

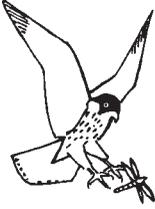
# Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society

# Bird News

Number 20 October 1993



Species Spotlight • Recent Reports • Peregrine Watch  
The Early Years • Notes & Letters • The Cormorant  
Woolston Eyes - Update • Ringers Notebook



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*Articles, Letters and Comments would be welcomed by the Editor*

Front cover: Spoonbill by Tony Broome

# Editorial

I was so engrossed in dreaming up clever headings for the July editorial that I singularly failed to carry out one of my principle duties, namely proof checking the copy. I really must apologise for allowing Colwyn Bay to be relocated to Anglesey in the article by Tony Broome on Black-Winged Stilts (page 3 line 2). This obviously should have read Cemlyn Bay and Birdline certainly didn't say Colwyn. Then on page 8 Ron Harrison's latest chapter of "The Early Years" is credited to Ron Harris. Sorry Ron! Whilst these errors and other lesser typographical mistakes shouldn't have been there they didn't prevent us from receiving a number of compliments regarding the contents. Reflecting on all my pleas in the early days (we are into the 6th year with the next issue) I'm sure the response of recent spontaneous articles is due to the excellent standard of Bird News. I trust that this issue maintains that standard. It is now a pleasant dilemma to have more copy than the nominal space available but although occasional articles will have to be held over to the following issue we would prefer to maintain topicality by adding pages. Thanks therefore to all but one of our regular contributors for meeting the stated deadline and particularly to those who sent in individual articles. But do keep up the good work.

It would be wrong for me to single out any particular contribution but one in this issue struck a particular chord with myself. Steve Holme's submission in the "Day (evening!) to Remember" series illustrates the great pleasure to be derived from routinely covering particular sites. Birdwatching has many facets but sharing regular trips with friends in a not over-serious way and then setting the world to rights over a pint or a meal seems just about ideal to me. Following my editorial comments in the last issue I would also like to draw your attention to David Cogger's invitation to a "Species Watch" team. An application form is enclosed but please read his article. Finally, I can endorse our newly appointed R.S.P.B. Youth Officer's (Jean Crouch) view that today's youth are tomorrows conservationists and custodians. If you feel strongly enough about this I'm sure she would very much welcome hearing from you. Her address and telephone number appear at the end of her article.

I will take the risk of raising an issue which has prompted some controversy in the letters section, namely Frodsham. There can be no conclusion to a subjective debate on the quality of the past and present habitat but few people would deny the boost to birds provided by the "new workings". The impact over such a short period has been considerable coming as it does from excavations not specifically designed for birds. For some while I thought that the advent of "set aside" to take out surplus farming capacity would mean a substantial opportunity for the creation of good natural habitats. This was until I was educated into the "rotational" nature of the scheme which means that land which is "set aside" is simply left fallow before being returned to use after three years. From this autumn however the E.C. have agreed to a scheme of "fixed" set aside where farmers can be supported to actively create habitat. We might hope that a more permanent, albeit much smaller, replica of the Frodsham "new workings" may one day be created at a similar strategic site.

RICHARD GABB

**PLEASE NOTE: the latest copy date for the January issue of Bird News is  
1st DECEMBER 1993**

# Species Spotlight

## SPOONBILL & LITTLE EGRET

To Cheshire and Wirral birdwatchers, both these birds are rare and welcome visitors. Although Spoonbill has been marginally more frequent, both are less than annual. What a pleasant change, therefore, when first a Spoonbill arrived and stayed at Frodsham for nearly a month, then four Little Egrets showed up there and one or two hung around for several weeks at Frodsham and Burton Marsh.

Both species are birds of open shallow stretches of water and are superficially similar. Their stories are rather different however. Spoonbills are specialist feeders; filtering water with a side to side movement, picking up food items by touch as well as by sight and are therefore mainly a nocturnal bird. This accounts for why it can often be seen standing on one leg with its beak securely tucked under its back feathers. I must admit to having suspected the RSPB of having a fixed platform with two model Spoonbills in this position which they move around from reserve to reserve.

Little Egrets are much more active and can be seen dashing around, stabbing at small fish. They hunt in standard heron style, standing and waiting but more often walking around, making themselves visible to observers.

Breeding populations and distributions of both species are obviously restricted to waterside areas but again differ quite markedly. Spoonbills bred in Britain up to the 17th century and were once a widespread breeder across Europe. Drainage of their favoured extensive marshes or reedbeds with open water throughout its range, as well as a certain amount of exploitation in previous years, have reduced the breeding populations substantially. Now the colony of 150-200 pairs on Texel, Holland, is our nearest, followed by Austria. Inevitably most British records have a south eastern bias and although birds do stray our way occasionally, numbers generally in the country are not high. So it remains, and probably will always remain, a rare bird in Cheshire and Wirral.

Little Egrets have enjoyed a come back over recent decades since the banning of hunting for plumes early this century, which, incidentally was one of the inspirations for the RSPB being established. From being a very rare bird in Britain where it is not traditionally a breeding bird its fortunes have changed. Who would have thought that Birdline would have been reporting a flock of 56 at Thorney Island (Sussex) or totals approaching 400 in the country. It is therefore not really a surprise that twelve, including our four, reached north western counties. If things continue along these lines we may well see breeding Egrets in the county.

Identification is rather straightforward, Spoonbills are larger bulkier birds and their beak shape is obvious. A distant flight view across Burton Marsh may seem difficult to those not familiar with the two species, but the Spoonbill's extended neck and legs distinguish easily from the Egret's hunched up neck. Even the flight pattern differs, Spoonbill's making several flaps followed by a glide, Little Egret's tend to flap continuously like other herons, gliding to land.

Finally, have you ever wondered why they are white? Well the theory goes that they are less noticeable to prey, more noticeable to others of their species (being gregarious feeders) and there may be a certain amount of reduction of heat absorption where they feed for hours in the open. Apparently paler underparts have less of a frightening effect on prey when seen from below and when seen feeding well out on a stretch of open water a white bird is very obvious and will draw in other birds to a good food supply.

Alan Roberts

### 1992 Cheshire & Wirral Bird Report News

You should receive the 1992 Cheshire & Wirral Bird Report at the same time as your Bird News. It contains 238 species in the main list, 49 of which are county rarities and 11 national rarities. The standard of the descriptions submitted to both rarity panels was generally high with about 300 looked at by the county panel, who accepted around 90% of them.

Sadly, some excellent sightings were not even considered for inclusion due to a complete lack of supporting descriptions. Please try to send them in! To all those people who did, thank you for bothering. They increase the quality of the report. Enjoy reading it!

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 late June to early September.*

**Little Grebes**, subject of a CAWOS breeding survey this year, were quick to take advantage of conditions at the new workings at Frodsham Marsh with a small post-breeding gathering. It has been considered that Mink have become an ever increasing threat to breeding waterfowl in parts of Cheshire in recent years. At Rostherne Mere NNR **Great Crested Grebes** have fared badly but following Mink trapping six pairs were successful there this summer - a much improved showing on recent years. **Black-necked Grebes** have generally made a poor showing, one or two were at Rostherne Mere NNR on a number of dates between June 19th and Aug 10th, one was at Farmwood Pool on July 21st and a recently fledged bird visited Budworth Mere on August 15th.

Small numbers of **Manx Shearwaters** were off Hilbre and Moreton early in July while a large passage was noted off Red Rocks on July 31st. Among the Manx Shearwaters three **Mediterranean Shearwaters** were seen, thereby doubling our previous total of this recently split species. **Gannets** were seen off the coast regularly from late July onward. There was a report of four **Cory's Shearwaters**, seen well, off Hilbre on August 7th. Very small numbers of **Storm Petrels** were reported from Hilbre, Red Rocks and Moreton in July.

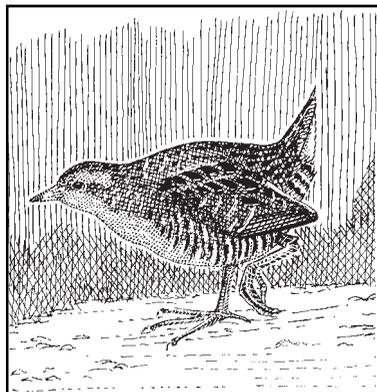
After reaching their lowest ebb in June and July numbers of **Cormorants** in the roost at Rostherne Mere NNR began to increase in August with 21 by the end of the month. A **Bittern** 'boomed' at Fiddlers Ferry on June 19th and perhaps the same bird was reported flying over Frodsham Marsh on August 16th. A **Little Egret** was reported from Burton Marsh in late June and again in mid-July. A party of four Little Egrets were discovered roosting near the Weaver Bend on August 8th (the first multiple sighting in Cheshire and Wirral) and later that day two gave distant views out on Frodsham Score, up to three then frequented the new workings on Frodsham Marsh from August 9th to 13th, one was on Hale Shore on August 13th; one was back at Frodsham Marsh from August 18th to 24th, one was on Burton Marsh in late August with two on August 29th and 30th. Up to 30 **Heron**s gathered on Frodsham Marsh from late June, while Fiddlers Ferry had a new maximum count of 50 in August. A **Spoonbill** frustrated some observers with irregular appearances on the new workings at Frodsham Marsh from July 12th to 17th and 24th to 29th and August 6th to 7th, one was at Inner Marsh Farm on August 10th.

More than 20 **Mute Swans** gathered on the River Dee at Chester in June while the flock in Tatton Park peaked at 48 on July 15th. The flock of feral **Greylag Geese** which moult at Rostherne Mere NNR was much reduced this year with a maximum of 30 compared with over 200 at the same time last year, does anyone know what happened to the missing 170? Once the Greylags regained their powers of flight numbers at Rostherne quickly increased to 243 by mid-August; 18 were at Budworth Mere on June 30th. A **Snow Goose** was present at Budworth Mere in August. A **Ruddy Shelduck** was off Hilbre on June 19th and at Parkgate on July 2nd. A drake **Wigeon** visited Bar Mere on June 18th, numbers on the estuaries began building up from August. Fiddlers Ferry hosted one or two **Garganey** irregularly in late July and early August while one or two were seen rather more often in July and August at Inner Marsh Farm; three remained on Frodsham Marsh until at least June 19th, two were noted here in early August while up to 12 ever-present in late August and early September often gave superb views; two were on Decca Pools on September 1st. A drake **Falcated Duck** attracted visitors to Inner Marsh Farm from mid-June to the end of the month but proved elusive to many. The usual **Red-crested Pochard** could be found on Melchett Mere in Tatton Park and visited Rostherne Mere NNR on August 17th. **Tufted Ducks** had a good breeding season at Inner Marsh Farm while six successful pairs at Doddington was described as unusually high. Two different female **Scaup** were on the new workings at Frodsham Marsh on August 28th with at least one next day. The regular summer movement of **Common Scoter** brought one or two to Catchpenny Pool, Doddington and Rostherne Mere NNR and parties of six to both Lamaload and Ridgeway Reservoirs between July 1st and August 18th; small parties were seen in flight off Red Rocks in late July and early August.

