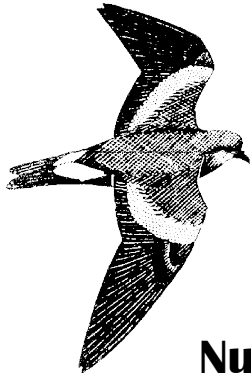


Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society

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BIRD NEWS

Number 123

July 2023



**A Day of Stonechats
County Rarity: Great Shearwater
The Footit Challenge**

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Bird News welcomes articles, letters and comments relevant to birdwatching in Cheshire and Wirral. Please either email or post your contributions to the Editor at the address shown above.

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Front cover: Black-winged Stilt by Ray Scally

Other illustrations by Phil Jones and Ray Scally

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 14th October 2023

Guest Editorial

I was struck when reading Colin Schofield's article about the January Footit challenge about his observations of changes in abundance of and difficulty in recording different species. Far from having no scientific basis are instead the fundamental building blocks of detecting the immense changes that are occurring in biodiversity. Multiple observations of changes in local populations can build a compelling picture of larger patterns.

I have taken sedentary birding to something of an extreme and am taking part in the National 2023 Patchwork Challenge using just my garden and the new Atlantic Salt Meadow and embryo dune system developing between it and the sea as my patch. I am up to a not too shabby 116 species so far but it's been a strange spring. I've only had one Wheatear, no Sedge Warbler, and only recorded Reed Warbler in mid-June, yet I had my second and third Stonechat in the garden, part of the passage noted in Richard Smith's article on Stonechats. Another remarkable aspect of what was generally a difficult spring passage, with non-ideal conditions though most of April and May was five different Grasshopper Warblers; at one point two were having a Mexican stand off on my front lawn. Speaking to friends on the East Coast, this seems to have been a local phenomenon, with weather conditions funneling birds up the west coast more than usual.

Aside from Stonechats and Grasshopper Warblers I don't know of any passage migrants that appear to have had a better than average spring. My sole Spotted Flycatcher of the year prompted me to get out some of my records from previous years. Just up the road at Red Rocks I recorded 58 Spotted Flycatchers in May 1994, and 1382 Swifts peaking at 435. It used to be commonplace to see and hear 50-100 in screaming parties over Hoylake. I've not seen more than four Common Swifts together this spring, coincidentally the same as the number of different Alpine and Pallid Swifts I've seen over the area since last summer. Swifts are long lived bird with low reproductive rates. Provision of Swift bricks in new build houses may go some way to stabilising populations, but I have a sinking feeling that the real cause of Swift, Spotted Flycatcher, and for that matter hirundines, decline at 'insectageddon'.

According to the Bugs Matter survey, the abundance of flying insects in the UK has plummeted by nearly 60% over the last 17 years, and though it wasn't measured, I feel that was already a much depleted baseline to measure to. The survey, which was conducted by Kent Wildlife Trust and Buglife, involved citizen scientists collecting insects on vehicle number plates. The results showed that the number of insects collected in 2021 was 59% lower than in 2004. This struck me as a cycled back down the Wirral Way to 10 miles or so from a friend's 80th birthday party on a still sunny afternoon. I saw just three butterflies. Coming in through my back gate I was met by a haze of flying insects, bees, wasps, hoverflies, butterflies and a myriad of small things I can't identify. I managed to get four in my eye down the length of my garden path. A garden full of native plants, an 'in development' meadow and no pesticides since 2000 is all it has taken. Habitats recover if we let them. The developing green beach here in Hoylake is supporting more and more species as it recovers from decades of mechanical and chemical abuse. This year it managed to attract a migrant Quail briefly, but much more importantly it's sustaining an increasing population of Linnets, possibly contributing the record numbers reported on Hilbre in John Elliot's article.

Outside in the garden yesterday I heard a Black-headed Gull and it struck me suddenly that their raucous calls that should be filling the air just now, a point mentioned in Richard Smith's great piece about Meols. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) has been ripping through Black-headed Gull colonies in the UK, with more than 10,000 deaths reported at breeding colonies this year. Our local colonies are affected, as are the Common Tern colonies at Shotton and Seaforth, where mass deaths have occurred. The scale of this disaster is hard to comprehend.

The only way we can protect against the long term impacts of climate change and short term effects of high impact diseases such as HPAI is to take urgent actions to reach carbon net zero and protect and create rich and varied habitats that can support the food chains from the bottom up. Which brings me full circle. One of the most important things we can do as birders is to focus

on our local areas, do all we can to protect them, keep our carbon footprints to a minimum and make sure our records are put into the national recording systems.

Enjoy this edition of *Bird News* - sorry for the sermon.

Jane Turner

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 14th October 2023

please be prompt

We cannot guarantee that material received after this date will be published in that issue. If you are aware that your material may be delayed, please let the Editor know as soon as possible.

CAWOS News

There have been two Council meetings since the last edition of *Bird News*. The AGM in March and an ordinary Council meeting in April.

The attendance at the AGM was disappointingly low and the subject of low attendances at meetings is now being considered and addressed by Council.

The main outcome from the AGM was confirmation that Ted Lock has stepped down from the role of CAWOS Secretary after 15 years, and I have taken over that role from him. I know that I can speak on behalf of all members in thanking Ted for his time and dedication to CAWOS over the years. I have only known Ted for four years myself, and am grateful to him for being so knowledgeable and approachable and making me feel welcome at CAWOS. He has always been there to offer advice and, for that reason alone, I am also thankful that he is continuing as a Non-Executive Member of Council! Thank you Ted.

The other Council changes confirmed at the AGM were the resignation of John Jones and the election of Emma Jenks. We welcome Emma and look forward to her input. There is now a vacancy for one Non-Executive Member. If anyone is interested, please contact me at davidhiley@cawos.org.

The CAWOS website has been amended to reflect the changes mentioned above, with the help of Mike Hems, and there are other changes to be made to bring everything up to date.

Our Chairman, Phil Hampson, was unable to attend the April Council meeting for health reasons so the meeting was chaired by Tony Parker. One of the main subjects discussed was the declining attendance at Zoom meetings. Enquiries are being made of other societies and, as mentioned in the last issue of *Bird News*, we may revert to members with alternative proposals if appropriate.

Our Treasurer, John Patterson, confirmed that, despite subscription income being slightly down, income from database searches and *Bird Report* sales were ahead of plan so the expectation is that the final outcome will be slightly ahead of the original budget.

The deadline for submitting records for the 2022 *Bird Report* was the end of April. The data for the 2022 *Bird Report* is currently being prepared. This a considerable amount of work for which we are extremely grateful to Phil Hampson. It is hoped that the prepared data will be distributed to compilers shortly.

It is pleasing to report that all the priority squares for the Woodcock survey reported in the last *Bird News* have been taken and the survey at Lindow Moss is also going ahead with the participation of Ted Lock, Andy Livermore, Brian Dyke and Jon Kelly.

David Hiley

MEMBERSHIP

Welcome Kate Jauffur (and family) - thanks for joining CAWOS.

There is little to report since the previous edition of *Bird News*. Membership is currently standing at 292 - slightly below the total of this time last year.

Carolyn Bailey

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

As I write this it is early summer, depending which way you look at it. I hope everyone has had a good spring birding. This spring seems to have been very dry and now warm. Locally to where I live there have been some great reports of Stonechats breeding and then showing with four young. Sand Martins have returned and are nesting in the riverbank, can't see which side as the river is the county boundary. But they are flying and feeding in Cheshire! This week a Yellow Wagtail family has been seen, great record as a scarce bird in the area.

Work on the 2022 *Bird Report* has been progressing with me working on the data. There is a great deal of work to ensure the locations are matched to our gazetteer. This is all done now and I and Ted just need to work on a couple of points, we can then send the packs to our compilers. Have to say thank you to this group of people for their hard work in generating their sections of the systematic list. May seem a simple task to people reading the list but there is a great deal of work done by the compilers before we can publish. I expect we will publish the report in very late autumn/early winter.

For many years Graham Palmer has been an important and integral member of the *Bird Report* team working on the data before we send it to the compilers. Sadly, he has had to step down due to ill health. I would like to thank Graham for all his hard work and to say how I enjoyed working with him on the last two reports. The work you have done in the background Graham is very much appreciated.

For those going on holiday I hope you have a great time and if birding good luck.

Phil Hampson

Note: If YOU see anything of interest in your local paper, on the Internet, or even in the national press, relevant to Cheshire and Wirral, please bring it to the Editor's attention. Either scan in the article and email it, or cut it out and put it in the post. Please make sure the source and date are clear. Editor's contact details are on the inside front cover of *Bird News*.

**If you know anyone who might want to advertise
in future Bird News please let me know and
I'll contact them with all the information.**

Sheila Blamire at sheilablamire@cawos.org Tel: 01565 830168

CAWOS Programme

The 2023-2024 programme will be done by Zoom and instructions will be sent via email to the membership, so please make sure we have your up-to-date email address. Any other updates to this programme will be on www.cawos.org and again via emails to the membership.

6th OCTOBER 2023

'BBS IN CHESHIRE, WIRRAL AND BEYOND' by David White, BTO

In my talk, I will outline what the Breeding Bird Survey is and how long it has been running for. I will also focus on local results from the survey, especially from Cheshire and The Wirral. As well as exploring local bird population trends, I will also explore local mammal trends as appropriate.

3rd NOVEMBER 2023

'ARCTIC SKUAS' by Nina O'Hanlon, BTO

The talk will cover the biology, behaviour, conservation and ecology of the species. More information will be provided nearer the time.

1st DECEMBER 2023

'WILDLIFE OF EAST ANGLIA' by Kevin Elsby, Wildlife on the Web

The talk is entitled Wildlife of East Anglia and covers a wide variety of the birds, insects, plants and mammals to be found in this part of the UK. The overall diversity is related to the numerous habitat types to be found in East Anglia. I have lived in Norfolk for over 35 years and have been photographing the wildlife to be found there for even longer than that. I am a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society and a leader for Naturetrek. I speak on wildlife on cruises around the world and am also a speaker / guide on polar expeditions.

5th JANUARY 2024

'THE SCIENCE AND BEAUTY OF BIRDS' by Oliver Smart, Smart Images

Ever wondered why a raptor has an orbital ridge or what the purpose is of a tubenose on a petrel? Well, in this talk, Oliver guides you through some fascinating insights to the science of birds, their adaptations, evolution and physiology. Oliver's talk is split into four sections covering the science of birds, the photography, the aesthetics of bird photography and the rewards.

2nd FEBRUARY 2024

'ANTARCTICA, FALKLANDS AND SOUTH GEORGIA' by Mike Watson

A bird and wildlife talk that takes us to the 'great white continent'. Antarctica, Falkland Islands and South Georgia offer up a feast of seabirds, rare land birds (including a number of endemics) and marine mammals (seals, whales and dolphins). Antarctica is like no other journey on earth; it is about as close to visiting another planet as we are ever likely to get. It is the last frontier on our ever-shrinking planet, a place that so few ever see. An uninhabited continent of more than twelve million square kilometres almost entirely encrusted with ice - an awesomely silent but starkly beautiful frozen world.

1st MARCH 2024

AGM followed by 'MERSEY WeBS SUMMARY 2023' (tbc) by Dermot Smith

More information will be provided closer to the time.

County Round-Up

Some of the records may be unauthenticated and therefore will require review by the Society's Rarities Panel or the BBRC. This report covers the period from January to April 2023.

SITE REPORTS

Chester area

Two Cattle Egrets were at Puddington on Jan 14th, Ospreys at Aldford on Apr 18th and Mollington on 23rd. Pied Flycatcher was at Burwardsley on Apr 11th and three Redstarts at Pulford on Apr 15th.

Congleton area

Red Kite was at Astbury Mere on Mar 31st and a Black Redstart here on Apr 29th.

Crewe and Nantwich area

Four Whooper Swans were at Sandbach Flashes on several dates during Feb-Mar, two Egyptian Geese at EHF on Jan 30th, two Garganeys at Railway Flash on Apr 23rd whilst two Scaups at Bar Mere on Jan 2nd to 26th. The first Little Ringed Plover was at PHF on Mar 13th, six Whimbrels at EHF on Apr 28th and Wood Sandpiper at PHF on Apr 23rd. A single Iceland Gull was at EHF on Feb 25th, White Stork was over EHF on Apr 17th with Cattle Egret at EHF from Apr 19th to 21st.

