

Winter Newsletter 2025/26

Cylchlythyr y Gaeaf 2025/26



© Great Spotted
Woodpecker - Phil Jones

Welsh
Ornithological
Society



Cymdeithas
Adaryddol
Cymru

Chair's Welcome! Croeso'r Cadeirydd!

Winter has now arrived, but it feels like it came in by stealth. Winter migration was gradual with no major influx of species, even the thrushes appeared in small numbers over several weeks and it took a while to realise that they were here. So far, the weather has been relatively mild with no periods of really cold weather – those are still to come I suspect. However, the Short-eared owls have made their presence known at coastal sites in the north along with Hen Harriers and thousands of geese and duck.



So now is time to reflect on the past year. WOS Council has gone through a period of major change but despite this we put on a very successful conference, focussed on bird recording. More younger delegates attended than ever before and this bodes well for the preparation for Atlas 2027-31. WOS intends to play a crucial part in recruiting the next generation of bird recorders and engender a lifetime of enthusiasm for survey and research work so ably illustrated by the inspiring talks from Steph Tyler and Andy King at conference. Fieldwork for the Atlas doesn't start until winter 2027/28 but we want to be well prepared.

Unfortunately, Avian flu has reared its ugly head again and this time it is mainly affecting wildfowl. So far, Wales has not been badly affected but we need to be vigilant and report any dead birds that we find to the relevant authorities and organisations such as BTO.

WOS has several projects/campaigns to highlight next year. Welsh Government needs to be taken to account for not taking action on Swifts, particularly as the Scottish Government has approved the policy of Swift bricks being installed in all new suitable buildings. More action is needed to help our breeding Curlews, and the gamebird release licensing issue needs a much firmer steer than it is getting. Sitting on the fence will not do. However, without a full complement on Council, we will struggle to do what we know, you the members, wish us to achieve. Despite increasing the potential number of trustees to 14 at the AGM, our numbers are now down to nine as sadly, Emma-Louise Cole has recently left us. We urgently need more dedicated admin support and other volunteers to help share the workload. Any offer of time will be seriously considered. You do not need to be an expert birdwatcher to help our birds.

As usual, this newsletter is full of fascinating information, which we hope will provide a good read over the festive period. It is difficult to keep on top of all the action for birds that is happening in Wales, but WOS will continue to keep members informed through our social media channels and by working closely with all its bird conservation partners.

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A final plea: please do not forget the birds this winter. A recent study by the Royal Horticultural Society has shown how important our gardens and allotments are for wildlife. The BTO supplied bird data for this study from Garden BirdWatch and our gardens are important refuges,

especially in winter when the weather turns for the worse. Putting out water is vital for bathing (keeping feathers in good condition) and drinking.

Merry Christmas.

Anne Brenchley WOSChair@gmail.com.

All we want for Christmas is a WOS Secretary

Unfortunately, since our previous Secretary – Clare Ryland came to the end of her tenure, WOS still finds itself without a Secretary. Currently, the secretarial tasks are being shared between Council as appropriate, but it would really help things run more efficiently if we could find someone willing to fulfil this role.

Previous experience is not necessary and in fact neither of our previous Secretaries had done anything like this before. It is not even essential to be knowledgeable about birds. It just needs someone who is well organised, comfortable with using a computer and has some regular time to spare.

The main tasks are organising and taking minutes at our six Council meetings a year, maintaining our files and records online and sending mailings to our members.

If you think you might have the time to spare to help us fulfil this position, or if you simply have any questions about this role, please do get in touch with us as we would desperately like to hear from you. Likewise, if you know of anyone who may not be a member of WOS who might be a good fit for this position, please encourage them to get in contact with us.

Without a Secretary, the best way to contact us about this would be to email our Chair – Anne Brenchley at WOSChair@gmail.com.

Croeso Gwenan, Siôn Emlyn and Anya!

Gwenan Williams lives in Morfa Nefyn and is a fluent Welsh speaker. She was elected as WOS Treasurer at the 2025 AGM. Her fascination with birds began at a young age and as an adult it has continued to shape her interests and her travel destinations. In 2014, retirement from her position as a lecturer at Bangor University provided her with the freedom and time to dedicate herself more to her lifelong interest in birds. Volunteering with the Glaslyn Osprey project was a significant step in her continued commitment to bird conservation and she became a member of the Board of Trustees for the Bywyd Gwyllt Glaslyn Wildlife (BGGW) charity. Over the past decade, she has served in several key leadership roles, including Vice-Chair and Chair. Since 2020 as Treasurer she is responsible for the charity's financial strategic management, and also manages the Osprey Protection site, enjoying a hands-on involvement in safeguarding the birds and their habitat. In collaboration with Tim Mackrill of Osprey Leadership Foundation, Gwenan coordinates the annual programme for visiting research assistants from the Kartong Bird Observatory in the Gambia to the Glaslyn Osprey project.



