Welsh Ornithological Society
Cymdeithas Adaryddol Cymru

Winter Newsletter 2023/24

Cylchlythyr y Gaeaf 2023/24

From the Chair – Anne Brenchley

As I write this, winter has arrived at last and the recent cold snap has brought many more birds into my garden in search of food. During some of the more inclement weather I have had time to reflect on the messages coming out of our recent successful annual conference. Whilst it is interesting to hear about how our bird populations are faring, most of the news was of decline. We've been very good at recording, monitoring and documenting declines but we must act now and every one of us can do something to make a difference. It was excellent to see more young birders at the conference than we've ever welcomed before and we hope that they will be active in WOS's work.

To take part in surveys and ensure that our birdwatching records are captured for conservation purposes is very rewarding, but decision makers are still struggling to understand the messages or be aware of our concerns. WOS endeavours to collectively represent your views and take part in the most important campaigns, but local and national politicians often take as much notice of individual views and local stories as they do of that from conservation organisations.

Post Brexit, the Welsh Government is about to bring in a new Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) that could, if designed effectively, make a positive impact on the bird populations in our farmed landscapes. The all-important SFS public consultation, which gives us all an opportunity to share our views on it and to help shape its final version, was launched earlier this month. If you have only one New Year's Resolution in 2024, please resolve to respond to this consultation. To make this as easy as possible for everyone, WOS is entering into an exciting collaboration with RSPB Cymru over the coming months. You'll find more information about how we'll do this later in the newsletter.

Whether you grew up in Wales or moved here later in life, we've all experienced land use changes that have been to the detriment of birds. I moved to North East Wales over twenty years ago and I walk in my local area regularly but I no longer see Marsh Tits, Tree Sparrows and Yellowhammers. The variety of species in my Breeding Bird Survey has decreased and my local woodlands seem to have become unsuitable for Pied Flycatchers. We could all tell our individual stories in the context of our responses to the SFS. We all care, but now is the time to show this. This could be our last chance to influence the future and ensure that the birds we all love can thrive in Wales.

Finally have a peaceful festive season and whilst you are taking part in that special seasonal food and drink do not forget the birds. Give them some extra food and fresh water and find time to relax and simply watch the wildlife around you.

Nadolig llawen a blwyddyn newydd dda to you all!

Welsh wildlife needs us now

On 13 December something happened that that could pave the way to a brighter future for wildlife in Wales. But, to make sure that happens, requires all of us to raise our voices for nature over the next three months. On that date, the Welsh Government launched its **Sustainable Farming Scheme** (SFS) consultation.

SFS is the new, post-Brexit, farm payments scheme aimed at encouraging nature-friendly farming. The scheme is intended to use public money to help farmers produce food sustainably, tackle the Climate and Nature Emergencies and restore the ecosystems we depend on. It's an enormous task, but it's one that Welsh farmers are well placed to meet, if they are given the right support. This is where the SFS comes in.

This is a once in a generation opportunity to shape the way our land is managed. With 90% of the land area of Wales given over to farming, if we're to halt and then reverse the declines in nature, it's imperative that the SFS is fit for purpose. That it delivers on what it sets out to achieve. It must work for farmers, for people and for wildlife.

This is where we can all play our part.

We need as many people as possible to respond to the consultation before it ends on 4 March.

In February and early March, WOS will be teaming up with RSPB Cymru to host short face to face sessions at various places around Wales to not only give people an introduction to the SFS but also to guide them, step by step, through the consultation response process. By the end of the session, you will have written and sent in your consultation response. We envisage these sessions lasting no more than an hour and a half. For those not able to attend these sessions in person, RSPB Cymru also intends to host a live webinar.

So how does the consultation stack up for nature?

It's positive that Welsh Government is developing a Scheme that all Welsh farmers can enter to be paid to farm their land in ways that benefits nature and climate alongside producing food sustainably.

- There are three tiers of payment to the Scheme. The Universal (basic), the Optional and the Collaborative Elements. The consultation focusses largely on the Universal (basic) Element of the Scheme, which will reward farmers for retaining and managing all existing semi-natural habitats on their farms. It's likely it will also lead to additional areas of new habitat being created, especially in the most agriculturally improved parts of Wales. These are positive steps for nature.

Contents of this issue

p3-6: **Latest News**

p7: **Latest winner of the BTO's Tucker Medal**

p8-9: **Looking back at this year's WOS Annual Conference**

p10-11: **Winners of this year's WOS Lifetime Achievement Awards**

p11-12: **Swift Projects updates from across Wales**

p13: **Bardsey Bird Observatory University Week**

p14-15: **Headlines from Wales in the 2022 Online Ringing and Nest Recording Report**

p15: **Avian Influenza - reporting sick or dead birds**

p16-17: **Farewell to three greats of Welsh ornithology**

p17: **Supporting WOS**

- Unfortunately, there's very little information of the Optional and Collaborative Elements that are intended to support more targeted management for climate and nature, including the management of SSSIs.
- Without details of the Optional and Collaborative Elements, including how they interact with the Universal Element, it's difficult to know just how effective the overall Scheme will be for nature. Will it support farmers to manage the right mix of habitats across Wales that nature needs to thrive once more, and how will it help farmer manage land at scale to benefit rare and vulnerable species like Curlew?
- A key part of the Scheme will be to encourage farmers to plant more trees to tackle climate change, especially on marginal farmland. To ensure the best use of land its vital Welsh Government develops an approach that ensures new woodlands are in areas that compliment, rather than put nature and food production at risk.