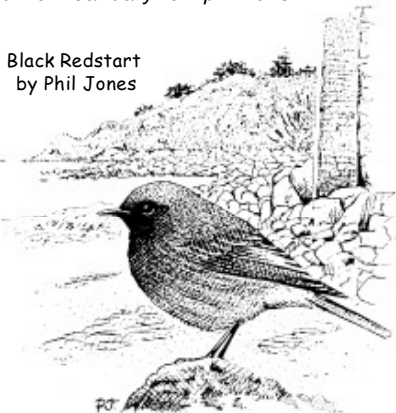
An Osprey was at EHF on Apr 24th, Marsh Harrier at Bar Mere on Mar 16th, Red Kites noted at Doddington Pool on Feb 7th, Crewe on Mar 11th, Norley on 24th, PHF on 23rd and Bickerton on Apr 3rd and an early Hobby at EHF on Apr 9th. The first Sand Martin was at EHF on Mar 17th, five Swallows at PHF on Apr 2nd, Willow Warbler at EHF on Mar 25th and a Firecrest at Quaker's Coppice on Jan 27th. Two Redstarts were at Bickerton on Apr 5th and two Whinchats Maw Green Tip on Apr 24th.

Ellesmere Port and Neston area

Wildfowl included: over 11,000 Pink-footed Geese on the Mersey Marshes on Feb 11th, single White-fronted Goose at BMW during early Feb with Lesser White-fronted Goose on Feb 19th (presumed escape). Two Bewick's Swans were at BMW on Jan 19th, 30 Whooper Swans at Shotwick on Jan 29th and BMW on Feb 28th and two Egyptian Geese at Neston on Jan 2nd. Four Garganeys were at Decca Pools on Mar 18th and Scaup at Shotwick on Jan 1st and 3rd. Alpine Swift was over BMW on Mar 30th. Three Cranes were reported at Parkgate on Apr 23rd, two Avocets returned to BMW Feb 19th with over 100 on Mar 27th and 248 counted on the Apr Mersey WeBS count. Black-winged Stilt was at BMW on Apr 26th and 27th, two Little Ringed Plovers at Parkgate on Mar 28th, 20,000+ Knots at Parkgate on Jan 14th and Long-billed Dowitcher at BMW for most of the period. Gull-billed Tern was at BMW on Apr 19th and 20th and Black Tern there on Apr 22nd.

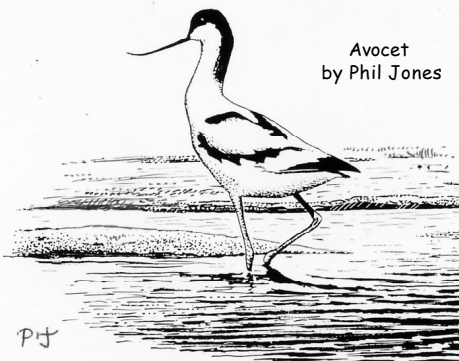
A single Spoonbill was at BMW and Parkgate on several dates late Apr, at least six Cattle Egrets at Parkgate on Jan 4th with seven Great White Egrets on 26th. Single Ospreys were over BMW, Burton and Neston on several dates, 15+ Marsh Harriers at Denhall on Jan 2nd with up to three Hen Harriers and Red Kite at BMW on several dates. The first Sand Martin was at BMW on Mar 15th, Willow Warbler on Mar 25th, possible Siberian Chiffchaff at Neston on Apr 18th, Sedge Warbler on Apr 15th and an early Reed Warbler at Parkgate on Mar 24th. Three Grasshopper Warblers were at BMW on Apr 21st, Savi's Warbler at BMW from Apr 10th to 18th, probable Dartford Warbler at Parkgate on Jan 29th. Ring Ouzel was at BMW on Apr 5th, Pied Flycatcher at BMW on Apr 17th and Blue-headed Wagtail at Shotwick on Apr 25th. Three Whinchats were at Burton Marsh on Apr 29th, up to four Water Pipits at Neston during Jan, 22 Twites at Parkgate on Mar 20th and Lapland Bunting at Neston on Mar 3rd.

Black Redstart
by Phil Jones



Halton area

Two Brent Geese were at Hale on Jan 16th, whilst single Common Scoters noted at Pickering's Pasture on Mar 8th and Hale on Apr 16th. Two Avocets were at Carr Lane Pools on Apr 23rd, Little Ringed Plover on Mar 17th, Grey Plover at Pickering's Pasture on Apr 22nd, five Whimbrels at Pickering's Pasture on Apr 22nd and Little Stint here on Jan 7th and Mar 18th. Caspian Gull was in the Widnes/Pickering's Pasture area on several dates, Kumlein's Gull on Apr 7th and 8th, Iceland Gull on Feb 4th and Glaucous Gull at Hale on Jan 8th. Spoonbill was observed at Hale on Apr 20th. Two Ospreys flew over Runcorn on Apr 19th and Merlin at Carr Lane Pools on Apr 3rd. An early Swallow was at Carr Lane pools on Mar 27th, Ring Ouzel at Hale on Mar 31st and Oxmoor LNR on Apr 15th and Redstart at Carr Lane on Apr 16th and 17th. Two Water Pipits were at Carr Lane on Mar 21st and 25th and Tree Pipit on Apr 22nd. Firecrest was at Hale Park from Jan 1st to 6th whilst a single Twite was in the Hale area on various dates.



Avocet
by Phil Jones

Macclesfield area

30 Whooper Swans were at Poynton Pool on Jan 13th, two Garganeys at Acre Nook SQ on Apr 25th and two Common Scoters there on Apr 8th and 9th and three Smews at Lapwing Hall Lake on several dates with Red-breasted Merganser on Mar 12th with another at Redesmere from Mar 14th to 16th. Four Black-necked Grebes were at Lapwing Hale Pool on Mar 23rd. Two Little Ringed Plovers were at Arclid SQ on Mar 19th, four Whimbrels at Acre Nook SQ on Apr 28th with eight Dunlins on Apr 28th. 20+ Little Gulls were at Acre Nook SQ on Apr 22nd with four Common Terns on Apr 28th. Osprey flew over Macclesfield Golf Course on Apr 6th, Marsh Harrier at Brereton on Mar 17th and Red Kite at Danebower on Apr 8th. Two Sand Martins were at Redesmere on Mar 15th, two Swallows at Lapwing Hall Poll on Apr 7th, two Ring Ouzels at Wildboardclough on Apr 19th and Danebower on 26th. Four Pied Flycatchers were at Tegg's Nose on Apr 17th and Redstart at Rainow on Apr 8th.

Vale Royal area

Two Egyptian Geese were at Marbury CP on Jan 21st and Tatton on Feb 23rd, four Garganeys at Frodsham Marsh on Apr 27th, Green-winged Teal at Frodsham Marsh from Apr 17th to 24th and Common Scoter at Tatton on Mar 17th with another at Marbury CP on Mar 19th and Apr 19th. 70+ Swifts were over at Ashton's Flash on Apr 30th. Two Cranes were at Hartford on Mar 16th and two Black-necked Grebes at Marbury CP on Apr 18th. Four Avocets were at Neumann's Flash on Apr 23rd, two Little Ringed Plovers at Marbury CP on Mar 19th, 22 Whimbrels at Neumann's Flash on Apr 29th, 25 Bar-tailed Godwits at Frodsham Marsh on Apr 22nd and Wood Sandpiper there during late Apr. 40 Little Gulls were at Newchurch Common on Apr 21st, two Common Terns at Winsford on Apr 21st, four Arctic Terns at Marbury CP on Apr 14th and Black Tern at Frodsham Marsh on Apr 30th. Cattle Egret was at Marbury CP on Apr 18th.

Four Marsh Harriers were at Frodsham Marsh on Jan 11th, Red Kite at Marbury CP on Mar 20th and Apr 8th and Middlewich on Apr 10th, Merlin at Newchurch Common on Jan 28th and 29th and Hobby at Ashton's Flash on Apr 9th. 11+ Waxwings were at Nunsmere on Jan 30th, 450 Sand Martins at Marbury CP on Mar 28th, Wood Warbler at Hob Hey Wood on Apr 26th, Sedge Warbler at Ashton's Flash on Apr 15th. Single Ring Ouzels were at Marston on Mar 22nd and Middlewich on Apr 12th, Pied Flycatcher at Moulton on Apr 15th whilst the White-throated Sparrow remained in Northwich for much of the period. Three Whinchats were at Frodsham Marsh on Mar 22nd, 500 Chaffinches and 220 Linnets at Newchurch Common on Mar 2nd.

Warrington area

Two Garganeys were at Woolston Eyes on Apr 6th, 975 Tufted Ducks here on Jan 22nd and Scaup on Jan 5th with Common Scoter at Silver Lane Pools on Mar 19th. The earliest Swift was at

Woolston Eyes on Apr 21st. The first Black-necked Grebe was at Woolston Eyes on Feb 17th with 19 by Apr 1st. Four Avocets were over Appleton on Apr 29th, Little Ringed Plover at Woolston Eyes on Mar 22nd with Wood Sandpiper on Apr 25th. At least 67 Little Gulls were at Woolston Eyes on Apr 19th, two Common Terns on Apr 13th and two Arctic Terns on Apr 20th. Two Spoonbills were at Woolston Eyes on Apr 18th and Bittern at Moore NR on Jan 24th.

Marsh Harrier
by Ray Scally



Osprey was at Woolston Eyes on Mar 31st and Apr 1st, up to four Marsh Harriers there during Apr, Red Kite at Silver Lane Pools on Apr 6th. Hoopoe was at Rixton on Apr 25th and Merlin at Silver Lane on Mar 14th. A Marsh Tit was at Moore NR on Mar 2nd, 600 Sand Martins at Woolston Eyes on Apr 9th with 60 Swallows on 13th and c119 Chiffchaffs counted on Apr 1st. The first Sedge Warbler was at Woolston Eyes on Apr 1st, Redstart at Silver Lane on Apr 21st, eight Yellow Wagtails over Woolston Eyes on Apr 28th whilst a Tree Pipit was at Silver Lane on Apr 6th.

Wirral area

185 Brent Geese were at Hilbre on Feb 12th, 6330 Pink-footed Geese at Heswall on Jan 22nd, Green-winged Teal at Heswall on several dates during Apr, Scaup at Hilbre on Mar 10th with eight Eiders on Feb 19th and Mar 5th. Velvet Scoter was noted at Hoylake on Jan 1st and Leasowe on 22nd, 15,000+ Common Scoters off Hoylake on Jan 3rd, seven Long-tailed Ducks at Hoylake on Feb 12th and West Kirby on 12th and 21st and 13 Red-breasted Mergansers at Heswall on Jan 7th. Two Alpine Swifts were at Red Rocks on Mar 22nd with others at Birkenhead, Hoylake and Saughall during mid-Mar, two Cuckoos were at Leasowe on Apr 24th. Waders of note included: 8800 Oystercatchers at Heswall on Feb 1st, 287 Whimbrels at Heswall on Apr 23rd, 250+ Bar-tailed Godwits at Leasowe on Feb 27th, 250 Sanderlings at Hoylake on Jan 8th, 22,500 Dunlins there on 23rd and seven Woodcocks at Moreton on Jan 4th.

275 Kittiwakes were off Hoylake on Jan 9th, 68 Little Gulls at Hilbre on Apr 1st, also at Hilbre 150 Sandwich Terns on Apr 12th, Little Tern on Apr 8th and 12th, 22 Common Terns on Apr 23rd and four Arctic Terns at Hilbre and Leasowe on Apr 23rd. Two Arctic Skuas were noted off Leasowe on Apr 23rd, 150 Guillemots off Hilbre on Jan 9th, two Black Guillemots on Mar 25th, 25 Razorbills and two Puffins off Hoylake on Jan 9th, 45 Red-throated Divers off Hoylake on Jan 3rd with single Great Northern Divers at Hoylake and West Kirby on Feb 12th, Leasowe on Apr 15th and Hilbre on 16th. 70 Manx Shearwaters were off Hilbre on Apr 12th along with 180 Gannets on the same day. Spoonbill was at Red Rocks on Feb 21st. Single Ospreys flew over Heswall, Hilbre, Hoylake, Leasowe and New Brighton on various dates in Mar and Apr, Red Kite at Leasowe on Mar 27th and Hobby at Heswall and Saughall on Apr 29th.

