

The Buzzard



**Shropshire
Ornithological Society's
quarterly magazine**

No. 240

Summer 2015

Society Officers and Officials

President:	Frank Gribble, MBE.
Vice Presidents:	Hugh Blofield, Colin Wright and Chris Whittles.
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Treasurer:	Brian Andrews, 6 Sytche Close, Much Wenlock, Shrops. TF13 6JJ. 01952 727531. <i>bafca@yahoo.co.uk</i>
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Management	Society Officers, Graham Walker and Sue Brealey.
Conservation Chair:	Graham Walker, 5 Spa Street, Belle Vue, Shrewsbury. SY3 7PU. 01743 351686. <i>gramanda5@btinternet.com</i>
Committee:	John Tucker, Allan Dawes, Geoff. Holmes, Geoff. Smith, Simon Twigger, Leo Smith and Helen Griffiths, Mike Shurmer, Linda Munday and Martyn Owen.
Development/ Publicity Chair:	Sue Brealey, 6 Nobold, Baschurch, Shrewsbury, SY4 2EA. 01939 262450. <i>susan@suebrealey.plus.com</i>
Committee:	Helen Griffiths and Jim Almond.
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Field Trip Leaders:	Various Society members as appointed by the Management Committee. See the annual programme.
County Bird Recorder:	Martyn Owen, 34 Peacock Hill, Alveley, Shropshire, WV15 6JX. 01746 780336 & 07736 286675 <i>soscountyrecorder@gmail.com</i>
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Editorial

In this quarter's edition of *The Buzzard* we have the latest news on *The Birds of Shropshire*, the comprehensive avifauna of the county that will act as a baseline for ornithology in the county for the first half of the 21st century. This essential volume will condense the sightings and diligent hard work of an army of recorders, researchers and compilers and will represent a lasting and practical legacy for all involved.

On page 6 there's a first glimpse of the cover, showing a Common Buzzard (of course!) taken by the well-known birder and photographer Jim Almond, one of 21 local photographers to contribute work to the book.

Other talented photographers have kindly submitted images to illustrate articles for this edition of the magazine. Bill Watkins' moth feature is a follow up article inspired by positive feedback from the many SOS members who are also moth enthusiasts, and Gareth Thomas has written an account of a fascinating piece of Swallow behaviour, backed up by stunning images.

It's hard to do justice to these photos when the magazine is printed in black and white so, as an experiment, a colour version of this issue will also be available as a PDF on the Society's website. Do have a look towards the end of the month to see for yourself and, if you enjoy seeing the magazine in this way, please let me know so that we can judge the potential demand.

If you haven't already done so please return your Spring Migrant Arrival Date forms to John Tucker, and keep the enclosed *Last Migrant Date* form to hand so that we can monitor the return migration from the county. More news of the spring survey will be in the autumn issue.

Thank you very much to everyone who has contributed to this quarter's magazine, and the unsung band who pack the envelopes.

Martin

Copy deadline for the autumn 2015 issue is 1st August.

Please send contributions or suggestions to: martin@thegreenfuse.net

Views expressed in The Buzzard are those of the individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the SOS or its Committees unless otherwise stated.

SHROPSHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Chairman's Report 2015

The Society has had another successful year, with the **Finances** in a healthy state and a number of new members joining during the year. Thank you to our Treasurer, Brian Andrews, who manages the finances of the Society so well, and to the Membership Secretary, Annie Andrews.

During the year, a series of **Indoor Meetings** with guest speakers took place in Shrewsbury and Church Stretton. Thanks should go to everyone who helps to make these evenings such successful events, particularly the organisers, those who provide coffee and tea, and those who prepare the hall for the meetings. Many thanks, particularly, to Jean Rickard, who organises the Indoor Meetings for the main Society; up to 100 people attend the meetings and have enjoyed an interesting and varied programme.

A full programme of **Field Trips** took place during the year, organised by the Development and Publicity Sub-committee, Church Stretton and Ludlow branches, and led by a number of different members. Coach trips, in conjunction with the local RSPB group, have proved popular with members. Thank you to Sue Brealey for organising the Society's field trips, and to all field trip leaders.

Day-to-day management continues at **Venus Pool**, ensuring that the site remains one of the finest bird reserves in the County, attracting a wide variety of birds throughout the year. During the autumn, a programme of willow scrub removal began at the back of the pool. The area has become very overgrown and because the work was beyond the scope of our volunteers, contractors undertook the work. Tall willow scrub was removed and, fortunately, remnants of the original fen grassland and common reed swamp had survived under the trees, so we expect recolonisation to take place quickly. Further work is planned over the next couple of years.

The hay fields at **Venus Pool** were cut and baled during the summer and then grazed by the neighbour's cattle during the autumn. As usual, the arable field was planted with bird-friendly crops and a large flock of yellowhammers and reed buntings, together with a small flock of corn buntings, spent the winter feeding there. The Society's Hebridean sheep continue to graze areas of the reserve where the vegetation needs to be controlled, particularly the marshy areas. Several work parties were held at which volunteers cut willow, weeded the islands, and strimmed vegetation, and numerous small jobs are taken care of regularly.

