

Help contribute to most ambitious Atlas yet

BTO News

Jerry Lewis

Interest in the New Atlas has continued to increase since the last issue of The Dipper. With the first winter period over, we are now well into the first breeding season, and the first of two visits will have been completed.

For those who are not yet involved there are two ways in which you can contribute to this most ambitious Atlas yet, and during the four years there will be few other BTO species surveys taking place.

So, to get involved you could either take on a tetrad (2km by 2km square) and do a one or two-hour count. Counts are done twice during a winter period and twice during a summer period - most counters like to do both the winter and summer counts, although you could opt to do only one season. Or you could collect any breeding and wintering records from anywhere – a species lists from your own regular patch would be especially useful.

The first option is known as a Timed Tetrad Visit (TTV), while the second is termed a Roving Record. You could, of course, do both - adopting a tetrad and submitting roving records from anywhere else you might visit.

Both TTVs and Roving Records are equally important in getting the full picture of how our wintering and breeding birds are distributed. The more unusual or secretive species are unlikely to be picked up on TTVs and the Roving Records will be vital to record them. It will always be better to have several duplicate records than to have a species missed, so don't think that someone else might be covering a patch and is bound to submit the record.

At the moment, the minimum number of TTVs (eight out of the 25 tetrads in each 10km square) have been allocated in all but three 10km squares, so help is still needed in SO31 (six tetrads covered so far), SO40 (four tetrads) and ST49 (just two tetrads).

In most other squares, eight to 10 tetrads have been allocated, but an amazing 21 tetrads are being done in ST28. Details of all the tetrads that have been allocated so far, and how to register to become involved are available on the website www.bto.org/birdatlas

So don't delay, register for next winter's TTV or start submitting Roving Records now. If you need paper forms to record your records, or want to know more, give me a ring 01873 855091.

As well as the Atlas fieldwork, the 'dedicated' recorders will also be out doing the second visits of their Breeding Bird Surveys. Please let me have your returns (or submit them online) as soon as possible after you have completed the second visit. I still need a few returns from 2007 and these would still be greatly appreciated.

As the data is used to compare year on year changes, one year without data effectively means two years without comparisons. So the records are valued, no matter how late they may be received.

Last winter will probably become known as the winter of the Siskin. Huge numbers crossed the North Sea when their food source - conifer seeds - failed and they came looking for alternatives, joining up with the resident birds and swelling their numbers.

Large flocks could be found moving around Gwent's forests and they visited gardens in much larger numbers than usual, particularly if nyger seed was available.

The BTO/CJ Garden Birdwatch Survey has revealed that late March/early April is the best time to see them in gardens as they fatten up prior to returning to their northern breeding groups.

Committee Commentary

Trevor Russell

In February, the Committee was introduced to Camilla Smith, the new RSPB Heads of the Valleys Lapwing Project Officer. The first year of her survey revealed that 29 pairs produced

only 0.19 fledged young/pair though 0.7/pair is required to maintain the population.

Site monitoring will continue and training courses will be available on the RSPB method. Volunteers for the Lapwing survey work are always welcome and any interested GOS members should get in touch with any Committee member for further details.

The decision of the AGM, to give precedence to the traditional/vernacular name over the BOU name in the Annual Report, received another full and frank discussion in February - resulting in the County Recorder being asked to convey our preference to the Welsh Recorders' meeting in March for their views.

The WR discussion was sympathetic, but they nevertheless voted to give precedence to the BOU name. However, because more than 70% of the AGM voted in favour of the traditional name first, the April meeting agreed to comply with our members' preference.

An information board has been erected at Goytre Wood, thanks to a grant from Monmouthshire County Council. Six nest boxes were also installed in time for the breeding season.

Positive reaction to the Board encourages us to ask for a further grant to install a second board at the canal end of the footpath, although it is recognised that it may be more vulnerable to vandalism in that location.

