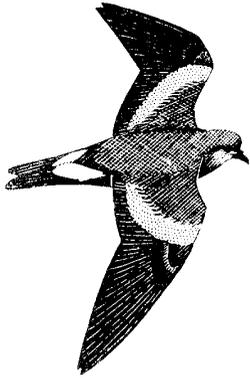


Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society



BIRD NEWS

Number 32 October 96



County Rarities • Recent Reports
Submitting Descriptions • Notes & Letters
Projects & Surveys • Diary



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Articles, Letters and Comments would be welcomed by the Editor

Front cover: Red-necked Phalarope by Tony Broome

Other illustrations by Jeff Clarke, Tom Lowe, Thelma Skyes & David Quinn

Editorial

The first edition of Bird News was published in January 1989 and had what I still consider to be one of the most appealing black and white covers, an adult and juvenile Long Tailed Skua drawn by Tony Broome. The editorial was written by our then Chairman, Bob Anderson, who outlined the evolution of CAWOS from the Cheshire Ornithological Association, mentioned our inaugural six committees and announced, after only three months, a membership approaching 200. It is interesting to note a letter in this issue from our membership secretary "welcoming an influx of new members to 307, one more than last year". Just 50% growth in eight years.

My own contributions as Editor began with the second edition and I doubt, if asked then, I would have envisaged lasting so long. As this is my last editorial perhaps I might be allowed some selected reminiscences. Looking back over the past 32 Bird News I feel we should all be proud of the developments throughout the years. It would be invidious to pick out particular contributors but all the 'regulars' know just how much I've valued their support. 'Ringers Notebook' has appeared in all but two issues and its absence in this issue is explained elsewhere, together with some exciting news about its author! 'Species Spotlight' was an early regular slot and this has evolved into 'County Rarities'. More recently 'Sites to Watch' has been resurrected. In 1990, the April edition contained one of our earliest pleas for recruitment, 'Recent Reports' was under way together with 'Notes and Letters' but 'Conservation' as a separate article has sadly disappeared. Issue 12 in October 1991 contained the first of what must have become a rather tedious sequence of resignation threats from the Editor together with heartfelt requests from Tony Broome for more contributors and a publicity officer. Today we certainly are blessed with far more copy but little changes regarding the need for better publicity. However, read on! Issue 16 a year later in 1992 contained the 'Local Patch' which ran for some time and which has been followed by the equally enjoyable 'View from the Farmyard'. Undoubtedly one of the highlights of my Editorial regime has been the recording of Ron Harrison's early bird watching in Bird News. I suspect in years to come these memories will be regarded as priceless. Why, I wonder, did I fail to follow up on Dr John Raines similar offer having published just his first contribution. Now, there's a suggestion for my successor. Looking at 1993, I much enjoyed the poems in the April issue, the Poynton Parrot. I've always felt these contributions have provided a little bit of balanced culture (which is not to say even the most rabid bird racing article isn't equally 'cultured'). 1994 began with my praising such an improved response that we had to include extra pages and ended with a recipe (also from yours truly) for grilling Sooty Shearwater! Finally, last year I'd like to remember our July publication with one of our rare 'Personality Profiles'. There, I've gone back on my opening promise but re-reading the tributes to Alan Roberts brought back such good memories. How about a letter from Norfolk? I'm sure we would all enjoy an update on Alan's life since leaving Cheshire.

So much for the past. For this year we achieved a mile stone in having a colour cover, coupled to a revised type face. By courtesy of Geoff Blamire's pocket, CAWOS has had four such covers but is there anyone else prepared to sponsor forthcoming issues? Over the past few weeks a re-vamped Publicity Committee has met for the first time. After reviewing the function of the committee and listing as many issues as the group could think of with regard to our future objectives, a selection of the most important tasks was allocated to group members. A report on this will appear in a future issue of Bird News. In essence however we are aiming to raise the profile of the Society in order to both attract new members and sharpen up what we want to achieve beyond our membership. Hopefully I can continue to make a contribution to this aspect of the running of our Society.

Finally, I am delighted to announce that my successor as Editor is to be **Jeff Clarke**. Since his earliest contributions to Bird News I have admired his depth of content and his style of writing. After a little persuasion in balancing his other commitments to home and continuing studies, he agreed. I have high hopes that he will help Bird News continue to evolve. Of course, I would ask you to continue to give him as much support as you can. His address and telephone number are:-

90 Simonside, Hough Green, Widnes, Cheshire WA8 4YN, 0151-423 4275

Au revoir and thanks again,

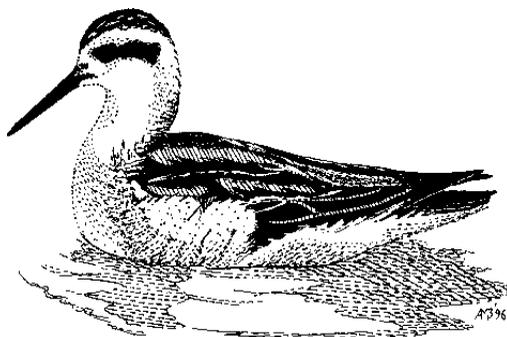
Richard Gabb

[Note: copy date for the next issue will be the 7th of December.]

County Rarities

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE

Usually labelled as delicate, colourful and enigmatic, there can be few birdwatchers who do not find phalaropes delightful. If proof is needed, one only had to be at Frodsham in mid July, and count those watching the Red-necked Phalarope as opposed to Cheshire and Wirral's first Lesser Scaup or the gang of Spoonbills present at the same time which were being paid scant attention compared to the extensive viewing the phalarope was receiving.



Phalaropes are not difficult to separate from other waders based on persistent swimming behaviour and jizz and by that dark patch through the eye. In addition, in summer plumage, with the females brighter than males, Red-necked and Grey Phalaropes, are easy to tell apart, with Red-necked a daintier bird with a fine pointed black bill, white throat and red confined to the neck, whilst Grey has totally red underparts, white face, a yellow based thick bill, and is a chunkier bird all together.

With this years record, there have been 13 Red-necked Phalarope records in Cheshire and Wirral since 1967, as follows:

- 1971 River Birkett, Moreton Sept 18th- 30th, Adult female
- 1973 Sandbach, May 24th, 2 Adults
- 1976 Frodsham, May 26th -June 3rd, Adult female
- 1977 Seacombe, Sept 12th, Juvenile
- 1980 Frodsham, Aug 17th - 19th, Juvenile
- 1983 Gateworth SW, Sept 25th -26th, Juvenile
- 1984 Sandbach, May 28th, Adult & Frodsham, Aug 27th, Juvenile
- 1985 Woolston Eyes, July 15th, Adult male
- 1987 Woolston, Nov 18th. 1st Winter
- 1992 Bar Mere, Sept 8th-10th, Juvenile
- 1996 Frodsham July 10th -26th Adult female

Although 6 of the Cheshire and Wirral records have been of summer plumaged individuals, it is autumn phalaropes that need a bit of care in sorting out, with over half the records being of juvenile/ first winter plumage birds. Here, the pattern and timing of the occurrence can also help to distinguish between them. Red-necks tend to pass through on coastal marshes or fresh water habitats, in August and early September, whilst Greys are often a fly-by during a seawatch, and are late September to year end birds. Hence most Red-necks will pass through in juvenile plumage, with dark upperparts and no moult, whilst most Greys will be in some stage of moult, and showing varying amounts of grey patches on the upperparts.

