

*Cheshire and Wirral
Ornithological Society*

BIRD NEWS

Number 15 July 92



**Black-necked Grebes * Recent Reports * Notes and Letters
Local Patch * The Early Years * Diary**



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Newsletter Editor : Richard Gabb

72 Chester Road, Poynton, Stockport, Cheshire SK12 1HA, Tel: 0625 876577

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10 Castlecroft Road, Westminster Park, Chester, Cheshire CH4 7QD

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Front cover - Rose-coloured Starling by Ron Plummer

Editorial

There can only be one theme for this issue and I make no apologies for concentrating upon it. The long awaited Breeding Bird Atlas for Cheshire and the Wirral is now published, as I hope the majority of our members are aware due to its recent arrival through their letterbox. For anyone who did not subscribe to the pre-publication offer I wonder if I could find words appropriate enough to describe its excellence. An Editorial however is not the place to write a thorough review and Dr. Jane Turner has kindly agreed to do this for the next issue of Bird News.

I would rather pay tribute to those who gave up so much of their time and whose considerable efforts have been rewarded with such a superb publication. (It is also a tremendous bargain!) For once I feel I can speak from personal experience, having seen the recent publication of "my" similar book on the distribution of Cheshire's dragonflies. (Plug!) You will notice that I have placed the personal authorship above in quotation marks. For administrative convenience there often has to be a front man (sorry, person) but clearly no such publication could be completed without the teamwork and the co-operation of many people. In my own situation I know my co-author David Kitching could, but doesn't, feel put down by focus through myself. He understands that his great contribution to the field work and computer programming are recognised by the majority. Similarly our publishers at Liverpool Museum have offered so much helpful advice and produced such an attractive design.

So it is with the Breeding Bird Atlas. The four members of the Editorial panel named on the cover would acknowledge that whilst theirs has been the major effort, the book could not have been produced in its final format without the contributions of the lengthy supporting cast detailed in the acknowledgements. However, I feel it is a privilege to be able to thank these four on behalf of all members of CAWOS. Dennis Elphick organised the original tetrad breeding survey, marshalled the work of the 10k square co-ordinators and then processed vast amounts of data manually at a time before the advent of the home computer spread sheet. All of the original mapping and the final distribution maps were again created manually by Alan Hunter in what must have been a prodigious effort. These species distribution maps have each been supported by fascinating in-depth text, nearly all written by J.P. Guest who also completed much of the introductory chapters. He was in turn helped by comment from David Norman, with both of them making a final concerted effort to pull the whole book together. Finally, Alan Hunter again brought the project to its successful conclusion through selection and close liaison with the publisher.

Perhaps, appropriately, in years to come, the names on the covers of both books will mean nothing to those who look back and are grateful for the invaluable bases they have been given. Nevertheless it should be a matter of great satisfaction that someone outside Cheshire took the trouble to telephone me to praise the renaissance of the county in the context of these publications.

Let us hope this will be continued through increased membership of our Society and further contributions to Bird News. Yes, sadly we are back to normal with very few unsolicited articles for this issue (which just wouldn't be the same without one such comment now would it?).

Richard Gabb

Species Spotlight

BLACK-NECKED GREBES



Black-necked Grebe are spread across much of Europe, Asia, North America and even have outposts breeding in parts of Africa. In fact, anyone who has visited places such as California can probably relate tales of flocks numbering thousands if not millions. As a world bird, it is not rare.

In Britain, however, the story is different. Small numbers breed in various sites in England and even the established population in their stronghold in Scotland is not a large one. More winter, mainly offshore around the coast with a few visiting lakes and meres.

The rumours in the early 1980's of summering Black-necked Grebes in Cheshire created exciting news. Were they or were they not breeding at Nunsmere? It was certainly possible to see splendidly plumaged adults bobbing around in and out of the vegetation of the meres edge.

Then suddenly the venue had changed and birds were now at Woolston. The first record had been in July and August 1982, with no more until a one day bird in 1985. In 1986 one summered but then in 1987 three summered and breeding was actually proved when a pair raised two young.

The site was obviously to their liking and the following years produced astounding success.

1988	-2 possibly 3 summered, at least 1 young was raised.
1989	-5 adults summered. 2 pairs raised 4 young.
1990	-5 adults summered. 3 broods were raised, 1 pair being double brooded.
1991	-11 adults summered. 4 pairs bred, all of which were double brooded. 15 young were raised.

I will not dwell on the demise of Woolston's No. 3 bed later that year. Suffice to say that Cheshire has lost perhaps the most important site it has ever had, not just for the Grebes but many other waterfowl which it held in nationally, if not internationally, important numbers.

This year birds have been seen on various of our meres as well as Pennington Flash. They started appearing in late March which was about the time they would have been arriving at Woolston. By late April groups of up to five were seen at Marbury and Rostherne and the sequence of records shows quite clearly that there was a problem moving around different sites in the area. There have been three records of individuals prospecting at Woolston despite the almost complete lack of water. None have found an alternative site to breed this year.

In previous years the birds at Woolston would be among the first migrants to return, almost immediately setting about the breeding business. Nests were built within days of arrival and when

the young were about two weeks old the brood would be split with each parent taking on the responsibility for feeding one of the young birds. It was a flurry of activity with voracious chicks making great demands on their industrious parents. It seemed that it would not be possible for one adult to supply the needs of more than one youngster, such was their appetite.

Observations at Woolston led to the individual identification of birds by their differing size and the variety of colours in the golden ear coverts. Fascinating facts like these are not mentioned in any literature. The situation was seemingly perfect for the Grebes and the study of them.

