



Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society

Bird News

Number 19 July 1993



Species Spotlight • Early Years • Recent Reports
Birdwatchers Guide • Inner Marsh Farm
Notes & Letters • Witton & Marbury • Local Patch



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Articles, Letters and Comments would be welcomed by the Editor

Front cover: Black-winged Stilts by Tony Broome

Editorial

'EAD' IT ORIOLE

The talking point since the last issue of Bird News has undoubtedly been the arrival and attempted breeding of Black-winged Stilts in the county. A brief description of the time the three birds spent in Cheshire is covered in a later article by Colin Wells and Billy Moreton. Such an event is notable nationally considering the infrequency with which the species has bred or attempted to breed in the past. A full report on the movement and behaviour of these birds will appear in the Cheshire Bird Report for this year. I would like however to make a couple of comments which probably won't be covered elsewhere.

The arrival and nesting of the stilts at Frodsham created a natural upsurge in interest, with the site being visited by many people around the country after it featured daily on the bird lines. This influx may be contrasted with the recent 'norm' for Frodsham and the Weaver, an area which Billy Moreton has covered on a regular basis for a long time. Comments were recently made that Frodsham seemed almost devoid of birdwatchers, either casuals or those who used to visit regularly. I can confirm that many Cheshire birders, including myself and friends, didn't even know about the extent of the New Pool excavations. The moral of this goes without saying and serves to re-inforce the views of those who criticise the chasers of rare birds!

C.A.W.O.S., as the county society, could well plan for future such events. Undoubtedly we must endorse Billy's thanks to the R.S.P.B. and everyone else who offered or gave help in monitoring these birds. Clearly there was a spontaneous wish to assist, which is a feeling I think we should build upon. Membership of our society could well benefit from its greater promotion and the formation of a 'task force', which would be willing to deal with all aspects of rare breeding bird control, seems a sensible option prior to the next such occurrence. For those who might think this is hardly necessary because the services of such a 'task force' would only be called upon every few decades, I would point out that expected changes in our fauna due to climatic warming are being taken very seriously in the invertebrate world! Of course there are other species such as Peregrine, Raven etc. which equally warrant round-the-clock monitoring at breeding sites. So, if anyone is interested in putting their name on a rota please let me know.

I would again like to express my thanks to everyone who has submitted articles for Bird News. There has been a pleasing increase in response, particularly for one-off contributions. I hope however you will forgive the substitute title for this Editorial but there are times when I identify with the image of Oriole flying into a brick wall. Having been chided in the past for not publishing deadline dates for copy to enable future issues of Bird News to come out on time, I still find that having printed them I have to bother some regular contributors with phone calls. PLEASE THEREFORE REMEMBER THE 6th OF SEPTEMBER.

RICHARD GABB

Information from the Editor:-

***** NOVEMBER INDOOR MEETING *****

Please note that, due to the unavailability of the Civic Centre, the November's indoor meeting will be held on the 8th and not on the 1st as publicised in the last issue of Bird News.

BRITISH BIRDS - SPECIAL REDUCED SUBSCRIPTIONS

Once again C.A.W.O.S members are being offered a 25% reduction in the normal subscription rate for British Birds. A subscription leaflet is enclosed with this issue of Bird News. British Birds remains the authoritative monthly magazine; in particular its identification articles, which are so well researched in comparison to those in some other latter day publications.

Species Spotlight

CUCKOO

By the time this goes to press our Cuckoos will have either left the country or be thinking about it. The adults are short stay migrants, veritable smash and grab breeders. In they come during April seeking out potential nests. May and early June sees their main raiding period, victimising passerine parents by forcing their unwanted offspring on unsuspecting hosts. By the time the youngsters are the oversized greedy bundles of feathers with the gaping mouths that photographs are made of, their parents have left for sunnier climes.



A lot has been written about Cuckoos breeding habits so I won't go into depth but it is perhaps worthy of mention that interesting work has been done at some of our ringing sites. During the late 1980's and early 1990's parasitisation has been studied among Rostherne's and Woolston's Reed Warbler colonies. It is believed that the finding of young cuckoos at Rostherne in recent years is actually not random luck but the work of one female cuckoo. The fact that none have been found this year with the same egg colouration and pattern, may support this theory and she may have died or moved on.

It might be more appropriate to discuss their time spent in Africa in view of the fact that they spend from August to April, a lot longer than their time in Europe. However not a great deal is known about their wintering habits due to the confusion with African Cuckoo. European Cuckoos obviously like Southern Africa as studies suggest that they fly directly south over the Mediterranean and Sahara in one go to get there. In spring they linger to feed up in Zaire, Kenya and Tanzania before making a continuous flight of about 4000 to 5000 km to North Africa prior to their hop across to Europe.

Confusion with other species not only happens in Africa. One memorable bird at Spurn Point in Humberside a few years ago created quite a stir by looking like its eastern cousin, Oriental Cuckoo. Even after it was caught and examined in the hand observers still thought it was the rarity. Lots of people went to see it, lots of wise words were spoken about its identification but unfortunately lots of people were wrong. It was most likely the Spanish race resembling Oriental Cuckoo.

Red Rocks has produced our only two foreign cuckoo species records. A Great Spotted Cuckoo from Southern Europe was there in September 1978 and a bird identified and photographed as an American Yellow-billed Cuckoo in October 1982 was re-identified as the rarer Black-billed when the results were examined. These constitute the only accepted records, but a bird at Woolston in 1990 identified as Great Spotted Cuckoo was rejected by the British Birds rarities committee. Rather a shame considering it preceded a run of the species elsewhere in England.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo is surely the next contender as it is the commoner of the two Americans. I wonder if Red Rocks can pull the hat trick? Or just maybe there will be a bird resembling our Cuckoo calling like a Hoopoe from the middle of a bush and we'll have the true first Oriental Cuckoo for Britain?

Alan Roberts

BLACK-WINGED STILTS

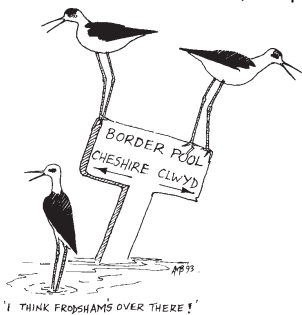
Below is a short account of the incredible events that overshadowed everything else on the counties' spring ornithological diary. It is only meant to be a summary and is intended to emphasise the significance of the breeding attempt by a pair of stilts and to encourage the many birders who saw them to send in their notes on behaviour, display etc. for a full account in the 1993 CAWOS Bird Report.

Only the fifthth British breeding attempt this century, (South Wales early 20th century, Notts 1945, Cambs 1983 and Norfolk 1987 were the others) it took almost everyone by surprise and disappointingly like the '83 attempt, was doomed to failure.

So what happened? The Black-winged stilts were reported on Birdline as being present on Anglesey at Colwyn Bay from April 10th - 21st. With the possibility of breeding at the site, everyone waited....and the birds disappeared....only to turn up at Inner Marsh Farm just inside the Cheshire border the next day at 10.00hrs. After a lot of initial confusion over which sex the birds were, two of them paired off and the 'gooseberry', the white headed bird, was left to its' own devices, driven off at times by the male but copulated with by the female (on top!). No one ever did sex that third bird! Then, on the 25th, they left before dawn, only to show up at Sandbach and Frodsham briefly before returning for dusk. What were they up to? For the next few days the 'pair' strengthened the 'bond' between them but still failed to defend a specific area. Were they settled? No.... all three birds were together on the evening of May 4th, only to have disappeared yet again by dawn on the 5th! Had they left for good? Possibly, for they were found over in Yorkshire at Wel Drake on May 6th. But on the 8th, all three birds re-appeared back at IMF, displaying and copulating. But for how long....?

Over the next few days, nest making was observed in a couple of places within the reserve, and whilst on the 'Border Pool' were actually inside Clwyd. They would surely settle now? May 14th....the pair had gone, followed the next day by the white headed bird, again, all being found at Frodsham where the display continued. The white headed bird did return to IMF briefly but soon returned to Frodsham to 'help out'. A nest site was chosen and by the 19th, the female was sat on the first egg and in doing so, presented the RSPB with the unexpected problem of protecting a rare breeding species in the middle of a very vulnerable area of habitat during the construction of a new tank. 24 hour protection in the form of a warden in a caravan was hastily organised and everyone held their breath....until torrential rain from the 26th to the 30th interrupted the routine and threatened to flood the nest. It was physically raised by the protection squad and saved, only to be robbed of two eggs the next day by a Magpie whilst the female was absent.

It was the beginning of the end. Although the female continued to incubate she deserted on June 5th and the remaining two eggs were predated by a Coot and a Magpie. All three birds stayed in the area until June 7th and then left, re-appearing at Radley Gravel Pits in Oxfordshire on the 8th, present until the 13th at least. After so much effort, the disappointment felt by all was hard to take. The unselfish volunteers who gave so much in time and expense, the RSPB staff and the Cheshire Wildlife liaison officer, Mike Wellman had all played their part but it was not to be...!