A Willow Tit was at Hoylake on Apr 28th, Bearded Tit at Hilbre on Mar 17th, 300 Skylarks at Heswall on Jan 21st and the first Swallow at Leasowe on Mar 24th. Single Wood Warblers were at Moreton on Apr 26th and Meols on 28th, c100 Willow Warblers at Hilbre on Apr 18th and three Grasshopper Warblers at Hilbre on Apr 18th. Single Ring Ouzels were at Leasowe, Meols and Red Rocks, Pied Flycatcher at Leasowe on Apr 21st and Meols and Thingwall on Apr 25th, Black Redstart at Hilbre on Mar 18th, at least four Redstarts at Hilbre on Apr 18th, four Whinchats at Leasowe on Apr 22nd, 30+ Stonechats at Leasowe on Mar 17th and 40+ Wheatears on Apr 30th. Six Tree Pipits were at Hilbre on Apr 30th, six Rock Pipits at Heswall on Mar 21st, a Redpoll of the Greenland race was at Hoylake on Apr 8th, Lapland Bunting at Hilbre on Feb 26th and Snow Bunting at Wallasey for most of the period.

Tony Parker, 41 The Park, Penketh, Warrington, Cheshire, WA5 2SG
Tel: 01925 726986 Email: tonyparker@cawos.org

Correction: the Water Pipit reported in the July *Bird News* at Neumann's Flash on Oct 18th was an error - it was actually a Rock Pipit.

Species Spotlight

A DAY OF STONECHATS

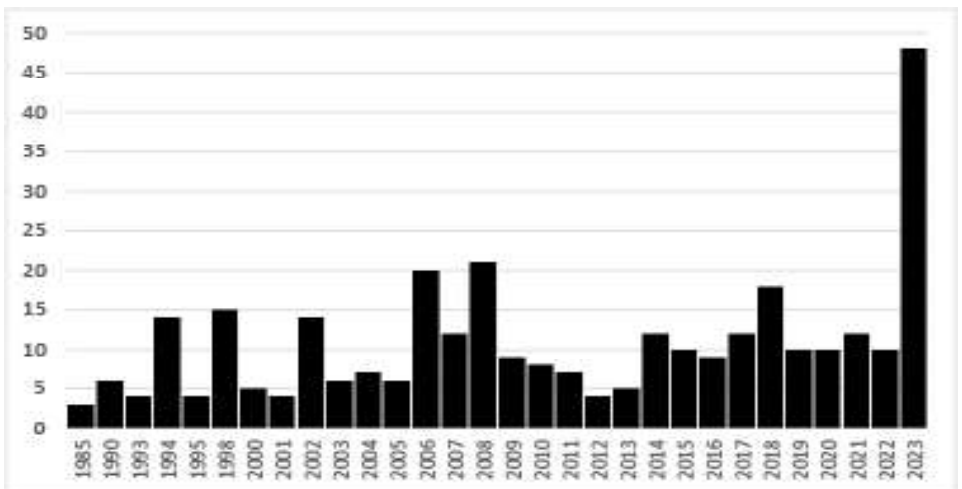
March 17th 2023 was one of those magical spring days we dream about during those long winter months. After prolonged cold weather, including some heavy snow, this was the first day of spring-like weather. The cold northerlies had held up the spring migration so we were expecting our first Wheatear of the year and we weren't disappointed with singles at both Burton and Little Eye early morning, quickly followed by around 20 more during the day - fantastic! We also had our first White Wagtail and our first Sandwich Tern of the year. Much more unexpected was Hilbre's first ever Bearded Tit, heard calling then briefly seen before flying off south.

But it was Jeremy Bradshaw's WhatsApp message shortly after 8am which really got my attention – "11 Stonechats in 'Hoopoe Hollow!!!"*. As I'm sure you all realise, Stonechats are very territorial and you just don't get flocks of them in one small horse paddock - they usually come in one or twos and even when we do get counts in double figures they will be spread over a wide area. Yet here we were with a flock of 11 and then came news of a flock of Stonechats on Hilbre! By late afternoon the birds at Hoopoe Hollow had increased to a remarkable 14 all sitting on a fence, together with 10 at Kerr's Field and up to six at the north end of the coastal paddocks, all in the Leasowe Lighthouse area. In addition, there was a minimum of 10 at Red Rocks and eight on Hilbre - giving a conservative estimate of at least 48. When Allan Conlin told me such numbers were unprecedented I knew I had to do some research to find out more and put these numbers into a historical context, hence this article.

*Hoopoe Hollow - our name for a small horse paddock just inland of Meols Common. As you've probably guessed a Hoopoe spent several days there a few years ago giving us local birders great views.

Stonechats in March at Leasowe aren't exactly unexpected, and this is what I wrote in my Dee Estuary February Newsletter: "Signs of the coming spring will include the usual passage of Stonechats along north Wirral". Some typical recent max daily counts are six on 28th Feb last year and 10 on Mar 17th in 2020. The previous highest count at Leasowe was 12 on Mar 14th 2017, but we had 10 in both 2007 and 2008 before the crash in numbers caused by the cold weather in 2010. We don't know what caused the high numbers in 2023, maybe it reflects a particularly good breeding season in 2022, or it could well be just a random event caused by weather conditions during their northward migration - I suspect both.

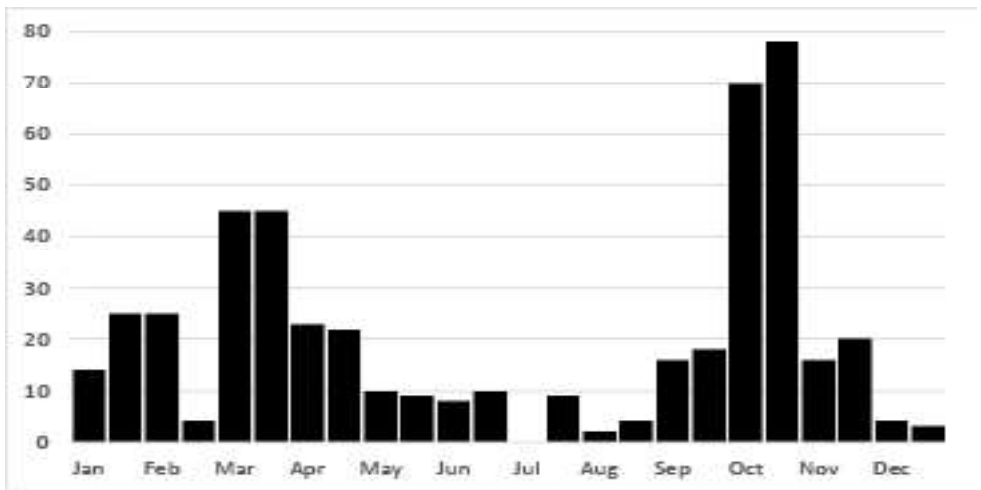
Stonechats on the Dee Estuary and North Wirral Coast
Peak annual counts 1985 to 2023



The bar chart on the previous page shows ad hoc counts made along North Wirral and the Dee Estuary for various years from 1985 to 1998 (those years not shown had max counts of just one or two birds) and from 2000 to 2023. They show the highest daily count made in any particular year. As well as those from the Leasowe Lighthouse area mentioned above other high counts of note were 20 from Heswall and Parkgate during a spring tide on Mar 19th 2006, 21 along Burton Marsh on Mar 9th 2008 and a combined count of 18 from Burton Marsh and Leasowe on Mar 7th 2018.

Most of these peak counts were from the Leasowe area or adjacent sites, and most were in late February and in March - so there has been a definite spring passage noted most years along the North Wirral coast. But there is also a return passage in October and the two highest counts for that month came from Burton Marsh with 12 in 2014 and 10 in 2019. Given that most peak counts are in spring it's perhaps surprising that more Stonechats are reported in October than March, as shown in the monthly distribution from Red Rocks, below. But after the breeding season a lot more Stonechats are present particularly after a good breeding season, the difference being that in March the passage is much more concentrated within just a few days, whilst in October birds are slowly dispersing away from breeding areas and any southward movement is much more leisurely. The monthly distribution at Red Rocks shows both the March and October peaks, plus over-wintering birds (mainly Jan and Feb) and breeding birds present from April to June.

Stonechats at Red Rocks Half-monthly totals for past 40 years



Red Rocks data provided by Jane Turner

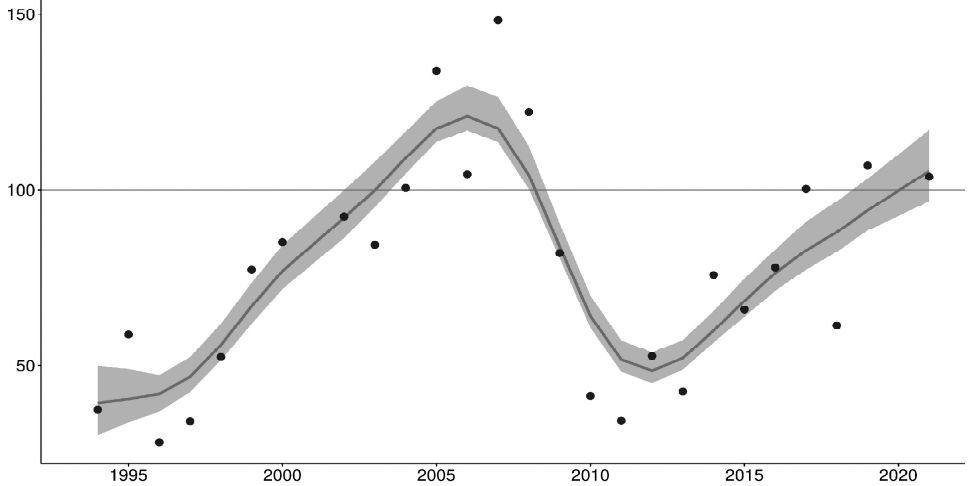
In the UK the Stonechat is doing very well with a 147% increase in breeding population since 1995 and similar increases in range both in the breeding and winter seasons. The BTO have a lot of data you can scrutinise here: <https://www.bto.org/understanding-birds/birdfacts/stonechat>.

Stonechats are hit hard by freezing weather and reading reports you can see how numbers plummeted when exceptionally cold winters struck such as in 1946/47, 1962/63 and 1981/82. The run of mild winters since has no doubt made a big contribution to the increase in numbers, but we did have some severe weather in the winters of 2009/10 and 2010/11 and you can see the effect in the two graphs opposite.

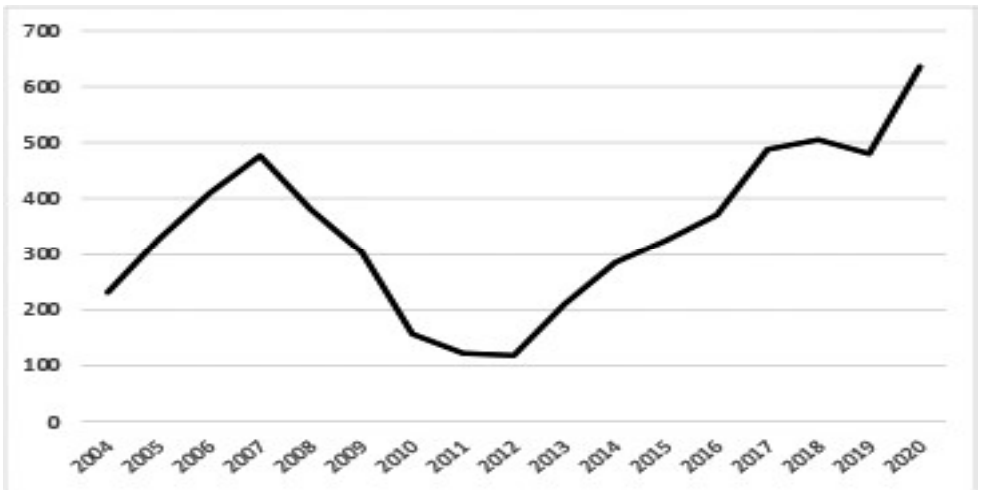
BTO graph: the smoothed *trend line* shows how the number of birds has changed through time. To make it easier to compare among species, this is expressed as an 'index', set to 100 in the penultimate year. An easy way to interpret this is to say for every 100 birds present now, the trend line shows how many were present in a previous year. The *shaded area* shows uncertainty around the trend line (based on 85% confidence limits) and values for individual years are shown as *dots*.

Harris, S.J., Massimino, D., Balmer, D.E., Kelly, L., Noble, D.G., Pearce-Higgins, J.W., Woodcock, P., Wotton, S. & Gillings, S. (2022) The Breeding Bird Survey 2021. BTO Research Report 745. British Trust for Ornithology, Thetford.