So, why Woolston and why not anywhere else? As long ago as 1928 they bred at Marbury Mere and since then several pairs have raised young at various of our mid-Cheshire meres. However they have never taken to a site in quite the same way as at Woolston. No doubt there are many factors but it would appear that the presence of Black-headed Gulls in the breeding season gives the Grebes a measure of protection and warning. Also such hungry offspring demand a ready supply of insects such as beetles, caddisfly and their larvae as well as dragonfly larvae, small fish and crustaceans. The water therefore must not be too deep and has to be healthy with good supplies of submerged and emergent vegetation. Basically, nowhere else in the County has quite the same potential these days.

For now all we can do is hope that one day another bit of habitat creation can bring back a bird which clearly wants to breed in Cheshire but through not fault of its own has been deprived of the chance. My thanks to Brian Martin, Steve Barber and the suppliers of records in the Rostherne and Marbury Country Park and Witton Limebeds logs, for supplying the facts for this article.

Alan Roberts

Recent Reports

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

Black-necked Grebes returned from March 24th only to find that their breeding habitat at Woolston had been destroyed, drained by the Manchester Ship Canal Company. Great Budworth Mere held up to seven and Rostherne five of these beautiful birds with ones and twos also visiting Tatton and the Chelford SQ's, sightings became increasingly fewer from mid-May. An immature **Night Heron** at Budworth Mere on May 16th was an excellent find, the sixth for Cheshire and Wirral, one had been in the same mereside bushes 10 years and 10 days earlier! A "probable" Night Heron flew south over Alderley Edge Cricket Club on May 17th. A **Little Egret** graced the new pools on Frodsham Marsh on June 8th and a **White Stork** was seen in flight over Caldby on April 16th.

A pair of **Mute Swans** nested at Rostherne Mere for the first time since 1961, possibly an indication of their continuing recovery in our area. **Bewick's Swans** at Burton/Inner Marsh Farm numbered 53 on March 14th before their departure. Less welcome, to some observers at least, than the beautiful wild wintering swans are the flocks of feral geese; the flock of **Greylag Geese** which moult at Rostherne Mere NNR exceeded 200 for the first time in June. An **Egyptian Goose** of unknown origin roamed east Cheshire waters being seen at Redesmere in April and Rostherne Mere in early



May. A **Ruddy Shelduck** at Inner Marsh Farm in early April may have been the bird at Rostherne on April 12th. **Garganey** visited Inner Marsh Farm on various dates and were also seen at Great Budworth Mere on April 7th, Rostherne Mere on May 7th and both Frodsham Marsh and Woolston on May 15th. Inner Marsh Farm hosted a **Blue-winged Teal** on May 27th and 28th. Two **Long-tailed Ducks** were at Marbury Big Mere from late April into May and one at Rostherne Mere from May 6th to 16th. Five **Common Scoter** were at Farmwood Pool on March 25th and a flock of 16 on Great Budworth Mere on June 2nd. The "red-headed" **Smew** was last seen at Rostherne Mere on May 3rd.

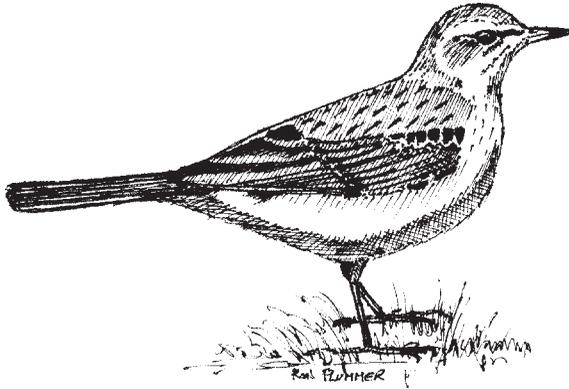
A **Honey Buzzard** over Acre Nook SQ on May 12th was a superb addition to one observers "work list".

Marsh Harriers passed through Sandbach Flashes, Frodsham Marsh and Gatewath between April 17th and 24th. A superb grey male **Hen Harrier** was over Macclesfield Forest on March 16th. Passage **Ospreys** made an excellent showing, the first was over Hilbre on April 4th followed by birds at Warrington on April 11th, Witton Flashes on April 19th and 20th, Rostherne Mere & Doddington on unspecified dates in Mid-April, Hale Decoy in early May while one was seen on May 21st at Frodsham Marsh and presumably the same bird later that day at Rostherne Mere. A **Merlin** passed through Woolston on April 20th. A **Hobby** performed well for observers waiting for the Night Heron to show at Great Budworth Mere on May 16th while at the same site two were seen by an observer looking for the **Caspian Tern** on May 30th; a single Hobby was at Moreton on May 20th. **Peregrines** could still be seen at Frodsham Score and Fiddlers Ferry into May and one was picked up dead at an inland site also in May; of serious concern are reports of disturbances at the only Cheshire and Wirral breeding site following publicity on local radio.