A drake **Goldeneye** summered on Farmwood Pool and one was at Rostherne Mere NNR from August 18th. Single 'red-headed' **Goosanders** were at Trentabank Reservoir on July 17th and Bosley Reservoir on August 21st; one appeared at Inner Marsh Farm in August. A pair of **Ruddy Ducks** at Sandbach Flashes was the first breeding here for several years, a female or immature at Poynton Pool on August 5th was the first here since May 1977.

A **Red Kite** was reported over Alderley Park and Capesthorpe on August 13th. A **Marsh Harrier** was on the Dee Marshes in early August and a female at Frodsham Marsh on August 13th and 18th. A male **Montagu's Harrier** passed through Woolston on June 13th. There were odd reports of **Buzzards** in July and August from Faddiley, Frodsham Marsh, Inner Marsh Farm and Tatton Park, on August 28th there were reports of two over Rostherne Mere NNR and five over Sandbach Flashes. **Ospreys** were reported from Northwich on July 2nd, Doddington on August 2nd, Bosley Reservoir on August 28th and Woolston on August 30th. **Merlins** were reported from both the Dee and Frodsham Marshes from August 13th and two often gave excellent views from Denhall Lane in late August. **Hobbys** gave enjoyment and excitement to observers at Shakerley Mere on June 14th, Focalpoint (Comberbach) on June 18th, Fiddlers Ferry on June 24th and 29th and July 17th, Rostherne Mere NNR on July 11th and August 2nd, 4th and 29th, Poynton Pool on July 17th, Wrenbury on August 8th, Sandbach Flashes on August 14th and 30th, Chelford SQ's on two dates in August and Burton Marsh (in front of many observers) from August 27th. Two **Peregrines** were regularly seen at Fiddlers Ferry in July and August and at least two on both the Dee, at sites from Red Rocks to Inner Marsh Farm, and on the Mersey throughout; singles were at Doddington on August 17th and Sandbach Flashes on August 22nd.

**Grey Partridges** appear to have had a good breeding season on Frodsham Marsh with a number of broods seen. A **Quail** called at Fiddlers Ferry on June 19th and there was a report from Frodsham Marsh next day, one called at Batherton on August 2nd and 3rd and two were flushed at Hurleston Lagoons on August 7th. Two **Water Rails** were at Inner Marsh Farm from July 13th onwards and singles at Bache House Pool on August 25th and Baddiley Mers next day. A **Spotted Crane** often gave good views at Inner Marsh Farm from August 22nd to 30th while this writer found one at Frodsham Marsh on August 31st and September 1st less obliging. **Coot** was one of the species benefitting from Mink trapping at Rostherne Mere NNR with the best breeding season for several years, a post-breeding build-up at Doddington totalled 290 on August 27th.



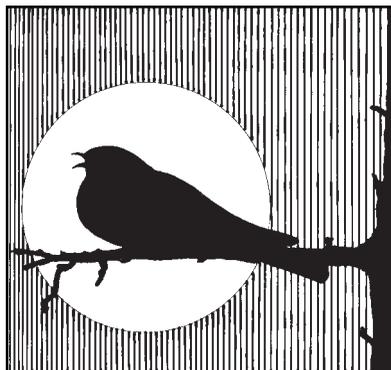
The post-breeding gathering of **Little Ringed Plovers** at Neumanns Flash was disappointing with a July maximum of only 20. The passage of **Ringed Plovers** is usually a feature of autumn at Frodsham Marsh, up to 1750 formed high tide roosts on the ICI and No 4 Tanks in August. Small numbers of **Golden Plover** appeared at Neumanns Flash and Frodsham Marsh from mid-August with a maximum of 30 at the latter site on September 1st. Up to 140 **Grey Plover**, many in superb full summer plumage joined the Frodsham Marsh high tide roosts in mid-August. Large **Lapwing** flocks included 3000 at Moore in early August and 1500 at Frodsham Marsh later in the month. Around 900 **Knot** summered on the Dee Estuary, singles were at Neumanns Flash for a few days in early August and at Sandbach Flashes from August 15th to 21st; up to 100 roosted out the highest tides at Frodsham Marsh. Up to five **Sanderling** were often among the Frodsham Marsh high tide roosts. **Little Stints** returned to Frodsham Marsh from early August with a maximum of ten, one was at Neumanns Flash in early August and up to three at Sandbach Flashes later in the month. A possible **Temmincks Stint** was at Inner Marsh Farm briefly on August 30th. The first returning adult **Curlew Sandpiper** was at Frodsham Marsh on July 19th, birds were often difficult to find but up to 20 (mostly juveniles) were present during the highest tides in August; 'twos' were at Sandbach Flashes on August 1st and Neumanns Flash at the end of August, four were at Inner Marsh Farm on August 28th. **Dunlin** began to build up at Frodsham Marsh from early July but numbers were small with even the largest high tide roosts struggling to reach 3000; small numbers were reported from Neumanns Flash and Sandbach Flashes.

**Ruff** numbers began to build up from mid-July at both Frodsham Marsh and Sandbach Flashes with respective August maxima of 50 and 15, Inner Marsh Farm had a maximum of 23 on August 29th and up to 11 were at Neumanns Flash around the same time; two were at Fiddlers Ferry on August 7th. Spectacular numbers of **Black-tailed Godwits** were in our area, many of the birds in superb plumage, up to 420 were at Inner Marsh Farm and up to 241 at Frodsham Marsh, ones and twos visited Neumanns Flash and Sandbach Flashes. I have heard of few reports of **Whimbrel** although up to three have been noted at Frodsham Marsh and two flew over Hurleston Reservoir on July 22nd. Inner Marsh Farm held up to ten **Spotted Redshanks** early in July, singles were at Sandbach Flashes on three dates in late July, three were at Neumanns Flash on August 11th and up to three occasionally on Frodsham Marsh. A **Greenshank** was at Sandbach Flashes on June 13th and three at Parkgate Boathouse Flash from July 2nd with up to five in August, Frodsham Marsh held up to five in July and 17 were at Inner Marsh Farm on July 26th, August saw a further influx with up to 31 at Inner Marsh Farm and 15 at Frodsham Marsh late in the month; August singles were also reported from Fiddlers Ferry, Nantwich and Sandbach Flashes. **Green Sandpipers** built up from mid-June at Sandbach Flashes with a maximum of 14 in August, up to three were reported fairly regularly throughout from Inner Marsh Farm and Frodsham Marsh, singles were at Woolston on July 10th and Doddington on August 12th while two at Rostherne Mere NNR on August 7th were welcomed as scarce species on the Reserve. In July single **Wood Sandpipers** were reported from Sandbach Flashes on 4th, Frodsham Marsh on 6th and Inner Marsh Farm on 9th, possibly the same bird accounting for all the sightings. Return passage of **Common Sandpipers** was noted from July 3rd at Rostherne Mere NNR while 37 had passed through Fiddlers Ferry by August 10th. Up to five **Turnstones** were seen among the Frodsham Marsh high tide roosts.

A few **Arctic Skuas** were seen off Hilbre and Red Rocks in late July and about 50 were reported from Hilbre on August 7th, in August an adult was inland at Neumanns Flash on 15th and a juvenile at Rostherne Mere NNR on 24th. Several **Great Skuas** were off Red Rocks on July 31st and a **Pomarine Skua** off Hilbre on August 7th. One or two different adult **Mediterranean Gulls** were in the Red Rocks/Hoylake area in late July and August, a second summer bird visited Frodsham Marsh on August 12th and an adult was at Inner Marsh Farm on August 28th. **Black-headed Gulls** were noted back roosting in small numbers at Rostherne Mere NNR from July 25th. A **Ring-billed Gull** was reported from Hilbre on June 30th. It seems to have been a poor summer for numbers of '**Yellow-legged Gulls**', a regular has been at Parkgate Boathouse Flash almost throughout the period while Fiddlers Ferry and Neumanns Flash have hosted only ones and twos - poor compared with the riches of last summer.

**Common Terns** have made a poor showing inland with two at Budworth Mere on June 18th, up to three at Rostherne Mere NNR in early July and singles on two dates in August, singles were in Tatton on an unknown date in late July or early August and Doddington on July 29th. **Arctic Terns** have fared even worse with one at Budworth Mere on June 18th the only inland report I have heard of. A visitor to Red Rocks in August could reasonably expect to see **Sandwich**, Common, Arctic and **Little Terns** the latter in poor numbers this year. I have heard of no **Black Terns** but a moulting adult **White-winged Black Tern** graced Inner Marsh Farm on July 20th and 21st. An adult **Black Guillemot** was off Hilbre from June into July.

A flock of 100 **Collared Doves** was at Fiddlers Ferry on August 1st. One or two **Turtle Doves** sang in the Rixton/ Glazebrook area in late June and early July, one was seen drinking from a pool at the new workings on an unspecified date at Frodsham Marsh. A **Barn Owl** was at Inner Marsh Farm on a number of evenings in July and early August. Two **Long-eared Owls** were reported from Woolston on July 3rd. The location of a **Nightjar** churring in June must remain undisclosed but is encouraging news. **Swifts** were still present in small numbers in late August. Two **Kingfishers** gave excellent views on the new workings at Frodsham Marsh on September 1st. A 'fly-by' **Red-rumped Swallow** was reported from Inner Marsh Farm on August 30th.



A **Tree Pipit** was discovered among passage **Yellow Wagtails** at Neumanns Flash on August 15th, small numbers of the latter species have passed through Frodsham Marsh in August. 70 **Pied Wagtails** were on a Nantwich school field on July 14th. A family party of **Whinchats** at Baddiley Meres all August suggested breeding there, one or two passed through Frodsham Marsh, Neumanns Flash and Sandbach Flashes in August.

