



From the Chair – Anne Brenchley

We are in that changeover season when many of our summer migrants have finished breeding and are on the move to their winter quarters. Here in North Wales, migrating waders from breeding grounds further north have been passing through for several weeks. This is a really challenging time for identification as moulting adults and juveniles are often confusing.



The 2024 season has been very variable for our birds. Whilst we now know the true impact of Bird Flu' as Gannet has been added to the Welsh Birds of Conservation Concern Red list (See 'News' below), other species including Osprey are faring well and increasing in numbers. Our small birds, which have a short life span, can be devastated by a wet and cold May/June and Pied Flycatchers are still having mixed fortunes. Monitoring all these species is vital and huge thanks to all those involved, many of whom are volunteers.

Many thanks to those of you who responded to the members' questionnaire. The results were of great value and you have provided lots of wonderful suggestions and ideas for us to consider over the coming months. I was delighted to see such enthusiasm and ambition for WOS and what we could achieve in the future. Ambition and enthusiasm that the WOS team shares with you! But, and it is a big BUT . . . WOS is run solely by a small group of volunteers and, I'll be honest with you, we're running pretty much at capacity at the moment. If we are to grow, to realise our ambitions and to make a greater impact for Welsh birds and wildlife, we really do need some more hands on deck. We are currently short of one member of Council and another three members come to the end of their term next year. If you think you, or someone you know, might be able to help WOS by joining Council or taking on a specific task depending on knowledge/skills to help us, we would love to hear from you. My email address is chair@birdsin.wales

In the meantime, I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible our annual conference in Aberystwyth on 16 November. We are specifically highlighting local initiatives and those where volunteers can make a real difference. Talking of which, I'm extremely excited that WOS is launching a very special one-off grant in 2025 that we hope will help enable an ambitious conservation project here in Wales. Read on for more information.

Wishing you all 'good birding' this autumn!

Announcing our President's Special Award

We're delighted to announce our brand new, one-off grant called the 'President's Special Award'. At £4,000 this is the largest single grant we have ever offered in our history.

We're very grateful to Iolo Williams, WOS President, and wildlife photographer Gary Jones for giving us the opportunity to offer this grant. Every year, Gary hosts a charity fundraising evening with Iolo where a wildlife charity of Iolo's choice receives the proceeds of an auction and raffle of bird paintings, photographs and equipment. This year Iolo selected WOS as the event's beneficiary and, back in March, at a packed house at Dewi Sant, Ewloe, 300 wildlife enthusiasts raised an astonishing £4,000. It is this 'windfall' that we would now like to use to benefit birds in Wales.



Iolo sharing anecdotes about his career and wildlife experiences with Gary and the audience at Ewloe.

The criteria for this grant are the same as those for our current £1,000 Project Grant (<https://birdsin.wales/small-grant-scheme/>) and Community Grants (<https://birdsin.wales/community-grants-2/>) so a great variety of projects are eligible for support. Our hope is that the additional funding will enable the creation of a more ambitious project. **The closing date for applications is 31 January, 2025.**

In order to encourage applications, WOS can offer assistance with making an application, including advice and possibly an on-line workshop, although any assistance given by WOS will be on the understanding that such help does not guarantee a successful application. If you would like more information please register your interest by emailing: grants@birdsin.wales.

This is a great opportunity to make a difference – if you have any potential project in mind, please act now to take advantage of it. We look forward to hearing from you!

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Booking is now open for the 2024 Annual Conference!

Our 2024 Annual Conference will be held in Aberystwyth (same location as 2022 and 2023), on Saturday, 16 November. The conference, whose theme is **'Action for Birds/Gweithredu Dros Adar'** will showcase current project research across Wales by amateurs and professionals, with a focus celebrating community-based conservation projects. Full programme below.

0930 Registration and Coffee

1000 Welcome Anne Brenchley (WOS Chair)

1005 Our national survey and a possible re-introduction

- The WOS Rook survey Anne Brenchley
- Restoring White-tailed Eagles to SE Wales and the Severn Estuary project Sophie-lee Williams

1100 Morning refreshment break

1130 Game Birds

- A future for Black Grouse Anya Wicikowski
- Woodcock ringing – a dazzling success Arfon Williams

1230 Presentation of Awards and prizes Iolo Williams

- Lifetime Achievement / Student Research / Photography Competition

1250 Lunch

1400 BTO Cymru and RSPB Cymru Round-ups

1440 Community projects – with waders!

- Just how many Green Sandpipers winter in Wales? Daniel Jenkins-Jones
- Colour-ringed waders in Pembrokeshire Paddy Jenks

1530 Afternoon refreshments, raffle and Silent Auction

1600 Community Projects

- Swift action required Ben Stammers
- Farming with our birds Samantha Kenyon

1645 Reflections on the day Iolo Williams

1700 Close of Conference Anne Brenchley

WOS President Iolo Williams will present our Lifetime Achievement and Student Research Awards and he'll announce the winners of this year's WOS Photography Competition. For the first time, a 2025 WOS calendar with a selection of winning photographs will be on sale this year. All the usual stalls, the WOS raffle and an excellent lunch and light refreshments (included in your ticket price) will be there.



BSG | ecology



nhbs
wildlife | ecology | conservation

We're very grateful to BSG Ecology, Gower Ornithological Society and NHBS for sponsoring this year's conference.

Booking will be through Eventbrite as usual – go to <https://bit.ly/actionforwelshbirds>. Although costs have increased, we've tried to keep ticket prices as affordable as possible: **WOS members will pay £35 and non-members £40**. There are no discounted tickets for young birders, but **WOS Young Birder members are encouraged to apply for WOS Young Conservationist Bursaries** <https://birdsin.wales/wos-bursaries/> to help with the costs of tickets and transport.

News

The 2024 photo competition – last few days for entries

A final reminder to all photographers that entries close at midnight on **30th September**. Maybe you're one of those who didn't spot the earlier closing date this year – it's so that we can present awards at the Annual Conference and also produce a 2025 calendar featuring the best of the photos – this will be on sale at Conference.

We've had some great entries already, but sadly none yet from young photographers. There are bigger and better prizes this year, so go to <https://birdsin.wales/the-2024-wos-photo-competition/> for all the details and entry forms and get those pictures in on time!