Judging by the lack of reports **Red Grouse** remain just as scarce as they were last year. **Quail** were heard calling at, at least, three Wirral sites from mid May and "inland" near Doddington on June 12th. The first returning **Little Ringed Plovers** were at Frodsham Marsh on March 15th and Neumann's Flash on March 21st but it was the end of the month before they became more widespread; by late June around 20 non or post-breeders had gathered at Neumann's. After the excellent numbers of **Ringed Plover**, **Sanderling** and **Dunlin** on spring passage through Neumann's Flash last year the very low numbers of these species this spring was disappointing. Over 500 **Golden Plover**, many in superb breeding plumage, were still on Frodsham Marsh in mid April with just odd birds remaining

into May. Five **Knot** were at Neumann's Flash on May 24th. A **Little Stint** was at Neumann's Flash on June 23rd and 24th and a **Curlew Sandpiper** on June 7th. **Temminck's Stints** are always welcome visitors so singles at Inner Marsh Farm on May 15th and 28th to 29th and Frodsham Marsh from May 14th to 17th were much appreciated. Neumann's Flash did well for **Ruff** with parties of 22 on March 15th, 14 on April 20th and 4 here on May 24th. Neumann's Flash also hosted parties of up to 16 **Black-tailed Godwits** in June but these were heavily outnumbered by the flock of around 200 which gathered at Inner Marsh Farm in mid June. The **Whimbrel** passage reported can hardly be said to have been spectacular, five at Hilbre on March 15th were the earliest, small numbers passed through Witton Flashes from April 19th with the May maximum here nine on 12th; elsewhere up to 15 were on Frodsham Marsh in late April and birds were over Woolston and three through Chelford SQ's on April 20th. Odd **Spotted Redshanks** were noted at Inner Marsh Farm in April and June. A party of seven **Greenshank** at Neumann's Flash on April 20th with one here on June 11th. A **Wood Sandpiper** was at Mobberley Pool from May 20th to 23rd. In a "Recent Reports" devoted mainly to spring migration it seems premature to be thinking about return passage, however two **Green Sandpipers** at Sandbach Flashes on June 14th and four on June 21st were the first of the summer build-up here while singles also appeared at Witton Flashes and Chelford SQ's. A superb dark-phase **Arctic Skua** was watched from the Rostherne Observatory on May 12th, it appeared to be following the line of the River Bollin heading north-west. Adult **Mediterranean Gull(s)** were reported from Fiddlers Ferry on odd dates from April to June, a bird in second summer plumage was at Great Budworth Mere on April 26th and a first summer bird at Neumann's Flash on June 26th. A report from New Brighton of 16 **Little Gulls** on March 13th reflects only a small proportion of the numbers present in the Mersey mouth in spring; inland one was on Tatton Mere on March 21st, two at Rostherne Mere on April 12th and also reported from the River Mersey at Gatewarth in late April. Spring brought a spate of reports of **Ring-billed Gulls**, one was on the River Dee at Chester from April 5th to 24th, the Richmond Bank hosted both first and second winter birds on April 11th, a first summer bird was at Fiddlers Ferry on April 16th and a second year bird at New Brighton on May 6th. The excellent year at Witton Flashes for sightings of both **Iceland** and **Glaucous Gulls** continued. Three or four "new" Iceland Gulls were noted here in April and single May sightings of two different birds brought the years total to around ten birds. The Witton Flashes also hosted three different Glaucous Gulls in April bringing the years total to six, three birds were seen together on May 10th and a first summer bird was present from June 15th to 20th. Elsewhere a first winter





Iceland Gull was at Farmwood Pool in late March and early April and one was reported from Hale in late May, Glaucous Gulls were reported from Gatewath in late April and May and Fiddlers Ferry in late May. The only inland **Kittiwakes** I have heard of were two adults at Farmwood Pool on March 17th and at least three birds at Rostherne Mere on March 22nd. A superb **Caspian Tern** moved between Neumann's Flash

and Great Budworth Mere on May 30th and 31st allowing many observers to catch up with it; the fifth record for Cheshire - incredibly four of these have been in the Northwich area, three of them at Witton Flashes! A **Common Tern** reported from Knutsford Moor on April 3rd would be the earliest ever in Cheshire and Wirral if substantiated; otherwise single figures were reported from a number of inland sites from April 24th. Small numbers of **Arctic Terns** passed through inland sites from April 24th. A **Little Tern** was over Great Budworth on May 6th. **Black Terns** appeared from April 24th with reports of single figures from Inner Marsh Farm, Pickmere, Great Budworth Mere, Rostherne Mere and Farmwood Pool, the largest flock reported was of 22 at Fiddlers Ferry on May 24th. A superb **White-winged Black Tern** was over Neumann's Flash on May 8th, the first record in our area since 1986 when an adult was at Woolston on July 13th.

Two **Turtle Doves** were seen at Witton Flashes on April 26th but apart from reports from Delamere Forest I have head of no other birds. A **Cuckoo** was at Woolston on April 16th while one at Rostherne Mere NNR on April 21st was the earliest ever there. A **Short-eared Owl** passed through Woolston on April 20th and one was reported from Frodsham Marsh on June 9th. **Swifts** were present in small numbers before the end of April, those over Rostherne Mere on April 24th the earliest so far reported. A **Bee-eater** flew over Widnes on June 13th. A **Hoopoe** was discovered at Witton Flashes on April 26th by observers taking part in a survey of the breeding birds of the area. A **Wryneck** was on Hilbre on April 27th. **Sand Martins** became more widespread, in small numbers, from mid March. A **Swallow** was in the Sankey Valley on March 17th, early April arrivals were at New Brighton on 4th, Redesmere on 7th and Witton Flashes on 9th but it was April 12th (a showery day) before birds became widespread in any numbers. Small numbers of **House Martins** were present from April 12th, some observers have commented on diminished numbers of this species - perhaps the CAWOS survey will shed some light on this? Red Rocks hosted a **Tawny Pipit** for a few days in mid-May and a **Red-throated Pipit** was here on May 15th. A **Tree Pipit** was reported from Acre Nook SQ on April 11th but it was the last week of the month before birds were back in the eastern hills, again observers have had the impression of diminished numbers. Up to four **Water Pipits** were at Neston in late March and (very) early April, two were at Witton Flashes on April 1st.

