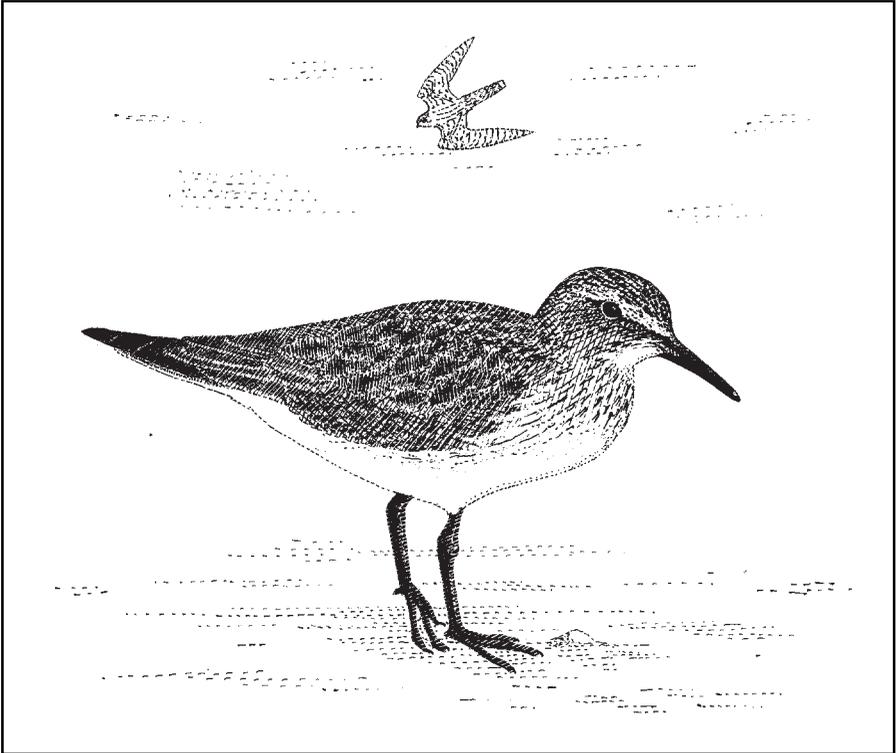


*Cheshire and Wirral
Ornithological Society*

BIRD NEWS

Number 16 October 92



**Water Pipit I.D. * Recent Reports * Cheshire Conservation Strategy
Notes and Letters * County Bird Race * Bird Report * Diary**



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Articles, Letters and Comments would be welcomed by the Editor

Front cover White-Rumped Sandpiper by Tony Broome

Editorial

When (or should it be if?) you read this and remember all my previous exhortations for articles you may just think I've been 'crying wolf'! An extra four pages in this issue shows how well you have responded, but don't tell the Treasurer! There is of course a temptation to hold some copy over to the next issue, but then there is the risk of losing topicality. For some unknown reason I managed to withhold for many months two of Tony Martin's contributions regarding the proposed development of Manchester Airport and his coverage of the Bollin Valley. I can only apologise and blame it on the computer!

Conservation is associated with so many issues in Cheshire, of which Manchester Airport is just one. From tentative beginnings a few years ago the Cheshire Conservation Forum, covering numerous different interests, is now the prime co-ordinating body. A summary of their activities entitled 'Cheshire Nature Conservation Strategy' appears in this issue. Derek Kelly represents C.A.W.O.S. at their meetings and he will be pleased to hear from you if you are concerned about any matter.

Ron Harrison's early birdwatching life has made such marvellous reading and a further instalment will appear in a future issue. To complement this we are also fortunate to have received reminiscences from Dr. John Raines. Dr. Raines, like Ron, is a past County Recorder. The freshness and enthusiasm conveyed in these memories makes me reflect upon what may have been lost in an age of birdlines and personal pagers which provide instant notification of other people's finds. Perhaps there is more lasting pleasure in recording your own Corn Bunting within the county, which is a pointer to Tony Broome's letter in this Bird News.

This caused me to reflect upon my suggestion in Issue 13 for someone to write a regular article covering the local area. I hope you are enjoying the results. Paul Whorton's 'Local Patch' achieves the right balance of serious local issues which are well observed and lightly told. Also Keith Stowell has sent in his first submission as an artist. So, well done everyone, and I know we are promised more for the next issue.

The launch of the Breeding Bird Atlas is over and our thanks appear elsewhere to the organisers. Very pleasing sales figures reflect the excellence of the book and such benchmarks in Cheshire publications set standards which others will find hard to follow. You will see that the Annual County Report accompanies this Bird News. All I will say is that few county societies can provide their members with such good value for their subscriptions.

Finally, I have long thought that I would like to praise and thank our advertisers. My experience suggests that anyone would be hard put to find more helpful, obliging and competitive suppliers. So, please remember to support them, as they support us.

(Now, how's that for an upbeat Editorial? and yes I am feeling well but I will admit to my holiday being just around the corner!)

Richard Gabb

Species Spotlight

WATER AND ROCK PIPITS

Regular readers of Bird News will be aware of the Species Spotlight feature which has until now been a general description of the bird in question highlighting some of the more interesting facts and idiosyncrasies that relate to it. From this issue we intend to introduce a more serious vein pointing out some of the difficult identification problems surrounding birds occurring in Cheshire and Wirral.

The two species we have chosen for this issue are both visitors, particularly in winter and on passage. Other than a few historical records of nesting Rock Pipits, neither breeds in the county. With the exception of Gayton Sands RSPB reserve where Rock Pipit is described as “common in winter”, both species are encountered in small numbers anywhere in the county with the majority on Wirral.

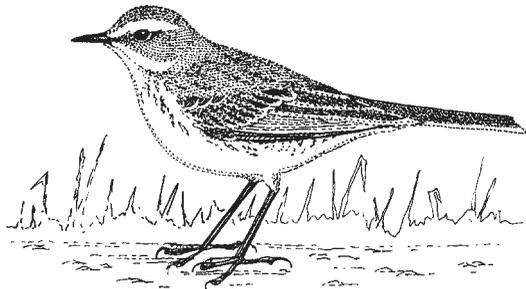
So how do we identify them? Some would say by habitat, with Rock Pipits preferring rocky coasts, rarely being seen away from the shoreline. Water Pipits, which breed in upland meadows in Central Europe, come down to freshwater marshes, sewage farms, reservoirs or such like to spend the winter. However, most of our Water Pipit records are received from the estuaries and Neston seems to have become established as the place to see them on Wirral. Bearing in mind that the Rock Pipits are seen in good numbers just up the coast at Gayton Sands, they will inevitably cross paths.

Another rule of thumb is that Rock Pipits are generally dark looking and have a dark olive/grey washed breast with smudgy diffused spots and showing grey outer tail feathers. Water Pipits are, however, cleaner looking, being paler with white outer tail feathers. This sounds easy until we throw a spanner in the works and introduce the Scandinavian race of Rock Pipit which is intermediate between the two and can sometimes closely resemble Water Pipit.

In winter plumage it is like a browner version of our Rock Pipit showing slightly clearer spots on the underside. It is very subjective and there is much overlap.

In summer plumage the Water Pipit is a distinctive species with a pale grey head and virtually unstreaked pink washed undersides.

Scandinavian Rock Pipits start to moult to summer plumage in mid winter. So it is this time when they are in transitional plumage at the same time as Water Pipits are in winter/transitional garb that the confusion is most likely. Hopefully the chart below will help. Summer plumage Water Pipit is not included.



	ROCK	SCANDINAVIAN ROCK	WATER
General appearance	Dark, dusky olive No real contrasting colours.	Slightly browner than Rock not as dark underneath, especially the throat. Can show greyish cast to head.	Much cleaner, whiter underneath especially toward belly.
Underside	Heavily streaked olive grey.	Whiter than Rock, especially on throat. Clearer defined spots extending to flanks. Spots look browner than Rock. Still retains yellow/olive wash on breast.	Clean and whitish with clearly defined grey/ brown breast streaks, not normally extending to flanks, giving giving obvious pale bellied look, especially in flight.
Wings	Pale olive grey tertial edges and covert tips.	Brighter than Rock showing more obvious wingbars and edges than Rock. Duller and more grey/olive than water	Whitish tips to coverts showing obvious wing bars. Tertials, secondaries and primaries light fawn whitish edged.
Outer tail	Light grey	Light grey with variable whitish at tip. But beware - can look completely white.	White but occasionally slightly greyish.
Supercilium Rump colour (Often visible on sides of flanks below closed wing)	Ill defined, dirty buff. Olive.	Whitish - well defined. Olive.	Whitish - long and obvious. Warm fawn.

