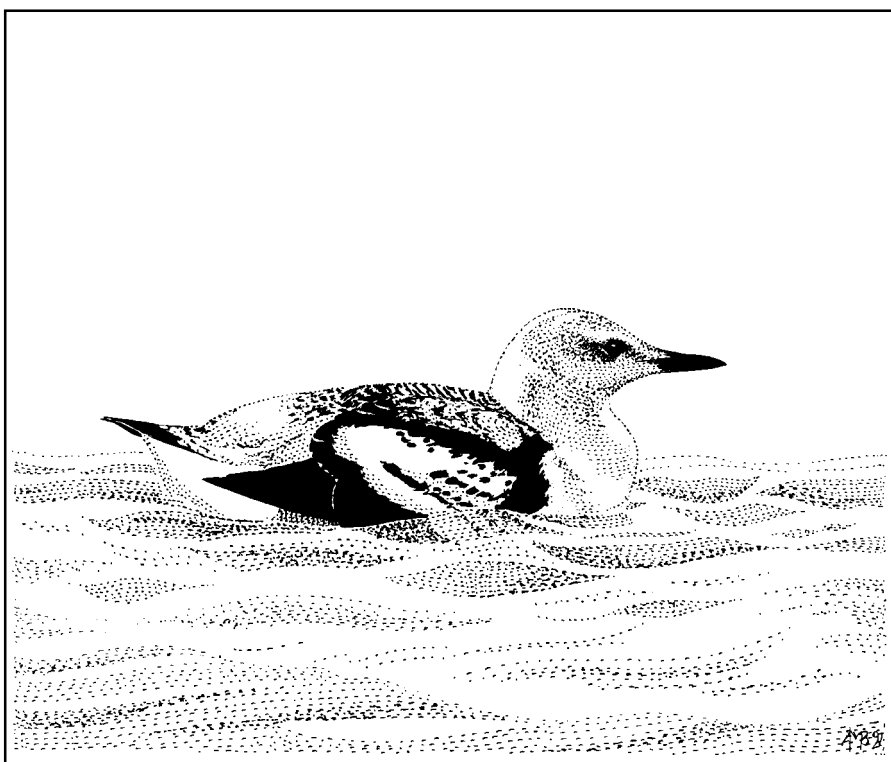


*Cheshire and Wirral
Ornithological Society*

BIRD NEWS

Number 12 Oct 91



Brent Geese * Recent Reports * Grey Heron Fishing

Garden Listing * Poynton Pool * Conservation

Ringers Notebook * Escapes * Twitching * Diary * Newsletter



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Articles, Letters and Comments would be welcomed by the Editor

Front cover - Black Guillemot by Tony Broome

Editorial

Some years ago, whilst on holiday abroad, I overheard a birdwatcher express the comment that he could manage to identify the “exotics” quite easily but would never be able to cope with the “L.B.J.’s”. For a day I puzzled about which family he was referring to but coming to no obvious answer, I enquired what he meant - Oh, the little brown jobs, he replied! Looking at Cisticolas, I knew then just what he meant. Sorting out identification provides much of the satisfaction for many birdwatchers on foreign trips. The first person to name the bird usually gains the plaudits although even amongst the experts there have been some notable blunders. (Who was it that directed us to the Little Egret so clearly moving on the other side of the estuary, which on closer approach turned out to be a white plastic carrier bag caught on a piece of wood and blowing in the wind?)

Whilst this facet of birdwatching is appropriate for those who regularly seek out new birds, the majority of us become quite familiar with our regular, local species. So, does this lead to familiarity which breeds a measure of contempt? Well perhaps it does unless there is an added dimension or purpose to our birding. To the dedicated local patch man, who I have mentioned in an earlier editorial and one in particular who I hold in the greatest respect, a “new” bird is indeed a red-letter day. Their pleasure comes from building up a mental picture over many years where any observations can be related in context to the past. More or less birds at any one time, a species arriving earlier, later or being totally missing. All this comes from the drive to go out and look, and consequently enjoy their interest all the more.

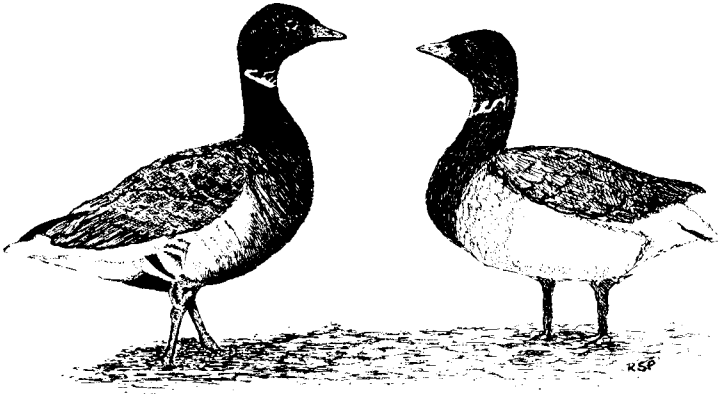
Even for those who have no incentive to regularly cover an area there is considerable satisfaction to be gained from our “G.B.’s”. No difficulty here with identification as our garden birds should all be quite well known. But what’s the point of looking at the same old Blackbirds and Blue Tits? Well, for a start it is unlikely that they are the same birds. Ringing studies have shown just how many different Blue Tits can pass through a garden feeder in a relatively short period. Numbers for each species will vary by the season, first arrivals and last sightings of summer and winter visitors are worth noting, and keeping the garden LIST can be fun, even if only to compete with friends. On this score however be sure to establish the ground rules very carefully!! Is it just those birds which land in the garden, over-fly the garden space or can be seen from the house? Even this last criteria has to be scrutinised as a friend has resorted to sitting on his house roof to look over better habitat (whilst pointing the chimney stack brick work you understand). Certainly garden census work is taken much more seriously in America where the number of “armchair birdwatchers” must be very high to justify all the wild bird feeder and food adverts in that absolutely superb magazine, Birder’s World.

Finally, after three years, this is likely to be my last Editorial unless the sentiments of the closing article are heeded. Much as the compliments for “Bird News” have been welcomed there must come a limit to what the same few names can generate. So, if you want “Bird News” to continue as it is, YOU may have to contribute.

With Best Wishes

Richard Gabb

Species Spotlight



BRENT GEESE

Every year a small number of these attractive little geese are seen on our coast, mostly around Hilbre Island but with scattered records all round the peninsula and occasional reports from inland sites.

Reports have increased slightly over the past few years but probably only in accordance with observer coverage, the counts at Hilbre are pretty much the same. Mostly they are seen in parties of less than ten, normally ones and twos and only exceptionally in flocks. The highest number recorded for at least the last twenty years was 18 on Frodsham Score in December 1980.

Where are our birds from? Unlike many vagrants it is possible to make an educated guess with this species because there are distinct races which breed and winter in different areas.

The nominate race (*Branta Bernicla Bernicla*) is normally known as the dark bellied form and it breeds mainly in Arctic Russia. It winters in Europe and is the one normally seen in Southern and South Eastern England. It is identified by its mainly dark belly and flanks, broken only by an amount of paler grey barring on the upper flanks.