A Wood Working Party will be set up to manage the wood in accordance with the Wood Management Plan. More details - and a call for volunteers - will be made at the indoor meetings.

Darryl Spittle has been awarded the 2008 Hamar Bursary to assist with his work on Cetti's Warbler at the NWR.

The SSSI status of Talybont Reservoir is under threat because CCW says that it no longer meets required SSSI criteria. It is proposed to open it up for recreational water sport use and Talybont-on-Usk Community Council asked GOS if we had any bird data that could be used to support its protest.

Being out of county, we have no data - but we were pleased to give our support to their protest, particularly as similar recreational water sports facilities already exist at Ponsticill Reservoir, only three miles away.

RK Consulting is conducting an Environmental Impact Assessment for a biomass incinerator near Newport (fuelled by wood from Norway) and asked GOS for any bird data in the area. We await their response to our quotation.

The Treasurer has calculated that after the Birds of Gwent has been paid for and the anticipated Annual Report expenses met, 2008 will run at a loss of a few hundred pounds. Given forecasted increasing costs of printing and postage, he warned that it would be prudent to consider a subscription increase in 2010. Discussion continues.

The editors of the Annual Report use the GOS website Sightings Page data for much of their work, but do not find the present format convenient for analysing the data they need.

They are making proposals to the webmaster suggesting that by entering sightings in a more structured way, everyone will soon be able to manipulate the data for their own purposes.

It was agreed that GOS will attend the Garn Lakes Fayre on June 29

The Birds of Gwent was launched on April 19, and over 500 books have been sold so far.

As approved at the AGM, £5,000 was sent to the GWT Wyewood Common Appeal. A letter of thanks has subsequently been received from Julian Branscombe.

Outdoor Walks Programme

Forest of Dean trip, St David's Day Luke Phillips

Eleven members met up at Brierly, which is known as the place to see Hawfinch. But before everyone had got there, we were already seeing the birds flying over us - heading deep into the canopy.

Thankfully, the birds put in a repeat performance, although we were restricted to flight views. Everyone had a good chance to brush up on the Hawfinch's call instead.

We then turned our attention to Willow Tit, as Brierly is the best place in the Forest for this species. However, on a previous visit I could only manage a single Marsh Tit and sadly this time, neither species was seen - except for a very brief view (of what could have been either) by one of our group.

We did see a good number of Brambling, but given how many we've had in Gwent this winter, we weren't that surprised to see them.

From Brierly, we ventured on to New Fancy View to try our luck with Goshawks. Our luck was in, as we had plenty of good views of birds displaying. At one point, we could see four Goshawks in the binoculars at the same time.

Given our good luck, we then decided to look for the wintering Great Grey Shrike, which had been using a clearing just up the road from New Fancy. As we got near to the clearing, we noticed a few birders already there and hoped they were watching the Shrike - and they were! Everyone in our group got excellent scope views of the bird, including it devouring a vole.

We decided to end the day down at Cannop Ponds to hopefully get Mandarin Ducks and a few other wildfowl. I had also heard of a feeding station there which regularly has Marsh Tits visiting.

A stroll down to the lower pond revealed a few Mandarin resting on a tree root allowing us excellent close views of this exotic species. After that, we came across the feeding station I had been told about and, sure enough, a short wait produced amazing close views of a Marsh Tit. A few photos later, we headed back to the cars after what had been a great birding experience.

GOS visit to Silent Valley, March 30, 2008 Nicholas Beswick

It might have been the clocks going forward or the filthy weather the previous day, but only a handful of enthusiasts made the early start on a glorious spring morning. Needless to say, the birds had started rather earlier and the woods were alive with song as we gathered in the car park. The Green Woodpecker evidently thought the joke was on us!

Our leader was Julian Branscombe, Chief Executive of the Gwent Wildlife Trust - who better to tell us about the history and ecology of the site, one of the Trust's reserves?

This ancient woodland, tucked into the hillside above the Ebbw Valley, has the distinction of being the highest natural beech wood in Britain and one of the most westerly.