Swift Petition

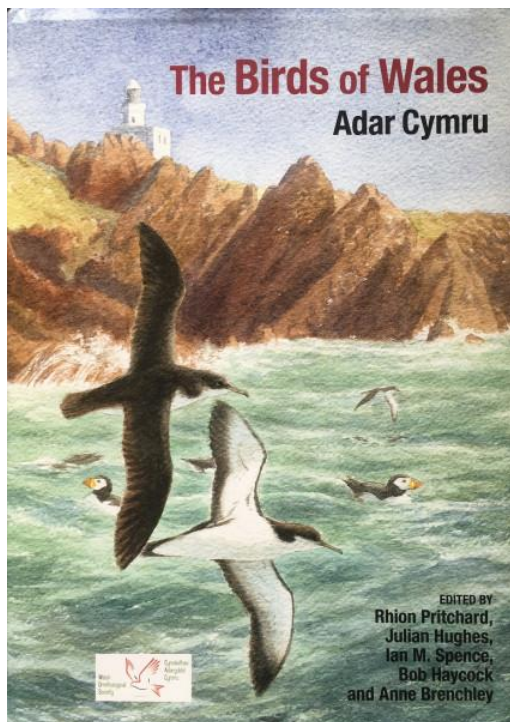
As publicised in our Summer Newsletter, WOS supports the Senedd petition calling on the Welsh Government to legislate to ensure Swift bricks are installed in all new buildings in Wales. **The petition needs 10,000 signatures by 5 December** to guarantee a debate on the issue. The petition currently stands at around 4,600 signatures. At the moment, the majority of signatures are from north or mid/west Wales, so come on south east Wales! But wherever you live, if you haven't already done so, please sign this petition and sign it soon and share it with friends and family. Diolch!

<https://petitions.senedd.wales/petitions/246264>

Grab a fantastic WOS bargain!

We were thrilled by the reviews for our *The Birds of Wales/Adar Cymru* book when it was published in 2021. Nation.Cymru described it as “nothing short of a monumental achievement” and the BTO said it was an “impressive” book of interest to the wider birding community and that “Welsh-based birders and ornithologists should not be without a copy”.

If you are one of those without a copy, you’ll be pleased to know that we’ve secured a small number of *The Birds of Wales/Adar Cymru* from the publisher which we will be selling at the bargain price of £20 (+ p&p). You’ll struggle to find a copy online nowadays for less than £60.



We’ll be bringing some copies along to our annual conference in Aberystwyth on 16 November, so bring £20 along with you and you’ll be able to take a copy home with you that day. They’ll be sold on a first come first serve basis. If you can’t make it to the conference but would like to get a copy of the book, please drop us a line to web@birdsin.wales

The next edition of *Milvus*



Talking of WOS publications, we’re delighted to say that the next edition of our journal, *Milvus*, available only to WOS members of course, is in production.

This edition will include two papers derived from the WOS 2022/23 National Breeding Rook Survey, in which many of you reading this newsletter will have participated. Using the data gathered for that survey, one paper will describe the status and distribution of Rook in Wales in 2022/23. The other will look at this survey as a case study for single-species volunteer surveys.

The journal will also include an all-important addendum to *Birds of Conservation Concern Cymru* reflecting the changing status of breeding seabirds in Wales. See p7.

Amongst the papers appearing in this edition will be ones on: the importance of the Ely valley to wintering Green Sandpiper; population-level impacts of wind farm collision risk on Welsh Red Kites and on forest bird communities in south Wales’ main forest types.

Two short papers will feature the history of a 1923 Golden Eagle record from Meirionnydd and on an artwork in a museum archive which is likely to depict the last breeding pair of White-tailed Eagles in south Wales.

If you’re working on a project, a local study, a dissertation or have an idea which you think could make a paper or a short communication for our *Milvus* journal, we would love to hear from you. For more information, please visit <https://birdsin.wales/milvus-submissions/>

Welsh Seabird Biosecurity Survey

Now that summer is over, many of you may be reminiscing on visits to seabird islands in Wales. Even if you have not visited a Welsh seabird island in recent years, your voice can help keep these islands safe.



RSPB Cymru has commissioned a seabird biosecurity survey on behalf of Biosecurity for Wales. Biosecurity involves protecting seabirds on islands by stopping stowaways like rats. This involves island checks, awareness campaigns and clever barriers to keep our seabirds safe.

Please share your thoughts in a quick survey (5 minutes) about your awareness of biosecurity measures on these island sanctuaries. By sharing your opinions and knowledge, you'll play a crucial role in shaping how we protect these majestic birds.

You can find the survey here <https://forms.office.com/e/ug2k396vEW> or by scanning the QR code below with your phone.

The survey is available in Welsh and English and is anonymous.



Cronfa Adnoddau Natur / Nature Resources Database

Mae Gwreiddiau Gwyllt, prosiect Mentrau Iaith Cymru a ariennir gan Grofna Dreftadaeth y Loteri, newydd lansio cronfa ddata Adnoddau Natur lle gallwch ddod o hyd i lu o adnoddau bywyd gwyllt Cymraeg rhad ac am ddim sy'n addas ar gyfer pawb o bob oedran. Mae ar gael ar gyfer grwpiau neu at ddefnydd personol. Er enghraifft, gallwch chwilio a lawrlwytho taflenni adnabod ar gyfer pob math o rywogaethau - o adar, mamaliaid, planhigion a thrychfilod i rywogaethau mwy heriol fel mwydod. Dewch o hyd i'r gronfa yma:

<https://www.gwreiddiaugwyllt.cymru/>

Gwreiddiau Gwyllt, a Mentrau Iaith Cymru project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, has just launched a Nature Resources database where you can find a whole host of free Welsh language wildlife resources suitable for different age groups. It's available for groups or for personal use. For example, you can search for and download ID sheets for all manner of species – everything from birds, mammals, plants and insects to more challenging species like worms.

<https://www.gwreiddiaugwyllt.cymru/>

Action for Nature

RSPB Cymru has recently relaunched its campaigns e-newsletter. This new incarnation is called *Action for Nature* and it now goes out every two weeks, rather than monthly. It includes information about RSPB Cymru's latest campaigns in Wales and the UK, useful tips about ways in which people can help wildlife in their own gardens and green spaces, and links to articles and trending activity online. This e-newsletter will share community campaigns and will feature updates on subjects such as the Sustainable Farming Scheme in Wales. To sign up, please visit <https://shorturl.at/2ePLo>

Throwing light on Storm Petrel movements

Storm Petrel ringing sessions carried out by the Teifi Ringing Group at Strumble Head are throwing up some interesting recoveries. Re-encounters this year include a bird ringed on Lundy in the Bristol Channel on 10 July 2023 recaptured on 11 July 2024 and a bird ringed on the Calf of Man on 24 August 2021 recaptured on 12 July 2024. A bird caught on 28 July with ring P14538 was found to have been ringed by Alderney Wildlife Trust at Longis Bay, Alderney on 18 June this year.

One bird ringed at Strumble on 22 June 2023 was recaptured at Illauntannig in the west of Ireland 379 days later on 5 July this year, the first re-encounter in South West Ireland for the group. Other Strumble-ringed birds have been recaptured on Skokholm and the Calf of Man.



