



Issue 6

Date November 2022

Devon Birds Update

Welcome to the Devon Birds newsletter. In this issue you will find A report of Plymouth Branch's recent visit to Soar and Starehole, an article about Goosander roosts sites, a short note on the benefits of getting up early to spot birds on Dartmoor and an interesting opportunity to join the Devon WeBs team. Devon Birds is also looking for volunteers in a number of areas

We are always open to news articles and items of interest to our members, so please feel free to forward anything that you feel may be worth publishing in the newsletter. Please email Communications@devonbirds.org

The Dartmoor Bird Report For 2021 Is Available

The Dartmoor Bird Report 2021, compiled by Peter Reay & Fiona Freshney, will be available on the Devon Birds [website](#) or can be obtained as a pdf from peter.p.j.reay@btinternet.com. In addition to the 154 species accounts, the report includes photos, a short article on autumn wader passage on Crownhill Down, and a list of 28 ongoing projects and surveys involving Dartmoor birds, including five which started in 2021. Some notable records and events included:

- First Dartmoor Chough and second Red-breasted Flycatcher.
- Species recorded in 2021 but not in 2020, ranked by year when last recorded in parentheses: Chough (new); Red-breasted Flycatcher (1958); White Stork (1993)*; Ruff (1997); Curlew Sandpiper (2003); Sanderling (2004); Whooper Swan (2013); Little Stint (2015); Wryneck (2017); Lesser Whitethroat, Pochard and Water Rail (all 2018); and Black-tailed Godwit, Pintail, Red-backed Shrike, Wood Sandpiper and Yellow Wagtail (all 2019). * = not in a truly wild state.
- Species recorded in 2020 but not in 2021: Dotterel, Little Owl, Long-tailed Duck, Oystercatcher, Ring-necked Parakeet, Woodlark, Yellow-browed Warbler and Yellow-legged Gull.
- First White-tailed Eagle seen on Dartmoor for over 75 years, though not in a truly wild state.
- A record site and Dartmoor count of Teal at Portworthy in Sep.
- First observations from an important wetland site on Crownhill Down, which produced counts of Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Sanderling, unprecedented on Dartmoor on autumn passage.
- Only one pair of breeding Ring Ouzel located, and no breeding recorded in the Tavy Cleave stronghold.
- Record numbers of Blue Tit and Pied Flycatcher breeding in Dunsford Woods, and equal highest Blackbird total.
- Dartmoor Curlew Recovery Project launched, with 33 tagged juveniles released, and the small wild population had its best breeding season for 16 years.



Crownhill Down (Tungsten West) Main Pit. Left, looking SW from behind perimeter fence, January 2022. Right, Dunlin and Sanderling in September 2021. Observations here produced record numbers of waders in 2021. Both photos by Chris Ellis.

Wetland Bird Conference Tickets

Devon Birds will be hosting the Wetland Bird Conference at the Exeter Court Hotel

You can buy your tickets for the Devon Birds Wetland Bird Conference on the Devon Birds Website.

Saturday 19th November 2022 10.30am–4.30pm

Exeter Court Hotel, Kennford, Exeter, EX6 7UX

Open from 10am for registration and coffee.

Sandwich lunch, coffee and tea included.

Devon Birds is looking for volunteers With Health and Safety Qualifications

As owners of reserves and organisers of outdoor meetings and events, we need to ensure that we always comply with Health and Safety legislation. To this end we are looking for qualified Health and Safety Managers to help keep our activities compliant.

If you have a health and safety qualification and would be interested in helping us then please let us know by emailing tony.utting@devonbirds.org.

The Devon House Martin Project

House martins are declining in Devon by nearly 50% in breeding tetrads as evidenced by a reduction shown in the 2007-13 Devon Bird Atlas when compared to the Atlas for the 1977-85 period This decline is consistent with the national picture described by the RSPB which quotes a 47% reduction in house martin numbers between 1970 and 2014 . They currently have “amber” status.