**Stonechat population abundance
Long-term trend (1994-) in United Kingdom**



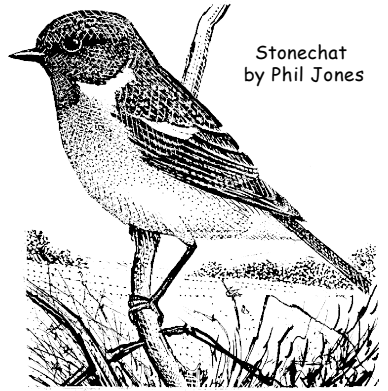
**Totals of Annual Stonechat Records
Submitted to CAWOS 2004 to 2020**



Given that these two graphs are derived from very different data it's remarkable how similar they are. The BTO graph is from BBS (Breeding Bird Survey) over the whole of the UK, whilst the second graph is of yearly totals of all Stonechat records submitted to CAWOS (Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological society) to be included in the *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report*. The records are mainly of birds on passage and over-wintering with just a few breeding records (note this second graph will be slightly skewed as more BirdTrack records have been used in recent years than in the earlier years). Prior to 2010 both graphs peak in 2007 with a fall in numbers caused first by a cold winter in 2008/09 followed by the severe winters of 2009/10 and 2010/11. It took the birds two or three years before starting a strong recovery in 2013 and up to the present day. Even our first bar chart (peak annual counts) shows a similar pattern with a decrease in numbers between 2009 and 2012 before the recent increase.

Breeding

Stonechats breed around the Dee Estuary in small numbers. *The Cheshire and Wirral Atlas* stated that between 2004 and 2006 at least three pairs bred along North Wirral. Since then they have been recorded breeding most years there plus at Heswall, Burton Marsh, Burton Mere Wetlands, Talacre/Point of Ayr and Gronant. However, the Atlas noted that many more used to breed along the coast in the 1980s (during survey work for the first *Breeding Bird Atlas*), but also noted that several pairs now breed in the eastern hills of Cheshire where they had been absent previously. Stonechats usually have two broods and sometimes three so during a successful breeding season a pair can produce at least 10 young - very useful when recovering from a population crash.



Stonechat
by Phil Jones

Atlantic Stonechats

The identification and taxonomy of Stonechats can be quite complex but, apart from a rare visit by an 'Eastern Stonechat', in this country we need only consider one species - the European Stonechat (*Saxicola rubicola*). The species is split into two sub-species which are commonly known as Atlantic and Continental Stonechats. These two sub-species are described as 'weakly defined' mainly because there is a lot of variation and overlap. Atlantic Stonechats (*S.r. hibernans*) are found in SW Norway, Great Britain and NW France, and probably coastal Portugal. These are partial migrants and it is reckoned about 40% migrate south of this country for the winter with ringing returns telling us that they spread themselves out between western France, Iberia and the western Mediterranean coast of Africa. Continental Stonechats (*S.r. rubicola*) are found right across Europe including Spain, France, Germany, Denmark and Italy with many migrating south to the Mediterranean basin for the winter. Continental Stonechats are commonly believed by birders to be regular migrants through the UK, perhaps even breeding in SE England, but, because of the difficulty in differentiating the two sub-species, they are not on the British List.

Intriguingly, Jane Turner (now the Cheshire and Wirral Bird Recorder) was sure that eight male Stonechats she saw in a flock of 14 on the Royal Liverpool Golf Course in March 1994 were of the Continental race, and of the 10 or so Stonechats seen around Red Rocks on March 17th 2023 Mark Turner thought two were good candidates for the Continental race. It seems likely that the birds we saw on March 17th were passage migrants coming north after spending winter in France, Spain or even as far south as North Africa. It is also likely that both Atlantic and Continental races spend winter in the same areas and then head north at the same time so it is not unreasonable that both races migrate north together so that Atlantic birds could carry Continental birds even as far north-west as North Wirral. One day colour ringing may tell us for sure! Whatever their race there's no doubt they are a stunning-looking bird and I love seeing them. They are very photogenic; a selection of great photos can be seen with the original article published on the Dee Estuary Birding Website <http://www.deeestuary.co.uk/news0423.htm>.

References:

1. *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Reports*, 1966 to 2021, currently published by CAWOS.
2. *Clwyd Bird Reports* and *North-east Wales Bird Reports*, various from 1975, currently published by Clwyd Bird Recording Group.
3. Stonechat Bird Facts page and Trends Explorer - <https://www.bto.org/understanding-birds/birdfacts/stonechat>.
4. David Norman, *Birds in Cheshire and Wirral (a breeding and wintering atlas)*, Liverpool University Press, 2008.
5. Helm, Barbara & Fiedler, Wolfgang & Callion, J.. (2006). Movements of European Stonechats *Saxicola torquata* according to ringing recoveries. *Ardea*. 94. 33-44.
6. Chris Kehoe, Racial identification and assessment in Britain, a report from the RIACT subcommittee, *British Birds* 99 (635-636), 2006.

Richard Smith

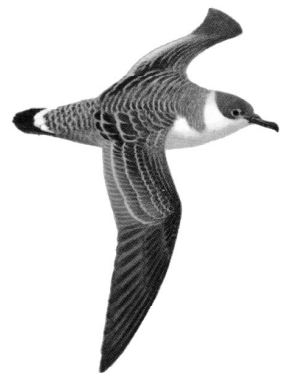
County Rarities

GREAT SHEARWATER *Ardenna gravis*

Bearing in mind the number of hours that are put into sea-watching of our coasts looking for Leach's Petrels, records of all large shearwater species are few and far between. There are several reasons for this: firstly their peak passage in NW Europe tends to be late summer as opposed to our peak sea-watching time in September, secondly they tend to feed over deep water, rather than the shallows of Liverpool Bay and thirdly, when on passage, they tend to stay just in sight of land, and so would cut the corner between the Lancashire coast and the Great Orme.

For these reasons, the best chance of seeing any large shearwater off Cheshire and Wirral is in squally conditions with bad visibility, and odds are it will already be making its way back out to sea. Unless you are really lucky and the bird is close and in good light, it's very likely that you will have just a few seconds and less than perfect views to identify it.

Seen well Great Shearwater is easy to identify. There is a rather skua-like dark cap and striking pale collar, contrast between paler browner inner wing and much darker outer wing, and a pale horseshoe on the uppertail coverts, as well as dark markings on a generally white underwing. At distance, against the sea and in bad light, all this detail reduces, if you are lucky, to darker upperparts, paler underparts and a distinctive paler collar.



Fortunately, the structure and flight can be helpful. Great Shearwater has notably long and narrow wings but tends to fly most like the noticeably smaller Manx Shearwater, with five or so flaps close to the water surface, between careening arcs. Great, like Cory's Shearwater, also crosses the surface of the water on bowed wings, but doesn't share that species' lazy almost meandering flight. Fulmar is a fatter bird, which shorter broader wings which are held flat and will show a pale head, in any circumstances where you can see the underside is pale.

I hate to think how many hours I have put into sea-watching off Wirral, and I have never had a sniff of a Great Shearwater. But in recent years there have been large numbers in The Minches in late summer, so it might just be a case of a well-timed squall.

Jane Turner

GREAT SHEARWATER IN CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL

Describing its status in English coastal waters Brown & Grice in *Birds in England* (2005) say "few coastal counties have recorded more than ten birds". They go on to say that "the vast majority of English records are from Cornwall where the birds occur annually in August and September.... Most of the remainder of the records are from July or October."

Cheshire and Wirral, with just two records, joins most of the other coastal counties away from Cornwall with less than ten records. The two records are both from Hilbre, both are of single birds and the three named observers are all of some renown. The first was seen on 31st October 1971 by Ted Abraham and John Gittins and the *Cheshire Bird Report* for the year includes brief descriptive details. The second was seen by Tim Cleeves, on 12th September 1980, towards the start of a period of north-westerly gales.

When or even whether there'll be another Cheshire and Wirral record is anyone's guess!

Steve Barber

Ringling News

Ringling plays an important part in developing our knowledge of birds. In this feature we invite ringling groups, or individual ringlers, active in Cheshire and Wirral to contribute their own accounts of their activities. In general, the idea is that these should provide a means of updating local birders on the groups' work - both by way of information about birds ringed or recovered, and news of other events (or incidents). Future contributions will be welcomed.

RINGING AT WOOLSTON - WINTER 2022/2023

This covers the winter period from October 2022 through March 2023 ('this winter').

In the period under review 1,467 new birds of 42 species were ringed at Woolston which compares with 1,856 new birds of 34 species in the 2021/2022 winter period ('last winter'). For the first time in three years there were no restrictions on winter ringling. The decrease of 389 birds (or 21%) is more than accounted for by the absence of Bramblings with just one ringed compared with 466 last winter. On No.3 Bed the easing of the Avian Flu outbreak allowed the Fixed Duck Trap to be operated and 146 Teal were ringed as well as a drake Shoveler, just the second to be ringed at Woolston after a bird in 2001.

Winter ringling is a combination of resident birds and migrants from further north in the UK or continental Europe. Totals for a representative selection of resident birds are shown below. Results appear mixed with most species apparently having a reasonable breeding season. The comparison for Long-tailed Tit is at odds with the ringling results for the year of 2022 which were significantly better than for 2021 and it may be a matter of timing such that in 2022 we caught more of the recently fledged juveniles by the end of September and they did not fall into the winter totals.

	2022-2023	2021-2022	Delta
Dunnock	21	16	+5
Song Thrush	13	7	+6
Robin	26	+6	
Wren	42	-2	
Long-tailed Tit	39	55	-16

Chiffchaffs were again present in good numbers with 59 ringed after 65 last winter. However, it is likely that only the bird ringed on 28th January was a genuine overwintering bird with the others being late leaving or early arriving migrants. 10 Blackcaps were ringed in the last quarter of 2022. The nine ringed up until November 9th probably represent the tail end of autumn passage, but the bird ringed on No.1 Bed on December 9th was probably overwintering. Cetti's Warblers continue to spread and 22 were ringed compared with 10 last winter.

In late autumn we anticipate the passage of both Goldcrests and Redwings. Goldcrests arrived in good numbers and 217 were ringed compared with 163 last winter. It was not the same story with Redwings. There were small parties very evident across the reserve but 87 were ringed compared with 117 last winter implying that the scale of arrival was reduced. There was no obvious passage of Meadow Pipits and only five were ringed compared with 34 last winter.

As is usually the case, winter visitors were evident in variable numbers. After a remarkable arrival last winter there were virtually no Bramblings on the reserve. Chaffinches, some of which also arrive from Scandinavia, were present in lower numbers with 125 ringed compared with 197 last winter. The remorseless downward trend in Greenfinches reversed a little with 149 ringed compared with 109 last winter but the winter of 2020/2021 was 189.

Lesser Redpolls are irruptive at Woolston and it was a reasonable movement with 88 ringed compared with 57 last winter.

As I write in early June it is too early to have any clear view of the breeding season except to say that the Blue Tits and Great Tits appear to again have done reasonably well in the nest boxes. A total of 141 chicks have been ringed on No.3 Bed compared with 145 in 2022. There is one late brood still to ring. Of course, the real acid test is how many chicks successfully fledge

but the early signs are promising with good brood sizes. Of 24 nesting attempts, 20 made it to the chick stage. Of these, nine have so far been checked for fledging with a one hundred percent success rate.

As a tailpiece - what of the surprises? Kestrel and Woodcock were ringed on No.1 Bed, both unusual in the nets at Woolston. Yellow-browed Warbler is less than annual and, in most winters the individual ringed on No.1 Bed on 3rd October would be the winter's stand-out bird but on 12th November on No.3 Bed a Penduline Tit found its way into a net. Not surprisingly, this was the first of this species to be ringed at Woolston and very likely to have been the bird seen at Pennington Flash a week or so previously.

Michael Miles, on behalf of the Woolston Ringing Team

Correction In the last Ringing at Woolston in the March Bird News one table was incorrectly converted and the dates were transposed. Sorry for this error. Here's the correct table:

Ringing date of first juvenile for migrant warblers:

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Chiffchaff	06-Jun	28-May	26-May	31-May
Blackcap	04-Jun	17-Jun	07-Jun	09-Jun
Whitethroat	11-Jun	26-Jun	16-Jun	09-Jun
Reed Warbler	24-Jun	26-Jun	16-Jun	22-Jun

MID-CHESHIRE BARN OWL GROUP

At the risk of being too optimistic, so far 2013 looks as though it could be a very good year for Barn Owls in Cheshire. There, I've gone and done it now - the rest of 2013 will probably be awful.

