



Issue 5

Date July 2022

Devon Birds Update

Welcome to the Devon Birds newsletter. In this issue you will find a article from our Chairman, Nick Armstrong, on Co-operation in wildlife management, details of upcoming events and a report of a recent event held by Plymouth Branch. As well as an insight from Steve Hopper into the History of Red Kites and a call for more WeBS surveyors

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

Cooperation in Wildlife Management

Partnerships or teaming is one of the key initiatives in the new Devon Birds Strategy that is currently under review and scheduled for discussion at Council before distribution to all our members. Exponential benefits arise when like-minded conservation groups and individuals engage together in the conservation of wildlife.

The Cove rewilding project is one example of teaming together for the greater good. In this case, the League Against Cruel Sports (“LACS”) and a neighbouring landowner have cooperated in the creation of a thriving nature reserve from a once largely barren hill farm. The land has been allowed to rewild for the benefit of all wildlife. Devon Birds was involved at the start of the programme and is in the third year of monitoring the birdlife. While about 70 species of birds have been recorded, many are breeding including vulnerable and sensitive, sentinel type species such as Redstart, Tree Pipit, Meadow Pipit, Spotted Flycatcher and Barn Owl. Butterflies are spectacular. They can be found on their natural host plant species, sometimes in abundance. Recent sound recordings of churring crickets have unearthed the presence of Roesel’s Bush Cricket that has started to move into the southwest. There are also two species of Conehead Crickets. Clearly a success, for the project is expanding. Neighbouring landowners have recently agreed to join the partnership by contributing land to this cooperative arrangement. Devon Birds will continue to be on hand to record and monitor the bird species. Our results are captured on the BTO’s BirdTrack and by Devon Birds for the Devon Birds Report. Our relationship with LACS offers a mutual benefit. Recently, members were given the opportunity to join a guided tour of a LACS wildlife reserve in the Dulverton area.

Silvopasture is another interesting conservation minded project that is currently under trial at Elston farm near Coplestone in Mid Devon. In this case, cooperation comes in the form of a change in farm management practice that hopefully will benefit both livestock productivity and the biodiversity of natural species. Silvopasture is a technique that introduces tree forage for cattle. It is part of a twelve-year experiment to see effect on biodiversity and carbon capture. Fifty years of arable farming with small areas of pasture has impacted the biodiversity on the farm. Yet, with this initiative, the change may happen. The farm has engaged in a trial to determine the benefit that may arise from planting a mix of trees and shrubs, pollen bearing plants and bird seed. Hedges are being left uncut. It is hoped that a 12-year trial of this regimen will benefit the soil, livestock, ground drainage and climate, and ultimately the biodiversity of species. Devon Birds is in its second year of a monthly bird study. Our results are reported to the farm owner in cooperation with Farming Wildlife Advisory Group South West. Although it is way too early to determine the impact of the test, the change in land use is clearly attracting more birds to the farm. Approximately 60 species have been recorded to date. Again, our results are recorded on the BTO's BirdTrack and feature in the species totals recorded by Devon Birds.

Another bird study scheduled to start later this year is centred on the historic Fursdon Estate in Thorverton, Mid Devon. In this example, Devon Birds has been invited to work with the owners of the Estate through our contacts at Devon Wildlife Trust. We plan to survey and monitor the local bird life. History in this arrangement is evident. Devon Birds has conducted a number of bird counts at Fursdon since the 1950s. A glance at some of the results from past surveys indicates the loss of many resident and migratory breeding species. Hopefully, by cooperating in this programme with DWT, we can help to recognise and develop important wildlife corridors and identify the bird rich environments for future conservation.

Nick Armstrong, Chairman of Devon Birds.

Devon Birds (Plymouth Branch) Visit To Aylesbeare Common

MONDAY 4 JULY 2022

The dull morning was 'brightened' by getting the first of several sightings of Dartford Warblers within a short distance of the entrance to the RSPB reserve. Most birds were seen skimming over the gorse or disappearing into it, rather than perching in plain view for extended periods. That said it was still a treat for all 13 people taking part in this visit, to see this species. Linnets seem to have had a very successful year and were by far the most numerous of the 23 bird species seen. The heath was looking beautiful with the heather in flower and in the wetter, marshy areas there were sundews and bog asphodel. The warmer afternoon weather brought out a common lizard and a wide variety of moths, butterflies and dragonflies.

