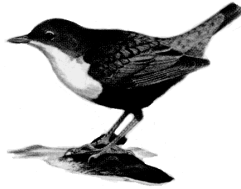


# THE DIPPER



## THE GWENT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Registered charity number 1088830

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GOS WEB SITE: [www.gwentbirds.org.uk](http://www.gwentbirds.org.uk)

Newsletter No. 116

September 2010

### **COMMITTEE COMMENTARY**

**Trevor Russell**

The committee was pleased to hear at its September meeting that the illegal concrete runway at **Whitson Aerodrome** had been dug up and rendered unusable for flights. This should be of significant benefit to local birdlife.

Reports about **Llandegfedd Reservoir** criticised it on two counts: 1) that the hides had deteriorated structurally and that undergrowth had grown to such an extent that access to and birdwatching from the hides was now virtually impossible; and 2) that rumours alleged that diminished funding was being blamed for the lack of maintenance and that by discouraging birds to the site, the reservoir's management was deliberately designing to lose its SSSI status. This would facilitate easier planning permission to build other, year-round, money making attractions to gain greater income and compensate for the loss of funding.

However, I am happy to report that following the committee meeting, I discussed these issues with Richard Poole, the Manager at Llandegfedd.

While accepting that summer staffing shortages due to sickness had prevented necessary ground maintenance, he said he would soon be up to full complement and that normal groundworks would commence shortly to enable the hides to be used as we would all expect. Repair of the hides was built into the winter maintenance schedule.

Purchase of bird seed had become a victim of financial cuts imposed by Welsh Water and so the empty feeders had been removed before they were stolen. The reservoir was looking for funding to buy seed to continue to attract birds.

Richard Poole said that the SSSI story was a myth. The reservoir was contractually obliged to maintain the SSSI status and, indeed, hoped to shortly improve biodiversity with the introduction of water voles.

He added that there were no plans to change the present sailing, fishing or GOS access timetables or programmes.

The committee heard that **Newport Wetlands Reserve** had reported in its June newsletter a depressing lack of breeding success so far: many Avocets had bred twice up to June but only

two chicks were nearing fledging due to Crow predation; only five broods of Lapwing had survived thus far, with only two chicks fledged; and four broods of Common Redshank had survived, but only three birds had fledged by then.

Predation by corvids is the main cause, and we will be contacting Tom Dalrymple to ask whether there are any plans to reduce this carnage. NWR is the only breeding site for Avocets in Wales.

Cetti's Warbler numbers were also very low, at 40 territorial males, and Water Rail down to eight pairs - both considered to be due to the very cold winter.

Tom will be giving a talk to GOS on Saturday, October 2, and I'm sure we will be able to quiz him further then.

On a lighter note, and in the context of planning how to celebrate being 50 years old, the committee actually found itself debating how old the Society was!

The confusion centred on the fact that Bert Hamar and Betty Morgan gathered together a small group of birdwatching enthusiasts in 1961, but didn't create the Pontypool Bird Club until 1963. This later morphed into the Monmouthshire Ornithological Society in 1964, and the Gwent Ornithological Society in 1974.

Previously, discussion had assumed we would be 50 years old in 2011, the 'Bert and Betty' anniversary. However, we realised there is a plaque which commemorates the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, dated 1988. So, clearly, the founding of the PCB was in 1963.

To avoid further confusion, it was decided to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013 – which also buys us extra breathing space to get our thoughts together!

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#### **REMINDER – Subscription Rates for 2011**

**Keith Roylance, Treasurer**

The membership rates for 2011 are:

**Adult £15.00**  
**Family £18.00**  
**Concession £12.00**

Would all those members who pay by standing order PLEASE advise their bank of the new rate to be paid from January 1, 2011. With a standing order, it is the account holder who has to notify their bank. We are unable to do it for you.

A standing order form is enclosed with this copy of *The Dipper*. Just complete the 'red' areas and send or hand it in to your bank. If you bank online or use telephone banking, you can alter your standing order via these methods. Many thanks in anticipation of a smooth renewal.

