

The Buzzard

*Shropshire Ornithological
Society's Quarterly Magazine*



House Martin by Russ Malin

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Membership Matters

Membership Cards

The hide codes were changed last week, which seems to have given members a good reason to visit VP and try them out. As a result, several members have contacted me because they have not received their cards, even though they paid in January and their cards should have been posted once payment was confirmed. My usual process is to send out cards as soon as they become available in December each year to Life Members, members under 25 and newly joined members who have recently paid. I also check renewals from members who paid after October and send cards to them, although it would help if payments could be set to go out in January each year. In any case, I would be very grateful if members could let me know if their card has not arrived within 10 days of payment. As we all know, there are ongoing issues with postal deliveries, and unfortunately that is beyond my control. Some members also mislay their cards and ask for replacements. I will now begin noting these requests on member records so I can keep track of them. I have only a limited number of cards, and they are intended primarily for new members. There is also the cost of postage to consider, so I would ask everyone to look after their cards carefully. A couple of members have shared helpful ideas: one has laminated the card and keeps it in the car, while another took a photo of it on their phone, which I think is an excellent suggestion. Thank you in advance for your care and cooperation.

As members will remember, the welcome pack sent on joining included the latest Shropshire Bird Report, recent editions of the Buzzard, a programme of events, and other information about the Society and its work. Since the beginning of April, I have been offering new members the option of receiving most of this information as PDF or Word documents. At present, the SBR cannot be sent as an attachment, although with a fair wind the next edition may be. This supports our aim of being as paper-free as possible and will also reduce postage costs. In the meantime, if any members would like updated copies of these documents, please get in touch. The pack includes information about Venus Pool, field trips, social media, and the revised Rules and Constitution approved at the Emergency General Meeting earlier this month and later ratified by the Board. It would also be very helpful to hear from younger members of the Society with ideas that are more relevant to them, and any suggestions would be warmly welcomed.

That's all for now. Enjoy the summer and, as always, please get in touch if you have any relevant queries or concerns.

Sue Brealey

House Martin Conservation – Call for records

House Martin Conservation is an independent charity that aims to increase knowledge of the House Martin and create a channel for support throughout the UK and Ireland.



The 2026 season sees the charity make a renewed call for all nesting records of this declining species.

In partnership with Coreo, House Martin Conservation have developed the 'House Martin Mapper' app. The app allows you to record details of yours, or other colonies, along with a facility to record mud collecting data. Data is shared with Local Environmental Record Centres (LERCs), the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Atlas and bird clubs, upon request to Dean Cornish, Data Lead at datasharing@housemartinconservation.com, to maximise the data use for conservation locally and nationally and informing planning decisions/mitigation.

Although our social media accounts allow us to see your reports of national locations of House Martin colonies across the UK and Ireland, we needed a more consistent and accessible way of collecting and utilising data, to enable us to refine and enhance our conservation efforts.

For further details on the work of our charity and for instructions on downloading and using this free app please visit <https://housemartinconservation.com/house-martin-mapper-app>

We also welcome new members to the charity. We are hugely grateful to our membership family. Membership is entirely free and members will receive a welcome pack, a twice-yearly digital newsletter and will be invited to take part in charity events as we grow and increase our activities. Members will also be able to attend our AGM and vote to elect trustees and officers. We have very active social media groups attracting members and followers from all over the world. For more information on membership please visit <https://housemartinconservation.com/join-us>



Russ Malin

In the hide with...

...Michael Montier



Michael moved to Shropshire recently after living in Mallorca for about 10 years. He was heavily involved in the birding community there, acted as a guide and travelled the country. He ran a highly successful BirdForum thread (featuring the latest bird sightings), that amassed an impressive 3 million hits. Michael wrote a regular column for the Majorca Daily Bulletin and was Vice President of a raptor study



group. He particularly enjoyed tutoring novice birders and leading groups of bird enthusiasts. He even made it on to Mallorcan TV! He recently chatted to Claire Mulvey in the hide at Venus Pool.

Michael tell me, what first inspired your love of birds?

It was my Grandfather. He showed me my first Yellowhammer when I was eight years old. I still get emotional thinking about that moment or when seeing a Yellowhammer today.

You've been photographing birds for a long time. How did that begin?

I've been taking bird photos since 1969, though I don't consider myself a photographer and I don't even own what most people would call a "proper camera". I also keep notebooks, though I would deny being any kind of artist. I have countless books filled with sketches and field notes. It is lovely to share some of them in the hide today.



Articles and notebooks by Michael.



Alpine Accentor by Michael Montier.

So do you have a favourite bird photograph?

Yes. I spent six years trying to see an Alpine Accentor in Mallorca with no luck. One day, while climbing in the mountains, I stopped to eat a sandwich and felt something walk over my foot. I looked down - and there it was, an Alpine Accentor strolling across my shoe. We named it "Prunie" (*Prunella collaris*) and it stayed around for a few weeks. I also like the photo of the Hoopoe.

They're quite common in Mallorca but I would still get excited seeing them.

Do you have a favourite bird?

I think it would be the Nightjar. They're just so unusual in so many ways.

