**Summary of Raptor Monitoring in Shropshire during 2021**

The historic county of Shropshire covers the current county of Shropshire, and the Borough of Telford and Wrekin. The Shropshire groups referred to here all cover the whole of the historic county.

The Shropshire Raptor Study Group monitoring work since 2010 has concentrated on breeding Goshawk, Hobby, Merlin, and Red Kite, with the small group of members trying to find the nest sites of these species. Kestrel was added in 2019, and a Honey-Buzzard survey was undertaken in 2021.

The Shropshire Peregrine Group was established in 1997, and Shropshire Barn Owl Group in 2002, so these independent groups were well established before the formation of the Raptor Group, which co-operates with them, and does not duplicate their work. All three groups provide summaries of their results for publication in the annual Shropshire Bird Report, and further information can be found on the Shropshire Ornithological Society website www.shropshirebirds.com

* [www.shropshirebirds.com/bird-conservation/the-shropshire-raptor-study-group/](http://www.shropshirebirds.com/bird-conservation/the-shropshire-raptor-study-group/)
* www.shropshirebarnowlgroup.org.uk/
* www.shropshireperegrines.co.uk/

**Raptor Group results 2021**

The status of the target species, and the monitoring results in 2021, are summarised below, and in Table 1.

**Goshawk**

The population was estimated at 31-50 breeding pairs in 2014, but has increased since. South-west and south-east Shropshire are national strongholds. However, some breeding sites have been lost recently, because the maturing conifers in Forestry Commission and other plantations have been felled and harvested. This is assisting the spread of the species, into privately owned woodland, and northwards.

Almost 50 previously occupied sites were visited, 14 of which were apparently unoccupied; nests were also found at six new sites. Including the new sites, 40 territories were occupied, and nests were found in 25 of them. Seven nests failed, and 18 were successful. At least 36 young are known to have fledged from these nests, and 13 were colour-ringed. Four of the successful nests were in the northern half of the County.

In addition, records submitted to SOS suggest an additional three pairs, one in the north (not included in Table 1)

**Hobby**

In 2014, the population was estimated “to exceed 70 breeding pairs in good years”, but it is unlikely this number has been reached since. The number found annually fluctuates considerably.

Thirty-seven sites where breeding Hobbies have been found in the previous 12 years were checked, and three new nests were also located. Twelve breeding pairs were found or reported, including the three nests, and three (perhaps four – a bird that was probably a juvenile was not definitely identified) other pairs had fledged young. Six pairs were in the south, and six in the north. Two pairs failed, 6-7 pairs fledged 14-15 young, and the outcome at 3-4 sites is unknown.

**Merlin**

There has been one traditional breeding site, with one, occasionally two, pairs found there between 2010 and 2017, but none have been found since then, in spite of thorough searches.

**Red Kite**

Monitoring is carried out jointly with the Welsh Kite Trust. Forty-four nests, and confirmed breeding evidence for 6 additional pairs, were found, compared with 37 nests in 2020, and 28 in 2017. Thirty-two nests were successful, producing at least 50 fledged young, the highest annual totals yet. Probable breeding evidence was found for a further nine pairs, and 78 previously occupied sites were checked, but no evidence of breeding Kites was found at them.

Given the increasing population and range, finding all the nests gets harder each year, and the 59 breeding pairs must be a decreasing proportion of the total number.

Over 430 young are known to have flown from Shropshire nests since 2006, and 207 have been wing-tagged. The tagging programme has finished, but two chicks in one nest were tagged. The oldest Shropshire Kite yet found, cerise/black 30, a 12-year-old male tagged in the nest in 2009, was found nesting again. Three white-tagged Kites from 2011, and two yellow-tagged in 2013, were found again, all at the same nest sites as last year. A black-tagged female from 2017 was again reported, but the nest was not found, and another green-tagged bird from 2015 was photographed before the breeding season.

Efforts are continuing to try and find all nests in the County, to locate tagged birds, and monitor the continued spread eastwards and northwards. since the first known successful breeding for more than 130 years, as recently as 2006. Kites have spread rapidly from the south-west, and might be found breeding anywhere now.

A full report, *Red Kites in Shropshire 2021,* can be found on the SOS website.

**Kestrel**

The Mid-Wales Ringing Group and the Shropshire Ringing Group have both been operating separate nest-box and colour-ringing projects for some years, the former including south-west Shropshire and the latter primarily in north-east Shropshire.

In 2019, the work of the Shropshire Ringing Group became a joint project with the Raptor group, and it operates across the County, with the active support of Community Wildlife Groups. The project aims to find out the reasons for the population decline, partly utilising productivity and longevity data. The Mid-Wales Ringing Group continues to operate in south-west Shropshire, and submits its data to the joint project.

Progress has been limited, but in 2021 17 sites were checked, 13 nests were found, 11 were successful, and 44 young fledged, 34 of which were colour-ringed.

Kestrels have declined considerably in recent years, and numbers are less now than the 2014 estimate of 300-350 breeding pairs published in *The Birds of Shropshire.*

**Table 1. Summary of Shropshire Raptor Study Group results 2021**



**Peregrine**

(Shropshire Peregrine Group results)

Peregrine has bred regularly only since 1987, increasing by about 1-2 pairs a year to 19 breeding attempts in 2003. Numbers were fairly stable for the next 11 years, then 20 breeding attempts were recorded for the first time in 2015, and 22 in 2019 and 2020 is the highest annual total yet. Over 30 sites have been used altogether, mostly in quarries. Less than 10 are natural sites, and old Crow or Magpie nests have been used occasionally.