With a phalarope on the deck, either swimming or roosting, go for the structural differences around the bill in particular, then look at the breast. Juvenile Greys have a strong buff wash, and darkish brown upperparts with a few grey patches moulting through on the back. Red-necked is also dark above, but tends to show well defined buff lines on the mantle and scapulars, with a noticeable white patch on the bend of the wing. It also lacks that strong buff breast wash. The other point I look for is the shape of the black ear patch which in Grey Phalarope is rectangular and runs back horizontally from the eye, whilst Red-necked seems to curve back from the eye and ends in a point. In flight, however, they are not easy to separate. I tend to view Grey Phalarope as Sanderling-like, with a prominent pale grey wingbar and a twisting flight action, Red-necked is darker brown winged, plus wingbar and very fine bill, but personally, I think it would be a bold observer who claimed a fly by Red-necked during a seawatch!

It would be very unusual to see an adult Red-necked in winter in the UK, and separation for winter adults of the two species comes down to structure, and the ear patch shape again, as both are pale grey all over with little to distinguish plumage wise between them. A final comment on Wilson's Phalarope, which in juvenile plumage, although tending more to resemble a 'Tringa' wader, could be confused with Red-necked, if noted swimming at a distance. Wilson's has a distinctive "tipping forward" appearance due to its long neck, small head and long fine black bill. This species always strikes me as very pale, with only a small line through the eye. It also shows no wing bar in flight, and yellowish legs.

Hugh Pulsford, 19 Tudor Way, Congleton, Cheshire, CW12 4AS

RECENT REPORTS

I would firstly like to give my personal thanks to Steve Barber for all his hard work in compiling this section since the April 1991 issue which I now know takes up a lot of time. I have decided to adopt a style of my own which I hope will spark some interesting letters to the editor. *Some of these records may be unauthenticated and require review by the Society Records Panel or the BBRC. The records cover the period from early June to early September.*

Late news from a Macclesfield observer who had a **Long Eared Owl** in his suburban garden all day on 8th February. The bird was so obliging it allowed a neighbour to photograph it from just a few feet away. It appeared when thick snow covered the ground and presumably the bird had been wintering in Macclesfield Forest, which is strange as there have been no published records from there for many years.

JUNE

Bird of the month was the **Spoonbill** with a large influx in Britain increasing the number of birds to five at Frodsham No6 tank by the end of the month, although six different birds were seen including a ringed bird with one of these visiting Ellesmere Port, the first ever there. This is the largest flock ever recorded in Cheshire and is the fourth consecutive year that birds have summered at Frodsham. They were seen in courtship display and proceeded to make an attempt at nest building for the first time in Britain since 1909. A further two birds visited Inner Marsh Farm during the month, one of which was a colour ringed bird from the Dutch breeding colony. The influx of c70 birds into Britain included up to 20 in the North West.

The juvenile **Red-throated Diver** remained at the Weaver Bend (until the 6th). The first **Great-crested Grebe** chicks were at Rostherne Mere (9th), where three pairs had young by the end of the month. At least two broods of **Black-necked Grebes** hatched in north Cheshire. Most of the 2700 **Manx Shearwaters** which passed the mouth of the Dee on the 28th during a WNW force 8 wind, will have no doubt been visible from Hilbre, although the count was made at Point of Ayr. A **Little Egret** frequented the Inner Marsh Farm/Parkgate area and a further bird was at Sandbach Flashes (22nd), the second of the year there. A count of 14 **Grey Herons** at Fiddler's Ferry on the 23rd included a colour ringed bird.

Up to 32 **Mute Swans** were at Kingsway Bridge, Warrington but the resident pair at Rostherne Mere failed to breed this year. **Mandarins** bred at Beeston for the first time, now one of the best sites in Cheshire to see this species, and up to 3 birds visited Rostherne Mere irregularly through the month, no doubt having strayed from the Tatton collection. Nine **Gadwall** broods at Woolston Eyes equalled last years record count and numbers built up at Rostherne Mere by the month's end. Small numbers of **Teal**, **Pochard** and **Ruddy Ducks** (up to 25 of each) frequented Frodsham during the month. Two **Pintails** were seen at Fiddler's Ferry with a male moulting at Poynton Pool (from 14th) for the second year running. Up to 3 **Garganey** were at Frodsham No6 tank. The max. count of **Tufted Duck** at Fiddler's Ferry was 17 with a pair breeding for the first time at Mosedale Pool, Rixton but the young soon disappeared. The first summer **Lesser Scaup** remained all month at Frodsham becoming the first record of this species to summer in Britain and only the 16th ever

recorded in Britain. A **Goldeneye** visited Rostherne Mere irregularly during the month. Single **Ruddy Ducks** at Poynton Pool (3rd and 10th) were only the third and fourth site records. A **Red Kite** over the Frodsham/Helsby area mid month was only the second June record this century, the other being the long staying Tatton bird. A **Marsh Harrier** was reported at Frodsham (7th) and **Buzzards** appeared over Frodsham (from 19th), Sandbach Flashes (9th) with one/two irregularly at Rostherne. During the month **Hobbies** visited Marbury No1 tank, Hale and Stanlow. An immature **Peregrine** was at Fiddler's Ferry (21st) and calling **Quails** were reported at Farndon (2), Frodsham (2) and Parkgate (1) this month.

Little Ringed Plovers reached 25 at Neumann's Flash (29th) whilst singles at Rostherne Mere (12th) and Woolston Eyes late in the month were more unexpected. Up to three **Grey Plovers** were at Fiddler's Ferry and **Lapwings** failed to breed at Rostherne Mere this year, probably due to the bad spring weather. Both **Little Stints** and **Curlew Sandpipers** were at Frodsham (18th) and five days later a large, long-billed first summer type **Dunlin** at the same site initially caused some confusion having been reported as a Pectoral Sandpiper. A large influx of non breeding first year **Black-tailed Godwits** occurred early in the month with 420 at Inner Marsh Farm and 188 at the Weaver Bend. The odd **Whimbrel** passed through Neumann's Flash late in the month. Up to 70 **Curlews** were seen there, but birds failed to breed at Rostherne this year. **Spotted Redshanks** at Inner Marsh Farm increased from 3 (summer plumaged) birds on the 19th to 8 at the end of the month. By the last week **Green Sandpipers** had returned to Marbury, Sandbach and the Weaver Bend. A **Wood Sandpiper** was at Sandbach (9th) and a **Common Sandpiper** at Poynton Pool (30th) was the first ever June record there.