It's opposite number, the pale bellied form (*B. B. Hrota*) is identified by its pale grey belly and flanks, with a restricted amount of darker barring on the flanks. There are two breeding populations of this race, one which breeds in Greenland and Arctic Canada and winters mainly in America, with a smaller number in Ireland. The other population which breeds in Svalbard and Franz Josef Land winters in Denmark and North East England.

The third race (*B. B. Nigricans*), or Black Brant, winters on the Pacific Ocean Coast and is only a vagrant to British shores, normally seen as individuals with the flocks of other races around our coast. It is identified by its contrasting black and white flanks and large white neck patch which meets in front of the throat, unlike the other two races. It is unlikely to be seen in our region due to the lack of a flock to join, but a vagrant is a vagrant and there is nothing to stop one turning up.

Perhaps a cautionary identification note is in order here. The belly and flank colouration contrasts with the white under tail coverts on all three races and all are variable in colour to some extent. This means that it is not automatically possible to tell one from another, especially if juveniles are involved where there is considerable overlap.

Both dark and pale birds are reported from Cheshire and Wirral with, if anything, a slight bias towards dark bellied birds. As outlined above, these should probably be wintering in South East England. The pale bellied birds are more likely to be from the Irish wintering flock rather than the North East and have probably been raised in Greenland or further West.

In the 1930's the nominate race had a population crash due to disease and shortage of their winter food plant, Eel Grass (*Zostera*). Numbers fell to 16,500 but have fortunately picked up again and in the early 1980's were up to 150,000. This is possibly partly due to the fact that their feeding habits are changing. Reports from Southern England show that instead of feeding exclusively on *Zostera* at the beginning of the winter and moving to the upper salt marsh plants later on, they have over the last twenty years been seen to take more readily to farm crops. They are now being seen further inland than ever.

This change in behaviour has undoubtedly gone some way to help the species prevent another catastrophe and is probably working in the same way as it did with the other geese many years ago. All the geese have learned to feed on the newly available resource of cultivated crops as a substitute for natural grazing. We may even be seeing this species going through its development from estuary dweller to stubble feeder. Evolution in action!

Alan Roberts

PUBLICITY (we need some)

As might be obvious from articles contained within this newsletter, the Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society would welcome with open arms anyone who could support us in anyway possible.

If your personality is that of a naturally friendly sort who would enjoy contacting a wide variety of societies, schools, libraries etc then you'd love the position.

As a volunteer you would have every chance of rising quickly through the existing ranks if that is what you so wish! Why miss the chance?

You would also be your own boss, work to your own timetable and feel satisfied that the time and effort you've spent advertising CAWOS has lead to 100% increase in the membership.

Is there a catch? Definitely not. We think that you'r out there somewhere but we haven't reached you yet. We need a publicity officer

If you are interested, just contact any of the officers at the front of this Newsletter.

(Written to the sound of sceptical laughter ED.)

Recent Reports

Some of these records may be unauthenticated and require review by the Society Records Panel or BBRC. Records refer to the period early June to early September.

Black-necked Grebes had a record year at Woolston with seven broods seen during the summer; unusually, no wandering birds have been reported. **Fulmars** were seen from Hilbre in late July and **Gannets** were observed quite regularly from here and Red Rocks from July onwards. A **Cory's Shearwater** was an unexpected sighting from Red Rocks on July 15th. Small numbers of **Manx Shearwaters** could be seen off Hilbre from July with up to 400 here in early August. At the time of writing, good seawatching conditions have not materialised and the only Petrels noted were a small number of **Storm Petrels** in the Mersey mouth in mid June.

Mute Swans appear to have had a similarly successful breeding season to last year. A pair bred successfully for the first time at the Chelford SQ's. There were no really large summer gatherings but parties of between 20 to 30 birds were on the Dee at Chester, Acton Bridge, Great Budworth Mere, Tatton Park, Winterley Pool and Winsford. A **Whooper Swan** on the Mersey off Frodsham in August is thought to be the bird seen there in April. Results of the summer feral **Greylag** and **Canada Goose** surveys are not yet collated but it seems certain that numbers of both species continue to increase in Cheshire and Wirral. The summering Greylag flock at Rostherne numbered as many as 318 in early September, summer records here began in 1969 with just two birds. Moulting of **Shelduck** was noted over Woolston in mid July while 1500 were still present on the Mersey on July 20th - a large number for the time of year. **Wigeon**, **Teal** and **Pintail** were arriving back on the meres and estuaries from late August; the moulting flocks of **Pochard** and **Tufted Duck**, forming from late June on the meres, are breaking up at the time of writing while **Ruddy Duck** are now flocking at their favourite locations. There has been a sprinkling of sightings of **Garganey** with up to three birds at Inner Marsh Farm, Frodsham Marsh, Rostherne and Sandbach from early August into September. A pair of **Common Scoter** were on Tatton Mere on July 25th with the female remaining for several days. Single **Goldeneye** appeared at Rostherne and Ridgegate Reservoir in late August, the Rostherne bird being a bird of the year.

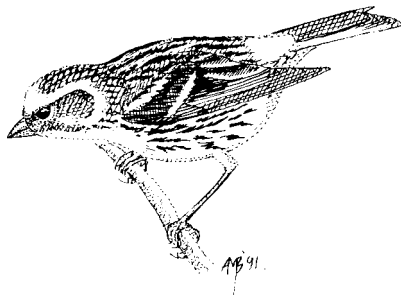
A **Marsh Harrier** passed through Frodsham Marsh in early June and one was over Burton Marsh on August 13th, a **Hen Harrier** at Frodsham Marsh in July was unexpected. A **Goshawk** was seen over Focalpoint on a couple of dates and one was over Rostherne on September 8th. Single **Buzzards** were over Bidston in mid July, Bromborough in late August and Chelford in early September; on September 7th two flew north over Burton Point and three were over Rostherne while two were over Arley hall next day. An **Osprey** spent an hour at Rostherne on June 10th. A **Hobby** was seen at Rostherne on June 12th with two on July 14th, singles were at Woolston on July 25th and over Northwich on July 27th and there were sightings at Burton Point, Chelford and Sandbach in early August. A pair of **Peregrines** hatched young at a site in our area and there were reports of one or two birds from Frodsham Marsh, Fiddlers Ferry and Sandbach from mid July onwards. The only **Quail** reported so far was calling at Ness in July.

Little Ringed Plover appear to have had a poor breeding season, no young were seen at Neumann's Flash where several pairs summered; numbers on passage here peaked at 35 in July with four still present in early September before the flash dried up. **Golden Plover** reappeared at several lowland sites during August with numbers just about creeping into double-figures in early September.