## ***The Last Ferry***

**Keith Roylance**

One of the more familiar sea-watching trips over the years has been the 'mini-cruise' on the P&O Pride of Bilbao ferry from Portsmouth to Bilbao. This birding experience came to an end on September 27, when P&O withdrew the ferry from service.

While many colleagues had experienced the trip over the years, I had not. So, before the opportunity was lost, I decided I had to 'do the Pelagic'. Along with other GOS members - Arthur Pitcher and Craig Constance, together with Steve Butler and John Davies and their respective partners - we all met up at Portsmouth Harbour on Friday September 10 to experience one of the last ferry crossings by the Pride of Bilbao.

A four-day round trip - leaving Portsmouth at 9pm on day one, dawn on day two brings you to the French coast as you turn south, heading to the Bay of Biscay, the major part of which you cross during the day. By dawn on day three, the boat is docking in Bilbao Port, and we had four hours on Spanish dry land before re-boarding the ferry for a noon departure back to Portsmouth. During the remainder of day three, you sail into the part of the Bay of Biscay you failed to see on day two, then by dawn on day four you are in the approaches to the English Channel, docking back at Portsmouth at 5pm.

So what do you actually see on this trip? I am told every journey is different, as one would expect when viewing birds and cetaceans (whales and dolphins) over a wide expanse of ocean.

After a surprisingly good night's sleep, all the sea watchers seemed to have risen early for a full day on the top open deck. The only area higher up was 'Monkey Island', especially reserved for those who had booked a 'Company of Whales' trip. Whether the sightings were any better there, I don't know, but we saw all that was called from our viewpoint. There is an official look out on the bridge who calls sightings of the cetaceans over the public address system.

Twenty species of birds were noted during the day, some reasonably close but the majority at scoping distance. Oh to have eyes as good as the younger members of the party! A Wheatear landed on the ship and stayed for a while before continuing its migration, while Swallow, White Wagtail and Lapland Bunting circled for a minute or two but did not land. Sea birds were dominated by Gannets, although good numbers of Great Skua, Storm Petrel and Sooty Shearwater were also seen. Bottle-nosed and Common Dolphin performed at the bow of the ship, while a Fin Whale was seen at a distance off the starboard side.

On land for four hours gives an opportunity to bird watch scrub land just outside the port area. The key bird here was a Wryneck in a typical pose – horizontal on a bare branch. Griffon Vultures were overhead and Black Redstart, Stonechat, and Spotted Flycatcher were noted, among others.

The return sea journey was probably quieter than the outward. There were distant sightings of Sperm Whale and Striped Dolphin, while Cuvier's Beaked Whales passed the ship close by but underwater - their shadowy shapes could be made out as they passed. Sabine Gulls were seen, but at a distance similar to that on the outward journey.

The approaches to the English Channel and subsequent sailing into Portsmouth gave very little in the way of bird life. It was soon time to disembark and reflect on the many birds seen - and those that might have been - and regret that there will no longer be the opportunity to sea watch from the Pride of Bilbao.

Species noted:

Fulmar, Sooty Shearwater, Little Shearwater, Balearic Shearwater, Storm Petrel, Gannet, Little Egret, Buzzard, Kestrel, Peregrine, Griffon Vulture, Oystercatcher, Turnstone, Grey Phalarope, Arctic Skua, Great Skua, Mediterranean Gull, Sabine's Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Black headed Gull, Sandwich Tern, Common Tern, Arctic

Tern, Black Tern, Turtle Dove, Wryneck, Swallow, House Martin, Tree Pipit, White Wagtail, Wren, Robin, Black Redstart, Stonechat, Wheatear, Blackbird, Cetti's Warbler, Fan-tailed Warbler, Sardinian Warbler, Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Willow Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Pied Flycatcher, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit,

Red-backed Shrike, Magpie, Starling, House Sparrow, Serin, Goldfinch and Lapland Bunting.