The first **Yellow Wagtail** was reported from Frodsham Marsh on April 4th but I have heard of no passage parties of even double-figures. Small parties of **White Wagtails** were reported into May with 10 on Frodsham Score on May 3rd. Six **Waxwings** were reported from Heswall on March 30th. A **Black Redstart** was at Red Rocks in late May. A **Redstart** at Marbury Country Park on April 5th was early, birds were back in the eastern hills by the last week of April. A party of 13 **Whinchat** was at Meols on May 5th, one or two passed through Frodsham Marsh and this species remains very difficult to find in the eastern hills. **Wheatear** passage was slow to get underway and continued until mid May with by far the largest numbers reported from Frodsham Marsh and Score where at least 55 were counted on May 3rd. Passage **Ring Ouzels** were at Red Rocks on April 16th and Chelford SQ's on April 20th, numbers in the hills remain low. A flock of at least 1000 Fieldfare was near Wincle on March 22nd.

A **Grasshopper Warbler** was "reeling" at Witton Flashes on April 24th with birds back at Woolston next day. A **Subalpine Warbler** attracted many admirers to Moreton on May 9th and 10th. **Whitethroats** began to appear from April 19th and some observers formed the impression that they had returned in larger numbers in recent years. A **Blackcap** was singing in Marbury Country Park on March 24th but it was the second week of April before many sites had their first birds. A **Wood Warbler** was singing at Teggs Nose from April 23rd while passage birds were noted at Marbury Country Park and Chelford. A **Chiffchaff** sang at Rostherne Mere NNR on March 17th and many sites had their first birds over the next week. **Willow Warblers** were singing from April 4th at Witton Flashes but arrival was slow and some sites had to wait two more weeks for their first bird. **Goldcrests** remained very scarce with any singing bird worth an entry in an observers notebook. A female **Firecrest** was at Red Rocks on May 17th. The first **Spotted Flycatchers** returned to the Witton Flashes/Marbury area from May 6th with a more general arrival by the weekend of May 16th/17th. **Pied Flycatchers** were back in the eastern hills from April 23rd with good numbers reported from several sites, spring passage birds were noted at several sites including Pickerings Pasture and Rostherne Mere NNR, the status of two pairs which turned in the Witton Flashes area in mid June is as yet unclear.

Two **Golden Orioles** were an excellent find for a CBC worker at Rostherne Mere NNR on May 17th. Two **Ravens** reappeared on Frodsham Marsh/Score from March with sightings at least into May. A farmer enjoyed close views from his tractor of a lovely **Rose-coloured Starling** near Sproston on April 27th. A **Serin** flew calling over Shotwick Park on May 28th. A **Lapland Bunting** was at Hilbre on May 22nd.

Steve Barber

Thanks to the Witton and Marbury Log, Keith Massey, Bernard Shakey, Birdline NW and anyone else who has passed records on.

British Birds reduce subscription

Negotiations are under way with the above magazine for a reduced subscription to C.A.W.O.S. members in the near future.

Notes & Letters

OF COURSE IT MATTERS

After reading J.P. Guest's "ESCAPES OR NOT: DOES IT REALLY MATTER?" I had to shout out loud 'of course it does.' Although escapes are frowned upon they do give an indication of whether the habitat can support the species if it finds an unoccupied niche.

When studying birds more deeply you need to find out why birds are found in areas they don't normally inhabit. Is their population level too high for the area they come from? Is there a food shortage or is habitat being destroyed? All of this gives us a better understanding of the species and finding possible ways to help it if we can. It can also show us where we might be going wrong with our manipulation of the countryside. Enabling us to put it to better and more profitable use.

Rare birds which come to Cheshire do not last long without the right habitat for their needs. So the more rare birds that arrive and stay the more likely we are to be looking after the countryside properly. Just look at all the species that have disappeared through the destruction of their habitat. Then look at the species making a return through a better understanding of their habitat. Of course a rare bird is of more significance than a budgie. The budgie was brought here with help and only escapes into the wild. A rare species finds it's own way here, a marvel in itself, even if it is by adverse weather conditions.

Cheshire is only dead to those dead towards Ornithology. You have to be alive to enjoy it. That's a prerequisite for normal people.

We need to know why species are not to be found in Cheshire, just as well as why certain species are found.

The reason most people fail to submit notes for Bird News and Bird Report is that like me, most are field Ornithologists. Finding time to send in your sightings is difficult. People who do find time regularly, may be armchair bird watcher's with only a little field experience, tending to look on birds as a recreational past time. (Nothing wrong in that, as with twitching, but not the basis for the betterment of Ornithology.)

I started by being an egg collector in the early 50's at the age of five and by the beginning of 1960 I had become a field Ornithologist because there was more interest in it for me. (Egg collecting was the normal way to start in those days.) Adult Ornithologists were hard to come by, I had to teach myself. I still have records I never got round to sending in, like finding a Rock Pipit's nest with eggs and young in a quarry at Moore and observing four Buzzards displaying in the late 50's, also at Moore. In the 60's Woodlark, Red-Necked Grebe, and a Great Northern Diver in August at Hilbre. Not to mention dozens of sightings around where I live of migrants such as Grasshopper Warbler singing in the last week of March.

The sun will never set on Cheshire's birds as they come from most parts of the world and they will continue to forever. Cheshire Ornithology should look to a better future by ignoring people who unfairly criticise true birdwatchers. Otherwise people like me (and there are plenty of them) will get on their bikes and ride off into the sunset. Don't forget, field Ornithologists are the backbone of Cheshire Ornithology, you cannot exist without us, but we can without you.

Keith G. Massey 4 Hall Terrace, Gt. Sankey, Warrington, Cheshire. WA5 3EZ

(This subject is now closed ED.)

