



Red Grouse Survey 2021

Introduction

Since 2011, the Red Grouse population on the Long Mynd has been counted by the co-ordinated efforts of volunteers at dusk on several evenings between late March and early May. Volunteers have included participants on the National Trust / *SOS Birds of Shropshire* courses, members of the local SOS, SWT and RSPB groups, National Trust Volunteers, members of the Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group, and other people interested in birds. We need as many helpers as possible, please.

A survey is particularly important this year, as we couldn't do one last year, because of coronavirus restrictions, and we don't know the effect of the substantial die-back of heather in 2019. We need to know what effect that has had on the Grouse population. Therefore, we want to recruit as many helpers as possible for the 2021 survey.

It's easy to do, and new participants will be very welcome. Counts will be held on seven successive Thursdays from the beginning of April until mid-May. Additional dates will be arranged on other days of the week, so please sign up even if Thursdays are inconvenient. Participants do not need to come to every count. Please come to as many as you can.

Method

Pairs are secretive in the breeding season, and stay in the deep heather, so they are difficult to count. However, territorial males display around sunset. Most territories are within sight and hearing distance of the road along the top, between the Gliding Station and the Shooting Box car park. The display flight is noisy, conspicuous and unmistakable, and can be observed over long distances, so this is a suitable project for anyone interested in birds or conservation. No special knowledge or skills are needed. A briefing, and training for anyone that wants it, will be provided

A number of Watch Points on or near the road are marked on large scale Ordnance Survey maps. Each participant will be allocated a Watch Point, sent by email the day before, and go to it around one and a half hours before sunset, and stay there until about 15 minutes after sunset. The location and activity of all Grouse seen or heard will be marked on a map (recording instructions and a map will be provided). A population estimate can be made by collating all the observations.

The methodology is very straightforward. We normally hold a Project Briefing for new participants, but that won't be possible this year. However, there will be a written brief, and a practical on-the-job (socially-distanced) training session, explaining how to go about the survey, and record what you see, on the first date, 1st April.

Planned Count Dates (Thursdays). Please be at your Watchpoint by the start time

- 6.15pm, 1st April
- 6.30pm, 8th April
- 6.40pm, 15th April
- 6.55pm, 22nd April
- 7.05pm, 29th April
- 7.15pm, 6th May
- 7.30pm, 13th May

Sunset is about 7.45pm on the first date, and gets later by 15 minutes per week.

Surveys will be held on other days of the week in mid – late April, so even if Thursdays are difficult for you, please join in – you will still be able to help.

Watch Point allocations for each date will be sent to participants by email the day before. Wherever possible, participants should go straight to their Watch Point. Alternatively, you can meet at Pole Cottage Car Park (OS Grid Reference SO413937) on the first evening at 6.00pm, to collect paperwork (if you don't use email) or receive training. After the first survey date it will only be possible to meet by prior arrangement.

In previous years we have arranged car-shares for people who want a lift up, but that won't be possible this year either.

Participant Form

So we can plan, every participant will be asked to complete a form, indicating which of the Count dates you can attend, watchpoint preferences, and contact details. You can download the form from the Community Wildlife Group website, <http://www.shropscwgs.org.uk/sample-page/strettons-area-community-wildlife-group/> Anyone can also request a form by email from Lorna Taylor (see below). All forms must be returned no later than Wednesday 24th March.

Weather Warning

It can get very cold or wet, so please bring plenty of warm and weatherproof clothing.

Why Count Red Grouse?

The Long Mynd holds most of the Shropshire population. Many years ago, numbers were considerably higher than they are now, but suffered a substantial decline. They now appear to be recovering as a result of the heather management carried out by the National Trust. This project helps the Trust assess the effectiveness of the management by providing annual population estimates, and a population trend. Therefore it is hoped to repeat the project each year.

Adding the result to The Stiperstones counts gives an estimate of the total Shropshire population.

Red Grouse was added to the *Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern* in the 2009 review, as the population is dwindling across the Country as a whole. The Shropshire population is the most southerly in England, apart from a few on Dartmoor. The Exmoor population has recently died out. Monitoring the population is therefore important nationally as well as locally.

The usual survey method for Red Grouse involves mapping territorial displaying males on several dawn visits in spring, and analysing the comparative results (the "Territory Mapping Method"), but this was difficult to organise. This project method produced better results than the previous NT dawn counts, so it has replaced them since 2011.

A copy of the 2019 Survey Report was supplied to everyone who participated. New participants can download it (and previous reports since 2012) from the Community Wildlife Group website, shropscwgs.org.uk/strettons-area-wildlife-group/long-mynd-red-grouse-project/

Other Bird Species

In previous years, some participants have been lucky enough to see or hear Hobby, Merlin, Peregrine, Hen Harrier, Red Kite, Short-eared Owl, Curlew, Snipe, Golden Plover, Cuckoo, Stonechat, Grasshopper Warbler and Reed Bunting. As an optional extra, participants are requested to record any Curlew, Snipe or Grasshopper Warbler seen or heard, if possible.

Bird monitoring on the Long Mynd

The project will be part of the bird monitoring on the Long Mynd carried out for the National Trust as part of their Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme Agreement with Natural England.

Further Information (and Participants form) from shropscwgs.org.uk/strettons-area-wildlife-group/long-mynd-red-grouse-project/ or Lorna Taylor (email: lorna.taylor@btinternet.com phone 01694 723301)