**A Life in Bird Monitoring (Sarah Harris, BTO) 16th January 2025**

On **16th January** we had a talk by **Sarah Harris** from the BTO “A life of bird monitoring.”

Sarah gave an account of her life/job route and how she became interested in first birds and then wildlife and how she had pursued a dream career in this subject.

It started at the age of six weeks when she was shown a nest of young Owls and it developed from there. She grew up in the Lea Valley in Essex, close to the Rye Meads wildlife site and would regularly go bird ringing with the Rye Meads Ringing Group.

After leaving school, Sarah then went to Aberystwyth University and studied Countryside Conservation, where she started doing a bird atlas. She then went to the Calf of Man Observatory with daily bird logs and collected data to monitor population changes and changes in migration strategy. This was probably her favourite location of all the wildlife sites she has been based at.

Next were Skomer and Skokholm islands, monitoring the Puffins, Guillemots and Razorbills, along with Manx Shearwaters.

This was followed by the Isle of Skye with the RSPB, monitoring the White-Tailed Eagles for eight months. These were extinct in 20th Century but there are now 120 – 150 pairs. She explained how she monitored the nests and worked with a climber to take the chicks from the nests, weigh them and return them. She gave an interesting story of how the climber once found a live octopus in a nest which must have been brought by the adults as food for the chicks. The octopus made a move for the climber when he got into the nest! She also monitored the Golden Eagles which are in decline due to disturbance from climbers and walkers where they nest inland. Disturbance is less of an issue for White-Tailed Eagles where their nests are more coastal – less accessible to climbers and protected, due to the presence of nesting seabirds. Also Golden Eagles seem to be less comfortable living with humans than White-Tailed Eagles.

Sarah then joined the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) to organise the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) which covers 119 species and as well as 9 mammals. She explained that Muntjac and Roe deer numbers had increased drastically – by around 300% - and there was evidence that this was affecting songbird populations She also organised the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) which is a smaller bird survey: covering 38 species for breeding. Various trends were found from the surveys, including Little Egrets having a 2347% increase. Goldfinches have had a 150% increase, mainly due to garden feeding. Chaffinches on the other hand have decreased 32% due to diseases. Greenfinches have had a similar decline due to a respiratory disease and went directly from the Green list to Red list in 2021.

The talk generated a lot of questions from the Society members.