Common Dolphin, Striped Dolphin, Bottle-nosed Dolphin, Cuvier's beaked Whale, Fin Whale and Sperm Whale.

Wall Brown butterfly and Common Blue butterfly.

## ***Chairman's Chatter***

**Dave Brassey**

Several things have happened over the past three months which have highlighted one area of our society where we do have a definite weakness - quick communication with and between members.

Some of the things that happened were:

- We were asked at short notice if we wanted to have a stall at a local show.
- One of our members wanted to know if anyone could give her a lift back from the Birdfair
- A local conservation group wanted to draw attention to some local ecological damage.
- One member want to express discontent with the situation at Llandegfedd, and another wanted to have a debate on it.
- Someone was looking for an unwanted pair of binoculars to encourage a friend's interest in birdwatching.

All these, plus more, could have been dealt with using the forum on our website. But because the current forum appears difficult to access and not very user friendly, it is not being used to anything like its full extent.

We are trying to address this and, at the same time, freshen up the website so that it can also be used to attract potential new members. Work is progressing well and hopefully we will be able to introduce it shortly.

While I am aware, however, that there are many members who do not use or have access to the internet, maybe our new site will assist the new Government Digital Inclusion Task Force in achieving its goal of 10 million additional internet users!

On a different subject, your committee has decided that one of the ways to commemorate our 50th anniversary in 2013 is to produce a guide of the best 50 birdwatching sites in Gwent, probably (rather imaginatively!) entitled *Where to watch birds in Gwent*.

This will be a book by the members for the members, so to see how you can contribute, please read Andrew Baker's article in this *Dipper*.

**BTO Atlas enters the final survey year.** Now that the breeding season survey period has ended, I thought it would be a good idea to give an update on progress. Everyone who has contributed a sighting will have received the August 2010 newsletter from BTO HQ showing what excellent coverage has been achieved nationally.

I will have some spare copies at indoor meetings for anyone else who is interested. In Gwent, coverage has been even better than the more general comments given in the newsletter.

The response to my appeal at this time last year for more TTVs to be undertaken in several parts of the county has been fantastic, and we have now achieved the minimum level of winter TTV coverage in every one of our 10km squares.

Please complete your data submissions for the recent breeding season as soon as possible, so I will be a position during the winter to plan priorities for the next (and final) breeding season period.

Whether you have already contributed sightings or not, the priorities for this coming winter, which will be the last winter survey period and starts November 1, will be as follows:

**TTV coverage.** If you have already requested TTV squares and have not yet completed the survey, please do so - especially in those 10 km squares where the minimum coverage (of eight TTVs) has only just been achieved. These are **SO10, SO30 and SO40**.

For all of the other 10km squares, we have already exceeded this minimum coverage, and fieldwork would be better spent in trying to increase the number of species recorded.

**Increasing the number of species.** For all squares, including the three listed above, the push in this final winter should be to try and find those more 'elusive' species.

The 'regional results' pages on the website will help you to find the most useful 10km squares to target. They will also give you the percentage of species already recorded, from what might be expected based on the previous Atlas results.

The lower the percentage, the more new species that are likely to be found. So even if you haven't already contributed to the Atlas, please visit any part of the 10km square looking for species that have not already been reported (see below), and submit them as casual records.

To check which species have already been recorded in a square, on the website click on 'any square summary', enter the details of the 10km square (either the one you have been recording in or one you might want to visit), omitting the tetrad letter, eg, SO31 or ST49. Click 'winter' and 'go'. A list of species will then come up which you can print.

Whenever you are then in the square during the winter survey period, you can look out for species that are not on the list and record them as casual records.

Anyone who has not already submitted records can also look at these lists and submit a record for anytime during the past three winters for a species not yet recorded in the square.

Finally, please bear in mind that some parts of the country are not as well covered as Gwent (eg, parts of West Wales and Scotland, and much of Ireland - see the August 2010

newsletter maps). So if you are visiting any of these, or want to plan a short break there, you will also be able to print a species list for these squares and start looking for the missing species - or do a TTV - while you are there.