What's proposed in the consultation is a good start but it's vital that all Elements of the Scheme are implemented as soon as possible and are adequately funded. It's also essential that, in combination, the three Elements are effective at helping farmers halt the loss of nature by 2030 and establish the foundation for nature's recovery by 2050 to ensure Wales meets is biodiversity commitments.

Next steps . . . can you spare ninety minutes for nature?

The process of booking venues is already underway and they will be confirmed early in the New Year. We will contact all WOS members in January with details of locations, times and dates of the face-to-face meetings as well as more information about the online webinar.

Nature needs as many people as possible to raise their voices for nature in their responses to this consultation. To do that will only take around ninety minutes of your time. If you can, please make every effort to join us, online or in person.

News

WOS Photo Competition 2023

The 2023 photo competition closes at midnight on 31st December. The 2021 winning entry was actually submitted at 23.57 on 31st December, but don't leave it that late to enter! All the details of the categories and prizes, together with downloadable entry forms can be found on the website at https://birdsin.wales/the-2022-wos-photo-competition-is-now-open-and-weve-already-had-our-first-entry/ . Yes, we know the URL says 2022, but rest assured, this is the right page for the 2023 competition. We look forward to your entries and good luck – Iolo Williams will be selecting the winning entries towards the end of January 2024 once our four shortlisting judges have done their work.

WOS' Scarce and Rare Report, 2022 now online

We were delighted to publish Jon Green's 'Scarce and Rare Birds in Wales, 2022' (*Milvus Volume 2, issue 2*) a couple of weeks ago. This is an online only publication and is available for member only to read and download from the *Milvus* section of our website.

The report makes fascinating reading, with full details of three new species for Wales, a great collection of photos and an update of the list of scarce and rare species considered by the Welsh Birds Rarities Committee.

News

2022 Welsh Bird Report coming soon

Another benefit of being a WOS member is that you receive a copy of the Annual Welsh Bird Report. Its Editor, Julian Hughes, has just delivered the 2022 edition to the printers and it should be dropping on your doormat with a nice big 'thud' in the New Year. If you can't wait that long, use your Member Login on the WOS website and go to https://birdsin.wales/welsh-bird-report/

Hwyl fawr and thank you, Jez Smith

After four years in post, Dr Jez Smith stood down as a WOS trustee at this year's AGM. As well as general trustee duties, Jez managed our Student Research Awards and was a valued member of WOS' Communications Team. Jez has recently taken a position as a Research Ecologist with the BTO, in addition to his role as a director of the scientific research and communication company, EcoExplore. With his passion for Pied Flycatchers, we doubt Jez will be able to stay away from Wales for long! 'Diolch' Jez for all the work you did for WOS. We wish you and your family all the very best for the future.

New Welsh Bird List published

A new, updated Welsh Bird List is now available on the WOS website. The species added this time are Snow Goose, Moltoni's Warbler and Tennessee Warbler, and the subspecies are Siberian Bar-tailed Godwit and Siberian Knot. Following the recent extraordinary autumn for rare birds in Wales next year's list will have a bumper suite of additions!

WOS All Wales Rook Survey update

Our ambitious, two-year, all Wales Rook survey was completed last spring. This survey was a momentous project for WOS and was greatly enhanced by partnership support, especially NRW, BTO Cymru and its Regional Representatives, RSPB Cymru, Cofnod and several bird clubs, societies and County Recorders. 705 random stratified tetrads were surveyed with many additional tetrads done, particularly in Pembrokeshire, Brecon and Eastern Glamorgan where complete surveys were undertaken. More than sufficient Priority tetrads were surveyed for a robust Welsh population estimate to be calculated. Many casual records were also recorded. In total there were about 2350 records entered online.

BTO Cymru has been awarded the contract for data analysis and preliminary results are due at the end of January, a draft report by the end of February and a final report by 28 March. The timetable is tight but we hope that a paper for our journal, *Milvus*, can be produced by the end of May. We'll keep you updated on progress on the WOS website and in our next newsletter.

Enlli Winner

Many congratulations to Charlotte Farmer who won a week's stay at Bardsey Bird Observatory at our recent annual conference. We're very grateful to the Observatory who generously donated this fantastic prize which, unsurprisingly, generated a lot of interest in the raffle! Betty and Bob Lee were the names that came out of the hat to win the stay at the Observatory. But, having already visited the island several times in the past, they very generously returned their prize, asking that it be offered to someone of a younger generation. They also kindly offered a £100 bursary to help cover the winner's travel and subsistence costs. Charlotte's name was drawn from those WOS Young Birders present at the conference. We hope you have a lovely time on Ynys Enlli / Bardsey, Charlotte, and we look forward to hearing how you got on!