Up to 7 **Little Gulls** were at Frodsham all month. **Black-headed Gulls** at the Woolston No3 colony hatched over 250 young. Gatewarth continued a good run of **Yellow-legged Herring Gulls** (6+ this month) with 4+ birds on the 25th, and Fiddler's Ferry, the best site in Cheshire for this species, had its first bird of the summer (22nd). A pair of **Common Terns** spent several days at the Weaver Bend with three at Rostherne Mere (9th) and up to three at Sandbach Flashes (four dates from the 22nd). A single **Turtle Dove** was at Rixton Clay Pits (23rd). On the 11th, thousands of **Swifts** were flying over Frodsham Marsh. **Kingfishers** bred near Lymm and Poynton Pool with birds seen most days at Woolston. A **Blue-headed Wagtail** visited the Weaver Bend (1st) reappearing (9th and 12th) having bred with a 'normal' **Yellow Wagtail**.

Redstarts were breeding at Tegg's Nose CP. A **Grasshopper Warbler** was at Fiddler's Ferry (9th), two 'reeling' birds were at Frodsham and five at Woolston Eyes respectively during the month. A **Reed Warbler** caught during ringing on Woolston No1 bed had been ringed there 9 years ago. One or possibly two Reed Warblers at Poynton Pool from the 6th to 8th were local rarities and the first for the site. The first young **Whitethroats** appeared at Woolston Eyes from mid month and a pair of **Garden Warblers** at Lapwing Lane NR, Moore were possibly breeding. Juvenile **Willow Warblers** appeared at Woolston Eyes from mid month. The first **Spotted Flycatcher** arrived back at Rostherne (2nd), a late date showing a poor year for this species with birds on territory at Tegg's Nose CP. A pair of **Pied Flycatchers** were at Bosley (10th). A **Nuthatch** at Sandbach Flashes (22nd) was only the third record for the flashes and a pair of **Carrion Crows** bred at Poynton Pool for the first time ever. Four **Tree Sparrows** were at Breerton (1st) with a **Siskin** over Fulshaw Park, Wilmslow (6th) and a late **Redpoll** over Poynton Pool (3rd). No young **Reed Buntings** or **Wrens** were at Woolston by the end of the month. Two pairs of **Corn Buntings** were seen at Frodsham and a pair was at Winterley (28th).

Several species had a good breeding season despite the second coldest May this century including Common and **Lesser Whitethroats**, **Sand Martins**, **Swifts**, **Raven** and Buzzard but yet again there were virtually no Turtle Doves and Spotted Flycatchers were also very scarce.

JULY

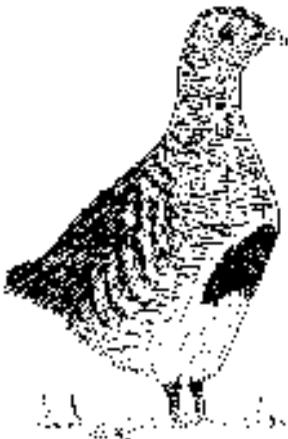
Bird of the month must be the sparkling, summer plumaged female **Red-necked Phalarope** which appeared at the Weaver Bend and ICI tank from the 10th for ten days, briefly reappearing on the 26th. This is the seventh bird recorded at Frodsham out of only 22 birds in Cheshire. It was also the second longest staying bird in the county after a bird spent 12 days on the River Birkett, Moreton from the 18th September 1971.

Coming a close second was a superb first summer male **Bluethroat** which was caught and ringed at Woolston Eyes No4 bed on the 6th. The bird was typically skulking and eluded most observers. It was of the white spotted form, the continental race of Bluethroat, which is exceptionally rare in Britain (6-8 seen this spring) and the first midsummer record of the white spotted race in Britain. Perhaps it was breeding nearby? A further approximate 100 Bluethroats of the red throated race, which breed in Scandinavia, was a high total for Britain. This is the 12th for Cheshire (1st of the white spotted race).

At Lapwing Lane NR, Moore 3 pairs of **Little Grebes** bred (max. 14 on 6th) and 4 pairs bred on the nearby Moore Eastern NR. Single **Black-necked Grebes** were at Rostherne Mere (6th and 14th) with two present (17th and 18th). A few **Storm Petrels** were recorded in the mouth of the river Mersey mid month and the maximum count of **Cormorants** at Fiddler's Ferry was 22, a new July record. Up to two **Little Egrets** again frequented Inner Marsh Farm during the month. **Spoonbills** were again a feature with up to five still at Frodsham involving several different birds and bringing the years tally to 8 there. Birds again made sporadic attempts at nest building during the month but none were serious, the last successful nest in Britain was over 300 years ago. These birds were part of an influx involving most of northern Europe and included a large inland flock of 33 over Belgium, the first successful nest in Denmark for 27 years, record breeding numbers and a flock of 60 birds in Lower Saxony (Germany) and an increase in numbers at the Dutch breeding colony. Perhaps the No6 tank should be renamed as it has hosted breeding attempts of Black-winged Stilt (1993) and Little Egret (1995). What will be next?

Moulting **Mute Swan** flocks included 33 at Tatton Mere and 38 at Kingsway Bridge, Warrington but on Frodsham No6 tank breeding attempts failed. At Frodsham an escaped **Black Swan** was present all month (and into September) and **Greylag Geese** had begun to return to Rostherne by the end of the month. At least four pairs of **Shelduck** hatched young at Frodsham No6 tank this month. A female **Mandarin** visited Rostherne Mere (13th) where **Gadwall** numbers increased to 14. **Teal** returned to Fiddler's Ferry (from 7th) and Rostherne Mere (from 11th). The male **Pintail** remained at Poynton Pool until the 22nd. Frodsham and Inner Marsh Farm held one/two **Garganey** and up to 28 **Pochard** were at Rostherne Mere. **Tufted Ducks** reached 70 on Frodsham No6 tank this month with 179 at Rostherne (19th). A **Scaup** was present at Fiddler's Ferry (20th) with two at Sandbach Flashes (23rd), the first July record for the flashes. The **Lesser Scaup** became more difficult to find as it moulted at Frodsham. A **Common Scoter** passed through Rostherne (14th), where it has been seen annually since 1983 and two drakes at both Watch Lane Flash (6th) and Frodsham No6 tank (25th).