Siôn Emlyn Davies was co-opted to Council in 2025 and elected as a Trustee at the 2025 AGM. He is a wildlife filmmaker, presenter and environmentalist from Ynys Môn. A graduate in Environmental Conservation from Bangor University, he combines scientific knowledge with creative storytelling to celebrate Wales's landscapes and wildlife. His films highlight species such as red squirrels, dolphins and seabirds, bringing the natural world closer to audiences. Siôn is a regular panellist on BBC Radio Cymru's Galwad Cynnar and was chosen for Wales's first ever Nature and Conservation Fellowship. He also volunteers with Tir Natur, producing films that raise awareness of Welsh conservation projects, and works to inspire pride and care for Wales's wild beauty.

Anya Wicikowski was co-opted on to Council in 2025. She currently works for RSPB as a Conservation Officer for the North Wales Moors Priority Landscape. She has been with the RSPB since September 2022, previously focusing on Black Grouse conservation work across the North Wales uplands. She is currently working towards her ringing permit and actively undertakes a range of volunteer ornithological surveys. She also volunteers with the Osprey Leadership Foundation, supporting emerging conservation leaders. A keen birdwatcher and scuba diver, Anya is often found off the North Wales coast either birdwatching or exploring underwater! She has worked on diverse species recovery projects, including Black Grouse, Osprey, Stone-curlew, and White-tailed Eagle reintroductions. Previously, she worked as a Technical Specialist in Marine Ornithology for offshore wind developments. Anya holds a BSc in Wildlife Conservation and an MSc in Endangered Species Recovery and Conservation, both from Nottingham Trent University.



NEWS

WOS Council – Comings and Goings

Following on from our recent AGM, we have several changes to Council to notify you all about.

Firstly, we would like to say a fond farewell to those who have left Council - Giles Pepler, Clare Ryland, Daniel Jenkins-Jones, Alun Llwyd, Huw Roberts, Rhion Pritchard and Emma-Louise Cole. A huge thank you must go out to all of you for your hard work and dedication towards WOS over the years.

Congratulation to those who have been re-elected to their positions - Iolo Williams as WOS President. Anne Brenchley as Chair and Trustee. Mike Shrewring as Council Member and Trustee.

Congratulations to all the newly elected WOS Trustees – Simon Boyes, Joshua Pedley, Malcolm Smith, Gwenan Williams, Siôn Emlyn Davies.

And a welcome to Anya Wicikowski who has been co-opted onto WOS Council with a view to be voted in as a Trustee at the 2026 AGM.

In Memory

We at WOS are saddened to hear of and inform you of the passing of both Steve Sutcliffe and Mike Alexander

Mike Alexander was a committed author, wildlife photographer and a conservationist. He was the warden on Skomer from 1976 -86 and then headed up the National Nature Reserve Management Team for CCW (now known as NRW) until his retirement.

Steve Sutcliffe followed Mike as warden on Skomer from 1986-94. Steve was passionate about seabirds and dedicated much of his life to seabird research and survey and enthusing others to follow in his footsteps. He helped re-establish Skokholm as a Bird Observatory and was given a British Empire Award and a Marsh Award in Ornithology for his dedication. Steve was also a former WOS Treasurer.

Our thoughts are with their family and friends in these sad times.

Bird Sightings News

MEGA RARE

- **Killdeer** (*Charadrius vociferus*) seen on Skokholm Island and over Skomer Island, Pembrokeshire on November 5th and 6th.



© Killdeer - Richard Brown

- **Eurasian Scops Owl** (*Otus scops*) Killay, Glamorgan between December 6th and December 12th.

RARE

- **Pallid Harrier** (*Circus macrourus*) subadult female at Llanrhidian Marsh, Gower present between September 30th and December 13th. Another individual, a returning male seen at Dowrog Common and Trefeiddan Common, Pembrokeshire between October 19th and November 16th.
- **Bufflehead** (*Bucephala albeola*) Drake at RSPB Point of Ayr – Flintshire on December 8th and Foryd Bay – Caernarfon on December 19th.

SCARCE

- **Smew** (*Mergus albellus*) female type at Llangorse Lake, Brecon on November 23rd and is still present at time of writing.
- **Shore Lark** (*Eremophila alpestris*) at Great Orme between November 7th and December 4th.

OF INTEREST

- **Pied Flycatcher** (*Ficedula hypoleuca*) female type ringed at Glebelands Park, Gwent on November 30th. Coinciding with a sighting of a male in New Quay, Ceredigion on December 5th and a report of a male at Radnor Forest, Radnorshire on December 2nd.

***Milvus* the Welsh Bird Report and Scarce and Rare Birds in Wales 2024**

Members can expect both *Milvus* and the *Welsh Bird Report* to be with them by the end of January. Both publications have recently gone to press and will be sent out together in due course. We apologise that this current edition of *Milvus* is arriving later than expected, but the next edition will not be impacted by this, and you can expect it to receive it as expected in July 2026.

In the meantime, members can peruse the annual Scarce and Rare report for 2024 in Wales, which includes full reports on two new species for the country. It's available to WOS members only at <https://birdsin.wales/scarce-and-rare-birds-in-wales/> - you'll need to log in as a member first.

Got an idea for our *Milvus* journal?