There you have it, unravelled as best I can up to now. If you do know any more, have any little detail about any part of the story, let me know, the full story in the Report will be fascinating! Many thanks to Colin Wells and Bill Morton for providing the lengthy versions of the above account and for sharing their 'local patches'. You now know how good they are, perhaps you will visit them more often and turn up something really rare! **Tony Broome**

Recent Reports

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

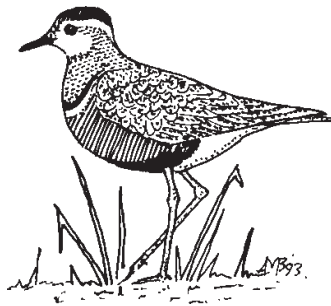
A **Red-throated Diver** frequented the Weaver Estuary from late March into early April. At least one observer found **Little Grebes** less common than expected during field work for the CAWOS survey. A **Slavonian Grebe** in full summer plumage was on Rostherne Mere on April 14th. In April single **Black-necked Grebes** were on Rostherne Mere on 3rd and 4th and at Tatton on 11th and 13th and one or two were at Budworth Mere from 13th to 23rd; up to nine were at Woolston for a brief period in late May, they were taking advantage of regrettably short lived flooding. There were reports of **Fulmar** from Beeston on a number of dates in April and May. Although numbers in the **Cormorant** roost at Rostherne Mere NNR reduced as spring progressed they remained high for the time of year with new record counts for April and May of 199 and 80 respectively. A **Shag** was on the Manchester Ship Canal at Runcorn in early May. A **White Stork** was a superb find for a "sky (blue) watcher" as it flew over Wilmslow on April 10th.

Mute Swans appeared set for a good breeding season as broods appeared from late April at sites widely spread across Cheshire and Wirral, flocks of non-breeders began to form with over 20 at Inner Marsh Farm and Tatton before the end of May. Two **Whooper Swans** appeared at Inner Marsh Farm and remained until April 11th. **Greylag Geese** began appearing at Rostherne Mere NNR for their moult from late May and over 100 were present at the end of the first week in June, a **Barnacle Goose** accompanied them. One or two **Brent Geese** were still off Hilbre late in March and two appeared at Budworth Mere on April 14th. A **Wood Duck** frequented Birkenhead Park in April. Up to 35 **Shelduck** were at Neumann's Flash in April and May. Around 60 **Wigeon** still at Sandbach Flashes at the end of March soon moved on. There was quite a good scattering of **Garganeys**, at Frodsham Marsh a drake was present from late March into April with another for a few days in late May, there was something of an influx here in early June with up to six birds present on 7th; elsewhere birds were found quite regularly at Inner Marsh Farm while visitors to the Gilroy Road Nature Reserve, a pool near Wilmslow and Knutsford Moor were more fleeting. A fine drake **Scaup** was on Rostherne Mere on April 29th. An **Eider** was off Hilbre on March 24th. Three **Common Scoter** were seen at Bosley Reservoir on March 21st, two were at Budworth Mere on April 23rd and one on Rostherne Mere on May 28th. A **Goldeneye** remained on the Weaver at Frodsham until May 1st while birds were last noted at Tatton on May 21st, different drakes remained at Farmwood Pool and Rostherne Mere through May and into June. The last **Smew** I have heard of is a "red-head" at Tatton until March 16th. A drake **Red-breasted Merganser** was inland on Rostherne Mere on April 25th. A small number of **Goosanders** remained at reservoirs in the eastern hills into April, while possibly the same bird visited Budworth and Tatton Meres on April 18th.

Single **Marsh Harriers** passed through Inner Marsh Farm in late April and Red Rocks on May 23rd while a female gave good views on Frodsham Marsh on May 24th and 25th. A **Hen Harrier** passed through Woolston on April 6th. A **Goshawk**, an April visitor to Frodsham Marsh, was the first record for the site. **Buzzards** were present at a very small number of sites in spring and early summer, the finding of two poisoned birds at one site goes a long way to explaining why this species struggles to maintain its population in Cheshire - a ridiculous situation in these supposedly more enlightened times! **Ospreys** put in welcome but brief appearances at Redesmere and Radnormere on March 20th, Tatton on May 6th, two were over West Kirby on May 7th, Hilbre on May 14th and Sandbach Flashes on May 23rd; more prolonged visits were to Doddington Pool on May 26th and 27th and Rostherne Mere NNR where a bird roosted overnight from June 5th to 6th. A **Merlin** passed through Woolston on April 11th. I have heard of few **Hobby** sightings but birds were at Hilbre on April 26th and Woolston on May 22nd. There were very occasional sightings of **Peregrines** near Rostherne, Tatton and Woolston while two or three different birds visited Fiddlers Ferry more regularly throughout the period.

Red Grouse appear again to be few and far between on the moors and anyone with 1993 sightings is asked to let me have full details. Single **Quail** were calling on Frodsham Marsh and at Hale on May 22nd. Birdline reported a **Corncrake** at Parkgate on May 9th.

Breeding **Oystercatchers** have lost eggs to a fox at Doddington and to flooding on Frodsham Marsh, hopefully pairs present elsewhere in Cheshire and Wirral will fare better. The story of the **Black-winged Stilts** stay in our area is detailed elsewhere in "Bird News". The first **Little Ringed Plovers** at Sandbach Flashes appeared from March 13th with a passage maximum of nine, at Neumann's Flash where the first bird had been reported as early as 3rd the passage maximum was 14. **Ringed Plover** passage maxima at Neumann's and Sandbach Flashes were 24 and 10 respectively. The County Recorder has received a description of a **Dotterel** at Neumanns Flash on May 16th. A **Grey Plover** was at Neumann's Flash on May 23rd and 24th. Sandbach Flashes had a **Sanderling** on May 15th while Neumann's Flash had its passage maximum of eight next day. A **Golden Plover** was seen and heard flying over Knar in the eastern hills on March 20th at a time when several hundred remained on Frodsham Marsh, one remained at the latter site on May 8th. Two **Knot** were at Neumann's Flash on May 28th with one next day.



Little Stints were scarce on spring passage but two were at Neumanns Flash on May 14th with one remaining next day and one was on Frodsham Marsh on May 19th and 20th. The first **Temminck's Stint** was at Inner Marsh Farm on April 29th with a May maximum of three on 12th here, singles were at Frodsham Marsh from May 6th to 9th and Neumann's Flash on May 14th. A report of three **Curlew Sandpipers** at Rostherne Mere NNR on April 30th was unusual, more expected were three at Frodsham Marsh on May 16th and 17th and two at Neumann's Flash from May 23rd to 26th. A **Purple Sandpiper** was by Harrison Drive in late March. Two **Dunlin** were in Tatton Park on April 26th while respective May maxima at Frodsham Marsh and Neumann's Flash were 125 and 27. Up to 17 **Ruff** were still at Sandbach Flashes at the end of March, five were at Inner Marsh Farm in early May. **Black-tailed Godwits** put on an excellent showing with up to 470 at Inner Marsh Farm in April and 85 at Frodsham Marsh in late May, some of these birds were in excellent plumage.

Apart from a party of 13 **Whimbrel** at Tattenhall the passage was disappointing with only ones and twos reported from Fiddlers Ferry, Frodsham Marsh, Rostherne Mere NNR and Sandbach Flashes. Inner Marsh Farm played host to up to a dozen **Spotted Redshanks** in late April and early May while one or two were on Frodsham Marsh in the same period. Odd **Greenshank** appeared at Fiddlers Ferry, Hale and Neumann's and Sandbach Flashes in May. **Wood Sandpipers** were scarce with only Inner Marsh Farm and Frodsham Marsh attracting odd birds. A wintering **Green Sandpiper** remained at Fiddlers Ferry until April 11th. A **Common Sandpiper** was at Budworth Mere from March 27th but it was the end of the second week in April before a more general arrival, according to some observers, in relatively small numbers; one flying over Focalpoint on May 24th was an addition to their site list. One or two **Turnstones** visited Frodsham Marsh and Neumann's Flash in mid May.

The first inland **Little Gull** I have heard of was over Rostherne Mere on March 23rd, singles were here and over Tatton on a number of dates until mid April, the latter site was visited by a party of seven on April 29th; Budworth Mere was also favoured by this species with reports on many dates from April 6th until early May, maximum five on April 6th. An adult **Ring-billed Gull** was by the weir on the River Dee at Chester in early April. **Iceland** and **Glaucous Gull** were scarcer than at the same time last year. An adult Iceland Gull was at Fiddlers Ferry from March 8th to 14th, one was at Neumanns Flash on March 28th and 29th and another on April 13th to 15th, the last at Maw Green Tip was seen on April 10th. A Glaucous Gull was at Neumann's Flash on March 17th and 18th, an adult and a first winter at Fiddlers Ferry on March 20th and a first winter there on March 28th, Danes Moss Tip held one on March 21st. Single **Kittiwakes** were reported from Budworth Mere, Frodsham Marsh and Rostherne Mere on a number of dates with little obvious pattern to the occurrences. An inland **Sandwich Tern** was at Budworth Mere on April 14th and 15th. The first **Common Tern** was over Budworth Mere on April 9th, Budworth remained the chief haunt of this species throughout April and May with a maximum of 17 in late April, other reports came from Farmwood Pool, Frodsham Marsh, Rostherne Mere, Sandbach Flashes and Tatton Park with a maximum of five at the latter site on May 11th. A single **Arctic Tern** was over Farmwood Pool in the early date of April 9th and birds appeared irregularly at Budworth Mere, Frodsham Marsh, Neumann's Flash and Tatton into June with a maximum of four at Tatton on April 20th and Budworth Mere in mid-May. A **Little Tern** was over Budworth Mere on May 11th. The first **Black Tern** was at the Chelford SQ's on April 27th, other sites holding birds in April and May included Budworth Mere, Doddington Pool, Frodsham Marsh, Hurleston Reservoir, Inner Marsh Farm, Rostherne Mere and Tatton with maxima of 12 at Budworth on May 10th and 11th and five at Tatton on May 11th. A **Black Guillemot** was off Hilbre from late May into June.