Recent Reports

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

Around 50 **Little Grebes** had returned to wintering quarters at the Weaver Bend by early September. Rostherne Mere NNR hosted a large early autumn gathering of **Great Crested Grebes**, of the maximum of 83 present early in September about 20% were birds of the year. Following the small parties of homeless **Black-necked Grebes** which wandered several Cheshire waters during spring, an adult on Budworth Mere from July 19th to 21st was the only subsequent report.

Manx Shearwaters were reported from Hilbre in July with a good passage in the middle of that month. Seven **Storm Petrels** were off Hilbre on July 5th and odd birds were seen from the north Wirral coast early in August. Small Numbers of **Gannets** could generally be seen from Hilbre and the north Wirral Coastal watchpoints throughout the period, numbers increasing with onshore winds. A **Cory's Shearwater** was off Leasowe on one date in early August. Gale force winds veering from south-westerly to north-westerly during the last days of August and early in September brought a **Sooty Shearwater** among small numbers of Manx Shearwaters off Dove Point on August 30th; small numbers of the latter species were regularly seen off coastal watchpoints over the next few days. On September 4th a Cory's Shearwater was seen off Hilbre and a **Little Shearwater** off New Brighton. One Storm Petrel was reported from New Brighton on August 31st with two on September 4th. Ten **Leach's Petrels** were off Hilbre on August 31st when four were seen from New Brighton, on September 4th 30 were off New Brighton, 15 off Hilbre and eight off Leasowe; smaller numbers were off these sites next day.

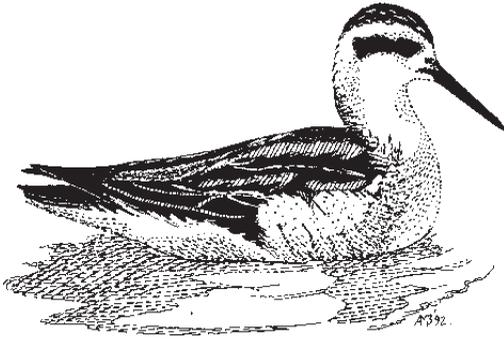
Numbers of **Cormorants** roosting at Rostherne Mere NNR built up during August with 51 present early in September, one at Fiddlers Ferry had been colour-ringed at Abberton Reservoir. A **Little Egret** was on Parkgate marsh on July 31st. Several flocks of non-breeding **Mute Swans** were noted with up to 25 at both Budworth Mere and Tatton Park in July and 13 at Farmwood Pool in August; a pair, nesting for the first time since 1961, at Rostherne Mere NNR have four well grown cygnets. The flock of feral **Greylag Geese** at Rostherne Mere NNR numbered as many as 380 in early September, up to 20 could be found at Budworth Mere in July and August. A **Ruddy Shelduck** was often seen in the Burton Marsh/Inner Marsh Farm area. Although odd **Wigeon** were at several sites during the summer a party of eight at Chelford SQs on July 5th was unusual. The Rostherne Mere NNR **Gadwall** reached around 60 late in the period. Up to three **Garganey** were at Inner Marsh Farm in late August, two were at Hale Decoy in early August while single birds were reported from Budworth Mere, Neumanns and Sandbach Flashes and Woolston Meadows on odd dates in July and August. One or two **Red-crested Pochard** could generally be found on Melchett Mere, Tatton Park. The 'usual' moulting flocks of **Pochard** and **Tufted Duck** have built up and dispersed again at sites such as Fiddlers Ferry, Farmwood Pool and Rostherne Mere NNR. A drake **Scaup** was at Fiddlers Ferry on July 2nd and two drakes were there from 4th to 9th. One or two **Common Scoter** appeared at Astbury, Budworth and Rostherne Meres between July 8th and 12th and a drake was on Budworth Mere on August 9th. A **Goosander** was reported back at Bar Mere in mid August. **Ruddy Ducks** appear to have had a poor breeding season at Budworth Mere and Chelford SQs, the flock of 75 at the latter site in early September was 'normal' for the time of year.

'Birdwatching' magazine reported a **Honey Buzzard** as a late migrant over Inner Marsh Farm in July. The only **Marsh Harrier** I have heard of was at Hale in the second week of August. Single **Buzzards**, possibly the same bird, were reported from the Chelford Sqs and Tatton Park on several dates in July and August, one was over the Dee Marshes in late August. Unlike spring, **Ospreys** were conspicuous by their absence. A **Merlin** was back on Frodsham Marsh from August 25th. One or two **Hobbys** were reported (very) irregularly during the period from Chelford SQs, Doddington, Hale, Rostherne Mere NNR and Vale Royal Locks.

There were regular **Peregrine** sightings from Dee Marshes with three together over Burton Marsh on August 28th; one or two were often seen over Frodsham Marsh and Score including on September 1st, when after taking a wader from the No.4 Tank high-tide roost, a female was challenged by a second female, resulting in the first bird losing it prey; there were also occasional reports from Chelford SQs, Fiddlers Ferry, Rostherne Mere NNR and Sandbach Flashes. I have heard of no reports of **Quail**. A **Spotted Crake** was heard calling at Woolston until July 1st.

The now expected gathering of **Little Ringed Plovers** at Neumann's Flash peaked at 42 in late July, several pairs summered here but the only chick seen survived for just three days. Large numbers of **Ringed Plovers** formed part of the roosts on Frodsham Marsh No.4 Tank over the period of very high tides in late August and early September with up to 2800 counted. **Golden Plover** returned from mid August with single figures reported from Burton Marsh, Chelford SQs, Frodsham Marsh, Neumanns Flash and Sandbach Flashes. Up to 190 **Grey Plover**, many still in superb summer plumage, joined the high tide roosts on Frodsham No.4 Tank in late August and early September. The largest **Lapwing** flocks I have heard of were of up to 3000 at Neumanns Flash and 1500 at Sandbach Flashes in August. One or two **Sanderling** were at Neumanns Flash on two dates in August while up to three were among the high tides roosts on Frodsham No.4 Tank in late August and early September. **Little Stints** have been fairly scarce, odd adults were at Frodsham Marsh in early July and up to 10 among the No.4 Tank high tide roosts in late August and early September, otherwise singles were at Neumanns Flash on a couple of dates in late August and early September. What was considered to be an adult **White-rumped Sandpiper** was seen briefly among the Frodsham No.4 Tank high tide roost on August 31st but could not be relocated over the next few days.

An adult **Curlew Sandpiper** in summer plumage was at Neumanns Flash from June 30th to July 2nd, up to four were here in early August with two remaining until 17th; up to four were among the high tide roosts on Frodsham No.4 Tank in late August and Early September. Up to 4000 **Dunlin** were among the Frodsham No.4 Tank high tide roosts in late August and early September but numbers at the Weaver Band rarely exceeded 200; the maximum at Neumanns Flash was 54 on July 16th.