Thanks are due to everyone who is involved in any way with the management of **Venus Pool**, particularly Graham Walker, Geoff Holmes and Helen Griffiths; also to Chris Whittles for planning the planting regime, and for organising the ploughing and sowing, of the arable field.

The **Conservation Sub-committee** continues to meet regularly and members of the committee are involved in many different aspects of ornithology in the County, from co-ordinating bird recording to representing the Society on various groups including the BAP Steering Group and the AONB group. Most are involved in a practical way with many aspects of bird-related work, such as providing management advice, involvement with community groups, research, liaison with Natural England, RSPB, BTO and the Wildlife Trust, and generally taking an overview of nature conservation work in Shropshire. So, thank you to Graham Walker and his Sub-committee for their efforts.

A number of members were involved in **Bird Recording** during the year, contributing to national surveys such as the ongoing Breeding Bird Survey, and the Wetland Bird Survey, undertaking bird ringing, and submitting their own records to the County Recorder or to Birdtrack. Fieldwork for the **Shropshire Avifauna** was completed during 2013, and preparation of the book is now well underway, with a proposed publication date of late 2015. Thank you to all those who have contributed in any way to bird recording in Shropshire during the year. Special thanks should go to Geoff Holmes, who has retired as **County Bird Recorder** after 18 years, and our Best Wishes go to Martyn Owen who has taken on the role.

There has been some progress on the production of **Annual Reports** during the year; 2009 was published, and the editor, Martyn Owen, is currently working with the Conservation Sub-committee on the Annual Reports for 2010 and 2011, so we are catching up slowly. However, a number of people who write for the Annual Reports are also involved in the production of the Avifauna, which is taking priority at present.

The Society's **website** has now been running for a number of years and continues to be popular with our own members as well as with many other people throughout the country. Thank you to Yvonne Chadwick who is responsible for the website and for producing the quarterly Bird Notes for the Buzzard.

Thanks are due to Martin George who has recently taken on the task of producing our quarterly magazine, **The Buzzard**.

I would also like to thank the team who get together four times a year to prepare the bulletin packages for posting to members.

I would like to express my thanks and appreciation for the work of the Management Committee, the Sub-committees and the branches during another busy year, and to all those people who contribute in any way to the smooth operation of the Society. Thanks are also due to **CJs Wildbird Foods** for their continued support of the Society.

Finally, I would like to thank our members for their support as we look forward to another successful year in 2015, and to celebrations for the 60th Anniversary of SOS.

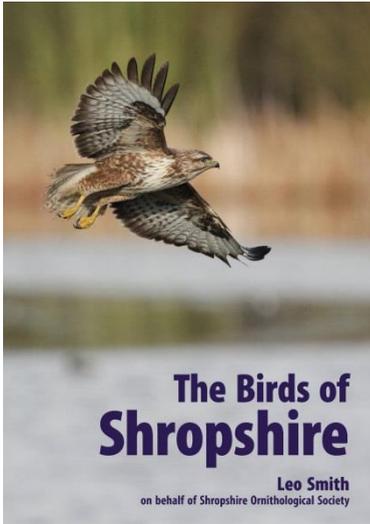
P G Deans, Chairman

Welcome to our new members

A very warm welcome to the following new members of the Society:
Mrs S Ablitt, Portishead; Mr & Mrs.F Barnes, Condover;
Ms C Bickerstaff, Much Wenlock; Mr.& Mrs B Bristoll, Oswestry;
Mr J Carey, Telford; Mr C Cooke, All Stretton; Mr MJ Dixon, Church Stretton;
Mr & Mrs S Fox, Telford; Mr & Mrs S Leyland, Stoke-on-Trent;
Mr A Murphy, Bridgnorth; Mrs J Potts, Leebotwood;
Mr MJ Vaughan, Bayston Hill.

We hope you will enjoy your membership of the SOS and that we will get to meet you at a Society event or out in the field. The officers listed on the inside front cover will be pleased to help if you have any enquiries.

Please note that names and addresses are held on computer and anyone who objects should contact the Membership Secretary. Please see our website for more information about the Society and local birding. We hope to see you at our indoor meetings, which are interesting and varied with first class speakers, and on our field trips, which are suitable for beginners and more advanced birders and offer expert advice and identification with the chance to have questions answered.



The Birds of Shropshire **A County Avifauna** **Planned Publication:** **Autumn 2015**

The Birds of Shropshire will be the most comprehensive record of the County's avifauna ever published. It is being produced by Shropshire Ornithological Society, and will be based largely on the results of six years fieldwork up until 2013, winter and summer, by over 650 different observers who submitted over 333,400 records. These records have been used to produce maps showing the current distribution of almost 200 different species.