I reported last time that we'd had more early Barn Owl sightings than usual this year already - but didn't want to get over optimistic. Well, there can be no doubt that so far we're reporting an increase in the number of breeding Barn Owls and an increase in the sizes of broods. In fact, we're getting a goodly number of broods in excess of 6 eggs/chicks - even as high as 9. In addition, there seems to be a very good supply of food out there - with a number of boxes having caches of voles and shrews, etc, in them, ready to feed the increased number of hungry mouths.

It's clearly 'early days' so far, but long may this continue this year. However, as ever, we're in the hands of Mother Nature and the ever increasing incidents of extreme weather. We can only hope things don't change too much over the next few important breeding months.

As noted in our last reports, we've still found no obvious signs of bird flu deaths within the Cheshire Barn Owls. Fingers crossed again in this respect, because we have no obvious controls over this desperate decease at the moment.

As my now usual final comments - we do our best, but it stretches our limited resources to help support these beautiful and iconic birds. We get a great deal of satisfaction out of the conservation work we do. But we are always in need of more help.

To repeat our usual concerns and plea - if you have seen any Barn Owls recently please could you let us know, either direct or by our sighting report on the website www.cheshirebarnowls.co.uk; as you will appreciate it is important that we know where the birds are regularly seen.

John Mycock, Chairman Tel: 07970 235437 Email: cheshirebarnowls@gmail.com

COLOUR RING REPORT

This report is a summary of the records obtained by the Dee Estuary Colour-ring Birding Group from mid-February to early June 2023.

Shelduck: Although Shelduck are present all year round on the Dee Estuary we have two seasons when they come near enough to read rings - autumn and spring. We were struggling this spring to find any but were pleased to end up with three as follows: Lime HZ and LH were both ringed at WWT Martin Mere in November 2018 and they have been recorded dozens of times

there each winter since. Our two records of HZ, at Meols in April 2023, were the first away from the ringing site, whilst LH was at Thurstaston in October last year and also in March 2023. The third one was one ringed in the Lower Derwent Valley NNR (Yorkshire) in November 2020. It has only been recorded twice since - at Meols in March 2021 and again in April 2023.

Marsh Harrier: This was a wing-tagged individual spotted flying over Parkgate Marsh in March 2023. It was a female, ringed and tagged as a nestling in Norfolk in June 2021 - the nest featured in BBC Springwatch that year. This was its second visit to Parkgate having been recorded previously in February 2022, since when it has also visited RSPB Titchwell, Langtoft Fen, Lincs and Rutland Water.

Grey Plover: Of our regular waders the movements and migrations of Grey Plovers are probably the least understood. To find out more over 100 have been colour-ringed on the nearby Sefton Coast over the past few years and we have seen 36 of these a total of 74 times since October 2022. High tide at Hoylake has been the most productive site, but we have also recorded them at Meols, Thurstaston and West Kirby.

Black-tailed Godwit: Operation Godwit has now been on-going for over 20 years, and so far, we have recorded 285 Black-tailed Godwits ringed by this project. Two seen this spring are notable: L/L-L (three lime rings) was ringed as a chick in Iceland in June 2003. Since then, it has been recorded a remarkable 285 times with over 90% of sightings coming from the Dee Estuary. After several records in 2021 there were none the following year so we thought this bird was no more, then we got a surprise when it was reported from Frodsham Marsh in March this year, after which it turned up at Caldly in April. If it survived the journey to Iceland it will now be 20 years old. The second bird of note was fitted with an orange flag inscribed with the letters AA. It was ringed on the Maltraeth Estuary on Anglesey in November 2022 and its only sighting was at RSPB Burton Mere Wetlands in April. The reason why this is notable is because it is the only Black-tailed Godwit ever to have been colour-ringed on the west coast of mainland Britain (hopefully many more will follow)! All the other British-ringed birds have been caught on the east and south coast of mainland Britain, as well as in Ireland.

Redshank: Despite the Dee Estuary being the most important site in the United Kingdom for Redshank we see very few ringed ones, so it was good to spot one at RSPB Burton Mere Wetlands in April and May. It was ringed in Chichester Harbour in November 2017 and recorded there every winter since. Previously it has been spotted at Burton, always in spring, in 2019, 2021 and 2022. Presumably, after spending each winter on the south coast, it travels north-west to breed here.

Knot: As explained in my last Colour Ring Report (February 2023) we see more colour-ringed Knots than any other species and between mid-February and early May (when the Knots depart to breed) another 104 were recorded. A notable record was one in a small group of waders (which included a Long-billed Dowitcher) at RSPB Burton Mere Wetlands which is the first colour-ringed Knot to be recorded there - it had been ringed at Hoylake the previous November.

Dunlin: The winter of 2022/23 saw very good numbers of Dunlin on the Dee Estuary, but it was a frustrating one for we colour-ring spotters as the several ringed ones we saw were always too distant or moving too quickly to read rings. However, we did manage to record two in the spring - one from each of the two most numerous races which visit us. White flag (5X3) was at Hoylake in March, having been ringed at Gdansk, Poland, in August 2021. This bird was the '*alpina*' race which breeds in northern Europe and western Siberia. Yellow ring (60C) was at Meols in May, having been ringed on the coast of Cardigan Bay in November 2018. This one was the '*schinzii*' race most of which breed in Iceland, they spend the winter in West Africa.

If you want to be part of the Dee Estuary Colour-ring Birding Group all you have to do is submit a colour-ring sighting either to myself or copy me in on any submission you may make elsewhere so I can include it in our database. Email: richard@deeastuary.co.uk.

Note there is a monthly colour-ring update on the Dee Estuary Birding Website: www.deeastuary.co.uk.

Richard Smith

CHESHIRE SWAN STUDY GROUP

Since my last report in February, our activities have been confined to counting flocks and collecting ring numbers. Please note that at the time of writing the RSPCA at Stapeley Grange, Nantwich is only accepting young wildfowl.

The maximum counts of flocks of Mute Swans since my last report are as follows:

- Acre Dell Pools, nr Congleton: 20 on 23rd May.
- Bottom Flash, Winsford: 11 on 19th Feb, 14 on 12th Mar, 8 on 23rd Apr and 48 on 23rd May.
- Burleydam Pool, nr Whitchurch: 11 on 16th Feb, 10 on 7th Apr and 18 on 7th May.
- Comber Mere, nr Whitchurch: 3 on 21st May.
- Coole Pilate, nr Nantwich: 8 on 24th Feb, 10 on 21st Mar and 15 on 10th Apr.
- Doddington Mere, nr Nantwich: 4 on 28th Mar, 9 on 23rd Apr and 31 on 29nd May.
- Neumann's Flash, Northwich: 9 on 23rd May.
- Redesmere, nr Macclesfield: 11 on 28th May.
- Sankey Valley CP, Warrington: 14 on 19th Feb and 15 on 12th Mar
- Woolston NR, Warrington: 40 on 19th Feb, 37 on 12th Mar and 25 on 23rd Apr.

Longevity Report

CNA0 was ringed as a third-year female on 26-4-04 at Winterley Pool, near Sandbach. Seen on 11-5-23 at Wychwood GC, Weston, near Crewe = aged 22 years.

CSH5 was ringed as a male cygnet on 2-8-02 at Cannock in Staffordshire. Seen on 11-5-23 at Wychwood GC, Weston, near Crewe = aged 21 years.

Please note that CNA0 and CSH5 are a pair and have hatched 70 cygnets since they started breeding in 2007, of which 56 have survived. We have ringed 43 of these cygnets.

Movements

CSJ4 ringed as a male cygnet on 15-8-21 on the canal, Barbridge, near Nantwich. Seen on 8-1-23 at Connah's Quay NR, near Chester = 34kms.

CSN2 ringed as an adult female on 7-5-22 on Bottom Flash, Winsford. Seen at Stowe near Whitney-on-Wye, Herefordshire = 124kms (found dead).

Sightings of all swans, geese and Mallards should be sent to: David Cookson at cheshireswans@gmail.com, giving details of place (6-fig map ref), colour/character combination of ring and, if with other birds, total number present in the flock. All sightings will receive a printout of the history for the relevant bird(s).

David Cookson, on behalf of Cheshire Swan Study Group
<https://cheshireswanstudygroup.wordpress.com>

HILBRE BIRD OBSERVATORY (HiBO)

Ringling February 2023 to early June 2023

A major issue dominating bird ringling in 2023 is the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) new hygiene rules introduced at the end of 2022 to minimise the chances of ringers spreading highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) from one bird to another. HPAI was a disease generated by the poultry industry in the Far East that has spread to wild birds and can now be encountered all round the world. British sea bird colonies were particularly badly affected in 2022 but other groups of birds, specifically passerines and near passerines, which are the bird categories mainly caught on Hilbre, have not been affected at all. The ringling on Hilbre in 2023 has followed the BTO guidelines to the letter and no birds showing symptoms of HPAI have been encountered. This has been a great relief to the ringers on Hilbre. HPAI is a terrible disease and we would like to highlight the fact that all local bird ringling has not been as fortunate as that on Hilbre.

The spring on Hilbre has been very interesting this year and the ringling has delivered some good results. A Robin was trapped in March that had been rung in Devon in September 2022. We expect a local movement of Robins in spring; we have ringed 24 Robins on Hilbre this year, but a

movement of this distance is unusual. Not so unusual was a Blackcap that was ringed at the Portland Bird Observatory 18 April 2023 and retrapped on Hilbre four days later. We have caught other birds ringed by Portland; we had a Willow Warbler in 2022 that got to Hilbre a day after being ringed at Portland. These events demonstrate the kind of migration movements that we would expect, although the Blackcap is interesting in so far as it is probably a British breeder returning from a winter spent in the Mediterranean, as opposed to a wintering bird going back to northern Europe.

Hilbre had a project that lasted for a number of years in the early 2000s where we colour ringed 400 Northern Wheatears of both the nominate race and the Greenland race. None of these birds were seen again, we got no sighting reports of the colour rings. So we were delighted to observe this spring a nominate race Northern Wheatear with a colour ring. This was the first Wheatear that we could identify where it came from - it was ringed at the Calf of Mann bird Observatory June 2022 and seen on Hilbre 28 May. The date this year would suggest that it was a failed breeder that was winding it was back to Africa.

We have had reasonable numbers of the migrants that we would expect at this time of year. As usual we have ringed more Willow Warblers than any other migrant but we have ringed over 50 Linnets. The Linnets come to Hilbre for the summer, they are a red list species in the UK, but they are holding their own on Hilbre. Last year was a record for birds arriving and for the number of young produced and it could be a similar situation this year. We have ringed 31 Chiffchaffs as well as all the Willow Warblers but the most exciting *Phylloscopus* warbler this year was a Wood Warbler. 25 years ago they used to breed in Stapeldon Woods but they have always been unusual on Hilbre so we were very pleased to catch one this year.

We caught four Sedge Warblers this year and one of them was suffering from a condition known as scaly leg. It can be caused by mites or by a virus. The disease is often found in Chaffinches where its spread was blamed on poor hygiene at bird feeders. Why it should be found on Sedge Warblers has not been explained.

So an interesting spring has been brought to a good end by an observation rather than a capture. We have ringed one Shelduck on Hilbre but we had a breeding colony that built up from the mid-2000s to the mid-2010s, there were 30 adults. Then a fox took up residence on Hilbre and the Shelduck decided not to attempt to breed on the island. We have seen returning birds in the 2020s but have seen no confirmation of breeding until June this year. Two adults were seen leaving the island 8 June with seven young. It is great to confirm Shelducks breeding on Hilbre once again.

John Elliott, on behalf of the Hilbre Bird Observatory



Blackcap
by Ray Scally

**If you know anyone who might want to advertise
in future Bird News please let me know and
I'll contact them with all the information.**

Sheila Blamire at sheilablamire@cawos.org Tel: 01565 830168

Sites to Watch

RSPB DEE ESTUARY RESERVE

First published on the RSPB Dee Estuary Blog on 24 May 2023 – see <https://community.rspb.org.uk/placestovisit/deeestuary/b/deeestuary-blog/posts/reserve-round-up-may-2023>

Recent sightings

It has been a great spring so far, especially for nesting Lapwing and Redshank. With half-grown chicks running around the wet grassland area and the first Avocet chicks have now hatched with more nests at the far end of the reserve viewable from the Border hide.