My personal apologies go to Peter Walton for inaccuracies in scanning and blatant spelling mistakes in the printing of his poems published in the last issue of Bird News.

A Good Days Walk

Since moving from North Wales ten years ago, it has been one of my minor ambitions to walk to Hilbre Island, from where I now live, just outside Chester Zoo. So an earlyish six o'clock start along the Shropshire Union Canal to Backford on Thursday the nineteenth of March saw me combining two passions of mine, birdwatching and walking. The first birds of note, were a pair of Tree Sparrows at Mollington, their "tchupp" calls demanding attention from amongst a small charm of Goldfinches on ploughed land. These underrated, under-researched and under-recorded passerines are always a delight to find, and like a party at Upton Heath which I have watched regularly this winter, they have probably just split off from the Hock as a pair, and a nearby tree holds excellent possible nesting sites. After a somewhat boring and noisy section of the walk along the dual carriageway to Shotwick, I was pleased to find two Corn Buntings singing against each other, either side of one of the small roundabouts along Shotwick Road, neither being too bothered by the monstrous roar of the heavy goods wagons thundering continuously past them. My next point of call was the Shotwick Water Tanks where a drake Long-tailed Duck has been well watched in recent weeks, but, after settling down comfortably to watch this marvellously plumaged bird, still without his tail streamers, he took to flight down onto the nearby Shotwick Lake, appearing more nervous than on my last visit two weeks ago when I watched him undisturbed for a half an hour.

At nearby Inner Marsh Farm Reserve a pair of the highly dimorphic Ruffs were present in the background, but, stealing the show from the wealth of waders and waterfowl were a group of five feeding Spotted Redshanks. Far greyer than nearby brownish redshanks, and with a much more slender form, legs and bill, even the red proximal patch on the lower mandible was clearly evident on these waders. But, perhaps more interestingly, it was their behaviour which arrested my attention, with all five waders actively feeding together in quite deep water, turning this way and then that with bill and head submerged, their frenetic feeding behaviour almost made the water boil.

After a quick count of seventeen Bewick's Swans still off Burton Point, and a few Mutes, a change to wellies was initiated at Denhall as I took the saltmarsh path to Parkgate, alongside which the piped "dweeb-zweeb-beeb-beeb" ditty of numerous reed buntings was constantly heard. At Little Neston another Spotted Redshank was found, this time showing no white wingbar, just the white flash up its back from the rump. Here again the jizz came in handy, the high-flying nature of a migrant wader, the pronounced rolling flight with strongly down-curved wings and the helpful "chew-it" call. Here I was also expecting the two wintering Water Pipits which I have watched four times now this year, but my disappointment was vanquished not long after when I found a single bird on gaining the Parkgate foreshore. Having become accustomed to the sharp rising "wheet" "wheet" calls of the Neston birds, I was pulled up short by the call as I walked along until, after almost a full minute, I found the bird on the badly patched up rooftop of a building with a decaying white verandah. Here, and on its visits to the high water mark of the saltmarsh, I watched it foraging diligently for half an hour or so, and observed several towering flights straight up in the air when disturbed, and from where it almost somersaulted before flying over the marsh, eventually returning after about a minute when again its call heralded its approach. Having lost (but not wasted) time watching the pipit, I just missed out on the high tide from the old baths, where the warden informed me of the Short-eared Owls, Peregrines, Merlins and eight Corn Buntings that had been seen, but at least I found his male Wheatear as I left, and a trio of calling Twite in overhead flight were noteworthy as I gained the Wirral Way from here.

The highlights of the Wirral Way were a pair of Green Woodpeckers around Parkgate golf-course, and a silent flycatching Chiffchaff near the boundary stone between Heswall and Thurston. The walk continued from Thurston along the beach, and soon degraded into a prolonged plod in the mud before I escaped to the Marine Lake at West Kirby. From here to Middle Eyre and on to Hilbre presented a dearth of waders considering the out-going tide, with only a dozen or so each of Grey Plovers, Knots and Curlews amongst the Oystercatchers, Redshanks and Dunlins. Clearly the majority had already left for their arctic breeding grounds.

Following the gutter to the tip of Hilbre hoping for the two Brent Geese was disappointing, just a trio of Grey Plovers on the seaweed covered rocks, until a sit down on the slipway in an unsuccessful attempt to count the Purple Sandpipers (10+), found the two Pale-bellied Geese grazing the sandstone rocks right in front of me, where else, a perfect end to a good days birdwatching walk. P I Morris, Caughall Farmhouse Cottage, Caughall Road, Upton-by-Chester, Cheshire.

Spring movement of Wheatears 1992 at Fiddlers Ferry Power Station

Spring passage started rather late on the 28th March this year, with only two previous years having a later start, and finished on 14th May, the earliest finish of Wheatear passage to date. In that time the maximum number of birds passing through was calculated at 86, a new maximum count for the species in spring migration.

The previous maximum spring passage count was 70 birds in 1987, between 22nd March and 29th May. 70 was also recorded in 1986 between 21st March and 3rd June, the latest finish of any year.

The maximum count on any one day this spring was 16 birds on 21st April. Previously in 1987 the maximum was 24 birds on the 24th April. In 1986, 30 were seen on 14th May.

The highest day count was 31 birds on 15th April 1984. In that year only 60 birds were seen passing through from the latest start of all years on 10th April.

Keith G. Massey 4 Hall Terrace, Gt. Sankey, Warrington, Cheshire. WA5 3EZ

(1992 proved to be the best year for Wheatears at many sites in the county including Red Rocks where record numbers were counted on many days. Ed.)

Long-tailed Tits

While on my way home from work, I was walking alongside the R. Dee by the RooDee car park when my attention was drawn to movement amongst the bankside Willows.