The Birds of Shropshire will be a full colour, easily readable hardback book of around 500 pages, written by 26 of the County's most experienced and knowledgeable birders. Stunning images of 220 species have been contributed by 21 local photographers, both amateur and professional. It is intended to publish the book in late 2015 as part of the 60th Anniversary celebrations of the Shropshire Ornithological Society.

The book will include an account for each species, describing its distribution and relative abundance, and the breeding status where relevant. The current breeding and winter maps will be compared with those shown in *An Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Shropshire* (1992) and with the Shropshire part of the national *An Atlas of the Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland* (1986). Historical data, and results of specific local studies, will also be incorporated.

It will cover every species on the "Shropshire List" (over 300), so migrant species, county rarities and birds that have not been recorded here since 1950 will also be covered.

For many species it will show that massive changes have occurred in their population and distribution. The book will shape conservation priorities in the County for the next 20 years.

Forewords have been contributed by Amanda Craig, Area Manager for Natural England, confirming the importance of the research for setting conservation priorities and targeting scarce resources; and by Dawn Balmer, co-ordinator of the acclaimed *Bird Atlas 2007-11* for the whole of Britain and Ireland, published recently by the British Trust for Ornithology, putting the local book in its national context.

Migrant arrivals and departures

With the last issue was a sheet on which you could note migrant arrival dates and by the time you read this they should all be with us – so please send me your completed form. I need as many returns as possible (I dream of 100, or more). If I'm successful and I receive lots, then I'll write a report on the results for the autumn *Buzzard*.

By that time many migrants will be leaving and recording their departures is more difficult – it needs discipline! So with this issue comes another form, for you to nail down your last migrant dates. It means you have to mark them down every day you do record them – and one day they won't be around anymore – so you'll know the last one; I can't think of another way. The form is also available, as a PDF file for printout, on the SOS website.

So please keep the *Last Migrant Date* form to hand and start filling it in, from 15 July – by then most Pied Flycatchers and probably all Wood Warblers may already have left. Then, when they are all gone, send it to me. With your help 2015 could be the first year ever when we have a really good idea of just when they left. Many thanks.

John Tucker

Cuan Wildlife Rescue – Tawny Owl found in Highley

Early in March this year we received a call from the Severn Edge Vets in Bridgnorth to say that they had just had a Tawney owl handed into them which had been found at the side of a road in Highley.

On examination it was found that it had a broken left wing just above the wrist joint. The break hadn't broken the skin, wasn't directly involving the joint and also was a clean break so it was decided to strap the wing which immobilises it, giving the bones a better chance of healing in the correct position. When bones heal they form a callous, if this is too near the joint then it can fix the joint preventing it from moving and thus the bird would be unable to fly.

The owl was given pain relief and also a homoeopathic remedy from a plant with an old folk name of "bone knit" which helps in the healing process.

After a few weeks we removed the strapping, the bones had healed together correctly and hadn't affected the joint, we test flew the owl on jesses and although it was weak, it was able to use both wings correctly. We continued to fly the owl on jesses so it was able to regain the strength in the affected wing.

After two weeks of this, the owl was able to be returned back to Highley where it was released at dusk. It flew off straight away very strongly and landed in a nearby tree to take in its surroundings before flying off into the dusk.

Interestingly, when the owl came to us it had a ring on which meant we could trace its history. With the help of Martin Grant we were able to find out that the owl had been ringed, along with 2 others, as nestlings in Highley in May 2007 by the Chelmarsh Ringing Group. This meant the owl was 8 years old and had also been found in the same area, not far from its original nest.



New island retreat for local wildlife

Ground-nesting birds, fish and amphibians are set to benefit from Telford's first BioHaven floating wetland, recently installed on Apley Pool in Apley Woods, near Wellington.

Measuring 14 metres by 6 metres and anchored in the centre of the fishing pool, the island was built and installed by Frog Environmental, with help from volunteer group, Friends of Apley Woods. The island mimics a floating wetland, utilising the natural processes of plants and microbes to improve water quality but its purpose at Apley is also to benefit wildlife, particularly in providing a safe haven for ground-nesting birds.



Telford & Wrekin Council and the Friends of Apley Woods are working hard to improve the waterside habitat for birds at Apley with a programme already underway to increase the size of the reed beds on the fishing pool. The difficulty is in the high population of Canadian Geese that are continually grazing on poolside vegetation and stripping it bare.

Recently, the existing reed bed was fenced off to allow it to recover and there are plans to extend it further across the pool with help from the Love Your River programme, set up by the Environment Agency with support from Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Telford & Wrekin Council, Severn Trent Water and Telford Green Spaces Partnership, which provides the local conservation volunteers.

The BioHaven was built on the banks of the pool over two days and then “punted” out into the centre. Funded by the Love Your River programme, it is made from recycled plastic covered with hessian, appearing initially rather like bed mattresses. These are wired together into the desired shape and size and then covered with coir rolls, ready-planted with established wetland and marginal plants such as Marsh Marigold, water mint and reeds.