A 'Stormie' at Strumble

The history recovery feature added to the BTO online reporting tool, DemOn (Demography Online), enables comprehensive re-capture information, as shown in the two individuals below:

Bird 1

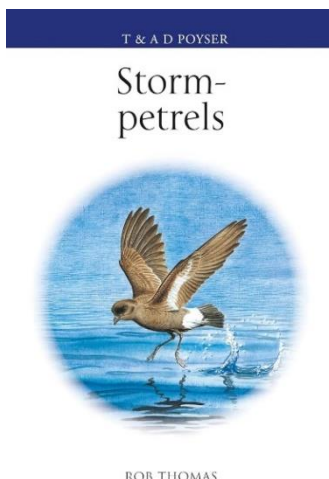
- 21/07/2020 Ringed at Bae y Rhigol, Bardsey
- 31/07/2021 Porth Iago, Llangwnnagl (Lleyn Peninsula)
- 22/06/2023 Porth Iago, Llangwnnagl
- 14/07/2024 Strumble

Bird 2

- 01/07/2022 Ringed at Little Saltee (south east Ireland)
- 18/06/2023 Gwennap Head, Porthgwarra, Cornwall
- 15/07/2024 Strumble

More information on this project can be found on the Teifi Ringing Group's blog (<https://teifimarsbirds.blogspot.com/>). Many thanks to Wendy James and Richard Dobbins of the Teifi Ringing Group.

New Storm Petrel Monograph



Talking of Storm Petrels, many congratulations to Dr Rob Thomas on the publication of his monograph, 'Storm-petrels' - the first definitive work on the European Storm-petrel and its relatives. Rob is a Senior Lecturer in Zoology at Cardiff University is one of the world's leading experts on the species. He is also a member of WOS! Rob has been involved in storm-petrel studies since he was 16 and his research now takes him to islands in Wales, Scotland and the Faroes to study storm-petrel breeding behaviour, and to the coasts of southern Portugal, where he examines their long-distance migration journeys. Published by Poyser, surely this book would make an ideal Christmas present for WOS members.

Thirty Years of BBS in Wales

*The Breeding Bird Survey completed its 30th year of fieldwork in 2023 and shows no signs of slowing down. We asked **James Heywood**, the BBS National Organiser, to share with us the history of this important survey here in Wales.*



Background

The BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey, or BBS for short, is widely regarded as the UK's premier bird monitoring scheme. It succeeded the Common Birds Census (CBC) as the primary way that we monitor our birds in the breeding season. CBC ran for 30 years before being superseded but, unlike its predecessor, BBS shows no sign of needing replacement. That very fact is a testament to the surveys 'founding fathers'; Stephen Baillie, Richard Gregory and Ian Carter all recognised that, whilst CBC was a very successful survey and in many ways the vanguard of the bird monitoring world, a new approach was needed.

That approach would centre on the need for a randomised site selection method, so making the survey – and its findings – more representative of all the UK's habitats, as well as lowering the effort required by volunteers. After a two-year Pilot Study, a protocol involving two 1km transects on randomly selected squares, with two survey visits a year and using the distance sampling method familiar to all BBS volunteers was arrived at. That converted the annual ask of volunteers from around 30–50 hours a year down to just under 10. At its peak, CBC had some 350 sites being covered each year, but now that figure for BBS is over 3,500. In Wales, there were no more than 10 CBC plots, now there are over 300 BBS squares being covered on an annual basis.

All this, coupled with a robust, yet simple statistical modelling framework has led to BBS often being viewed as the 'Gold Standard' monitoring scheme for birds, in the UK and right around the world. From the data collected, population trends for 119 (and counting) UK species are produced, which in turn form the cornerstone of the evidence base against which bird conservation in the UK and its four constituent countries is built. The Birds of Conservation Concern, National Indicators and The State of Nature all depend on BBS. Such is the success of BBS that all four countries have their own species' trends. At the last time of asking, 60 species have a dedicated trend for Wales alone.

When coupled with other sources, these provide the basis for many of our conservation policies – agri-environmental schemes being one prime example – but also allowing those same policies to be assessed. BTO, RSPB and JNCC have all worked together on studies showing the value of site designation for conservation. Welsh BBS data, alongside that from Scotland and Northern Ireland, where reporting of SSSI condition allows a better comparison, demonstrated that not only does the existence of a protected area benefit birds, but so too does improving its condition.



BBS data informed moving Rook from the Green to the Red List

In Wales, the impact that BBS has on policy and priority setting can be seen most directly with the Birds of Conservation Concern Wales 4, where Rook hopped straight from Green to Red-listed on the back of a 63% decline between 1995–2021. BBS data also led to the impetus behind the 2022 and 2023 All Wales Rook Survey, the first species survey to be ran and organised by WOS.

Welsh BBS – the survey in numbers

Nearly **800 volunteers** have contributed over **half a million records** to BBS in Wales. Those records have required nearly **14,000 individual visits** amounting to some **22,000 hours of recording time**, not to mention all the unrecorded travelling, climbing 500m just to get to the transects start or being thrown out of schedule by a suspicious landowner. A total **610 randomly selected squares** have been covered in the last 30 years out of a possible 630.

That number has grown too, just like it has across the whole of the UK. In its first year, 122 squares were covered by the early pioneers of Welsh BBS, with that accelerating to over 200 five years later, reaching the peak of 343 in 2015. Numbers have fallen a little since, with 300 squares surveyed in 2023 and some regions, such as the central part of Powys, are now rarely covered and are in need of BBS volunteers.

Each one of those BBS squares is valuable. So long as a square is covered for two separate years, the data collected will go forward to the calculation of those all-important population trends. Even so, some squares do stand out for one reason or another. An impressive 125 have been covered for 20 years or more, with 42 having 25 years to their name and eight having the full quota of 30.



Pied Flycatcher and Wood Warbler are UK species heavily dependent on Wales' remarkable Atlantic Oak Woodlands and other forest habitats.

BBS squares in Wales are hugely important to our understanding of the status of some of the UK's most iconic birds and landscapes. Two woodland birds, Pied Flycatcher and Wood Warbler, have the very great bulk of their UK population in Wales. Whilst neither have dedicated Welsh trends, their UK-wide declines signal two things: the great importance of Welsh woodlands for their conservation and the benefits to increasing coverage in Wales – more squares covered = greater sample sizes = more species trends = greater local impact.

As well as woodlands, there are the uplands. Welsh BBS surveyors are among the most intrepid, with several in the north-west with transects over 700m. One of the highest, SH6623, includes the summit of Diffwys on the Cambrian Way, whereas SH5954 covers the western flank of Yr Wyddfa, circuiting around Llyn Coch, with Dipper, Raven and Goosander for good measure. Both these, and a handful of other upland squares, are available. If you are up for a challenge, get in touch with the BBS team. With the growing interest in the fate of our uplands and its birds, Welsh BBS squares again are up there, if you'll excuse the pun, in terms of aiding our understanding and driving policy changes.