On looking closer, I was surprised to see a group of birds side by side in a hollowed out section of a tree branch, all Long-tailed Tits (*Aegithalos Caudatus*).

There were 18 in line abreast, perfectly lined up, all huddled up together obviously ready to roost. There were another 8 to 10 Long-tailed Tits moving around this group, some attempting to join them, so I've no idea what the final roost number may have been.

Barry MacDonald 17 Cobham Road, Moreton, Wirral, L46 0QZ



AUGUST

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|---|-------|--|
| 1 | CAWOS | BREEDING ATLAS launch at Marbury Country Park 12 - 2pm |
| 8 | LOG | BOTANY TRIP TO LOWTON, ring for details |

SEPTEMBER

- | | | |
|-------|--------|--|
| 4,5,6 | RSPB | BRITISH BIRDWATCHING FAIR at Rutland Water (see back page) |
| 6 | CADOS | FLAMBOROUGH, ring 0928-724994 for details |
| 7 | HPRSPB | "AGM + BIRDWATCHING IN ISRAEL" by Paul Lewis |
| 8 | MRS PB | "BIRDS OF SPEYSIDE" by Paul Hill |
| 9 | HO | "AGM + SLIDE SHOW" |
| 11 | SECOS | "WILDLIFE & CONSERVATION IN FALKLANDS" by Rod Martin |
| 12 | CADOS | HILBRE, meet Overleigh Cemetery 8.00am |

SEPTEMBER

13	HPRSPB	HILBRE ISLAND meet Hazel Grove car park 8.00am
20	KOS	HILBRE ISLAND ring 0565 632784 for details
25	KOS	"ARISTOCRATS OF THE FOREST" by Gordon Yates
25	WG	"THE COMPLETE OWL" by Michael Leach
27	SECOS	HILBRE ISLAND, ring 0270-872435 for details

OCTOBER

1	CADOS	"SPRING MIGRATION AT POINT PELEE" by Dr J Raines
2	SECOS	"CORMORANTS" by Dr Robin Sellars
4	WG	SPURN POINT, meet at Guild HQ at 7.30am
5	CAWOS	"SEYCHELLES" by Barry Taylor
7	HPRSPB	"BIRDS OF DERBYSHIRE" by Mark Hamblin
13	MRSBPB	"WINGS OVER EUROPE" by Trevor Gunton
15	HPRSPB	GLOSSOP FILM SHOW, films by Bob Maton
16-18	WG	HOLY ISLAND WEEKEND, ring for details
18	HPRSPB	RUTLAND WATER by coach, ring 0663-745208 for details
23	KOS	"SOUTHERN TEXAS AND S.E. ARIZONA" by Tony & Brenda Holcombe
25	CADOS	SPURN, ring 0244-345043 for details
25	SECOS	SOUTHPORT & MARTIN MERE, ring 0270-872435 for details
30	WG	"BIRDS OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN" by C. Heyes

NOVEMBER

2	CAWOS	"THE COMPLETE OWL" by Michael Leach
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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 Civic Centre 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.
MRSBPB	Macclesfield RSPB Members Group, mtgs Senior Citizens Hall 7.45pm, Prog. Sec. Peter 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.

The Local Patch

Hello, hello, I'm back again! CAWOS' answer to Gary Glitter reporting from the grim shores of Loch Granox. (Granox makes the strange smell that visitors to Widnes remember well).

During the past quarters' birding I set myself the task of seeing how the finches and buntings around Widnes and Runcorn were faring. Is there any hope for our much loved farmland species against the tide of redbrick "executive homes" and herbicide spray? As you might expect in such a diverse group of birds, some are getting on better than others:-

House Sparrow

These are doing perennially well throughout the area, but the Winter flock in Halebank never exceeded 80 birds on any count. Perhaps this was due to the mild Winter.

Tree Sparrow

This has never been a common bird in the area, but the local population around Hale and Pex Hill in North Widnes is being maintained.

Corn Bunting

These are holding ground in their usual site at Hale Head with flocks of up to 10 birds. More unusually, I observed singing males at Finger House Lane near the M57 and Tue Lane in Cronton. This is the first time I have seen this species in this area. Perhaps this is a small improvement for the "fat bird".

Linnet

This is one of my favourite finches. Unfortunately it has suffered along with the Tree Sparrow and Corn Bunting from the changes in farming practice and development of marginal land.

Once, these birds numbered in hundreds around Upton. Most of this land has or is being developed for housing. Consequently, it supports only a fraction of its' former population of Linnets.

This year the Winter population was very small, with cries of "There's one!" echoing around my van on the occasion of a sighting. The nearest sizeable Winter flock was at Frodsham Marsh. The Spring seems to have swelled numbers with confirmed breeding birds at Pex Hill and Fiddlers Ferry, a small flock of 8 being seen at the latter site in May.

Yellowhammer

Another farmland species on the decline. It is still doing well, however, around a traditional strongpoint in Cronton where there are at least 3 pairs feeding young.

One unusual feature of Yellowhammers

feeding their young is their predilection for large spiky ground beetles and hairy moths (pass the ketchup!). The young birds seem delighted though.

Reed Bunting

These are evenly scattered around the area. There is usually a breeding pair to be seen by each



farm pond that has survived filling in. I could find confirmed breeding pairs in Hale, Halebank and along the St Helens Canal.

Brambling

I only saw one female bird at Fiddlers Ferry, during the late Winter period. Again, climatic, rather than environmental factors, would be the main influence on this species.