News

2022 Welsh Bird Report coming soon

Another benefit of being a WOS member is that you receive a copy of the Annual Welsh Bird Report. Its Editor, Julian Hughes, has just delivered the 2022 edition to the printers and it should be dropping on your doormat with a nice big 'thud' in the New Year. If you can't wait that long, use your Member Login on the WOS website and go to https://birdsin.wales/welsh-bird-report/

WOS bursaries and awards for young birders

We received four grant applications from young WOS members for a bursary to help them cover some of their traveling costs to get to our annual conference this year. We were only too pleased to award bursaries to all four applicants.

As a Society, we are very keen to champion and encourage the next generation of conservationists. We have a Young Birder Membership category which is available to individuals up to the age of 25 for only £5 a year; Young Conservationist Bursaries (up to £200) which provide a financial contribution towards the costs incurred while volunteering, or gaining experience, of studying or conserving birds in Wales and, finally, a Student Research Awards for undergraduates (£200) and post-graduates (£400) to recognise and promote the contribution made to Welsh ornithology by undergraduate and masters level students researching birds in Wales.

More info on all these funding opportunities can be found on our website. If you don't qualify for any yourself, please pass them on to a young person who does!

New *Milvus* Editor

Hot off the press! We're delighted to announce that the new Editor of our *Milvus* journal is Dr Rachel Taylor, Senior Ecologist at BTO Cymru. Rachel brings with her a wealth of experience to this role. We'll introduce you properly to Rachel in the next edition of the newsletter!

WinGS is back!

After a hiatus of twenty years, the BTO's Winter Gull Survey (WinGS) returns in January 2024.

BTO carried out the first WinGS in the winter of 1952/53, to collect data on wintering gull populations in the UK. Since then, the survey has been carried out around every 10 years. However, the most recent survey was from 2003/04 – 2005/6, and a substantial gap in our knowledge of our wintering gulls has developed.

WinGS will be run over the winters of 2023/24 and 2024/25, to collect up-to-date information about the five most common gull species in the UK in winter. The aim is to:

- Understand how wintering populations of gulls have changed over the last 20 years
- Identify key autumn and wintering sites for these species, and inform their conservation
- Determine how gulls have been impacted by the recent outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza.

The survey requires one count in January 2024 or 2025, at known 'key' roost sites, as well as some sample stretches of coastline. Gulls will be counted as they arrive to roost at dusk.

As you can see from the map above, there are plenty of sites across Wales to choose from. Please help our BTO Cymru colleagues by checking out the WinGS Vacant Site Map https://t.co/MEaoYTmswy and sign up to count gulls at sites in your area.

News

Thanks Kelvin!

Kelvin Jones retired from his position as BTO Cymru's Development Officer earlier this year, a role he was appointed to in 2011.

A founding member of the BTO Cymru team, under Kelvin's leadership the number of volunteers participating in BTO surveys in Wales increased considerably. He's always very keen that people should know that, per head of population, there are more BTO volunteers in Wales than anywhere else in the UK!

From day one, Kelvin also took on the role of the BTO Cymru representative on WOS Council where his deep knowledge of the Welsh birding scene was invaluable. It was lovely to hear the warmth expressed by the audience towards Kelvin when his successor in post led a round of applause for him at the recent WOS Conference.

We know that he'll make good use of the extra time on his hands. Expect the ringing totals in north Wales to soar over the coming years! 'Diolch' Kelvin for all you've done for Welsh birds and birding over the years.

Milvus submissions

Are you involved in any studies of birds in Wales and looking for somewhere to publish your findings? We're always on the lookout for papers for our journal, *Milvus*. More information about submissions can be found here: https://birdsin.wales/milvus-submissions/

Introducing BTO Cymru's new Development and Engagement Coordinator

News of Kelvin's replacement was eagerly awaited and the name of his successor was announced at the WOS Conference in November. His name is Gethin Jenkins-Jones from Cardiff.

From childhood, Gethin has been a keen birder and BTO volunteer and, prior to this new role, served as a BTO Youth Representative. Working alongside and supporting the BTO Regional Network, he will be responsible for expanding the BTO community in Wales by organising events, training and other activities to engage and motivate supporters. By engaging with new audiences and supporting BTO's existing volunteers, he hopes to increase participation in BTO surveys, to build an ever-clearer picture of the state of the country's birds. Participation also brings considerable enjoyment and he hopes that his personal passion for bird recording will inspire others too.

Gethin will be joining us as the new BTO Cymru representative on WOS Council. 'Llongyfarchiadau on your new job, Gethin! We look forward to working with you.

Dr Stephanie Tyler wins the BTO's Bernard Tucker Medal

Stephanie Tyler with Professor Juliet Vickery, BTO's Chief Executive Officer at the award ceremony

We would like to offer our warmest congratulations to Dr Stephanie Tyler for being awarded the BTO's Bernard Tucker Medal at a recent ceremony at London's Mall Galleries. The Bernard Tucker Medal is awarded in recognition of outstanding contributions to BTO's scientific work.

Steph has been a prominent figure in Welsh ornithology for a very long time and, during a career when there were too few women in conservation or the natural sciences, she was a pioneer. Steph has very close connections with WOS. She has served as one of our trustees and as the editor of our journal, *Birds in Wales* (now *Milvus*) and was awarded a WOS Lifetime Achievement Award in 2015.