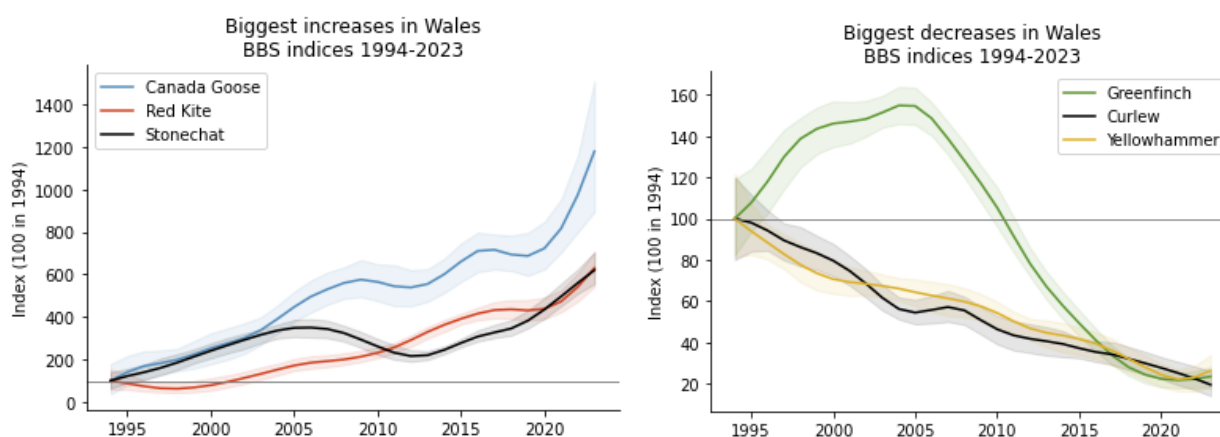
Welsh BBS – the birds by numbers

First bird: A Chiffchaff (probably) on the Pembrokeshire Coast on 7th April 1994 at around 0630h by Peter Tithecott. By a quirk of the site selection system, the ‘allocated square’ is actually in the sea! For 30 years, SM8113 (where the only bit of land is Stack Rocks, more appropriate for the Seabird Monitoring Program than BBS) has persisted.

Most recorded (approximate total counts): Carrion Crow (77,800), Blackbird (74,125), Jackdaw (74,050).

Rarest. Thirteen species have been seen on just one occasion in Wales, including a Woodchat Shrike and Marsh Warbler (both 1997 - Pembrokeshire), Garganey (2021 – Anglesey), Red-backed Shrike (Anglesey – 2023) and Spotted Crake (Anglesey – 2006). The Spotted Crake is the only one to have been recorded in the UK on a BBS survey.

Trends. The early reports reported trends on just over 50 species. In 2023, 60 species have a dedicated Welsh trend, a marker of growth in coverage.



The species with the biggest increases and decreases in Wales over the thirty years of BBS

Welsh Surveyors

Whilst BBS is undoubtedly a numbers game, it is also, fundamentally, about people – the citizen in Citizen Science. It is rarely fair, when considering that every contribution to a great ‘machine’ like BBS is valuable, to single out individuals for their contributions. However, a small number of volunteers present themselves for applause.

Andy King. Eighth in the all-time list of visits completed (215) and the highest of any surveyor in Wales and over the full 30 years of surveying covering 16 different squares. As well as this, he also squeezes in being the Regional Organiser for Brecknock.

Heather Coats. Sixty-three visits to two squares in Glamorgan, including SN8003 which she has covered for the full 30 years. One transect runs along the Sarn Helen Roman Road. It is unknown how many other BBS transects also use Roman Roads.

John Lloyd. Another ‘BBS lifer’, covering 156 visits on nine squares in Carmarthenshire and Brecknock, including SN9657 (across the Craig Chwefri) for 18 years. John’s BBS experience of BBS featured in WOS’ Summer 2024 newsletter.

Jerry Lewis: Recently retired and the completer of 57 visits during all 30 years, including SO3113 (Ysgyryd Fach, the Roman Fort of Gobannium).

Jim Vale: Tenth in the all-time list of visits (208) to some 16 squares in Cardiganshire and Brecknock.

The future

BBS has successfully been the bedrock of bird monitoring in Wales and the UK for 30 years and there is no hint that it will stop anytime soon. Whilst it has been the benchmark for consistency at every level – volunteers returning year after year, the same time, same place, and with analytical methods that have stood the test of time, BBS has had to evolve. It has incorporated many ‘sub-schemes’, the most recent incarnation being the Upland Rovers. Where will BBS be in another 30 years, particularly in Wales?

Given the success of the Upland Rovers approach, which has benefited Scotland in the main, it is very likely that more ‘holiday squares’ (to coin a phrase from my colleagues in Butterfly Conservation) will become available in Wales, precisely to tackle the importance of covering some of Wales’ harder to reach uplands, not to mention riverine species like Dipper, another species that depends a great deal on Wales. And what of the greater use of automated sound recording? This too will have to become part of the armoury of our national monitoring schemes, whether as part of BBS or alongside it. With Welsh woodlands being such an important habitat, you can see the value of acoustic recording in habitats where sound is so crucial for detection.

These technological and analytical developments are exciting and have the capacity to provide yet more and better information on our wildlife. What is certain is that BBS will always be about its volunteers. If you think you have the skills and would like to be part of the next 30 years of BBS, then we’d love to hear from you; contact the BBS team on 01842 750050 or bbs@bto.org.

The 2024 WOS Membership Survey – your feedback

We’re very grateful to the 83 members who responded to the membership survey we conducted in June. This represented about 20% of our membership and the sample largely reflected the age, gender and geographical distributions of WOS members, though the Cardiff area was slightly under-represented.

You gave us much food for thought, as well as encouraging support for the WOS Annual Conference, current WOS publications and the recent all-Wales Rook survey. However, although over two thirds of respondents had attended at least one Conference, and all of these had found Conference useful, stimulating and enjoyable, there were some differences of opinion about its timing and location.

Of those who had never attended a Conference, twenty cited the difficulty of travelling to Aberystwyth (though an almost equal number wanted to keep the Conference there) and seventeen found the time of year difficult. We’ll be looking at other suitable locations which may be more convenient for some members and considering the timing, in the light of the fairly crowded UK-wide ornithological conference calendar.

Comments on the WOS conference

'I think that the annual conference is fantastic. I have only been a member for the last 2 years, but both conferences have impressed me no end. The whole operation is very slick and professional'

'As a new member I attended my first conference in 2023. I found it an excellent event. Very well organised, good speakers, relevant topics, great venue. Very importantly I felt it was welcoming. I cannot think of any improvement necessary.'

'Aberystwyth is an excellent venue with excellent facilities and is accessible for people living in either the North or South of Wales'

'Return to the practice of moving it around the country so that it gives the opportunity for more people to attend, even if less frequently'

'Hold it in South Wales more frequently'.