Two pairs of **Stonechats** with young were noted between Leasowe and Meols. Passage **Wheatears** were reported from Hurlleston Reservoir and Tatton Park. A **Ring Ouzel** fed young at Danebower in late July. A party of 15 **Mistle Thrushes** was in Tatton Park on July 29th. A **Melodious Warbler** was reported from Hoylake on July 14th. By all accounts **Pied Flycatchers** have had a successful breeding season at several sites. A male **Golden Oriole** was at Thurstaston on July 7th. A juvenile **Red-backed Shrike** was an exciting find at the ICI Tank on Frodsham Marsh on September 1st. There is a report of 20 **Ravens** over Inner Marsh Farm on August 1st which if substantiated must be easily the largest ever party in Cheshire and Wirral. A number of reports of finch flocks indicate a successful breeding season in some areas at least. 100+ **Greenfinches** were at Doddington on August 17th, August reports of flocks of 150 **Linnets** come from both Doddington and Fiddlers Ferry while similar numbers at least were on Frodsham Marsh, in August about 45 **Goldfinches** were in Tatton Park and reports of flocks of 150 came from Fiddlers Ferry and Frodsham Marsh.

**Note** All contributions welcome, please send details for early September to the end of November to me at 14 Thornfield Grove, Cheadle Hulme, Stockport SK8 6AZ by December 1st.

*Thanks for this 'Recent Reports' go to Birdline NW, 'Bird Watching' Tony Broome, Andrew Green (south-west Cheshire), Eric Hardy, Ron Harrison, Andy Hearn, Paul Hill (Witton and Marbury Log), Kevin Hughes, Colin Lythgoe (SECOS area), Keith Massey (Fiddlers Ferry), Bill Morton, Joe O'Hanlon, Bryan Roberts (Tatton area), the Rostherne Log, Jane & Mark Turner, Colin Williams and anyone else who passed records on.*

Steve Barber

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## PEREGRINE WATCH 1993

For several years Peregrine Falcons have attempted to nest on the crag at Beeston Castle. They met with little success as either the eggs or the chicks were taken. Their attempts were followed with keen interest by members of the local community, who asked for assistance in protecting the nest.

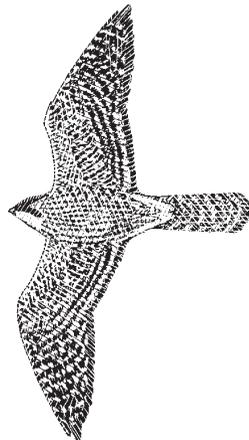
Early in 1993 a voluntary group emerged. The main organisers were PC Mike Wellman, Cheshire Constabulary's Wildlife and Environmental Officer, and Harry Espley, who acted as site co-ordinator. English Heritage, owners of the Castle, and Peckforton Estates gave their permission for the watch to take place on their land and help was also given by RSPB, RSPCA, English Nature, Countryside Rangers and Forest Enterprise. Nearly one hundred people volunteered to help; these included members of the local community and members of CAWOS, CADOS, Mid Cheshire OS and the Wirral and Cheshire Badger Group. Volunteers were organised into seven groups and the person in charge of each day had the job of drawing up a rota so that a 24-hour watch was kept. The watch began shortly after an initial meeting on 6 April and continued until 25 June, by which time all four young had fledged safely.

The group could not have functioned at all without the cooperation of Mr and Mrs Blinkhorn at Home Farm. An excellent view of the crag can be obtained from their yard, which they kindly allowed us to use as a parking area and vantage point. In wet weather we could shelter in the dairy or in the farm office. Each daily group operated as a separate unit and worked in 4, 6 or 8 hour shifts, as convenient. Normally two people were watching though one could manage, especially in the daytime. Our job was to keep watch on the site, deter anyone at the top of the castle from going over the wall and noting any suspicious persons or vehicles - and of course to watch the Peregrines and other birds. It is greatly to the credit of those concerned that there were only four shifts during the next eleven weeks when the site was not manned.

We had the backing of the Cheshire Constabulary, though it was emphasised that our job was to report incidents rather than tackle intruders; the County Planning Department supplied a mobile phone and the Police a powerful searchlight. Suspicious cars were reported to the police, who made 8 arrests for various offences and recovered two stolen cars!

Those who broke into the castle premises one evening were doubtless very surprised to be arrested later that same night! The castle is a venue for many illicit parties by small groups of youths and girls, but few posed a serious threat to the birds. Two suspicious characters reported to the police by watchers turned out to be security wardens, who in turn had reported the watchers! Four people known nationally for stealing eggs or chicks were disturbed on their way to the site.

Enough of humans - what about Peregrines? The eggs were laid early in April and for the rest of that month there was little activity - the female sitting, the male hunting and bringing food to the larder which he established close to the nest. The arrival of a third bird, a female, produced some interesting aerial fights, in one of which the female had the third bird down on the ledge before finally letting her go! Colin Lythgoe from the BTO checked the nest on 21 April and found four eggs. A week later intense activity by the male - harrying any bird nearing the nest - made us believe that hatching had started, and the presence of 3 chicks was confirmed on 4 May. A fourth, smaller than the rest, was later found when the chicks were ringed.



Before the end of May the chicks could be seen exercising and wing-flapping. The nest was cleverly placed so that the chicks survived the rain which affected the Black-winged Stilts at Frodsham, and on 4 June the first chick flew. It had been intended to end the watch in the middle of June, but it was extended as two of the chicks were not then capable of sustained flight. One landed on the road round the castle and was taken back up near the nest site. The watch ended with all four flying successfully and when this article was written in mid-July all six birds were still in the area.

Most birdwatchers' views of peregrines are either as blobs on a distant post or as objects moving swiftly through the air. The watch gave us a great chance to see them at really close quarters for although we were 400 feet below them we could see them well against the sky. Most activities were seen - soaring, gliding, the flight with its rather weak wing-flapping, the pair hunting with the male flushing out birds and the dash out from the crag towards a possible kill. Several kills were seen, as was the passing of the kill in mid-air both to the female and to the young. A cascade of feathers down the cliff was a sure sign of plucking. Prey was difficult to identify but included pigeons of various types and some smaller birds.

Apart from Peregrines, many other birds were seen. There were spectacular confrontations with jackdaws and other corvids, while birds of prey seen were Buzzard, Goshawk, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel. Owls, warblers and many other songbirds were noted in the log book provided by CADOS. A highflying microlite apparently flapping its wings was correctly identified as a spoonbill, while perhaps the most unlikely bird was the fulmar which flew round the crag not just once, but on several different occasions. One watcher helped rescue an injured young badger and various other animals and insects were seen and recorded.

What were the results of all this effort? The operation was successful - the young flew. Several potential nest-robbers were deterred and the goodwill of the local community strengthened. Most watchers were not CAWOS members but several did join us. Although no publicity was given through the press until the end of the watch, many people in the know did drop in to see what was happening. Pressure on car parking would make it impossible to open up the site completely, as at Symonds' Yat or Rishforth. All who experienced it will long remember the beauty, grace and power of the Peregrine, seen at close quarters by many for the first time.

David Cogger



### **Remember Remember the 8th of November!**

Richard Thaxton will be making an epic 800 mile round trip for his first visit to CAWOS to give us his talk on the Abernethy Forest.

Please support this meeting on Monday, 8th November 1993.

# The Early Years

## Ron Harrison's Story Continued

The highlight of these early years was however a weekend that a party of us had on Lindisfarne from January 6th to 8th. What an outing! I have often remarked that they nearly buried me there. Starting off with heavy cold, in thick fog with Stan Dobson, Sidney Jacobs and Arthur Johnson as passengers, we struggled over the Pennines finally finding ourselves in brilliant sunshine. Peter Wolstenholme and Bill Mulligan were to join us on the following morning. The weather suddenly changed and the first night saw six feet of snow blocking the A1 at Alnwick, and Bill who arrived by train had to struggle through with a taxi. An 80 mph gale lashed the coast and blew the snow off the island but left the roads like staling rinks. Never have I been so cold, both before or since. I had jerseys and an army "greatcoat" on and finally a wartime gas cape which was the one thing which kept out the cold. With my nose bleeding with cold I decided to hang about the harbour whilst the others braved the elements and made it to Emanuel Head where they had "everything". Little Auks, Gannets, Fulmars, Velvet and Common Scoters, Long-tailed Ducks etc etc whilst in the harbour I sorted out three species of diver, five species of grebe, and in addition saw thousands of wigeon and other duck from the shelter of the harbour wall. The following day it abated somewhat and with assistance and by driving part way along "Crooked Lonnie", a rough track leading to Snipe Point, I made it to the sea but even then the wind was so strong I couldn't stand up. We saw most of the previous days birds but not the Little Auks, a species which still eludes me as I write this. On the way back the van became stuck in the snow and when pushing it Bill Mulligan removed my rear window, an incident he regretted on our homeward journey. We saw three species of swan, Snow Buntings, Peregrine and countless other rarities. That "holiday" will always be etched on my mind for the good company and the happy atmosphere in the pub at night when we made up our bird lists for the day as well as the scary moments driving home along highly lethal roads, with snow still falling and only one pass across the Pennines open. We thoroughly enjoyed it and I swore that I would visit it again, but alas I never did. That was probably my first occasion doing what is now the norm, a "big twitch". This preceded other trips like the day spent at Hartlepool watching a Dusky Thrush and a Red-backed Shrike and a trip to a lake near Harrogate to see a Pied-billed Grebe thanks to having received a letter from Graham Bell, one of the ASF regulars who has emigrated to Teeside and in fact was later a member of the "BB" rarities committee. Weekend visits took us to many of the places in Shropshire where I had "dangled a worm" and places in North Wales that Ray had spent weekends surveying on his motor-bike. The van was always full, the cost being shared by one and all.

We began to make occasional weekend trips with Ray organising the two days bed and breakfast, which usually meant sharing a room in somebody's cottage. There were the trips to Anglesey to watch the Montagu's Harriers that nested at that time in the new forestry area at Malltraeth and to look for Roseate Terns on the new RSPB Reserve at Llandwyn Island, which was strictly wardened by the well known Elizabeth Jones, who kept all-comers at bay. Ray, when on his own, used to ring her from the mainland and ask if she wanted any shopping done as he was coming over, so he avoided the necessity of a permit. Whilst looking for the Montagu's Harriers in the forest area we were accosted by the new warden DP Morgan who was on the lookout for egg collectors and photographers. When we had passed his scrutiny he showed us the area where we could watch the pair making their "food pass". We became very friendly with him, unfortunately he died shortly afterwards. The nest site was lost as the trees grew, affecting Short-eared Owls as well as the Harriers.