But it also has a remarkable diversity of habitats, as nature has reclaimed old spoil tips and careful control of grazing has created woodlands of varying character.

It is also rich in industrial archaeology and recently discovered evidence suggests that iron was being extracted from local ore many centuries before the Industrial Revolution.

Within the month or so, the wood would be alive with Redstart, Pied Flycatcher and Tree Pipit - but there was not a summer visitor to be found. Likewise, the winter visitors had all but departed, the exception being a solitary Brambling that Luke Phillips found as he had to leave the group early.

The rest of us had to be content with the delights of close views of Treecreepers and Nuthatches and the aerobatics of Ravens ever-present over the ridge above the reserve.

A speck in the sky revealed its identity with a stunning power-dive, and to the Peregrine, we added Buzzard and Sparrowhawk.

The woods eventually revealed their expected residents, though Goldcrest and Bullfinch were spotted only as the group dispersed from the car park. Sadly, there was no sign of the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker or Hawfinch that have wintered on the site.

Though our bird list was modest, the walk was most enjoyable and well worth the early start. Our thanks go to Julian for taking us round and for providing a comprehensive and fascinating commentary on the reserve.

Species found were: Peregrine, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Woodpigeon, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Skylark, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Goldcrest, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Jay, Magpie, Crow, Jackdaw, Raven, Chaffinch, Brambling and Bullfinch.

Mynydd Maen, Sunday May 25, 2008 Mick Bailey

I was prepared to lead this now traditional annual walk if anyone was keen (or foolhardy) enough to turn up, but luckily nobody did - the wind and rain would have made it wretched and probably unproductive. However, a recce earlier in the week had produced some interesting sightings and some puzzling omissions.

The highlight for my novice companion was an excellent view of a male Cuckoo, both in flight and perched. As someone who can never manage to distinguish Meadow and Tree Pipits by sight, I had hoped to show him how easy it is by sound. The Tree Pipit duly sang from the top of a distant beech tree, but unfortunately no Meadows were present for comparison and, when eventually we found some near the summit, only one sang - and then only on the ascending part of its song flight! A bit late in the season for them to sing, perhaps?

We had no Whinchats and Wheatears at all - and no Stonechats until the return (southern) half of the walk. The sole Reed Bunting was singing on the reedy field to the west of the tip heaps above Henllys, on the southern extension to the walk.

Species found were: Buzzard, Raven, Crow, Jackdaw, Magpie, Blackbird, Mistle Thrush, Blue and Great Tit, Starling, Wood Pigeon, Stock Dove, Wren, Robin, Cuckoo, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Linnet, Swallow, House Martin, Swift, Meadow and Tree Pipits, Skylark, Willow Warbler, Whitethroat, Redstart, Stonechat, Reed Bunting - total 30.

Strangely, we heard no Green Woodpeckers. But I saw a male feeding in the grass verge of Penmaes Road as I waited in the car on Sunday!

2008 Gwent Bird Race Luke Phillips

Just three teams took up the challenge of the first Gwent Bird Race for a number of years - but there certainly wasn't a lack of competition!

A dodgy weather forecast made it a very interesting day for our County Recorder's team - which consisted of Chris Jones (County Recorder), Richard Clarke, Darryl Spittle and Julian Branscombe - who were doing the race on the Saturday of the mid-May weekend.

Much better weather was enjoyed on Sunday by the other two teams, comprising Craig Constance, Steve Butler and John Bennett in one, and myself and Ruth Brown in the other.

All teams made considerable effort in researching sites for the race, hence the sightings page on our website being rather quiet for a few days prior to the event - or was that just a coincidence?!

The results were: first place went to Chris Jones's team, with a massive 119 species - which beats the county record, set in 1991, by eight species. Second place went to Ruth Brown and myself with 108, and third place to Craig's team, with 103.