'Be interesting to hear what WOS grants are achieving'

'Something on helping members become more engaged in (understanding) and influencing policy (e.g. Nature Positive Bill)'

Almost all respondents enjoyed WOS publications, especially the Welsh Bird Report and *Milvus*. Under half of you perused the Annual Report on Scarce and Rare Birds in Wales, possibly because they were not interested in rarities, but more likely because it is only available online and not in print copies.

What should WOS do more of?

- Workshops, outings, survey techniques
- Site visits with a WOS guide and educational talks. More expert evenings (Iolo Williams etc.)
- Workshops would be good. ID and survey techniques
- Bird identification training events
- Campaigning
- Campaigning and surveying to establish status of Welsh birds
- Campaigning on key issues which affect birds
- Speaking up for bird conservation
- Influence policy
- Conservation/active conservation
- I would like to know more about how WOS uses its finances to action on the ground conservation
- Species surveys
- All Wales species surveys
- More surveys or research into species of importance in Wales that e.g. BTO are not covering in Wales
- More single species surveys, use WOS's platform as the only Welsh based organisation fully committed to the conservation of birds in Wales to hold Welsh government to account on environmental issues i.e. 30x30 and pushing them not to roll back on agri-environment commitments.

You were all aware of current WOS activities and projects and had participated in some or all of them. There was a range of comments on what WOS should be doing more of, grouped around workshops, campaigning, conservation, species surveys and raising our profile.

Whilst it's clear that a number of members would like to see greater WOS activity, it must be remembered that WOS is a relatively small organisation, managed entirely by volunteers with no paid staff and relatively limited resources. We actively support and publicise BTO Cymru and RSPB Cymru activities, which include survey techniques and ID workshops. We do a fair amount of active conservation campaigning, often in liaison with RSPB and BTO but could do more – it's often the lack of resources that limits us.

Thank you again for your responses and comments. We will be reviewing subscription rates and establishing a new five-year strategy in 2025 and will consider carefully what you have told us.

Gannets Move Into the Red

A one-off review of breeding seabirds undertaken by the RSPB on behalf of Natural Resources Wales (NRW), the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and WOS has resulted in Gannet being added to the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern in Wales (BoCCW) for the first time.

Grassholm, a small island 11 miles off St Davids Head in Pembrokeshire, had been home to up to 34,491 pairs of Gannets in 2022. It's one of two Gannet colonies found in Wales and was the third largest in the UK. Prior to 2022, Grassholm held just under 10% of the world population of Gannets. However, a census carried out in July 2023 by RSPB Cymru and funded by NRW, showed that the number of Gannets nesting on the island had plunged dramatically. In 2022, 34,491 pairs were recorded on the island, but that fell to 16,482 pairs last year - a 52% reduction. The population crash was due to deaths caused by the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (bird flu) outbreak at the colony.

But what of the 2024 breeding season? Julian Hughes, RSPB Cymru's Head of Species reported on his Bird Notes blog (<http://www.birdnotes.wales/blog>) that there was no sign of bird flu in any UK seabird colonies this year, which was good news for the pioneering Gannet colony on Ynys Badrig off the north Anglesey coast. Last year, there were concerns that the virus could extinguish establishment of this, the second Welsh breeding site. Photos show several well-grown chicks on the island and at least one adult with a black iris, rather than the usual pale blue. This individual appears to have survived the flu. Research by the RSPB in Scotland found that 78% of black-eyed Gannets had antibodies for the H5N1 strain of the virus.



A Gannet with a black iris

This one-off update to *Birds of Conservation Concern Cymru* will be published in our journal *Milvus* and it confirms that Wales remains the stronghold for breeding population of Manx Shearwater, with up to 64% of the global population. The species however remains on the Amber List. Encouragingly, Black Guillemot moves to the Green List because of increased numbers in North Wales.

Following a similar comprehensive population assessment, the recently published *UK Birds of Conservation Concern*, sees five species of seabird being added to the Red List: Arctic Tern, Great Skua, Great Black-backed Gull, Common Gull and Leach's Storm Petrel.

A Remarkable Ringing Story

The value of colour-ringing was highlighted by a recent astonishing find by Caroline Pickett. On 19 June, Caroline was at the Gann estuary in Pembrokeshire when she found and photographed this Curlew Sandpiper with a black leg flag 'MAB'.



With help from the International Wader Study Group and Dr Balachandran of the Migratory Bird Monitoring Trust in India it transpired that the bird, an adult female Curlew Sandpiper, had been ringed on 27 November 2022 in Puthalam Saltpan, Kanyakumari district at the southernmost tip of the Indian mainland – a distance of 8,794 km from the Gann in direct flight.

Curlew Sandpipers observed in Wales are mainly seen during the autumn migration, the largest number of these being juveniles seen in September so to find an adult bird in June is very unusual.

If you find a colour-ringed bird of any species, please make sure you report it. You never know, you too could be responsible for an amazing story like this. To find out how and where to report your colour-ringed bird, please visit the **European Colour-ring Birding website here** <https://cr-birding.org/> and click on 'Info Field Observer>Find a Colour-ring Project'.



MAB's ringing site in India and the Gann Estuary, Pembrokeshire

Thanks to David Astins for his help with this article and congratulations Caroline for getting the photograph that was able to clinch the all-important colour ring code. Many thanks for sharing it with us!

Our youngest photo competition entries . . . so far!

Our photo competition is open to birders of all ages of course, but it is particularly pleasing when we get entries from young birders.



Here are two of the youngest entrants we've received over the years into the competition's Young Photographers section. I'm sure you'll agree that both images are absolute stunners!

The photo to the left is 'Kingfisher' by **Tomos Roberts, aged 6**. The photo below is 'Swallow' by **Jamie Smart, aged 7**.

Do you know of any young wildlife photographers? If you do, please encourage them to take part on our Photography Competition. It's open to anyone aged 21 years or under.

Winners receive NHBS vouchers worth £100 to the winner, £75 for second place and £50 for third place.

But tell them to hurry, the closing date for this competition is on **30 September**.

More information about the competition can be found here: <https://birdsin.wales/the-2024-wos-photo-competition/>



Experiences from the 2024 BTO Cymru Welsh Bird Camp

*The BTO is doing some fantastic work with young people as part of its Youth Strategy. Amongst the activities it has organised are Bird Camps in each of the UK's four countries. This summer a Camp was held again at Stackpole in Pembrokeshire and here, three of its participants - **Ionothan Poleg, Finn Whately and Rowan Peters** – share with us the exciting experiences they had that weekend.*

On a weekend in late July, we had the opportunity to participate in the BTO Cymru's Welsh Bird Camp. We signed up not knowing any other birdwatchers our age, having found out about the event mostly through our own connections with the BTO, and desperately wanting to connect with any others with the same passion. 14 of us travelled from across England and Wales to enjoy the beautiful scenery and amazing wildlife that this corner of South West Wales had to offer.