Steph's professional career took her from Gwent Wildlife Trust to the RSPB as Wales Conservation Officer, but she has been involved with the Gwent birding scene continuously since 1981. With Professor Steve Ormerod, she authored the standard volume on Dippers, and wrote numerous papers that highlighted the impact of acid rain and forestry on water quality, insects and Dippers in the Welsh uplands. That was a huge environmental issue in the 1970s and '80s, and Steph was central to gathering the evidence that brought about change for the better.

Steph's contributions to BTO's mission are truly outstanding. Her work stretches back over more than 50 years to her first paper on the breeding biology of Grey Wagtails in 1972. Her valuable efforts include fieldwork for the national Atlases, co-authoring species accounts, a wide array of other surveying work, her Ringing Scheme participation and training activities, her role as Regional Representative and her vast Nest Record Scheme involvement. Steph is a true inspiration to many women in ornithology.

Looking back at this year's WOS Annual Conference

120 delegates came to the 2023 Annual Conference at Aberystwyth University on 4th November, including an encouraging number of young birders, and they enjoyed an excellent and thought-provoking day. There were some clear messages for WOS Council coming out of the presidential introduction, the talks and a panel discussion about the need for all of us to take action about the alarming state of our red-listed species and our increasingly impoverished biodiversity. WOS will act on these messages.

As well as holding the event in conjunction with RSPB Cymru and BTO Cymru, we were also joined by our generous sponsors for Conference, BSG Ecology and Gower Ornithological Society.

We're grateful to BSG Ecology who, along with the Gower OS, sponsored this year's conference.

As has now become tradition, the day was opened by our President, Iolo Williams, with his round up of bird news from Wales, although this year with a different message. We've got used in previous years to Iolo chastising the likes of NRW and the Welsh Government for their lack of action on protecting birds and their habitats in Wales, but this year Iolo issued a clear call to arms to attendees that action needed to be taken by all to protect Nature. Without that, in Iolo's words, "Nature is buggered."

The theme for the day echoed Iolo's opening with talks centred around "*Into and out of the Red*", driven by the latest Birds of Conservation Concern 4 (BOCC4) Report. The keynote speaker this year was Dawn Balmer, Head of Surveys at the BTO and Chair of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP), who gave a fabulous insight on the work of the RBBP, who are celebrating 50 years this year, and how its work aligns with the BOCC4.

Dawn was followed by Pat Lindley of Natural Resources Wales (NRW), who covered the way that NRW and the Welsh Government should use and analyse the data provided by BOCC4 to drive their future plans and policies.

The Pembrokeshire Rookery Survey, part of WOS's Welsh Rook Survey, was the topic of the talk given by Bob Haycock, and he gave some incredible insight into the highs and lows of the survey. This also included the complexities of rooks choosing to move their rookeries, sometime out of the reporting tetrad!

Just before lunch Iolo paid tribute to David Saunders, Roger Lovegrove and Bob Howells, three greats of Welsh ornithology who all sadly passed away during this year. He also awarded WOS Lifetime Achievement Awards to both Bob Tallack and John Wilson for their years of dedication and their contributions to bird study and conservation in Wales.

Socialising is a big part of the conference and lunch was a great opportunity to network with other delegates and there were lots of conversations driven by the morning's talks. In the exhibitor's room there were a good number of diverse stands for people to browse and take information from.

The afternoon session started with updates from the work of both RSPB Cymru and BTO Cymru and then the speakers for the remainder of the day continued with the conference theme. BTO Cymru Senior Ecologist, Dr Rachel Taylor, gave a welcome update on the work being done with Curlew in Wales, and the ongoing efforts to preserve and increase their numbers. The final talk was given by Julian Hughes, RSPB Cymru's Head of Species and he focused on positive conservation stories which prove that we can, given the opportunity, reverse the declines in our bird populations and other wildlife.

The final session of the day was a Question-and-Answer session with some of the speakers and with the addition of Dr Lizzie Wilberforce of *Natur Cymru* magazine. There was a mix of prepared and audience submitted questions led by Iolo. All questions echoed the day's theme, and pointedly asking the panel what they and we can do for the future of red-listed birds in Wales.

Dawn Balmer, Julian Hughes, Pat Lindley and Lizzie Wilberforce fielding questions from the audience

The raffle was as always popular, with a first prize of a week at Bardsey donated by Bardsey Bird Observatory, and a silent auction for a distillery tour donate by Dyfi Gin. Combined these raised around £600 to be used in the WOS grant and awards schemes.

There were 2 overwhelming takeaways from the day, the first is the need for us all to redouble our efforts for conservation, something WOS will be looking at urgently in how we can drive forward and support change. The second was the large number of young people who attended the event showing the wide spread of age range in the Society, and the enthusiasm that was obvious from those who attended to make a difference.

We've already started planning for our 2024 Annual Conference. We look forward to seeing you there!

2023 WOS Lifetime Achievement Awards

Also at this year's Annual Conference, it was a pleasure to award Bob Tallack and John Wilson, two stalwarts of the Glamorgan birding scene, with WOS Lifetime Achievement Awards.