Chaffinch

Although there is a lack of mature woodland in the area, the Chaffinch appears to be becoming more suburban. From my memories as a teenager, a Chaffinch was always worth a long second look if seen in North Widnes. They are now breeding in the locality and there is a wintering population.



Greenfinch

This bird has become a suburban success story. It is being beaten only by the House Sparrow as a visitor to my bird table. The flocks of the mid-80's around Hale/Halebank which previously numbered in excess of 200 birds now no longer occur. This can be linked directly to the change in farming practice.

Up to the mid-80's, once the cereal crops were cut, the fields were left for up to 3 months before Winter Barley was sown. Now it is barely 3 weeks before the fields are ploughed again. This doesn't allow the growth of weed for the Greenfinch (and others) to feed on. Let's hope that the suburban population is maintaining overall numbers.

Siskin

Whoops! I caught one of these on the traditional red peanut bag in my garden in April. The female Siskin was my first sighting of this bird in Widnes. (Any news from Runcorn?, perhaps a few moving around Delamere?)

Goldfinch

These birds appear to have maintained a stable population around the area. I usually see them in pairs or fours on alternate birdwatching forays at least. They're also occurring in flocks at Big Wood and Frodsham Marsh.

Goldfinches don't appear to be affected by herbicidal clearance because thistles aren't targeted, or they are cleared effectively by pesticides. This gives our bright friends more of an even break.

Redpoll

The last year that I can remember breeding Redpoll was 1976. I have searched diligently for these birds for many years. I have had sparse success, usually in the Autumn, at Runcorn Town Park and Pex Hill. This suggests that the birds I saw were passage birds resting.

Bullfinch

Another local paucity of this species due to the lack of woodland on the Widnes side of the water. It appears to be more prevalent around Runcorn, although I did catch sight of a pair in Cronton in June.

So there you have a quarters' round up of finchly observations. Less than scientific, I'm aware, but nevertheless a starting point perhaps to follow up one species over a longer period of time.

Paul Whorton

THE EARLY YEARS

The fishing season had closed for three months so, full of expectations, I returned to the Altrincham Sewage Farm of my boyhood to find it still there, and thriving. Slowly I began to familiarise myself with the many species of birds I had only read about or vaguely recognised, not having the resources of binoculars. At this time there were few people about, it was that time of year when most of the summer migrants had settled in and the ducks had left. One day I discovered a bird which left me foxed even with the aid of my bird book. It looked like a very small gull with short legs, black head and sooty black underpants and mantle and it was standing on the mud. I searched among the gulls and terns in the birdbook and the nearest I could get was Little Gull, but that only had a black head. I consulted the library in an attempt to find somebody who could solve the problem and they gave me the name of Phil Newton, treasurer of the Altrincham Natural History Society. By the time we reached the Sewage Farm the bird was flying above the muddy waters and was identified as a Black Tern, a marsh bird that I had never even heard of let alone seen. We phoned Major A W Boyd who was the county recorder, he was very pleased to receive the news as it was quite an unusual date.

So began my introduction to the birding fraternity. This spurred me on to greater aspirations and I began to visit the area at every available moment until it became an obsession. Living within half a mile of the area I began to spend part of every day exploring the area, which at peak periods meant every morning, noon and night. I commenced writing a daily diary which later led to keeping daily charts. It was inevitable that I should begin to meet people with the same interests and I well remember my first meeting with Ray Summerfield. My wife and I were sat within the confines of my van, for by now we had transport and used it as a hide. We were watching a party of waders, birds which I was totally unfamiliar with, when up rode a small, middle-aged man on a motor-cycle. He propped his bike against a tree and began to walk towards us, after first glancing towards the birds we were watching. Needless to say they took flight and to say I was annoyed would be an understatement. He spoke to us, asked what we had seen, and I could barely repress my feelings of anger to answer him. However enough was said for him to realise that we were learners, or to use the current vernacular “dudes”. From that time onwards I often met him and the friendship grew, for he was passionately fond of birds and life in general, and shared his extensive knowledge unstintingly. Through him I began to meet many other well informed people who at that time “did their own thing” and met informally wherever the best birdwatching was at that particular time of year. I began to learn about habitat preferences, migration times, weather dispersal movements, different approaches to birdwatching, ringing, note-keeping etc etc and it opened up a new world about which I knew little. As my passion for watching birds grew I began to learn the secrets of successfully watching birds and one of the first lessons was the absolute sincerity everybody had about the need to be 100% sure of a birds identity before accepting it onto ones “life list”.

Especially before reporting it to A W Boyd who was an absolute stickler for the truth and held in a certain amount of reverence by all concerned. Another emotive subject was disturbance either by egg collectors or photographers, but especially the former, and everyone went to great pains to keep sites secret, especially where breeding birds were concerned. AWB in his “Nature Notes” in the Manchester Guardian referred to Rostherne Mere as the “big mere” and Tatton Mere as the “long mere” which at the time seemed reasonable, for we all became familiar with his “code”. In later years however when books

began to appear a lot of these records were lost. Many of the people that I met have since passed on, many have moved away from the area, some are still around and when we meet there are always the references to the days when we met on the sewage farm and the surrounding Carrington Moss. There was always a great camaraderie among us and news of birds to be seen was passed around either by phone, if we had one, or by letter if not, and I still retain many of the letters I received. Unfortunately the telephone has killed off a lot of the personal correspondence which could have been retained for future reference.