About this time, John Wilkinson, one of the group of friends that regularly visited the Moss, was prospecting the area, ultimately retiring to live in the village of Malltraeth. Being a chemist he had very little spare time, only occasional Sundays and Wednesday afternoons. Usually on the latter he ended up visiting Rostherne and Tatton, so he rarely shared our outings and was indeed virtually a "loner" except for being very much in touch by post. I still have a letter telling me of his wonderful experience in finding only the third Wilson's Phalarope to be recorded in the British Isles. It was in full summer plumage on the Cob Pool at Malltraeth and was verified by Tunnicliffe who was resident there, the end result being a beautiful painting of the bird which John still has. He was instrumental in finding another of the same species at Shotton Pools in September 1959, only this time it was in winter plumage. By now we were thinking of renaming the bird "Wilkinson's Phalarope".

It was on our Anglesey trips that we first met the Waltons of St Asaph and Peter Hope Jones, a young ornithologist who was soon to become an authority on the wildlife of North Wales. It was from them that we learned of the Black-necked Grebes at Llyn Llywenan, the Roseate Terns on Ynys Fenrig and the reserve at Cemlyn Bay where Hewitt the infamous egg collector endeavored during the war time to enclose the ternery within a high brick wall only to have it stopped when half built. This story and others like it emanated from Eric Hardy whom we met there on our first visit.

There were the annual Solway trips to see the geese, long before it became so popular, and again Ray arranged the booking. On one occasion we were unable to find our usual place and ended up in a lodging house sleeping three to a bed, but for only ten shillings a night and we had a wonderful breakfast. Places like Leighton Moss, before it became an RSPB Reserve, and the Southport mossland became regular venues in winter time. We used to go to the Bescar Lane end of the moss and it was on one of these visits in 1958 that we found what turned out to be a Blue Snow Goose, the second record for Great Britain; one had been reported in Scotland previously. At the time it caused quite a stir, making a headline in Eric Hardy's "Countryside" report "Blue Goose Fever". Peter Scott was there on the same weekend and confirmed our identification. The area known as Whams Farm is behind the new Wildfowl Trust, Martin Mere, and hosted another Blue Snow Goose a few years later. It was Peter Scott's visit to the area that sowed the seeds for the by now highly popular bird reserve that is visited annually by thousands of people and which was a carbon-copy of his successful venture at Slimbridge.

Two of the regular visitors to the Altrincham Sewage Farm were a Mr and Mrs Palmer, he being a bank manager in Cheadle and a close friend of Stanley Dobson. When Mr Palmer tragically died Ruth Palmer moved to a village in Norfolk called Cley next the Sea (did I hear someone say "never heard of it?") the news began to circulate through the usual grapevine at that time of the very good birdwatching to be had on the heaths and marshes and so came our first visit to the area in May 1959. Frank Moscrop and I were to go down by van and meet up with Ray who would arrive later on his motor bike and finally to be joined by Stanley who was returning from a visit to his brother in France, he was also on a motorcycle. Ray however never made it for we received a telegram saying he had been attacked by a lorry on his way. We made efforts to find Ruth Palmer's house "Moppets", finally locating it on the main coast road, the last house out of town next to a gravel or flint stone pit, where the Parrinder Visitor Centre now stands. We stopped at the gate and saw our first new bird, a Red-backed Shrike, perching on the telephone wires. Having made ourselves known we asked Ruth if she knew about the shrike, "oh yes" she replied, "they nest in the gravel pit". So began what to me, and later my wife Babs, a wonderful friendship with a very remarkable lady. She introduced Frank and I to Billy Bishop the warden of the Cley Reserve and better still to Piggin the warden of Hickling Broad. It was he who took us around the Reserve in a Norfolk punt, showing off his wondrous domain. He showed us Miss Turner's hide from which she took photos of the birds and he took us around White Sleat Lodge where the Royal Family stayed whilst visiting the area. A fantastic place with all the rooms adorned by large framed pictures by Lodge each depicting one particular family of birds, raptors in one, sea birds in another, warblers in another and so on, even the loos were treated in the same fashion. The friezes around the walls showed scenes from the Broads with Short-eared Owls, Harriers and Ospreys hunting over the reedbeds, they were painted by a well known local artist. She escorted us around all the "bird spots" introducing us to the local wonders. Stone Curlews, Long-eared Owl, Nightingales, more Red-backed Shrikes, Nightjars - we even went looking for Wood Larks in the Holt Lowes. She introduced us to "Richard" or RA Richardson as he was formally known and to an ever increasing circle of birding friends and acquaintances some of whom like Prof. Meiklejohn became universally known. Most of our group began visiting the area on a regular basis, for some it became an obsession, and to one person in particular, Peter Wolstenholme, a second home.

Needless to say Scotland had also become a target in our endeavors to expand our life lists and my first trip to the west coast in search of the elusive Black Guillemot and divers ended in Mallaig. After a hair raising drive along the old "road to the isles", which at that time was single lane and wound up and down like the "Big Dipper" at Blackpool, we were on our last gallon of petrol and by the time we reached the first petrol pumps at the Arisaig Hotel I must have owed it half a gallon. The pint of beer we had on finding out that they really did sell petrol went down very well. Babs however was in a state of terror, for there had been little room for errors negotiating the bends, but what a fabulous journey! We visited the area again in later years but a new road had been blasted out of the rock and the excitement was never repeated.

Ron Harrison

# Notes & Letters

## TATTON PARK

In Bird News no. 18., Tony Usher again showed that Tatton Park is a good patch to work. However, for years locals have known that Tatton has been developing two increasingly successful technical systems:-

- System A - Originally based on a Startrek design, an invisible rarity deflector, has been operating at the boundary of the Park.
- System B - Based on a Fort Knox design, a highly visible people deflector, has been progressively installed, again at the perimeter.

Be warned that the next time System A fails, you won't get in before 8am. and you won't get out after 5pm (7pm summer), and don't even think about a winter Monday.

So the next time you wish to visit the Alton Towers of the National Trust (if you can find it open), why not walk in, leave the car outside and save a couple of quid. You probably already paid them enough via the Council Tax!

Bryan Roberts, 55 Mereheath Park, Knutsford, Cheshire, WA16 6AS.

P.S. System A has now been almost perfected and Tony's gallon of Boddington's Bitter looks totally safe!

## FRODSHAM - "ABOVE AND BEYOND THE STILTS"

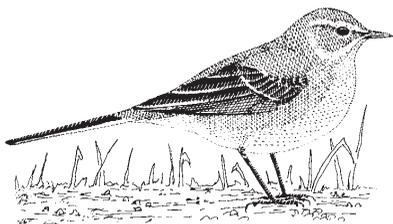
At the end of the otherwise excellent article on the Black-winged Stilt saga by Tony Broome in the July 1993 Bird News I was surprised to see the comment that the presence of these birds shows how good a site Frodsham Marsh is. The well-documented records in CBRs, our Breeding Bird Atlas and Garner and Morton's Birds of Frodsham Marsh show that for the last fifteen years or more the area has held the highest concentrations of breeding Lapwings and Grey Partridges in the county, and the biggest population of Meadow Pipits away from the eastern moorland. It is one of the few regular breeding places in the county for Shoveler and Redshank, while the Sedge Warbler population is probably exceeded only at Woolston, and the total of Reed Warblers rivals that of Rostherne Mere. With all these species breeding every year in regionally important numbers at Frodsham Marsh I find it disappointing that the County Recorder (of all people!) thinks it needs a rarity to show "how good" the site is.

(Professor) David Norman, Rowswood Cottage, Ridding Lane, Sutton Weaver, Runcorn, Cheshire

[Rather than waiting until the January 1994 Bird News, I asked Tony Broome for his defence which follows. ED]

## REPLY - "FRODSHAM IN CONTEXT"

I am grateful to Professor Norman for once again emphasizing the true significance of sites like Frodsham. He is absolutely correct in his reference to the breeding densities of what are generally thought of as "common" species. There is also much debate amongst ornithological bodies as to whether "strays and waifs" breeding a long way outside their normal range warrant the enormous amounts of energy and money when their world populations are not threatened. Species that genuinely deserve more attention, for example, the Peregrine, cannot always be guaranteed the resources needed to ensure the protection of every pair. Should therefore the survival of relatively small populations of "British" rare breeding birds, again "safe" on a worldwide scale, take precedence over a rapidly declining, once common, breeding species?



The discussion, the fors and againsts, would take up volumes of "Bird News" and probably never reach a solution that satisfied everyone. It is a fact, albeit a sad one, that the majority of today's birdwatchers call in on places such as Frodsham to see the more unusual avian visitors. One day perhaps, when the Yellow Wagtail is as rare as Citrine, that species will also be worthy of the attention of the masses.

You only have to read the Editorial of the last issue, or talk to Billy Morton, to find the evidence necessary - except for a few "real" birdwatchers, no one goes to Frodsham unless there is something unusual to see. Even for "respectable" wader counters the prospect of finding an American or Siberian vagrant amongst the thousands of Dunlin provides the "spice" and a great deal of emphasis is placed on these rarities. Witness the rapid growth of successful Bird-Lines.

So, Professor Norman, I agree with you whole-heartedly except for the fact that you are preaching to a birdwatcher who was converted from being solely a twitcher many years ago to someone who genuinely cares about Grey Partridges and the like, who puts a great deal of effort and time into county ornithology in various ways, but who is realistic enough to use a nesting pair of Black-winged Stilts to promote Frodsham in the hope that visitors will appreciate it's other attractions whilst they are there!

It is these visits that will hopefully make people aware of how excellent these areas are, for breeding birds and migrants alike. Unfortunately, official ornithological organisations are so under-funded that creation or salvation is left to commerce and industry. Do they care about how many Sedge Warblers there are at Frodsham?

Tony Broome (C.R.)

## **EGG DUMPING BY BLUE TITS**

As part of the BTO Nest Record Scheme I regularly check a number of nest boxes erected by Mid-Cheshire Ornithological Society in Hatton's Hey Wood and other nearby woods alongside the River Weaver near Kingsley. The main occupants of these boxes are titmice species with the occasional Nuthatch to add variety. Not very interesting you may think but surprises do occur.

On the 23rd of April one box was found to contain four Great Tit eggs being incubated by one of the parents. On the 29th the nest held ten eggs, two of these were however noticeably smaller than the rest by about ten percent and also slightly paler. I put this down to the exertions of laying a large clutch. Incubation, hatching and development of the young continued as expected. However on the 29th of May when the chicks were fully feathered the nest was seen to contain eight Great Tit and two Blue Tit chicks all healthy and apparently happy. Two days later the brood had all flown.