The island at Apley has three inner pools incorporated into its centre and, to hopefully give it protection from grazing geese, it is fenced around its perimeter. Beneath the island, a hanging network of roots, rhizomes and attached biofilm will form within two weeks of installation, providing a valuable and rich habitat for pond-life. Microbes will grow and proliferate, consuming many of the pollutants present, but in much higher concentrations than with a natural wetland.

Friends of Apley Woods will be monitoring the water quality monthly to assess improvements, and carrying out regular wildlife surveys to see what positive impact the installation has on birds, amphibians, mammals and pond-life. We would welcome your help in reporting any sightings to us at foawinfo@yahoo.co.uk

Julie Burroughs
Friends of Apley Woods

Award for the Friends of Apley Wood

On 2nd June the Friends of Apley Woods officially received the Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service, the highest award that can be bestowed on a voluntary group in the UK.

The awards is presented for outstanding achievement by groups of volunteers who regularly devote their time to helping others in the community, improving the quality of life and opportunity for others and providing an outstanding service.

Found: the remains of two eggs

On 7 May, while doing my WBBS survey along the Clun from Coston upstream to Purslow bridge a little below Clunbury, I found an egg—shell fragment, about half the shell. It was coloured a plain, pale creamy-green, though not green enough for Mallard and with no other markings. It seemed a bit big for Mallard, and rather elongated and elliptical, so I put it in my bag to take home. A little further upstream I found another scatter of fragments of a very similar egg but broken into so many pieces that no further clues remained.



Back at the desk over a coffee I first checked the size of my egg – length 67mm and Mallard eggs stop at 57 so too big for one of those, see photos. Goosander eggs measure 66.4mm according to my Collins Guide and they are the same colour as mine, described as “smooth and slightly glossy, creamy-white” – just right. I have reported it as a breeding record to BirdTrack, at level UN, meaning ‘Used Nest or Eggshells.’



There were other clues as to what happened and when. On the remaining side of the shell were two stab-wounds commensurate with pecks by a corvid – I think the culprit. The adhering egg-white albumen and small traces of yolk within were wet and still fresh, suggesting the recent attack, and traces of blood on the shell indicated that embryo development had begun but, coupled with the albumen and yolk, that the egg was at a relatively early stage (the first third?) of the 32-35 days incubation – so the egg was laid towards the end of April.

Goosanders are known to nest on this section of the Clun – I have seen adults and young here on several occasions. They tend to nest in holes or crevices so the crow must have searched hard to find the eggs, unless the birds made a mistake and nested in too open a situation. The nest was, riverside, probably within a short distance of where I found both remains remains in tetrad SO38Q. Let's hope that the eggs were taken soon enough for the female to be able to re-lay, hopefully more safely this time. I'll look out for the young when I do my second WBBS walk therein June.

John Tucker

More on moths

Earlier in the year I was clearing away some old strawberry plants when I found a strange, brown, leathery object at the base of one of them. It was about 4 centimetres long and as thick as my little finger; It was pointed at one end and it moved as I gently picked it up. I recognised it as the larva of a large moth so I took it home and kept it in a clear plastic container in a shaded place where I could check it each day to see what emerged. What a joy and worth the wait to see this beautiful pale green and pink insect in pristine condition.



Elephant Hawkmoth (photo by Bill Watkins)

Our Chairman, Peter Deans, and I were recently invited to survey and record the birds at an old gravel quarry site near Bridgnorth. In the course of our survey, on 4 May, we spotted this caterpillar in the grass and stopped to take a photograph. It is the fully-grown larva of a Lackey Moth, which used to be much more common than it is now. The caterpillars of the Lackey moth develop from eggs which have spent the winter on the twigs of hedgerow trees. The larvae live in groups in webs in which they bask in open, sunny positions. Being hairy, the larvae are less-liked by most birds but they were often a favourite food of the cuckoo.



Larva of The Lackey Moth (photo by Bill Watkins)



Garden Tiger Moth (photo by Bill Watkins)

Another very attractive moth which has declined markedly in numbers over the last forty or fifty years is the Garden Tiger. The adults are strikingly marked so that each one is slightly different and they are sometimes seen flying by day. The caterpillars are brown and very hairy so they were known as “woolly bears” and as a child I used to see them as they sought a place in which to pupate in relative safety. I was delighted to find the one shown opposite in my moth trap in June of 2014.

The adults of these species are attracted to the light of a moth trap, so anyone interested in trapping and recording moths may find them in their own garden.

A Garden Moth Scheme (GMS) exists for those wishing to make a real contribution by weekly trapping from March to November. Further information about how to start out moth-trapping can be found on www.gardenmoths.org.uk

Bill Watkins

Peregrines in the Forest Glen

A pair of Peregrines has nested in the Forest Glen, next to the Wrekin, and three chicks had hatched by the beginning of June.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust teamed up with Shropshire Peregrine Group to be on hand in the Forest Glen during afternoons in the first half of the month with expert guides and telescopes to allow people to get close-up views of the nest, which is on a ledge, high up on the rock-face.