Friday

On our first evening at the camp, we had an incredible chance to meet the famous wildlife filmmaker Hamza Yassin. We had fascinating conversations with him about our love of the natural world and excitement for the weekend ahead. Later that night, we went with Bob Haycock, the county bird recorder for Pembrokeshire, to observe a Greater Horseshoe bat roost. Hamza and the BBC were there filming at the roost and we had the chance to see them filming a documentary as well as seeing the bats.

The bat roost was in a clock tower and, as the night drew in, we saw hundreds of bats leaving the roost. It was a sensational and unforgettable experience! The total count of bats leaving that night was just over 1,100. Greater Horseshoe bats are one of the largest bat species in the UK. This colony has been growing rapidly recently and is the largest of three in Wales, the highest count ever recorded at this roost.

After most of the bats had left the roost, we went for a walk near Bosherton Lakes. We had bat detectors with us, which are devices that convert the bats' echolocation calls to within the frequency range of humans. We listened to the calls of many different bat species, including Noctule bats, which are one of the largest bats in the UK, Common Pipistrelles and Daubenton's bats, which we saw feeding over the water on the lake.

Our first evening at camp was unforgettable. Meeting wildlife filmmaker Hamza Yassin and observing a Greater Horseshoe bat roost was a highlight. Watching bats emerge from their roost while the BBC filmed a documentary was incredible. This experience truly displayed the area's remarkable biodiversity.

Saturday

The next day, we woke up early in the morning and went down to open up a moth trap. This activity was also led by Bob Haycock and his wife Annie who, as well as being very knowledgeable on bats and birds, also happened to be expert in identifying the local moth species. Despite the heavy rain



Finn and Ionathan on their way to Skomer

that greeted us, the trap was literally bursting with moths. Whilst moths are considered by many to be small, brown, boring creatures, this trap proved that wrong. There were many species such as the large, straw yellow Swallowtail moth; the intricately patterned green Brussels Lace moth and the Rosy Footman being bright orange. This workshop really opened our eyes to the wonder of invertebrate life and helped inspire many of us who had not had the chance to experience this before.

Because the weather outside was looking miserable the next day, after breakfast we had some indoor workshops. Bob taught us about the Guillemots that inhabited the local cliffs, helping us learn more about this coastal species, followed by a workshop about the POMS – the UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme. This helped us understand how to carry out a pollinator survey and help contribute to citizen science. Finally, we had another workshop on bird songs led by another volunteer, helping us know how to describe birdsong both verbally and visually. Later, we had another chance to socialise with our newfound like-minded friends.

After lunch the weather seemed to be clearing up, so we proceeded to take a walk to the nearby coastline. We saw good views of many Choughs, a local rare bird species that many of us had not had the opportunity to encounter before. We also saw other unusual local species such as Ravens, Mediterranean Gulls, Rock Pipits, and even hundreds of Manx Shearwaters flying past the coast. We also saw a lot of invertebrate life by the cliffs - dragonflies and many Six-spotted Burnets being crowd favourites. This was a fun way to experience the local birdlife, many of us having seen lifers that we had never seen before.

After some evening socialising, we had the opportunity to relax, socialise and toast some marshmallows over a fire, reminiscing over our previous activities and looking forward to the day ahead.

Sunday

With the wake up call this time being at 5:30 the camp leader came round playing some loud songs to wake us up. Then, after quickly packing up the last bits and pieces and having a quick breakfast we set out, excitedly, to our bird ringing destination - where a group of ringers very welcomingly showed us the work they do, and gave us a demonstration. Although one or two of us had ringed before, most people had never experienced it, and it was a delight to release some of the birds that we caught and ringed. Some of us were lucky enough to actually ring a bird. Some of the birds we caught included Sedge, Willow and Reed Warblers, Blackcaps, Whitethroats, Wrens, Bullfinches, Chiffchaffs and more. One of the many amazing things that we learned that day was many ways to identify between Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers. Chiffchaffs have emargination on feathers 3 to 6 whilst Willow Warblers have it on 3 to 5. The location of the ringing site was an old industrial site near the Alero oil refinery which had been turned into a marsh and a nature reserve.



Camp participants were shown how to identify Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler in the hand

After that we got on the minibus to go to Martin's Haven for a boat trip around Skomer island, which everyone was super excited about. In the harbour as we waited for our boat to arrive, we watched some Rock Pipits, Skylarks, Swallows and Cormorants. As we set off the excitement began to grow, the swell rocking the boat peacefully and the sun shining, creating a spectacular setting. Some of us had not seen any seabirds and many people were very excited about seeing the Puffins and other iconic seabirds.

As we came into Jack's Sound, we started to see Gannets and Great Black-backed Gulls in front of Skomer and Middleholm. Then as we approached Skomer we saw our first Guillemot and soon Razorbills followed suit. As we entered some of Skomer's many coves, Fulmars and Kittiwakes started to appear. Everyone was amazed by the sounds and smells of the colonies in the cliffs, even if it was late in the season and most of the breeding birds had left. We had great views of a Peregrine perched and then later flying back to the cliffs. We were also treated to a Curlew flying past. Then to everyone's joy a friendly visitor arrived. A very brave Herring Gull who knew where they could get a morsel or two. It was so brave that it even stood on people's heads and even landed some of our shoulders!

Through the very joyful boat ride we came across some very sobering facts. A near island, Grassholm, a huge gannet colony that looked like it was snow-capped but it was just all the guano. In recent years due to avian influenza the population has halved. Kittiwakes can only feed in the first few centimetres of the sea, and as of global warming their favoured prey now live just a few centimetres deeper than they did. As a result, from 1991 their world population has declined from 1.8 million pairs to around only 600,000 pairs by 2020.

We all thoroughly enjoyed the boat ride a lot, and afterwards we sat down in the car park to have lunch. Surprisingly, it was rather nice with the variety of insects and flowers, with Swallows feeding just over our heads.

Then it was time to head back to Stackpole, get our things and go but, before left, we gave a presentation to the parents. In this we talked about what we did, learned and enjoyed, as well as showcasing some of the art and other things we had been doing, such as writing A to Z lists of many groups of birds such as warblers. This activity made us all laugh at points and was enjoyed a lot by all. Then it was time to go. Although everyone was sad to leave, we were very happy about what an amazing experience we had and all the new friends we had made.



Camp members travelled to Martin's Haven to catch the boat for Skomer

Bird camp will be something none of us will ever forget. Having not met almost anyone else who shared our passion, it took only minutes for us to have a group of great friends. Coupled with the fact that some of us had never been to Pembrokeshire before, the whole experience was life changing and gave us a range of opportunities that we would have not had previously. We would strongly recommend the camps to any young person who has a passion for the natural world, and who would like to connect with others with the same passion.