If you have an idea for an original research paper (up to 5000 words) or a short communication (up to 2500 words) for the journal, the editor, Dr Rachel Taylor, would be delighted to hear from you. Rachel is also keen to include more short articles which could be interesting notes, intriguing negative (or non-significant?) results; perhaps observations from local studies and certainly more pieces by citizen scientists. *Milvus* should be a journal that brings scientists, both professionals and citizen scientists, together through our shared interest in Welsh birds. Rachel and the Editorial Board are here to help and advise you through every step of the process. You can find out more about submissions to *Milvus* here: www.birdsin.wales/milvus-submissions/ Rachel's email address is: milvuseditor@birdsin.wales Bring us your best ideas!

Articles for our Spring Newsletter

If you have any ideas for articles about birds or birding in your local area which you would like to bring to the attention of the wider birding in community in Wales, we'd love to hear from you.

They can be any length, from snippets of news to three-page articles and anything in between. Some images to accompany your piece would be very nice too. If you have any ideas, please drop Josh an email to: newsletter@birdsin.wales.



Conference 2025 – an excellent day

Conference 2025 brought another full house, with over 150 delegates enjoying a stimulating day of presentations, stalls and displays and the usual excellent Aberystwyth food (all vegetarian this time). We are delighted that BSG Ecology and Gower Ornithological Society sponsored the day and helped us break even financially.

Our Chair, Anne Brenchley, set the scene, emphasising the importance of making sure that all records, however trivial they might seem, are logged in a recognised database, so that they can contribute to conserving birds in Wales.

The first session showcased two former WOS Lifetime Achievement Award winners – Steph



Tyler and Andy King – describing their birding journeys and how their long-term studies had contributed to conservation, not just in Wales, but all over the UK and beyond.



The main sessions before and after lunch were given over to a series of short presentations on participation in a range of surveys and studies: Bob Edwards on *BirdTrack*, Susan Jones on *Garden BirdWatch*, Tara Okon from the Fledgemore group on *nest recording*, Roy Tapping on *how the LERCs gather and use data*, Naomi Davis on the *BTO Regional Rep structure*, Owain Gabb on *ringing and training* and Liliana Tarrant-Snedden on *getting girls supportively into birding and the Cardiff Uni WeBS counts*. Julian Hughes (RSPB) and Richard Facey rounded off the post-lunch session with a review of how RSPB and NRW use our data for planning and conservation. Finally, Rachel Taylor (BTO Cymru and editor of *Milvus*, presenting David Noble's talk) looked in to the future and developments in recording techniques, not least the use of audio recording.



Our President, Iolo Williams, presented awards and prizes: much deserved Lifetime Achievement Awards to Heather Coats and Geoff Gibbs, several of the 2025 photography competition winners who could be present, and Fraser Masterson, who received the first

Student Research Award for several years for his work on foraging strategies of Guillemots and Shags on Anglesey. We reduced the number of raffle prizes, but increased their value, so that each was worth at least £50 and Jasmine Davies was thrilled to walk off with a week's accommodation on Ynys Enlli, donated by Bardsey Bird & Field Observatory.



Another excellent day, with a full house of stalls and fascinating displays. It was very encouraging to see so many young birders there and everyone enjoyed meeting old friends and making new ones; the social side gave a real buzz to the day. We will be back at Aberystwyth on Saturday 31st October for the 2026 conference – watch this space.



Lifetime Achievement Awards

Council was delighted to make two Lifetime Achievement Awards this year – to one South Walian - Heather Coats – and one North Walian - Geoff Gibbs. Heather was presented with her award at Conference, but Geoff was not well enough to travel, so Iolo Williams went up to north Wales to present him with his award.

Heather Coats

Heather has made a hugely important contribution to ornithology in Wales through ringing projects and training, involvement in BTO survey initiatives and local atlas projects and her long-term active involvement with Gower

Ornithological Society. She has been involved in the BTO's Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) initiative from its outset and was one of a few 'stars' of BBS who was featured in the BTO's LifeCycle magazine in 2024. She also actively involves herself in other initiatives including the Waterways Survey and most recently Cudyll Cymru. Heather is currently the President of Gower Ornithological Society (GOS), having performed various other committee roles for many years and been an active contributor to atlas work (including the 1987 West Glamorgan Bird Atlas). She is a long-time section writer of the GOS annual report 'Gower Birds' and contributes numerous records to inform it. She represents GOS at events, where her enthusiasm for birds and her readiness to engage with people shine through. She has also been part of a committee that has more than doubled membership of GOS over the past 5 years, and which has seen typical attendances at talks and online events rise from less than ten to 30-50+. Under Heather's leadership Gower Ringing Group (RG) has grown to become one of the largest in Wales, with over thirty active ringers and a steady production line of trainees.



Her projects include:

- A Recapture of Adults for Survival (RAS) project on Pied Flycatcher at Cwm Clydach (Swansea). This is the second oldest project of its type in the UK and has helped

inform academic studies critical to understanding how the species is responding to climatic change.

- Constant Effort (CES) studies including at WWT's Llanelli centre, which she has run since 2000, and both winter and garden CES at her home in the Dulais Valley. She was also one of the regular attendees at the (now discontinued) Kenfig CES, regularly donning thigh-length waders to head out into the deep water, and once (memorably) sinking, and travels annually to support a CES site in Portugal.

Heather is very committed to training prospective ringers. Since 2015 she has helped add two ringing trainers, three A permit holders and 11 C Permit holders to Gower RG alone, and trained others who have become permitted and then relocated. This next generation of ornithological researchers and data gatherers are some of the people who will lead and inform future conservation action.