Events like these provide a great opportunity to see this wonderful bird of prey and to find out about more them. Peregrines almost became extinct in this country during the 1960s as a result of pesticides, especially DDT. Since the banning of that most harmful chemical, Peregrines have slowly recovered and can even be found nesting in the centre of cities.

The peregrine, like other falcons, is an expert flier, reaching speeds of up to 200 mph in its hunting dive, known as a stoop.

Garden BirdWatchers deliver a staggering 20 years of citizen science

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Garden BirdWatch survey is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, thanks to the dedication of its participants. Their hard work has allowed scientists to examine how, when and why birds and other wildlife use gardens and the resources that they contain, and there have been some ground-breaking findings. None of it could have been achieved without the support of 'citizen scientists', so your help is needed for us to continue for another two decades.

House Sparrow by John Harding/BTO

Gardens are often the place where people first encounter, and learn to love birds and other wildlife. In addition, they are an important habitat in their own right, supporting a wide range of species. Back in 1995, when BTO Garden BirdWatch started, however, gardens were less appreciated and funding was hard to come by. It is thanks to the generosity of BTO Garden BirdWatch supporters, who fund the survey, that it is still going strong 20 years later.

With an average of 29 bird species reported per garden, our participants have contributed an astonishing 7.3 million hours of their time over the last 20 years, submitting just under 100 million observations. This wealth of information has also allowed BTO researchers to produce an average of one scientific publication a year, including several investigating the decline of the UK's House Sparrow population, first discovered through BTO's garden-based data. It was also thanks to the contributions of our volunteers that scientists from BTO and the Institute of Zoology were able to reveal the impact of finch trichomonosis on the Greenfinch population, which has declined by 30% since 2005.

As well as its scientific outputs, the project also provides benefits for its community of Garden BirdWatch volunteers. As Clare Simm, from the Garden BirdWatch team commented, "The one thing that many of our volunteers comment on is how their knowledge has developed through watching their garden wildlife for Garden BirdWatch, as well as the interest that they gain from seeing the changes in the bird community over the years, all whilst collecting simple but incredibly important data on a weekly basis. Given how much has changed during the last 20 years, it will be fascinating to see what happens over the course of the next two decades."

If you watch birds and other wildlife in your garden then why not join this community of citizen scientists and develop your interest, while contributing to this fantastic national project?

To find out more about the BTO Garden BirdWatch, including receiving an enquiry pack and a free copy of our 20th anniversary magazine, please get in touch by emailing gbw@bto.org, telephoning 01842 750050, or write to GBW, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU. More information can also be found at www.bto.org/gbw

The drinking habits of the Swallow

Originally inspired by Stephen Dalton's images in the '80s of Swallows drinking in flight, I attempted to emulate his results without restricting the birds, or using high-speed flash. The birds could choose to drink over a large area of pond, so results would be very hit & miss.

I wanted to see the 'corona' of water sent up as the bird's mandible incised the water. Even using 6.5 frames per second, the best I managed was 'before' and 'after' of the bird, while the central image was not there. However, the water stayed 'incised' for a brief moment on the second frame, so I montaged consecutive frames together to show the sequence.

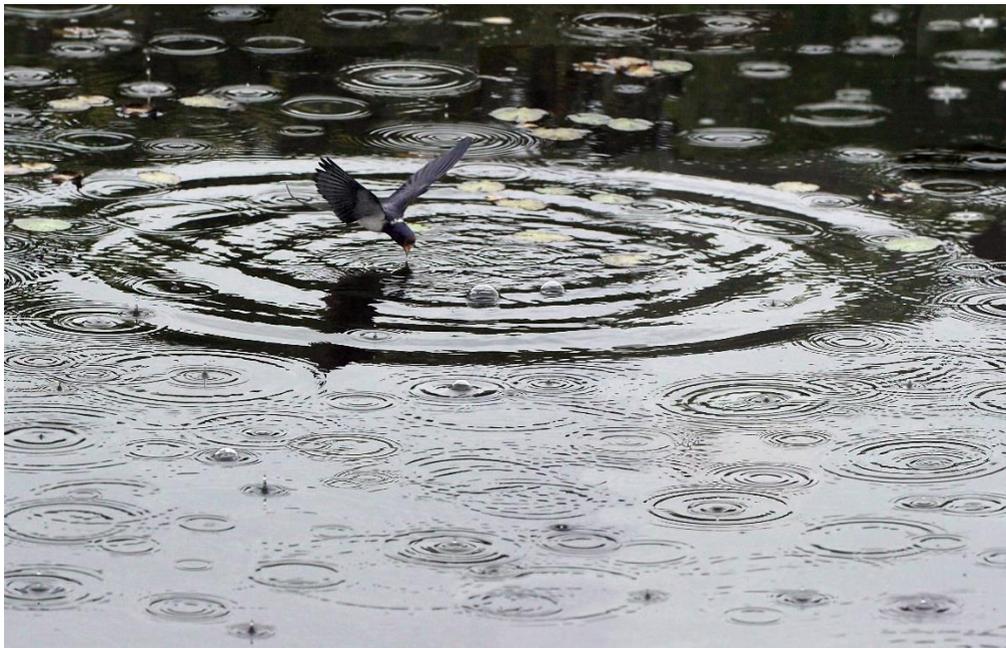


Image by Gareth Thomas

Later on that day, a thunderstorm hit the pond and my hide. It was raining far too hard to leave, so, trapped in the hide, I continued to photograph the birds as they came down to drink. They appeared not bothered by the deluge, indeed almost more attracted to the water.