The Blue Tit had obviously entered the box and laid its two eggs after the rightful occupants had started their clutch as the first four eggs were most definitely those of the Great Tit. Egg dumping is well documented but usually amongst members of the same species. Not having come across this behaviour before I wrote to the BTO to find out if this was a regular occurrence. The answer is shown below.

Joe Carroll, 24 Beech Heyes Close, Weaverham, Northwich, Cheshire CW8 3BX

Very many thanks for your interesting letter describing egg dumping in your nestbox population. The answer basically is 'Yes' egg dumping occurs in more than 1% of the high density nestbox programmes in Britain, especially after a series of mild winters (as now with 1992/93 the fourth of five) and populations are at unusually high levels (as BTO Common Birds Census currently shows).

"Combinations" of egg mixtures vary but most often it is Great Tit taking over Blue Tit's partially completed clutch and often successfully rearing a mixed brood. Great Tits physically dominate both Blue and Coal Tits and as titmice populations grow with a series of mild winters or beech mast years you may have noticed how the percentage of boxes occupied increases at the expense of the smaller Blue Tit (hence the precaution of including extra boxes with smaller nest hole diametres).

Pied Flycatchers can also be involved (if lucky enough to have them) and they will rear Great Tit young and vice versa. DNA studies are just developing and early findings suggest that parental combinations at nests may be far more complicated than one presumes from an interested nestbox inspector making weekly visits. For some species it seems likely that some young in many nests may be sired by more than one male - though these are early days yet. And in the unnatural but important world of high density nestbox programmes for cavity nesting birds a tangled story of extra-marital intrigue is likely to be not uncommon. We await further findings with interest - meanwhile, do please keep up the good work in charting the breeding fortunes of your birds.

David Glue (BRITISH TRUST FOR ORNITHOLOGY)

## IN FOCUS - COUNTY BIRD RACE '93

### (IN SUPPORT OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL'S POLISH WETLANDS APPEAL)

Following the achievements of the Dunnocks Team in the Bird Race last year - we came last, 156th out of 156 - we decided to do lots more pre-Race preparation this year. Annual Bird Reports, Breeding Bird Atlases and Where To Watch Birds books were all scrutinised. Which birds were likely, which were possible, which were an outside chance? Which sites were good, which were duff? Site visits were made, routes were checked and our target for the day was to beat the 50 birds which we saw last year.

Unfortunately, all of this planning failed to take into account one factor - the weather. The morning of 15th May revealed overcast skies which threatened rain. A quick call to BirdLine North West at 0545 provided some cheer however: Temminck's Stint and Little Stint at Neumann's Flash plus Common and Arctic Terns at Budworth Mere - both sites on our list!!

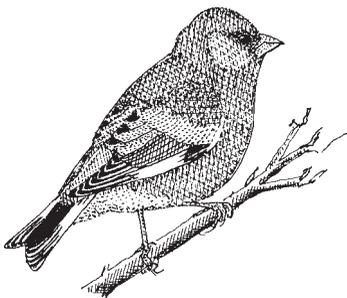
We set off at 0700 (1 hour earlier than last year) and headed towards Moreton on the Wirral. The journey turned up a few bits and pieces, Magpie, Starling and Carrion Crow, but the weather was looking worse and worse. On arrival at Moreton, we got out of the car and had a glimpse of a Wheatear but were unable to confirm it. The weather was rotten, gale force winds and bucketfuls of rain, so we sat in the car until it eased off. It calmed enough for us to do a very brief tour of the site picking up only Linnet, Feral Dove and Skylark. To add to this disappointing start, the tide was in so there were none of the expected waders on the tideline.

After an hour of waiting, freezing and getting wet we decided to push on to Red Rocks. The rain eased off on the way, but as soon as the car stopped, it bucketed down again. When it stopped, the team walked out onto the rocks to see .....Nothing!! Not a sausage - not even a bird. The tide was miles out and so were the waders. Any sensible bird had probably taken one look at the weather and gone back to bed! We got back in the car, and by this time, the team leader's chin was on his knees. All that planning .....

We carried on to West Kirby to find a loo (at Safeways) and after a cup of coffee, things looked a bit brighter. We bought a bag of mints (so that we could get out of the car park !!) and decided not to pack it all in, but to bite the bullet and carry on. Even the weather looked a bit better.

Next stop was Stapleton Wood, and we hadn't even entered the wood before we picked up a stunning Jay. We had soon scored Wren, Robin, Mistle Thrush, Blackbird, Blue Tit, Chaffinch and a particularly cheeky Great Tit. At last we were into double figures and a lot more cheerful.

Then down the coast to Caldy Blacks, and what at first looked like a rock in the mud, turned out to be a magnificent Peregrine which was busily ripping apart another bird and carried on doing so throughout our stay. We also picked up Herring Gull, Shelduck, Oystercatcher, Curlew and Redshank. One team member was so impressed by the Peregrine that we nearly left here as a three-man team and minus one telescope! We hope we didn't need the bird which it was eating!!



Next site on the list was Thurstaston Country Park. It was raining again as we dashed towards the visitor centre scattering OAPs on the way. When it stopped, we soon picked up our first House Sparrow. This was followed by Greenfinch, Grey Heron, Greenfinch, Cormorant, Greenfinch, Mallard, Greenfinch, Collared Dove, Greenfinch, Wood Pigeon, Greenfinch and Swift. Oh yes, and Greenfinch - a bit like Lapwings last year!! We missed Willow Tit and Yellowhammer which were supposed to be here.

Now the important bit - Lunch. It really is about time that the BirdRace organisers introduced a new prize category for the "Team which has the longest dinner break" or the "Team which eats the biggest Banana Split" - we might win something then.

After lunch, we carried on down the Wirral Coast to Burton Point. It was fairly quiet here, but we added Moorhen, House Martin, Lapwing, Swallow, Black Headed Gull and two eagerly awaited birds - Reed Bunting and Goldfinch.

Then on to the RSPB reserve at Inner Marsh Farm, and as we had hoped, this site delivered the goods for us - Mute Swan, Greylag Geese, Canada Geese, Sand Martins, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Coot, Rooks, Dunlin, Pied Wagtail, Shoveler, Black-tailed Godwits, a splendid Sedge Warbler singing its head off, and quite unexpectedly three Common Terns. We just managed to miss Pintail, Little Grebe and Wigeon here, but we left feeling confident with 49 birds behind us.

We decided to give Frodsham a miss because we didn't have a great deal of time left, and headed straight to Marbury Country Park and the delights of Budworth Mere picking up a Kestrel on the way. The team were relying on this site to produce some of the more ordinary birds like Dunnock, Coal Tit, Jackdaw, Nuthatch, Treecreeper and Long Tailed Tit but it was not to be. However, it served us well, with a dazzling male Ruddy Duck, Song Thrush, Lesser Black-backed Gull and lots of Great Crested Grebes. As promised by Birdline, there were Arctic Terns with the Common Terns, but quite unexpected was a Little Gull.

We now only had time for one more site, and since we had beaten our score from last year, we decided to go for Neumann's Flash to see if we could score something unusual rather than Sandbach Flashes. It proved to be a good decision because as well as Ringed Plover and Little Ringed Plover, this site provided a tiny Little Stint feeding next to Dunlin. This delightful wader kept up our tradition of finding Stints on the big day (or at least, having them pointed out to us), and brought us to the end of a very enjoyable day with a much improved 59 species in 12 hours.

Next year, we will probably aim for a target of 70 species, but since we missed such easy birds as Teal and Cuckoo, plus others which we know were knocking about, we might even beat that with better weather!!

Don't forget, that the money raised this year will go to help set up the new reserve which is being established at Karsiborska Kepa in the Swina Estuary on the Baltic Coast of Poland. This island is home to about 100 pairs of Aquatic Warbler - that's about 1% of the total world population. Other breeding species include Little Bittern, Marsh Harrier, Hen Harrier, Dunlin, Great Snipe, Corncrake, Redshank, Ruff, Curlew and Black-tailed Godwit. It also provides a resting and feeding area for White-tailed Eagle, Red Kite and Cranes. Other notable birds occurring in Polish wetlands include Garganey, White Stork and Black Tern.

The money which the Dunnock's team has raised will help to provide essential infrastructure for the reserve including hides, walkways and information centre, car park and wardens. The overall fundraising target for the Polish Wetlands Project is £75,000 - so if you haven't coughed up already, please send the money or a cheque made payable to BirdLife International - and thanks for your continued support.

M D Holmes, 114 Merlin Way, Coppenhall, Crewe, Cheshire, CW1 3RZ.

[Surely a contribution towards the project is warranted by this antidote to intense birdracing. ED]

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## 150 IN A DAY IN CHESHIRE

I read James Walsh's report on his team's bird race with a pang of conscience! I'm afraid he will have to go to the magic 150 mark to now beat the record for the most species seen in a day within the county boundary, as a team led by myself achieved 149 on May 2nd this year. Although I was part of Tony Broome's record setting team of '92, various circumstances meant that we could not get the same team together to race again in 1993, so I decided to race with my three regular birding colleagues. Whilst not as experienced as the '92 team, these young lads, Phil Marley, Mike Crawley and John Adshead, with lists in the low 300's, were keen as mustard and twice as sharp, often putting us older 400+ boys to shame! Another reason for having another go, was that I passionately believe that 150 species can be seen in a day in Cheshire if you plan your sites carefully and get a little bit of luck!

Rather than go through the usual style of a report on what we saw where, which often appears mundane, and perhaps is not really that interesting, I thought I would give my perception of how you go about getting up towards that magic 150 total, which despite only hitting 149, I still believe is achievable.

First, find yourself a good sponsor or two. This year Zeneca Pharmaceuticals paid for all our food and petrol needs for the day, and Avis of Macclesfield provided a spacious Escort estate. This then leaves just the sites and expected birds to sort out. I find it is important to do a list of the species you will definitely see, ie. Cormorant, Grey Heron, or Magpie type species which are bound to be about if you visit a series of habitats in Cheshire, ie. there is no way you will not see these if you have your eyes open! I make these about 56 in total. Then the “almost certain” ie. those which should be around. Like Little Grebe or Reed Warbler which could be at several sites, but which by some quirk of fate may have disappeared on the day, ie. a 90%+ chance of connecting with, of these there are about 38. Now we get into the “probables”. These are birds like Wigeon, Bar-tailed Godwit or Bullfinch, which again should be at one or two sites, but realistically you could be unlucky, ie. only a 75%+ chance of seeing a probable. I have about 36 of these. That makes a running total of 131. Clearly to hit 140+ you have to be confident you can see all of these!