Bob Tallack

"Bob Tallack stands out amongst the active members of the Gower Ornithological Society because of the very professional nature of his birdwatching. He is the epitome of the gifted and dedicated amateur, who during an otherwise active business and family life is making his own special and valuable contribution to the knowledge of the status of birds in West Glamorgan." This was written in 1985 and Bob has continued to make a similarly valuable contribution since those days. He instigated systematic counts of Rookeries, heronries, Sand Martin colonies and co-ordinates a breeding census of Mute Swan all of which are conducted annually by a team of fellow ornithologists.

Bob's first article on the status of Rooks appeared in Gower Birds in 1973, followed by reports on House Martin and the Mute Swan census in 1983. He wrote an article on the breeding status of Ringed Plover in 1986 and on heronries in 2002. He then updated his article on Rooks in 2012. He was on the editorial panel of the 1992 *Atlas of Breeding Birds in West Glamorgan*. In addition, Bob coordinated the field work for the last BTO Atlas, doing much of the fieldwork himself as well as encouraging others to take part.

Bob has contributed to the production of the annual bird report "*Gower Birds*" continuously since 1972 as a section writer and as Editor for the last ten years.

Bob was a committee member of Gower Ornithological Society for over 50 years and was Chair for ten years till his retirement in 2019. He was then honoured with Honorary membership of GOS and has served since then as our President.

John Wilson

John joined, and quickly became an integral part of the Glamorgan Bird Club (GBC), when he moved to south Wales in 1991. Since those early days, John has undertaken the mammoth task of producing the annual East Glamorgan Bird Report, almost single-handedly. The 2021 Report, his last as editor, was the 30th consecutive report he'd produced. The report is a now a high-quality publication, that has improved dramatically under his stewardship. He has taken the report from being a basic leaflet style publication to a full colour book.

As well as producing the annual report, John is an active Club committee member and Trustee and served a considerable period as the club's Chair. His superlative IT skills are used to create and maintain the Club's web site and he has embraced the use of social media to promote bird watching and other bird related topics to a much wider audience. He has also served as the secretary of the local Rare Birds Panel, liaising closely with the County Bird Recorders of East and West Glamorgan on behalf of the Club.

John has been recognised as the principal bird-walk leader for GBC with the main responsibility for organising the varied annual programme of field trips. His tremendous ornithological knowledge and his infectious passion for bird watching has been passed onto many hundreds, if not thousands, of people in the south Wales area over the years by way of these highly informative bird watching excursions.

He will take great pains to help the most inexperienced of bird watchers during these walks, often going out of his way to ensure that everyone on a walk has had the opportunity to study a specific/selected/chosen bird by sharing his telescope and providing accessible information on each bird being observed. Likewise, he is also able to engage, confidently and on an equal footing, with the topmost birdwatchers in Wales to discuss sightings and conservation matters. His enthusiasm and knowledge have no doubt helped build the next generation of birders and citizen scientists.

Swift Projects updates from across Wales

Several projects have been launched in recent years to try and reverse the decline in the numbers of our Commons Swifts. This is testimony, no doubt, to the place Swifts have in so many people's hearts – birders and non-birders – as one of the most loved species of our springs and early summers. We got in touch with three of these projects to bring you all the latest news on their progress.

Glamorgan Bird Club. We continue to try and help the recovery of this iconic species, with 200 nest boxes put up across our region over the last six years. This is a result of working with individual residents, swift and community groups, housing associations, community, town and county councils and includes the 90 in the National Lottery Heritage Funded Cardiff Bay swift tower.

Sadly, there are no records of the species using them yet, despite having call systems associated with 6 of our projects. We know however that 4 boxes in Cowbridge have been occupied and we have observed Swifts using boxes outside our project, in a couple of locations. It appears proximity to existing colonies is the key.

Our scheme has generated considerable amounts of interest. The six local authority Local Nature Partnerships in our area have been very supportive in our aim to help the species thrive. The project, led by our swift champions in Porthcawl (known as *Porthcawl Swifts*), has obtained Bridgend County Borough Council 'Local Place for Nature' backing and the Town Council has declared "swift-friendly" status for the town. Innovative ideas are coming forward such as knitting Swifts for engagement purposes, painting images of Swifts and information about them onto Open Reach cabinets and persuading a new Aldi supermarket to install next boxes, following an example in Wrexham.

Fishguard Swifts. In May the Pembrokeshire Bird Group paid for a swift box and lure system to be erected at the Yet-y-Gors campsite and fishery near Manorowen just outside Fishguard, the owner has had swifts feeding over the lakes in the past and was keen to try to encourage the birds. Despite very few birds seen in the Fishguard area this year, a pair did occupy one of the boxes and managed to fledge young. The owner reported 8 birds on site and has set about making another 6 boxes!

Breeding was reported from only 5 locations in the county in 2022 so this was a very encouraging result.

North Wales Wildlife Trust. We have confirmed occupancy of at least 15 local boxes – 11 in two Menai Bridge sites (8 in the Ocean Sciences building, and 3 in Ysgol David Hughes (of which 2 were new nesters), at least 3 in Holyhead and 1 in Rachub. We've had reports of 1 in Llanrug (Gwynedd), and 1 in Llanfair DC (Denbighshire), plus reports of swifts showing interest in boxes at a handful of other sites. (Left - *Swift nest at Bangor University).*

Although difficult to be exact due to lack of comparable data, overall numbers were reported dwindling at various locations. However, generally good foraging conditions in May and first half of June may have allowed better productivity for those that did nest this year, and although weather in July and August was probably sub-optimal, it was perhaps not bad enough to affect chick provision.