Heather has also been instrumental in the success of the Welsh Ringing Course, which has been hosted by Gower RG for over 10 years. In addition to being one of the assessors on the course, she leads on the domestic arrangements. The course has a Welsh focus; the number of ringers in Wales is relatively small and communication between ringing groups has been limited in the past. It has addressed this through having trainers from different groups involved in assessment and numerous Welsh ringers attending. Wider benefits such as a close relationship between Gower and Teifi RGs, allowing trainees more varied experience have ensued. Her energy in all her ringing endeavours is hugely admirable, and despite an almost mythically fearsome reputation for not putting up with fools gladly, she is greatly admired and loved by her current and former trainees.

In addition to this award, Heather has been awarded the BTO Jubilee Medal for 2025.

Geoff Gibbs

Geoff worked in North Wales between 1965-1971 and during this time he:

- Undertook arranging a nestbox scheme in Aber Valley for Pied Flycatchers and Redstarts, eventually ending up with 50 boxes either side of the steep Valley. Participated in ringing chicks, some sitting females and data collection.
- Took part in BTO surveys and Beached Bird Surveys.
- Was active with Bangor Bird Group and Cambrian Ornithological Society (COS) and was the Regional Organiser for Caernarfonshire for the first BTO Bird Atlas.
- He moved away from North Wales until his return in late 2001 though did volunteer on Ramsey and Bardsey Islands during his absence. Before returning, he was a member of the Scientific Committee of Bardsey Island Trust and continued for a further 5-6 years after his return. More than 85 people have been introduced to the Observatory and island over the years by Geoff. In 2018 he accepted the honorary position of Vice President of the Bird Observatory.
- Following his return to North Wales he resumed involvement with the Aber Valley nestbox scheme, did regular WeBS counts on Lavan Sands from about 2002 to 2020 and acted as Regional Organiser for Caernarfonshire for the 2007-11 BTO Bird Atlas.
- In 2008 Geoff received a national award for services to ornithology, the BTO's Jubilee medal.

- He was heavily involved from the outset with the project to carry out the first tetrad-level survey of the whole of North Wales, serving on the Steering Group. He was one of 26 observers who contributed over 1,000 records with breeding codes, did a great deal of work on validating records and was one of the editors of the final volume, *The Breeding Birds of North Wales*. He also did much of the legwork getting sponsors to fund the Atlas thanks to his “persuasive” nature.
- He surveyed several BBS Squares for many years including difficult upland ones.
- He was a Trustee of the Pont Croesor Osprey Project from 2013 to 2021 and volunteered regularly at the site during this time engaging with the public.
- Led spring bird song ID walks locally for about 10 years and for 10 years between October and March he would spend a day a month in the main hide at The Spinnies/Aber Ogwen helping beginner and visiting birdwatchers.
- Geoff served as a Director of Natur Cymru 2006-2020 and was with the Bardsey Island Trust Ltd. 2001-2007.



Fraser Masterson awarded Derek Moore post-graduate Student Research prize

For the first time since 2021 we had a Post-graduate Student Research Award application well worthy of recognition, so we were delighted to make an award to Fraser Masterson, of Bangor University, for his fascinating study of diving strategies of Guillemots and Shags. Apart from being a splendidly crafted study, his work will contribute to a broader understanding of the impacts of windfarms and general offshore infrastructure on Welsh seabird populations. Here's a summary of his research:

Using n-dimensional hypervolumes to understand coexistence between fundamentally similar diving seabirds. The project involved using bio-logging devices; which are sensors attached to animals that can record location, depth and acceleration of equipped animals. Bio-logging devices were deployed on nesting *Uria aalge* and *Gulosus aristotelis* individuals on Puffin Island, North Wales between May and June 2023. Despite having significantly different wing loading values, the results suggested that there was negligible overlap in the spatial foraging areas of *U. aalge* and *G. aristotelis*. Instead, dive distance and speed were highly partitioned, suggesting that the distinct underwater propulsion methods across the two species was the primary distinction. Despite their limited spatial distribution, the larger size of the *G. aristotelis* hypervolume inferred a more generalist foraging approach, in which a broader environmental tolerance was used to maximise prey capture. Equally, by exhibiting more differentiated time at depth, dive depth, and bottom distance metrics, *U. aalge* were observed to individually specialise their foraging approach to minimise competitive overlap with *G. aristotelis* and conspecifics, as well as potentially pursuing different prey species. Datasets and results of this thesis contribute to the ECOWind-ACCELERATE project, led by Bangor University. The inclusion of both behavioural and environmental data in the n-dimensional hypervolume approach will facilitate a broader understanding of the impacts of windfarms and general offshore infrastructure on Welsh seabird populations.



The sixth year of the photo competition

The sixth year of the WOS photo competition produced an excellent 172 entries: a record 142 in the Main section, but sadly only 15 each in the Mobile Phone and Young Photographers categories. Encouragingly, almost a third came from female photographers.