The remaining species come into the “possibles” ranging from birds like Divers, Goldeneye, Black Tern to Stonechat, ie. they are perhaps one site only species or lingering winter visitors or maybe scarcer migrants. It is the 26 of these that in my view breaks or makes a bird race total! Some are surprisingly easy, others a real pain to pre-plan for a site. There are also the “unlikely” category, birds like Marsh Harrier, Quail, Crossbill, Hawfinch, etc. which may be available on the day and help to pad out the list, and supplement any of the possibles you don’t get.

So once you’ve sorted your birds, thirdly, plan your route and timings to maximise seeing these at your sites. In my view the first week in May, is the peak time. At this time there are still winter visitors lingering, passerines moving through coastal sites and all migrants back on breeding sites in the eastern hills. Try racing a week later and some waders will have gone, some sea birds might not be available, and some species like woodpeckers have gone quiet!

There is also, I believe, only one way to bird race Cheshire, and that is to check the high tide time on the Wirral and the wind direction as both dictate where you should be at first light. A high tide around 8.30am at Red Rocks is ideal, as it means you can plan and target to pick off awkward nocturnal species, like one site Owls or Woodcock from mid-night onwards, get Grasshopper Warbler and Water Rail out of the way if possible and then collect any other night callers on the Dee Marshes, before waiting for first light either at New Brighton, or if the tide is right, overlooking the Dee for Scaup. A quick check for migrants along the north shore will always add a few and is useful to get birds like Tree Sparrow and Grey Partridge out of the way, but you need those odd finches and pipits that pass over as well.

New Brighton should add several good species, as will Stapleton Woods, before you hasten up for a sea watch off Red Rocks at high tide. The only people who are surprised at divers, sea-duck, auks and even shearwaters being off Red Rocks in early May are the ones who never go sea-watching there! By now it will be around 9.00am, and you should be on 80+ species, then its down to IMF and that splendid new hide to really mop up on all those ducks and waders. This site added 29 species for us, and meant that by 10.00am we were 120 species up with the rest of the day ahead of us.

Then its on towards the eastern hills via Crook of Dee, Kingsley, Marbury Country Park and Neumann’s Flash, depending on what’s missing from your total. By now you should be left with a list of specific sites for specific birds, like Goldeneye at Tatton or Rostherne, or Ring-necked Parakeet at Poynton Park. Yes and do list all the feral geese you can, they all count! Then its into the eastern hills, where several sites will give you Tree Pipits, Wood Warblers, Dipper, Grey Wagtail etc., but Goshawk, Red Grouse and Golden Plover need pre-planned visits in late April to target birds on territory.

So what did we miss? Well when you think we saw 149 without Buzzard, Stonechat, Whinchat, Little Tern, Grasshopper Warbler, Sanderling, Red-legged Partridge and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, then perhaps next year someone will cross the 150 barrier! Although we were beaten into fourth place on handicap we did share national honours with a team from Norfolk for seeing the most species.

### **HOUSE MARTIN SURVEY FORMS**

Hugh Pulsford

Please return your survey forms as quickly as possible to Sheila Blamire

## HARD TO SWALLOW?

In 1750 there is record of an energetic debate on the whereabouts of the “Swallow tribe” in winter. Mr M. Klein published a paper entitled “Curious Observations on the Nature and Dispositions of Swallows” tending to prove they are not birds of passage! Some ancient writers had claimed that they were birds of passage, others like Aristotle preferred to believe that only some went away, “whilst others, not so expeditious, are obliged to stay behind and retire into holes and corners, where they pluck off their own feathers, and thus repose themselves during the winter, naked, as if it were in bed”. Another popularly held belief was that they retired to lakes and pools, lying “at the bottom in a torpid state during the winter”.

Klein asked several questions and tried to propagate the answers himself. Were there any other species of Swallows in the world? Did they migrate? What could be learnt from studying them? A Mr Catesby from Virginia, Carolina mentioned only one Swallow, he called the Purple Martin. Klein didn't rank it as a Swallow because it “builds in holes in houses etc, like the pigeon ...”. American Swallows wouldn't migrate from Jamaica to South America because it was always so warm in Jamaica, even in winter. In hot countries they must retire to old houses, willow trees, reeds etc. where they remain in a torpid state. Within Europe there were four species: the “Common” or “Chimney Swallow” (House Martin), the “martin” or “martlet” (Swallow), the “sand martin” or “shore bird” and the “black martin” or “swift”.

Birds in Poland and Russia were thought to seek refuge under stones and the roots of trees “from whence at times they sally forth in quest of food and return”. They then apparently contracted a state of torpid lethargy which continued 'till the warmth of the sun “resolves the lentor of the blood, brought on by the cold, renews its natural circulation, and rouses the vital spirits in such a manner as to enable them to shake off that sleep with which they have been for some time oppressed”.

Klein also thought that Sand Martins, on the approach of winter, retired into holes prepared in the summer season which they shut up and opened again in the spring. They were thought to be torpid in the manner “of flies, snakes, lizards, tortoises and perhaps all insects”.

These “Swallows” were meant to fly very dully, “which would not be the case, were they obliged to take a long flight to foreign countries” and it was said by some “that when their vivacity fails, and they become heavy and dull by their blood being condensed by the cold, they, by a natural instinct, retire to pools and lakes, where reeds grow, and where the common people pretend to have observed several of them perch upon a single leaf, and at last, when it is able to bear them, sink along with it”.

Mr Klein's theories were however challenged by a Doctor Wright who correctly pointed out that the analogy made between “Swallows” and insects spending the winter in a torpid state was unfair in that their respiratory systems were different. “I humbly think that we still have some excuse for doubting whether Swallows can remain alive during the whole winter under water”. Even if they got in, he couldn't understand how they would get out, their bodies being heavier than the water.

Doctor Wright concluded by saying that “absurd” theories such as the migration of “Swallows” should not be discounted in physics or natural history “until all the arguments have been weighed on both sides, and the truth confirmed by observations”. How true!

Abridged from a submission by Ron Plummer

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## OWL IN DAYLIGHT

I'd forgotten how small  
It is, the Little Owl -  
Melting into the bark  
Of the great field oak;  
Forgotten too its stare,  
A yellow blinkless glare;  
and the grip it perches by  
Clenching the whole tree.

Peter Walton

## AN EVENING TO REMEMBER

Tony Usher's recounting of a morning at Tatton (Bird News 18) has triggered my putting pen to paper in similar vein about an evening in early May this year (1993) when myself, Dave Roberts and Roger Parry enjoyed an equally fascinating time over a period of some four hours.

Before telling the tale proper, a little background. For more years now than any of us care to remember we three have religiously gone birding straight from work on a Thursday evening. Anyone who has seen three be-suited scope-toting birders in the Chester area now knows who they were! Birding is never too serious, so we always have time for a good natter on topics as wide as the state of the nations' various sporting teams, to which pubs serve up half decent meals. These evenings are begun on the first available day in the April, and end on the last in September, thus we manage anything between 15 and 25 during our "season". Since 1988, we have made conscious efforts to record absolutely everything we see or hear conclusively - in that first year, a total of 77 species became our all time high for an evening - not that we make any effort to see big numbers of species.

1993 saw a flurry of nightly totals well above any previously known average (that for the previous five years being 57). On April 16th, it was 70, on the 22nd, a tantalisingly close 76 (when we failed to see Lesser Black-backed Gull and Jay!), and on the 29th Roger and I finally established a new record of 78. This was, for us, the equivalent of (whoever it was!) breaking Bob Beamon's long jump record - alas without an otherwise engaged Dave ..... and so to May 6th....

Our route from Chester to Inner Marsh Farm took us via the ponds on the Shotton approach road, the rifle range pools and Palethorpes pond, after which we probably weren't excessively happy. Neither Common Tern nor Corn Bunting had shown, but at least there had been a Wheatear, which we enjoyed. From the reserves' hide, a typical spring showing of sparkling waders and duck were, unfortunately, not topped off with the Black-winged Stilts, now gracing Frodsham's new workings. Stunning Black-tailed Godwits, bizarre Ruffs and soot-black Spotted Redshanks stole the show, along with an immaculate drake Garganey. Playing second fiddle to these were some marvellous looking Pintail, Wigeon, Gadwall and Shoveler, all in their summer spectacular. Normally, after leaving our first "real" location, the total lies around the mid-forties, and so it did this time.

Travelling to Marbury Country Park produced the occasional new species (such as House Sparrow and Collared Dove!) and it was hoped that the mere and its environs would come in with some woodland species and perhaps a bonus Black Tern or two. From the hour spent there, the choicest morsels were superb Great Crested Grebes and Ruddy Duck, Garden Warbler and Great Spotted Woodpecker.

At nearby Neumann's Flash, Blackcap and Ringed Plover dragged themselves onto the list. Here it was decided to return home via an old favourite of ours, Hockenhull Platts. The platts can generally be relied upon to produce at least something of interest, perhaps a Grasshopper Warbler or an owl species, and tonight was no exception, with the warbler and both Tawny and Little Owls being seen or heard well.

It was in fast fading light that I totted up our night's list, and following two re-counts caused out of disbelief, announced the figure of 86 to Roger and Dave. Eighty had been a total we had often felt attainable, if we hit everything just right - eighty-six, on a night that didn't feel as though we had, simply staggered us. Quickly totting up those few species we didn't see just about convinced us that, no, the hundred isn't on. In truth we wouldn't want it to be, we enjoy our birding too much just the way it is.....

Steve Holmes

### CANADA GEESE

The MAFF are conducting a survey into the population and distribution of Canada Geese. They have now ringed about 1200 birds with yellow or white darvic rings. These have black letters on them and should be easy to read at a reasonable distance. Having been originally ringed in Yorkshire, they have so far been sighted in Cheshire, Shropshire, Inverness, and Radnor. Any one who sees any of these birds should send details to Tony Broome who will then forward the information to the relevant person(s). Full details of birds will be forwarded on.

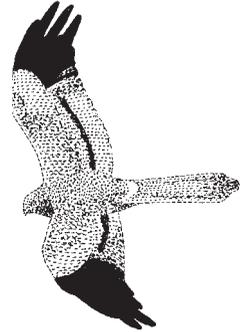
## WOOLSTON EYES - UPDATE

Further to the recent article "Cheshire Local Patching" by James Walsh, I feel an update on the situation is long overdue.

James was quite correct when he stated that interesting birds can still be found there, but the visiting birder has to work a little harder to find them!