Although some traditional sites held **Turtle Doves** numbers seem to get smaller from year to year and all records should be submitted for the Bird Report. A **Cuckoo** was calling below Cat's Tor on March 26th, while following its earlier March record Rostherne Mere NNR had further reports from April 4th, elsewhere one was reported from Neumann's Flash on April 7th while most other sites had first birds from April 20th. Three **Short-eared Owls** remained on the Dee Marshes into early April. The earliest **Swifts** were at Inner Marsh Farm on April 21st and one or two were reported from a number of sites next day; the main arrival was in the second week of May, birds had returned to their breeding sites at Great Sankey by 11th while 1000 were over Tatton Mere on 15th. Many birders find **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** difficult to get to grips with but perhaps Marbury Country Park, with at least three pairs, presented the best opportunities. A **Swallow** was back at Redesmere on March 23rd and two's and three's were over various waters by 28th.

A **House Martin** over Tatton Mere on March 28th equalled the earliest ever arrival date in Cheshire and Wirral, one was over Budworth Mere on April 3rd but it was mid-April before birds had returned to some waters. The **Richard's Pipit** remained at Mow Cop on the Staffordshire border until April 4th but could be elusive at times. A **Tree Pipit** was at Burton Point on April 4th and by 17th birds had returned to the Eastern hills at Teggs Nose. Around 600 **Meadow Pipits** were in three flocks between Allgreave and Knar in the Eastern hills on March 20th but had dispersed or moved on a week later. Two summer plumaged **Water Pipits** remained on the marsh at Parkgate until at least April 7th. A **Yellow Wagtail** was at Burton Point on April 4th and one in Tatton Park next day but passage appears to have been very poor with no sizeable parties reported, one of the best places to view this species was Frodsham Marsh where several pairs attempted to breed. 80 **Pied Wagtails** were still using their Knutsford Moor roost on March 27th. **White Wagtail** passage appears to have been very poor with only ones and twos reported from a small number of sites.

A **Black Redstart** was at Hilbre on March 19th and another at a North Wirral coastal site early in May. A **Redstart** was on Frodsham Marsh on April 10th and in some numbers in the eastern hills at Teggs Nose by April 17th. Reports of a female **Whinchat** at Hoylake on March 13th and a male at Leasowe on March 18th are extremely early and will require substantiation, birds passed through Frodsham Marsh, Tatton and Widnes Warth Marsh in late April. Pairs of **Stonechats** were at Leasowe and Red Rocks in late April. Five **Wheatears** were in Tatton Park on March 25th and birds had arrived back in the eastern hills in some numbers by the next day; the passage maximum at Fiddlers Ferry was 18 on April 10th but the observer estimated that at least 63 birds moved through by the end of April, 83 were counted in one mid-April day on the North Wirral coast. A **Ring Ouzel** was at Three Shires Head on March 26th and two at Danebower next day, five were at Red Rocks then Leasowe on April 10th and April passage birds were also noted at Chelford SQ's and Mow Cop Quarry. The latest **Fieldfare** was at Rostherne Mere NNR on April 25th.

Four passage **Grasshopper Warblers** were at Moreton in late April and birds were "reeling" at Cuedley and Frodsham Marshes, Neumann's Flash and Tatton Park, but perhaps the best place to hear one was at Woolston where up to four were noted. A **Savi's Warbler** at Red Rocks early on the morning of May 23rd is only the second record for Cheshire and Wirral, the first was on Frodsham Marsh on 9th-10th May 1978. The first **Sedge Warbler** was singing at Rostherne Mere NNR from April 17th but it was another week before the first was recorded in nearby Tatton Park, 167 singing birds were counted during the Woolston warbler survey. A **Reed Warbler** singing at Rostherne Mere NNR from April 10th was exceptionally early. **Lesser Whitethroats** were back around Neumann's Flash from April 16th and later at least three pairs were in the area. Whitethroats returned to Neumann's Flash from April 16th, the Woolston warbler survey found 80 singing birds. A **Garden Warbler** was at Neumann's Flash on April 16th but it was early May before birds had returned to Rostherne Mere NNR and Tatton Park. A **Wood Warbler** was singing at Marbury Country Park on April 21st and 22nd and then birds moved through Rostherne Mere NNR, Tatton Park and several Wirral sites into early May. **Willow Warblers** were singing at Neumann's Flash and Woolston on April 3rd and the first birds were reported from Fiddlers Ferry, Rostherne Mere NNR and Tatton Park from April 8th to 10th. Thankfully **Goldcrests** seem to be making a much improved breeding season showing compared to last year. Unfortunately the same cannot be said of **Spotted Flycatchers** which returned fairly late and apparently in poor numbers. The earliest **Pied Flycatcher** I have heard of was at Rostherne Mere NNR on April 11th, birds were back at breeding sites in the eastern hills by April 17th.

The only **Golden Oriole** I have heard of was near Bosley Reservoir on May 31st. A **Raven** in flight over Witton Tip on April 21st is believed to be the first for the area. A good return passage of **Brambling** was best indicated by a flock estimated at 120 birds at Marbury Country Park on April 16th, the latest birds I have heard of were in Tatton's Dog Wood on April 24th, many of these April birds were in superb plumage. Two different **Serins** passed through Red Rocks early in the morning of May 23rd, these are only the second and third records for our area, the first was a female at the same place on 26th April 1976. A good flock of 60 **Redpoll** was in Tatton Park on April 24th. Four **Corn Buntings** were still roosting on Knutsford Moor during April.



Note I would welcome any contributions to "Recent Reports" especially from south-west Cheshire and the Wirral coast. Please send details for mid-june to the end of August to me at 14 Thornfield Grove, Cheadle Hulme, Stockport SK8 6AZ by September 1st.

Thanks / acknowledgements for contributions to this "Recent Reports" go to Birdline Northwest, Birdwatching magazine, Richard Gabb, Eric Hardy, Ron Harrison, Gary Healey, Andy Hearn, Paul Hill (Witton and Marbury Log), Kevin Hughes, Colin Lythgoe (SECOS area), Keith Massey (Fiddlers Ferry), Antony Parker, Bryan Roberts (Tatton area), the Rostherne Log, Robert Walton and anyone else who passed on details of sightings.

Steve Barber

The Early Years

Ron Harrison's story continued

There are many stories I could tell of those halcyon days, like the night on Altrincham Sewage Farm when a party of about eight of us flushed a Corncrake from the rough grass around one of the sludge beds. It flew into a nearby potato field and being at the rear of the party I was the only one not to see it, how I cursed my luck! There was a better result however at Dunham Massey, near my "local", which a friend told me about. Needless to say I was doubtful, but the local farmhands remarked it had been there for days so I quickly dashed back to the spot. Sure enough it was calling repeatedly but I couldn't find it. Remarking on its rarity was a mistake for the farmhand tried to catch it in the night and nearly succeeded, consequently it left the area. Then there was the Hoopoe at Speke Hall, yes we did a bit of twitching in those days. Having heard about it Ray, Bill Mulligan and I set out in the evening hoping to see it. When we arrived we were met by Stan Dobson who told Bill "it has just flown through a gap in the hedge". I thought Bill was going to explode! For years it was a standing joke, but Bill got his own back when the Caspian Tern, reported by John Shakeshaft and Tony Murphy, turned up at Witton Flashes. Again we three went at night and were in time to see it, on the lime beds as they were then, before it flew away over Northwich. 30 seconds later Stanley arrived and Bill had the satisfaction of saying "its just flown through a gap in the hedge".

The time arrived when the long dreaded decision to modernise the sewage farm was upon us. Many of us thought that not enough was done at the time to save it, which realistically was impossible, or to at least come to some agreement as to its management. We voiced our opinions at the Manchester Ornithological Society meetings, but A.W.Boyd pointed out that this new processing would destroy all the insect life which was the main attraction to the birds. So the sewage farm gradually faded into obscurity, a slow death for we still saw good birds on the odd occasion. There was the time when I received a phone message from my wife whilst I was at work, telling me that Ivan Clarke and Graham Cotterill, two young schoolboys, had discovered a Red-necked Phalarope on one of the few remaining sludge beds. I obtained a "passout" from the foreman, much to his amusement, for family business and dashed over to see it. There was the Spotted Crake which Peter Wolstenholme and others saw, and one or two other goodies, but finally the area became deserted. I very rarely visited the area then and even when I did I never met anybody. By this time AWB had passed on, we missed seeing him around with his telescope already fixed to a heavy wooden "tripod", his monocular slung around his neck and his blind eye sporting a monacle, and hearing his ever-cheery words of greeting "hasta seen owt?". Visiting him on what was to be his death bed he was still as quick to pick me up on a slip of the tongue. When I reported that I had seen a pair of Ruff, he quickly fixed me with his one eye and said "a pair?" and I changed my remark to "a male and a female". He gave me a signed copy of his book "A Country Parish" which along with many of his letters I treasure deeply.