The **Ring Ousel** is in serious decline in Wales. It is now becoming extremely difficult to find in the county, and its decline is probably related to circumstances on the wintering grounds in North West Africa.

For further information on how the BTO is researching the issues facing our summer migrants, please go to the *Out of Africa* appeal at [www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)

For those who can remember, January and February 2009 had prolonged freezing temperatures - conditions that affect our resident birds and winter visitors badly. But two of Britain's smallest birds fared better in Wales than in the rest of the UK.

The latest BBS results show that both **Long-tailed Tit** and **Coal Tit** have bucked the downward trend to increase in numbers in Wales between 2008 and 2009 - up 26% and 36% respectively.

The next BBS Report will tell us what effect the prolonged snow cover, earlier this year, will have had on these birds. Another species doing better in Wales is the **House Sparrow**, but **Starling**, **Rook** and **Green Woodpecker** are all faring worse.

During the past 25 years, the numbers of **Cuckoo** in the UK have dropped by over two-thirds. and recent research has looked at whether earlier nesting - due to climate-induced changes - by the host species will have made the Cuckoo's arrival to be too late.

**Dunnock**, **Pied Wagtail** and **Reed Warbler** have all moved their breeding forward by about five to six days. Both Dunnock and Pied Wagtail are early nesters, so their nests will be less available for the Cuckoo, but the late nesting Reed Warbler is likely to become more available.

The other main Cuckoo host is the **Meadow Pipit**, which has also declined. But the correlation suggests that this would only account for a small part of the Cuckoo decline. Researchers will now look at the Cuckoo's food supply - large caterpillars - and at conditions on its migration route and in the winter quarters as more likely causes for the decline.

**Cats** are estimated to kill about 55 million birds in Britain every year, and this predation could be contributing to the long term declines of garden birds like House Sparrow.

The BTO has produced a **free guide** for cat owners, giving practical tips on how to reduce their impact. Some examples are to spread out bird feeders so that there is more chance for feeding flocks to detect any nearby cat, or using chicken wire of a suitable size, or thorny bushes to help protect nest sites.

More information is available from 01842 750050, [gbw@bto.org](mailto:gbw@bto.org) or from GBW Cat Guide, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU.

## ***The Dipper***

***December 2010***

The deadline for submissions for the next Dipper is November 30, 2010. Please e-mail Jackie Huybs at [jackiehuybs@btinternet.com](mailto:jackiehuybs@btinternet.com) or [newsletter@gwentbirds.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@gwentbirds.org.uk). Thanks!

**SIGHTINGS, JUNE 2010****HIGHLIGHTS**

A male Marmora's Warbler was discovered at Carn y Gorfydd on the Blorenge near Blaenavon on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and remained until June 15. The Iberian Chiff Chaff was still present in Wentwood until at least June 13.

**Newport Wetlands Reserve**

A Little Stint was recorded (14<sup>th</sup>).

**Other sites**

Single male Nightjars were reported from Wattsville (5<sup>th</sup>), and Wentwood (9<sup>th</sup>), while three male birds were recorded at a previously unknown site near Blaenavon (4<sup>th</sup>), with one nest found.

Four Little-ringed Plovers were seen at Gobion (7<sup>th</sup>). Red Kites were again reported from several sites around the county, with single birds at Garn-yr-erw (9<sup>th</sup>), Llanfoist (14<sup>th</sup>), Usk (27<sup>th</sup>), Llantarnam (28<sup>th</sup>) and Pontrhydyryn (28<sup>th</sup>), while two birds were seen at Brynmawr (25<sup>th</sup>). Eleven male Grasshopper Warblers held territory in the Blaenavon to Brynmawr area throughout the month.