Speaking of chicks, our heronry has been causing a real stir for the visitors, with Grey Heron chicks already fledging. Then the Little Egrets can still be heard making their fantastic bubbling sounds, often described as a turkey farm in the trees. Plenty of Great White Egrets have been seen but no sign of them breeding and regular sightings of Spoonbill, just on Sunday one was seen from the Visitor Centre with occasional reports of Cattle Egret.

Another highlight for the breeding season has been our Marsh Harriers nesting again in the reed bed at Burton Mere Wetlands. They now have chicks in two nests with a single male working hard to bring food in. You can often catch great views of the male doing a 'food pass' to the females. This is when he flies over calls the female up off the nest and they pass food across mid-air. This has been viewed regularly from the Marsh Covert hide and the Reedbed screen.

Other birds of prey that have been generally pretty good have been Red Kite and Peregrine seen occasionally either just passing over or hunting on the reserve. Staff got lucky one sunny afternoon, with a spot from the main office window of a pair of Hobbys! We all rushed outside and caught a great view of them hunting insects overhead.

Speaking of birds who like to hunt on the wing; Swift, Swallow, and House Martin are now daily sightings. Sand Martins tend to come in early in the season and don't stick around with us for very long.

Over the last few months of spring migration we have been quite spoilt. On the main scrape, Bridge Pool, and Centenary Pool we have had a great variety of birds, like a regular view of a male Garganey on the main scrape, then fleeting but clear sightings of Mediterranean Gull, many Spotted Redshanks and Ruff in full breeding plumage, then Greenshank, Common Sandpiper and Wood Sandpiper. Then more recently, Ringed and Little-Ringed Plover, huge flocks of gorgeous rusty-red Black-tailed Godwits, and unusually for us, both the Bar-tailed Godwit and a great number of Knot hanging around too. Dunlins are looking very smart with their black bellies. Then a great unexpected highlight was the 10 Sandwich Terns seen on the main scrape in April for just one evening.

Between the main hide and the far Border hide the reserve is adorned with bird songs from warblers like Cetti's, Reed and Sedge and closer to home, just outside the Visitor Centre, a Common Whitethroat has been singing away for a couple of weeks now in the same very obvious place on top of our new electric pole, whilst plenty of Willow Warblers, Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps singing from the woodland and scrubby areas. Highlights up along the Hillfort trail have included dozens of Wheatears and a very showy male Ring Ouzel, which I can personally testify too as I made it out after work one sunny evening after work. Whilst Lesser Whitethroats have been seen along the trail toward Border hide.

If you head down to the Bunker hide area you are likely to find unto seven boxing hares in the field. Then overhead and landing very close for some spectacular views are the Yellow Wagtails nesting nearby.

As we move towards summer our visitors have been reporting an array of butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies adorning the reserve like aerial jewels. We have already been spoilt with the fantastic display of bluebells that carpeted both Gorse Covert Woodland and Burton Point. Other

spectacles to look forward to are the five different orchids we get from June onwards; we are already seeing the marsh orchids appear.

Star sighting

It is a hard one to pick just one star sighting, with a flurry of rarities seen this year! The Long-Billed Dowitcher being the longest visitor, staying for over a month, then briefly Gull-billed Tern, Black Tern, and in true form, the elusive Savi's Warbler only ever heard and my personal favourite for two individual days the male Black-Winged Stilt.

Wardens' wanderings

The warden team continues their rigorous monitoring of the breeding birds across Burton Mere Wetlands and out on the Dee Estuary. Another vital job they have to do regularly is the maintenance of the miles of electric fence. This is a critical part of their work for a successful breeding season; the fence is there to exclude large mammals from preying on the vulnerable eggs and chicks.

The volunteer warden team have been very busy recently with the likes of: path and viewing area clearance, dry-stone walling up at Burton Point and gate repairs. The list is endless as are their skills. Speaking of fences, the team have also been slogging away at the Welsh part of the reserve - Point of Ayr. Working tirelessly over the last month, installing fencing and facilities to protect and manage the Little Tern colony that is now slowly building. We will hopefully have another great year down there, as last year all their efforts really paid off with 40 pairs and around 60 chicks that fledged.

Megan B

ROSTHERNE MERE NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE

Newsletter Jan-Mar 2023

Welcome to the first newsletter of 2023. As I write this the sun is shining and it appears that spring has finally arrived. The transition of winter into spring is one of my favourite periods at Rostherne as it provides a lot of wildlife interest.

Wintering wildfowl included up to 12 Goldeneye, 32 Mandarin, 37 Pochard and over 150 Mallard, Teal and Wigeon. Up to 10 Goosanders flew into roost during Feb evenings. An early arrival was a Black-necked Grebe seen in front of the Boathouse during Feb. There were up to 28 Great Crested Grebes with several pairs displaying. Four Water rails squealed from the reed beds and five Woodcock flew into roost during Jan. Snipe were often encountered in the new wetland habitat.

There were around 550 Lapwing rising from surrounding farmland in Jan and 120 Golden Plover in Feb. There was a single Curlew and Oystercatcher calling in early Mar. The Cormorants started building their nests in Jan and there were birds sitting on 115 of them by the middle of Mar! Six Buzzards were seen on several dates with two fiercely battling with a Raven during Feb. Sparrowhawk and Kestrel were frequently observed and a Peregrine was hunting over Harpers Bank Wood on several dates. A welcome visitor was a Marsh Harrier in early Feb.

There were around 2000 Black-headed Gulls, up to 320 Lesser Black-backed Gulls and several Herring Gulls roosting on the mere in Jan evenings.

There have been at least three Barn Owls seen on the Reserve. Tony Tyler built an excellent new box which was put up to replace the old dilapidated one in Mere Field. Both Tawny Owl and Little Owl were also recorded during the quarter.

Bullfinches, Siskins, Lesser Redpolls and Reed Buntings often visited the bird tables in front of the Observatory and hides.

Kingfishers were frequently seen at several locations around the mere. Cetti's Warbler was recorded on most days and Malcolm Calvert caught two females and a male.

Over 100 Fieldfares and 80 Redwings were feeding in the fields around the Reserve in Jan. There were around 50 Linnets and flocks of Chaffinches, Goldfinches and Reed Buntings regularly feeding on the Sprout Field. Grey Wagtails were seen on the banks of Rostherne Brook from the road bridge.

Mar saw the arrival of the first Sand Martins and Chiffchaffs. Skylarks were heard singing as they displayed near the Sprout Field. Stonechats were seen on Dolls Meadow with two pairs on several dates.

One of the highlights was a male Otter as it swam across the Mere on 15th Feb. Fresh Otter spraints were seen along Rostherne Brook and in the Boathouse. One was recently captured on Trailcam footage in the Boathouse along with film of several American Mink. Brown Hares were frequently seen on the meadows and a Reeves' Muntjac was spotted in Harpers Bank Wood in Mar. The first butterfly of the season was a Small Tortoiseshell seen by Pete Kelly on 22nd Mar.

Bill Bellamy

Editorial note: In the November *Bird News* there will be an update what is happening about surface water run-off which contributes to poor water quality within the Rostherne Mere.

TATTON PARK

The transitional stages between winter and spring were marked with a variety of species in the parkland. A gathering of 34 Whooper Swans on Tatton Mere reflected winter on 26/3, while spring arrived with my first summer migrant, a Sand Martin, over Tatton Mere on 28/3, followed a day later by a Swallow. Passage migrants included a pristine Wheatear and an over-flying Osprey. A singing Redstart on the 11/5 led to hopes of repeated breeding success from a couple of years ago. A record of breeding Stonechat with 3 juveniles spotted was quite an unusual record, as was a rare sighting of a Cuckoo on 22/5. Another rarer sight these days was that of a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in one of the outer private woods. Unfortunately, many of these birds, as we all know, used to be common and it's a sad state when we are noting these once common birds as unusual or rare.

As we move to summer and autumn we can hopefully look forward to sightings of Hobby, maybe a Black Tern over the meres or a returning Osprey. Our resident Ravens have been successful again as has our heronry with 14 nesting pairs of Grey Herons this year. The Great Crested Grebes seem to have done well too and the sound of begging 'humbugs' will soon be a constant down by the meres.

Other breeding success came in the form of our Barn Owls when I discovered two chicks sitting alongside five eggs which were ready to hatch! They will be monitored and ringed later. We also ringed three Tawny Owl chicks that had taken up residence in one of my Barn Owl boxes.... Cheeky....

Away from the birds, the deer now have their young and they can be seen around the park. The hinds and does have been busy calving while the stags and bucks are lazing away the summer months growing antlers ready for the forthcoming autumn rut.

Darren Morris, Park Ranger

Late News: Four Barn Owls were ringed in early June.

A YEAR AT MEOLS - A FAVOURITE PLACE

In Spring last year I wrote an article on the Dee Estuary Birding website about the bird paintings along the 'Wader's Walk' at Meols, and this got me thinking about all the good bird experiences I've had there over the years, including some mega rarities found by others. Although this can be used as a site guide it's more a collection of highlights mostly from the past 20 years.

Setting the Scene

Meols Shore stretches along north Wirral from Meols groyne (1km west of Leasowe Lighthouse) in the north-east to the Hoylake/Meols boundary close to Hoylake Lifeboat Station in the south-west - taking you past Dove Point, Meols Parade and Sandhey Slipway. The tide comes in from the north-east along a channel from New Brighton direction - this channel fills very quickly and you don't want to be on the wrong side of it!

The shore between the Dove Point slipway and the groyne is relatively sandy although you have to cross some quite thick mud to get to it. Going south-west from Dove Point the shore is very muddy and hence attractive to waders. Beyond the muddy area is East Hoyle Bank which turns sandy as you approach the sea at low tide. On most days all this is covered by the sea at high tide, although on neap high tides some of East Hoyle Bank remains uncovered and the birds use it as a roost site. All the landward side (Meols Promenade and the sea defence) is raised up above the shore and gives good views over the sea at high tide. The rising tide usually reaches Dove Point, along the channel, two hours before high tide. The sea tends to spread out here as it moves towards Hoylake forming a lagoon with many waders and gulls feeding on the tide line. I'll describe some highlights season by season, but with rarities grouped at the end - and there have been some megas over the years!

Summer

I start with what many birders regard as the start of the birding year - with the return of the birds after breeding.

By the end of June there is a sharp increase in gulls on the shore with Black-headed Gulls easily the most numerous. Colour ringing tells us that many of these Black-headed Gulls breed in the north-west of England, but the same can't be said of the Mediterranean Gulls and they breed throughout the continent. In 2022 we saw a juvenile Med Gull in mid-July which had still been in the breeding colony on the Atlantic coast of France at the end of June, and over the years we have seen ones which have bred in the Netherlands and Germany and as far east as Poland. As the tide floods the Med Gulls often feed or roost on the mud in front of the incoming tide, with the shore in front of Sandhey Slipway a favourite spot. At low tide a sizable gull roost can form on the sand to the west of the groyne and in July 2022 eight Med Gulls were counted there. Another gull species to look out for is Little Gull, they are scarce here in summer but the last two years a single adult has been recorded on the tide line in August, and close enough to get a decent photo. Other gull species are recorded here in smaller numbers, including Common Gulls.

Although we never get large numbers at Meols the tideline in August is where you can get good close views of terns, mostly Sandwich at first then towards the end of the month there should be a noticeable influx of Common Terns with a few Little, and occasionally one or two Black Terns.

One of the joys of summer birding is seeing the waders in full breeding plumage. By the end of July Dunlins will be piling in and at this time of year we see the ones that have bred in Iceland and Greenland on their way to spend the winter in West Africa. Most of these will be of the *schinzi* race, but look out for the noticeably smaller *arctica* which only breed in north-east Greenland.

Although much smaller in number, Grey Plovers, Bar-tailed Godwits and Knot all look stunning at this time of year. Perhaps not as colourful, but juvenile waders always look so smart and 'brand new' and it's always good to see them as it means they have had a successful breeding season.

The Meols groyne is a magnet for birds, particularly at high tide. Notable recent summer records are 6 Common Sandpipers on July 19th 2021, 24 Little Egrets on August 24th 2022 and eight Wheatears on August 27th 2022.

Autumn

The adjacent Hoylake shore is well known for its high tide wader roost but it's not always realised that many of the waders, in particular the rare and scarce ones, often make their way to Meols as the tide drops - sometimes giving better views than at Hoylake. This certainly applies to Curlew Sandpipers and Little Stints in September and I well remember a couple of years ago standing on the shore by Dove Point when four Curlew Sandpipers dropped down beside me and started feeding. Little Stints and a good selection of other waders are probably best seen feeding in front of the incoming tide off Sandhey Slipway.