Ringed Plover and **Dunlin** passage at Frodsham Marsh was disappointing with short-lived peaks in late August of 1000 and 9000 respectively; much smaller numbers occurred at Neumann's and Sandbach Flashes. **Little Stint** passage was poor with odd birds at Frodsham Marsh from late July and a peak of 14 here on September 8th; odd birds occurred at Neumann's Flashes. Odd adult **Curlew Sandpipers** were at Frodsham Marsh from mid July and there was a count of around 80 birds here on August 24th but birds quickly moved on; Woolston, Neumann's Flash, Chelford SQ's and Sandbach Flashes held single figures into September and 41 were at Hilbre on September 7th. **Ruff** appeared at their favourite sites from late July and double-figures were at Frodsham Marsh and Neumann's Flash in August and into September. **Black-tailed Godwits** summered, in splendid plumage, on the inner Dee marshes and a flock of over 100 was on the Weaver Bend in early September. **Whimbrel** were noted from early July at several sites but only in small numbers. **Spotted Redshanks** summered on the Dee Marshes and were reported, in small numbers, from the usual passage sites. Over 400 **Redshank** could be found on Frodsham Marsh at times in August and September but a small proportion of those present in early September were heavily oiled. The inner Dee marshes held the largest numbers of **Greenshank** with double-figures often seen from August; smaller numbers could be found at traditional sites. Sandbach Flashes remains our best site for **Green Sandpipers** with up to 18 present at times from late July. It seems to have been a good autumn for **Wood Sandpiper** sightings with up to three birds from early July into September at Dee Marshes, Frodsham Marsh, Woolston, Witton Flashes and Sandbach Flashes.

Although **Arctic Skuas** were seen reasonably frequently from Hilbre and Red Rocks there were only odd reports of **Great** and **Pomarine Skuas**. A **Mediterranean Gull** was at Hoylake in August and two adults were at Neumann's Flash on August 8th. A **Sabine's Gull** was in the Mersey off New Brighton on June 19th and a **Ring-billed Gull** was reported from Fiddlers Ferry on July 7th. Up to seven "**Yellow-legged**" **Gulls** were at Fiddlers Ferry in June and July, two at Neumann's Flash in July and August and one at Sandbach Flashes on August 17th. An adult **Glaucous Gull** was at Neumann's Flash in late July and August. A visitor to Red Rocks and Hilbre in August could expect to see **Little**, **Common** and **Sandwich Terns** but elsewhere there was little passage of terns. Two **Arctic Terns** visited the Weaver Bend briefly on September 8th when a "commic" was over Tatton Mere; a **Black Tern** was over Woolston on July 6th. A **Black Guillemot** was seen from Hilbre on August 11th.

The decline of **Turtle Doves** in Cheshire and Wirral apparently continued with some recent breeding sites remaining unoccupied. A **Barn Owl** was an unusual visitor to Frodsham Marsh on July 26th and a daytime flying **Nightjar** near Macclesfield gave one lucky observer a surprise on August 22nd. Young **Green Woodpeckers** were seen near Northwich and Chelford. Most **Swifts** had left our area before the end of August while **Sand Martins** were still present in small numbers in early September. **Dippers** were seen with young in the eastern hills. **Ring Ousels** breeding at Danebower were disturbed by a motor-cycle scramble, a passage bird was at Neumann's Flash on July 27th. **Grasshopper Warblers** seem to have been scarcer than usual although a bird sang on Frodsham Marsh in late July. **Pied Flycatchers** appear to have been recorded in greater numbers than ever before. A **Serin** was at Heswall in July 7th.



Notes & Letters

Grey Heron Plunge Fishing

On several occasions this past summer, one of the two resident Grey Herons at Poynton Park has resorted to plunge fishing, instead of the usual stalk and stab routine. It would make short flights over the water, see a fish and drop into the water with wings outspread, lunging with its beak at the same moment. Although not successful on every occasion, the tactics did pay off, the heron having no trouble getting airborne again even when holding quite large fish.

Up to four herons can be present at any one time around the shoreline, each defending its own patch against intruders by flying at them and calling until they are driven off. However, only the above individual took the opportunity to fish by this unusual method.

BWP states that Grey Heron only "exceptionally swims or dives". However, the Herons Handbook mentioned various species that feet plunge or dive off perches into the water for prey, including Great Blue Heron.

Tony Broome

Garden Listing

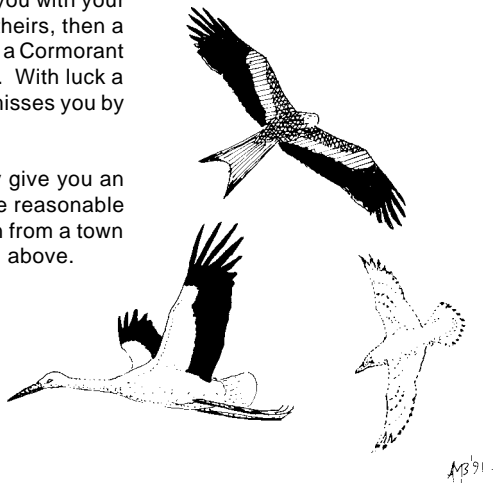
I wonder what the largest Cheshire or Wirral garden list stands at? It depends of course on which boundaries are counted by the person involved, but ignoring the "birds feet have to touch the ground" ruling and accepting the flexible approach of "if it can be seen from the garden, it counts", the results could be interesting.

The first category can quickly become static anyway with months, even years between additions. Not so the second (unless you've been keeping tabs for the last thirty years or so !). If you know there's a bird in a neighbour's garden you can even enlist their help in getting it to show. Perhaps a Corn Bunting singing on a wire three fields away can be seen from a bedroom window or a Moorhen on a local pond just visible from the ridge tiles. In all cases they're on your list and if in competition with another garden watcher, all the more valuable.

If they're the friendly type of birder who will help you with your list in exchange for a bit of encouragement with theirs, then a phone call could even pay dividends. "I've just had a Cormorant over the house and its heading in your direction". With luck a bird that size should be visible even if it actually misses you by a mile or so, but once visible, on the list it goes!

Living on the coast with a wood behind you may give you an unfair advantage and for comparisons it would be reasonable to categorise similar habitats. Sixty species seen from a town garden is relatively good, even compared to the above.

It can get quite heated at times and you do have to treat it as a bit of fun. To suppress something you know a competitor needs or actually to make a point of flushing it in the opposite direction by throwing bricks at it is not playing the game. After all that's exactly what it is, isn't it?!



Tony Broome

The Changing Face of Birdwatching

Like most people who started birdwatching upward of twenty years ago, I have seen huge changes in my hobby. Mine was a gradual change from local patch watching to occasional jaunts further afield like the four hour journey by bus, train and foot from Altrincham to Frodsham for a White Rumped Sandpiper. Unperturbed by the scale of such vast expeditions, I graduated with a group of friends to travelling throughout the country for all sorts of exotics, some of which I had never heard of. During the late 1970's and into the 1980's we went away most weekends and many miles, birds and experiences were shared. It was a thoroughly enjoyable social circle. I have no grudge against those who wish to see everything that turns up, I've been there. I got bored, others haven't.

