 700 Calandra larks. Several Pygmy Cormorants, 8 species of raptor (including Rough-legged and Long-legged Buzzards) in a total of 50 species completed a memorable day's birding, but it seemed that Red-breasted Geese were not yet this far south and our search would need to move further north.

On Saturday we drove north, visiting several sites along the coast of Lake Razim. A brief woodland walk produced excellent views of Middle-spotted, Lesser-spotted and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, but it was lunch-time and still no geese! However Andu was not at all fazed by this – he knew all the sites where the geese might be, so if they were not in the places we had looked so far, then they were bound to be in the places where we would look next – quite logical really! And he was right! In early afternoon we saw them: 3500 White-fronted Geese and around 300 Red-breasted Geese feeding among cereal stubble. The Red-breasts were even more beautiful than I had imagined, but were very jumpy and soon flew off giving us an excellent view as they went past us at less than 100 metres. We thought that was it, but Andu knew better. Apparently they only feed in the company of White-fronts who, with their longer necks, are more effective look-outs and give early warning of danger. So if we waited, the Red-breasts would come back. True to prediction they were back after about 15 minutes. They circled nervously and began to descend when out of the blue, they were attacked by a Saker falcon. The falcon missed and the geese rose again. This sequence was repeated again after 5 minutes, and eventually the geese settled on a nearby lake where we had excellent views of them washing and preening. Scanning through the flock we could pick out very few immatures so presumably their breeding season in the Arctic has not been good.

On route to our hotel in Tulcea we stopped briefly at other sites, seeing 50 Great White Egrets

and numerous Pygmy Cormorants. It had been another great day with a total of 54 species that again included Rough-legged and Long-legged Buzzards.

On Sunday we were aboard our boat, eating our freshly cooked breakfast, and sailing into the Danube Delta before dawn. As the light began to pick up, the sky was blackened by a flock of some ten thousand Jackdaws that passed low overhead. In the heart of the Delta there were tens of thousands of wildfowl, and from the open platform on the top of the boat we frequently saw Spotted Eagle and White-tailed Eagle. Shortly after midday we watched the dramatic spectacle of 6 White-tailed Eagles attempting to catch a lone Mallard, and eventually failing! While that drama was being played out, a Black Woodpecker fed on a tree 30 metres behind us - which way do you look?! It was another memorable day with a total of 54 species that also included Merlin, Peregrine, Ferruginous Duck, many Grey-headed Woodpeckers and a Great Grey Shrike.

Monday morning was taken up with our drive to Bucharest for the afternoon flight back to Heathrow, but we managed some short stops that produced an interesting variety of birds, and a brief visit to the Bucharest Folk Museum - a sort of Romanian version of St Fagans.

In an excellently organised trip we had seen 85 species and had some truly magical moments. Andu proved a very competent, knowledgeable and approachable guide, and our search for the geese made us realise that without his expert local knowledge we would probably have not seen them at all. Our two hotels and our transport were very comfortable, and food was of excellent quality and plentiful. Diana's organisation could not be faulted, and included some nice touches such as a lunch in a seaside restaurant from where we had great views of feeding Black-necked Grebes. The weather was cold at times and frequent hot drinks from flasks in our minibus were another thoughtful feature. All in all it was a great trip that we highly recommend.

This 4-night trip (2 nights in Constanta; 2 in Tulcea) for 5 people with Diana Travel cost £470 per person and included all costs except for drinks with meals. The price reduces with increase in group size. BA flights booked two months in advance on-line were £168.50. The website for Diana Travel is <http://www.dianatravel.ro>

Breeding Lapwing Initiative

Jerry Lewis

During the spring, Monmouthshire County Council gave breeding Lapwing a helping hand by paying farmers to adjust their normal farming operations to help the birds. Most Lapwing in Monmouthshire now breed on maize stubble fields - harvested during the previous autumn, they provide ideal (sparsely vegetated) ground in the spring. However the preparations for the new crop involve ploughing, tilling and seeding during the nesting period and nests and eggs are often destroyed in the process.

Lump sums were payable if the farmer either delayed cultivations until after mid June, or if all the cultivations took place over a short (1-week) period before mid April. The benefits are that either the main breeding season is avoided, or if nests are destroyed, the birds have time to re-nest without other attempts being destroyed by the next stage of cultivation.

An additional payment could be made for every successful nest - this generally involved finding the nests and ensuring that any cultivations went around them (or alternatively that the nests were lifted and replaced after the machinery had passed). Both methods were successful and once eggs have hatched the young are able to move away from the disturbance.

A total of 20 nests were helped on three farms. The most successful farm (12 nests) involved several visits, and close co-operation between a member of GOS (Steve Roberts) and the farmer, to find the nests and mark them. It is hoped that the project will continue into next year, if any member knows of a suitable breeding site, and is willing to help the farmer to find and monitor nests, give me a ring, 01873 855091