We began to spend our evening at Astley Colliery Flash, a similar bird spot close to mossland. It was here we met Frank Horrocks the "birding dustman" as we affectionately called him, he was the epitome of a Lancashire lad and really did work on the local council. He was, and is to this day, an excellent birdwatcher, spending all his time watching either Astley or his favourite Pennington Flash, where incidentally they have named one of the hides after him. We saw a similar selection of waders and duck to those we had been used to seeing on ASF but he had the added attraction of seeing Nightjars on the nearby mossland and told us exciting stories of having watched them. Those days one could go at night and watch them hunting moths on Chat Moss, Rixton Moss and Abbots Moss on Newchurch Common in Cheshire plus those at

nearby Delamere which I personally never saw. Those on Carrington Moss had long since been extinct.

Another area that we visited was the old Weaver Bend Reserve which soon became the site of a poison tip for the expanding ICI Works nearby. The unofficial, non-paid warden was an extremely competent observer, Ron Allen, who became another of my corresponding friends. He was the leading light in the Mersey Shelduck migration study which was finally published in "BB". I used to send sightings of birds overflying Carrington Moss in the July evenings. It was not until the No.3 and new No.4 sludge beds were formed on Frodsham Marsh that we really became interested in that area, but the No.4 bed which was on virgin marshland with its ditches and hedgerows was a revelation.

As the ASF declined and my meetings with the many friends made there became fewer and fewer, Stanley Dobson and I resolved to send a round robin letter to the people we used to see frequently, proposing the possibility of getting together once a month to "share the spoils" of our birding, for by now we had begun to extend the boundaries of our birdwatching activities. There were the autumn boat trips to Anglesey aboard the St Tudno which were a new experience to me, introducing me to the mysteries of seabird identification, albeit at the risk of being violently seasick; fortunately this never occurred after I took my "Quells". We met other birders, many of them "scouters" some of whom I still correspond with. We would all gather in the prow of the ship, whatever the weather, witnessing sights no longer available. Once leaving "the bar" we were all agog with expectancy and in the right conditions the ship sailed through huge concentrations of Gannets, Manx Shearwaters and Terns with the ever present predatory Skuas. Off the Welsh coast around Llandulas and Rhos we passed through thousands of Common Scoter and goodly numbers of Velvet Scoter were always flushed by the ship and Red and Black-throated Divers were numerous at the latter end of the season. It was from the St Tudno that we saw the first Black Guillemots, just the odd one or two off Beaumaris, before they began breeding on the island of Anglesey. As the boat passed by Puffin Island we saw large numbers of auks, Razorbills and Guillemots and Puffins which were then still plentiful. The island literally exploded as we passed by and the gulls, Cormorants and Shags were all around the ship. We thought ourselves lucky if we saw Peregrine, but Ravens were always to be seen. Bill Mulligan had a pass through the auspices of his newspaper, the "Empire News", and as his work took him well into the early hours of Sunday morning he would lend it to one of us with the strict instruction to post it as we left the boat for him to use on the Monday. The fare for the return was just sixteen shillings in "old money", but what good value!

Then there were the memorable trips to Hilbre Island and the always hilarious meetings with John Gittins and his mates George Richards, Tony Bell, Rob Cockbain, etc, etc who were using a Heligoland bird trap in one of the gardens, long before they had any proper facilities such as they have at present. I remember we were anxious to see a Glaucous Gull which was often reported and George Richards promised us that if we came on a certain day and waited until 4.30pm we would get our reward. We scoffed at the offer but went anyway. We waited until 4.29 and turned for home, for the tide was at its lowest ebb. We were moaning at the non-event when George turned and said "there you are, dead on time !" Needless to say we were impressed, Paul Daniels couldn't have done better. It turned out that on that particular tide the ebb was at its lowest and exposed the starfish which were the gulls favourite food. Years later when I could no longer walk to the island I endeavored to get to the island by van, and nearly became marooned, but that is another story, except that I finally made it after guidance from my good friend John Gittins.

Ron Harris

A BIRDWATCHERS GUIDE TO OTHER BIRDWATCHERS

Is your birdwatching becoming dull? Hitting that "midsummer lull"? Failing to sort your Wheatears from your Chaffinches? Having murder with Crows or have your Goldfinches lost their charm? If so, then try this handy birdwatcher's guide to other birdwatchers.

The Common Punter (PUNTERUS DOMESTICUS)

Mainly sedentary but occasional movements to the coast during the summer months. Can occur in larger concentrations at favoured sites, with a marked preference for weekends. Plumage variable, generally not weatherproof and is brightly coloured. Most recognisable feature is the firmly boxed pair of binoculars slung to the rear. Use of hides and/or noticeboards a general characteristic. Calls, usually quiet, with a quizzical "where was that one?" An interesting factor appears to be the disparate numbers of males and females with a ratio of 20:1 in favour of males!

The Beige (SENEX CRYPTES)

An interesting species easily recognised by its uniform beige or tweed plumage, legs can be grey. Females similar to males in winter, but in summer can moult into bright floral patterns and inappropriate footwear. Summer females generally have bare knees. Males can show a flat cap which tends to become canvassy and more floppy in the summer. Can be sedentary but some are long distance migrants. Long lived ranging from 50 years upwards. Optical gear variable, with some antiques present. Generally unscoped. Calls include a polite "Good morning/afternoon" and a more strident "I saw one of those in 1956"
N.B. Can occur in high densities in binocular-free form in urban areas.

The Crested Hippy (GROOVIS CRISTATUS)

A scarce species, but can form flocks amongst other birders. Plumage generally army surplus drab. Males support a decorative tuft of hair on the chin. Usually accompanied by a well-used scope and binoculars, slung forward and ready for use. Difficult to spot in countryside, feeding mainly on muesli and lentils. Females rare, plumage similar to male, but may sport a subdued "Slogan" T-shirt. Two distinct calls, an appreciative "Hey Wow" and a long, rambling, earnest discourse on the state of the environment.

The Spotted Weekender (DUODURNIS FAMILIARIS)

Wide distribution in U.K. with a limited time span of Saturday and Sunday. Plumage highly variable, most typical is a barbour jacket, arran sweater, jeans and green wellies. Almost always display scopes with pristine cases and tripods. Most obvious by its tendency to rush around "hot" sites due to limited time span. Equal numbers of males and females, call absolutely unmistakable "I saw one of those last weekend". Occurs in higher numbers in the summer months, generally not too far from car parks.

The Non-Bogus Expert (ORNITHOLOGICUS SAPIENS)

Genuine examples of this species should be immediately submitted with a rarity form, although confusion within the subspecies (BOGUS BOGUS) is easy for the unwary. Identification difficult as it can mimic any of the other species for self defence purposes, and can surprise even the most experienced observers. Plumage variable but always sensible, weatherproof and generally well worn in. Optical devices always of high quality and positioned for immediate use. Generally silent in the field, but if disturbed, can unleash up to 20 minutes of incredibly detailed information with uncanny accuracy. This call can go over the head of the ignorant, leaving them to wonder if the sighting was a genuine one.

The Frustrated Dabbler (FAMILIMANIIS EXASPERANS)

Fairly common at easily accessible sites. Usually occurs in family groups, males tending to precede female and nestlings by at least 30 yards. Nestling calls draw attention to this unassuming species listen for "Can I have an Ice Cream?" or "Can we go home now?" echoing around secluded woodland. Plumage usually bright, bodywarmers present for the winter months with accompanying woolly hat. Bird species tend to avoid dabbler nestlings leaving the dabbler with nothing to look for! Invariably silent when alone, utters a loud "SSSSH" in the presence of nestlings, and a long "AAAAH" as nestlings catch up. Occurrence especially summer weekends with massive bank holiday eruptions.

The Other Side Gazer (GAZUS NEBULARIUS)

A species falling into distinct subspecies. Some schools of thought suggest there are three, fell walkers, sailors and a punterish antecedent. Identification simple and common to all, plumage consisting of: red or yellow cacouge with loud wellingtons or gaiters (especially in fell walking subspecies), unscoped, binoculars tiny and dangle at the angle. Infrequent use of optical devices is characteristic, tendency to look at planes or ships. Usually appears in pairs or family groups. All year round occurrence, no site preference, although can form flocks around tourist traps. Calls vary from a loud metallic laughter to a curious punter-like "What huge flock?".

The Mobile Twitcher (SWIFTUS DECKO)

A well known but surprisingly rare type, characterized by its reliance on wheels and telephones, can turn up at any site at any time of the year, but will only settle for a short time before moving on. Only resident in the Scilly Isles, where it forms tightly packed flocks. No characteristic plumage but always scoped and the stooped posture is diagnostic. Rumoured to be a mimic of other species (see Non-Bogus Expert) especially the weekender and the punter. Calls generally a grunt or murmur in response to queries and an exasperated sigh on being told of rarity movements to another site.

The Solitary Patcher (STUDIOUS LOCALIS)

Highly sedentary, secretive, with little known habits. Presence only betrayed by articles in local journals. Solitary or occasionally in pairs, invariably scoped and binoculars to the fore. Some authorities suggest a specific overlap with the non-bogus expert, but this is not always true. Plumage usually olive drab or a wax jacket, but always waterproof. Often present at unlikely sites at unearthly hours of the day. Use of the note book an obvious sign of this species. Usually silent, but calls include a soft "20 .. 30 .. 40 .. 50 ..." or a rarely heard delighted "Whoop!".