The advent of purpose built telephone lines reeling off everything you want to see anywhere either in the country or the region was an incredible step forward both for the ardent twitcher and the casual birder who just wants to know where to go at the weekend within driving distance. No longer were watchers reliant on phone calls from friends. The disappointment of discovering on Tuesday that you had driven past a major rarity on Sunday could be drastically reduced. What it did in addition was open the floodgates which were already bulging. The surge of people wanting an outdoor hobby was increasing and those who had been birding for years were joined at rare bird sightings by others who hadn't a clue what they were looking at. Suddenly it was big business. "And what's wrong with that" you may ask. Well basically nothing, it's only a hobby and it is up to the individual how he enjoys himself. However the attendant pressures have led to news being suppressed and sites being kept private. In past years the main reason people did not hear about a bird was that the finder did not know who to tell. Now everything is different and it is a major consideration whether or not to let news out, risking several hundred people arriving and perhaps trampling your wood or your reed bed.

Fortunately sour incidents are rarer than the birds themselves and most people are pleasantly surprised by the good nature and generosity of the visitors. It is the prospect of impending problems that makes people cautious and although their fears are often not justified, nobody can be blamed for preserving their privacy. Suppression of news tends to incense some twitchers who feel that if a bird is found then the news should be publicised so all can enjoy it. It is a different problem and both sides argue their cases well with deep belief in their respective causes.

My personal belief is that it is the division which is the problem. Whatever our category, be it twitcher, ringer or weekend birdwatcher, we should all be on the same side. Total suppression can never work. Even the rarest bird at the most sensitive site can be discussed in confidence with responsible colleagues, the county recorder or even the managers of the birdlines who can assist in assessment of the risks. To find out afterwards inevitably leads to people saying "We could have seen that, what was the problem?" The mistrust that follows leads to division, not unity. Each case can be evaluated on its merits and some birds have to be kept quiet. If people believe it was well thought out they will accept it far more readily.

Over the years we have seen some excellent sites being destroyed for various reasons, including big business walking over little interest groups. Time after time the cry goes up, "Look what's happening to A" or "It's a shame about B". This happens a lot less in the counties with larger more influential societies. If 3000 twitchers got together for a bird on a housing estate in Kent, surely Cheshire and Wirral can raise a shout when a site is threatened. There are many hundreds of birders in the county and although I realise that not all are active ornithologists, there are surely enough to be rallied round if need be. Also opening sites to the public has to be better than keeping them private. How can one expect support for somewhere nobody is allowed to visit. If people have enjoyed themselves somewhere it will stick in their mind and they will be upset at its being threatened.

My message is really that now there are so many birders around and it's a lot bigger business than one could have imagined twenty years ago, we are still not moving with the times, conservation wise. People quickly get to know when a rarity arrives, we should use the same means to let them know some action is needed. Money is being made by people in the bird business and some is given back, lets make the best use of it. Everyone can do something from bird counting to stall manning and tea brewing. Please don't be shy, grit your teeth and volunteer.

Sites to Watch

POYNTON POOL AND PARK

Situated on the outskirts of Poynton village on the western edge of the Pennines, the pool and park are in an area of greenbelt that separate what was once a tiny settlement from what is now the huge urban sprawl of Manchester and it's suburbs. As the population of Poynton itself has grown, so has the pressure on what used to be part of Lord Vernon's estate, in it's prime perhaps in the 1700-1800's. Besides planting an avenue of Limes that run diagonally through the park, he also had a boating lake built and although slightly different in shape these days, the pool itself is otherwise the same. Bordered on one side by the A523 and surrounded by large residential properties, it is definitely a local patch requiring plenty of man hours in order to turn up something unusual.

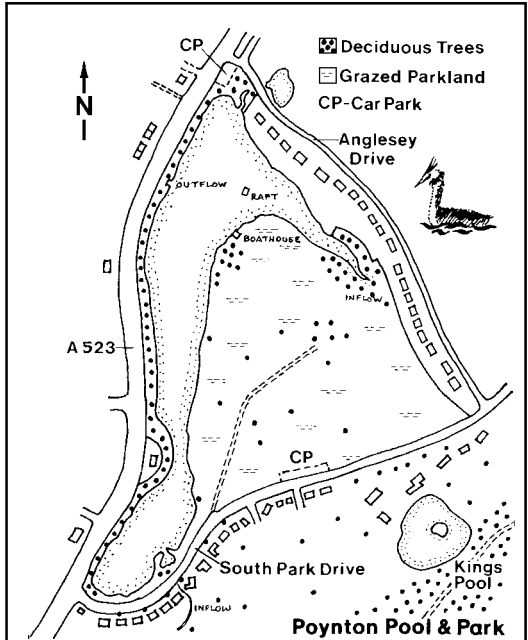
The large flocks of Pochard, Tufteds and Coot, breeding Little Grebes and Willow Tits are a thing of the past, quite a puzzle really with not much in the way of plausible

explanations coming from any source. There was a pollution problem in the 70's that killed all the freshwater mussels and today the fishermen that line the shore reach saturation point regularly, making it unsuitable for nervous migrant waterfowl or waders. However with perseverance, a little luck and good timing, some interesting birding is possible. Besides the limes, there are many mature deciduous trees in the park, several acres or so of sheep grazed grassland and a small boggy patch.

Most of the expected woodland species can be seen over a period of a few months, Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers the most difficult to find without a doubt. Green is extremely rare. Chiff Chaffs, Willow Warblers and Blackcaps pass through in spring, the first mentioned also singing sporadically through September and October. Spotted Flycatchers nest in some years but are irregular and can be absent altogether and likewise Stock Doves - these are very shy and often difficult to detect. Up to six pairs of Great Crested Grebes attempted to nest in 1991, five doing so successfully, raising seventeen young to varying stages of development. Unfortunately an unknown predator was responsible for the dramatic decline in birds on the water through the summer months, at least eleven juvenile grebes and an adult disappeared virtually overnight. Whatever the cause, it remains an unsettling mystery.

Other species associated with the pool are Heron, with up to four birds at any one time; Kingfisher, mainly an autumn and winter visitor and Reed Bunting, a regular breeder.

Objections to the Canada Goose flock from residents led to a series of articles in the local press. Their noisy courtship rituals apparently upset some people but apart from mass slaughter, there is no ready solution. Besides, the gatherings do attract various other "plastics" Barnacle, Pink Feet, Greylags and both Whitefronts. A herd of fly-by Mute Swans this spring was quite a good record, as they used to breed before lead and the local thugs took their toll. Hopefully with an increase in their numbers nationally, they'll chose to do so again.