On July 7th, a group of at least 100 swifts was seen feeding on flying ants near Rhoscolyn on Anglesey. Other large counts included 35 at Corwen on May 21st, 30 over Llyn Tegid on July 7th, 50 over Penmachno on July 8th and 40 over Betws-y-Coed on July 26th.

NWWT received funding for its *Swift Action* project from Swire Charitable Trust and were able to install 45 swift boxes this spring – in Tanygrisiau, Llan Ffestiniog, Bala, Menai Bridge, Holyhead and Trefriw as well as call attraction sound systems in Beaumaris, Bangor, Betws-y-Coed, Holyhead and Valley. We are also working with a local housing association to install c25 special swift boxes into external wall insulation (EWI) along a Bangor street where swifts still nest. Interestingly, properties on that street without plastic soffits are the ones where swifts still nest.

We installed a camera in a nest-box on a Bangor University building in Menai Bridge this year, and that pair had a successful season, raising 3 chicks to fledging. The first returning swift was seen in the box on May 3rd, joined by its mate on the 4th, and they roosted inside from then on. The first of three eggs was seen on May 11th, and the first hatching was on June 1st, after which chicks were brought insect food-balls by both parents. The first chick fledged on July 15th, and the last on the 17th, but two adults (presumably the parents) continued to roost overnight in the box until August 7th. We hope to install a further 1 or 2 cameras next year.

Wales Swift Day? Watch this space!

The Wildlife Trusts are keen organise a Wales Swift Day to bring together swift groups from across Wales to share knowledge and learn about the ongoing projects to help swifts and explore further opportunities together to enable swift recovery at scale across Wales. This is an urgent need given the ongoing significant declines in swifts throughout Wales. We'll keep you posted.

Bardsey Bird Observatory University Week, 12-19 August 2023

This year Bardsey Lodge and Bird Observatory teamed up with the West Midland Bird Club, British Birds Charitable Trust and WildSounds *to offer ten students a fabulous week on the island during August for just £100 per person. One of the places, for a student from Wales, was sponsored by the Welsh Ornithological Society. That student was* ***Josh Cumming*** *and here's the story of his week.*

In August 2023 I was fortunate enough to take part in the university birding week on Bardsey Island on the west coast of Gwynedd. The Director of Operations and Warden Steve Stansfield and the rest of the staff at the observatory were very hospitable throughout the week and really helped me to improve my bird ID skills.

Students and Obs staff seawatching

As a result of the island's ideal location with regard to migrating birds (often being the first point of landing for many of them) we were treated to many birding spectacles during the week. From seeing rarities such as Melodious Warbler to experiencing large flocks of passerines like Willow Warblers passing through. Spotted Flycatcher was a personal favourite, a birder's delight.

Seeing and ringing my first Storm Petrel under Steve's watchful eye was another highlight. I found it remarkable how such small birds spend most of their lives out in the rough ocean. Spending nights listening to and seeing thousands of Manx Shearwaters come ashore was awesome, and being able to ring some was a special treat. The fluffy shearwater chicks which were taken from their burrows to ring and weigh as part of a long-term monitoring project were amazing to see. Being taken to see the Kittiwake colonies was also an amazing spectacle, with hundreds of adults flying round our heads on the boat, and all their noisy chicks still in the nests on the cliffs. We were also treated to seeing Risso's Dolphins off the coast as they passed the island along with their calves.

It was especially enjoyable meeting students from different universities, studying various disciplines. A great ice breaker was the Bird race, a competition where we split into three teams aiming at seeing the most species of birds within that day, followed by a quiz in the evening. Much fun was had by all, thanks to the Bardsey team for a great week. *(Right: the ten lucky students and Obs staff).*

I would also like to thank the Welsh Ornithological Society for providing the funding for me to join this fantastic week on this superb Welsh island, and to *Wildsounds* books for all the field guides they provided for me and the other students.

Headlines from Wales in the 2022 Online Ringing and Nest Recording Report

The BTO recently published its 2022 Online Ringing and Nest Recording Report. We've scanned through the results and picked out the following headlines.

Nest Records

www.bto.org/our-science/projects/nest-record-scheme/publications/online-nesting-reports

BTO Nest Record Scheme participants gather vital information on the breeding success of Britain's birds by following the progress of individual nests on two or more visits. They must adhere to the Scheme's Code of Conduct and, thanks to the dedication of these volunteers, the BTO and other scientists can use their Nest Records to assess the impacts that changes in the environment, such as habitat loss and global warming, have on the productivity of wild birds.