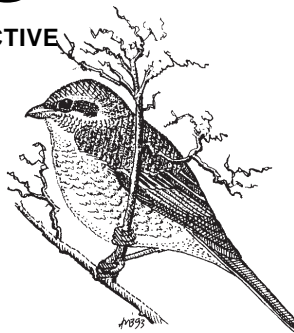
Any similarity between the species characteristics described in this guide and birders living or dead is purely intentional (BUT OF COURSE, IT'S NOT YOU!)
Paul Whorton

Notes & Letters

CHESHIRE LOCAL PATCHING - A TEENAGE PERSPECTIVE

"Welcome to Birdline Northwest, Friday October 2nd, 8th update. In Cheshire the Glossy Ibis came in to roost at Neumanns Flash again this evening ..."

It's amazing how one short call can affect someone, this particular call provoking a frenzy of excitement during the early hours of Saturday morning, after a night in Stockport, as I persuaded a shopping trip and a visit to my Auntie Mary's to be cancelled, (I had to go for a Red-backed Shrike at Inner Marsh farm afterwards) and "arranged" a 5.30am lift to Northwich from my long-suffering mother in our 100,000 mile on the clock, 7 year-old Nova.



So, after precious little sleep and a 15 minute journey later we arrived at the mid-Cheshire saltflash in total darkness, but as the day gathered light good views of this Messiah-like visitor were secured. 5 hours of madness by anybody else's standards, but these are just the normal rigours any fanatical birder and local-patcher has to go through!

I have been birdwatching for half my life now, and local-patching during most of that time.

Rostherne was my first local patch. Here I could get to grips with scarce species such as Smew, Hobby and Scaup, relax in the superb observatory and watch someone come and go whilst quenching my increasing thirst for birdwatching knowledge.

When told of breeding Black-necked grebes near Warrington, I soon became an avid Woolston watcher, whilst still visiting Rostherne. The news of the drainage of no. 3 bed came as a shock - as this was my favourite area of Woolston. One of my greatest successes was knowing I had got a first-winter female Ring-necked duck accepted by the BBRC for no. 3 bed, February 8th 1991, and I will never be able to erase memories of the Black-necked Grebes tending downy young on this bed.

I now do Woolston and Rostherne less regularly than I'd like to and instead for the past year, as is becoming a growing trend, have concentrated more of my energies into the Marbury/Neumanns area and was one of many birders to connect with Night Heron, Caspian Tern and the aforementioned Ibis last year, as well as an excellent selection of gulls (Iceland, Glaucous, Yellow-legged, Little and 'argentatus' Herring).

Having said that one of my best days in Cheshire was when I saw female American Green-winged Teal and Hawfinch in the same minute at Rostherne, while Woolston still produces good birds - witness October 90's Wilson's Phalarope, and the recent female Garganey.

Local patching is a bug and fortunately I caught it at an early age. The great thing about it is I feel just as much elation finding, say, a Green Sandpiper, a Little Stint, a Glaucous Gull, a pair of Sanderling or even a Kingfisher on my local patches as seeing somebody else's Great White Egret or White-throated Sparrow much further afield.

In an ideal world I would spend most of my time at these three hallowed sites, but with GCSE examinations looming ever closer I do well to go local-patching once-a-week, but when my exams are over my recent CAWOS membership and ever-growing enthusiasm for these sites will encourage me to become an even more active Cheshire birder.

James Walsh, 3 Brookway, Timperley, Cheshire, WA15 6RX

MARBURY COUNTRY PARK AND WITTON LIMBEDS BIRD RACE 16TH MAY 1993

As many of your readers will know the above event was arranged as a means to raise money for the Witton Area Conservation Group and primarily to fund the purchase and siting of a hide over the soon to be formed wader scrapes on Marbury Number One Tank. Paul Hill, Paul Kenyon, Julie Mottishaw and myself raced, as a team, from 05.00 to 15.00 to identify as many species within the confines of our area as was humanly possible.

Our final total of eighty seven was excellent and held several locally exciting birds including Turnstone, Little Gull, Arctic Tern, Kittiwake, Sanderling and the first Turtle Dove of the year. A touch of the ridiculous was added by a wandering Barnacle Goose seen at several sites throughout the area during the day. John Gregory and a friend raced independently raising money for the same cause and finishing with the total of eighty two. Included in this was a Common Gull, a species that we unexpectedly missed.

Somewhere in the region of £1,200 was raised and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the individuals and companies who generously donated their hard earned money to this worthy cause. If anyone would like to make a belated donation to the group then please contact me at the following address.

Dave M. Walters, (Witton Area Conservation Group treasurer), 115 London Road, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 8AT.

BIRD RACE '93 - MAY 9TH

After writing to several clubs seeking other interested young birders, Chris Done and Lee Bradburn, two innovative CAWOS members, with Stuart Naylor and myself teamed up to form the "Unstoppable Birding Machine".

Our formidable task was to overcome the record of 142 species set by Tony Broome's team last year. None of us had done more than a 7 hour race before, our route was experimental and the winds were unpromising North Easterlies. On our side was a variety of stake-outs and a hired Escort 1.6iL.

12:01am found us on the Eaton Estate enjoying a stroke of luck as a Mandarin flew over calling. Little and Long-eared Owls delighted our ears at a Mersey site. More excitement ensued as a Barn Owl hunted the verge near Manor Park. Leaving Frodsham at 3:30am with 20 species recorded, the highlight here having been a trilling "Whimbrel", we sped eastwards.

Conditions were far from ideal but around Macclesfield forest roding Woodcock, Dipper and Tree Pipit were found. The fierce winds discouraged the songsters at Tegg's Nose CP but Pied Flycatcher, Redstart, Wood and Garden Warblers took our list to 60. Cut-thorn Hill added Ring Ouzel before disaster struck as we crossed over the border. A Red Grouse sat in the road and a Merlin dashed through - rendered untickable as we were in Derbyshire! This meant an exhaustive sprint across the moors before another Red Grouse appeared in Cheshire.

Poynton efficiently added Kingfisher, Egyptian Goose and Ring-necked Parakeet before we were Wirral-bound, at 9:15am having recorded 76 species.

Sea-watching from New Brighton and Leasowe produced gems - Little Gull, Turnstone, Red Breasted Merganser and Knot. A surprise bonus was a male Stonechat at Red Rocks marsh while offshore Grey Plover, Sandwich Tern and a Peregrine were accounted for by 1:15pm. 3 Bar-tailed Godwits at Caldy kept us on our toes and we arrived at IMF with 99 species. 7 waders (Stilts included) and 6 ducks here increased the total.

At Tatton an Arctic Tern and a Goldeneye at 5:30pm, then Corn Bunting at Rostherne made us 116. A Lesser Whitethroat "rattled" at Neumann's, followed by Tree Sparrow, before Sand Martin at Budworth closed the list at 7:00pm. We struggled fruitlessly until 10:00pm, staying on 121 - 89% of our handicap. We were pleased, but felt 130+ was attainable. Various members scored Wheatear and Manx Shearwater, but they were not seen by three members. Other dips included Sparrowhawk, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Grey and Yellow Wagtails. We also lost 1.5 hours in the evening vainly retracing our steps around Delamere, looking for a member's lost specs!

As for next year the record will be ours!

Special thanks to Dave Walters, Tony Broome, Mark and Jane Turner for information, Stuart's Dad and my Mum for driving, Tatton Park for free entry and our sponsors who helped us to raise about £200 to help save the Polish Wetlands.

James Walsh, 3 Brookway, Timperley, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 6RX

101 USES FOR HOUSE MARTIN NESTS

It has been pointed out to me (by Tony Usher) that Spotted Flycatchers nesting in House Martin nests is nothing new! In 1910, T. A. Coward, in Volume 1, page 183 of 'The Vertebrate Fauna of Cheshire', mentions this unusual occurrence. "On May 31st, 1857, the late R. Holland saw a Spotted Flycatcher leave the half-finished nest of a House Martin, under the eaves of his house at Mobberley. He found that the Flycatchers had built a nest on the foundations begun by the Martins and had laid one egg. Three weeks later the Martins had recommenced building operations and had nearly finished the outside of the nest; the Flycatchers' nest, now empty, was still within. Holland did not notice whether the Flycatchers had brought off a brood or had been driven away by the Martins." T. A. Coward goes on to say under House Martin, page 187, "In common with many insectivorous birds, the Martin has, in places, suffered from the inordinate increase of the House Sparrow; the stronger bird will oust the weaker and appropriate its nest. In this connection it is a significant fact that at Tarpoley, where Sparrows were rigorously destroyed, Mr R. J. Howard has counted thirty-two occupied nests of the House Martin under eighteen yards of eaves." Anyone anything else to add?

Sheila Blamire, Woodruff Cottage, Clamhunger Lane, Mere

INNER MARSH FARM - A PERSONAL VIEW

As I write, Inner Marsh Farm has been officially open to local RSPB Members for just over a year. I felt it now time to reflect on the events of an excellent twelve months at one of the prime wildlife sites in our region. These recollections are necessarily of a personal nature, and undoubtedly there are many people more eminently qualified to write such an article. You will also notice my reluctance to view the birds at the reserve as it were in isolation. As with some of my contemporaries I (happily) find it increasingly difficult to ignore the other aspects of wildlife that comprise our natural heritage. So even though this is an ornithological journal, I make no apologies for mentioning my other non-birding observations.