Oystercatchers are present all year but peak in the autumn. Several hundred can be seen feeding around the boats at Dove Point at low tide but a few thousand pass through before and after high tide between their roost site at Hoylake and the main feeding area off Leasowe. One thing I love seeing is 'The March of the Oystercatchers' which happens on every medium to spring high tide. As the tide starts to flood, coming up the channel, the Oystercatchers first gather in a large temporary roost on East Hoyle Bank off the groyne. They will then fly closer to the 'prom' and then all start walking in front of the tideline towards Hoylake. With their pink legs, black

and white bodies and bright orange beaks it is really quite comical and impressive at the same time. It is also a good opportunity to look out for colour rings on those pink legs and we have seen birds ringed in Iceland, Norway, the Netherlands as well as several locations around the UK.

Autumn, of course, is when we expect, and hope for, gales. Any prolonged north-west gale, particularly around mid-September, will blow in Leach's Petrels as well as a selection of skuas and other sea birds. It was Meols where I saw my first Leach's Petrel in September 2001. It was high tide and blowing a gale (of course) and I was in the shelter at the end of Roman Road. 16 flew past in just over half an hour, no more than 100 yards out, and I've been obsessed with them ever since! In 2010, which was the best Leach's year this century, I stood on the slipway at Dove Point looking down the north Wirral Coast towards New Brighton and I could see 10 flying towards me in just one sweep of the 'scope. More recently, 2017 was particularly good when a total of 36 were recorded past Dove Point on September 11th.

Shelduck are very much a feature of Meols Shore. Not so much because of large numbers but because of the great views they give close to the promenade, drinking and bathing in the channel. Large numbers are present on Dawpool Bank off Thurstaston in September and early October after which they start to disperse and it's then we see them at Meols with up to 300 on the mud through November.

Winter

We get all the usual estuarine waders at Meols, mostly feeding around the boats at Dove Point but also right up to the Lifeboat Station. On most days last winter (2022/23) we had several hundred Dunlin feeding and Redshanks and Oystercatchers were ever present, plus a few Turnstones on the seawall. But it's the Knots I love seeing and, as Knots tend to do, they come and go. They'll arrive, perhaps a couple of thousand or so, either from the east having roosted at Seaforth, or the west from Hoylake direction. They cover the mudflat in tight flocks, moving in unison as they feed on small shellfish. Having spent ten minutes in one spot they'll suddenly decide to move a couple of hundred yards putting on a synchronised flying display as they go. The most spectacular displays are put on when a Peregrine is around; if the Peregrine attack is not too severe they'll come back but often we see them disappear as fast as they can go! I spend many hours down there scanning their legs for colour rings and the best views are had when they start feeding on the sandy area to the east of Dove Point as they can come really close to the seawall, and I've sometimes seen them walking up the seawall just like Turnstones, with cyclists bombing along the path just a few yards away.

The Meols groyne is used as a high tide roost by the waders and great views can be had of Lapwings, Sanderlings, Dunlins, Redshanks and Knots although numbers vary greatly from day to day. An over-wintering Greenshank has been regular there for several years, and this winter we've had two.

When the sea is flat calm take a look through your telescope and you will be amazed at the number of birds out there. Common Scoters are always present and numbers between 5,000 and 10,000 are not unusual, but occasionally we get much larger numbers. There was a huge flock of up to 40,000 in February 2016 stretching all along North Wirral, with a similar number in October that year. Just an amazing sight especially when they all take to the air!

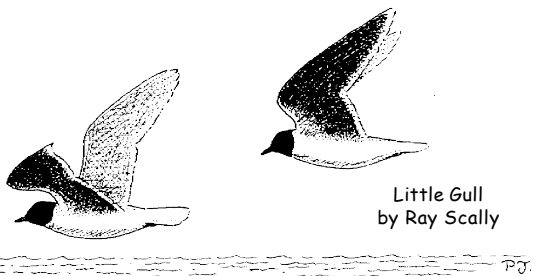
On November 16th 2022 589 Great Crested Grebes were counted on the sea. But that was by no means the highest count with several over 800 over the years with the maximum a remarkable 1195 in January 2011. This was the total for the whole of North Wirral but whenever I've done counts the highest concentration has always been off Meols.

One of the most spectacular sights I've seen at Meols was a huge gathering of gulls during February 2013. There were several counts of 20,000 between Hilbre and New Brighton that month. Mainly Herring Gulls but plenty of all the commoner gulls were present, but on 12th most of them were loafing on East Hoyle Bank on the ebbing tide. I've never seen so many gulls in one place before or since!

On dry land Snow Buntings and Rock Pipits are often seen along the Meols stretch. One or two Snow Buntings are seen most winters on the sea defence/cycle path east of Dove Point, with the winter of 2020/21 being particularly good when we had a flock of eight at Hoylake which often wandered up to Meols.

Spring

With plenty of northward movement, both on sea and land, spring is an exciting time at Meols and elsewhere along North Wirral. In March and April there is a passage of Little Gulls which fly up the Irish Sea before flying across the country on their way to breed in the Baltic. They can be seen flying along the tideline on the edge of East Hoyle Bank, identified by their small size and the distinctive black underwing.



Most years a few Ospreys are recorded flying over, but they don't usually stay the night. One did just that on April 14th 2022, roosting in a tree overnight before landing on a post next to the groyne the next morning until it decided to resume its journey north. April 12th last spring was particularly notable with the following all seen between Dove Point and the groyne that day: 1 Great Egret (in the gutter), 30+ Wheatears, 10+ Swallows, 1 House Martin, 2 Sand Martins, c20 Willow Warblers and c10 Chiffchaffs. Other notable records last spring where 10 White Wagtails on the shore on April 27th, six Arctic Terns off the groyne May 4th and a summer-plumaged Curlew Sandpiper with Dunlin on the groyne on May 17th. By early May the Knots will be in full breeding plumage but we rarely see these birds as they tend to stay up at Ainsdale and Southport before flying off across the Atlantic. But in 2021 a flock of around 1,000 fed up on Meols Shore looking lovely and red, and the presence of several Grey Plovers in the flock, also in full summer plumage, helped to make for a spectacular sight.

In both spring and autumn good numbers of Wheatears can be seen passing through, in the sand dunes on Meols Common, in the nearby horse paddocks or on the rocks on the groyne.

Rarities

For the most celebrated rarity at Meols we have to go back to October 1979 when an Asian Desert Warbler was found in the sand dunes just east of Dove Point. At the time it was only the fourth British record and it resulted in a large twitch.

There is a horse paddock just inland of the sand dunes on Meols Common which is still called 'Hoopoe Hollow' after a Hoopoe which was present there for several days in April 2004. I remember it well as it gave excellent views.

Two waders, initially seen at Hoylelake and then relocated at Meols, were a Broad-billed Sandpiper in May 2011 and a Western Sandpiper in September 2012. The latter was initially thought by many to be a Semipalmated Sandpiper and was the cause of much debate, but the BBRC agreed with the finder (Allan Conlin) that it was a Western Sandpiper.

An unexpected rarity was a Green-winged Teal in a flock of Teal (themselves a rarity at Meols) seen at Dove Point on April 4th 2014.

An Alpine Swift flew over Park Lane on April 22nd 2015. Also at Park Lane that year was a Red-backed Shrike on September 4th and 5th.

Three summer-plumaged Dotterels were in a Dunlin flock on the mud on May 3rd 2015.

During September gales it is not unusual to spot a Grey Phalarope or two from Meols, but on September 16th 2017 one landed on the groyne to join the sheltering waders.

A Pied Wheatear was a nice find sitting on top of the sea wall at Dove Point, it showed well for three days in early November 2018. Although not a rarity as such a Black Redstart was in the exact same spot, also showing really well, in October 2020.

Arctic Skuas are not unusual off Meols in the summer and autumn but Pomarine Skuas are much rarer. Unusually an adult decided to fly over Meols town on September 26th 2019 before landing on Meols Shore not far from the promenade.

Richard Smith (article first published on the Dee Estuary Birding Website
<http://www.deeestuary.co.uk/news0223.htm>

Conservation News

A round-up of news from the CAWOS conservation representatives, who aim to keep an eye on what is going on in their area. If you have any issues or concerns then do contact your local representative (by letter or email preferably). They may be able to help or should know someone who can! The relevant contact information is listed at the end.

CONSERVATION NEWS FROM STEVE TURNER

I hope you are all making the most of this weather (even though it's too hot for me); it won't last, the next thing is we will all be moaning about the wet weather. I will have my usual moan, but I will keep it very short. Conservation Reps for the same areas - we have not got any. I am NOT going through it all again as everyone will be getting that used to my moaning they won't listen. Here endeth the lesson. Although my offer of a packet of cream buns to the first taker of one of the vacant positions still stands.

Here at Weaverham our birds are doing well. Robins and Blackbirds are all on the third broods. We are inundated with House Sparrow and Starling juveniles. Blue Tits, Great Tits and Long-tailed Tits have all hatched and reared large broods of chicks. Last week I saw a male Cuckoo fly over, no vocals. This morning 30/5/23 my daughter heard a Cuckoo calling at Marbury Country Park. I heard a male calling during the second week in May in St Mary's churchyard, Weaverham. We have two pairs of Stock Doves, with chicks in the same churchyard. Sadly, no Turtle Doves, I haven't heard any this year at all.



Whilst out and about please keep your eyes open for American mink. They have preyed on many Kingfisher nests along the Trent and Mersey canal between Marbury and Preston Brook; a walk along the same stretch of canal a couple of years ago would have revealed at least six or seven birds fishing or whirring back and to, now all you notice is mink on the banks and mink spraint everywhere. There are no Mallard ducklings or Moorhens along the canal. Every time I spot a mink I contact Natural England and DEFRA by email, a phone call is no good as they deny receiving it, at least with an email it leaves a trail that can be traced. I have spoken to many landowners who have mink problems, and they are having problems with unknown people damaging any traps they are setting for mink. Whilst the idea of damaging traps may seem a good one at the time, the landowners are trying to save Kingfishers and waterfowl for everyone's pleasure. The people damaging these traps are also trespassing and are committing a crime; landowners will only replace traps so many times as they are so expensive; it's down to Natural England and DEFRA to control these bloodthirsty killers. Before long Kingfishers, waterfowl and Sand Martins will be helped towards extinction by these cuddly (not!) bloodthirsty killers. Please remember the majority of landowners, gamekeepers and shoot managers are doing as much for conservation as we are; please remember 99.99% of them are on the same side as us. If you see something or someone untoward have a word with them, MOST will be very grateful and act at once. (Did I ever mention before I hate mink?)

As usual please remember when you are out and about keep your eyes peeled if you see something that does not seem true, trust your instincts it probably isn't, again note all the details you can using your optics and not putting yourselves in any danger, the more details you record the better chance the police have of getting a result. Many people have over the years developed their own kind of shorthand for noting bird descriptions, plumage, colours etc. This is perfectly OK to use in recording descriptions in your notebooks for the police as long as you unscramble it. Don't make things hard for yourselves.

I hope you all have a good summer and autumn and get that lifer that you are waiting for.

Steve Turner, Conservation Officer, 11 Pinfold Way, Weaverham, Northwich, CW8 3NL
Tel: 01606 853796 Email: conservation@cawos.org

WARRINGTON AREA

The most important conservation issue in the Warrington area occurred late last week [beginning June] when a man called Karl Green, who is doing amazing work to protect and enhance the huge Swift population on the Westy estate adjacent to Woolston, discovered that a house that he knew had up to three pairs of breeding



Common Swift
by Ray Scally

Swifts had suddenly had the soffits and fascias completely covered with heavy duty wire mesh. A Swift was trapped behind the mesh and others were trying to gain access to their nests. Apparently, the resident had been advised by someone in the local area that Swifts went into the loft creating much mess and should be excluded. This, of course is untrue. Karl emphasised this to the resident pointing out that what had been done was illegal and after telling her all about Swifts the lady concerned was devastated and wanted the mesh taken down immediately. The mesh had been erected by a local Housing Association that owns the property.