What's your top birdwatching tip?

Take your time. Just stand and stare and the birds will come. You need to be still, quiet and patient.



Hoopoe by Michael Montier.

What's your most embarrassing birding moment?

I was watching Nightjars, and in an ill-advised attempt to attract them, I was waving white handkerchiefs and clapping my hands, trying to do my best impression of a male Nightjar. I then realised to my horror, that a group of German tourists were walking past who were undoubtedly bewildered by this man who was skipping and waving two handkerchiefs in the air!

And your best birding moment?

I've had a few but I can think of a special one. It was a frosty morning in Kent and the sky was blue. In the low morning sun, I was treated to the metallic beauty of a magnificent Hawfinch, and I just stood in total awe because I never thought I'd ever see one. I was quite taken aback at how beautiful it was and how its bill looked like gunmetal.



Firecrest by Michael Montier.

What skills or qualities has birding given you?

Patience and definitely a sense of gratitude. I feel a deeper understanding of the environment that we live in and feel more greatly connected to it. It certainly helps me appreciate the wonders of nature and the Universe and so I'd say I've developed a greater appreciation, tolerance and understanding.

Finally, what advice would you give to new birders?

Never lose the sense of awe. The magic that unfolds when you look at nature is extraordinary. Hold on to that wonderment because nature truly is awesome.

Claire Mulvey



Osprey feeding by Michael Montier.

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Shropshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy Published

Previous issues of the Buzzard since September 2024 have reported on the development of the Shropshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). The final version of the LNRS, approved by Shropshire Council, Telford and Wrekin Council, and Natural England, was published on 22 April. There are 29 named priority species, including nine bird species: eight breeding species (Curlew, Dipper, Nightjar, Pied Flycatcher, Red Grouse, Swift, Wheatear, and Willow Tit) and the winter roost of Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Two further species, Tree Pipit and Whinchat, are named amongst *Species reliant on heathland and grassland mosaics, including fridd*, and one further bird species, Snipe, is listed as a *Species reliant on bog and other wetland habitats*.

The LNRS suggests actions to reverse the decline of these species, as well as actions to improve important habitats.

The LNRS can be downloaded from the Shropshire Council website <https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/environment/shropshire-and-telford-wrekin-local-nature-recovery-strategy/the-strategy/>

A full colour, high resolution version, which takes about a minute to download, a quick-loading version (no photos), a Summary, and a Habitat map, can all be accessed through this link

Leo Smith

Bird Notes

Bird Notes January to March 2026

As usual these records include some unconfirmed reports. All county rarities should be submitted to the recorder with notes or photos, sound recordings etc. This is my last Bird Notes as Martin George has kindly offered to take over from the next issue.

Geese!

Early 2026 will long be remembered for the exceptional numbers of wild geese in the county, and indeed in the country. There was a big freeze in major wintering areas in northern Germany that shifted large numbers of White-fronted Geese west in search of milder conditions. Numbers of these geese have been falling in Britain for decades, in part due to short stopping. The birds now winter in the low countries or further east, where milder winters

caused by climate change mean conditions are usually suitable for them. Why waste energy flying to Britain, once more reliably mild in winter, when you don't need to? However this time for once they did need to. After a couple of records at the end of 2025 six dropped into VP for a typically brief stay on 2 Jan. Later in the month five were found at Crudgington Moor, where they could go missing but remained into early February so proved very popular. Then things started to get a bit crazy – on 6 Feb the flock increased enormously with at least 192 present. For some context here, I was lucky enough to see the flock of 57 at Molverley Floods a few years ago, which was the largest count in Shropshire since 1982. The next day the Crudgington Moor flock increased further with one observer making several counts of over 300 and arriving at a figure of 305. Thereafter, numbers were consistently around 270 with 268 on 12 Feb falling to 50 by 14th with an isolated record of three on 18th. Elsewhere there were a few scattered reports of small numbers with two larger flocks reported on the move on 8 Feb. Piecing together the full details of the influx is beyond the scope of this note.

Someone did ask at this time whether the 305 was a county record, but although it's exceptional by recent standards it's nowhere near the highest count of 4,000 in February 1960. At this time there was a regular flock wintering in the Welshpool area and adjacent parts of Shropshire (the Camlad Valley). This flock had been regularly present since at least the late 1940s and usually peaked at 1,500-1,700 in late February. Shifting baselines...

Six Barnacle Geese arrived at Leighton Bends the same day as this huge influx started, 6 Feb, and likely had the same origins. They stayed for several days. Elsewhere in the country a few Tundra Bean Geese were tagging along with the White-fronts but we didn't get any this winter (however, read on).

Isombridge birding Mecca

Meanwhile I received an email showing some lovely footage of a Hoopoe somewhere in the Isombridge area on 17 Feb. I wasn't sure exactly where it was but alerted a local birder who got my hazy message about it, looked up from where he was standing and there it was! It stayed in the area until at least 22 Mar but could be very elusive at times.