Between all the teams, an amazing 126 species were seen in Gwent over the weekend, including a few county scarcities such as Arctic Skua, Fulmar and Mediterranean Gull. Hopefully, this event will become an annual item on GOS's outdoor programme, given the

success of this year's race. Thanks to all who took part.

The Hunt for Yellow-legged Gull

Ian Smith

Leaders: Ian Smith and Luke Phillips

It may be a race of Herring Gull in your book, but if you want to bag a real bird, forget that outdated guide and come along on this hunting expedition to the deepest depths of Glascoed.

In our sights will be Western Yellow-legged Gull. This 'new' species breeds earlier than Herring Gull, with pairs in southern England as well as the Atlantic coasts of Western Europe and the western Mediterranean. After breeding, they go northwest – arriving in Gwent from July onwards.

There are always a few around Llandegfedd if you know where to look – possibly tucked just behind an innocent looking Caspian Gull?

In fact, this may be your best chance to confirm ANY species of gull in your sights, just before exerting the gentlest of finger pressure to add it to your trophy tick list.

The hunt starts at 6pm on Thursday, August 21 from the Fisherman's car park at the north end of the reservoir (SO 332 006). We will also stalk warblers, waders and terns at this really good time for passage migrants. A trip around the Island to Green Pool or wander down to Sor Bay might be needed - and expect to stay till dusk ...some prey arrive late at the watering hole !

From bugs to birds, and sport to spotting

New GOS Committee members introduce themselves

At this year's AGM, Luke Phillips and Lyndon Waters were elected as Committee members. Here, they tell us a little about themselves.

Luke Phillips

As a nipper, I had a great interest in bugs and birds - but changed my mind on an annual basis. One year, it would be butterflies and the next, birds. But I eventually settled for birds at the age of nine, when I joined the local Young Ornithologists' Club.

I stayed there for a number of years, building a basic knowledge of common British species. Eventually, I wanted to start seeing some of those fantastic birds I kept reading about in my books, so I persuaded some family members to take me to a few good birding spots.

My first real birding day out on my own was at the Newport Wetlands around five years ago - which got me well and truly hooked. Since then, I've learned to drive, which has opened my eyes to the world of twitching. My life list has rocketed and I have seen some of those exotic species from my books, most memorable at present being a Roller, which was at the Gower last year.

I joined the Committee of my own free will (with slight persuasion by others!) and have also taken on the task of organising this year's outdoor programme - which so far I've enjoyed immensely.

Lyndon Waters

I joined GOS just over two years ago, not knowing anyone at the Society - or so I thought. Yet arriving at my first indoor meeting, I saw Andrew Baker and Mark Stevens - both classmates from almost 30 years ago!

My interest in birdwatching began around the early 1970s, but due to one thing and another, I never took it too seriously. Then, after 'retiring' from football and cricket, I found myself at a loose end on weekends and decided to walk my local area around Undy and Magor, taking an old pair of binoculars 'just in case'.

After seeing an out of county bird walk advertised in the South Wales Argus in 2006, I decided to try my luck further afield and went on the Wye Forest walk. I enjoyed the walk and the company, and decided to join GOS.

After attending many outdoor meets, I was asked to stand for the Committee by Dave Brassey and Keith Roylance, which I was subsequently elected to.

I am an inexperienced birder with only a few years' spotting, but even in the short time I have been a member of GOS, I have learned a lot from members who take the indoor and outdoor meetings - and would like to say thank you to them for making me feel welcome.

Newport Wetlands

Tom Dalrymple

February

Birds

Wildfowl, wader and the seed eating passerine numbers are all in decline as we come to the end of the winter. Wildfowl highlights: Gadwall 21, Goldeneye 10, Mallard 97, Pintail 63, Pochard 21, Shelduck 242, Shoveler 117, Teal 344, Tufted Duck 56, Wigeon 892.