The following morning Karl Green and a friend removed all the mesh at 6am and the trapped Swift was soon out and flying and other Swifts were able to gain access to their nests. Karl and I arranged a meeting with one of the Senior Managers of the Housing Association which took place yesterday morning. He apologised unreservedly for what had been done by their maintenance team and taken steps to ensure nothing like this happens again. I have today received an email from him emphasising that the Company policy is to protect breeding birds and it is clear that there had been a breakdown of communication between senior management and workers doing the maintenance. Having had regular contact in the past few years with the manager concerned I know that the Housing Association is genuinely wildlife-friendly and had earlier supported my submission to the Cheshire Wildlife Trust to have the Westy estate designated a site of local importance for the huge Swift breeding numbers there, that are bucking all the national declines in Swifts. Hopefully, the internal enquiry into this incident will ensure that what occurred will not happen again. The quick action ensured that the Swifts survived and with any luck the Charitable arm of this Housing Association may compensate Karl Green with a grant that will lead to many more Swift nest boxes being made and erected by Karl on this very special estate.

Brian Martin, Warrington Area Representative

CONSERVATION TEAM

Conservation Officer	Steve Turner, 11 Pinfold Way, Weaverham, Northwich, CW8 3NL Tel: 01606 853796 Email: conservation@cawos.org
Chester	Vacant - please let Steve Turner know if you are willing to take on this role
Congleton	Vacant - please let Steve Turner know if you are willing to take on this role
Crewe and Nantwich	Vacant - please let Steve Turner know if you are willing to take on this role
Halton	Tony Parker, 41 The Park, Penketh, Warrington, WA5 2SG. Tel: 01925 726986 Email: tonyparker@cawos.org
Macclesfield	Vacant - please let Steve Turner know if you are willing to take on this role
Vale Royal	Roy Leigh, 8 Hall Drive, Marston, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 6DT Tel: 01606 892032 Email: roysleigh@aol.com
Warrington	Brian Martin, 45 Albert Road, Grappenhall, Warrington, WA4 2PF. Tel: 01925 264251 Email: brianmartin1940@hotmail.com
Wirral	Richard Smith, March Wall, King's Drive North, Caldy, Wirral, CH48 1LL. Tel: 0151 625 2320 Email: richard@deestuary.co.uk

Notes and Letters

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

This section is a chance for members to contribute, whether a few lines, or a long article, which might be split over several issues. Some ideas might be amusing (or otherwise!) anecdotes, unusual avian behaviour, special memories, ringing and/or survey stories, and looking back over the years – even back to childhood! The list is almost endless – it's up to members. If you think it's worth writing, other members will think it's worth reading! Also, we are always interested in your views on any of our articles or on the newsletter itself. Ed.

PIED WAGTAILS

I've just heard a story from my hairdresser who had a successful fledging of five Pied Wagtails in her horse box. Surprising thing was this was despite the box being taken away 3x per week for 4 hrs (she plays Polo). The parents would fly off when the horse box was moved and wait for its return throughout brooding and feeding. The young fledged this morning (31st May) and flew off straight away in front of her when she went in the horse box.

Karina Stanley

THE 'FOOTIT' CHALLENGE

Some CAWOS members may recall, or even took part in, the 'Footit' challenge. This was an internet-based birding competition which ran for a few years in the early 2010s. Without going into the details of exactly how this worked, the organiser stopped running the competition in about 2014 but, as I'd really enjoyed taking part, I carried on by myself, with my own hybrid version. How my version works is as follows:

The challenge runs for the whole of January each year. I draw a two-mile radius from my house and can count any birds I see within or from the two-mile circle, but I have to walk to see the birds. No cars, public transport or bicycles are allowed. That is basically it.

I have done this each year since 2013 (with the exception of 2021 when I had a new knee fitted in January!). My patch for most of this time has been urban Wallasey and Birkenhead, but with the benefit of the Mersey shore and part of the north Wirral coast. I moved home in 2021 and whilst I am still in Wallasey I now have less of the river, docks and Birkenhead in my two-mile area and more of the Wirral coast. Whilst this has some advantages, it also has disadvantages and I've now lost Birkenhead Park, Flaybrick cemetery and the edges of Bidston Hill.

My yearly species totals range from 60 (2015) to 75 (2019). I worked full-time until the end of 2018 so was able to spend more time birding from 2019, although personal circumstances have curtailed this in the last two years. My running total over the 10 years is now 97 species which illustrates the potential for good January totals each year. For my own interest, I also keep a note of how many times I've been out and distance walked (eg in 2023 I did 21 walks, taking 48 hours, 205,000 steps covering 89 miles).

The majority of birds seen are what you would expect in such an environment, but the excitement each year is to find something new or that you've rarely seen before. Birds that fall into this category include: Shag (one on New Brighton marine lake in 2014); Golden Plover (Leasowe shore 2022); Black-tailed Godwit (Wallasey shore 2019); Woodcock (Bidston Moss 2013); Red-breasted Merganser (New Brighton marine lake 2014); Goldeneye (Bidston Moss NR 2016); Kingfisher (New Brighton marine lake 2015); Chiffchaff (Leasowe Gunsite 2019); Siskin (Bidston footpath 2022) and Lesser Redpoll (Bidston Hill 2019). Two new arrivals in the current year were a Rock Pipit on Wallasey promenade and a nice male Mandarin in Wallasey Central Park. It is perhaps of interest to note that some birds have seemingly become easier to see in recent years (eg Little Egret, Peregrine, Pinkfoot, Common Scoter, Skylark, Goldcrest, Blackcap and Snow Bunting), whilst others seemingly have become harder to find (Lapwing, Stock Dove, Treecreeper, Jackdaw, Fieldfare and Coal Tit). Obviously there is no scientific basis to this comment and there are undoubtedly many reasons for this.

Several friends and my brother have joined me in 'FootIt' in recent years covering Wallasey and Bebington areas. Whilst we compare notes and totals, the real challenge is in trying to beat my own personal January total and hopefully break the overall 100 species mark next year. I'm still waiting for my first Cetti's Warbler which others have seen locally so hopefully there are still new species to be found.

Colin Schofield

THIS IS HOW LONG WARRINGTON WENT WITHOUT RAIN IN MAY AND JUNE

Reported in the *Warrington Guardian* on 20th June 2023.

According to the Met Office, no rainfall was recorded in the town from May 20 to June 11. This is based on the rain gauge at Rostherne in Cheshire East which is the nearest weather station to Warrington. This coupled with the recent hot weather led to the Mersey running at an 'exceptionally low level'.

Many residents have raised concerns about the river in Warrington during the hot weather, not only with the water levels but also the hundreds of dead fish and distressed fish 'gasping for air' along the water surface.

The Environmental Agency has spoken out about the impacts of the dry weather. A spokesperson said: "Due to recent dry weather Environment Agency teams have seen an increase in reports to the incident hotline over the last few days about fish in distress, algal blooms and low water levels across the North West. The Environment Agency works hard to balance the water needs of people, business, farmers and the environment working with United Utilities and other abstractors, such as farmers to protect water resources and ensure they take precautionary action to balance the needs of water users and the environment. During dry weather it is even more important that water is used efficiently."

Jim Ratcliffe, Environment Agency Environment Manager, added: Environment Agency teams have been working hard to respond to dry weather environmental impacts and we will continue to respond to reports of fish in distress, algal blooms and low water levels across the North West. We thank the public for alerting us to any incidents so we can investigate and take action and encourage everyone to use our 24/7 hotline on 0800 807060 to help us protect the environment."



SEPTEMBER 2023

- 8 SECOS 'GATEWAY TO SAHARA' by Keith Offord
- 9 KOS Woolston Eyes, ring for details
- 7 SECOS Attenborough NR (tbc)
- 22 KOS 'THE PEREGRINE FALCON' by Steve Watson

OCTOBER 2023

- 6 CAWOS 'BBS IN CHESHIRE, WIRRAL AND BEYOND' by David White, BTO
- 13 SECOS 'THE MERSEY AREA' by Mike Roberts
- 15 KOS Llanfairfechan followed by Conwy RSPB, ring for details
- 15 SECOS Leighton Moss RSPB (tbc)
- 27 KOS 'CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS ON PASSERINE MIGRANTS: INSIGHTS FROM CITIZEN SCIENCE DATA' by Mark Eddowes

NOVEMBER 2023

- 3 CAWOS 'ARCTIC SKUAS' by Nina O'Hanlon, BTO

- 10 SECOS 'YORKSHIRE'S WILD BEAUTY' by John Gardner
- 12 KOS Leighton Moss RSPB, ring for details
- 19 SECOS Wirral (tbc)
- 24 KOS 'THERE'S A TAPIR AT THE DOOR! A GREEN BIRDING ADVENTURE' by Gary Prescott (the Biking Birder)

DECEMBER 2023

- 1 CAWOS WILDLIFE OF EAST ANGLIA' by Kevin Elsby, *Wildlife on the Web*
- 3 KOS Marshside RSPB and Martin Mere WWT, ring for details
- 8 SECOS 'WADER QUEST' by Rick Simpson
- 10 SECOS Middleton Lakes RSPB (tbc)
- 15 KOS Christmas Party

JANUARY 2024

- 5 CAWOS 'THE SCIENCE AND BEAUTY OF BIRDS' by Oliver Smart, *Smart Images*
- 12 SECOS 'AN EYE FOR BIRD' by Bruce Kendrick
- 13 KOS Mere Sands Wood NR, followed by Lunt Meadows
- 21 SECOS Martin Mere WWT (tbc)
- 26 KOS 'THE LAND OF GEYSERS AND GYRS' by Keith Offord

FEBRUARY 2024

- 2 CAWOS 'ANTARCTICA, FALKLANDS AND SOUTH GEORGIA' by Mike Watson
- 9 SECOS 'A CELEBRATION OF BRITISH BIRDS' by Nick Martin
- 17 KOS Tatton Park, ring for details

AFFILIATED SOCIETIES

ADNHS Altrincham & District Natural History Society <http://mpettipher.me.uk/altnats>
 Meetings Jubilee Centre, The Firs, Bowdon, Altrincham 7:30pm, contact Jacky Johnson 0161 928 7896

CAWOS Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society www.cawos.org
 Currently held by Zoom, starting at 7:45pm, contact Sec. David Hiley 07484 836652

CRSPB Chester RSPB Members' Group www.rspb.org.uk/groups/chester
 Meetings Christleton Parish Hall, Christleton, CH3 7AS 7:30pm, contact Norman Sadler 01244 335670

HPRSPB High Peak RSPB Members' Group <https://ww2.rspb.org.uk/groups/highpeak/>
 Meetings Senior Citizens' Hall, Marple 7:30pm, contact David Knass 07879 646856

KOS Knutsford Ornithological Society www.10x50.com
 Meetings Jubilee Hall, Stanley Road, Knutsford 8pm, contact Sec. Karina Stanley 07532 833083

MRSBPB Macclesfield RSPB Members' Group www.rspb.org.uk/groups/macclesfield
 Meetings Macclesfield Community Centre, Macclesfield 7:45pm, contact Ray Evans 01625 432635

NNHS Nantwich Natural History Society
 Occasional meetings throughout the year, contact Sec. Roger Crow, 01270 618416

SECOS South-East Cheshire Ornithological Society www.secos.org.uk
 Meetings Ettiley Heath Church Community Centre at 7:30pm, contact Mike Tonks 07484 306147

WGBG Wilmslow Guild Birdwatching Group <http://wgbwcopy.wikidot.com/wgbg>
 Meetings Wilmslow Guild at 7:30pm, contact Brian Dyke 01625 525936

Will **affiliated societies**, who wish to advertise meetings of relevance to CAWOS, please send their programme to:- **Sheila Blamire, Woodruff Cottage, Clamhunger Lane, Mere, Cheshire, WA16 6QG or, preferably please, by email: sheilablamire@kawos.org**

SITUATIONS VACANT

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“THE SOCIETY NEEDS YOU”

For further information, please contact:

Phil Hampson chairman@cawos.org 01625 260059

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 14th October 2023

please be prompt

We cannot guarantee that material received after this date will be published in that issue. If you are aware that your material may be delayed, please let the Editor know as soon as possible.

If you know anyone who might want to advertise

in future Bird News please let me know and

I'll contact them with all the information.

Sheila Blamire at sheilablamire@cawos.org Tel: 01565 830168

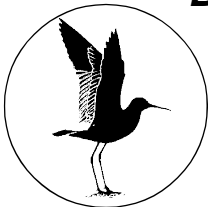
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‘BBS IN CHESHIRE, WIRRAL AND BEYOND’

by DAVID WHITE on 6th OCTOBER 2023

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