Number of nest records submitted from Wales 2013-2022	
Year	**Total**
2022	5713
2021	5740
2020*	1859
2019	5812
2018	4975
2017	5030
2016	4781
2015	4944
2014	4543
2013	3270

*Covid

Top 10 Species in Wales in 2022 (numbers of nest records submitted)	
Species	**Total**
Blue Tit	1510
Pied Flycatcher	966
Great Tit	663
Little Tern	304
Kittiwake	252
Dipper	221
Barn Owl	213
Swallow	150
Blackbird	138
Redstart	115

Numbers of nest records submitted by county in 2022 (2021 totals in brackets)	
Powys	**1316** (1231)
Clwyd	**1228** (1053)
Dyfed	**1176** (1039)
Morgannwg/Glamorgan	**888** (877)
Gwent	**712** (790)
Gwynedd	**326** (669)
Ynys Môn/Anglesey	**68** (81)

You may be surprised, given how widespread they are in Wales, or how easy it is to find their nests that some species remain remarkably under-recorded in Wales for the Nest Record Scheme. Here are a few species that jumped out at us while reading the report (numbers of nest records submitted in 2022 in brackets): **Greenfinch** (1); **Collared Dove** (1); **Great Crested Grebe** (1); **Chiffchaff** (3); **Mallard** (3); **Skylark** (3); **Goldfinch** (5); **Chaffinch** (8); **Mute Swan** (8) and **Dunnock** (17).

Perhaps you could fill help increase these, and other nest record totals in Wales? For more information about how to take part in the BTO Nest Record Scheme, please go to the website: https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/nest-record-scheme

Bird Ringing Scheme

www.bto.org/our-science/projects/bird-ringing-scheme/ringing-publications/online-ringing-and-nest-recording

Bird ringing generates information on the survival, productivity and movements of birds, helping us to understand why populations are changing. Ringing data make a major contribution to the study of population changes and to our understanding of species declines. Bird populations are determined by the number of fledglings raised and the survival of both juveniles and adults.

A total of **912,160** birds were ringed in Britain & Ireland in 2022 (900,131 were ringed in 2021). Of these, **76,336** were ringed in Wales (73,353 were ringed here in 2021).

Amongst the more unusual species ringed last year were: Wales' 1st ringed **Long-billed Dowitcher,** 2nd ringed **Golden Oriole**, our 2nd and 3rd ringed **Red-breasted Flycatchers**.

Top 10 Species in Wales in 2022 (numbers of birds ringed)	
Blue Tit	7451
Pied Flycatcher	5788
Siskin	5665
Goldfinch	3589
Dunlin	3287
Great Tit	3120
Manx Shearwater	2469
Chiffchaff	2396
Blackcap	2391
Redwing	2197

Totals include nestlings, juveniles, adults, unaged birds

Two longevity records were broken in 2022 by birds ringed in Wales. A juvenile male **House Sparrow** colour ringed in Bedwas on 8 July, 2008 was seen there again on 30 March, 2022, making it at least 13 years 8 months and 22 days old. The previous longevity record for House 12 years 8 months and 27 days.

And a **Chough**, ringed as a nestling on 18 Mat, 1998 on Ynys Môn was seen again on the island on 13 April, 2022, making it 23 years 10 months and 26 days old. The previous record was 23 years 11 days.

To find our more information about the Ringing Scheme, please visit the BTO's website: https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/bird-ringing-scheme/about-ringing

If you're considering getting involved in ringing, you can find your nearest ringing trainers here: https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/bird-ringing-scheme/training-ring/how-find-ringing-trainer

---

BTO BirdTrack and dead or sick birds

Unfortunately, Avian Influenza is still very much with us. Several important breeding colonies in Wales were badly hit last summer, and although there have been fewer cases this autumn and winter so far, new cases continue to emerge.

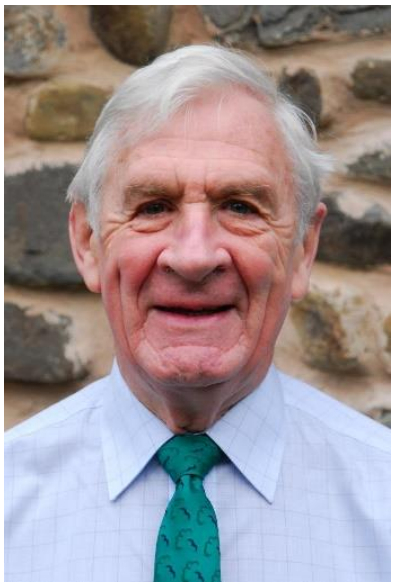
If you find a dead or sick bird that may be a victim of Avian Influenza, you should not handle it. If a dead bird is ringed, you should use a stick to move it into a position where you can read the ring number without touching the bird. Dead wild birds should be reported to Defra. The easiest way of doing this is to use the online reporting system here: www.gov.uk/guidance/report-dead-wild-birds. Alternatively, you can telephone the Defra help line at 03459 33 55 77**.** Dead birds can also be recorded on the *BirdTrack* app. Note that this is in addition to reporting to Defra, not an alternative. You will be given a reference number by Defra, and when you add the record to *BirdTrack* you should include this reference number in the "Comments" section. Doing this will greatly assist the tracking of new outbreaks.