What was noticeable though, was that in the rain, they rarely dipped their beaks in the water as was usual, but instead appeared to choose to cruise horizontally near the

surface with beak wide agape. Photography was not easy in the very dark conditions, but one frame apparently shows a Swallow about to catch a rebounding raindrop above the surface.



The 'ring of bright water' on this image was caused by a House Martin having taken a full flying bath two seconds before, and leaving. Image by Gareth Thomas

In heavy rain, each raindrop creates a 'bounced' droplet, about 2cm above the surface. For a split second, this is suspended and completely still, and much easier to trap than a falling drop.

From my observations that day, and from just one frame that may show it, I am convinced that the Swallows were in fact 'harvesting' the crop of suspended droplets, by cruising around with beak open, one inch above the water surface. More photography would be needed to prove this activity, and the opportunities will be extremely limited. One does not normally set out to photograph birds in a thunderstorm!

Personally, I do not need more proof, I am convinced, but as a true scientific observation, I am well aware that this report has its limitations, but still worth sharing, I hope.

Gareth Thomas



Cuan Wildlife Rescue

01952 728070 (9:30am – 5:30pm)
07731 347998 (emergencies)

www.cuanwildliferescue.org.uk

Cuan Wildlife Rescue is a registered charity dedicated to the care and rehabilitation of sick, injured and orphaned wild animals and birds.

The charity's aims are to:

Rescue, care for and rehabilitate sick, injured or orphaned wild animals

Advance the education of the public in the care and rehabilitation of wildlife

Undertake research and assist others in the field of wildlife rehabilitation

They have now been in operation in Much Wenlock for 21 years and have steadily grown over the years, recently moving into purpose built facilities to meet the needs of any wildlife casualty that may come into their care.

Each year, more than 1,500 wildlife casualties are received and, on admission, every patient receives immediate first aid treatment in the form of pain relief, treatment for shock, fluid therapy, wound management, antibiotic cover etc, as appropriate.

Where further veterinary intervention is required Cuan are extremely fortunate to have the services and support of the Severn Edge Veterinary Group, Much Wenlock, and in particular the professional expertise of Chris Woodroff, who has been their wildlife vet since 1995. The practice's dedication and commitment to treating the many different species of wildlife admitted enables any seriously injured creature to have the best possible chance of recovery.

Once recovered, creatures are always returned to the wild. Adults, particularly, will be released back where they were found, where they may have a mate waiting or where at least they will be familiar with their territory or hunting-ground.

The primary goal remains always to give the creatures a second chance.



Is it better to live in the North or South?

Field work for the national Atlas ended in 2011 but new information continues to be generated from the wealth of observations which contributed to the project. Living in the heart of the country we do not need to answer the north/south question but it is one which some species are addressing. BTO scientists compared detailed distribution maps for 122 British birds in 1988–91 and 2008–11 to measure the complex ways in which their breeding distributions have changed. Over these two decades they found that birds had shifted to the north, on average by 13.5km, which continued a trend seen in previous decades and that almost half had retreated from southerly directions. This was just part of the report's findings, overall the range shifts could not be explained by any single climatic factor, leading the researchers to conclude that the distribution changes for British birds are complex, multi-directional and species specific.

Twenty years of citizen science

The Garden BirdWatch survey is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, thanks to the dedication of its participants. Their hard work has allowed scientists to examine how, when and why birds and other wildlife use gardens and the resources that they contain, and there have been some ground-breaking findings. With an average of 29 bird species reported per garden, participants have contributed just under 100 million observations. This wealth of information has allowed BTO researchers to produce an average of one scientific publication a year, including several investigating the decline of the UK's House Sparrow population. It was also thanks to the contributions of GBW volunteers that scientists from BTO and the Institute of Zoology were able to reveal the impact of trichomonosis on the Greenfinch population.

Where have all the Siskin gone?

Initial results from Garden Birdwatch suggest that last winter saw the lowest proportion of gardens reporting Siskins since the survey began in 1995. According to the Forestry Commission, 2014 looks was another good year for Sitka Spruce. Siskins love nothing more than the seeds of the Sitka Spruce tree. In years where there are lots of seeds available, Siskins have less need to come into gardens in search of food, except when the weather is wet and the Sitka Spruce cones close up.