Maximum counts of **Ruff** were 21 at Frodsham Marsh in late August and early September, 15 at Sandbach Flashes in early September and four at Neumanns Flash; two appeared ahead of a downpour at Rostherne Mere NNR on September 3rd. At Inner Marsh Farm **Black-tailed Godwits** peaked at 312 in July, odd birds appeared at Frodsham Marsh and Neumanns Flash during the period. **Whimbrel** appeared from mid July with single figures at Fiddlers Ferry, Frodsham Marsh, Neumanns Flash, Rostherne Mere NNR and Sandbach Flashes while up to 30 were at Gayton in late August. A **Curlew**

roost developed at Neumanns Flash from July with up to 125 present on occasions. Up to eight **Spotted Redshanks** were at Inner Marsh in July and odd birds were seen at Frodsham Marsh, Neumanns Flash and Sandbach Flashes. Up to 400 **Redshank** could be seen regularly at the Weaver Bend. Inner Marsh Farm hosted five **Greenshank** in July, up to five were on the new marsh pools at Frodsham Marsh in August and September and a party of six visited Neumanns Flash on August 19th. **Green Sandpipers** once again found Sandbach Flashes to their liking with monthly maxima of ten in July and 12 in August, numbers reduced here from mid August; up to four were at Frodsham Marsh pools and up to five at both Hale Decoy and Witton Brook - elsewhere ones and two were at Acton Bridge, Fiddlers Ferry, Kingsley and Woolston. After a good series of records last autumn I have not heard of any reports of **Wood Sandpiper** so far this autumn. Two **Turnstones** were at Neumanns Flash on September 3rd and up to four among the high tide roosts on Frodsham No.4 Tank in late August and early September. A **Red-necked Phalarope** was reported from Bar Mere on at least September 8th and 9th, the last confirmed record in our area was in 1985 when one was at Woolston on July 5th. Following the gales single **Grey Phalaropes** were off Hilbre on September 4th and Leasowe next day.

Small numbers of **Arctic Skuas** were seen off Hilbre, Hoylake and Red Rocks from early July. The strong winds that pushed several species of shearwaters and petrels close to shore in late August and early September had the same effect on skua species. Arctic Skuas appeared in larger numbers at sites such as New Brighton and Dove Point as well as those already mentioned. Smaller numbers of **Great Skuas** included seven off Hilbre on August 31st while odd **Pomarine Skuas** appeared off New Brighton over the period. **Sabine's Gulls** appeared off Hilbre Meols in the first few days of September. The only **Mediterranean Gull** sightings I have heard of were at Fiddlers Ferry where an adult made occasional appearances in July and August. **Little Gulls** could be found in the Mersey mouth and one appeared inland at Neumanns Flash on September 3rd. In spite of the drainage of No.3 bed at Woolston **Black-headed Gulls** managed to breed and up to 102 young were noted. A **Ringed-billed Gull** was seen at New Brighton on August 30th. **Lesser Black-Backed Gulls** flooded back in July with a maximum of 1000 at Neumanns Flash. **'Yellow-legged' Gulls** made a good showing with an obvious influx from mid July, at Fiddlers Ferry six adults and a 3rd summer bird were noted between July 12th and 30th while at Neumanns Flash between July 20th and 26th three adults, one 4th year, two 3rd years, two 2nd years and one first year were noted, two adults were here in early August; there were also reports from Sandbach Flashes. A 2nd summer **Iceland Gull** was at Moore in early July and an immature at Neumanns Flash on August 25th and 26th. The only **Glaucous Gull** reported was at the Richmond Bank on August 7th.

Small Numbers of **Sandwich, Common and Little Terns** were regularly present in the Dee mouth from Late July into September with 500 of the former off Hilbre on August 30th. Inland parties of up to seven Common or 'commic' Terns passed through Budworth Mere. Fiddlers Ferry, Neumanns Flash, Rostherne Mere NNR and the Weaver Bend on a number of dates throughout the period. The only inland **Arctic Tern** I have heard of was at Rostherne Mere NNR on August 30th. **Black Terns** were generally scarce although an adult was over Catchpenny Pool on July 15th and a juvenile here on August 9th; four were over Budworth Mere on August 7th with eight next day and one or two were present from September 4th to 8th.

Two **Short-eared Owls** were at Frodsham Marsh on one date in mid July and two were over the No.5 Tank here on September 5th. The largest gathering of **Swifts** reported was of around 2500 over Budworth Mere on July 1st, very small numbers could still be found over the meres up to at least September 8th. A **Hoopoe** appeared in a Lower Heswall garden on 7th and 8th August. Although only a small number of **Sand Martins** remained over the meres by early September 140 were over Catchpenny Pool, near a breeding colony, on September 6th. A juvenile **Red-rumped Swallow** was over Witton Brook briefly on August 8th, the first in our recording area since 1988 when one was at Hilbre on May 7th, continuing the excellent run of 'good birds' in the Northwich area. There was an obvious influx of hundreds of **Meadow Pipits** to the Burton and Frodsham Marshes and Hale in late August and early September. A **Blue-headed Wagtail** was on Burton Marsh on August 22nd. The nightly gatherings of **Pied Wagtails** at Neumanns Flash numbered up to 60 birds in August while at least 85 were on and by Frodsham No.4 Tank on September 5th, with small numbers of **White** and **Yellow Wagtails** representing a substantial influx. 'Chats' on the move included a **Redstart** at Hale on September 8th, four **Whinchats** on Frodsham No.5 Tank on August 29th and small numbers of **Wheatears** through Burton and Frodsham Marshes and Neumanns Flash in late August. A **Wood Warbler** singing in Marbury Country Park on August 6th was on passage. Flocks of around 50 **Linnets** and 50 **Goldfinches** fed on the weed choked banks of the Frodsham Sludge Tanks and a flock of around 100 of the former was at Chelford SQs. A party of 11 **Crossbills** flew into Shotwick Park on June 22nd but I have not heard of any other reports suggesting an influx.

Steve Barber

Thanks to Birdline NW, Eric Hardy, Ron Harrison, Keith Massey, the Rostherne Log, the Witton and Marbury Log (Paul Hill) and anyone else who passed records on. Bernard Shakey - get a move on!

The Bollin Valley - Morley to Castle Mill

The River Bollin meanders south from Morley and then north-west to Castle Mill through a deep valley pock marked with ox-bows and has become more accessible since the involvement of the Bollin Valley Project.

Cars can be parked on the old A538 road just to the west of Wilmslow Moat House (formerly Valley Lodge Hotel) and there is an hourly bus service between Wilmslow and Altrincham, Monday to Saturday only.

Just south of the new A538 on the east (Morley) bank of the river cross a stile into a field. Kingfisher may be seen anywhere along the river. Follow the river and ascend the steps beyond another stile to reach a large field above. To the west stands Hooksbank Wood (Oversleyford) dominated by high Beeches. Go south across the field over a deep wooded ditch into another field. A path comes from the east from Dooleys Lane (Morley) cross the field south-west and over another stile into a wooded dell which leads down to the Bollin and cross the small footbridge. The dell and the bank on the left is good for spring flowers and I once found Goldilocks Buttercup here. After another stile the path clings to the wooded valley side where Siskin can be seen in the Alders in winter. Eventually you cross a footbridge over a stream at the north end of Burleyhurst Wood which separates Morley from Mobblerley. Burleyhurst Wood has a rookery of 28 nests at the northern end in 1975 which had gone by 1978 since the emergence of clay pigeon shooting at the south end of the wood.

Cross the stile into a field below Bollin House Farm. I once disturbed a Sparrowhawk devouring a jay here, which fortunately it flew off with up river. In the same area in the breeding season I saw a Sparrowhawk carrying prey but failed to locate the nest site. After checking the river the path leaves Burleyhurst Wood behind, up a bank, to a stile into the next field. It is worth pausing to admire the valley at this point looking up river to the Moat House and down towards Ringway with Hodesbank Wood across to the right. Manchester Airport is planning to cross the valley with a second runway and an extension to the existing one which would completely devastate the valley between Bollin House Farm and Double Wood (Ringway) if efforts are not made to stop them.

Below Bollin House Farm is one of the ox-bows which is now well tree clad with a pool around an island formed from the abandoned inner bend of the river. In different years since 1978 Little Grebe, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Canada Goose and Moorhen have bred on this pool.