Access to No. 1 bed has been restricted since construction on the second Thelwall Viaduct began earlier this year, but we have been promised that it should be opened up again by late October. This bed has various small pools in the centre and at the western end which usually hold one or two wintering Water Pipits, with three present in December 1992. Water Rails were proved breeding here when three juveniles were seen, the occasional wader may also be present. The area of reed canary grass near the north bank held up to four Short-eared Owls and one Long-eared Owl during winter 91-92, although only one Short-eared returned the following winter. Rixton Tip is located to the eastern end of the bed, and attracts many gulls, with an adult Iceland Gull seen in February 1993.

Pumping onto No. 2 bed has been much reduced since the halcyon days of the mid-eighties, although occasional waders do still drop in to feed at the edge of the main pool, which hold the bulk of the duck on the reserve. So far this year we have seen Cheshire's second earliest Garganey (February 20th), red head Smew, Red Crested Pochard and up to nine Black-necked Grebes. A Spotted Crake was calling throughout June and into July 1992 from the Typha, which also held up to four Water Rails. Early morning and late afternoon Gull passage is noticeable from this bed and a Kittiwake was found on the bed this year, being mobbed by the resident Black-headed Gulls. Interesting raptors seen on the bed this year have included Hobby, Red Kite, Osprey and a male Montagu's Harrier.



The view from the hide on No. 3 bed is very different from two or three years ago, looking across a sea of Typha and Willowherb, although there are some pools in the centre of the bed that hold duck and occasional waders, with Black-tailed Godwit and Ruff seen this year (please note access to the centre of No. 3 is restricted). Two Black-necked Grebes dropped in for one day before moving on to other areas. Whilst work is now being carried out to divert the River Mersey to the north of the bed, with the spoil being dumped inside the bed, I feel it will never regain its former glory.

The future centre piece of the reserve is likely to be No. 4 bed, with a 20 acre wetland being developed later this year. At the moment, the bed is mainly covered with stinging nettle and reed canary grass with willow scrub around the edges. Contractors have taken top soil from an area in the south-east corner of the bed, which has created a complex of shallow pools that have proved attractive to small numbers of waders including up to four Green Sandpipers. Pintail and Gadwall are also regular here in winter. Ringing on the bed has revealed a steady passage of Willow Warblers and Blackcaps through the north-west corner, while a Pied Flycatcher was also ringed recently (only the third Woolston record). Ringing throughout the reserve generally has revealed large numbers of warblers moving through the area, particularly Sedge Warbler and Whitethroat.

An indication of the number of bird species present on the reserve at any one time was given on January 2nd 1993, when wardens saw a total of 66 species on a "big day" there. The number of birders visiting the reserve has declined dramatically since 1991, reducing the number of records submitted to the Group, but I feel the above article outlines the excellent birding still available at Woolston Eyes and will encourage more people to spend a morning (or longer) there; after all, who knows what they will find!

PLEASE NOTE: Woolston Eyes is a reserve on private land, permits for which can be obtained by sending £3 and a S.A.E. to Brian Ankers, 9 Lynton Gardens, Appleton, Cheshire WA4 5AD. Please make cheques payable to the Eyes Conservation Group.

Dave Riley, ECG Warden

# AGE, SEX AND RACE DETERMINATION IN THE CORMORANT PHALACROCORAX CARBO

(SEPTEMBER 1989)

Order of determination of AGE, SEX and RACE not particularly important, but probably best to begin with AGE.

## AGE

### (1) Plumage:

Non-breeding season: Three distinct plumage types can be recognised:

(a) juvenile: breast and belly dull milky white with variable amount of brown speckling, streaking or blotching; back dull brown to brownish-black. Most of these birds are first-year birds (certainly those with breast/belly all white can be treated as such); however, some birds retain white breast/belly feathers into their second winter, those with these always some brown feathers admixed.

(b) sub-adult: breast and body dull brownish black. Mainly second year birds, but may include some in their third year.

(c) adult: plumage essentially all black. Third year and older birds.

Breeding season: As non-breeding season but some birds now acquire white thigh patches and white head feathers. Birds as young as two years old may acquire white thigh patches, so of little value in ageing. White head feathers also acquired by birds as young as three years old, though some evidence that older birds, especially older males, have whiter heads and retain the feathers longer than younger individuals.

### (2) Iris colour :

first-year : grey-brown to blue or blue-green (latter towards end of first-year)

second-year and older : emerald green

A very difficult feature to see - close approach in strong light (preferably direct sun) essential.

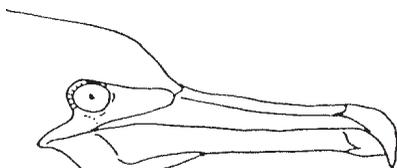
## SEX

No simple criteria exist for sexing all Cormorants in the field, but a combination of the following should allow some to be sexed. Close view essential. Sexing in the hand straightforward if race known.

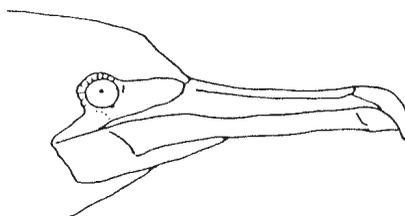
### (1) Bill shape:

male: relatively massive bill, mid-point in particular appearing deeper and bill tapering along whole length.

female: bill less obviously massive, outer half not tapering.



*P.c.carbo*



*P.c.sinensis*

Comparison of bill size/shape with nearby Cormorants often helpful (particularly in colonies). Intermediates best left unsexed.

### (2) Body size:

Males average ca. 10% larger than females but differences difficult to see in field. However probably safe to conclude that very small birds are females and very large ones males. Comparison with nearby birds helpful.

(3) Behaviour:

Sexes generally alike in terms of behaviour, however differences in three aspects :

(a) wing-waving: (performed at nest as advertising display) shown only by males.

(b) greeting display: (typically seen at nest between paired birds; sometimes seen in non-breeding season, presumably between birds which are not paired; sexual identity of birds presumed by analogy with behaviour in breeding season.)

male: behaviour in four parts:

(i) pointing closed bill, head and neck straight upwards,

(ii) swinging head and neck slowly backwards, bill opening widely while loud call made,

(iii) touching base of tail with closed bill while head and bill rotated rapidly from side to side with gargling sound,

(iv) returning head and neck rapidly forwards.

female: begins as male but does go beyond pointing open bill up and slightly backward before head and neck returned forward; subdued hoarse call given.

(c) copulation: male above, female below.

(4) Biometrics:

Several body measurements show a sexual dimorphism (males larger); of use primarily for birds caught or examined post mortem. Bill depth alone should allow most birds to be sexed, if race known.

|                       |             | females | males   |
|-----------------------|-------------|---------|---------|
| <i>P.c.carbo</i> :    | wing length | 318-351 | 350-363 |
|                       | bill length | 59-68   | 67-73   |
|                       | bill depth  | 13-15   | 16-18   |
| <i>P.c.sinensis</i> : | wing length | 311-337 | 330-364 |
|                       | bill length | 50-58   | 58-67   |
|                       | bill depth  | 11-13   | 13-16   |

All measurements in mm; based on museum skins, live birds may be slightly different.

## RACE

(1) Plumage gloss:

This can only be seen clearly in bright sunlight with observer between bird and sun, and from reasonably close range (>50m).

*P.c.carbo*: bluish or bluish-purple gloss

*P.c.sinensis*: greenish gloss

This criterion is most reliable in the breeding season; winter plumage generally duller, so should be used with caution in the non-breeding season. Applicable to immature as well as mature birds, but differences less easy to see.

(2) Shape of gular pouch:

*P.c.carbo*: gular pouch hardly extends behind eye

*P.c.sinensis*: gular pouch extends well behind eye

(3) White thigh patches and head feathers:

These tend to be more extensive and last longer in *P.c.sinensis*, but not reliable as method of racing individual Cormorants, though valid if applied to groups of birds e.g. colonies.

R M SELLERS

NOTE: Considerable numbers of Cormorants are currently being colour-ringed both in the British Isles and abroad. The author would be grateful to receive details of any sightings. As the age and race (and often the sex) of these birds is known with certainty such sightings can make a very significant contribution towards a better understanding of age, sex and race determination in this species - anyone seeing such a bird is invited to send in plumage details etc to the author. A standard recording form is available on request. All correspondence will be acknowledged.

## **SPECIES WATCH**

Several members to whom I spoke about the Peregrine watch said that they would have liked to take part but did not know about it. Unfortunately this watch, and the watch over the Black-winged Stilts at Frodsham in late May, had to be arranged at very short notice. It was impossible to contact more than a few members of CAWOS.

However, as it is likely that the Peregrine watch may be repeated and as there could be watches on other species in the future, the Council of CAWOS has decided to compile a list of members who might wish to be involved. This would save us time contacting members who either do not want to, or more commonly have not the time to, participate. It would not imply a definite commitment, as this would obviously depend on time and place, but would enable us to plan better. Members on this list would be contacted to see if they were available for any future watch but there would be no obligation - obviously individual circumstances can change.

If you have not been involved in this type of activity before, you might like to consider the following points:

1. You don't need any specialised knowledge - you don't have to be an "ace" bird-watcher.
2. Once involved you must try to keep that commitment, in fairness to the rest of the group.
3. Usually people worked in pairs or groups of three.
4. Be prepared for poor as well as fine weather.
5. Sometimes you will see very little of what you are watching; other times you will see some fascinating behaviour. It is also surprising how much you see when you stay in one spot!
6. Be prepared to ward off people who, intentionally or otherwise, are approaching the nest. Most people respond well to a firm but polite approach.
7. You would be given clear instructions about what to do in the event of a serious attempt on the nest.

If you are interested you will find a form with this issue of Bird News. Please fill it in and return it when you pay your subscription to David Cogger, 113 Nantwich Road, Middlewich, Cheshire CW10 9HD - tel 0606 832517.

## **THE Y.O.C. AND C.Y.O.'S**

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Youth Section, The Young Ornithologist Club is a nationally recognised youth organisation. It is the largest conservation body in the world and has over 115,000 individual members and 250 local groups. Its aim is to provide hands-on experience with wildlife, both indoors and out. It also promotes an awareness of the environment and conservation issues, whilst at the same time, having fun. The Y.O.C. achieves this through games, competitions, activity days, road shows and by local groups holding both indoor and outdoor meetings.