A **Honey Buzzard** flew over Neumann's Flash (18th) and a **Marsh Harrier** passed through Frodsham. Up to two **Buzzards** were seen irregularly over both Frodsham and Rostherne with one at Fiddler's Ferry (31st). **Hobbies** were at Sandbach Flashes (3rd and 6th), Rostherne (14th) and Inner Marsh Farm (17th). Two **Peregrines** were at Fiddler's Ferry with singles at Sandbach Flashes, Chelford SQ's and Frodsham. A **Grey Partridge** at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (11th) was the first there for over 8 years and two **Quail** called from one site all month. A **Common Crane** flew over the Weaver Bend (15th). This is the seventh county record, the last being in the Shotwick/Burton area on 'at least' 25th August 1986.



A **Stone Curlew** seen in flight at Cranage (22nd) would be only the ninth county record, with the last records in 1990 when birds were at Delamere in July and Oglet in August. **Little Ringed Plover** numbers reached 30 at Frodsham (12th), 27 at Neumann's Flash and 13 at Sandbach Flashes both mid month and 8 at Fiddler's Ferry (13th), a new July max. there. **Single Knot** and **Sanderling** passed through Frodsham with one of the later at Sandbach (24th). Two **Little Stints** were at the Weaver Bend (10th) with further birds at the months end and at Sandbach (24th). One or two **Curlew Sandpipers** were at the Weaver Bend towards the end of the month where **Dunlin**

levels rose dramatically from 40 on the 10th to 850 a week later, peaking at 1510 birds including many juveniles. Returning **Ruff** were at Frodsham and Marbury. A flock of 150 **Black-tailed Godwits** were at Fiddler's Ferry (7th), a new site record beating the previous record of 11 on 16th April 1994. Eight **Bar-tailed Godwits** were at Frodsham (6th) and a flock of 100 **Curlews** visited Fiddler's Ferry (7th) with a single **Spotted Redshank** at Gatewarth (summer plumaged bird on the 18th). Five **Greenshanks** at Frodsham (27th) was the highest count there during the month. Up to 11, 3 and 9 **Green Sandpipers** were at Frodsham, Chelford SQ's and Marbury No1 tank respectively this month with 6 at Sandbach Flashes (23rd). The first returning **Wood Sandpiper** was at Frodsham (from 25th to 30th). **Common Sandpipers** bred at Trentabank Reservoir but the first returning birds were at Rostherne Mere (4 on 13th) and at Gatewarth (from 18th) with 9 at the Weaver Bend (16th). A **Mediterranean Gull** was found at Frodsham No6 tank and at least two pairs of **Black-headed Gulls** nested, the first breeding record at that site. An adult **Yellow-legged Gull** was seen twice this month at Fiddler's Ferry and a third year bird was at Sandbach Flashes (21st). An adult **Glaucous Gull** at Thurstaston (27th) was distinctly unseasonal but not exceptional. On the 18th, three **Common Terns** on the River Mersey, Penketh were seen at Frodsham later that day, up to 3 were at Sandbach Flashes (4 dates until 14th), a single bird was at Fiddler's Ferry (15th) but best of all was the news of the first inland breeding of this species at a mid Cheshire site (location withheld). An **Arctic Tern** visited Rostherne Mere (14th) and up to 6 **Arctic Skuas** were seen almost daily from Hilbre. Single **Turtle Doves** visited Rixton Clay Pits (4th and 14th) and Forge Pool, Northwich (17th), a former stronghold of this species with two birds at Farndon. An adult and juvenile **Cuckoo** were at Fiddler's Ferry (14th) and a juvenile seen there next day was being fed by a **Sedge Warbler**. Two **Kingfishers** at Statham Pools (7th) were the first there since 1993. 200 **Sand Martins** at Fiddler's Ferry (16th) indicated a good breeding season. One **Blue-headed Wagtail** was still at Frodsham (until 25th).

Two **Grasshopper Warblers** were at Frodsham this month with a 'reeling' bird at Fiddler's Ferry (25th) and an immature **Lesser Whitethroat** was seen at a Wilmslow garden (17th). A pair of **Garden Warblers** were again seen at Lapwing Lane NR, Moore briefly. Eleven **Willow Warblers** passed through Fulshaw Park, Wilmslow (from 23rd up to 26th August) and small numbers were recorded at Hilbre. A **Wood Warbler** was still in song next to Trentabank Reservoir (8th) with a pair of **Treecreepers** nesting in a batbox there, not exactly a typical site. Flocks of 40+ **Blue Tits** and 30+ **Long-tailed Tits** visited Poynton Pool this month. Up to 58 **House Sparrows** fed in a Statham Garden while 16 **Tree Sparrows** at Little Heatley (5th) included 8 juveniles and 12+ were at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (11th), where a record 3 pairs bred. A male **Brambling** in full breeding plumage at Lyme Park (13th) was easily the latest (or earliest ?) ever recorded in the county with the previous best at Delamere on 11th June 1966. Birds generally leave late April/early May so this bird may have been in the area for some time. A good flock of 60 **Greenfinches** at Fiddler's Ferry (21st) and **Siskins** were present all month at Macclesfield Forest and singles over Fulshaw Park, Wilmslow on 3 dates (and a further two dates in August). Two **Crossbills** were at Trentabank Reservoir (2nd) with 10 present six days later. One observer claimed to be lucky to see four **Corn Buntings** at Heatley where the species was numerous some years ago.

AUGUST

Very brief views of a swift at Poynton Pool on the 16th proved inconclusive, but the observer was hoping for **Alpine Swift**, which would have been the fourth County record. Singles were at Compstall (in old Cheshire) on 17th August 1970, Elton Hall Flash on 9th October 1993 and Great Sankey on 21st April this year.

At Moore Eastern NR 18 **Little Grebes** included 12 young (1st) and single **Black-necked Grebes** were at Rostherne Mere (4th and 10th). **Fulmars**, **Kittiwakes** and **Gannets** passed off Hilbre at the end of the month along with the odd **Skua** and **Guillemot**. The peak count of **Cormorants** at Fiddler's Ferry (24th) was 36. A **Little Egret** was again at Inner Marsh Farm on 2 dates. Up to five **Spoonbills** remained at Frodsham early in the month with two present on the 14th. The largest count of **Mute Swans** at Kingsway Bridge, Warrington was 35, which has had over 106 different ringed birds this year. **Greylag Geese** numbers reached 288 at Rostherne Mere (18th). **Canada Goose** numbers reached 550 on the Mersey Estuary and Frodsham No6 tank, 450 at Sandbach Flashes and 850 at Inner Marsh Farm (26th), equalled the Dee Estuary record with a 'small race'

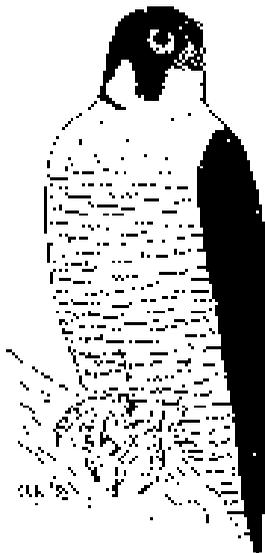
bird at the last site (17th). A single **Barnacle Geese** was at Inner Marsh Farm (17th) with 3 birds at both Chelford SQ's mid month and at Tatton (31st). Two **Bar-headed Geese** and a **Ross's Goose** were seen at Frodsham this month. A **Ruddy Shelduck** was among 7000 **Shelducks** counted on the Mersey (8th).