Species List:

Birds

Blackbird
Buzzard

Linnet
Meadow Pipit

Carrion Crow
 Chiffchaff
 Collared Dove
 Coal Tit
 Dartford Warbler: [see photo below](#)
 Great Spotted Woodpecker (juvenile)
 Greenfinch
 Herring Gull
 Jay
 Kestrel

Robin
 Siskin
 Stonechat
 Swift
 Treecreeper
 Yellowhammer: [see photo below](#)
 Whitethroat (heard)
 Wood Pigeon
 Wren



Images Chris Marcol

Reptiles

Common Lizard



Image Chris Marcol

Moths

Large Yellow Underwing
 Light Emerald

Butterflies

Small Pearl Bordered

Ringlet
 Small Heath
 Green-veined White
 Meadow Brown

Dragonflies

Golden Ringed: [see photo below](#)
 Emperor
 Common Darter
 Keeled Skimmer
 Common Blue Damselfly



Beetles

Green Tiger Beetle

REPORT WRITTEN BY M JOHNSON

Extra WeBS counters needed

The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) provides valuable data on waterbird numbers and distribution, both nationally, in Devon and more locally. Participation through monthly counts is (usually) enjoyable and provides counters with a local patch where regular seasonal events unfold and unexpected occurrences occasionally add excitement. In Devon, there are nearly 80 active sites, comprising estuaries, stretches of open coast, coastal marshes, a few sections of rivers and a great variety of leys, lakes, reservoirs, ponds and pits. Almost all have counters, but there are vacancies at the following sites: **Torbay** (Goodrington to Brixham, or part thereof); **Grand Western Canal** (Ayshford Bridge to Lowdwells Bridge); and **Taw-Torridge Estuary**.

Please contact me if you are interested or would like further information on WeBS. 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 peter.p.j.reay@btinternet.com. (Or for the Taw-Torridge vacancies contact **Chris Dee** on chris_w_dee@hotmail.com).

Sightings of Red Kites are Becoming more common in Devon



Image Steve Hopper

On the 12th June 2008 I had my first sighting of a Red Kite in the skies over Devon, it was a bird that I had always wanted to see here and I was even more delighted that I saw it in the sky over my home village of South Brent.

By 2013 members of Devon Birds were reporting Red Kite sightings at increasing levels on the societies web site.

So by 2022 the sight of Red Kites soaring over the County of Devon is at last becoming a common site, more so in the months of May and June.

The reintroduction of this species into the UK must rate as one of the most successful conservation stories in modern times. From 1989 Red Kites were introduced to four areas, the Chilterns, East Midlands, Yorkshire and the North-East, the original birds being brought in from the continent, the Chilterns introduction established well and rapidly producing enough young birds so that small numbers could then be used to establish introduction programmes into other parts of the country, the final project being at Gateshead in 2004.

I understand that Devon was considered as a site for one of the reintroduction projects but due to the apparent success of other introduction projects it was felt that Red Kites would arrive in and over the county in their own good time, all we need to do now is actually confirm that they are breeding here, to my knowledge that is yet to happen. (Yet Cornwall confirmed successful breeding by a pair in 2021)

Once widespread and numerous to the point of being one of the country's most abundant birds the Red kite was exterminated in England and Scotland during the 18th and 19th Centuries simply due to human persecution. A small population survived in Wales.

In 1989 the species became subject to a UK reintroduction programme, without doubt that programme has been an incredible success following the release in excess of 600 birds at nine locations since that time, the Red Kite had been largely absent from the skies of the UK over the previous 150 years.

Despite full legal protection in the UK Red Kites still suffer from illegal persecution and this factor has spoilt what in any terms is something we should be proud of, yet there still remains a core of people who due to their interests view all birds of prey as an unwanted problem.

In Scotland the Red Kite population suffers from ongoing persecution and the growth of the Scottish population has not matched that of other regions according to some studies, in balance Red Kites thrive in the dryer warmer areas of the home counties, the nests in these counties produce more young per year that go on to survive in better numbers than their northern relations, in turn these birds then breed at a younger age than the birds from colder wetter areas.