To help achieve these aims and objectives the R.S.P.B. has recently introduced new voluntary roles, in the form of County Youth Officers. Cheshire is one such county with a Youth Officer in post. Local Y.O.C. groups within Cheshire are very limited, so I am therefore hoping to encourage the promotion of new groups within the county. I am also aiming to set up a series of Active Conservation Days in which our teenage members can become involved. Most children are happy just to gain some knowledge and help with Bird Watching and conservation, within their local areas. They do not need to be transported throughout the countryside in search of rare birds. We owe it to ourselves to give them a sound background as today's youth are tomorrow's conservationists and custodians of our countryside.

If anyone feels they, or someone they know, would like further information, or would be interested in helping in any way, please contact Cheshire C.Y.O. Jean Crouch, 4 Blenheim Close, Poynton, Stockport, Cheshire SK12 1ON (Tel. 0625 873147).

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## **BACK COPIES OF BIRD NEWS**

Members who have joined recently may like to know that there are some copies of the following back numbers available:

- |      |        |   |
|------|--------|---|
| No 3 | Jul 89 | Little Stints and Curlew Sandpipers; Frodsham Marsh |
| No 6 | Apr 90 | Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler; Red Rocks            |

- No 7 Jul 90 Yellow and Grey Wagtails; Marbury Country Park  
 No 8 Oct 90 Leach and Storm Petrels; Tatton Park  
 No 9 Jan 91 Goosander and Red-breasted Merganser; Macclesfield Forest and reservoirs  
 No 10 Apr 91 Ring Ouzel; Hilbre  
 No 11 Jul 91 House Martin  
 No 12 Oct 91 Brent Goose; Poynton Pool and Park  
 No 13 Jan 92 Mediterranean Gull; Eastham Woods

Please send 30p per copy to cover postage and packing to:-

David Cogger, 113 Nantwich Road, Middlewich, Cheshire CW10 9HD.

[ No 14 to current issue are available on request at 75p per copy including post and packing. ED]

# Ringer's Notebook

Two Mute Swans from Chester, regularly seen there from 14 February to 3 April, went missing in April and then were re-sighted together in Peel Harbour on the Isle of Man on 27 April, 166km away, and the first movements from our area to Man.

Two more Black-headed Gulls ringed in winter at Rixton, Warrington, have been reported in summer from the Baltic region, one in Lithuania on 8 August 1992, while the other was in Helsinki, Finland on 4 May 1993.

The Siskins caught in spring passage through sites on the Wirral have always given interesting results, mostly moving between ringers in different parts of the country. Spring 1993 brought three notable records: one caught at Bidston on 22 March had been ringed at East Grinstead in Sussex, 328 km away, on 5 February, while another was ringed at Bidston on 12 April and caught at Currie, Lothian (276km north) seven days later. The most unusual Siskin from Bidston, ringed there on 15 March, crossed the Irish Sea to be caught at Dunmurry, County Antrim on 12 April, 229km north-west, the first from our area to have moved to Northern Ireland.

Details have only recently been received of the female Whitethroat caught at Meols, Wirral, on 29 June 1991 wearing a ring from the Brussels scheme, which had been ringed at Knokke on the Belgian coast as a first-year bird on 28 August 1987. Another Whitethroat has provided one of the outstanding records of the year, being ringed at Woolston on 24 July 1992 and caught by the expedition at Djoudj, Senegal, on 24 March 1993, 4282km south. This is only the fifth British-ringed Whitethroat ever to be reported from south of the Sahara, all of them from Senegal. Three have been found dead by members of the public there, and I handled the fourth, also at Djoudj, in April 1992, which had been ringed at the observatory on Bardsey Island, Dyfed.

I had the good fortune to spend a morning in August ringing at the famous Mai Po reserve in Hong Kong, where the commonest species we caught was Kingfisher (good old *Alcedo atthis!*), with two Redshanks (albeit of the small eastern race) to remind me of home, 6000 miles away.

Professor David Norman, Rowswood Cottage, Ridding Lane, Sutton Weaver, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 6PF. (Tel 0928 711064)

## An Ode to the Dedicated Birders

Cormorants are funny  
 They're always big and black  
 Sometimes they're hard to find  
 Especially from the back  
 If you go to Rostherne  
 And look up in the trees

You're sure to find lots of them  
 More-so in a freeze  
 And in the hide up yonder  
 Two adults and their son  
 Sit huddled as they ponder -  
 When will they all be gone

Anon

[My apologies to Peter Walton who is no way associated with this makeweight filler. ED]

**BTO - Shropshire Ornithological Society - Joint One Day Conference**  
**Saturday, 13th November 1993, 9:15am to 4:40pm**  
**The Shirehall, Shrewsbury**

People are invited to attend the above conference. The programme includes:-

- "The Ecology of the S. Cheshire & N. Shropshire Meres" by Andrew Hearle (English Nature)
- "The New Atlas of Breeding Birds" by Dave Gibbons (BTO)
- "Water Fowl Monitoring" by Jeff Kerby (WWT)
- "Keeping Track of Waterway Birds" by Steve Carter (BTO)
- "Habitats for Water Birds" by Jack Sankey (BTO)
- "The Moorhen's World" by David Gibbons (BTO)
- "Goosanders" by Steve Carter (BTO)
- "Habitats & Birds of the River Teme" by Gareth Thomas (SOS)

Book in advance, no later than the 25th October 1993, by writing to:-

Ken Bird, BTO Regional Development Officer, 44 Bromley Road, Bicton Heath,  
 Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY3 5AZ. Tel: 0743 363807

Good Value at £10.00 per person! (cheques payable to Shropshire Ornithological Society)



**NOVEMBER**

- 1 HPRSPB "Birds of the Midnight Sun" by Clifford Heyes
- 4 CADOS "A 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
- 7 CRSPB BLACKTOFT SANDS by coach ring for details
- 8 CAWOS "Abernethy - Forest of the Future" by Richard Thaxton
- 8 SRSPB "A Bird for All Seasons" by Gordon Yates
- 9 MRSPB "Galapagos, an Island of Dreams" by Val McFarland
- 12 MCOS "Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust" by Mrs M Moss
- 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
- 14 WG SOUTHPORT & PENNINGTON FLASH meet 8.00am
- 14 WRSPB STAPLETON WOODS & CALDY HILL meet Kings Drive North 9.00am
- 17 CRSPB "Red Kites in Wales" by Dee Doody
- 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
- 21 MCOS TREGARON BOG meet 10:00am Devil's Bridge car park
- 26 LOG "Hebridean Raptors & Hill Country Birds" by Gordon Yates
- 26 WG "Birds of Northern India" by Mike McKavett
- 26 KOS "Bonxies, Tysties and Tammy Noires" by Sheila Blamire & Alan Roberts
- 28 HPRSPB SOLWAY FIRTH meet Marple 7.00am or Hazel Grove 7.15am
- 29 HPRSPB "Aristocrats of the Forest" by Gordon Yates
- 30 CWT "Birds of Russia" by Dr Algirdas Knystautas, 7:30pm Stockport Town Hall,  
 Ring CWT HQ for details & tickets.

## DECEMBER

- 1 CWT "Birds of Russia" by Dr Algirdas Knystautas, 7:30pm Lower School, Bridgewater County High School, Appleton, Warrington, Ring CWT HQ for details & tickets.
- 2 CADOS "Antarctica" by Peter Rathbone
- 3 CWT "Birds of Russia" by Dr Algirdas Knystautas, 7:30pm Northwich Memorial Hall, Ring CWT HQ for details & tickets.
- 3 SECOS "Focus on Birds" by Susan & Allan Parker
- 5 CRSPB CHESHIRE MERES meet Sainsburys car park 9.30am
- 5 SRSPB SOUTHPORT MARSHES ring 061-969-9741 for details
- 5 WG HALF DAY LOCAL CAR TRIP meet 9.00am
- 6 CAWOS "The Great Migration" by Paul Doherty
- 10 LOG "Christmas Party" ring for details
- 10 WG "Birds of the Lancashire Flashes" by Charles Owen
- 10 SECOS SANDBACH FLASHES ring for details
- 12 MCOS "Penguin Promenade" by Brian Dyke
- 11 CADOS CHESHIRE MERES meet Overleigh Cemetery 9.00am
- 11 NCRSPB PENNINGTON FLASH meet main car park 9.30am
- 12 WRSPB SEAFORTH/FORMBY/MARSHSIDE/MARTIN MERE ring for details
- 12 MCOS MARTIN MERE & MARSHSIDE meet 9:00am at Sandwashing Plant
- 13 SRSPB "A Wildlife Photographer Abroad" by Michael Leach
- 14 WRSPB "Flora & Fauna of Derbyshire" by Steve Knell
- 15 CRSPB "The Ebro Valley - Spain" by John Armitage

## JANUARY

- 6 CADOS "Wild New Zealand" by Don Coan
- 7 SECOS "Wading About" by Brynton Holt
- 8 KOS WIRRAL & INNER MARSH FARM meet 9:00am Sessions House
- 10 SRSPB "Tunncliffe's Anglesey" by Paul Rogers
- 10 CAWOS "The Americas" by Richard Gabb
- 14 MCOS "Gulls at Seaforth" by Steve White and Chris Kehoe
- 16 CADOS MARTIN MERE meet Overleigh Cemetery 9.00am
- 16 MCOS MARTON MERE meet 10:00am at Blackpool Zoo car park
- 22 NCRSPB "Members Evening"
- 23 NCRSPB ROSTHERNE & TATTON PARK meet Fir Grove Hotel 8.30am
- 28 WG "Birds of the Pennines" by Gordon Yates
- 28 KOS "Cheshire Reed Warblers & Cuckoos" by Malcolm Calvert
- 30 WG SLIMBRIDGE meet 8.00am

## SOCIETIES

- ADNHS Altrincham & District Natural History Society, mtgs Hale Methodist Church Hall 7.30pm, Sec. Vincent Pedley 061-748-4717.
- CADOS Chester & District Ornithological Soc, mtgs Caldby 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, Grebe House, Reaseheath, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 6DA, Tel: 0270 610180
- 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.
- MRSBP 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. Jowitz 051-625-5534.

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## BLACK-WINGED STILTS

Of all bird names this must be the most apt - not so much for the clean, pied plumage-shapes (which would give them identity alone) but for their startling pink-red legs, with ankles half-way up, whose long fragility recalls the tragic limbs of desert famine tribes. These, though, are honed for what they have to do: showing off a daily, natural circus-act - as here, in a field-lagoon in Wales, where three rare wind-blown migrants wade and dip and probe for food, in teetering elegance.

Cemlyn Bay, Anglesey Peter Walton

# Waxwings

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