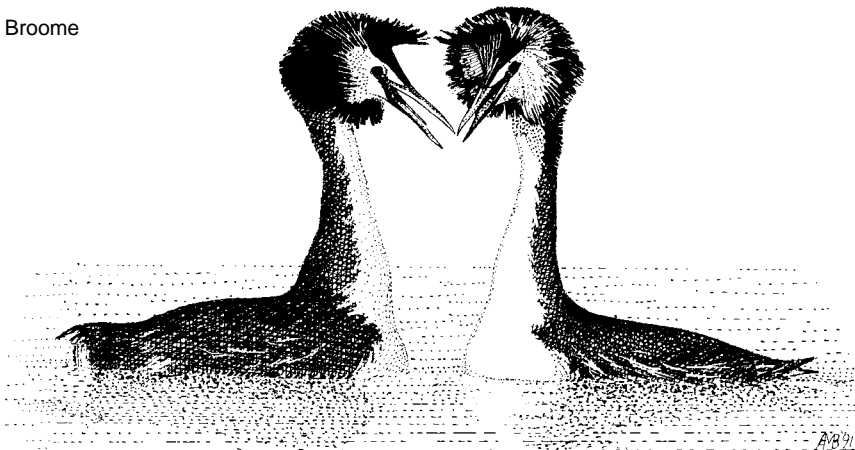
Sparrowhawks are by far the commonest raptor, Kestrels taking a back seat. Merlins are rare with two sightings in winter, there has been one recent Buzzard and an Osprey this May actually flew off with a large fish in its talons. Normal common migrants are not so "common", with Yellow Wagtail, Whinchat and Sand Martin having only a single record each in 1991. The wagtails used to occur in sizeable flocks but are probably declining throughout the country, the lack of occurrences elsewhere supporting the theory.

Perhaps surprisingly, Reed and Sedge Warblers are to the "patch" like Bluetails and Rubythroats are to the east coast ... they are as rare anyway !

Winter visitors, Fieldfares, Redwings and Bramblings are very common some years, scarce in others, particularly the latter. Siskins drop in occasionally and there are Crossbill records, albeit all flyovers.

So, birding can be worthwhile with avian bonuses when you least expect them ... an odd Cormorant, a frozen out Goosander or Wigeon, a Black Tern (last record many, many years ago!) or a Jack Snipe... the list now stands at over one hundred species. Not a Rostherne Mere or a Hilbre, just a local patch. At least if Brown Pelican ever gets accepted into category A of the British list, there's been one, if you count Ring Necked Parakeets on your Cheshire List, there's one present at the moment and if you'd like to try to add a few records to the list, no one will object. Try it!

Tony Broome



Stop Press

Recent negotiation with the controlling fishing federation has led to the southern end of the Pool becoming a fishing-free zone. It is hoped that with the co-operation of the ranger service and with the already keen interest of the Stockport RSPB group, an area more suited to wildlife than artificial fishing pegs can be created over the next few seasons. Anybody that is interested in helping, either being able to supply native shrubs and trees or fence posts etc, will be warmly welcomed. Anyone with past records for the Pool and Park are urged to contact me with a view to creating a "patch checklist" and in the future maybe a book covering a wider natural history aspect. This would also prove useful in the grading of the site by the borough council who rely on field workers to supply the necessary information and who have to balance the interest of a wide range of the public with the amenities available. The annual Poynton Show and other odd events throughout the year prevent the area ever becoming an undisturbed nature reserve, but with careful management it's attractiveness can be increased.

Conservation

WILDLIFE GARDENING

So much has been written about what plants are best for attracting wildlife, but the information is infrequently incomplete and not very clear when it comes to which varieties are being talked about. It is better to look for plants yourself, not necessarily native species, although of course they are usually best suited, but for those which can be seen to be attractive. If insects find a plant attractive then in most cases it's useful. There is nothing nicer than sitting in a garden listening to the droning of bees and hoverflies on a warm summers evening. Also, if there are insects, then there are normally birds. The two go together very well. To forget or exclude one isn't always practicable anyway. Pretty borders with neatly lined bedding plants may look sure candidates to win a gardening prize but they definitely don't do anything to increase your garden's wildlife potential. You don't have to plant a jungle to do the trick but finding the right balance can be difficult at times. It's worth trying.

Listed below, in some sort of order are the species I have used in the last eighteen months and include other tried and tested types. It's worth mentioning at this point that the best way of acquiring your collection is either by splitting clumps and swapping with someone else or collecting seeds and planting at the correct time. It is illegal to take plants from the wild, but as all are abundant, seeding should not create any problems. If in doubt, leave it alone and find out.

a) **Hedgerows:** most native trees and shrubs are ideal especially when mixed rather than using all one kind. Once established after twelve months, prune hard to keep bushy, decide on a height and work to it. Plant one foot apart watering well if in drought conditions. Examples:- Birch, Oak, Yew, Hornbeam, Wild Service Tree, Ash, Rowan, Blackthorn, Field Maple, Hawthorn, Elderberry, Sycamore, Broom, Holly, Buddleia, Willow sp, Alder Buckthorn.

b) **Trees and Shrubs:** some of the hedgerow species can be used in spaces by themselves, depending on the size of the garden. A more careful approach to this section is probably prudent. Examples:- Scots Pine and Larch look nice by themselves and don't require a huge area as do most mature deciduous types in the big to massive category. Otherwise try Silver Birch, Rowan, Buddleia, Elderberry, Hawthorn, Bird Cherry, Siberian Crab (or one that keeps it's fruit well into the New Year), Pear, Apple, Plum, Cotoneaster, Mezereon, Guelder Rose, Wayfaring Tree, Hebe, Pheasant Berry, Pyracantha and Berberis sp.

c) **Climbers and Crawlers:** either plant by themselves or preferably around an old fruit tree or amongst your hedgerow. They're useful thickeners. Examples :- any of the Dog/Field Rose types that produce hips, Bramble, White Bryony, Honeysuckle, Japanese Honeysuckle, Ivy.

d) **Flowering Plants:** the title covers a huge assortment of plants and these below are most likely only the tip of the iceberg as far as "attractiveness" goes. You will probably know of others yourself. Examples:- Red Valerian*, Sedum Spectabile*, Dames Violet*, Aster sp*, Orange Hawkweed, Phlox, Meadowsweet, Purple Loosestrife, Toadflax sp, Evening Primrose, Black Knapweed, Honesty, Shasta and Ox Eye Daisies, Globe Thistle, Thistle sp, Nettle, Red Campion, Scabious sp, Leopardsbane, Perennial Sunflower, Liatra, Comfrey, Yellow Crucifer sp, Umbellifer sp (Fennel and Angelica are nice), Labiate sp, Lady's Smock, Ragwort*, Foxglove, Rosebay and Greater Willowherbs, Sunflower, Mallow sp, Annual Borage, Astrantia, Perennial Flax, Clover sp, Feverfew, Tanoy, Yarrow, Hemp Agrimony, Campanula sp, Common Valerian.



* Those marked with an asterisk are especially good for butterflies.

e) **Vegetables:** the Victorians had the right idea when they wouldn't sacrifice beauty for food. They mixed their vegetables in with their border plants, saved on space and never went hungry (well the well-off didn't anyway!) After all, vegetables are only cultivated wild species and if left to overwinter and flower, provide an insect larder for birds. Examples:- Cabbage, Sprout, Green Bean, Turnip, Cauliflower etc etc.

One word of warning before you rush out to your nearest garden centre to sort out the useful plants from the useless ones, beware the dreaded "variety". In the majority of cases it is the native or wild sort that is any good. Varieties tend to be scentless and perhaps lacking in seeds, berries or fruit, being ignored by the very things you're trying to attract. It's not always the case but worth remembering. Likewise coloureds: copper beeches and "acers" are only for show, not for wildlife.