Sand Martin used to breed in the former river bank beyond the ox-bow pool and Kingfisher has bred by the river upstream. Continue along the fence to reach the lane to the farm. At this point you can go straight ahead to walk through Oak Farm (Mobberley) across the fields to Burleyhurst Lane to return to the Moat House via Morley Green. It was in May 1982 when I took this route that I found a male Subalpine Warbler above Burleyhurst Lane at the south end of Burleyhurst Wood. It remained in the area for 45 minutes not to be seen again. Back at Bollin House Farm, go down the lane towards the farm, and cross a stile into the next field where the road bends to the right at the farm. Turn right to Beehive Farm, over a stile, turn left into the lane and right over another stile into the next field towards woodend. The Oak trees to the right before the farm at woodend is a past site for breeding Little Owl and I have seen Redstart here on passage. Go over the stile beyond the farm on to the ILS (Instrument Landing System) enclosure, where you have the option of going around the perimeter to the left or to the right to get down back to the Bollin. On the opposite side of the enclosure you can go over a stile across another field and over another stile to Castle Hill Farm (Ashley) beyond which you can turn right down Mill Lane to Castle Mill. I once saw Mink in the Bollin here. Crossing the bridge you leave Ashley and enter Ringway (Greater Manchester) with Sunbank Wood dominated by Sycamore to north of the river. Carrying on up the road you pass Cotteril Clough (SSSI) where Tawny Owl, Spotted Flycatcher and Marsh Tit have bred in the past. Continuing on you get back to the Moat house via the A538 tunnel under the runway. The embankments either side are good for flora in summer, I have seen several species of Orchid here.

Back at the ILS enclosure, turn right past a copse which usually has Lesser Whitethroat on passage, go through a gate down to the bridge over the Bollin. This area normally attracts one or two pairs of Stock Dove and I once saw a Buzzard cross the valley here. To the north is Double Wood (Ringway) nearly half of which was felled to make way for the 1983 runway extension. The river was diverted on the Mobberley side of the valley, many bends were taken out and although tree planting has taken place the wooded valley was previously continuous from Double Wood to Hooksbank Wood. There is a track halfway up the airport embankment, access to which can be gained from the road leading towards Double Wood, which attracts many species of butterfly in summer.

Cross the river bridge into Ringway (Greater Manchester) and turn right upstream and follow the road up hill to a gate by the airport perimeter fence. The path goes to the right of the gate inside a fence on a woodland edge which brings you to the A538 by the airport tunnels. Cross the A538 go up the bank and take a look over the airport aprons. Wheatear regularly call here on passage in spring and Lapwings and Skylark breed. Ringway was a traditional site for wintering Golden Plover, they flocked on the airport verges and used at least 15 fields locally. The highest count I ever had was 2,520 in January, 1978 but few now are seen in winter. While there are other factors at play, I am convinced one is that a lot of these fields and aprons previously used by Golden Plovers are now covered in concrete and tarmac in satisfying the airports ever increasing demands for car parks, cargo buildings, terminals and taxiways. Behind you is the former Oversleyford (Cheshire) brickworks site which is now part Willow scrub and holds Whitethroat in summer, but numbers have declined in recent years. However Garden Warbler can be seen on passage in spring. Emerging at the north end of the brickworks follow the old A538 down past Oversleyford Farm back to Wilmslow Moat House.

The Bollin Valley may not be spectacular for migrants but persistent visits can be rewarding. Teal visit the river in winter. Sparrowhawk are more frequent in winter and on passage and Kestrel are resident. Grey Partridge are less common now, Woodcock can be seen and Curlew, Common and Green Sandpiper occur on passage. Curlew has also been present in summer in Mobberley. Cuckoo is regular, Green Woodpecker visit the valley particularly in spring, while Greater and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker breed. Willow Tit has bred but Marsh Tit is not as common as it used to be. Whinchat and Redstart have occurred on passage. Blackcap, Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff breed and Grasshopper, Garden and Wood Warbler occur on passage.

Spotted Flycatcher has bred and Meadow Pipit is a winter visitor and passage migrant. Pied Wagtail is resident, Yellow Wagtail has become scarce, but Grey Wagtail has bred on the Bollin. Chaffinch is common and breeds, Greenfinch, Goldfinch and Linnets are present, but Redpoll is now very scarce, while Bullfinch breed. Yellowhammer breeds, Reed Bunting has bred and Tree Sparrow was once common at Bollin House Farm.

Tony Martin, 6 Avon Road, Heald Green, Cheadle, Cheshire, SK8 3LS

CHESHIRE NATURE CONSERVATION STRATEGY

Cheshire now has a 'Nature Conservation Strategy' prepared by Ian Marshall, the county's Nature Conservation Officer, in consultation with all the various organisations involved. It comprises of 5 objectives: for each are listed current achievements, areas for action and targets to be met. Below I have presented a selection of the areas for action and targets in areas to give a flavour of the text of the strategy.

It is up to the CAWOS membership and executive to play their part from now on.

OBJECTIVE ONE: CONSOLIDATE THE INFORMATION BASE AND ENSURE ITS EFFECTIVE USE

Current achievements : 40 separate surveys.

Areas for action:

- Maintain and review the SBI Record.
- Develop more effective data handling systems.
- Improve the centralisation of biological data and exchange of data between databases.
- Expand survey and monitoring of habitats and species along established and standardised lines.
- Undertake research to improve our understanding of Cheshire's ecosystems and elucidate cause-effect relationships.
- Improve the dissemination of information.
- Prioritise the above in response to conservation needs.

Targets to be met include:

- Improve collaboration on information gathering.
- Review peatlands in Cheshire by 1993, identifying current resources and future survey needs.
- Strategic river corridor survey of Gowy (1992), and Weaver and/or Bollin (1993).
- Devise a classification of rivers according to nature conservation status and potential.
- Review and compile "Red Data Book" of Cheshire's threatened plants and animals.
- Compile confidential register of legally protected species.
- Review Cheshire's wildfowl count & establish ornithological importance of Meres and Mosses by 1993/94.

OBJECTIVE TWO: SECURE THE PROTECTION, PROPER MANAGEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT OF SITES AND FEATURES OF NATURE CONSERVATION INTEREST.

Current achievements:

Currently in Cheshire (including Peak Park) there are:

<u>Status</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Hectares</u>
SSSI	56	7,417.67
SBI	Grade A 59)	3153.90)
	Grade B 158) 479	2,833.10) 8,615.10
	Grade C 262)	2,628.10)
Special Protection Area	1	1,499.00
Ramsar Site	2	1,652.00
Tree Preservation Orders	c.1,000	
Areas of Special County Value for Landscape (ASCV)	16	12% . of county area
National Nature Reserves	2	176.00
Local Nature Reserves	3	51.50
Cheshire Wildlife Trust Reserves	16	90.00
Woodland Trust Reserves	3	37.00
RSPB Reserve	2	2,070.00 (part in Clwyd)
Wirral & Cheshire Badger Group	2	2.50

Areas for action include:

Enlarge the number of areas managed for nature conservation.

Monitor changes on SSSIs, SBIs and other protected areas for nature conservation.

Targets to be met include:

- Include specific nature conservation policies and proposals in all forward plans and regularly review.
- Compile a list of sites suitable for LNR status by 1992 and aim to establish at least 1 new LNR in each local authority by the 1995.
- Press for full Ramsar and SPA designation for the Mersey Estuary and progress the South Cheshire Meres and Mosses as a Ramsar site.
- Identify important areas in public ownership and encourage proper management and consultation.
- Increase recognition and protection for rivers.
- Prepare a peatland recovery programme by 1992.
- Prepare a Barn Owl recovery programme for Cheshire during 1992/93, linking with RSPB national campaign.
- Set up a monitoring system to detect and measure changes in SBIs and to assess the need for improved management and increased protection of these sites.

OBJECTIVE THREE: ENCOURAGE CONSERVATION OF NATURE IN THE WIDER ENVIRONMENT**Areas for action include:**

- Encourage the integration of nature conservation in all land management practices.
- Reduce existing levels of pollution & prevent pollution arising from new developments & other sources.

Targets to be met include:

- Prepare a code of practice for the restoration of mineral workings, landfill sites and derelict land.
- Prepare a code of practice for the treatment of nature conservation in the appraisal and construction of road schemes.
- Examine the opportunities for wildlife conservation within the new Mersey Forest through the Study Groups and include within the Forest Plan, June 1993.
- To integrate nature conservation in canal maintenance.
- Undertake strategic assessment of Wych Brook Valley ASCV and prepare subsequent action plan to effect landscape and nature conservation improvements by 1992.
- Make significant progress with landscape and nature conservation improvements within the Combermere/Wirsall/Marbury ASCV by 1993.
- Encourage organisations to review their use of peat & endeavour to develop & use suitable alternatives.