84 different species were photographed and the most popular were photos of Puffin (9) and Red Kite (8). Unsurprisingly, there were no Waxwing pictures this year! 8 species appeared for the first time: Crossbill; Dartford Warbler; Sedge Warbler; Black Redstart; Hoopoe; Eider; Feral Pigeon and Hawaiian Goose.

The judges commented that the standard of photographs in the 'main' and 'young' competitions was excellent and it was very difficult to rank them, let alone pick out winners. In all categories there were some cracking pictures that didn't even manage to make the shortlist and the six photos illustrating this article are splendid examples of these.

The overall winner of the Main section was Dave Parry, for his superb capture of a greedy young Cuckoo demanding food from its unfortunate Meadow Pipit host and he was also Highly Commended for his Hoopoe in the late afternoon light – one of several Hoopoe entries generated by the spring numbers in Wales. Second prize in the Main section went to Sid Simmons for his beautiful Dipper photo: it's straightforward enough to take pictures of a



'Getting that look' - Mark Rolph

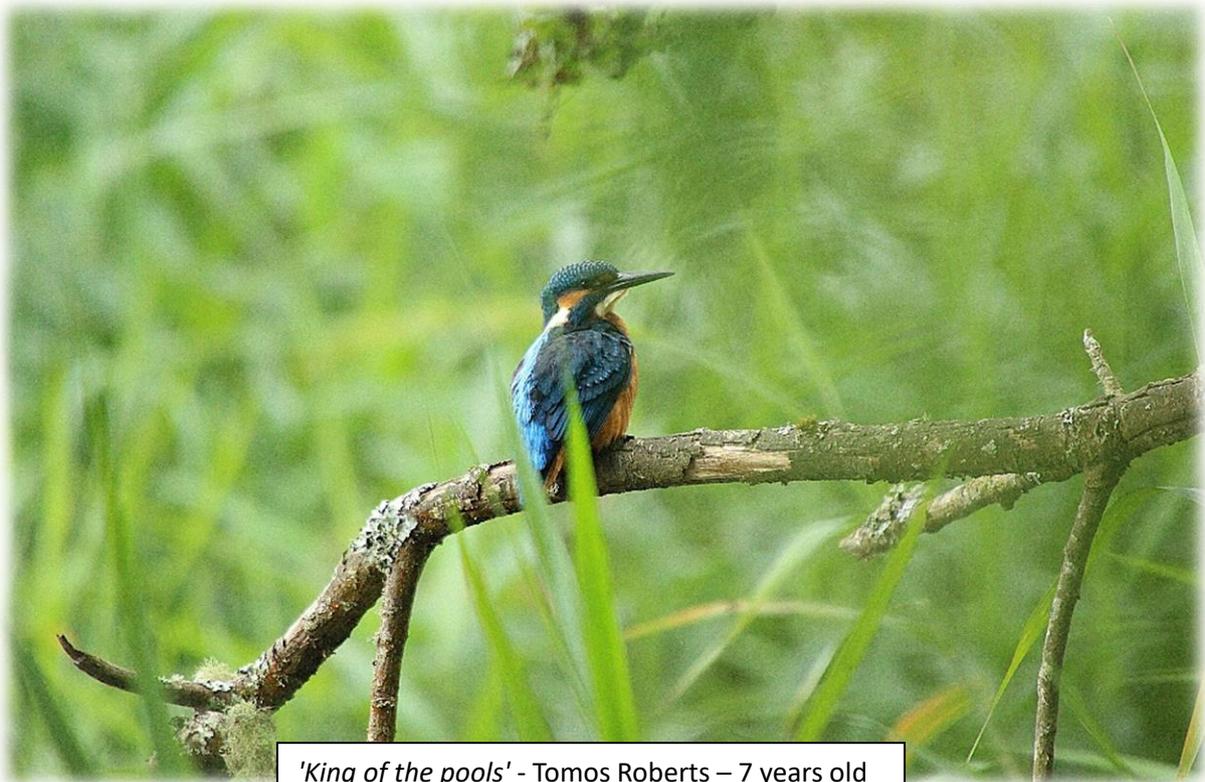


'Black Redstart' - Jayne Williams

stationary Dipper, but very difficult to take photos of one in flight. Blair Charles Jones was awarded Third prize for his splendid flock of Black-tailed Godwits taking flight and this makes a great cover for the 2026 calendar. Several Highly Commended photos also make the calendar: Mike Pollard's Fieldfare (February); Kate Smith's Herring Gull (April); Tommy Evans's Kingfishers (July); Laura Peyton's Amber Oystercatcher (August); Gordon Wilcock's Peregrine in flight (October) and Rebecca Clarke's silhouetted Starlings (December).