So you don't have to live in a forest, just create the right atmosphere. Half an hour every couple of days is all it takes and with a well stocked border, weeding is easier than if you'd gone for the "pretty desert" approach. If you want it to look after itself, choose all perennials. Along with a bountiful bird table you should have a wide range of avian visitors in no time and if interested, the delights of the insect world are fascinating! Drop me a line if you'd like some further advice.

Tony Broome

Ringers Notebook

It was noticeable from ringing that there were fewer passerines around this summer and autumn than in most years. Many birds died on their spring migration when northerly winds during April and May covered most of Europe. Cheshire Sand Martin totals were less than half of that of 1990, with colonies building up slowly as some adults arrived even as late as mid-June. For many species there was also poor productivity of offspring in the wet June, with many young birds dying in the nest. However some birds such as Sedge Warblers and Whitethroats raised unusually late broods. Reed Warblers at Rostherne and Woolston had young in the nest in the last week of August. One of the old faithfuls returned to breed at Rostherne, a bird ringed as a chick there in 1982. The observatory at Ottenby in southern Sweden, which has been carrying out standardised trapping since 1946, is also experiencing its worst ever autumn for numbers of passerine migrants.

Pied Flycatchers continued their spread in Cheshire, with an unprecedented 88 chicks ringed in nest boxes near the eastern border of the county. One of the breeding females had been ringed near Sheffield in 1989. A chick from Delamere in 1990 nested this year in a box in Clocaenog Forest, 53km west.

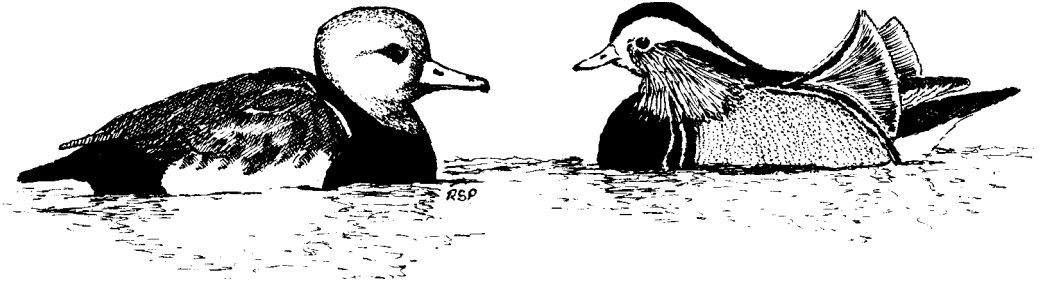
Unusual ringed birds this summer included corvids, 26 Rooks and 33 Jackdaws being cannon-netted, with gulls, near Warrington. Two Black-headed Gulls ringed there in February have been reported from their Scandinavian breeding grounds, one 1133km away in Sweden and the other 1883km distant in Finland.

In contrast to the passerines, Arctic-breeding waders had a good breeding season, as expected: this is a peak year in the lemming cycle. In a "lemming year", predators such as arctic foxes and Snowy Owls feed on lemmings, whereas when there are few of the rodents, the predators turn to wader and goose chicks. The importance of this area for waders from both sides of the East Atlantic flyway is emphasised by the spread of species caught at Frodsham this autumn, with Curlew Sandpiper from the north east, Black-tailed Godwit from the Icelandic race and arctica Dunlin from north-east Greenland.

Evidence of the easterly origin of many of our wintering Greenfinches comes from birds caught in winter in gardens at Hale, Parkgate and Sutton Weaver, reported in the breeding season from Yorkshire, Cambridgeshire and Tyne & Wear.

Dr David Norman, Rowswood Cottage, Ridding Lane, Sutton Weaver, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 6PF.
(Telephone Runcorn 711064)

ESCAPES OR NOT



This is a thorny question but one that is relevant to Cheshire birdwatching. We have a fair number of wildfowl visiting our region and among them every now and then are oddities which are either vagrants or escaped birds from collections. How does one decide which of the Greylag Geese, 1 White Fronted Goose, 1 Barnacle Goose or even the 20 Canada geese they are with are escapes? Or in another example, the Black Swan with 50 Greylag Geese is obviously escaped but what about the Greylags? The latter come as feral feeding birds from Anglesey to summer on Rostherne Mere so they have better credentials. Mind you, does that argue a better case for the 2 Greylags at Sandbach in the previous record? In fact, if we are discussing feral populations, what about another record, this time from Tatton? 2 Bar Headed Geese, 2 Red Crested Pochard and 2 hybrid Canada/Barnacle Geese. Easy that one, the Pochard are from the Tatton Gardens collection, the hybrids one can ignore and the Bar Headed's are obviously escapes. Bar Headed Geese breed ferally in Sweden, why can't one or two fly over here and if one counts the feral Greylags breeding in Britain then why not foreign feral birds? Getting back to the hybrids, if Barnacle geese are breeding with our Canada Geese, does that put the full Barnacles as all dodgy or as feral?

What about Red Crested Pochard? I have seen up to four free flying drakes at Tatton. They occasionally join the wild Pochard flock. That flock ranges widely to such places as Rostherne, Woolston, Chorlton, Salford Quays and perhaps up to Frodsham. Does that put all records of Red Crested Pochard in Cheshire into the escape category? I think not - if the Tatton ones do disperse that far, how is it that they always return for feeding time?

Another exotic, Ruddy Shelduck, occurs here from time to time. Some observers would argue that it is no coincidence that they are usually immatures in or around August. I must admit the ones I have seen have almost invariably been immatures in August.

Mike Rogers (British Birds) wrote a very good article on the subject a few years ago. He explained that no records had been accepted for the last 50 years due to their most likely origin being the feral population in Germany rather than the true breeding range, which is in fact declining, further east. I do believe in this theory, having seen good numbers of feral birds in Belgium which are actually supported by released birds every August!

However, if we discuss released birds supporting the wild/feral population, what about the 5000 Mallard released each year in the Withington/Chelford area to support the wildfowling? Surely our own Mallard are wild. But how do we know that the individual we see is a genuine wild one.

Many letters have been written to magazines about the subject of escapes and I hope that from these few examples, you will see how complex the question is. I have only touched on the wildfowl. If I started involving the passerines such as Sandbach's Yellow Headed Blackbird or near passerines like Ring Necked Parakeet the article could go on indefinitely so, having made the point, I will wind up.

Basically it does not matter whether the bird you saw was an escape or not. The main thing is you saw what you saw and your conscience is your judge. When it starts to matter is when reports are submitted for recording purposes. That is, when a body of people with generally only experience as qualifications, make educated guesses as to whether your bird was wild or escaped.

Certain criteria are used, agreed between these "experts" and we accept that if they have bothered to concern themselves with trying to categorise your record then we owe them the benefit of the doubt that their judgement will, if not correct, at least be well reasoned. So if your "valid" record appears to be scorned and thrown to the escape file, have a thought for the assessors and if you are aggrieved, volunteer yourself as one of the "experts".