Shropshire Wildlife Trust

Wild, mysterious flowers

You can buy them in supermarkets, wrapped in cellophane, with warnings not to eat them. Orchids, most exotic of flowers, can be grown on windowsills, glistening with strange beauty. But nothing beats a wild orchid in its natural situation; common spotted and pyramidal in old, undisturbed meadows, twayblade and greater butterfly in ancient woods, bee orchids in short turf on shallow soils. Watching them appear, they tell us the season; their brief flowering a moment to be cherished as the year spins out.

“The air is full of orchid seed,” a friend once told me. Each pod can contain 10,000 seeds, tiny dust-like motes that blow in the wind. Thousands will drift without a chance of germinating; some will be breathed in and perhaps make people sneeze. Others alight in just the right place, growing slowly and probably unnoticed for years until they burst into splendid, unmissable bloom. They may crop up on new roundabouts, old spoil heaps and in neglected lawns, mysteriously appearing one year and then often vanishing.

Bees, butterflies and moths feed on the rich nectar of orchids, often attracted by their perfume. Greater butterfly orchids smell like freesias; fragrant orchids have a powerful aroma of carnations and early purples smell like tom-cats.

Orchids have lost out in modern agriculture; fertiliser does them no favours but scattered colonies survive on steep banks and rocky outcrops where tractors cannot go. Green winged orchids, once widespread, have been drastically reduced by drainage of wet pastures. The discovery a few years ago of a tiny field in south-west Shropshire, brimming with these gorgeous flowers, caused waves of excitement at the Trust and resulted in its being selected as Shropshire’s Coronation Meadow. Hay from this field has now been spread at Lightmoor nature reserve in Telford in the hope of recreating some of its original diversity. Let’s hope the experiment works as well as the meadow creation at Venus Pool.

Sarah Gibson



Green winged orchid

Bird Notes for January, February and March 2015

Yvonne Chadwick

Bewick's Swan Two adults were seen at Venus Pool, Coundlane or fields near Atcham from 7 Jan through to 25 Jan.

Whooper Swan Numbers on the Severn Vyrnwy floodplain continued to increase, with counts of 27+ at Edgerley on 13 Jan, 31 at Melverley Hall on 6 Feb, with 21 there on 16 Mar. At Coundlane / Venus Pool the highest count was of 13 on 7 Jan, which included a family of eight and five other adults.

Bean Goose A Tundra Bean Goose was photographed at Chipnall on 15 Feb.

Pink-footed Goose Six hundred flew west over Whitchurch on 6 Feb. A flock was also heard, but not seen, over Heath Farm, Shrewsbury on 18 Jan. Single birds were at Cranmere Bog and Leighton.

White-fronted Goose Records of a Greenland race bird were received from Venus Pool on 1 Jan and intermittently at Polemere between 3 Feb and 26 Mar.

Mandarin Duck Seen at Aston on Clun, Dowles Brook (2 pairs), the canal at Ellesmere and Weeping Cross in Shrewsbury.

Ring-necked Duck An adult drake was found with Tufted Ducks on 21 Mar at Priorslee Lake, remaining until the next day.

Common Scoter Two drakes were seen at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 28 Feb.

Smew Two were reported to be on the west side of Chetwynd Pool at 1pm on 1 Jan, but unfortunately there was no sign by 4pm.

Red Grouse Several sightings from the usual locations of Long Mynd and Stiperstones, with a count of 6 at the latter on 7 Feb.

Grey Partridge The only records were one in the top field at Venus Pool on 4 Feb and 2 at Decker Hill, Shifnal on 14 Feb.

Little Egret Four were on floods downstream of Stowe Bridge on 15 Jan. Single birds were also at Onibury, Porth-y-waen, Culmington, Whixall, Coppice Leasowes, Pentre, Wykey, Trefonen, Dothill, Aston on Clun, Ludlow and White Mere.

Hen Harrier On Whixall Moss a male continued to be seen during Feb, it was last reported on 8 Mar. A female was also at Venus Pool from early Feb until 20 Mar, where it could be seen hunting over the top field most days. On 22 Mar a female roosted in the reeds at Chelmarsh Scrape.

Osprey One flew north over Upper Affcot, near Craven Arms, on 24 Mar.

Water Rail Sightings came from Norbroom Marsh, Muxton Marsh, Trench Pool, Chelmarsh, Venus Pool, Polemere, Wood Lane and Devil's Dingle at Buildwas

Golden Plover High counts during the quarter were; 1500 at Crudgington, 400 at Upton Lane, Shifnal, 150 at Market Drayton, 120 at Bayston Hill, 95 on the Long Mynd and 80 at Titterstone Clee.

Little-ringed Plover The first back were at Venus Pool on 21 Mar and Devil's Dingle (2) and Buildwas on 29 Mar.

Black-tailed Godwit All sighting were at Venus Pool, with singles on 18 Mar, 24 Mar and 31 Mar and 6 on 22 Mar.

Ruff Single birds were noted at Wood Lane on 22 Mar and Polemere on 25 Mar.

Dunlin Just two records; one at Whixall floods and another at Venus Pool on 21 Mar.