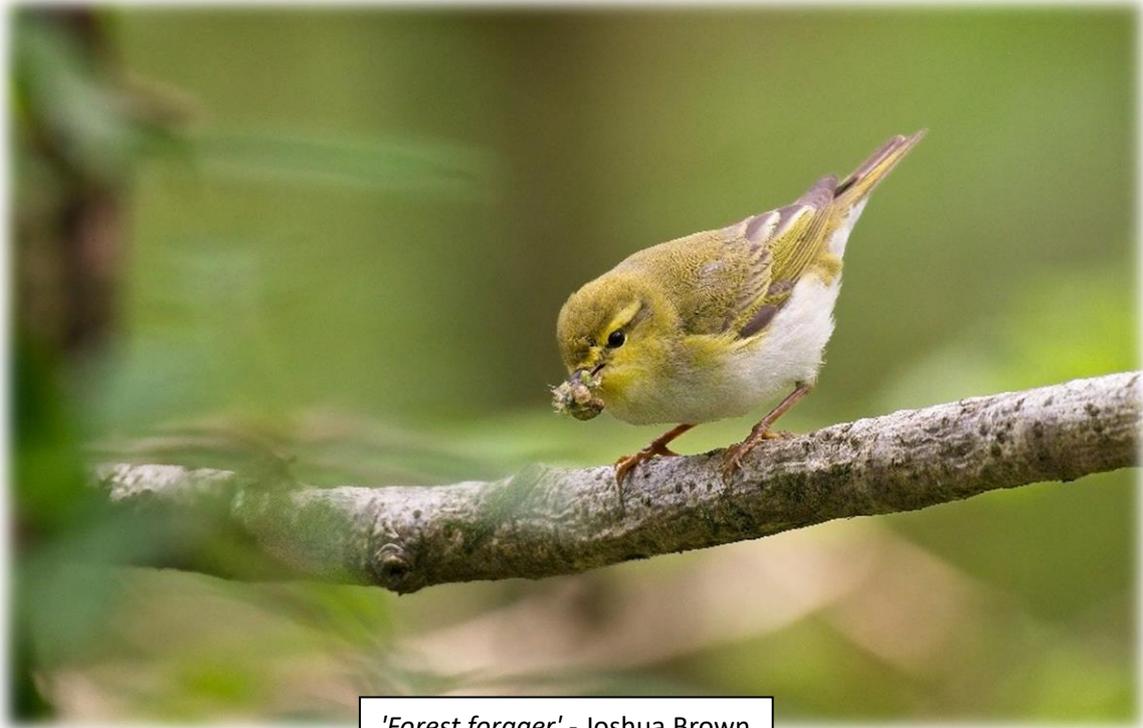


'Rock steady' - Richard Castell



'King of the pools' - Tomos Roberts – 7 years old

Although there were disappointingly few Young Photographer entries, the standard was very high again. Daniel Gorton (who just squeaked into the age category) again won both First and Second prizes for his lovely Snow Bunting and equally sharp Grey Plover and Third prize for the second year running went to William Lambourne for a splendid portrait of a Turnstone clinging to the rocks. As in 2024 it was very encouraging to receive three entries from 10-years old and even younger photographers. All thirteen prize winning and highly commended photos appear in the 2026 calendar.



'Forest forager' - Joshua Brown



'Juvenile Stonechat on handle' - Lee Parsons

Iolo Williams presented all those prize winners who could come to Conference with their vouchers and calendars, and the volume of applause underlined how highly the audience rated their photographs.



Dave Parry receiving his award from Iolo Williams

Give a WOS 2026 calendar as a last-minute Christmas or New Year present

We've sold most of the 2026 WOS calendars, but we still have some available for purchase by post for £10, which includes p&p. The calendar features all the thirteen prize winning and highly commended pictures from the 2025 competition – here is the superb Grey Plover photo which illustrates November.

There are some really cracking photos in the calendar, so make sure you get hold of your copy before they sell out! If you'd like to purchase one (or more), just follow [this link](#) and you can pay by card.



'Black-tailed Godwits take flight' – Blair Charles Jones
Calendar Cover Photo

The 200 Challenge – Fun and Frustration

Seeing 200 species of bird in the UK in a year has always been an interesting but very achievable challenge for birders in the UK and increasingly a challenge that is being taken up by more people every year.

Several years ago, the Birdwatching magazine started to highlight the challenge in a more structured way by calling it ‘#My200BirdYear’’. Readers were encouraged to take part and



report progress, sightings etc. on social media. This made the challenge, maybe more competitive but definitely fun.

The actual challenge is quite personal. There are no rules, only those you set yourself. My challenge is fairly standard - to record 200 species in the UK in a calendar year. I do try to see all the species, but I will permit ‘heard’ records as occasionally species such as Cuckoo and Green Woodpecker evade me..... My good birding friend, Andrew, usually joins me in the challenge and together we make more effort to get out than we might do by birding alone. There is no doubt that a bit of friendly competition with other birders spurs you on.

Over the years I have usually kept a year list and in the past

reached 200, so I knew that it was possible. However, I hadn’t quite appreciated how difficult the challenge was now compared to twenty/thirty years ago. Many species that were once widespread are now a challenge in themselves because they are harder to find. Lots of species on my lists, such as Marsh Tit and Golden Plover were only encountered once or twice and far more effort was required to find them than was once the case. I haven’t seen a Tree Sparrow or Grey Partridge in my part of Wales for several years. Yellowhammers and Yellow Wagtails aren’t easy and this year these species were encountered in England – not Wales. I feel guilty about doing lots of travel and attending the occasional ‘twitch’. Part of my challenge is finding my own birds. Nowadays, birders must put time in and get out every month, visit lots of different habitats and have an idea of what to expect, where and when. Maybe two to three holidays in birding hotspots away from Wales such as east coast England and Scotland make the challenge easier.