Wader highlights: Black-tailed Godwit 88, Curlew 177, Dunlin 6650, Green Sandpiper 2, Greenshank 1, Grey Plover 12, Jack Snipe 1, Lapwing 1921, Oystercatcher 23, Redshank 40, Ringed Plover 12, Spotted Redshank 1.

Peak counts for the arable crop were: Brambling 5, Chaffinch 94, Goldfinch 5, Linnet 3, Reed Bunting 13.

Management

Approximately 500 metres of ditch have been cast and a further 500m of ditch side scrub removed in the Swap land to try to bring back the SSSI interest that has been largely lost in that area.

Long-term volunteers Sheila Dupe, Richard Garman and Reece Rice have been surveying wildlife in the Swap land to try and improve our understanding of how the land contributes to the reserve's bird targets.

I have altered the grazing regime on the wet grassland slightly this year. I've allowed cattle onto two field blocks to try to get them into suitable condition for Lapwings come the breeding season. The stock will be moved onto dry grassland before the birds attempt to nest.

Volunteers Keith Thomas, Keith Jones, Jackie Whant and Chris Hurn all passed their 4x4 assessment on the 28th, which will be a big help in the future.

The way markers for our recommended visitor route have been installed and the last section resurfaced this month. Work continues on the Uskmouth viewing screens and the pedestrian ramp from the visitor centre to the wider reserve.

Events/visitors

Kevin's interview with Iolo Williams on BBC Radio Wales was broadcast on the 10th and S4C used the reserve to film a programme about local art on 12 February.

March Birds

Our spring migrants have started to return: Swallow, Sand Martin, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler and Wheatear were all seen on the reserve in March.

Most of our wildfowl have now left us the peak counts for the month were:

Gadwall 13, Goldeneye 5, Mallard 34, Pintail 42, Pochard 16, Shelduck 113, Shoveler 123, Teal 148, Tufted Duck 79, Wigeon 394.

A few migrants have joined the winter waders, 17 species were seen in March including: Avocet, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Sandpiper, Curlew, Dunlin, Golden Plover, Green Sandpiper, Greenshank, Grey Plover, Lapwing, Little Ringed Plover, Little Stint, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Ringed Plover, Snipe, Spotted Redshank.

There have been up to 12 Avocet on the lagoons this month, which is as many birds as last year; hopefully they will have an equally good breeding season.

Darryl Spittle and Richard Clarke from Gwent Ornithological Society kindly carried out a Cetti's Warbler survey on the 29th. They discovered 71 singing males on the whole site, 55 of them around the reedbeds at Uskmouth.

Other Highlights at Uskmouth this month include 11 Bearded Tit and a Bittern on the 17th and good views of three pairs of Great Crested Grebes.

Management

The month began with last minute preparations for the grand opening. We just about made it - with a big effort from everyone.

Usually at this time of year we would lower the water levels on the wet grasslands. However, last year we were caught out by an unusually dry April, leaving some of the field blocks bone dry. So this year, we'll hold on to as much water as we can.

The electric fence is now operating around the first saline lagoon. It will be interesting to see how egg productivity compares with the lagoons that don't have a protective fence. Hardly any foxes have been seen at all on the fortnightly transects; this is in stark contrast to previous years, when vixens have been trying to feed two families of foxes on the lagoons alone.

The volunteer team has put up nest boxes close to where a new seed crop will be planted next month.

Events/visitors

Thursday, March 6 was the day of the grand opening. BBC TV's Springwatch presenter Kate Humble and Alan Morris, Mayor of Newport, cut the ribbon. The event, organised by the Cardiff team, seemed to run like clockwork and was enjoyed by all.

The following day was the education day, where environmental education workers and schoolteachers from far and wide came to see Newport Wetlands' facilities. Everyone took part in the activities organised by the Newport Wetlands education team.

Sunday, March 9 was Family Day - and the first real test for the centre. Jonathan Cooke and his team stood up well, however, welcoming 1,200 people to the centre with no real problems. Goldcliff Ringing Group put on a well-received ringing demonstration for the visitors.