**JULY****HIGHLIGHTS**

An Osprey was seen near Cwmtillery (31<sup>st</sup>). A Great Skua was reported from the Newport Wetlands Reserve (31<sup>st</sup>). A Quail was flushed near Caldicot (1<sup>st</sup>).

**Newport Wetlands Reserve**

23 Avocets were reported (5<sup>th</sup>). Single Hobbies were recorded (6<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>), while a female Marsh Harrier was seen (26<sup>th</sup>). Single Mediterranean Gulls were reported (5<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>) and two juvenile Bearded Tits were seen (12<sup>th</sup>). Sea-watching from Goldcliff Point produced 34 Manx Shearwaters (15<sup>th</sup>).

**Other sites**

A female Hen Harrier was seen near Garn-yr-erw (1<sup>st</sup>). Single Hobbies were reported from the Blorenge (7<sup>th</sup>) and Crick (18<sup>th</sup>), a Goshawk was seen near Bassaleg (24<sup>th</sup>) and Red Kites were reported from Llanfoist (1<sup>st</sup>), Abergavenny (1<sup>st</sup>), Brynmawr (2<sup>nd</sup>) and Gobion (21<sup>st</sup>). A juvenile Kittiwake was seen at Llandegfedd Reservoir (24<sup>th</sup>) and single Mediterranean Gulls were reported from Peterstone Gout (2<sup>nd</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>), the Moorings, Newport (3<sup>rd</sup>) and Llandegfedd Reservoir (10<sup>th</sup>).

On a more disturbing note, the bodies of an adult and juvenile Peregrine were discovered at a breeding site in the north of the county. The birds had apparently been poisoned via the carcasses of two pigeons found nearby. Investigations by the police are taking place.

## **AUGUST**

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

An Aquatic Warbler was trapped and ringed at the Newport Wetlands Reserve (30<sup>th</sup>). A Cattle Egret was reported from Usk (30<sup>th</sup>). Two juvenile Garganey were present at Newport Wetlands (28<sup>th</sup>).

#### **Newport Wetlands Reserve**

Single Hobbies were reported from the reserve (4<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>). A maximum of 64 Little Egrets were recorded (13<sup>th</sup>). Wader highlights included 380 Black-tailed Godwits, three Spotted Redshank and three Curlew Sandpipers (all 29<sup>th</sup>). A Mediterranean Gull was seen (27<sup>th</sup>).

#### **Other Sites**

A Merlin was seen at Newport (3<sup>rd</sup>) and a pair of Goshawks were also seen over the town (11<sup>th</sup>). At Llandegfedd Reservoir, a Grasshopper Warbler was recorded (10<sup>th</sup>), while a juvenile Black Tern was present (from 22<sup>nd</sup>), together with a Common Scoter (14<sup>th</sup>). A female Marsh Harrier was reported from Peterstone (15<sup>th</sup>). Other sightings included two Tree Sparrows at Porton (22<sup>nd</sup>), a Hobby at Ynysfro Reservoir (27<sup>th</sup>) and a Mediterranean Gull at Caerleon (28<sup>th</sup>). Red Kites were reported from Abergavenny (12<sup>th</sup>), Waunafon (24<sup>th</sup>) and Llanover (15<sup>th</sup>).

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#### ***Some fungi facts***

**Sheila Spence, Gwent Fungus Group**

Surprisingly enough, fungi are very important as far as birds are concerned. Woodpeckers, for instance, find their homes in holes in old hollowed out trees – it was fungi living in the tree that caused the initial rot which made the tree accessible to the birds in the first place.

Other birds eat insects which themselves are living off the fungi or, indeed, the rotten wood that the fungi have broken down within the tree.

Fungi can be found all around us - whether growing in the soil at our feet or on trees and shrubs, they are a vitally important part of our ecosystem. Fungi break down leaf litter and dead wood, ensuring the detritus from the rest of nature is broken down into a fertile layer from which our trees and woodlands thrive.

Most arboreal fungi help the tree to take up nutrients from the soil, such as phosphorus, nitrogen and zinc. In return, they obtain carbon in a mycorrhizal or symbiotic relationship, from which they both gain.