In 1954 the Manchester Ornithological Society was founded and meetings were held in the Reynolds Hall at the College of Technology and I well remember the first slide show I saw, it was given by G K Yeates on birding in Iceland and it opened up new vistas. There was a series of lectures, usually four per year, by such eminent personalities as Walter Higham, Bagnall-Oakley, Eric Hosking, Bruce Campbell, Rev Peter Hartley, George Edwards on the Orkneys and of course our own Dr Stuart Smith who wrote the excellent monograph on the Yellow Wagtail and who was the chairman of the society. Of course most of us joined and I was among good company, it enabled me to at last meet and talk with our recorder A W Boyd, or AWB as he was affectionately known. By that time I had written to him a number of times about birds I had seen and had always received very courteous and helpful replies which encouraged and guided me. It was at one of these meetings that I casually mentioned having seen Black-headed Gulls feeding on hawthorn berries on the sewage farm area, he expressed great interest and asked me to drop him a note about it. This I did, never expecting that the outcome would be a letter from "British Birds" accepting it for publication. What had I done! The significance of having added one small iota of knowledge to masses and masses of information gathered by all the worlds eminent scientists over the years was not lost on me. I realised there was much more to ornithology than just seeing rare birds, and this expanded my interest on a far wider field, especially when I had a further note from "BB" to say that another watcher had reported a similar incident at Rumworth Reservoir some days later and suggested it might be the same nomadic party. The horizons were getting wider and as I listened to Ray, Bill Cullen, Bill Mulligan and other well travelled enthusiasts it opened up a whole new aspect on life for the future years.

I was now in the happy position of being able to buy my first pair of binoculars and taking the bull by the horns I also bought a 25x telescope. The binoculars were 9 x 35 and made and purchased from Dolland & Aitchison in Manchester. The telescope, a leather encased three-draw piece of equipment, I had specially "bloomed" to stop light refraction. As a matter of interest the binoculars cost £25 which at that time was a lot of money, but the telescope only cost £11 10s, a far different cry from the present unrealistic prices. Many of the other birders possessed "glasses" made by Ross or Barr & Stroud, a few had huge binoculars which had started life in the navy, and weighed a ton, and yet others had ex-german Army glasses made by Zeiss; the market in birdwatching aids was very limited indeed, the Japanese certainly never supplied any at that time.

With such excellent equipment and guided by the experts I was soon able to tell the difference between a Green Sandpiper and a Wood Sandpiper, a Dunlin from a Little Stint - Curlew Sandpipers took a little longer. I well remember my first record of a Little Ringed Plover on the sewage farm. It was one evening in mid July when the small wader flew in calling peeoo - peeoo, finally alighting among the other waders on a muddy sludge bed. It was identified by Bill Cullen and Ray Summerfield from its call alone.

At that time this species had only just begun to colonise the country and we had to make car journeys to Fairburn Ings and the gravel pits at Willington in Derbyshire to find this elusive rare breeding bird. News began to leak out that one was nesting in Cheshire, but all the information that AWB gave in his "Country Diary" was a small flash in the Northwich area, which had me visiting all the known fishing places and likely areas. It was whilst on one of these forays that I saw Rays motorcycle leaning on a fence overlooking the junction of the Wade Brook and the Cranage brook, where there was a suitable shallow pool with muddy edges, he was also searching for the birds. It was not until a suitable time had elapsed and other pairs were nesting that we found out that the original site was Plumley Lime Bed which is now managed by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust especially for its plants. About the same time the Northwich area hosted a Great Grey Shrike which turned up at the Witton Flashes for a number of years. Ray would get a postcard from AWB to say that "George" was back, and those in the know went hunting for it. I personally visited the area 15 times before finally seeing it, having to do a hazardous walk, for me anyway, after Stan Dobson had located it.

Ron Harrison

ANTHUS SPINOLETTA

With a call as single as the wind's thin cry
The bird bounced up and circled me
Above a textbook coastal territory

For wintering pipits. Unaware
Of that, and of the scientific care
Hovering over the Latin world of species (where

This bird now flutters safe in separate
Identity) the water pipit's silhouette
Against the sky became a sudden, bright

And certain-patterned name as it swooped down
To fence-post focus in the morning sun.
I snatched the sight to make it my possession:

Elusive pink breast-flush and blue-grey head of spring;
Steep flight; the slender essence of the thing.

Peter Walton

Formerly Anthus spinoletta spinoletta, the Water Pipit was recognized as a distinct species by the British Ornithologists' Union in 1986.

Membership Secretary Vacancy

For the last four years since the Society began Don Pawlett has served us well as membership secretary but now is unable to carry on past the end of this year. Our thanks go out to Don for a sterling job.

We are now looking for someone to replace him. Don is willing to give any assistance to a prospective successor. He suggests that they might find the task easier if they have access to a computer system.

Contact Don (0244 - 677477) for further details.

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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:

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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 Jonnson, 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

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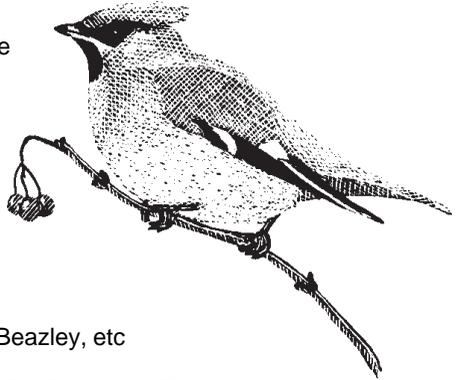
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RUTLAND BIRD FAIR

Clwyd Ornithology Society are taking a coach to the Rutland Bird Fair on Saturday the 5th September. There will be some vacancies on the coach. If you would like to go with them please contact:-

JOHN BLACKBURNE - 0745 730608

Picking up points (to be confirmed):-

VOELS COACHES GARAGE, DYSEARTH, near RHYL
NORTHOP VILLAGE CAR PARK
SAINSBURY'S (main roundabout), WREXHAM