WOS Grant News: the Welsh Ringing Course 2024

*WOS was very pleased to offer a grant to help fund this year's Welsh Ringing Course which was held over the long weekend of 6-9 September. Despite some very challenging weather conditions, it was a very successful event. **Owain Gabb** of the Gower Ringing Group tells us more.*

The Welsh Ringing Course was first hosted by Gower Ringing Group in 2015 and this was the eighth running of it. We were delighted to welcome ringers from groups all across south Wales, the west of England, Northumberland and Ireland. One of the objectives of the course is to make ringing permit assessments of a new generation of ringers. Seven of this year's twelve attendees were considered for permit upgrades with the remainder attending for more experience towards mist netting endorsements. Eight ringing trainers were present for the duration of the weekend to make these assessments.

The itinerary included daytime mist netting and (attempts at) whoosh netting at Oxwich Marsh, spring trapping in the intertidal zone at Overton and dazzling of waders at Whiteford Burrows and Weobley on the Burry Inlet. Chris Redfern delivered talks on aspects of Arctic Tern ecology, including the results of satellite tagging and what it had revealed about tern migration, and the (possibly counter intuitive) positive effects of visitor activity on the Farne Islands on tern productivity. These talks showed how ringing efforts can lead to projects that significantly improve our ecological knowledge of a species and were very well received.

The course was hugely weather affected. While wind speed was (thankfully) relatively low on all days but the Monday, heavy rain and regular showers severely limited and curtailed our activities on the Friday and Saturday respectively, and led to a late start on the Sunday. To illustrate the extent of the rain, there was a flood warning issued for the Ilston Brook, which runs past the centre we were staying in. The Brook duly rose, but it was the flow of water down the road, which became a raging torrent and flooded the car park of our lodgings (partially submerging and damaging several cars belonging to participants) that was the most dramatic result of the weather. The following morning the South Gower road was littered with deep pools and abandoned cars.

A total of 412 birds of 37 species were processed (as compared with 853 birds of 34 species in 2023). The difference in the overall number of birds between years points to the effect of the weather. However, the tides were more favourable for catching waders in 2024 than in 2023, and a break in the weather on Sunday evening provided an opportunity to target them.



Tony Cross (trainer) and 'Team 1'

A summary of birds ringed during the weekend is in the table below:

Species Name	Ringed	Recaptured	Total
Blackbird	2	2	4
Blackcap	52	2	54
Blue Tit	18	17	35
Cetti's Warbler	4	4	8
Chaffinch	12	5	17
Chiffchaff	34	2	36
Curlew Sandpiper	1		1
Dunlin	25		25
Dunnock	3	5	8
Garden Warbler	2		2
Goldcrest	12	2	14
Goldfinch	5	5	10
Grasshopper Warbler	3		3
Great Spotted Woodpecker		3	3
Great Tit	1	6	7
Greenfinch	9	2	11
House Martin	9		9
Kingfisher	2		2
Little Stint	1		1
Long-tailed Tit		1	1
Meadow Pipit	2		2
Pied/White Wagtail	1		1
Reed Bunting	1	1	2
Reed Warbler	22	13	35
Ringed Plover	55		55
Robin	7	12	19
Rock Pipit	1		1
Sedge Warbler	12	3	15
Siskin	4	3	7
Stonechat	1		1
Swallow	2		2
Tree Pipit	2		2
Turnstone	2		2
Wheatear	1		1
Whitethroat	2		2
Willow Warbler	11		11
Wren	1	1	2
Grand Total	322	89	411

Daytime Mist Netting

Mist netting sessions were held at Oxwich on three of the four days. Mist nets were set in habitats including reed bed, fen and damp scrub. Unfortunately, unprecedented levels of rainfall on the Friday night meant that a good proportion of the available net rides had several feet of water in them on the Saturday and Sunday: of the 760 m / ~ 2500 feet of net ride we had ready, approximately a third were very challenging or impossible to use. An added challenge was that the weather seemed to have led to birds clearing out of the area, resulting in atypically quiet mist netting sessions.

The most commonly captured species during mist netting sessions was Blackcap, with 52 birds ringed and two recaptured. It appears to have been a less productive year for the species than in 2023 (over 150 Blackcaps were captured during the equivalent course and the numbers throughout the later summer and early autumn were considerably higher). Of note were two Kingfisher, three Grasshopper Warbler, two Garden Warbler (not a bird we catch in number in Gower), two Tree Pipit and nine House Martin. The latter were tape lured into mist nets when the cloud base dropped in the late morning and they began to forage over the marsh. Reed, Sedge and Cetti's warbler were all caught in small numbers (peak

passage of the former two long distance migrant species is over – the latter is a resident that undertakes within-UK dispersive movements in the autumn). Despite daily passage of Grey Wagtails overhead, we could not attract them down into our nets, which was disappointing.

Unfortunately, there was very little passage of pipits evident. We were not able to lure them into our whoosh netting area (this had proven successful in 2023), with the two Tree Pipit and two Meadow Pipit captured on the course both being in mist nets. Participants were talked through the technique by Chris Jones, who has used it in recent years to capture large numbers of linnets (as part of a BTO Recapture Adults for Survival project) and whose recent whoosh net captures include Chough.

Spring Trapping

Spring trapping was undertaken on the storm beach at Overton on the Sunday afternoon. The session was led by Miguel Lurgi, who is doing a population study of Rock Pipits in Glamorgan.

One Rock Pipit was captured and colour-ringed, with a White Wagtail, a Wheatear and a Robin the other captures while participants were present.

Wader Dazzling

For many of the participants the highlight of the course was dazzling waders. Two teams went out on the Sunday night. Team 1 went to the grazing marsh at Weobley, with Tony Cross leading the dazzling effort, while Team 2 went to the shingle ridge at Berges Island / Whiteford Point with Ed O'Connor leading.

The results were excellent, with a combined total of 55 Ringed Plover, 25 Dunlin, a Curlew Sandpiper and a Little Stint captured. The number of Ringed Plover caught comfortably exceeded our total for the species in any previous session / year. Both Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint are very infrequently captured in Wales, with the most recent available BTO data indicating 14 captures of the former and three of the latter in 2022.



A 1st winter Curlew Sandpiper – one of the star birds of the course

Participants were given the opportunity to try dazzling, with many successfully capturing birds using the technique. In accordance with BTO protocols birds were held in pens and ringed under (subdued) red light prior to their release.

Acknowledgements

Feedback on the weekend from attendees was very positive. Despite weather conditions that were challenging, forecasts that changed rapidly and often didn't reflect conditions on the ground, and a constant resulting need to reassess and change plans, everyone remained upbeat over what was a very tiring weekend.