Alan Roberts

Quote from the 1968 Cheshire Bird Report:-

"In addition to the wandering, escaped geese mentioned above other species have been noted in the area, and there are several species of exotic duck to be seen. In particular Mandarin Ducks are resident at Eaton Hall, Ruddy Ducks have been seen at several of our meres, most often Barmere, and Green-winged Teal, most probably escapees, have been recorded."

Somewhat a change in attitudes these days and that's only 23 years.

FERAL GEESE

It would be interesting to find out just how many "plastic" geese there are in the county. The figure would probably run into many hundreds.

Are Bar-headed more common than Barnacles? How rare are Lesser White Fronted Geese? What proportion are hybrids? The questions are endless.

If you are familiar with your local patch and can supply details of you own tame geese then please let the county recorder know - the results could be very interesting.

Also if you are aware of any collections in your area which keep wildfowl then this information could also be useful.

OCTOBER 9 5 APR Sat 15 7 SEPTEMBER 8 May 7th 3 JAN Sun 28

Diary

NOVEMBER

- | | | |
|----|--------|--|
| 1 | SECOS | "ISLAY - ISLAND OF GEESE" by Gordon Yates |
| 3 | CRSPB | PENNINGTON FLASH, ring for details |
| 3 | SRSPB | FLAMBOROUGH HEAD by coach ring for details |
| 4 | CAWOS | "KENYA, WEST OF RIFT VALLEY" by Mike McKavett |
| 7 | CADOS | "ARGENTINA" by Val McFarland |
| 7 | RSPB | "RSPB FILM SHOW" at Birkenhead School |
| 9 | CAWOS | CAWOS/BTO CONFERENCE at Chester |
| 9 | WBC | DEESIDE NATURALISTS' RESERVE, ring for details |
| 11 | SRSPB | "PENNINE BIRDS & ARISTOCRATS OF THE FOREST" by Gordon Yates |
| 12 | WRSPB | "SCOTTISH HIGHLAND & ISLAND BIRDS" by Gordon Yates |
| 13 | HO | "BIRDS OF THE COSTA RICA" by Dr John Raines |
| 16 | CADOS | SHROPSHIRE MERES, meet Overleigh Cemetery at 9.00 am |
| 16 | HPRSPB | COFFEE MORNING in Disley |
| 16 | KOS | SEAFORTH - SOUTHPORT, ring for details |
| 17 | HPRSPB | MARTIN MERE & SOUTHPORT, Hazel Grove car park 9.00 am |
| 17 | WRSPB | MERE SANDS & MARTIN MERE by coach ring for details |
| 20 | CRSPB | "CROCODILE BIRD SAFARI" by Peter Rathbone |
| 20 | HPRSPB | "SYMONDS YAT TO MUCKLE FLUGGA" by Gordon Yates at High Lane Village Hall |
| 24 | LOG | BLITHFIELD RESERVOIR, meet Lymm Cross at 8.00 am |
| 24 | SECOS | MORECAMBE BAY & LEIGHTON MOSS ring for details |
| 28 | WBC | "CHESHIRE'S WILDLIFE" by Eric Thurston (CCT) |
| 29 | KOS | "PENGUIN PARADE" by Brian Dyke |
| 29 | LOG | "SYMONDS YAT TO MUCKLE FLUGGA" by Gordon Yates |

DECEMBER

- | | | |
|----|--------|---|
| 1 | CRSPB | MARTIN MERE, ring for details |
| 1 | SRSPB | PENNINGTON & MARTIN MERE by coach ring for details |
| 2 | CAWOS | "BIRDS OF THE MIDDLE EAST" by Richard Porter |
| 5 | CADOS | "HOCKENHULL NATURE RESERVE" by Dave Cummings |
| 6 | HPRSPB | "CHRISTMAS PARTY" at Marple S.C.H. |
| 6 | SECOS | "ARGENTINA" by Dr. John Raines |
| 7 | KOS | VISIT TO MARTIN MERE, ring for details |
| 8 | CADOS | SEAFORTH/SOUTHPORT, meet Overleigh Cemetery at 9.00 am |
| 8 | LOG | ROSTHERNE, meet Lymm Cross at 8.00 am |
| 8 | SECOS | SANDBACH FLASHES ring for details |
| 9 | SRSPB | "BIRDS OF NORTHUMBERLAND" by Tim Melling |
| 10 | WRSPB | "SAVE THE SEASHORE BIRDS PROJECT IN GHANA" by Andrew Grieve |
| 11 | HO | "FROM SYMONDS YAT TO MUCKLE FLUGGA" by Gordon Yates |
| 13 | KOS | "CHRISTMAS PARTY" |
| 13 | LOG | "CHRISTMAS PARTY" |
| 14 | WRSPB | RISLEY MOSS by coach ring for details |
| 15 | HPRSPB | CHORLTON WATER PARK, meet at W.P. car park at 9.00 am |
| 18 | CRSPB | "A SCOTTISH TOUR" by Roy Rhodes |
| 21 | WBC | STANLOW RESERVE with M.N.A., ring for details |
| 26 | HPRSPB | BOXING DAY WALK, meet Rams Head, Disley at 11.00 am |

JANUARY

2	CADOS	"EUROPEAN BIRDS, NESTS & YOUNG" by Pete Castell
3	SECOS	"WILDLIFE ON ALDERLEY EDGE" by Hon. Richard Littleton
5	CRSPB	NORTH WALES COAST ring for details
6	CAWOS	"TRAVELS IN SWEDEN" by Bob Anderson
8	HO	"IT'S A FUN WAY TO MAKE A LIVING" by Micheal Leach
10	MCOS	"BIRDING IN THE NORTH WEST" by Ted Abrahams
12	KOS	LEIGHTON MOSS
12	MCOS	SAND PLANT MARSHSIDE & MARTIN MERE, ring for details
13	SRSPB	"NATURAL HISTORY OF AMERICAN SOUTH WEST" by Chris Matteson
15	CRSPB	"25 YEAR IN LEIGHTON MOSS" by John Wilson
18	CADOS	NORTH WALES COAST, meet Overleigh Cemetery at 9.00 am
19	SECOS	SHROPSHIRE MERES, ring for details
23	WBC	"GALAPAGOS" by Dr. Philip Robinson
24	KOS	"IN SEARCH OF BIRDS" by Charles Owen