Some arboreal fungi you might look out for while out bird watching in woodland areas are the bright yellow Chicken of the Woods - *Laetiporus sulphureus* - seen growing in tiers, often high up on the trunk of Oak or Sweet Chestnut trees, and also occasionally on fruit trees in old orchards.

Other bracket fungi often seen in early autumn grow nearer the base of the tree, such as the Cauliflower Fungus, *Sparassis crispa*, which looks not unlike a rather open cauliflower; or Hen of the Woods, *Grifola frondosa*, which is more frondose and made up of darker brown, conjoined fingers.



Much like birding, you can go out on a fungus foray at any time of the year, finding different species depending on the season.

There are fungi which grow only at certain times, such as Chanterelles, *Catherellus cibarius*, in the summer or the Scarlet Elfcup, *Sarcoscypha austriaca*, found growing on fallen twigs and branches during the winter months and brightening up the often dark winter landscape.



*Catherellus cibarius*

One particularly well known fungus is the Oyster Mushroom, *Pleurotus ostreatus*, the farmed varieties now available in many supermarkets throughout the year. This shell-shaped fungus, which has gills which run up the whole of the stem and into the cap, can be found growing from late spring right through the frosts of winter, most commonly on fallen Beech trunks.

If you want to learn more about fungi we welcome both beginner and the more knowledgeable to join Gwent Fungus Group. Contact Sheila Spence on 01531 631736 or by email to [gwentfungusgroup@btinternet.com](mailto:gwentfungusgroup@btinternet.com)

Or why not visit our website [www.gwentfungusgroup.org.uk](http://www.gwentfungusgroup.org.uk) to find out even more about who we are and what we do.

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## ***Newport Wetlands***

**Tom Dalrymple**

### ***JUNE***

#### **Birds**

Crow predation continues to be a problem on the grasslands and the saline lagoons. Many of the Avocet that had nests predated already have re-laid in June. But, again, their efforts have come to nothing, as Crows have taken their eggs.

Only two Avocet chicks survived and they are now close to fledging. Interestingly, the Avocet nests tend to be predated just before or just after the chicks hatch.

The other wader species have fared little better - a maximum of five Lapwing broods have survived and two chicks have fledged. Only four broods of Redshank are alive now, and only three chicks have been seen to fledge.

In the reedbed, the Water Rail and Cetti's warbler numbers are very low - eight pairs and 40 territorial males respectively. The drop in numbers is perhaps understandable, given the very cold winter. Perversely, Bearded Tit numbers have gone up from four pairs in 2008 to six pairs this year.

A first sight for the reserve! Although not strictly speaking a bird, the Small Blue butterfly seen on June 29 was notable nonetheless. The butterfly's food plant, Kidney Vetch, is not known to grow on the reserve, so the butterfly is unlikely to colonise.

## Management

The very dry weather has lowered reed levels and dried out field ditches. In these conditions, the permanent pools and their gradually increasing shallow edges become vitally important for wader chicks in the grasslands.

Fence repairs have occupied most of Bryn and Richie's time this month, while volunteers Sheila Dupe and Phil Price carried out the monthly Common Bird Census. Sheila also carried out a weekly butterfly transect.

## Events and visits

On June 5, Kevin and Sheila used moths captured the evening before to show 12 visitors the wonderful diversity of Newport's Lepidoptera. The event was unappetisingly entitled "Moths for Breakfast".

A 'Bat and Moth Watch' event was held on the June 9. Kevin and Newport Council's Steve Davidson used bat detectors and a moth trap to show 40 visitors the nocturnal wildlife.

Roger James, Vice President of Gwent Wildlife Trust, gave a guided walk looking at plants and invertebrates for RSPB Cymru Cardiff Members Group on June 13. Roger and Julia James led another walk on June 19, this time aided by volunteers Angela and Gabi Horup. This walk was called 'Wetlands in Bloom' and was enjoyed by 58 people.