To try and track the ongoing situation for these birds across the county, Devon Birds initiated a campaign to raise awareness within local communities together with a website to facilitate the collection of data to follow the spread and progress of these birds over a period of years.

To find out more and to see if this is something you might be able to help with follow the link below

Devon Goosander Winter Roost Counts

During each winter since 2016/17 an attempt has been made to estimate the number of Goosanders wintering in Devon. This has followed on from the counts started in the 1990s by Roger Smaldon on Dartmoor, and although Dartmoor counts continue as part of the county-wide surveys, all other sites where Goosanders have roosted are now included. The most important are Tamar Lakes and Meeth Quarry. For most water birds, the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) provides information on numbers, but most WeBS counts are carried out in the daytime when Goosanders can be widely scattered on rivers, lakes and ponds, many of which are not covered by WeBS. Fortunately, these birds have the useful (but unexplained) habit of congregating to roost at night on a limited number of water bodies, and roost counts are the best way of estimating numbers, especially if counts are synchronised between sites. Synchronisation is important to avoid counting birds twice, or not at all, if there is movement between sites.

The initial counts on Dartmoor were carried out at dusk, but they now take place at dawn and observers are asked to be on site from 45 minutes before sunrise to try to make sure none fly out before they can be counted. Departure to feeding sites is usually within the 30 minutes either side of sunrise. Up to four counts are held each winter, and hopefully on at least one of them, all sites are covered, and the counts are not affected by adverse weather. The results of the count carried out on 22 Jan 2022 are shown in Table 1. Twenty-one sites were covered, 14 had roosting Goosanders and the total count was 169, with only 49 of these on Dartmoor (compared to 63 the previous month). In the last six years the highest Devon total for each winter has ranged from 143 to 239, and for Dartmoor from 55 to 75. As well as total numbers, observers record the number of adult males, times and direction of departure and any unusual behaviour. Hopefully there are counters lined up for all known roost sites for this coming winter, but if anyone would like to be involved and/or know of other sites where Goosanders may be roosting, please get in touch. A pdf of the latest report, *Devon Goosander Winter Roost Counts 2021/22*, is available on request.

In addition to the roost results, Table 1 shows monthly maxima for all sites in 2022 gleaned from a variety of sources. These are unlikely to be complete, and I would be interested to receive records (even if already submitted to Devon Birds or BirdTrack) that add sites to the list or show higher maxima than those in the table.

Peter Reay peter.p.j.reay@btinternet.com.



Roosting Goosanders at Burrator Nov 2021. PR.



Roosting Goosanders at Avon Dam, Oct 2019. PR

Table 1. Devon Goosanders 2022. Synchronised Roost Count on 22 Jan and max monthly counts Jan–Oct 2022. Sources include roost surveys, WeBS counts, postings on Devon Birds website and personal communications. **Apr–Jun counts show** number of ducklings as +N.

Devon Birds Plymouth Branch – Soar & Starehole Valley for Migrants

Monday 17th October 2022 with leaders Kev and Jacki Solman

Monday dawned fair, which was a great relief after a full day of incessant rain on Sunday. Expectations of the twenty-four participants (including six new members) for some seasonally special birds were high, at this, one of South Devon's best known stopping off spots for the autumn migration.

The walk began with dozens of restless Skylarks, in the blustery wind, over the airfield and the adjacent stubbles. Meanwhile the Meadow Pipits and even the assembled gulls were keeping their feet firmly on the ground. A late group of three Swallows flew close by the farm where a few migrant Chiffchaffs and Blackcap, along with the local Stonechats and Goldfinches, gave a flavour of what we would search for lower down the valley.

In the shelter of the valley a few of the resident Yellowhammers and Cirl Buntings put on a good show for us. The passage migrants were represented by a pair of Bullfinches, with Goldcrest, more Chiffchaffs and a good few Blackbirds. Sadly, some of those we had anticipated were not to put in an appearance.

In all, thirty-five bird species, along with five butterflies and a couple of dragonflies, as listed below were seen on the day.