A male **Mandarin** returned to the Bridgewater Canal, Statham (2nd to 25th) having been absent since 30th May. **Wigeon** returned to Gatewarth (11th) and **Gadwall** increased to 61 at Rostherne Mere (24th) with a female at Poynton Pool (8th), the first there since 1977. The first returning **Teal** arrived at Gatewarth (3rd) increased to 74 by the 31st with 1200 on the Mersey (8th). **Mallard** numbers reached 226 at Fiddler's Ferry (25th) with five **Pintails** there the same day and 1000 of the former on the Mersey Estuary (8th). **Garganey** numbers peaked at eight on Frodsham No6 tank (6th), where two or three years ago numbers often reached double figures, with two at Sandbach Flashes (8th) and one/two at Inner Marsh Farm all month. **Shovelers** increased to 50 at Fiddler's Ferry (25th) and 5 at Poynton Pool (7th) equalled the site record. **Pochard** had a late summer peak of 51 birds at Rostherne Mere (11th). **Tufted Ducks** peaked at 143 at Farmwood Pool (3rd), 40 at Fiddler's Ferry (4th) and 382 at Rostherne Mere (10th) was a record August count there. The **Lesser Scaup** at Frodsham stayed all month. Two **Common Scoters** were at Budworth Mere (2nd). There were 30 **Ruddy Ducks** at Farmwood Pool (25th), the first double figure count since spring, 68 at Frodsham No6 tank (21st), a record there, and 43 at Rostherne Mere (24th).

Marsh Harriers were at Hale mid month, Heswall late in the month and a female hunted Burton Marsh (25th), when one each of **Kestrel**, **Merlin**, **Peregrine** and **Sparrowhawk** were seen in the same area. A further (or the same?) Marsh Harrier was at Burton Marsh (30th and 31st). A **Buzzard** flew over Pott Shrigley (28th) and a count of 10 Kestrels came from Fiddler's Ferry (4th). Single Merlins visited Frodsham (from mid month) and Gatewarth (31st). Single **Hobbies** flew over Knutsford Moor (4th), Fulshaw Park, Wilmslow (7th) and two were regularly seen at the Toft Estate, Knutsford during the month. Single Peregrines visited Fiddler's Ferry (11th), Rostherne Mere (17th), the first there since spring, and one/two juveniles harassed the wader roosts at Frodsham late in the month. A **Quail** was still calling at one site (until 21st).

An **Oystercatcher** near Poynton Pool (12th) was exceptional there. Five **Little Ringed Plovers** at Gatewarth included 2 juveniles (24th) from a breeding pair nearby and a juvenile at Tatton Mere (8th) was the first confirmed record for that site. A roost of 150 **Ringed Plovers** was at Frodsham (29th) with the first returning **Golden Plovers** back at Fiddler's Ferry (17th), Gatewarth and Frodsham (both 24th). At least 139 **Grey Plovers** were on the Mersey Estuary (8th) with a summer plumaged adult at Gatewarth (18th) and 8 at Frodsham No6 tank (29th). By late August

Lapwing numbers reached 2000 at Frodsham and 1200 at Chelford SQ's. Frodsham held 14 **Knot** (29th) and one/two **Sanderlings** late in the month. One **Little Stint** remained at Frodsham early in the month with another at Inner Marsh Farm (14th). An adult **Curlew Sandpiper** was at the Weaver Bend (17th) with juveniles appearing from the 24th. 1500 **Dunlin** were on the Mersey Estuary (8th). Three and 14 **Ruff** were at Richmond Bank and Frodsham No6 tank respectively (both on 24th). **Snipe** returned late to Gatewarth (two on 24th) and four birds were at a farm pond at Lymm (11th). **Black-tailed Godwits** reached record numbers at Frodsham including 1500 on the 21st and 1640 three days later. On the later date a record 81 birds were at Sandbach Flashes, the previous record was 11 on 3rd July 1988. These large numbers coincided with large numbers across the North West. Two **Whimbrels** at Fiddler's Ferry (10th) were the first of the year there and a flock of 120 **Curlews** were at Fiddler's Ferry (24th). Single **Spotted Redshanks** visited Sandbach Flashes and Frodsham late in the month with 2500 **Redshanks** counted along the Mersey (8th), a high total. The same day, a **Marsh Sandpiper** reported from Frodsham No6 tank would be the third county record, the others were at Sandbach and Altrincham (in old Cheshire). Up to four **Greenshank** were at both Inner Marsh Farm and



Sandbach Flashes with 25 at Frodsham No6 tank (29th) and up to 40 in the Parkgate/Inner Marsh Farm area. The first **Green Sandpipers** returned to Gatewarth (from 10th) with 7 at both Sandbach Flashes (18th) and Frodsham (24th). **Wood Sandpipers** are rare at Richmond Bank so a single (18th) was the observers first with a new bird (21st), two at the nearby sewage farm (24th) and one at Frodsham early in the month. Passage **Common Sandpipers** at Gatewarth increased to 16 birds (11th) and an incredible 24 roosted along the river here (24th) with up to 5 and 9 at Fiddler's Ferry and Frodsham No6 tank respectively during the month.



Single **Pomarine Skuas** were off Hilbre (11th and 25th) with a maximum of 18 **Arctic Skuas** also off Hilbre (25th). A **Mediterranean Gull** was at Neumann's Flash (4th) and 10 **Little Gulls** were off New Brighton (30th). At least 5 **Yellow-legged Gulls** were reported from Gatewarth this month with singles at Fiddler's Ferry and Marbury No1 tank. A second winter **Iceland Gull** was at Frodsham (29th) with 26 **Common Terns** off Hilbre (31st) and four at

Rostherne Mere (7th). Single **Black Terns** at Hilbre (25th) and Burton Marsh (31st) continued another poor year for this species. Single **Cuckoos** were at Gatewarth (10th), Redesmere (19th) and Bateheath (26th). A day hunting **Long-eared Owl** was at Gatewarth (11th). **Swifts** left Wilmslow (15th) but three were still at Sandbach (26th). A **Green Woodpecker** was seen near Poynton Pool on 4 dates this month. A Wilmslow garden was visited by both a **Great Spotted** and **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** during the month. A mixed flock of 170+ **Swallows** and **House Martins** was at Hazelbadge Fields, Poynton while House Martins bred at Poynton Pool for the first time. Single **Tree Pipits** flew over Gatewarth and Fulshaw Park, Wilmslow with 200+ **Meadow Pipits** at the former site (28th). Light passage of **Tree Pipits** and **Yellow Wagtails** was noted at Hilbre and a one of the latter was at Gatewarth (24th). **Redstarts** bred at Lamaload Reservoir and near Kettleshulme. The first returning **Whinchat** at Gatewarth was seen (28th) and **Wheatears** had arrived back there (24th) with a pair and young at Frodsham (24th). Large **Mistle Thrush** flocks included c45 at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton and c40 at Poynton Pool.

