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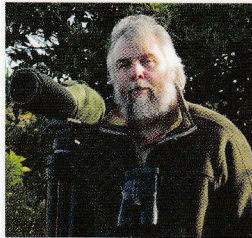
The Birds of Radnorshire



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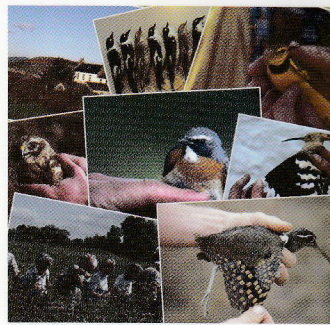
Peter Jennings

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Pete Jennings started birdwatching as a small boy in Hampshire in the 1950s at a time when Nightingales nested at the bottom of his garden and he walked past breeding Red-backed Shrikes on

the way to school. His hobby was encouraged by his family and teachers and then in his early teens by the ornithologist Colin Tubbs. He went on to take London University's old-style, systematics-based, Botany and Zoology as 'A' levels and as a joint degree. He led his first birdwatching walk at the age of 10 and has taken groups to many places in the UK, Europe and Africa and so far more than 2,300 people on birding excursions in Radnorshire. He started ringing birds in the grounds of Winchester College in the early 1970s, became the first ever assistant warden at Portland Bird Observatory and later spent four years in charge of the Calf of Man B.O. Whilst engaged on single species, habitat and migration studies in the UK and abroad, more than 160,000 birds of 330 species have passed through his hands ranging in size from a tiny Pallas's Warbler to a huge Marabou with a wingspan of 313 cms (10 foot 3 inches!). Pete moved to mid Wales in 1983 and spent four years studying Pied Flycatchers culminating in a 'Private Lives' style tv programme on the species for 'Survival Anglia'. He has been the county bird recorder for Radnorshire since 1986 and became the British Trust for Ornithology's regional representative in 1989, receiving their Long-Service Award in 2004. He has travelled more than 250,000 miles in search of birds in Radnorshire and in 2008 became the first (and so far the only) person to see 200 species in the county. (An easy total to reach in most counties but not in land-locked and mostly upland Radnorshire!). Pete has been the Chairman of the Radnorshire Wildlife Trust, chaired the Trust's conservation committee for 18 years and was one of the five founders of the Cambrian Mountains Society. 'The Birds of Radnorshire' is his third book: he was co-author of 'The Birds of The Isle of Man' with Dr. Pat Cullen and wrote 'The Good Birdwatchers Guide'.



were in the upper Elan Valley on 28th. Three thousand flew south and east down the Edw Valley on 14th October 2011 and on 29th October 2012 a total of 4,500 flew west up the Wye Valley at Glasbury and 3,300 flew west at New Radnor.

Many tens of thousands of birds stay in Radnorshire throughout the winter provided that the ground does not become frozen and snow cover does not last for any length of time. Noisy flocks of several hundreds systematically probing grasslands is a common sight in the county, as are groups of 10-50 ridding garden lawns of leatherjackets and aerating the soil in the process. At Garnfawr, near Franksbridge, there were 3,000 in the fields throughout the winter of 1987/8 and 5,000 near Llandrindod Wells on 15th February 1974. Large feeding flocks are often present in the Elan and Claerwen Valleys in winter, depending on the tipulid populations. There were 7-8,000 present in the Pont ar Elan area from January to March 2007 and 4,000 at Claerwen Farm on 13th March 1999.

The main roosting area in Radnorshire is in the conifer plantations of the Llanfihangel nant Melan/Llandegley Rhos area which has been used since at least the late 1970s. The plantation by Llandegley Rhos held 20,000 birds on 16th January 1978 and 29th November 1983 and had 10-50,000 occasionally between November and March in most winters between 1986 and 2000. Plantations in the nearby Fforest Inn area used to hold most of the birds with a small wood at Llanfihangel having a roost of 10-60,000 birds for most of the time during the winters between 1984 and 2002. However, shooting of the roost took place at times in an effort to persuade the birds to go elsewhere, which they have done for the most part ever since.

Since 2003 the roost has largely moved to Llandegley Rhos and steadily increased in numbers with counts at dawn and dusk producing average figures of between 135,000 and 180,000 birds. It is likely that even more birds use the roost on occasion especially in early November and late February/early March - soon after the main arrivals from the continent and prior to emigration. The highest counts are made during periods of fine, calm, weather and the fewest during very windy, wet and stormy, conditions when birds presumably find somewhere closer to their daytime feeding areas to spend the night. The current age and planting density of the plantation seems to be ideal for roosting Starlings and although predators such as Hen Harrier, Merlin, Sparrowhawk, Goshawk and Short-eared Owl are in attendance most evenings, the site is undoubtedly safer than ones used in the area in the past.

At least 65% to 75% of the birds now come from areas to the east of the roosting area and this seems to account for most of the increase in numbers as many fewer did so prior to 2001. Birds not only come from all parts of Radnorshire but also from well into Herefordshire with flight lines traced at least as far east as Shobdon. In general birds come in from a radius of c.25km.

Another roost in conifers by Perthi Common (on lower ground about five miles to the south-west of Llandegley Rhos) also held a large roost in some winters between 1987 and 2009 when the site was clearfelled. The site was used mainly as an alternative to the Llanfihangel/Llandegley area during periods