Along with many others my first memories of IMF are of distant views of interesting but somewhat small birds seen from the railway embankment or, on Bird Race days, from the top field at Burton Point Farm. These included such "goodies" as Broad-billed Sandpiper, Spoonbill and Temminck's Stint. How we longed for the day when we could relax in a hide and observe the birds at close quarters. Well, through careful and lengthy negotiations a hide plus access was secured in Spring 1992 and a whole new era opened up for local birdwatchers.

My first visit in June of that year is indelibly marked in my memory. It was like sampling the forbidden fruit. Amongst the fifty species I recorded that day were two summer plumaged Spotted Redshanks, an immature Little Gull and in the region of two hundred Black-tailed Godwits. It was like a scene from a Tunncliffe painting with Godwits, some in their beautiful chestnut summer garb, feeding, preening, loafing and occasionally taking short flights uttering sharp "tuk" calls. It was a wader fanatics paradise. On that day I also recorded Blue-tailed and Azure Damselflies just outside the hide.

The other impression I received from those early visits was that IMF was a great place for families. On Sunday mornings you would see dutiful fathers taking their offspring for a leisurely birdwatch. Although, I know through personal experience that young children can be a handful in a hide, they are, as has been said many times before, tomorrow's potential conservationists; so learning to appreciate wildlife at an early age is of benefit not only to them now but to our countryside in the future. This brings me nicely to my son who, at the grand old age of four, has a healthy interest in creepy-crawlies. On the wall above my desk I have a cherished photograph of him taken at IMF when he was three clutching his Sesame Street bins whilst pointing at the ground and saying "Dad, there's an interesting wasp"! On a stroll down to the hide in August of last year we counted eight species of butterfly without any difficulty, some of which, such as Painted Lady, were new to my son. We have also seen newly-emerged Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet moths sunning themselves on Rosebay Willowherb, their empty cocoons clearly visible on the stems of the plants.

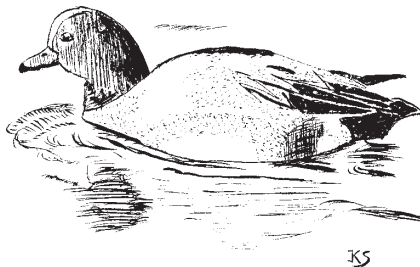
I have also photographed one of the few orchids on the reserve, flowering near the path. On examination it appeared to be a Common Spotted Orchid with a few Marsh genes thrown in for good luck.

Back to the birds. In July last year I was walking down the path at the edge of the farmer's field when a large bird flew with bounding flight over the top of the crop towards me. For a second or two I was at a loss to put a name to it. But seen through my bins the red cap and yellow rump instantly identified the bouncing torpedo as a Green Woodpecker. It's amazing how an out-of-context bird can fox you for a few seconds. From the hide on the same day there was a single Bar-tailed Godwit standing amongst a large flock of Black-tails.

The footpath down to the hide often produces other delights such as the Common Darters seen late in the summer. Each patrolled its own section of path or boardwalk and they would often settle close by if I remained still for long enough. Earlier in the summer I also glimpsed a large Hawker dragonfly, but unfortunately it was too flighty for me to identify it specifically.

One of the advantages of having an excellent reserve on our doorstep, so to speak, is to be able to appreciate it in all seasons and at all times of the day without too much difficulty. On the 13th September last year I decided to go for a quiet birdwatch after my tea, so IMF was the obvious choice. It was a warm and clear evening and the light on the reserve was excellent. On the first lagoon there were four eclipse Garganey busily feeding amongst a variety of other ducks. After watching them for some time it was easy to pick them out from the Teal purely on "jizz". The other highlight of the evening was a party of four juvenile Curlew Sandpipers feeding around the muddy margins to the left of the hide. Autumn also brought with it one of Cheshire's best birds of the year in the form of a first winter Red-backed Shrike, which frequented the willows adjacent to the boardwalk. I almost missed getting it on my Cheshire list as I was on holiday in Norfolk when it turned up, but thankfully it was still present when I returned.

On New Year's Day I invariably go birdwatching around Wirral to get a good start to my year list. My first port of call always used to be Bidston Moss where a Water Rail, who obviously had not read the model rules of Water Rail behaviour, used to wander around on open patch of muddy ground happily preening and squealing in full view of any birdwatchers. Unfortunately this area has now had stables built on top of it, depriving the Water Rail of a feeding area and me of a tick. So on the 1st of January this year, I was delighted to find an obliging Water Rail in the ditch near the hide at IMF. It was not an extrovert like the Bidston Moss individual but it gave excellent views nevertheless. This may in some part be due to the fact that a lot of the open water on the reserve was frozen over, which reduced the numbers of ducks and waders present, then again, you can't have everything.



Birds of the year in 1993 will undoubtedly be the three Black-winged Stilts which graced the pools in April and May. Words are incapable of adequately describing what must be some of the most extreme adaptations of any bird; the beautiful black and white plumage, the needle-like bill and those amazingly, no incredibly, long pinkish-red legs. They are the ultimate in wading bird evolution. Returning along the boardwalk that day I also saw a nice clump of Marsh Marigolds, which, not surprisingly, were probably overlooked by the majority of visiting birdwatchers. The Stilts were still present for the Wirral Birdrace, and on that day my son, without the need for binoculars, was able to see his first ever Stilt which was standing at the water's edge right in front of the hide. The same visit produced another excellent wader in the shape of a Wood Sandpiper, which we were able to direct one of the Bird Race teams to.

The first official year has been enthralling to say the least and even without the rarities IMF is still a first-class reserve. Here's looking forward to another fruitful year at what is clearly a gem of a reserve in the RSPB's crown. Thanks to Colin Wells for approving this article.

Keith Scovell, 4 Bletchley Avenue, Wallasey, Merseyside.

[The reserve is open every day except Tuesday from 9:00am to dusk. Entry is strictly limited to RSPB members only. EDS]

GLAUCOUS AND ICELAND GULLS IN THE WITTON LIMEBEDS AND MARBURY COUNTRY PARK AREAS 1981 TO 1992

Neumann's Flash is probably the main attraction within the Witton Limebeds, although our recording area also includes Marbury Number One Tank, Ashtons Flash, Marston Flashes, Northwich Tip, The Forge Pools area and Marbury Country Park. Over the past twelve years both Iceland and Glaucous Gulls have been recorded annually here with the exception of 1981 and 1983 which saw no Glaucous Gulls although Iceland were observed. Prior to 1981 both species were practically unknown, with the only published record coming from A.W. Boyd of an Iceland Gull on Budworth Mere. Obviously the presence of Northwich tip is primarily responsible for the majority of the records although according to my research the Tip was opened in 1968 which gives us thirteen years with no sightings of White-winged Gulls. There are only two plausible explanations for this; either the two gull species in question have dramatically increased during this time or sightings were not reported to the county recorder. The Cheshire bird reports for these years would lead me to favour the former.

The site is an excellent attraction for a wide variety of gulls with eleven species on the checklist including Franklins Gull and Ring-billed Gull which is currently pending. Late winter and spring is obviously the prime time with gatherings of upwards of 10,000 gulls estimated at the peak. The addition of the tip made it the perfect site. The three shallow flashes available within easy reach for resting and bathing gulls in between their foraging trips to follow the working bulldozers - these drivers must have the best views of White-winged Gulls possible. I have personally noted both species resting on or near these occupied machines, if only the drivers knew what they were looking at. Very few gulls roost in the area and a dusk visit to Neumann's would probably reveal only a scattering of moribund individuals. The gulls are regularly seen circling to a great height a couple of hours before dark gradually leaving to an unknown but presumably an estuarine destination. They return in dribs and drabs the following day and peaking around mid-morning. Obviously the state of activity on the tip directly affects the number of gulls present. Occasionally the area is not worked on a Sunday and the chances of seeing anything of interest on such a day is decidedly remote.

Since the first "modern" record of an immature Iceland Gull between April 6th and 20th 1981 we have recorded the following published totals, forty eight Glaucous and forty three Iceland, not bad for twelve years. This averages out at 4 Glaucous gulls and 3.58 Iceland Gulls per year. This is broken down according to age in the following tables. Bear in mind that the gulls occasionally visit for longer than one month so the total figures in the monthly occurrence table may appear to be misleading. Also the records for Iceland gull in 1984 were rather ambiguously worded in the C.A.W.O.S. report so I have taken the total for that year to be one. I have considered birds recorded as fourth year or near adult to be adults and birds which were noted as midway through a moult i.e. first summer moulting to second winter have been taken as unaged, quite simply to ease proceedings.

Glaucous Gull Monthly Occurrences. 1981 to 1992.

Age / Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Different Birds
1st Winter	1	1	3	2							1	1	9
1st Summer			1	2	1	1	1				1		5
2nd Winter		2	2	2							2	1	9
2nd Summer													0
3rd Winter	1			1							1		3
3rd Summer				1	2								2
Adult	2		1	1	1		2	3	3	1	2		13
Unaged			4	2						1		1	7
Total	4	3	11	11	4	1	3	3	3	2	7	3	43

To summarise, the best months overall for Glaucous Gull appear to be March and April although surprisingly we do have records from all months. The percentage of adults is 27.09% with 58.33% being immatures and 14.58% unaged. The most regularly recorded age of immatures is 1st and 2nd winters and the majority of adults appear between July and September presumably wandering (or frustrated) failed breeders.