2023: Farewell to three greats of Welsh ornithology

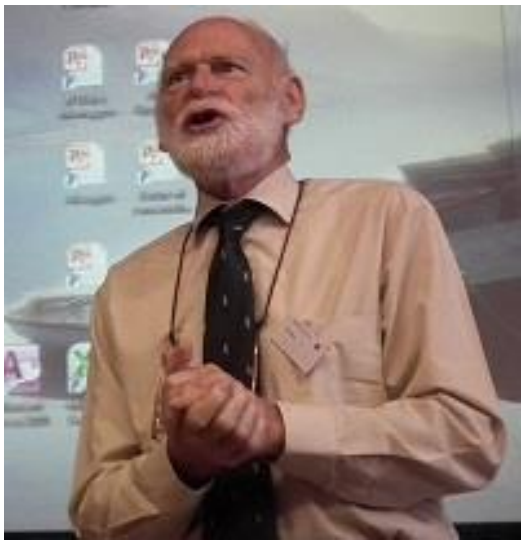
These last twelve months have seen the passing of the three people who made an enormous contribution to Welsh ornithology, as both professional and amateur conservationists. It was fitting that our president, Iolo Williams paid tribute and celebrated the lives of the three - Bob Howells, Roger Lovegrove and David Saunders - at the beginning of the recent Annual WOS Conference. All three were awarded WOS Lifetime Achievement Awards for services to Welsh Ornithology: Roger in 2013, David in 2014 and Bob in 2018.

Bob Howells was one of the founder members of Gower Ornithological Society (GOS) some sixty years ago, beginning a lifetime of generating bird data in the area, a contribution to GOS that is without equal. He was one of the first organisers of the BTO's 'Birds of Estuaries Enquiry' in 1968 and continued his work when Wetland Bird Survey was formed. His counts of birds in Gower tracked the seasonal populations of estuarine species; he was West Glamorgan Regional Representative for the BTO for 37 years, and he continued as Wetland Bird Survey co-ordinator for the vice county beyond that. Bob's dedication to record-keeping provided an invaluable record of the estuarine bird populations in the Burry Inlet and Swansea Bay SSSIs and has provided invaluable context for studies into Oystercatchers and the cockle fishery in the Special Protection Area. In 2008 he was awarded the Jubilee Medal for his outstanding and committed devotion to the BTO and in 2012 he was awarded an MBE for services to Ornithology in Swansea and West Glamorgan"

Roger Lovegrove was the foundation on which RSPB Cymru still operates today. He opened the first Wales office for the RSPB in 1971 and, in his 27 years as its Director in Wales, he developed the society's operations from a one-man office to an environmental powerhouse. A naturally gifted communicator, Roger was a skilled practitioner at influencing decision-makers and the wider public to benefit the conservation cause. Many people associate him with the protection of the small Red Kite population which was, for 100 years, confined to central Wales. He also played an integral role in the reintroduction of kites to England & Scotland, a project which has seen these birds of prey return to much of their former haunts.



Roger was also one of a small group of naturalists who formed the Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust in 1982 and six years later a founding member of the Welsh Ornithological Society. His boundless energy, knowledge and enthusiasm has inspired a whole generation of conservationists. He spread the conservation message as a broadcaster and very well-respected author. The Welsh arsenal of natural history publications would be much the poorer without his co-authorship of *Birds in Wales*, the first comprehensive ornithological record of the country, and his much-acclaimed, best-selling work *Silent Fields* which documented the long decline of British wildlife. On his retirement in 1997, Roger was awarded an OBE for his conservation work.



David Saunders was a stalwart of Welsh and UK ornithology for more than sixty years. When he was appointed Skomer's first Warden in 1960 this began a lifelong association with Pembrokeshire, from where he organised the first ever census of the breeding seabirds of the British Isles, *Operation Seafarer* in the late 1960s. For 20 years he was Director of the West Wales Trust for Nature Conservation, and Honorary Warden of Grassholm. He helped to initiate the *Pembrokeshire Bird Report* and was a prolific lecturer and author, including *Where to Watch Birds in Wales, The Birds of Pembrokeshire* and *Seabirds of Britain and Ireland*.

Iolo described him as "the Google of Pembrokeshire" – there was nothing he didn't know about the birds, especially the seabirds, of the county. David was the first President of the Welsh Ornithological Society and he was awarded an MBE in 2003 for his services to conservation in Wales.

And finally . . .

Many thanks for your continued support for WOS. We are an entirely voluntary organisation with no paid members of staff. Without you we wouldn't be able to publish our various journals, offer our conservation, student or community grants, organise an annual conference, engage in environmental consultations on behalf of biodiversity, maintain our website or produce this newsletter. Please tell others who care about birds and all wildlife about us and encourage them to join us. WOS membership is growing, but we still need many more members to ensure that our voice is louder and can be heard more clearly in the Senedd and elsewhere. Diolch a Nadolig llawen / Merry Christmas to you all!

WOS would like to thank all the photographers who kindly allowed us to print their images in this newsletter: Angharad Jones, Anthony Sajdler, Ben Stammers, BSG Ecology, BTO Cymru, Daniel Jenkins-Jones, David Hibler and Josh Turnbull.

Please follow us on our social media channels:

birdsinwales @birdsinwales birdsinwales birdsinwales

Please visit our corporate sponsors, BSG Ecology.

BSG | ecology

The Welsh Ornithological Society is registered as a charity in Wales and England, no. 1037823
Mae Cymdeithas Adaryddol Cymru wedi ei chofrestru fel elusen yng Nghymru a Lloegr, rhif. 1037823