Five staff, including Goldcliff Ringer and Reserve Volunteer Richard Clarke from the Welsh Assembly Government Value Wales office, volunteered on the reserve on the 23rd. They made 12 Bearded Tit wigwams and repaired and installed four bat boxes. The wigwams will be placed in the reedbed to encourage nesting Bearded Tit next season.

Welsh language wildlife society Cymdeithas Edward Llwyd gave a guided walk in Welsh for fluent speakers and beginners on June 26.

On June 27, the Black Environmental Network organised a visit for 16 people from Port Talbot's Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. CCW's Senior Recreation and Partnerships Officer Miki Miyata-Lee accompanied the group.

Kevin gave a guided walk of the reedbeds, including the Orchids and other plants, to 38 people from Newport Walking to Health on the June 28.

## JULY

### Birds

Final wader breeding figures are as follows:

Lapwing 25 pairs – 10 fledged, Redshank 40 pairs – seven-plus fledged, Avocet 23 pairs – two fledged, Oystercatcher five pairs – two fledged, Ringed Plover three pairs – two fledged, Little Ringed Plover one pair - none fledged. Black-tailed Godwit have arrived in numbers a bit earlier this year, peak count for the month 170.

Other notable sightings for the month include: Spotted Flycatcher (18<sup>th</sup>) and a Great Skua seen on July 26.

Three new moths for the vice-county of Monmouthshire were recorded on the reserve this month: Orthotelia sparganella, a micro moth that feeds on Bur-reed, and Reddish-light Arches and Brown-tail, both macro moths.

## Management

The Abergavenny team came down and did some hay cutting and scrub clearance for us. The area they were cutting was vegetation growing on pulverised fuel ash. This very poor soil can grow a diverse array of flowering plants, some suitable for the rare Shril Carder Bee that lives on the reserve. Unfortunately, without management even the poor PFA soil will scrub over in time.

By the end of July, local contractor Jamie Williams finished cutting and bailing all the hard rush on the grasslands. Biffaward, as part of the RSPB Coastal Grazing Marsh Project, donated the money for this contract.

Bryn took advantage of the low water levels and planed the grassland sluice boards. This should ensure a more watertight seal when the winter rains finally arrive. Richie has been cutting back unwanted vegetation, particularly around the viewing screens, so that our smallest visitors can also see the birds.

Bryn, Ritchie and Lucie Roberts of the Abergavenny team have been removing willow saplings from the grassland islands. The saplings act as Crow perches and make it easier for the Crows to spot wader nests and chicks.

The volunteer team replaced four tired reed screens and carried out lots of footpath maintenance.

## Events and visits

I gave a guided tour for 20 students from Lady Hawkins School Herefordshire on July 12. They were accompanied by biology teacher Tony Davies who, among other things, had helped build the viewing screens at Uskmouth in 2007.

Angela Horrup and Kevin helped me with our stall at the Nash Fete on the 17<sup>th</sup> this year.

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> was the Newport Wetlands 10<sup>th</sup> Open day. Despite the bad weather, approximately 800 people attended. Gwent Ornithological Society, Swan Rescue, Hedgehog Helpline, Gwent Amphibian Rescue Group, Goldcliff Ringers and the RNLi all manned stalls, as well as the three partnership organisations. A free bus ferried people in from town and we even had two Super Dragons from the Newport Festival.

Hydrological expert Gordon Spoor visited on the 19<sup>th</sup> to give me some advice on how we might store and transport more of our winter rainwater.

## AUGUST

### Birds

Black-tailed Godwit reached nationally important numbers this month, as the flock grew to 380. The Goldcliff Ringing Group managed to catch and ring an Aquatic Warbler for the second August in a row.

Other notable bird sightings include: 100 Ringed Plover, four Bar-tailed Godwits on August 29, a Common Tern on August 23, and Aquatic Warbler seen on the 7<sup>th</sup> and caught on August 30.