Iceland Gull Monthly Occurrences. 1981 to 1992.

Age / Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Different Birds
1st Winter	2	4	1	1	1						1	2	12
1st Summer				4	3								5
2nd Winter	2	2	2	2	1						2	2	11
2nd Summer			1	1	1								2
3rd Winter		1									1		2
3rd Summer													0
Adult			2	1	3								5
Unaged			2	4				1					6
Total	4	7	8	13	9	0	0	1	0	0	4	4	43

Iceland gulls appear to favour April and May with the majority of adults also preferring this time. Summer and Autumn records are extremely unusual so the first summer bird moulting to second winter on August 25th and 26th 1992 was quite unexpected. Percentages as follows adults=11.63%, immatures=74.42% with the majority being first winters. Unaged birds totalled 13.95%.

Multiple occurrences are not uncommon with the most Glaucous Gulls recorded on one day being three on the 10th May 1992. These comprised two third summers and a first summer bird (there was also an Iceland Gull on this day). Iceland Gull has scored with two birds together on several occasions. All ninety nine white winged gulls recorded since 1981 have been seen in the following areas: Northwich tip, Neumann's Flash, Ashton's Flash and Marbury Number One Tank, with the exception of a 2nd winter Iceland on 18/11/92, an unaged Glaucous on 2/10/88 and an adult Glaucous on 13/1/87, all of which were seen on nearby Budworth Mere. The whole site has become quite a draw for bird watchers as well as birds over the last few years and as a result 1992 gave us our best year yet with thirteen Glaucous Gulls, and sixteen different Iceland Gulls recorded. Our longest staying, (or rather daily returning Glaucous) a first winter moulting into first summer, was present on and off for thirty seven days during April and May of 1992. The most hardy Iceland Gull, a second summer, managed fifty seven days again on and off during March and April of 1990.

Neumann's and Ashton's flashes have, at present, an extremely uncertain future and even if they stay in their present state Northwich tip itself is nearly exhausted. Without this tip Cheshire is going to lose its most regular source of White-winged Gulls. If eighty plus years of watching in the area by several eminent Cheshire birdwatchers could only produce one Iceland gull then the prospect for seeing rare gulls in the future is looking bleak.

References: C.A.W.O.S. (formerly C.O.A.) annual bird reports 1967 to 1991.
Marbury Country Park and Witton Limebeds Report 1992.

Dave M. Walters, 115 London Road, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 8AT

Ringer's Notebook

Most Redwings and Fieldfares winter in different areas from one year to another, as with the Redwing ringed at Norton Priory, Runcorn in winter 1991/92 that was shot in Pas de Calais, northern France in 1992/93. A Dutch-ringed Blackbird roosting at Norton Priory on 15 March 1992 had been ringed on migration through the island of Texel on 22 October 1991.

Yet more records of gulls from the landfill site at Rixton! Black-headed Gulls caught there included ones ringed as chicks in Norfolk and Essex. Another, ringed at Rixton on 20 February, was seen in Copenhagen on 26 March, quite an early return to (or towards) its breeding quarters. A Herring Gull fitted the usual pattern, having been ringed as a chick on Eilean Loch, Oban.

Two Reed Warblers, ringed as chicks from nests about 5 metres apart at Woolston on 28 June 1992, turned up on the south coast on the same day (4 September 1992), but met different fates, one having the misfortune to be taken by a cat in Eastbourne, while the other had the luck to be caught at the major ringing site at Icklesham, both sites being in East Sussex. This year a Cuckoo is again parasitising the Reed Warbler colony at Rostherne Mere, with eggs laid in two nests, but the coloration and pattern of the eggs shows that she is a different female from the one that has laid there for the last four years. Another Cuckoo egg has been laid in a Reed Warbler nest at Woolston, and a Cuckoo chick fledged from a Dunnock's nest at Meols.

Four Peregrine chicks were ringed in May in their cliff-side nest at Beeston Castle, the first of the species ever to be ringed in Cheshire. They fledged successfully, thanks to the 24-hour-a-day watch scheme in which over sixty people participated from the beginning of April to the end of June.

Coal Tits seldom breed in the Delamere Forest nest-boxes, but a female incubating eggs there in May had bred in a nearby box in 1990, while one of the two Pied Flycatchers to lay eggs there had also bred at Delamere in 1992. The Pied Flycatcher population of the Peak District and its fringes continues to grow, and well over 100 chicks were ringed in east Cheshire nest-boxes this year. A Garden Warbler nest at Delamere was built within one metre of last year's nest site, each successfully rearing four chicks.



Sand Martin numbers at the colonies around Sandiway are somewhat higher than those of 1992. Last autumn saw a wetter than average rainy season in Senegal, leading to hopes for good over-winter survival and a rise in the population, although the drought in Mauritania may have made this spring's Saharan crossing more difficult.

Prof. David Norman, Rowswood Cottage, Ridding Lane, Sutton Weaver, Runcorn, Cheshire

The Local Patch

THE SINGER, NOT THE SONG

The wheel of the seasons has once again rolled around to spring and early summer, bringing with it our summer visiting and breeding birds. After nine months of flight calls, alarm calls and flock contact calls, we are once again treated to full song from a bewildering variety of visitors. With resident species throwing their collective spanner into the works, it can be difficult to sift through the wall of sound to pinpoint who is doing what. So, where can the prospective song-identifier begin on this perplexing quest?

To some, this can of worms is opened within the pages of identification books. Transcriptions of the individual species song can sometimes occupy more space than the plumage description! In well-respected tomes phrases such as rolling, relaxed, nervous and explosive grace the pages. These adjectives may lean towards the florid prose of the wine taster, (yes, fruity was one word!) and many convey little to the reader unfamiliar with the song or call described. But just how can you convey each species' individual sound quality? Use of phonetic rendering, sometimes laced with continental style pronunciation accents may be confusing to the British birders used to taking their language "straight from the bottle" with little such help. More useful to the reader with some familiarity with birdsong is a comparison to a "familiar" species such as Willow Warbler or Whitethroat. But even this can fall short of directly helping the novice. Some examples include "recalls a Thrush Nightingale" or "higher pitched than a Veery" (I have to thank Mr Jonsson or his editors for those gems!) which I'm sure are of little help to all but the most experienced birders who probably wouldn't need it anyway!

Another route into the Labyrinth of sound is to take to the field. This may involve separation from the beloved bed at ungodly hours to get the best from your local birdsong. (I wonder if the abolition of British Summer time will make the birds get up later?) Early mornings also mean a reduction in disturbance and background noise so that concentration, if undulled by lack of sleep or last night's beer intake, is more focused on potential songsters. Sight or sound can be used to track down the birds. Sound can be followed to its source, and with patience most singers will eventually show themselves, thus giving a positive I.D. to the song. The observer can then associate the two and become familiar with the song from a particular species. Or conversely a species located by sight can be watched until it begins to sing and the same result will be achieved. Easier said than done I hear you say? This is where local knowledge comes into its own. Information amassed as to the whereabouts and habitat preferences of resident species through the rest of the year can be invaluable to include or eliminate possible species in song. Migrants, once settled, can be quickly graded into suitable habitat types to make up a list of "possibles" for any unseen or unfamiliar singers. Even out of place migrants on passage can be sorted out with knowledge of local migrant traps or areas of possible bird falls. This raises the possibility of unusual species having to be borne in mind when investigating that particular area.

Even with personal observation and local patch knowledge song identification can still be a chicken and egg situation (sorry!).

What if a sighted bird doesn't sing or it is a female (not anti-feminist I assure you) or a vigorously singing bird just refuses to pop up? How can you be sure of matching sight and sound? A recent solution is the more widespread use of birdsong tapes or C.D.'s, so, being the kind of guy that uses all possible tools at his disposal, (but refuses to read the manual!) I have a copy of the birds of Britain and Europe tape. Now, bear in mind, this tape is excellently recorded, and all the birds follow each other in evolutionary order. A doleful voice introduces each bird doing its thing and one duly follows another. I found after about 10 different species comparisons became blurred on the subtler differences of call, and with no "similarity comparisons", it's a bit of a slog. Still, in the intervening songless nine months of the year it has been a great memory jogger and has given me a head start this year. Then I obtained a "freebie" tape on the cover of a well known magazine (no cash, no adverts!) This was a much better format because the lively commentary pointed out some of the critical pointers in each call, and a useful recap and direct comparison made it crystal clear. The tapes use of key words and alliterative phrases was a great mnemonic, even though some of them made me laugh, it is often said that humour is one of the best memory aids.

Once a bird song or call is learnt, it is usually easy to separate from other quite similar ones, once over the hurdle of the initial association. Each species has its own particular delivery, phrasing, speed and musical quality. This can be mentally converted to a mnemonic by paraphrasing the call, or as I do, try to find a word, even a silly one that sums up the call. A couple of examples that I use are "old scratchy" for Sedge Warbler, "buzz twang" for Reed Bunting and "giggler" for Chaffinch. Incidentally, my local Yellowhammers still say "a little bit of bread and no cheese" as opposed to the phonetic equivalent. I wonder if this is a conscious choice on the bird's part or just the way I hear it? Other familiar species calls that I can sum up quickly are Song Thrush "three repeats and gap", Corn Bunting "no time jingle" and Starling "phone interference": I'm sure everyone has their own examples. By using these pointers to sum up well known birds in song it makes it a lot simpler to spot unfamiliar calls. The main stumbling block to all these general guides and descriptions is individual perception.