A **Grasshopper Warbler** was at Gatewarth (10th and 11th). A **Reed Warbler** was still at Knutsford Moor (26th) and three different **Garden Warblers** visiting Fulshaw Park, Wilmslow (3rd, 22nd and 26th) was a good series of records there. **Spotted Flycatchers** bred at Tatton Old Hall with a single bird at Fulshaw Park, Wilmslow (19th). Record numbers of **Blue Tits** used feeders in a Wilmslow garden during July and August suggesting a good breeding season despite the poor weather with the max. count here of 85 birds on the 28th and a 1:8 ratio of adults to juveniles. A **Raven** at Gatewarth (18th) was the observers first here and up to 200 **House Sparrows** fed nearby. Flocks of **Tree Sparrows** at Thelwall (14 on 4th) and Heatley (12 on 11th), both included juveniles with a small flock at Frodsham most of the month. Flocks of 45 and 100+ **Goldfinches** were at Statham and Gatewarth on the 30th and 31st respectively. **Siskins** were at Macclesfield Forest all month and 4 **Corn Buntings** were on farmland at Lymm (20th).

Early SEPTEMBER

Star bird of the month, so far, was a stunning juvenile **Woodchat Shrike** which gave crippling views down to a few feet as it fed on beetles and caterpillars along the No6 tank embankment at Frodsham from the 4th to 7th. This was the second County record since the formation of the BBRC, the first being one on Hibre in the spring of 1958. Two older records, in 1908 and 1954 were however accepted in good faith by the relevant committees.

A **Little Grebe** was still on a nest at Winsford and a record 26 **Great-crested Grebes** at Fiddler's Ferry, both on the 1st. A **Black-necked Grebe** visited Frodsham (from 7th). A male **Gadwall** at the Bridgewater Canal, Statham (1st) was the observers second ever there in nine years following a male in 1992. On the 6th, 39 **Pochard** and 149 **Tufted Ducks** were at Tatton. The **Lesser Scaup** at Frodsham remained into the first week with at least 18 **Ruddy Ducks** present there (7th). A **Honey Buzzard** was seen over the M56 at Rostherne and Hoylake, both on the 7th, following the

typical recent pattern of records in the county. Up to five **Buzzards** were at Rostherne in the first week. A **Pectoral Sandpiper** arrived at the Weaver Bend (from 7th), was typical for this species in both date and location, where five **Curlew Sandpipers** were seen (7th). Last months adult **Yellow-legged Gull** at Fiddler's Ferry was still present (1st) and an immature **Iceland Gull** was an excellent find at Frodsham No6 tank (4th). A **Ring-necked Parakeet** flew south over a Wilmslow garden (1st) heading for the Bollin Valley and a **Swift** flew over Statham next day. **Green Woodpeckers** were seen at Poynton, Tatton Park and Winsford in the first week. Up to 12 **Yellow Wagtails** were at Frodsham No6 tank in the first week where 3 **Whitethroats** were seen (4th). A pair of **Nuthatches** bred 3 young at Rixton Clay Pits but surprisingly there are no previous records of this species at the site. A flock of 150+ **Greenfinches** fed in a stubble field at High Legh (1st).

PREDICTIONS FOR OCTOBER TO DECEMBER

By the end of October the last few Swallows and House Martins will have departed. October storms can produce excellent seawatching at Hilbre or New Brighton. Key species to look out for may include (in small numbers) all four Skuas, Razorbill, Guillemot and Puffin. If you are lucky you may find a Little Auk, better still would be a Leach's Petrel or Sabine's Gull which have both occurred in October. The odd rare passerine, such as Hoopoe or more likely a Yellow-browed Warbler, will turn up (even at inland sites). The county is due for an American passerine with only two previous accepted records, i.e. Black-billed Cuckoo (Red Rocks in 1982) and Common Nighthawk (Moreton in 1985), both in October and given the proximity of Liverpool there is a good chance of a ship assisted passerine on the Wirral. A Red-eyed Vireo would do nicely!!

By early November large numbers of both Fieldfare and Redwing will be in evidence. A high tide on the Dee estuary should produce several Water Rails but the main attraction is sure to be the raptors including Short-eared Owl, Merlin, Peregrine and Hen Harrier. The odd Lapland Bunting may turn up on the coast with the best bet at Red Rocks, Hilbre and Parkgate where small numbers of Twite may also be present. Search tit flocks for Nuthatches, Treecreepers and particularly Firecrest. Check finch flocks for Bramblings, Yellowhammers or even a Little Bunting is not out of the question. Harsh weather in December should bring a selection of goodies with all three divers and the three scarce grebes possible off Hilbre. Both Red-necked and Slavonian Grebes could turn up inland. The large duck numbers at Inner Marsh Farm and Rostherne Mere may hold the odd rarity such as Green-winged Teal or American Wigeon. Any large gull roost (try Rostherne Mere and Neumann's Flash) may hold Glaucous or Iceland Gull. Bitterns should be back at Rostherne but also try Budworth Mere. Last year a good influx of White-fronted Geese occurred and a repeat this year would be much appreciated (try Sandbach Flashes and Bosley Reservoir) but check any local Canada flock just in case. Keep an eye on those garden feeders for wintering Blackcaps.

If you would like to see your Cheshire and Wirral sightings featured here then send details to me, to arrive by early December.

Phil Oddy, 4 Swan Close, Poynton, Stockport, Cheshire, SK12 1HX (Tel: 01625 877855)

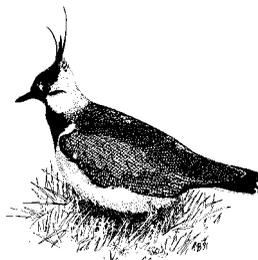
Thanks/Acknowledgements for Recent Reports go to:- Steve and Gill Barber, Philip Barnett, Birdline Northwest, Birdwatch magazine, Birdwatching magazine, R. Bridson, George Brown, Jeff Clarke (Gatewarth Area), Eric Hardy, Ron Harrison, Paul Hill, Ken Kirk, Geoff Lightfoot, Keith Massey (Fiddler's Ferry), Bill Morton (Frodsham Marsh), Brian Roberts (Tatton and Knutsford Moor LNR), the Rostherne Log, Sandbach Flashes Log, James Smith, Peter Walton and anyone else who passed records on.