Each year, I get very enthusiastic and am enormously disappointed if I haven't reached 100+ by the end of January. From then on it is a downhill battle. Life intervenes, foreign holidays beckon, the garden starts to come alive and needs attending and that is all without keeping up a social life and volunteer commitments.

It is useful to plan out the year and have a monthly target of species – rolling over those species from the previous month that somehow failed to reach the list. This does focus effort but there is always the dilemma of travel and in recent years much of my day-to-day birding has been restricted to North Wales and just over the border into the English counties of Cheshire and Shropshire. A couple of holidays to other birding hotspots in the UK are icing on the cake.



Since I started taking part in the challenge, I have failed to achieve the target. The nearest I got was 197 in 2019. Most years I reach somewhere between 170 and 190. Not a bad effort by most birding standards but quite frustrating. It is beginning to look like 2025 is not going to be my year either but there is always next year. I'm ever hopeful. Will I keep going until I have reached the target? Probably. Whatever, I would definitely recommend the challenge to other birders.

If any other WOS members take part in this challenge, we would love to hear your stories of the highs and the lows as well as tips and hints. In particular, if anyone achieves 200 just within Wales then please get in touch. In the meantime, happy birding.

Anne Brenchley

Supporting Bird Conservation Across Wales: Our Grant Programmes

The Welsh Ornithological Society is committed to advancing ornithological knowledge and conservation throughout Wales. To support this mission, we offer two grant programmes designed to fund vital work at both community and project levels.

Community Grants (£1,000 or 75% of total cost whichever is smaller) support local groups and individuals to undertake projects focused on community involvement to improve habitat for birds. Projects must aim to deliver for long term benefits for birds and communities.

Project Grants (up to £1,000) enable more substantial research and conservation initiatives that address key knowledge gaps or conservation priorities for Welsh bird populations. These grants fund work that contributes to evidence-base and benefit the birds of Wales.

Whether you're planning a local survey, developing educational resources, or undertaking research into Welsh bird populations, we encourage applications that will benefit ornithology and bird conservation in Wales.

The closing date for applications is 31 December 2025 – don't miss this opportunity to secure funding for your bird conservation work. For full details on eligibility, application procedures, and award amounts, please visit <https://birdsin.wales/grants-awards/>

Membership Updates

The members of WOS are the backbone of the organisation. Your support enables WOS to make a difference to the conservation of birds in Wales. The extra fundraising we do, such as the raffle at our Annual Conference, enables us to give a variety of grants to young people, community groups and researchers.

As you will know from the AGM papers, the annual subscription for individual WOS membership will be increased to £25.00 for up to two people living at the same address. The subscription for Young Birders (up to 26 years old) will increase to £10.00.

For those of you who use **PayPal** to pay for your subscription, the new rate will be automatically created within PayPal. Similarly, **Direct Debit** payments will automatically increase from 1st January.

A number of members still use **Standing Orders** which need to be changed by you at your bank. Please try to do this before the end of 2025 to avoid the need to chase up any shortfall.

And don't forget an increase in the cost of membership means an increase in the value of Gift Aid on your subscription. At no cost to you, WOS can claim 20% of the value of your subscription from the Government. If you are a UK taxpayer, please fill in the Gift Aid form attached to this newsletter to benefit birds in Wales.

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Welsh
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Title First Name

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I would like to Giftaid my donation and any donations I make in the future to the **Welsh Ornithological Society**. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income or Capital Gains Tax in each year than the amount of Giftaid claimed by all charities and Community Amateur Sports Clubs on my donations in that tax year, it is my responsibility to pay any difference. I agree to notify the charity if I no longer pay sufficient tax or if I change my name or address.

Signature.....

Date.....

Return to : Alison Noble, Membership Secretary, 25 Belle Vue Gardens, Brecon, LD3 7NY

The Welsh Ornithological Society is a charity registered in England and Wales Number 1037823

WOS' response to the recent Senedd debated petition calling on the installation of Swift bricks in all new buildings in Wales.

We would like to congratulate Julie Barrell, who started this Senedd petition and everyone who got behind it. This debate was a huge opportunity to help make a real difference to our Swifts - one of our most loved and fastest declining birds. Raising the subject for discussion was a huge achievement and so it was painful to see how ill-informed and under-prepared some of the Senedd members were for this debate.

Swifts face several threats which must be addressed. One of those is a lack of suitable nest sites. Installing Swift bricks on new buildings is literally the simplest and cheapest measure we can take to provide new nest sites. The debate was inconclusive, kicking the can down the road. None of this helped Swifts or the future generations of Wales, who may never regularly hear the true sound of summer.

We have noted that the English and Scottish Governments have approved the Swift Brick motion, so it is a shame to see that the Senedd did not.

The Welsh Ornithological Society fully supports any future legislative actions that can ensure that existing buildings remain suitable Swift nesting habitat and new buildings incorporate Swift bricks. Action is needed now. Please join us in continuing to keep this issue live and ensure Swifts have a safe place to breed in Wales.

BTO National Award Winners

Congratulations to all the winners at this years BTO and Marsh Awards. Wales was strongly represented with the Marsh Award for Ornithology being awarded to Rob Thomas, the Jubilee Medal being awarded to Heather Coats and the Dilys Breese Medal being awarded to Julian Hughes.