OBJECTIVE FOUR: IMPROVE GENERAL AWARENESS, UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT FOR NATURE CONSERVATION**Areas for action include:**

- Encourage the development of theoretical & practical nature conservation in educational establishments.
- Expand & co-ordinate public information on nature conservation, particularly that relevant to Cheshire.
- Raise the profile of nature conservation agencies in Cheshire.

Targets to be met include:

- Provide suitably located LNRs for environmental education, aiming to establish at least 1 new LNR in each local authority area by 1995.
- Enter into agreements to improve access and provide interpretative facilities in areas lacking in accessible sites, where this will not be detrimental to wildlife interests.
- Publish an annual review of nature conservation in Cheshire & publicise at annual "Nature Conservation Day". The review document to include a directory listing relevant organisations and events.
- Publish a popular book describing the nature of Cheshire by 1994.
- Produce a collaborative display on nature conservation in Cheshire & circulate around schools & libraries. Produce a separate summary description of the Forum to include others display material.

- Improve local authority awareness of the Forum by having a separate meeting with all local authority officers within 1992.
- Promote and co-ordinate nature conservation in the Northwich Community forest through the formation of a local liaison group.
- Seek to improve liaison with the local media to improve public awareness of nature conservation issues and raise the profile of conservation organisation.

OBJECTIVE FIVE: UTILISE CONSERVATION EFFORT AND RESOURCES TO BEST EFFECT

Current achievements

- Cheshire has the services of 36 permanent staff and over 100 country wide Rangers dealing partly or wholly with nature conservation.

Areas for action include:

- Seek to achieve closer integration between conservation agencies.
- Encourage collaborative projects which promote nature conservation.
- Targets to be met include:
 - The Cheshire Nature Conservation Forum will meet regularly (at least 3 times a year) to disseminate information, discuss problems and review the implementation of the Nature Conservation Strategy.
 - The publication of an annual review of nature conservation in Cheshire and annual "Nature Conservation Day" will improve liaison between agencies.
 - Increase local authority involvement within the Forum.
 - Publish a nature conservation action programme by 1992, defining a collective approach and adopting an agreed division of activity according to respective strengths and responsibilities.

CHESHIRE WILDLIFE AND ENVIRONMENTAL OFFICER

PC Mike Wellman is anxious to hear of any infringements, within the county, of wildlife legislation or regulations. He has moved to the following address:-
 Runcorn Police, HQ Community Section, Shopping Centre, Runcorn.
 Tel 0928 713456 extn 7208

Notes & Letters

GIVING BACK

We all derive pleasure from birds: that is one of the reasons we find ornithology such a satisfying hobby. I believe we have a duty to try to repay the birds for the enjoyment we get from them. We can do this by working to conserve declining species, to safeguard threatened sites, to combat pollution, to change policies on land-use and drainage, and so on. It is difficult for any individual to bring about any of these scale changes, so one of the main ways that we can try to influence the future of bird life is to contribute our field records. Then, on a national scale, organisations such as the BTO and RSPB can assess the status and conservation needs of each species and each type of habitat. On a local scale, CAWOS can do the same. Armed with this information, these bodies can work to ensure a better prospect for the birds.

In the course of his wide-ranging letter, Keith Massey (p.8, Bird News, July 1992) makes excuses for those who fail to submit their records. In my view there can be no excuse for the selfish attitude of taking pleasure from birds without putting anything back. Mr. Massey states that 'field ornithologists are the backbone of Cheshire ornithology'. I agree. But, as far as the birds are concerned, field ornithologists who do not record their observations might as well not exist.

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

ALMOST A TRAGEDY

When our neighbours across the lane brought us three young House Martins which had been grounded when a painter had knocked their nest down, there seemed there was little that could be done. It had happened four hours ago. They were fully feathered but unable to fly and would certainly never set off on their long southward migration if some urgent action wasn't forthcoming.

Fortunately, the two plastic House Martin nests under our eaves hadn't yet been occupied and replacing the original with one of them might be the answer.

With the lining from an old Swallow's nest, the young birds were installed in their new condo and it was screwed into position with only a couple of hours daylight left and plenty of crossed fingers.

Ten minutes later one of the adults flew past the nest site and almost immediately paid a visit, clinging briefly to the rim as if to inspect it's contents. From then on, both parents brought food at regular intervals as though nothing had happened. The emergency plan had succeeded and the human onlookers were delighted.

Maybe next year they'll nest on No.9?!

Tony Broome, 9 Vicarage Lane, Poynton

MANCHESTER AIRPORT DEVELOPMENT AND SECOND RUNWAY PROPSAL

Plans for further airport development are disturbing and as already mentioned include crossing the Bollin Valley twice. The Manchester Airport Company is going for Option 3 which would site a second runway just to the south of the existing one. The Oversleyford brickworks site, with its interesting flora, would go and much of Hooksbank Wood would be bulldozed. There has been an initial formal response by CAWOS to the proposals and myself, John Thompson and Clive Richards represented CAWOS at a meeting called by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust, held in Stockport on 29th November, 1991 for interested wildlife and conservation bodies. From this meeting a joint working party is being set up to gather information and co-ordinate and liaise between organisations and CAWOS will be represented at the first such meeting which will take place shortly.

One of the problems is the lack of a national strategy for regional airport development, the absence of which encourages Manchester Airport with its grandiose schemes. You really have to come and take a look at the Bollin Valley here to appreciate what is at stake, and I seriously urge all CAWOS members to write to their MP's, Councillors and the Department of Transport to halt this development.

I will be writing again on this subject in the CAWOS Bird News.

Tony Martin, 6 Avon Road, Heald Green, Cheadle, Cheshire, SK8 3LS

CORN BUNTING - YOU CAN HELP WITHOUT LEAVING YOUR CHAIR!

A national Corn Bunting census is being undertaken by the BTO with the help of volunteers and local societies.

Not only in Britain have Corn Buntings declined at an alarming rate, but in other European Countries.

The reasons for this are not at all clear, but there are several theories that require further research.

What we'd like you to do is dig out your old notebooks and look specifically for Corn Bunting records in years gone by. There must be a lot of people with odd records that never became publicised and a few with full scale studies tucked away with only the dust to blow off.

Have a look, for one day, if the present rate of decline continues, they could become 'twitchable'.

We would appreciate all records no matter how uninteresting they may seem - send them to Tony Broome! EDS.

Bird Watching Memories

Steve Barber's letter "Get on Your Bike" in Bird News No 13, fired me with nostalgic memories of early bird watching days. Serious bird watching, as opposed to egg collecting, began for me in 1937. Steve's article suggests that there is a lack of knowledge about how bird-watchers went about their hobby in pre-war days. Even though my field was not Cheshire but the environs of Ilkeston, in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, readers may be interested in some of my recollections.

Generally and perhaps most importantly, bird watching was not a well accepted hobby, one was generally regarded as a bit of a "crank". Egg collecting was understood and bird collectors were still accepted but I would consider carefully before telling anyone that I was a bird watcher. On encounters whilst out in the field I would quickly hide my field glasses - prismatics were beyond my means - lest I had to explain what I was doing.

Bird watchers were few and far between in those days and one rarely encountered another "crank" except by pre arrangement. In fact I did not meet another enthusiast until 1940. Typical activity was a country walk, preferably including a wood, lake or river. I suppose some would be lucky enough to live by the sea but coastal birding was a holiday aspiration, as were visits to mountain areas or paradise, a sea bird island.

Indeed transport for the most part was "Shanks pony" and bicycle. On the latter we roamed as far as North Notts and into the S. Peak district. I had a project to work out county distributions of Corn Bunting, Cirl Bunting, Woodlark, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Great Crested Grebe. To this end I would regularly cycle over 100 miles in a day and still have large leg muscles to prove it! The greatest labour was carrying a bicycle over an uncyclable terrain over long distance.