ON THE WING

I was watching swifts carve through the sky when, just as my train came, I saw two couple quickly in their flight - a thrashing of four wings and it was done: an ecstasy so clean and practical it put to shame humanity's manoeuvrings.

Peter Walton

The View from the Farmyard



In June my employer invited me to accompany him on a farm walk arranged by FWAG (farm wildlife action group). The farm visited was that of Richard Ratcliff at Sound, Nantwich. Mr Ratcliff's farm is ideally situated on the edge of Sound common. For some reason the farm is called Hill Farm, and as Mr Ratcliff pointed out is probably the lowest hill farm in the country. The hill is barely discernible above the rest of the Cheshire plain. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that Mr Ratcliff does have a genuine interest in the wildlife on his land, leaving small corners of fields and managing existing habitats sympathetically. The farm lies on the bank of the River Weaver and a steep wet area leading down to the river is to be planted with trees and a boggy area managed to create insect and bird habitat. Though these efforts are on rather a small scale they will enhance habitats already bordering the farm. These developments are not haphazard but planned with the aid of Doug Hill of FWAG and the Forestry Commission. Around 50 species of bird were identified on the farm between March and May by a BTO field worker, six of these species being considered locally scarce. You may be led to believe that any farm which invites the BTO onboard and can boast a healthy selection of birds, would be old fashioned and slightly run down. But this would be a mistake, Mr Ratcliff is acknowledged as an excellent farmer, his herd is first class and the standard of his cropping second to none. The 30 or so farmers attending were treated to a display of farming at its best, with room for wildlife too. Just to prove it can be done.

The continuing drought is gradually destroying the ponds and wet areas in Toft, as in many other places trees, and even the undercover in woods is dying, in some woods the usually rampant Rhododendron is even losing its leaves. Birch, Beech, Sycamore and Oak have become casualties as the water table falls away. Much of Toft is very sandy and the loss of moisture can be very rapid, should the understory in the woods die the prospects for nesting Blackcaps and Garden Warbler next year don't look too good.

Coots and Moorhens had many nests early in the spring, but few of the young survived. At first I felt the cause was most likely the weather, but the discovery of a large dead female Mink on the Hall drive points to a more likely cause. Subsequent nests have yielded well, now at last in late August good numbers of youngsters are to be found scampering about between the stems of lily pads which stand high and dry like beach umbrellas.

Toft Halls House Martin colony is once again going through expansion, with 43 first broods and 33 second, this is the highest number of broods in recent times and also the highest proportion of second to first broods I have seen. The young Swallows from their first broods left early this year, and the large roosts in maize fields of last year failed to materialise in 1996. One young swallow fell from the nest in the milking parlour, when I found it, it was very cold, having dried it with tissue and wrapped it in paper towels I slipped it inside my overalls during my lunch hour. After lunch the tiny bird was much warmer so it was returned to the other 3 young, all four fledged 10 days later - a most satisfying outcome indeed.

Tawny Owls are more often heard than seen, so to see three during daylight hours is quite a treat, especially when they were newly fledged youngsters. They sat on top of a feed rack by Toft pool like three poorly stuffed cuddly toys, their heads swaying, and hissing like a pit full of snakes. In fact it was the hissing that led me to them, clearly audible 200 yards away. The distress among other birds was considerable and I doubt if any other predator would have received a more aggressive reception. No adults were to be seen, but I felt I was being watched, and the protests of a party of Swallows indicated an unseen presence in the trees nearby. The young were to be seen here for several days more, then like their parents they learned to blend into the countryside and were gone.

A flash of blue and the piping call of the Kingfisher are usually the first indications that they have once again begun their summer visit to Toft pool. Only during summer and early Autumn

do one or two birds visit each year, There is no indication that breeding has ever taken place here. So what a treat to locate first an adult and then a well grown youngster, here for only a few hours they gave an exhibition of expert angling and enthusiastic begging. The adult caught fish and the youngster ate them, the adult I felt was becoming somewhat jaded by the pleas of junior and would soon be rid of it.

Contrary to popular belief my life isn't one long lunch time. But here's another lunch-time story, sitting in the long grass beside a hedgerow eating my lunch and looking over the Cheshire plain toward Beeston castle and its hill which rises like a wedge of Cheshire cheese above the plain. Suddenly to my right and two fields away 200 Lapwings took to the air, protesting at having been disturbed. Then in the wood closer to me a flock of Wood Pigeons took flight, their flight indicating they were avoiding an aerial predator. The distress of these two flocks was mirrored by the Swallow and House Martin flock over Toft hall 200 yards to my left. The commotion mounted, birds in the hedge behind me were issuing alarm calls. Though I searched the sky it took me a great deal of time to locate the Hobby, a small speck at first but coming toward me. It grew in size rapidly as its fixed wing glide enabled it to tear across the sky. Then when it was straight in front of me it pulled its wings in closer to its body. The terrific pace of its attack gave one House Martin no chance, it banked tight right reached out and grabbed its prey protesting as the other birds did, the kill was made and the Hobby was gone. No wonder that small birds show such respect for the Hobby, often with the threat of a Hobby attack small birds such as Swallows and Martins struggle to be higher than the predator, and will climb almost out of sight. The alarm note given by the Swallow and Martin flock when under attack from Hobby is slightly more desperate than for say Sparrowhawk or Kestrel, I think showing the respect due to an awesome bird.

Pete Hall, The School House, Toft Road, Knutsford



"LAPWINGS IN SLEET" by THELMA SYKES

Blue Neb Studios, 18 Newcroft, Saughall, Chester, CH1 6EL

SUBMITTING DESCRIPTIONS OF YELLOW-LEGGED GULLS - A CHORE OR A CHALLENGE?

A question for Jeff Clarke - When is *Larus argentatus/cachinnans michahellis* not a Yellow-legged Gull at all? Why, when it's a White-headed Gull, of course! Not a name I can warm to either, but my German friends urge me, as they would all British birdwatchers, to adopt this 'more appropriate' name, the English translation of their Weisskopfmöwe. I do my best in our conversations about these birds, but for the purposes of this letter I shall refer to Yellow-legged - a more familiar name for a gull that to me, in some strange ways, seems to become less familiar the more I study 'it'.