	<u>Common Name</u>	
1	Pheasant	□
2	Gannet	4+
3	Cormorant	1
4	Kestrel	□
5	Moorhen	h
6	Herring Gull	□
7	Great Black-backed Gull	□
8	Lesser Black-backed Gull	□
9	Woodpigeon	□
10	Skylark	100+
11	Swallow	3
12	Meadow Pipit	□
13	Pied Wagtail	4
14	Dunnock	□
15	Robin	□
16	Stonechat	□
17	Blackbird	□
18	Blackcap	□
19	Chiffchaff	□
20	Goldcrest	□
21	Wren	□
22	Great Tit	□
23	Blue Tit	□
24	Long-tailed Tit	6+
25	Magpie	□
26	Carrion Crow	□
27	Raven	2
28	House Sparrow	□
29	Chaffinch	□
30	Linnet	□
31	Goldfinch	□
32	Greenfinch	□

33	Bullfinch	2
34	Yellowhammer	□
35	Cirl Bunting	□

	<u>Butterflies</u>	
1	Clouded Yellow	4
2	Small Copper	□
3	Peacock	□
4	Red Admiral	□
5	Speckled Wood	□
	<u>Dragonflies</u>	
1	Golden Ringed	1
2	Hawker (sp) male	1
Report by Chris Marcol. pp Kev & Jacki Solman		

Dartmoor Birds Can Be Easy To Spot At Dawn

I don't know why, but when I occasionally drag myself out of bed and get up to Dartmoor for sunrise, I am always fascinated by how unwary the birds are when there are less people (and dogs) about.

I have been a fairly regular visitor to the moor since I moved to Devon Three years ago and have found birdwatching a challenge around the Haytor area during the day. Possibly because there are just so many visitors, but being a keen amateur photographer, I have recently started to visit just before dawn, in order to try and get one of those iconic sunrise shots that we all know and love.

On my first visit, I walked up Saddle Tor in the dark and was surprised at finding a small group of meadow pipits and a wheatear feeding on bugs from the cowpats within twenty feet of me, when normally they would stay at least three times that distance. Unfortunately I had no long lens with me and so couldn't get any meaningful photos. Other than a less than perfect sunrise.



Dartmoor sunrise. The sun would have been visible earlier and lower in the sky if there hadn't been a bank of cloud on the horizon.

My second visit saw me armed with a longer lens and I took the following shots from the saddle Tor car park, using my car for camera support. During the day, I don't think I could have got this close, or had the birds quite so relaxed.

I now have two reasons to get up at silly times of the morning. Only time will tell if they have any affect on my love of a warm duvet.



Text and photos Tony Utting

WeBS Counter Needed for Torbay South

All 80 or so Devon WeBS sites, and most sectors of the large sites, currently have counters, but at least one counter is still needed for Torbay. To make counting easier, the site has now been divided into three sectors. Torbay Middle (Preston to Goodrington) has a counter, and Torbay North (Preston to Hope's Nose) will probably have one soon, **but Torbay South (Goodrington to Brixham) remains vacant.** Hopefully one of the many birders who live in, or regularly visit, the area would be willing to spend a couple of hours each month counting and recording the birds for an important national survey? It might help to know that it's not essential to count gulls, and that the count doesn't have to take place on a fixed date each month. If anyone is interested, please get in touch. The 2021 Devon WeBS Report is available on request, and a summary of the 2020 report was published in the 2020 Devon Bird Report (pp 181–184). Further information on WeBS is also available on www.bto.org/webs.