Rare birds were indeed rare and there was little or no expectation of seeing a real rarity. Great excitements were finding birds in new localities or occasional breeders - Wryneck, Red-backed Shrike, Cirl Bunting could still be found in the county then and Tufted Duck, Pochard, Shoveler were still colonising. I suppose rare birds must have been over looked to a great extent. A Sandpiper by a lake would be a Common Sandpiper, a Redshank would be recognised with excitement, some birds would be as expected in the locality etc. There were stories of great rarities - Black Redstart, Bluethroat, Avocet and Spoonbill - seen by lucky fellows at coastal stations and one hoped that one day your turn might come!

In the early '40's, I felt a revolution in bird watching was occurring. Much of this was probably due to the publication of the "Handbook" with the vast store of information it contained, and illustration of all species in varying plumage. Many of my contemporaries, as well as myself, were made aware of species we had not heard of before.

The discovery of sewage farms as a bird habitat was another important factor. Sewage farms attracted a huge variety of birds, many regarded as great rarities and little known. Cambridge was probably the first to be worked - a Lesser Yellow Legs was found here - followed rapidly by Altrincham, Nottingham, Sunderland, Southport then Bedford etc. Surprisingly, Wisbech, later of some fame, was not discovered until the '50's.

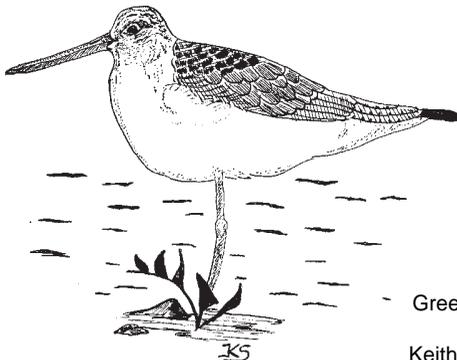
My sewage farm, in Nottingham, was by far the largest occupying 3-4 miles of the Trent Valley. Initially we found exciting birds such as wild swans, wintering Curlew and Redshank, Black Terns and many ducks. We quickly learned to identify Green Sandpipers, Wood Sandpipers, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpipers, Spotted Redshank. These birds, commonplace today, were hardly known by bird watchers at that time. Green and Wood Sandpipers according to the books, were hardly separable but few had experience of Wood Sandpipers anyway. About 1944 I wrote to Ralph Chislett, a famed ornithologist who worked Spurn peninsula, to ask if he was seeing any Curlew Sandpipers in the Humber area as we were getting up to 50 at Nottingham. He wrote back to say not to write such nonsense to him, he had not seen Curlew Sandpiper in Britain and was quite sure our birds must be Dunlin!

Before long our credibility was established and we had the great pleasure and privilege of escorting bird watchers, including virtually all the famous names of the day, around the Trent Valley. Many had their first experience of some of the less common waders.

Two tales may be worth relating ; - taking Bernard Tucker round the farm one day he said "I'm worried about these Grey Plover you've been recording here, it's a species not known to occur inland". I pointed to four birds in the corner of the "tank" we were passing and said "What do you think of those". "My God", he said "Grey Plover". With H G Alexander on another occasion he said to me "Do you get any Gargany here", "No" I said "We've looked hard for them but no luck" "What do you think of those four birds over there" he said!!! I've never forgotten how easy it is to have blind spots even on your own patch

To be continued.....

Dr J Raines



Greenshank
by
Keith Stowell

Ringers Notebook

Redstarts are always scarce birds on autumn passage anywhere in the CAWOS area and on average only about one a year has been ringed at Woolston in the last decade. We were very lucky therefore, that a juvenile caught there on 7th September 1991 was found in a nest-box on 18th May this year near Tain, in the Highlands of Scotland, 495 km north of Woolston. Unfortunately she was found dead (after a cold spell), but this record gives us interesting clues to the origin of some of our passage birds.

Within a couple of days of each other in mid-May, Sedge Warblers ringed last winter by the expedition at Djoudj in Senegal were caught at Woolston and at Meols, north Wirral. Another was caught just outside our area, at Hightown, north of Liverpool, whose ring number was just 16 different from the Woolston bird and they must have been ringed in Africa within a day or so of each other, although the full details have not yet been received. From the Sedge Warblers that have been caught in Djoudj already wearing rings from Britain or Ireland, there is a strong suggestion of a westerly bias to their distribution. This might not be too surprising since western Britain and Ireland are the westernmost edge of the species' breeding range, and Senegal is at the western edge of its wintering area. These three spring records might lend weight to that idea.

It is well known that our wintering Greenfinches may come from far distant breeding areas. One of the most northerly movements was displayed by the adult male ringed at Meols on 23rd November 1991 and caught by a ringer in Northumberland, 240 km north, on 29th March 1992. Another, ringed at Meols a month later, moved the other way to be trapped at Llansilin, Clwyd (61 km south) on 24th April. One of the spring passage Siskins caught at Bidston, Wirral, on 7th April, had been ringed on Boxing Day 1991 at Eastleigh in Hampshire, 296 km south and just about as far south as it could have been wintering without crossing the Channel.

Despite the tragic draining of the No.3 bed at Woolston, the Black-headed Gulls continued to breed there in 1992, bringing in fish for their young from elsewhere. 102 chicks were ringed in June and July, in the hope of getting some records of where they move to in the future.

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

The Local Patch

GONE MISSING

What has gone missing? Why? Where to? and basically who's nicked it?

In order to provide grist to this rhetorical mill I suggest three things, Song Thrushes, arable weeds and a sense of concern.

First of all the Song Thrush dilemma. From early January I have heard these birds cheerfully proclaiming the promise of spring ahead. Then, during the nesting season, several nests were hidden (using the term loosely in the case of the Song Thrush nests!) in local hedgerows and garden shrubs. The birds themselves were still very much in evidence. In the last fortnight of May, I counted up to eleven birds all gathering food for nestlings in an area of less than two hundred square yards. Soon afterwards the young fledged and "mum" thrushes were reasonably abundant in and around North Widnes. Then slowly as July crept into August, the Song Thrush as a species had disappeared. Looking back at my log, the last date for an adult Song Thrush was 1st August. Faced with this apparent mystery, I decided to investigate the factors contributing to "The case of the disappearing Song Thrush" (not quite as snappy as the "Maltese Falcon"!).

As a starting point I considered food supply. The bird I saw catching food for nestlings seemed to be concentrating on Earthworms and grass feeding insect larvae, still available in abundance up to the point of writing. I also checked slugs and snails which again were much in evidence around local gardens. Even snails, which are less plentiful in the immediate area were easy to locate in good numbers. So the case remains open on suburban food supply. On adjacent farmland Song Thrushes, even during spring, were not doing well. A check on food supply revealed a good deal fewer thrush-snack invertebrates than on an equivalent sized suburban area. This along with hedge removal (ah! that old chestnut) has stopped the farmland Song Thrush in its tracks. But these factors did not account for the disappearance of the suburban birds which were doing comparatively well.

Another piece of the "gone missing" jigsaw could be post breeding moult, with primaries lost, the birds might skulk in deepest cover until the feathers had regrown enough. After much searching I have not managed to locate an adult bird even in close cover since the date mentioned. So here ends the case for the disappearing adults with scant clues as to their whereabouts. If anyone can enlighten me further on this matter I would be only too pleased to solve the riddle.

As to the fate of the fledglings I think I may have the answer or at least part of it. Although juvenile birds are still visible in small numbers they are by no means as common as they once were. Who, you may ask is the villain in this case? Sparrowhawks, which have made a good comeback recently, could be swooping in on the humble Song Thrush. Undoubtedly Sparrowhawks account for some of the missing total, but short of developing an exclusive taste for succulent Song Thrushes I do not think they could be responsible for such a drastic reduction. Then, a rustling in the bushes and the real culprit is revealed. The domestic cat. Their predation on Song Thrushes during early post fledging seems disproportionately heavy when compared with similar garden birds such as the Blackbird and Starling. This factor seems to stem from the evasion strategy of the different species, so if there are any Song Thrushes reading, this is where you are going wrong chums!