On 14 Mar the same observer, John Reeves, was at Isombridge again and briefly saw three grey geese fly over, but the views were largely silhouetted against the sun. As they flew away, at least one was noted to look long-necked and brown, with an obvious bill band, dark upperwings and orange feet, suggesting a Bean Goose sp. The news was released as three possible Bean Geese, but he couldn't relocate them.

Almost immediately after the news was out, a local photographer shared an image of what must have been the same flock, taken a week earlier but not

identified or shared at the time. It showed two Pink-footed Geese and a Bean Goose species, but which one? After lots of searching JR relocated them the next afternoon and after much online and onsite discussion with Tom Lowe it was identified as a Taiga Bean, much the rarer of the two and never before recorded in Shropshire! As a first for the County it will be fully written up in the 2026 SBR.

Taiga Bean Goose is a rare species in GB, and especially in England. The once regular winter flock in the Yare Valley has now gone and one on the Slamannan Plateau in Scotland's central belt is the only regular location. This winter saw an unusual series of records away from that area from Shetland to Ireland where it is exceptionally rare. Ours stayed until 17 Mar and was popular with visiting birders from around the Midlands.

Like buses

And talking of rarities. The year began with the female Lesser Scaup that arrived in December at Ellesmere still present. It stayed until 21 Jan, allowing many to see it again for the New Year. This was only the second County record so quite a find. Then on 13 Mar Tom Lowe found another at the same site – this time a smart adult male! It was seen again on 14 and 15 Mar, at times feeding at super close range just off the front with Tufted Ducks. Then there was negative news next day and there were no more reports. Until 8 April that is, when the same bird was present again. It's still there at the time of writing (21 April) so how long will it stay? Did it really leave the site and return after nearly a month or was it lurking unobserved all that time?

Other highlights

The year started with last year's Cackling Goose briefly present at VP on 1 Jan but not seen again until it resurfaced in Worcestershire. There was a good run of Caspian Gulls in a field at Battlefields with several individuals involved and there was an intriguing report of a Glaucous Gull here but it could not be confirmed. On 24 Jan a Ring Ouzel was photographed in a garden at Ashford Bowdler. That's three winter records of this species in a few short years! A Little Gull was at Ellesmere on 27 Jan after stormy conditions. A Lesser Whitethroat was trapped and ringed at Chelmarsh on 15 Feb and was thought to be of the Siberian form *Blythi*, which is the most likely subspecies to be seen in winter in Britain. The first Sand Martin was at VP on the outrageously early date of 28 Feb. Three Cranes were at Wall Farm on 6 Mar, nine Common Scoters on Ellesmere next day and a Bittern was sound recorded over Cantlopgrove on 11th. A Hooded Crow was seen at Nantmawr on 30 Mar, our first for many years, albeit now somewhat irksomely lumped with Carrion Crow. Nonetheless a top find. In all quite a start to the Shropshire birding year - have a good spring everyone.

Indoor Meetings

Wednesday, 7 October 2026 7:15 pm – (approx.) 9:15

**'Bird and Wildlife Adventures in Costa Rica'
with Steve Dawes - well-known local wildlife enthusiast and
photographer**

Experience an evening with the ever-popular wildlife photographer Steve Dawes, as he shares stories and images from his recent adventure in Costa Rica — a country bursting with extraordinary wildlife and vibrant birdlife.

Wednesday, 4 November, 2026 7:15 pm – (approx) 9:15

**Please note that your SOS Program booklet incorrectly shows 5
Nov as the date for this meeting**

**'24 years of Barn Owl Conservation in Shropshire'
with John Lightfoot**

Co-founder of Shropshire Barn Owl group and owner of Talon Nestboxes, he has worked with owls in Shropshire for almost a quarter of a century.

Join us for a captivating talk by John Lightfoot, who has spent the past 24 years surveying and protecting these iconic birds. With decades of hands-on experience monitoring Barn Owl populations across the county, John and his wife Wendy bring a wealth of knowledge, fascinating stories from the field, and deep insight into the lives of these elusive nocturnal hunters. Whether you're a wildlife enthusiast, a budding conservationist, or simply curious about one of Britain's most beloved birds, this talk offers a rare opportunity to hear from someone who has devoted his life to Barn Owl conservation in Shropshire.

Field Trips

See website for full details

Sunday, August 6, 2026

**Burton Mere Wetlands RSPB , Cheshire
(Joint visit with RSPB Shrewsbury Group)
Leader: To be confirmed nearer the time**

RSPB reserve on the Dee estuary, with hides and a mosaic of wetland habitats, including pools, scrapes and reedbeds. A visit to look for waders, waterbirds and summer migrants; anything may turn-up at this time of year!

Travel towards The Wirral and onto the A540 towards Ness and Parkgate. Just after the Two Mills crossroads (A540 and A550) take the first left turn into Puddington Lane; reserve is signposted before you get to Burton village

Meet at 9.30am in the reserve car park

Grid Ref: SJ314735

w3w: desktop.unfounded.lipstick

Post code: CH64 5SF

Please send contributions for *The Buzzard* to buzzard@shropshirebirds.co.uk
Copy deadline for the Autumn 2026 issue is: 1 August 2026

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