Even with the sense of sight, which in many cases is more finite, the fine descriptions of colour is difficult. After all one man's "burnt sienna" is another man's "dark chestnut". Hearing tends to be a much more idiosyncratic experience, people's tastes in music for example, so what chance does a humble Blackcap have of being heard the same twice? Audible frequency sensitivity can also play a part in muddying the waters. Older people tend to be less sensitive to higher frequencies and this will most certainly affect any decision or description of an unfamiliar birdsong. Bear in mind that most bird calls contain elements that may extend upwards beyond the range of human hearing.

I don't think there is a quick fix to identifying bird calls, personal mnemonics are a good help in sorting through birds in the field, or at least to find out what an unseen bird isn't! Tapes are also an invaluable memory jogger, and if properly done can be an excellent aid for unfamiliar species. They can also provide a new description or throw new light on even familiar species. The vital key of local knowledge and understanding habitat and terrain on your patch will help place your likely singers into suitable habitats when not on passage. So, as birdwatchers begin to re-discover bird listening, it is well worth investigating your patch with another sense, giving another dimension to even familiar species and sites, and who knows the discovery of a singing "stunner" made special by its presence on your turf.

Paul Whorton



AUGUST

- 5 CADOS INNER MARSH FARM meet Overleigh Cemetery 6.00pm
- 15 HPRSPB DERBYSHIRE DALES meet Hazel Grove 8:00am or Chapel 8:30am
- 21 CADOS FLAMBOROUGH meet Overleigh Cemetery 6.00am
- 21 NCRSPB POINT OF AIR meet Frodsham Garden Centre 10.00am
- 22 KOS HILBRE ISLAND meet Sessions House 8:00am

SEPTEMBER

- 6 HPRSPB AGM followed by "Fair Isle and its Birds" by Geoff Howe
- 8 HO AGM and Film
- 9 SECOS FRODSHAM & WEAVER BEND ring for details
- 10 SECOS "Wildlife in Wales" by Val McFarland
- 12 KOS SPURN HEAD meet Sessions House 8:00am
- 12 NCRSPB NORTH HUMBERSIDE meet Birch Services (M62) 9.00am
- 13 SRSPB "Bulgarian Surprise" by Maurice Waterhouse
- 14 MRSPB "Antarctica" by Brayton Holt
- 17 NCRSPB "The Corner of an Island" by Rev. H. Linn
- 19 HPRSPB FAIRBURN INGS meet Hazel Grove 8:00am
- 19 CADOS HILBRE ISLAND meet Overleigh Cemetery 9.00am
- 24 LOG "The Corner of an Island" by Rev. H. Linn
- 24 KOS "Land of Fire and Ice" by Gordon Yates

OCTOBER

- 1 - 3 KOS HOLY ISLAND weekend, ring for details
- 1 SECOS "Urban Tawny Owls" by Paul Johnson
- 4 CAWOS "Birds of Moorlands and Uplands" by John Wyatt
- 6 HPRSPB "Posteric Carr Nature Reserv ... Against all Odds" by Roger Mitchell
- 7 CADOS "Canadian Rockies" by Val McFarland
- 9 CADOS YORKSHIRE COAST meet Overleigh Cemetery 6.00am
- 11 SRSPB "The Red Kite" by Roger Lovegrove
- 12 MRSPB "Where Solitude Reigns" by Roy Rhodes
- 15 NCRSPB "Selection of RSPB Films"

- 16 NCRSPB FORYD BAY meet Leo's car park Caernarvon 10.00am
- 17 HPRSPB POINT OF AIR meet Hazel Grove at 8:00am
- 17 SECOS POINT OF AIR ring for details
- 22 KOS "Portrait of a River" by Charles Owen
- 29-31 HPRSPB NORTH NORFOLK
- 29 LOG "Travels in Sweden" by Bob Anderson

NOVEMBER

- 1 HPRSPB "Birds of the Midnight Sun" by Clifford Heyes
- 4 CADOS "Funny Way to Make a Living" by Michael Leach
- 5 SECOS "Birdwatching in Ecuador & Galapagos" by Jeff Blincow
- 6 KOS SEAFORTH DOCKS & LANCASHIRE COAST meet Sessions House 8:30am
- 6 NCRSPB "Autumn Fair" at Frodsham Church Hall 10.15am
- 8 CAWOS "Abernethy - Forest of the Future" by Richard Thaxton
- 9 MRSPB "Galapagos, an Island of Dreams" by Val McFarland
- 13 NCRSPB "RSPB Sales Stall" at Runcorn Shopping City 9.00am
- 14 HPRSPB POTTERIC CARR & BLACKTOFT SANDS meet Hazel Grove 7:30am
- 14 NCRSPB SHROPSHIRE MERES meet Ellesmere car park 10.00am
- 19 NCRSPB "ICI Naturally" by David Platt
- 21 CADOS SOLWAY COAST meet Overleigh Cemetery 7.00am
- 21 SECOS PARK HALL & BLITHFIELD RESERVOIR ring for details
- 26 LOG "Hebridean Raptors & Hill Country Birds" by G. Yates
- 26 KOS Talk to be announced
- 28 HPRSPB SOLWAY FIRTH meet Marple 7:00am or Hazel Grove 7:15am
- 29 HPRSPB "Aristocrats of the Forest" by Gordon Yates

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 contact John Durell 061 427 3018
- 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.
- MRSPB Macclesfield RSPB Members Group, mtgs Senior Citizens Hall 7.45pm, Prog. Sec. Julia Thornburn 0625-582433.
- NCRSPB North Cheshire RSPB Members Group, mtgs Runcorn Library, Shopping City, Sec. Lynn Fewster 0928-575876
- SECOS South-east Cheshire Ornithological Society, mtgs Sandbach Library 7.30pm, Prog. Sec. John Clowes 0270-872435.
- SRSPB Stockport RSPB Members Group, mtgs contact Mike Armstrong 061-980-3986.
- WBC Wirral Bird Club, mtgs Kingsmead Hall Hoylake 8.00pm, Prog. Sec. Hilda Truesdale 051-632-2705.
- WG Wilmslow Guild, mtgs Wilmslow Guild HQ 7.45pm, Prog. Sec. Miss C. Roberts 061-432-5842.
- WRSPB Wirral RSPB Group, mtgs Williamson Art Gallery Birkenhead 7.30pm Prog. Sec. D. Jowitt 051-625-5534.

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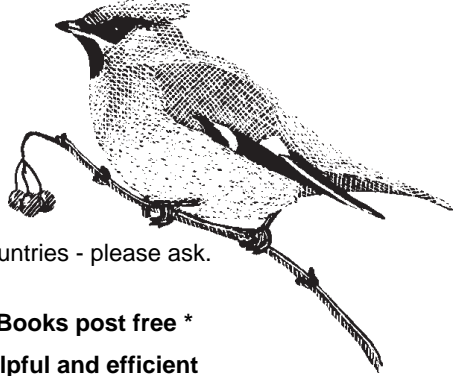
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PUBLICITY DRIVE UPDATE

The results of the recent publicity drive certainly prove that CAWOS members are capable of good ideas and innovative thought. Amongst the best suggestions for future consideration have been:

- The setting up of a junior section, with competitions and field trips.
- Better statistical analysis of records, especially a round up of all accepted Cheshire BBRC (and later County) rarities.
- Increased "active" conservation work, perhaps culminating in reserve development and management, linked to sponsorship from major employers within the county.
- Increased survey work on sites and individual species.

You will appreciate that the society is already reacting to some of the above. In fact some of you will already be involved in censuses, wardening etc. Many other suggestions have been made and if they pass the initial "litmus test" at council meetings, we will attempt to put them into action. At the end of this chain of activity is you, the membership. Please never feel that an offer of help is ignored or a suggestion sent cursorily binwards! We are keener than ever to develop an active membership and to act upon the most popular suggestions for change. However, as a medium sized society, we rely on our membership to spread the work load as evenly as possible. Let me illustrate this by an example. The publicity drive generated replies from 42 members, approximately 15% of the full membership. In total, 25 information packs were sent out to new prospective members, whose addresses were supplied by the respondents, 60 posters were mailed out, along with 192 membership forms. We received several high quality articles and promises of help. Now this in itself is very pleasing, in that we might have received no replies, requests or offers. As it is there ought to be a CAWOS poster on show at all the major sites in the County. If there is not one at your local site then ask yourself why not?

All the information we received indicates that you would like a more active society, doing more publicising, publishing more and more accessible to the membership. Please use stamped addressed envelope originally sent to you for your input. Recruit a new member, write an article, tell us what you don't like! With all the pressures on key habitats around the county only too evident, now is a dangerous time to be complacent.

Mark Turner, Publicity Officer, 12 Dovedale Rd, Hoylake, Merseyside L47 3AW

PS. Our first society merchandise should be available soon in the form of a car sticker. Please buy one and help publicise the society. It is one to be proud of !