### Management

Haf Leyshon has joined as part of a graduate training scheme for Welsh speakers. She will be full time for six months and will help with all aspects of reserve management.

The volunteer team of Richard Garman, Rhys Rice, Sheila Dupe and Katrina Murray cleared a 100metre stretch of ditch that had become strewn with household rubbish.

This year seems to have been a prolific year for Ragwort. Bryn and Ritchie, together with the volunteer team, pulled approximately six cubic meters from the green lanes around the reserve.

Contractors finished topping and bailing hard rush and other rank vegetation around the saline lagoons. Grazing pressure will have to be maintained to ensure a short sward in late February/early March when the Lapwing will look for nest sites.

Haf, Llinos and I gathered the saline lagoon benthic and nektonic invertebrate samples for measuring this month. I'm hoping the dry weather leading to higher salinity levels will not have reduced the invertebrate population too drastically.

## Events and visits

Kevin gave a guided walk to look at Damselflies and Dragonflies on August 25. Unfortunately, it rained heavily all day and only two intrepid people attended. The reserve passed its Green Dragon audit on August 26.

## TREASURER WANTED

After six years, our current Treasurer, Keith Roylance, wishes to step down from the post at the AGM in January 2011. Anyone interested in taking on the role should in the first instance make contact with Trevor Russell, [secretary@gwentbirds.org](mailto:secretary@gwentbirds.org) If further information on the role is required, contact Keith directly at [treasurer@gwentbirds.org](mailto:treasurer@gwentbirds.org)

## GOS CONTACTS 2010

### *President*

**Ian Walker** 01633 266382  
[irjwalker@googlemail.com](mailto:irjwalker@googlemail.com)

### *Membership Secretary*

**Helen Jones** 029 2069 1027  
[membership@gwentbirds.org.uk](mailto:membership@gwentbirds.org.uk)

### *Conservation Officer*

**Andrew Baker** 01873 830539  
[conservation@gwentbirds.org.uk](mailto:conservation@gwentbirds.org.uk)

### *Vice President*

**Al Venables** 029 2075 6697  
[wa.venables@zen.co.uk](mailto:wa.venables@zen.co.uk)

### *Secretary*

**Trevor Russell** 01600 716266  
[secretary@gwentbirds.org](mailto:secretary@gwentbirds.org)

### *Librarian*

**Keith Jones**  
[ogofkj@hotmail.com](mailto:ogofkj@hotmail.com)

### *Vice President*

**Alan Williams** 01873 880165  
[mochdreboy@waitrose.com](mailto:mochdreboy@waitrose.com)

### *Treasurer*

**Keith Roylance** 01633 868410  
[treasurer@gwentbirds.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@gwentbirds.org.uk)

### *BTO Representative*

**Jerry Lewis** 01873 855091  
[bto@gwentbirds.org.co.uk](mailto:bto@gwentbirds.org.co.uk)

### *Chairman*

**Dave Brassey** 01633 664212  
[chairman@gwentbirds.org.uk](mailto:chairman@gwentbirds.org.uk)

### *Field Secretary*

**Steve Butler** 01873 854583  
07970 558583  
[Steven.butler59@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:Steven.butler59@tiscali.co.uk)

### *Publicity*

**Mark Stevens** 01633 866470  
[publicity@gwentbirds.org.uk](mailto:publicity@gwentbirds.org.uk)

### *County Recorder*

**Chris Jones** 01633 423439  
[countyrecorder@gwentbirds.org.uk](mailto:countyrecorder@gwentbirds.org.uk)

### *Report Editor*

**John Coleman**  
[john.coleman@virgin.net](mailto:john.coleman@virgin.net)

### **Newport Wetlands**

Nash 01633 275567  
Visitor Centre 01633 636363  
CCW Office 01633 275813  
CCW St Mellons Office 02920 772400

### *Dipper Editor*

**Jackie Huybs** 01495 790212  
[newsletter@gwentbirds.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@gwentbirds.org.uk)