So it is likely that a number of factors come into play in relation to population density and colonisation of new areas, Red Kites are known to be a very social and sedentary species, while young birds will leave their natal area studies suggest that they return to the area that they were hatched in order to breed frequently close to the nest site where they were they started out in life.



Image Steve Hopper

in Devon it is always worth spending some time watching farmers ploughing a field or when harvesting hay or corn.

The danger to Red Kites from poisoning by second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides has been clearly identified in Britain, the importance of rats as a prey item and the habit of Kites to forage close to farm buildings (where rodent control is most frequently conducted by way of poisoned baits) make the use of such pest control methods a potentially serious problem to Kite populations.

It is known that Red kites in the past have ingested quantities of lead shot from having scavenged shot game birds, pigeons, and rabbits. Such species feature on a regular basis in the diet of the Red Kite (as does road kill and the variety of food that source provides) However the shooting industry has been promoting lead free shot for many years now and relatively few cases of lead poisoning have been actually confirmed in the UK so there is sometimes good news as well.

Kites and any large winged bird are vulnerable to electrocution on electrical lines, while this danger is well evidenced it is unlikely that anything will ever be done to negate this risk given the size of the network and the cost to make it safe to birds.

It has been observed that Buzzards (of which we have an abundance in Devon) can present a threat to young Red Kites, in truth many birds of prey are intolerant of another raptor in their territory or air space and such conflicts of nature can affect the first year survival of any bird of prey.



In the Chilterns Red Kites are clearly associated around human habitation and many local residents take great pleasure in feeding them, in turn you will read tabloid press reports of

“marauders from the sky” terrorising the population, at times giving simply outrageous advise to house holders to lock away their dogs, cats and pets in general, utter nonsense but believed by some!! Being familiar with humans providing food has led to reports of Red Kites stealing food from people in the same way as gulls do in some of our coastal areas, you of a ready food source.

The Red Kite has shown that despite the reasons that caused its historical decline, it is adaptable and can develop a self-sustaining population if given support and time, human interference is the main reason for the decline in many of our avian species so it is down to us to educate the ignorant and un caring and to encourage those who are a little more enlightened.

The prospects for Red Kites in the UK are now extremely good, with increasing numbers at most of the release locations.

Hopefully this has given a little insight into the Red Kite, there is a huge amount of information available on the internet, as ever you have to be careful to balance the reliability of any information and consider the source that supplied that article.

Steve Hopper

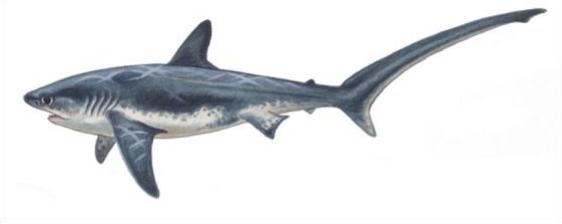
Upcoming events

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|--------|---------------|------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Jul 4 | 10:00 – 14:30 | Plymouth Field | Aylesbeare Common for heathland species including Dartford warbler, butterflies and dragonflies. Meet at Joney's Cross car park on opposite side of the Reserve entrance at SY056897. Leader: Mary Johnson Tel: 01752840397/07891844516 | Map |
| Jul 7 | 09:30 – 15:30 | East Devon Field | Venford Reservoir, Holne. Meet at car park at SX685712. AM/PM. Pre-booking required. | Map |
| Jul 7 | 20:45 – 22:30 | Plymouth Field | Cann Woods for Nightjar. A second visit with possible juveniles and adults on the wing. Meet at car park at SX547596. (Bring a torch and a Bat detector if you have one) Leader: Chris Marcol Tel: 07976359647 | Map |
| Jul 10 | 18:30 – 22:30 | Mid Devon Field | An evening walk to see and hear Nightjars in Cookworthy Forest. Also the possibility of Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Kestrel, Crossbill, Siskin, deer etc. Plan on a walk in the general area before settling at a vantage point to view the | Map |