In 2021, 25 sites were monitored, and there were 20 breeding attempts Success rates were once again high, and there were 43 fledged young (not as high as last year’s record of at least 46, but equalling the previous record in 2011). Average brood size remained high, and all the signs show the population is continuing to do well. However, 2021 saw a recurrence of the poisoning of Peregrines at Clee Hill, which has been investigated by the police and RSPB, without result.

Records were received from throughout the year, some of breeding birds and others of passage and wintering birds, which may or may not be part of the local breeding population.. No reports were received of colour-ringed birds.

**Barn Owl**

(Shropshire Barn Owl Group results)

Largely as a result of the Barn Owl Group’s nest-box scheme (around 430 boxes installed altogether, and over 2,000 chicks now produced in these boxes) and their other conservation work, the population has increased from an estimated 140 breeding pairs when the group was formed in 2002 to around 220 pairs now.

2021 was the most productive breeding season in SBOG’s twenty years of conservation work, with 233 young Barn Owls produced in nest boxes and natural sites, surpassing the previous record of 225 in 2017: 203 nest boxes and natural sites were monitored. Breeding (at least one egg laid) occurred in 73 (35.9%) of the sites and 233 chicks were produced in 71 (34.9%) of those sites that successfully produced chicks, 218 in nest boxes and 15 in natural sites. Broods ranged from one to six chicks and averaged 3.2 (the highest average rate since 3.4 in 2014). Thirty-two dead chicks were noted in July, the age and condition of the owlets suggesting that they had probably succumbed to starvation following a period of heavy rain. Unusually in a productive breeding season, no second broods were recorded. An additional six sites held a single adult. Eight new pairs were recorded.

The SBOG Annual Report, including comparative data since 2002, can be found on the website (see above).

**Other Raptors in Shropshire**

(Summaries taken from the *Shropshire Bird Report 2021* (in prep).

**Common Buzzard, Raven, Sparrowhawk**

These species are not systematically monitored. No information was received in 2021 suggesting any change in their numbers or distribution.

**Marsh Harrier**

All except one record was of a single bird, and they probably relate to at least nine different individuals. The estimated 8-9 different individuals seen in each of the three years 2019-21 have been the largest numbers by far: before that, the estimated maximum number of birds per year was five, in 2010 and 2012. The increase reflects the rapid growth in the national population, particularly the productivity of the breeding population at Leighton Moss, and the twenty-first century colonisation of several other sites in Lancashire and Merseyside

Sixteen of the 20 records came from Whixall Moss or Canal Floods. There was one record from the early winter period, three from the spring migration period in April, one on 22 June was possibly an immature or early returning failed breeder, two were seen on autumn passage, both in August, and one, a female or immature on the few occasions that it was identified, was seen on 13 separate dates at various sites in the Whixall area between 14 October and 25 November, and a second individual was seen on 21 November.

**Hen Harrier**

Rare passage migrant and winter visitor, with 26 records from five sites, two fewer than seven sites in 2020, all except one of single birds. At least three and perhaps as many as nine individuals were involved, similar to numbers in recent years, but in general the number of records is declining. Whixall Moss was again the most frequented site, with records on 15 days, including the only record of two. There were no breeding season records.

Most records are believed to involve birds from the breeding population in north Wales, and the recent reduction in numbers here may reflect a decline in the Welsh population

**Montagu’s Harrier**

An adult male was photographed for the third spring in four years on the Long Mynd in May 2020. All were seen on a single May day only but the likelihood of the three sightings all referring to one individual seems high. There were no records in 2021

**Honey Buzzard**

## There were no Honey-buzzard records in 2021.

The Shropshire Raptor Group and SOS undertook a survey, as part of the national survey organised by the Rare Breeding Bird Panel (RBBP) with support from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). Sixteen volunteers surveyed 16 different extensive woodlands, in accordance with the survey methodology, but no Honey-buzzards were seen. Not all the woodlands identified for survey were covered, so the remainder will be done in 2022. A report will be published in SBR 2021

**Osprey**

Rare passage migrant, with all except three records from the Severn Valley. They probably relate to about 16 different individuals, an increase on the 11 or so in 2020 and 8-9 in 2019.

Spring passage started on 28 March, and comprised an estimated nine individuals plus two birds on 11 May, the last spring passage record.

There were two out-of-season sightings, in June, probably prospecting immatures returning to the UK for the first time, and three individuals in late August-early September were presumably heading south on autumn passage.

**Long-eared Owl**

Rare resident, but very elusive and status poorly understood. A pair bred successfully again at a confidential site in the north, with at least one young calling near the nest site in June. This is a regular site where they have bred each year since at least 2015. No other records.

**Short-eared Owl**

Rare winter visitor and passage migrant, mainly transient individual birds and tending to become increasingly scarce. No evidence of breeding.

Six records, all of single birds, comprised one in April, one on the unusual midsummer date of 29 July, which could perhaps have involved early post-breeding dispersal, three in the autumn and winter (on 15 October, 26 November and 2 December), and an unseen satellite tracked individual that left its breeding site in Iceland in mid-October, crossed to Scotland, then drifted south, over the Telford area on 21 October on the way to the Elan Valley, then on to Devon and South Wales, where she perished.

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