THE BIG BIRD RACE

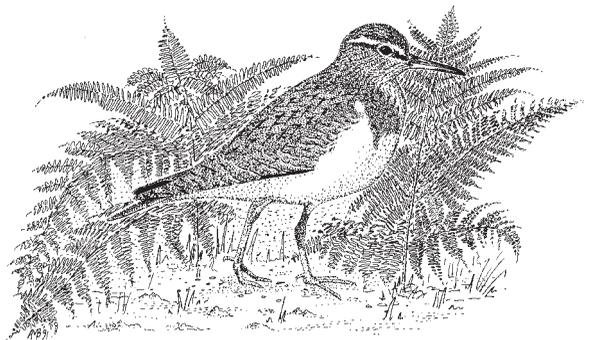
How to see 142 species in Cheshire...without really trying?

Hurting along the M56 at 11.00 pm on a Saturday night (2nd May) in a car packed with telescopes, binoculars, food and extra clothing along with three of Cheshire's most skilled ornithologists, I reflected on a question I was presented with a few weeks before as I touted my sponsorship form around the corridors of ICI at Alderley Park. It wasn't the usual "What on earth is the In Focus County Bird Race?", but instead a more astute individual queried "and what exactly do you need to win this sort of event?".

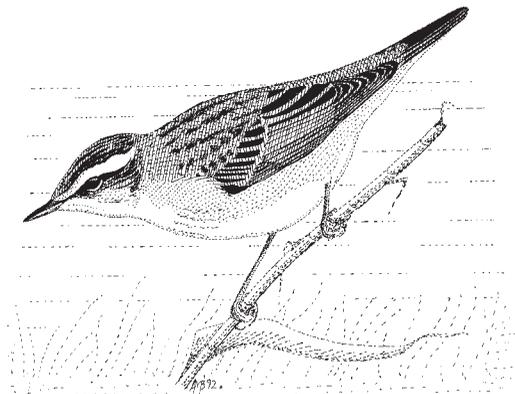
I thought for a minute and replied that you needed a team of sharp, quality birders; good local knowledge; weeks of careful planning; endless phone calls on whether you knew where Red-legged Partridges or Bullfinches could be found; other birdwatchers staking out sites on the day; the right weather; stamina and a sense of humour and of course; a lot of luck. As I told him the event was country-wide, with over 125 teams scheduled to race around the counties of their choice and a handicap system to try and make the race as fair as possible. He commented that the odds seemed stacked against us. Sitting in the car as we turned off the motorway, I felt he was probably right, but with Tony Broome, Mark and Jane Turner making up the rest of the "ICI Pharmaceutical's Peckers", all the planning and organisation under our belts and the wind turning to the south-east after a week of northerlies, expectations were running high and we knew we had everything to go for.

As midnight came, the Grasshopper Warbler that had been surprisingly vocal not 5 minutes before, as usual, went silent as we staked out a site near the Mersey and it was a calling Whimbrel that became the first bird on the list, closely followed by the eerie calls of a Water Rail and then, Little Owl. However, we had to wait 20 minutes before the wing clap and low hoot of Long-eared Owl had us piling back into the car and moving off to another site, this time to watch the ghostly silhouettes of two Barn Owls quartering the moon lit fields. A 2.30 am stop for food out at Burton Point added a few more night callers including the characteristic "wink, wink" of Pink-footed Geese still lingering here. We then headed back inland for Woodcock and Tawny Owl before finding ourselves waiting for dawn adjacent to the Dee and adding amongst others both Common Sandpiper and Grasshopper Warbler to the list.

First light found us at New Brighton, collecting a few more commoner species on the way, whilst a careful stalk around the rocks by the fort added a Purple Sandpiper to the total. Soon 7 species of Gulls and Arctic and Little Tern were also on the list and with Jane's excellent hearing pin-pointing passerines moving north across the Mersey, we soon had seen a variety of finches including Siskin and Redpoll. Forsaking the sea for the moment, we hurried along the coast to where the sand dunes and bushes held several migrants including Redstart, Whitethroat and Tree pipit. Unfortunately a large pale sandy, wagtail like calling, pipit that overflowed Jane and myself had to be forgotten as we collected two Sparrow species, Mistle Thrush and Collared Dove in a matter of minutes.



Jane by this time was listing the birds seen in a plethora of ways, as a total, on graph paper comparing with previous years and by deleting from our expected sightings list as we drove between sites. By now we were 63 species up and it was barely 7.00 am. We quickly added Little Grebe, Reed Warbler, Ruddy Duck and Yellow Wagtail and took in a wheeling flock of Knot as we ploughed on towards Stapleton Wood. Five Warblers including Wood Warbler, two species of Woodpecker and Pied Flycatcher were amongst 14 species that greeted us here whilst our next stop, Red Rocks had witnessed a large



fall of Wheatears and Whinchats. Pausing only to add Short-eared Owl and Corn Bunting we moved onto Caldy where Scaup and Red-breasted Mergansers were expected, but not the Lesser Whitethroat, Bullfinches or Willow Tit that were there.

At 9.15 our one hundredth bird came up, Grey Heron, as we arrive at Inner Marsh Farm knowing we had to be back at Red Rocks for the tide in just over an hour. IMF saw us add 6 species of Duck, Cuckoo, Spotted Redshank and Greenshank, but no sign of the Ruff, Green Sandpiper or Little Stint that were there the day before. We scoped the Raven's nest from the fields but nothing stirred so it was back to Red Rocks and a rewarding sea watch, with Black throated and Great Northern Divers, Scoter, several waders and an Eider and Shag, the latter two very unexpected. Pausing only to collect Buzzard on the way, we headed out from the Wirral towards the Eastern Hills. We rendezvoused with Richard Gabb, who showed us Kingfisher and Grey Wagtail and with an outrageous Ring-necked Parakeet flying around Poynton Park, we were now on 127.

At Cut-thorn Hill both Ring Ouzel and Dipper were soon in the bag but we then hit the low spot of the day, wasting over an hour tramping through the heather eventually finding Red Grouse and Golden Plover and with the bank holiday traffic slowing us down, we were late at Neumann's flash, where Little Ringed Plover, Garden Warbler and Garganey were welcome plusses but there was no sign of white winged Gulls or Black-necked Grebes. Hurrying on towards the Eaton Estate, where we had expected Marsh Tit, we found a pair of Firecrests and with the light starting to go, our last birds were a pair of Mandarins by torch light, our 142nd species of the day.

Since the previous county record was 129 species and our official handicap was 123, we thought we might have won but were pipped at the post for national honours by the In Focus Team who raced around Cornwall seeing 128 species, but who only had a handicap of 110. However we raised £1269, including sponsorship of £500 from ICI Pharmaceuticals. Of this, £400 will be donated to CAWOS. The team would like to thank all those who sponsored them and particularly those who helped stake out sites on the day. Considering we failed to connect with Marsh Tit, Snipe, Grey Plover, Pochard and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and missed three other available species on the day, perhaps 150 is achievable in Cheshire. Who knows, maybe next year.....

Hugh Pulsford.



OCTOBER

- 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 & 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

- 1 CRSPB CHESHIRE MERES meet Castle Square at 9.30am
- 2 CAWOS "THE COMPLETE OWL" by Michael Leach
- 2 HPRSPB "THE WORK OF THE RSPB INVESTIGATIONS DEPT" by Andy Jones
- 5 CADOS "BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY" by Dr. G. Higginbottom
- 6 MCOS Special Event "BIRDS OF FIRE AND ICE" by Gordon Yates at Kingsley Community Centre at 7.30pm. Tickets adults £2.50 children £1, ring Paul Kenyon 0606-77960
- 7 HPRSPB Coffee Morning at Disley
- 8 HPRSPB MARTIN MERE meet Hazel Grove car park at 8.30am
- 8 KOS EASTHAM WOODS ring for details
- 8 WG NORTH WALES meet Guild HQ at 8.00am
- 9 SRSPB "BIRDS OF FIRE AND ICE" by Gordon Yates
- 13 MCOS "FLORIDA'S FABULOUS BIRDS" by Eric Harvey
- 14 CADOS INCE MARSHES meet Overleigh Cemetery at 9:00am
- 15 LOG COPMERE & DOXEY MARSHES by coach ring for details
- 15 MCOS ROSTHERNE & TATTON meet Rostherne at 9.30am
- 15 SECOS CONNAH'S QUAY ring 0270-872435 for details
- 18 CRSPB "WILDLIFE IN THE ROCKIES" by Val McFarland
- 20-22 HPRSPB WEEKEND AT GIBRALTAR POINT ring for details
- 25 CWT "A NATURALIST JOURNEY ACROSS THE USSR" by Dr A Knystautas
- 27 KOS "BIRDWATCHER IN WEST EUROPE" by Nick Williams
- 27 LOG "ISLAND OF GEESE, RAPTORS AND WAXWINGS" by Gordon Yates
- 27 WG "BIRDS OF A CHESHIRE COUNTRY PARISH" by Hugh Linn
- 29 SRSPB CONSERVATION DAY at Eastwood Reserve meet at 10.00am
- 29 WG SEAFORTH AND MARTIN MERE meet Guild HQ at 8.00am
- 30 CAWOS "WATER BIRDS" by Nick Williams
- 30 HPRSPB "ARISTOCRATS OF THE FOREST" by Gordon Yates