Peter Reay (WeBS Local Organiser for Devon, excluding the Exe, Tav-Torridge and Tamar Estuaries)
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Upcoming Events Across The County

2022

Oct 24	09:30 – 13:00	East Devon Field	Emsworthy Gate Reserve. (Nr Saddle Tor, Dartmoor). Meet at small car park at SX744760 on B3387 (Haytor to Widcombe Road). AM only.	Map
Oct 27	09:30 – 15:30	Mid Devon Field	Fernworthy Reservoir and Plantation. Plan on morning and afternoon walks around the reservoir and forestry plantation. Crossbill, Siskin, Willow Tit possible. Bring packed lunch. Meet at the car park (pay & display) at SX669838. Leader : Helen Allin	Map
Nov 2	09:30 – 14:30	Mid Devon Field	Dawlish Warren. Meet at the first car park (pay & display) on the right at the mini rounabout before the tunnel entrance at SX978785. Leader: Nick Armstrong	Map
Nov 2	10:30 – 14:00	Plymouth Field	West Charleton Marsh for wetland and wildfowl. Meet in Marsh Lane, West Charleton at SX752426. (Can be very muddy footpath). Leader: John O'Connell-Davidson Tel: 07885536218	Map
Nov 8	19:30 – 21:00	Taw & Torridge Indoor	Talk by John Walters, the Secret Life of the Long-tailed Tit	Map

Nov 10	09:30 – 13:00	East Devon Field	Powderham Church - Turf. Meet at roadside near church at SX971843. AM only.	Map
Nov 14	19:30 – 21:45	Plymouth Indoor	Presentation by Ian Parsons, Seasonality – a personal account of nature through the seasons. Ian is a tour leader and author. The title of the presentation is also the title of his new book. This meeting will start with a brief AGM.	Map
Nov 16	10:00 – 13:30	Mid Devon Field	Roadford Reservoir. Meet at the layby near the hide at SX435930. An interesting mix of dabbling and diving ducks, the odd wader or two and the possibility of something unusual. Leader: Digby Greenhill	Map
Nov 21	19:30 – 21:30	South Devon Indoor	The annual cycle of the migratory Wood Warbler, understanding causes of decline. Speaker: Malcolm Burgess. Malcolm is a Principal Conservation Scientist at the RSPB Centre for Conservation Science, where he leads a range of mostly field- based projects, including many focusing on declining migratory birds. He will share the results from work by the RSPB Centre for Conservation Science, focusing on Wood Warbler migration and causes of decline, mostly undertaken in Devon. From monitoring nest predators, studying survival through colour marking, revealing migration routes through tracking, establishing habitat use in Africa and more this explores both the species ecology and efforts to diagnose the steep decline.	Map
Nov 28	09:30 – 13:00	East Devon Field	Parke, Nr Bovey Tracey. Meet at Nat. Park HQ car park at SX971843. AM only.	Map
Nov 29	10:00 – 14:30	Taw & Torridge Field	Fremington Creek. Meet at 10.00 am at Fremington Quay car park. SS517334. Leader: Steve Skirth (steveskirth@gmail.com)	Map
Dec 3	10:00 – 14:00	Plymouth Field	St John's Lake & River Lynher for waders & gulls. Meet on Marine Drive in Torpoint at SX438547. Move to Wacker Quay later for a walk along the Lynher and back to St John's Lake for high water. (Possible muddy walk along the river bank) Leader: Doug Herdson Tel: 01752405155/07910078599	Map

Dec 7	09:00 – 15:30	Mid Devon Field	Exminster Marshes and Mid Devon Branch Christmas Lunch. Expect a mix of waterfowl, waders and other birds. From A379 take Station Road past the Swans Nest Inn and over the hump-backed bridge to the RSPB car park on the right at SX953872. Christmas Lunch will be at the Swans Nest Inn. Leader: Nick Armstrong. Confirmation for lunch must be received by 30th October 2022.	Map
Dec 13	08:00 – 15:00	Taw & Torridge Field	Exe Estuary, BGM, Goat Walk and Powderham. SX971876. Meet at 8am at Barnstaple Leisure Centre car park, car share (parking fee). Tide time dependent. Leader: Kevin Wigley (email@kevinwigley.co.uk)	Map
Dec 13	19:30 – 21:00	Taw & Torridge Indoor	Talk by Philip Marlow, African Game Parks are not Just the Big 5	Map
Dec 15	09:30 – 13:00	East Devon Field	Escot Park, Talaton. Meet at car park at SY082981.	Map