Kittiwake colour ringing project - Liverpool Bay Area

For the last three years, in a collaboration between myself, Exeter University and RSK Biocensus, we have been studying Kittiwakes nesting on offshore platforms in Liverpool Bay. As part of this work, we have started a colour-ringing project in which we have ringed over 150 birds in the past two seasons. We'd like to get as many resightings and recoveries as possible. Although many birds return to the same nesting location, we think some first-year birds might disperse elsewhere, so we'd be especially interested to hear of any turning up in other locations. Places to keep an eye out include the Isle of Man, the north coast of Wales, the east coast of Ireland, Northern Ireland, south-western Scotland (including the islands), and the north-west coast of England.



The colour rings are fitted to the left leg and are bright yellow with three black letters starting with a "V" (from VEE to VZZ). On the right leg is a metal BTO ring, with a thinner, coloured plastic ring above. The small colour ring is important as it tells us which platform the bird was from. These rings could be red, green or white (see photo).

The aim is to learn more about the ecology and movement patterns of Kittiwakes nesting offshore to understand how important these environments are to the species across the

UK and wider Europe. This knowledge will equip operators to be able to reduce adverse impacts to the birds during decommissioning and repurposing of platforms.

Please let us know if you see one of our birds (living or dead). Please record where, when, the code on the yellow ring, and the colour of the ring on the other leg where possible. If you can get a photo of the bird that would be even better! Please share with your birdwatcher networks, but also with anyone else who spends time on the coast.

Please report all sightings to Debs Allbrook at dla205@exeter.ac.uk. For anyone interested in the findings from our study, we are more than happy to provide a final summary to those who contributed sighting information.

BTO Christmas wrap-up

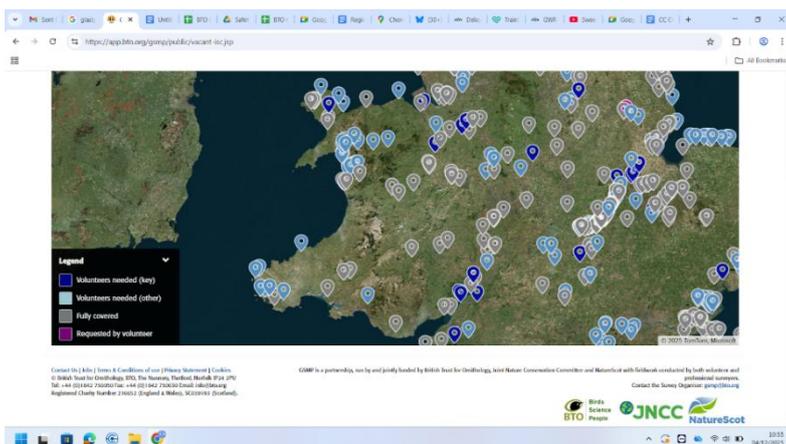
As 2025 draws to a close, on behalf of everyone at BTO I'd like to thank all of you who took part in our surveys this year. And what a year it has been in Wales; we reached a new record for BBS coverage, began our new raptor survey - Cudyll Cymru, ran new online training courses for surveys and ID, and have gained several new recruits for our Regional Network (volunteers who coordinate local survey coverage). All this was made possible from the continuing support of our BTO community. With the festive period approaching, we wish you all a relaxing and lovely few weeks with family and friends, and hope to see you again in 2026.

International Swan Census - January 2026

In case your 2026's new year's resolution includes enjoying doing more bird monitoring, then our next International Swan Census is coming soon. A simple survey that we do every 5-6 years, this census gives us good data on our wintering Whooper and Bewick's swans numbers. The census will happen on January 17-18th, and vacant flock to count can be found on our interactive map [here](#). If you'd like to get involved, all you need to do is:

- Count all Whooper and Bewick's Swans seen at your site
- Record the number of adults and juveniles
- Record the habitat

Wintering Whooper Swan numbers are on the increase in Wales, so it will be very interesting seeing what the results will show us!



International Swan Census Vacant site map



Whooper Swan (Edmund Fellowes)

Welsh Raptor Convention - January 2026

To celebrate the first year of Cudyll Cymru, on January 31st we will be hosting our very first Welsh Raptor Convention at Aberystwyth University. If you'd like to know more about Wales' birds of prey species (regardless if you did the survey or not) be sure to book your place [here](#). (Free for <25's, £10 for standard ticket)

And finally . . .

Many thanks to you all for your continued support of WOS. With special thanks to everyone who contributed to this newsletter. Finally, thank you to Phil Jones for use of his image for the front cover of this newsletter. To see more of Phil's wonderful photography, head to his website - www.philjonesphotography.com. We all wish you a very merry Christmas and a happy, healthy and bird filled 2026.

Nadolig Llawen!

Please follow us on our social media channels:



We're very grateful to our corporate sponsors for their support. Please visit their websites:

Natoura Voyage <https://natouravoyage.co.uk/> and BSG Ecology www.bsg-ecology.com/



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Mae Cymdeithas Adaryddol Cymru wedi ei chofrestru fel elusen yng Nghymru a Lloegr, rhif. 1037823*