On the 25th Iolo Williams gave a guided walk in Welsh around the reedbeds for Coleg Gwent.

April Birds

The breeding season is well under way here. A total 35 pairs of Lapwing have so far made

19 nests – and, unfortunately, three of them appear to have already been predated. A Raven was seen stealing Lapwing eggs at the lagoons on the 16th. No Lapwing chicks have yet been seen.

There are 17 Avocets using the lagoons and so far they have made five nests and hatched four chicks. Unfortunately, one of the chicks has since disappeared. There were 12 pairs of Redshank on the wet grasslands on the 30th; no nests have yet been identified.

After the survey on the 17th revealed we still had 18 Snipe skulking around in the wetter, more vegetated parts of the reserve, I was beginning to become optimistic about the possibility of them breeding. But by the 30th there were only two Snipe left, so fingers crossed!

There are two - possibly three - pairs of Oystercatcher, but so far only one nest. Five pairs of Bearded Tit were recorded on the 17th in the reedbeds.

There are lots of spring migrants around: Cuckoo, Swift and Hirundines – some of the flocks

of Sand Martin have numbered over 150. Ten species of warbler have been heard or seen on the reserve this month, including Garden and Grasshopper Warbler.

Passage Whimbrel in numbers of around 25 contributes to the 20 species of wader seen in April. The peak count for Black-tailed Godwit was 143 on the 21st; however, they had all but gone by the end of the month.

An interesting month for raptors, although we didn't see the White-tailed Eagle that showed itself in Slimbridge! A Marsh Harrier was seen on the 27th and 29th, Osprey on the 16th and Hobby on the 15th.

Other unusual sightings this month included a Little Stint on the 1st, Little Gull on the 3rd, a male Garganey from the 7th to the 12th and five Common Scoters seen in the estuary from Goldcliff point on the 27th.

Management

Wet grassland - in contrast to the very dry April last year, we have managed to maintain our target flooding levels for this time of year. The damper fields are crawling with invertebrates, lots of craneflies and spiders - all we need now are some wader chicks to eat them!

The breeding bird survey has been contracted out this year; the successful contractor was RPS group, who carried out a similar survey for us in 2004. The survey will include all wildfowl and waders, as well as other key species including Bearded Tit, Cetti's Warbler and Skylark.

Work on the fox and Crow surveys continues. After three months of virtually no fox sightings, three foxes were seen on the 24th - two on the reedbeds and one on the saline lagoons. There are 18 pairs of Crow on the reserve and they have all nested. Mike has installed a gate on Saltmarsh Lane, which save lots of time and diesel.

Saline lagoons - I've applied to the Environment Agency to put a fence at the toe of their sea wall. This will enable us to graze the Saltmarsh and Saline Lagoon 1 separately. Mike has welded some heavy-duty lifting eyes on the lagoon tidal flaps to make the business of letting the

tide in easier and safer.

Reedbed - Kevin has set up the elver ladders again this year in the hope of luring more elvers into the reedbed and, I suppose, ultimately into the beak of a Bittern.

Mike has been busy repairing benches and has stepped up our site inspections in anticipation of increased wear and tear now the visitor centre is fully operational.

Arable - Kevin arranged for a further 2 hectares to be sown with linseed, triticale, gold of pleasure, sunflowers, quinoa and kale. Volunteers Richard Garman, Reece Rice, Sheila Dupe and Keith Jones have put up nest boxes in the surrounding area in anticipation (and a degree of optimism) of Tree Sparrows. A pair of Lapwing had nested on the arable by the end of the month.

Events

Sue Howard and Kevin showed a group of BERR officials involved with the Severn feasibility study around the reserve on the 3rd.

Volunteer Chris Hurn took a group from Walk Newport around the reedbeds on the 7th.

On April 10, volunteers Sheila Dupe, Richard Garman and Reece Rice showed a Let's Walk group from Newport Local Health around the reserve.