We would like to thank the Welsh Ornithological Society for grant funding towards the course. We try and keep the charge for the course as reasonable as possible (so as not to exclude those with limited financial means), and this funding together with the course fee has allowed us to largely cover our costs. We are also hugely grateful to the Gower Society for their ongoing support to our efforts at Oxwich, and the contribution this makes to allow us to continue to train many of the next generation of ornithological data gatherers and researchers in South Wales.

White-tailed Eagle Study and a Kenfig Connection

*There's a lot of work being done in Wales on White-tailed Eagles at the moment. Sophie-lee Williams will be giving a talk at this year's WOS Conference on the potential of restoring White-tailed Eagle to south east Wales and **Lucy Rowley** is currently conducting PhD studies on the species at Cardiff University. We asked Lucy to tell us a bit more about her work.*

I am studying the genomic monitoring and spatial analysis of reintroduced White-tailed Eagles on the British Isles, supervised by Dr Frank Hailer and Dr Rob Thomas. My research investigates the genomics of White-tailed Eagles on the British Isles and across the entire Eurasian distribution, in particular the interplay of genetic drift, mutation, selection, gene flow on local gene pools and adaptation. My work aims to provide insights into the evolutionary history of the species, and to inform on the genetic health of reintroduced and other bottlenecked populations. To date, there has been no comprehensive genetic monitoring of the reintroduced population in the British Isles, raising questions about their genetic diversity and internal relatedness.



(Left) Lucy looking down the scope at a pair (right) of White-tailed Eagles on the Isle of Wight

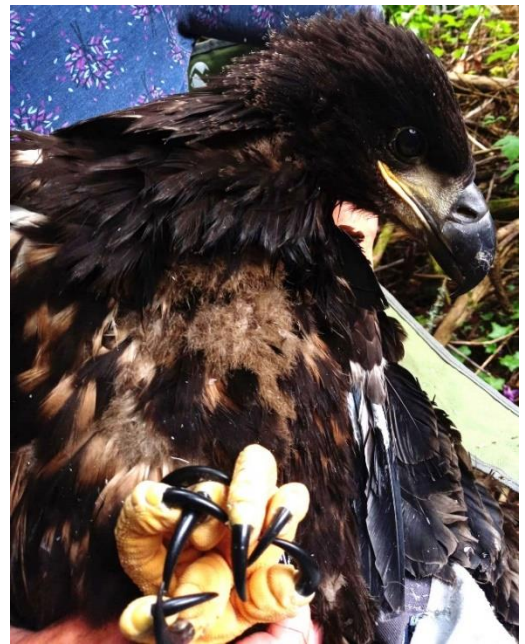
I am also studying the spatial movements of White-tailed Eagles that were reintroduced to the Isle of Wight, to determine what habitats the individuals are utilising across the British landscape. As White-tailed Eagles are not currently a breeding species in Wales, I hope that my findings will influence the anticipated introduction to Wales.

Historically, White-tailed Eagles were a breeding species across all of Britain including Wales, but the species became extinct in the early 20th century due to human persecution. However, huge conservation efforts led to the first successful reintroduction to the British Isles in 1975, where eagle chicks were collected from Norway and translocated to Scotland. Since then, there has been a huge effort to restore the species to the British Isles, there are now >150 breeding pairs in Scotland, England and Ireland.

The restoration of Welsh White-tailed Eagles is being led by Eagle Reintroduction Wales (<https://www.eaglereintroductionwales.com>), who are also a partner on my PhD. Working with Eagle Reintroduction Wales has given me the chance to work with the public at county shows and engagement events, to determine and hopefully influence perceptions of a White-tailed Eagles reintroduction in Wales. This is a great opportunity for me to engage and discuss the reintroduction with the public, and hear their opinions on the project.

During my PhD, I have been lucky enough to join White-tailed Eagles experts in the field to visit nests and release sites in the Isle of Wight, Ireland and Scotland and assist with the monitoring and ringing process. This was an invaluable experience and very rewarding to see the beautiful eagles in their natural habitat. I am also lucky enough to work with many collaborators and White-tailed Eagles experts across the globe, and I am currently collecting samples from across Eurasia for my studies. The samples span all the way from Greenland to Japan.

The history of the Welsh White-tailed Eagles is another interest of mine, and I have been collaborating with Amgueddfa Cymru – Museum Wales to assess the skin collection and records available for genetic studies. During a visit to the museum collection, we discovered a historical watercolour painting of a pair of White-tailed Eagles near Kenfig, dating back to 1816. Further details of this will be published in the coming edition of *Milvus*. I now look forward to seeing the White-tailed Eagles in the Welsh skies once again.



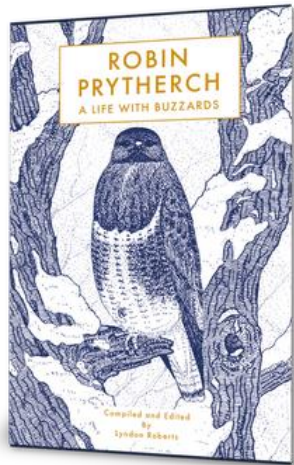
Irish White-tailed Eagle chick at 8 weeks old, handled and ringed under licence in 2023.

Below, Lucy's photo of a commute to a White-tailed Eagle nest site in Scotland with eagle expert, Justin Grant, June 2024.



A Christmas present suggestion

As well as Dr Rob Thomas' book on Storm Petrels (see p7), you may also be interested in putting Robin Prytherch's '**A Life with Buzzards**' (£12) on your Christmas 'wish list'?



Robin was a man with a passion for birds and one in particular – the Common Buzzard. For over 40 years, rain or shine, armed with a cheese sandwich, a flask of coffee, a pair of binoculars and a telescope, he headed out to watch them. During his studies he sketched and observed generations of buzzards and got to know their behaviour, individual characters and family relationships intimately. He delighted in finding new and interesting things to say about what one might think is already a very well-known species, and was eager to share his discoveries with others. So, starting in 1995, he decided to do just that by designing and sending out his own buzzard-themed Christmas cards. Sadly, Robin passed away in 2021 but, partially as a tribute to his memory, in this book they are all collected together in one place for others to enjoy.

And finally . . .

Many thanks for your 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 and campaign 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. Here's wishing you all good birding this autumn!

WOS would like to thank all the photographers who kindly allowed us to print their images in this newsletter: Storm Petrel p7 – Clare Ryland; Rook p8 – Angharad Jones; Wood Warbler and Pied Flycatcher p9 – Jeff Slocombe; Gannet p13 – Sam Turley (RSPB Images); Curlew Sandpiper p14 – Caroline Pickett; BTO Bird Camp photos pp15-17 – Ionathan Poleg, Finn Whately and Rowan Peters; Welsh Ringing Course photos pp18-20 – Owain Gabb; White Tailed-Eagle article photos pp21-22 – Lucy Rowley.

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