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|--------|---------------|----------------------|--|---------------------|
| | | | Nightjars. The entrance to the forest is situated just north of Halwill Junction on the A3079. Meet at the car park and picnic area at SS417016. Leader: John Laws and Nick Armstrong | |
| Jul 12 | 09:00 – 14:00 | Taw & Torridge Field | Meeth Quarry for woodland birds, butterflies and dragonflies. 9am meet at Barnstaple Leisure Centre car park to car share (parking fee) or 10 am meet at Meeth Quarry DWT car park. SS539085. Leader: Kevin Wigley (email@kevinwigley.co.uk) | Map |
| Jul 18 | 09:30 – 13:00 | East Devon Field | Exminster Marshes. Meet at RSPB car park at SX954872. AM only. Pre-booking required. | Map |
| Jul 18 | 19:30 – 21:30 | South Devon Indoor | Seabirds and other wildlife of Lyme Bay. Speaker: Mike Langman. Mike is a renowned speaker, artist and enthusiastic birdwatcher, whose reputation for seabird identification is well established throughout the south west. Lyme Bay might not have the deep water or continental shelf edge pelagic species but it can offer some very exciting wildlife watching from land and boat. For the globally threatened Balearic Shearwater the bay is of international importance. Mike will talk through the species, identification pointers plus times of year and weather to make the most of any time in the field. | Map |
| Aug 15 | 16:30 – 19:30 | South Devon Field | PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF DATE. Birdwatching Walk - Sea watching at Berry Head. Leader Mike Langman. Mike is an experienced 'sea watcher' and he will lead the group, supporting the identification of the birds and other wildlife observed from this well-known viewing point. Email Jeff Hacon jeff.hacon@devonbirds.org by 12th August for further details. | Map |
| Aug 20 | 09:30 – 13:00 | Plymouth Field | Saltram and Blaxton Meadow. Identification for the less experienced and knowledgeable birdwatchers of early autumn migrants and resident birds. Meet at the Blaxton viewing station. Leader: John Lloyd Tel: 07811232206 | Map |

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|--------|---------------|--------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Sep 8 | 09:30 – 13:00 | East Devon Field | Dawlish Warren. Meet at end of main car park at SX980787. (Pay & display fee) AM only. Pre-booking required. | Map |
| Sep 15 | 08:30 – 14:00 | Plymouth Field | Seaton Wetlands for wetland birds. Car parking through Seaton Cemetery at SY248914. Leader: John O'Connell-Davidson Tel: 07885536218 | Map |
| Sep 19 | 19:30 – 21:30 | South Devon Indoor | Insight into breeding birds of the Arctic Circle. Speaker: Dave Scott. Dave is an artist by day, specialising in wildlife art primarily & portrait work. He is a ringer for the BTO, monitoring & ringing a range of birds including Merlins, Ouzels & waders species on the high fells. He also runs a bird rehabilitation centre and is a photography guide for clients in Africa. This talk is based around Dave's journeys into the Arctic tundra from Alaska to Svalbard & breeding birds encountered. Dave specialises in finding nests of these species many of which are rarely seen. | Map |
| Sep 20 | 09:30 – 15:30 | Mid Devon Field | Northam Burrows Country Park, Northam, Bideford. In Northam take Broad Lane to Burrows Lane and enter Northam Burrows Country Park. Park on the side of the road after crossing the small bridge over the Pill at SS451304. Bring packed lunch. Leader: Rich Hudson/Nick Armstrong | Map |
| Sep 26 | 09:30 – 13:00 | East Devon Field | Mutters Moor, Sidmouth. Meet at Peak Hill car park at SY109872. AM only. Pre-booking required. | Map |

Upcoming event with the South Devon Group on 18th July

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|  |  <p>South Devon Group Meeting The Courtenay Centre Newton Abbot TQ12 2QA</p> |
| <p>Seabirds and other Wildlife of Lyme Bay</p> <p>An illustrated talk by Mike Langman</p> <p>Monday 18th July 2022 @7.30pm</p> |  |

Members and Non-Members Welcome

Indoor meetings are held at the Courtenay Centre in Newton Abbot (near the Cricketfield Car Park) on the third Monday of the month in July, September, October and November 2022. All meetings start at 7.30pm and last about 2 hours, including a refreshment break.

Entry £3 for members and £4 for non-members including tea/coffee

Other Talks coming Soon in 2022

19th September – Dave Scott- Breeding Birds of the Arctic Circle

17th October – Nick & Sara D'Agorne Scotland's Birds from Highlands to Islands

21st November – Malcolm Burgess -The migratory Wood Warbler

Talks Planned for 2023

White Tailed Eagle Project. WWT Slimbridge - Bewick's Swans & Spoon Billed