DECEMBER

- 3 CADOS "CHESTER ZOO CAPTIVE BIRD BREEDING PROGRAMME" by R. Wilkinson
- 5 KOS SOUTHPORT & MARTIN MERE, ring for details
- 6 CRSPB MARTIN MERE by coach ring 0244-324268 for details
- 6 LOG MARBURY MERE meet Lymm Cross at 8.00am
- 6 SECOS SANDBACH FLASHES ring 0270-872435 for details
- 11 HPRSPB "Christmas Party"
- 11 LOG "Christmas Party"
- 11 MCOS "KENYA, WEST OF THE RIFT VALLEY" by Mike McKavett
- 11 WG "ALONG THE SHORE AND THROUGH THE WOODS" by C. Smith & J. Walsh

DECEMBER

- 13 CADOS CHESHIRE MERES meet Overleigh Cemetery at 9.00am
- 13 MCOS LLANFAIRFECHAN & FORYD BAY meet Llanfairfechan at 9.00am
- 13 HPRSPB SEAFORTH DOCKS & WOOLSTON EYES meet Hazel Grove at 8.00am
- 13 WG HALF DAY LOCAL CAR TRIP meet Guild HQ at 9.00am
- 14 SRSPB "BIRDS OF ISRAEL" by Paul Doherty
- 16 CRSPB "HAVE WINGS - WILL TRAVEL" by Bob Adams
- 18 KOS "Christmas Party"

JANUARY

- 3 CRSPB MERE SANDS meet Castle Square at 9.30am
- 7 CADOS "THE CORNER OF AN ISLAND" by Hugh Linn
- 8 MCOS "THE GREAT MIGRATIONS" by Paul Doherty
- 10 KOS LEIGHTON MOSS, ring for details
- 11 CAWOS "PENGUIN PROMENADE" by Brian Dyke
- 11 SRSPB "FOCUS ON BATS" by Mike Freeman
- 13 WG MID-CHESHIRE & WIRRAL meet Guild HQ at 8.00am
- 17 SECOS SHROPSHIRE MERES ring 0270-872435 for details
- 20 CRSPB "THE CORNER OF AN ISLAND" by Hugh Linn
- 22 KOS "BIRDS OF WIGAN" by Charles Owen
- 23 CADOS MARTIN MERE meet Overleigh Cemetery at 9.00am
- 29 LOG "PENGUIN PROMENADE" by Brian Dyke
- 29 WG "BIRDS OF FIRE AND ICE" by Gordon Yates
- 31 SRSPB NORTH WALES COAST by coach ring for details

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.
- CWT Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Wilmslow Parish Hall, 0625 582460
- 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. 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.

1991 CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL BIRD REPORT

You should receive the latest bird report with this issue of Bird News. Thanks to the tireless efforts of the 'team' and all the contributors.

In dealing with the records, certain facts have surfaced and may be of interest to county birders; Yellow-legged Gulls would appear to be a regular late summer visitor with many records in 1991, especially from Neumanns Flash and Fiddlers Ferry. Observers familiar with this subspecies, possibly soon to be given full status, have noted that not only adults are identifiable but some second and third year individuals can be separated from Herring and Lesser Black-backed. Care should be taken however with other *Larus* species possibly still in the process of evolution, there are many different clines even with discreet populations. If you suspect a 'Yellow-legged' in a gull flock, which subspecies of Lesser Black-backed or Herring is it stood next to? How does the size compare? Can you accurately gauge the shade of grey? The pitfalls are many! There may be some which defy positive identification.

Still with gulls, it has also become obvious that in some cases, observers are unaware of the effects of moult, especially with the more noticeable species, i.e. Glaucous and Iceland. The appearance of say, an individual Glaucous Gull can change dramatically as it moults from ragged second winter plumage to fresh second summer plumage, creating the impression over the weeks it stays at a particular site, that more than one bird is involved. This is true particularly when the observer doesn't visit regularly.

Another species perhaps worthy of further attention is the Water Pipit. The only regular site away from the little watched Mersey areas is Neston, on the Dee, between the months of October and May. They are quite a rarity inland. Even at Neston they can be extremely hard to locate at times. Their frustrating habit of seeing you first and flying a long way after being flushed makes positive identification difficult to achieve. If you are familiar with the call it helps, but different observers transcribe it differently and you have to have a good ear to be sure.

Plumage wise, a Water Pipit is easily separable from a Rock Pipit given a good view. Half views in poor light conditions often lead to misidentification. The dusky features of the latter species can look misleadingly pale in bright sunshine when a bird flashes by, the whiteness of the outer tail feathers varies in intensity.

In spring, a stout pipit sat on top of a bush sporting a grey head, obvious supercilium and pink flush, almost certainly a Water. On the ground however, why isn't it a Scandinavian Rock Pipit, *A.p.littoralis*? Extreme plumaged examples may strongly resemble Water Pipits and so care has to be taken even at this time of year. They are certainly not as easy, particularly to observers unfamiliar with 'littoralis', as some sources may have us believe. Try writing a description of the next Water Pipit you see, you'll understand why they are a County description species. It is a pity the majority of observers choose not to send them in.

On a lighter note, submissions warranting descriptions in 1991 involved 76 species. There were 161 records of 555 individual birds. Only 18 out of the 161 failed to convince the rarities panel that a correct identification had been made, less than 12%. A big thank you to all who bothered to submit their records and further bothered to write descriptions. Your efforts are certainly appreciated - please continue to do so.

David Quinn has very kindly done the illustrations including the front cover, his expertise with the pen is all too obvious.

So, look forward to another top class report - you helped create it.

Tony Broome

If you have any queries involving the report, T.B. would be pleased to answer them. ED.

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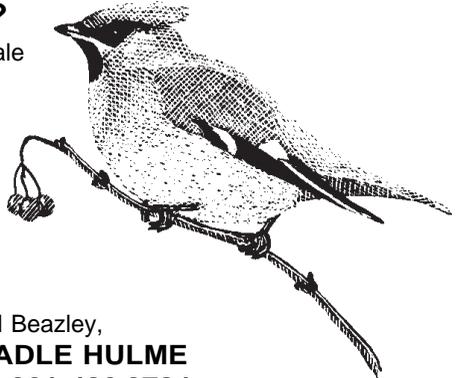
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SISKINS

Their singing is the best thing this cool day
just turning into March - a birdsong
I've not heard before. I know the zing-zang
of a siskin flock calling from alder tops,
as when I saw a swirl of fifty
last November near the mere. But this is new;
and better, even, than having lured them here
as temporary garden birds: fork tailed
quartet of migrants stopping off to gorge
on nuts and dunk themselves in bird-bath tameness.

I like their greenfinch colours; sparrow streaks;
and neat-as-titmouse foreheads, dapper black.
What I love most, though, now I've heard it sung
(as if in privileged rehearsal)
is this breezy song: so linnets-like, yet foreign -
full of Scandinavian sibilants. Instead of
tuning up in a hedgebound hawthorn
they'll be singing out of earshot soon, sky-high
in some far-flung forest tree - north of our spring.

Peter Walton

***** PLEASE NOTE NEW MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY *****

We welcome Dave Cogger in his role as membership secretary and hope he will feel his role is both fulfilling & rewarding. Many thanks for his help.