SOCIETIES

ADNHS:	Altrincham & District Natural History Society, mtgs Hale Methodist Church Hall 7.30pm, Sec. Vincent Pedley 061-748-4717.
CADOS:	Chester & District Ornithological Society, mtgs Caldley Valley Community Centre 7.30pm, Prog. Sec. Marion Barlow 09282-3871.
CAWOS:	Cheshire & Wirral Ornithological Society, mtgs Knutsford Civic Centre 7.45pm, contact Sheila Blamire 0565-830168.
CCTNG:	Cheshire Conservation Trust(North Group), mtgs Altrincham Library 7.45pm, Pub. Off. Ann Mason 061-860-5104.
CRSPB:	Chester RSPB Members Group, mtgs St. Marys Centre Chester 7.30pm Prog. Sec. Brenda Legard 0244-682018.
HO:	Hale Ornithologists, mtgs St. Peters Assembly Hall 7.45pm, Prog. Sec. Barbara Vercambre 061-980-8362.
HPRSPB:	High Peak RSPB Members Group
KOS:	Knutsford Ornithological Society, mtgs Knutsford Methodist Church Hall 7.45pm, contact Peter Perkins 0565-632784.
LOG:	Lymm Ornithological Group, mtgs Lymm Village Hall 8.00pm, Prog. Sec. Peter Tonge 0606-891274
MCOS:	Mid-Cheshire Ornithological Society, mtgs Hartford Village Hall 7.45pm, contact Paul Kenyon, 196 Chester Rd, Hartford.
MRSPB:	Macclesfield RSPB Members Group, mtgs Senior Citizens Hall 7.45pm, Prog. Sec. Julia Thornburn 0625-582433.
NCRSPB:	North Cheshire RSPB Members Group, mtgs Runcorn Library, Shopping City, Sec. Lynn Fewster 0928-575876
SECOS:	South-east Cheshire Ornithological Society, mtgs Sandbach Library 7.30pm, Prog. Sec. John Clowes 0270-872435.
SRSPB:	Stockport RSPB Members Group, mtgs contact Mike Armstrong 061-980 3986.
WBC:	Wirral Bird Club, mtgs Kingsmead Hall Hoylake 8.00pm, Prog. Sec. Hilda Truesdale 051-632-2705.
WG:	Wilmslow Guild, mtgs Wilmslow Guild HQ 7.45pm, Prog. Sec. Miss S. Ricketts 0625-583148.
WRSPB:	Wirral RSPB Group, mtgs Williamson Art Gallery Birkenhead 7.30pm, Prog. Sec. D. Jowitt 051-625-5534.

DO YOU READ THIS NEWSLETTER ?

The final editorial comment in this issue coupled with the late arrival of the July newsletter must surely raise a few questions amongst our readers.

Are you happy to read articles by the same old contributors? Don't you ever wish you could share an experience with someone ? Wouldn't you like to submit a drawing? Our requests are almost endless.

The magazine cannot continue to function in it's present form unless there is an input from a variety of sources ... not only to give the present staff a break but to provide a genuinely interesting read.

Criticism directed towards the society from time to time comes from various people, the majority of which are unfair and biased in their opinions. We can honestly say that if for once we received a genuine grievance we would be delighted. It would prove that there are actually members who read the mag!

If, of course, no one bothers, then no one will miss what is widely acknowledged as one of the best society newsletters in the country. It is hard to understand what you actually want when you fail to contribute yourselves. There are undoubtedly those county birders who still walk around with chips on their shoulders, still harbouring past grievances and still intent on ignoring pleas for help.

Doesn't anyone want to better the ornithological cause in the county? Surely it can't be the subscription rates that deter new members, after all what else can you buy for £7.00?

It's up to everyone of you out there to do your bit, whether it's five minutes a day promoting YOUR society or whether it's taking the time to write to the editor.

You'll have read it all before, no doubt, but this time **IT IS SERIOUS**. Recent problems are partly due to a lack of help on the part of the members. We can't force you to help, after all it is all voluntary, but we're volunteers also. We give up our time for you instead of birding on the coast or wherever, it's time you gave up some time for us!

Am I out of order? Maybe. But I am in a position to be, as are the others that produce this mag. Help us or the future of this newsletter is indeed doubtful.

Tony Broome

CAWOS BIRDLINE

Due to Alan Conlin attending college in Southampton and the general lack of support and interest, the birdline, although by far the cheapest one operating in the area has ceased to function. Many thanks to Alan for his time and also to the regulars who did bother to ring in

FOCALPOINT RUN BY BIRDERS FOR BIRDERS

FOCALPOINT

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Our recent move to Higher Whitley, has enabled us to offer our customers even better viewing opportunities. Situated within easy reach of the M56, we have ample free car parking. Visitors to our premises have been able to test out their prospective purchase whilst watching birds using our feeding station. These have included Willow Tit, Treecreeper, Tree Sparrow and Greenfinch, whilst overhead Goshawk, Buzzard and Arctic Tern have been seen on passage. So far nearly 80 species of bird have been seen - is there a better way to try before you buy?

BOOKS

With the increased space our new Unit has, we are able to offer our customers an ever increasing range of Natural History Books, with all the latest from Croom, Helm, T & AD Poyser, Academic Press, Collins, MacMillan and others

OUTDOOR CLOTHING

The following is a selection from our range of outdoor clothing:

Photographers Activity Vest	19.99
Lined Waxed Coats (incl Hood)	39.99
Activity Trousers (plenty of Pockets)	14.95
Adventure Shorts	9.95
Casual Trousers	9.95

FINE ART DEPARTMENT

We also now sell a range of limited edition artwork by Roger Tory Peterson, Lars Jonsson, Robert Bateman, Keith Shackelton and other leading artists. All work is on display at Higher Whitley together with a selection of original artwork by local artists such as Philip Snow, Gordon Trunkfield and David Quinn

FOCALPOINT

UNIT 8, MARBURY HOUSE FARM,
BENTLEY'S FARM LANE, HIGHER WHITLEY
Nr. WARRINGTON, CHESHIRE, WA4 4QW
TEL: 0925 730399 FAX: 0606 892207



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Waxwings



Collins, Poyser, Helm, Hamlyn, Mitchell Beazley

**12 BELLFIELD AVENUE, CHEADLE HULME
STOCKPORT, CHESHIRE, Tel: 061-486 0784**

The long-awaited "**Field Guide to the Rare Birds of Britain and Europe**" has just been published, price £14.95, hardback, 480 pages with 128 superb colour plates, it can be obtained for £13.50, post free, **from Waxwings Books - Just Phone (061) 486 0784.**

Waxwings Books are attending all indoor meetings and are donating a book of the winners choice, up to the value of £ 25, for the Christmas raffle to be held on 2nd December.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Ron Plummer for helping out with the illustrations.

Recent changes, both with the compilers and with the way the newsletter is put together has led us to use a different method to achieve our aims.

Pressure of work meant that Don Pawlett could no longer enter the raw material on to disc, many new commitments have given both myself and Richard Gabb much less time to spend on our roles and consequently it became impossible at the present point in time to liaise with David Lawrence in a way that was absolutely necessary. Apart from David, the other three of us will continue (if the last page is heeded) in a reduced capacity.

Therefore a very warm thanks from our hearts must go to David and his wife Jane, for the amount of time, patience and long hours spent making sure the newsletter was of a continually very high standard. Both their support AND frequent refreshments have been greatly appreciated - no doubt we'll be hearing from them as contributors!

Can we welcome Geoff and Sheila Blamire into the realms of the possessed ... they've volunteered to carry on where the rest of us have had to leave off. Many thanksbut what have they let themselves in for?!