CCW council chairman John Lloyd Jones signed the declaration and made Newport Wetlands a National Nature Reserve on the 16th. The event was witnessed by reserve stakeholders, many of whom had been involved since the reserve's inception.

Guests to the opening event were treated to a particularly stirring speech from the Rt Hon Mayor of Newport, Cllr Alan Morris, and then introduced to groups of children from the Malpas Church in Wales School, who were busily engaged in environmental activities with RSPB field

teachers.

On the 23rd the reserve passed its environmental management systems audit.

Volunteer Keith Jones led a wader walk for 30 people on the 27th.

Gwent UKBS Report

Chris Hatch

Sightings, February 2008

Highlights

A Caspian Gull was present at Llandegfedd Reservoir (from 15th).

Sightings

The three Short-eared Owls were present throughout the month at Waunafon bog. A male Hen Harrier was also reported from this site on a number of occasions during the month, with a Red Kite and a Merlin also present (6th). Single Red Kites were also reported from the Brynmawr area (10th and 16th).

A Mediterranean Gull was observed at Ynysyfro reservoir (5th). A Lesser-spotted Woodpecker was heard at Gobion (10th). A Barn Owl was reported from near Tredegar (11th). Eight dark-bellied Brent Geese were seen offshore at Peterstone Gout (13th), while a single Spotted Redshank was reported from the same site (16th and 22nd), as was a Jack Snipe (17th). A Jack Snipe was also recorded at Goldcliff (17th). Two Bewick's Swans were seen at Llandegfedd reservoir (17th), as was a single Sand Martin (28th).

March 2008

Highlights

A possible White Stork was reported from Newport Wetlands (18th). Over 50 Cetti's Warblers were recorded at the same site (29th) and Hen Harriers were reported from Waunafon Bog (5th) and Abergavenny (20th). A Hawfinch was seen at Wyesham (19th).

Newport Wetlands reserve

Up to three Avocets were recorded at various dates throughout the month. A Spotted Redshank was present (from 2nd). Single Short-eared Owls were reported (16th and 20th). 11 Bearded tits were reported (17th).

Other sites

Migrants began to arrive in reasonable numbers, with the first Wheatear reported from Cwmbran (14th) and the first Tree Pipits reported from Brynithel (26th). Two Swallows were seen at Abergavenny (31st) and sightings of Sand Martins, Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs were reported from a number of locations. Red Kites were reported from Abergavenny, (two on 1st, one on 20th), Ebbw Vale (3rd and 16th), Garnlydan (two on 5th), Llanellen (two on 7th), Cwmbran (22nd), Newport (22nd and 30th), and Waunafon (23rd). Barn Owls were reported from Crumlin (3rd), Clytha (two on 21st), Blaenafon (21st) and Tredegar (30th). Short-eared Owls were recorded at Waunafon Bog (two on 3rd, a single bird on 5th), and a Long-eared Owl was reported from Undy (20th). Single Merlins were reported from Rhiwderin (2nd) and Cwmbran (28th). A pair of Goshawks was reported from the Wye Valley (11th), with a single bird near Pontypool (20th). Single Jack Snipe were seen at Garn Lakes (16th) and Peterstone (24th). Other sightings of note included up to three Little Egrets at Gobion (6th), a flock of over 600 Brambling at Wentwood (6th), a Spotted Redshank at Peterstone (21st) and a Yellow-legged Gull at Bulmore (29th).

April 2008 Highlights

A Black Kite and a Honey Buzzard were reported from Treowen near Newbridge (23rd). Two Little Terns were at Newport Wetlands Reserve (23rd).

Newport Wetlands Reserve

A Brent Goose and six Bearded Tits were recorded (6th), waders included 14 Avocet, 92 Black-tailed Godwits and a Spotted Redshank (all 3rd), while a Little Gull was also reported on this date. A male Garganey was present (7th to 16th), an Osprey was reported (16th) and female Marsh Harriers were sighted (19th and 27th). Up to three Grasshopper Warblers were present (16th) and other sightings of note included 58 Wheatear, five White Wagtails, over 60 Cetti's Warblers and nine Lesser Whitethroats (all on 26th).