Jack Snipe Seen at Catherton Common on 17 Jan, Berriewood on 6 Feb and Colemere 8 Feb & 20 Feb..

Snipe Some high counts of up to 80 birds were made at Wood Lane in Jan, along with up to 40 at Venus Pool and Pulverbatch. Also seen at Priorslee Lake, Devil's Dingle at Buildwas (up to 14), Wall Farm (2), Colemere (up to 15), Polemere (4), Molverley, Titterstone Clee and Shavington Park (12).

Woodcock Seen at Shavington Park (3), Resting Hill (2), Market Drayton, Houghmond Hill (3), Hopesay and flying over the road just south of Cockshutt.

Common Redshank Just two records; single birds at Wood Lane on 13 Mar and Polemere on 17 Mar.

Little Gull A first winter was in the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere on 16-18 Jan. Another reported here on 29 Mar. Elsewhere, first winter birds were at Trench Pool on 4 Feb and in the Chelmarsh roost on 18 Feb.

Mediterranean Gull Seen at The Mere, Ellesmere on numerous dates during the period. These included two first winter birds in Jan and three adults and a first winter in late Feb.

Caspian Gull The eighteen records received were from The Mere on 16 Jan and 15 Feb, Colemere on 22 Jan (3w) and 6 Feb (2w) and Telford wher 1w, 2w, and 3w birds were all noted at Trench Pool and Granville Landfill Site.

Glaucous Gull A juvenile was photographed at Trench Pool in Telford on 2 Feb.

Short-eared Owl Two were flushed from a path side on 7 Feb, with one then observed on a post for an hour on 8 Feb and again seen on 26 Feb.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker The four reports came from Colemere, Ercall Woods, Telford and Stokesay.

Merlin Males were seen at Birchope, Wood Lane, Venus Pool and the Long Mynd. Also noted at Condoover, Newcastle and Hordley.

Great Grey Shrike One was near Abdon Burf summit, Brown Clee on 28 Feb through to 30 Mar. Another was seen in a clearfell on Black Hill on 8 Mar.

Sand Martin The earliest were at Venus Pool on 12 Mar and Whixall, The Mere and Wood Lane on 13 Mar.

Swallow The only sighting in this quarter on 31 Mar at Venus Pool.

House Martin One was reported at Venus Pool on 21 March.

Chiffchaff Heard singing from 10 Mar at Priorslee Lake and Whixall Moss on 12 Mar.

Ring Ouzel Up to 4 were seen on Titterstone Clee from 25 Mar.

Black Redstart A female was seen at Townsend Close and Priory Gardens in Ludlow on 28-29 Mar.

Wheatear The earliest seen was a single bird at Polemere on 16 & 17 Mar. All other sightings were at Titterstone Clee, from 18 Mar.

Tree Sparrow The only report was of 6 at Cheadle Orchard on 15 Feb.

Corn Bunting Reported throughout the period from Wall Farm, Kynnersley and Venus Pool. Peak counts of c100 were made at Wall Farm in early Feb and of 22 at Venus Pool including several singing.

Also recorded: Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Cackling Goose, Barnacle Goose, Shelduck, Wigeon, Gadwall, Teal, Mallard, Pochard, Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Goosander, Red-legged Partridge, Pheasant, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Red Kite, Goshawk, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine, Moorhen, Coot, Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Curlew, Green Sandpiper, Snipe, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Feral Pigeon, Stock Dove, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Barn Owl, Tawny Owl, Kingfisher, Green Woodpecker, GS Woodpecker, Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Dipper, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Fieldfare, Song Thrush, Redwing, Mistle Thrush, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Marsh Tit, Willow Tit, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Jay, Magpie, Jackdaw, Rook, Crow, Raven, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, Redpoll, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting, Common Crossbill.

Records: approx. 6,000

Some sightings are subject to acceptance by the County Records Committee.

Records for the next Bird Notes by 4 July please.

Ludlow Branch

The Ludlow Branch of the SOS has been active for nearly 25 years with a full programme of field trips and a smaller number of indoor meetings. Latterly numbers of active members have decreased and this has now reached a point where we think the Branch is no longer viable.

Before it is closed we thought it would a good idea to find out if there may be SOS members in the South who would be interested in continuing the group in one form or another.

If indeed there are perhaps they would contact me on 01584 861688.

John Mackintosh

Main Society Field Trips

Indoor meetings resume in October, details in the programme, SOS website and the autumn issue of *The Buzzard*.

Field Trips – Full Details in the Programme
(Check the website for fuller details)

Saturday 4th July **Prees Heath & Whixall Moss**

Please note the change of date from the SOS programme

Leader: Estelle Hughes By car Full Day
Meet at 10am
See the Guide to sites on the SOS website: www.shropshirebirds.com

No field trip in August

Sunday 6th September **Venus Pool**

Full Day – Reserve watch from dawn to dusk.

Not an organised field trip as such, but would be good to see as many people
As possible drop in.

Please share cars whenever possible.

Shropshire Ornithological Society is supported by CJ Wildlife

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