Other sites

A Red Kite was reported from near Cefn Mably (5th). A pair of Ring Ouzels was present for a short time at Silent Valley (6th) and a Merlin was reported from Sluice Farm (6th). Over 30 Common Sandpipers were present at Llandegfedd Reservoir (17th), a Short-eared Owl was reported from Peterstone (21st) and a Hobby was seen at Llanover (25th). Three Grasshopper

Warblers were reeling at Waunafon Bog (26th) and a Lesser-spotted Woodpecker was reported from Trellech (27th).

Warts hit Chaffinches!

Trevor Russell

I have received several phone calls from people concerned for the welfare of the Chaffinches in their garden when they see them with white growths on one or both legs. It seems to be confined to Chaffinches, but it's a distressing sight to see them hopping about it in what appears to be pain.

The BTO explained that Chaffinches and - to a lesser extent - Bramblings, are susceptible to a warty growth called *Fringilla papillomavirus*. A ringing survey of 25,000 chaffinches in Holland back in the 1970s found that 1.3% was affected, across both sexes. Because cases usually occur in clusters, higher proportions of local populations may be affected in outbreaks.

The disease causes growths on the bare parts of the leg or foot, and usually only one limb is affected. Growths vary from small nodules to large irregular-shaped and deeply fissured masses which almost engulf the entire lower leg and foot. Affected birds usually seem in good health otherwise, but may show signs of lameness. The warts grow slowly and may progress over several months.

It's suggested that the growths may be no more than an inconvenience to the birds, although it is possible that lameness is an indication of pain.

No treatment is offered and the outcome of the disease is unknown, though it is possible that birds may die through being incapacitated or by developing secondary infections. In some cases the lesions may regress spontaneously.

There is no known risk to humans and it's unlikely that it has a significant impact on Chaffinch population densities.

The fact that cases occur in clusters suggests that the presence of affected birds present a risk to others that are susceptible. The mode of transmission is unknown, but it seems likely that the virus may be spread via surfaces that the birds stand or perch upon. If so, hygiene measures and steps to minimise overcrowding at perching and feeding sites may reduce the risk.

The messages are:

- You can't treat them, so don't try
- Keep your feeding sites clean
- Prevent your dog or cat predated these slower birds
- Tell your neighbours to do the same!

Garn Lakes Country Fayre

GOS will be represented at the Country Fayre at Garn-yr-Erw, Blaenavon, on Sunday, June 29. Any offers of assistance greatly received – please contact Keith Roylance on 01633 868410; treasurer@gwentbirds.org.uk

Want to know more about birds?

Forthcoming courses:

- Birds of Gardens, Woods and Fields
- Monmouth, weekly starting September 16, 2008
- Newport, fortnightly starting January 12, 2009

- Bird Migration – an Introduction
- Newport, each month, Jan to May, starting January 11, 2009

Visit the GOS website home page, request latest copy of 'Choices' from Cardiff University Centre for Life Long Learning on 029 20 87 0000, or phone Ian Smith on 01600 713561.

Chairman's Chatter

Can you help?

As you know, there are very many wildlife and nature events around Gwent every year and GOS is often asked to support them by means of providing a stall to promote the society and/or manned telescopes for use by the public to encourage birdwatching.

We would like more members to offer some of their time to assist at these events. Enthusiasm for the club is more important than a deep knowledge of birds, so if you think you can help please let a committee member know. Thanks!

In the meantime, volunteers are needed to assist on the Society's stand at Newport Wetlands Open Day on Sunday, July 13. Also help is required from people with scopes at the Magor Marsh Open Day on Saturday July 19, where the Society will be at the hide overlooking the Pond.