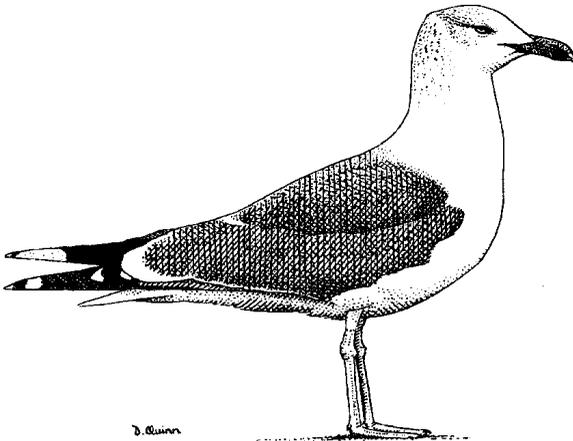
Jeff's letter 'A Rarity for the "Gullible"?' (Bird News, July 1996) should be welcomed for both it's tongue-in-cheek approach and for the more important issues it raises at a time when County Recorders around the country are experiencing problems dealing with Yellow-legged Gull submissions. Cheshire is having it's own difficulties in assessing the increasing numbers of reported Yellow-legged Gulls. However this isn't purely a numbers issue. The generally inadequate and often misleading nature of the descriptions accompanying the records only serve to undermine the, perhaps genuine, claims thus hindering attempts by the panel to establish the occurrence of these gulls with any accuracy.

The Cheshire Rarities panel have been monitoring the situation for ten years or so and even as recently as '92 - '93 Yellow-legged Gulls were still scarce late-summer visitors, rare at other times. By requesting full descriptions of all records, it was hoped that observers would document Cheshire's Yellow-legged Gulls whilst, in the meantime, more experience and knowledge of these birds would accumulate at County and National levels. Despite birders generally developing a feeling of familiarity with the 'species', the panel's initial hopes have yet to be fully realised - a result of some complacency and an apparent disregard for, or unawareness of, the difficult nature of the identification issues. A particularly unhelpful aspect has been the persistent use of stereotypical phrases in a number of cases duplicated word for word to describe birds seen in different months or even years! There are those who genuinely record what they have seen in the field and their submissions are welcomed with open arms. Ironically, one or two claiming experience of Yellow-legged Gulls submit little information to support their claims.

I have no wish to sound judgemental of any birder's competence in the field, I have enough problems of my own in that respect and I do appreciate that some will not always do their

identification skills and instincts justice when compiling formally written claims. Nevertheless, an assessor cannot be expected to make allowances for the simplistic methods adopted by some observers, especially for such a potentially difficult and little-understood bird as the Yellow-legged Gull.

Identifying Yellow-legged Gulls may not seem such a problem to many birders as long as the grey upperpart is well established i.e. on a second-winter bird or older and when a yellow leg colour is visible. It is interesting that of the 66 Yellow-legged Gulls submitted for 1995 (all adult except two or three second and third-years), every bird was described as having



Adult Yellow-legged Gull *michahellis* late August.

yellow legs. "So what's wrong with that?" I can hear you cry. Well to me this adds to the panel's dilemma. Have all of the observations confirmed the presence of yellow legs, or have a number of the duplicated descriptions merely included yellow legs as a convenient 'typical' feature of the 'species'? Or, less cynically perhaps, does it simply suggest that no birds were identified where legs were not seen, or similarly, where visible legs lacked any discernible yellow hue (a frequent occurrence in my experience with dull flesh, grey-flesh, pale washed-out buff or straw occurring even on birds of fully adult appearance in late summer/early autumn)? So although mantle colour and tone is indeed an important and useful aspect of locating specimens, as Jeff points out, it seems, from the records, that our observers are only identifying birds when yellow-leggedness is an available feature.

My suggestion that numbers of less-typical birds are going unrecorded only conspires to add weight to Jeff's argument that this scarce county bird is now apparently so numerous that it's rare status must now be regarded as questionable. However, I'm not sure that Jeff could go out and find 100 different individuals in Cheshire in one year, although I would be delighted if he proved me wrong. Unfortunately Tony & Co would need to hire an assistant to cope with all of the descriptions so neatly typed out by Mr Clarke's secretary!

I'm not sure what the answers are to all these potential logistical problems - I know that Jeff has already seen about forty Yellow-legged Gulls this year, though how many individual birds will be virtually impossible to establish, even with detailed field notes, as plumage and bare parts alter through late summer/early autumn. There is a sense of the panel swimming against the tide by adhering to their stance over description requirements for this, so-called, species.

To British birdwatchers, the Mediterranean 'subspecies', *michahellis*, is the Yellow-legged Gull and virtually every record of them in this country presumes this race. In most instances this probably is the case, the northward movement of *michahellis* in breeding range and post-breeding dispersal is now well documented and ringing recoveries from the Mediterranean coasts of France, Spain and Italy have provided evidence of their movement to Britain. The occurrence of 'nominata' *cachinnans* has been established amongst large flocks of *michahellis* in Essex and with a Portuguese bird recovered in Gloucester demonstrates the wide geographical origins of Yellow-legged Gulls making their way into Britain. It is worrying that a number of birders, with their undoubted heightened awareness and increasing exposure to Yellow-legged Gulls in this country are falling into a false sense of security and are becoming a little complacent about the need to identify and document these gulls with care.

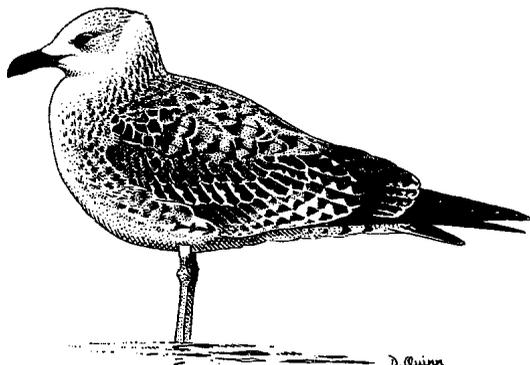
However obvious or distinctive typical Yellow-legged Gulls may appear in the field, the critical nature of the wider identification issues as much as the scarcity of these birds demands more caution and diligence than has so far been the case generally.

I can sympathise with those gull watchers who see Yellow-legged Gulls frequently, only to have to submit tedious records of their sightings of 'classic', 'typical' or even 'bog-standard' individuals. Descriptions needn't be long-winded or repetitive, of course this would become a chore. Concise but accurate and relevant details can be compiled in the field. I often use photocopies of pre-drawn outlines of gulls to quickly pencil in notes of patterns of plumage and bare parts, with additional comments or sketches on structure, size etc. next to the filled-in shape. Such practice not only improves your own knowledge but may help those assessing the records. Gull watchers who, like Jeff, are seeing tens of these birds in a year could submit copies of any notes they may have of individual birds with the emphasis being on quality of information as far as field conditions and circumstances will allow.

That only first and second-year birds should require descriptions, is a suggestion that makes me a little nervous. In my experience, some of the most problematic birds are near-adults or fourth-year type Yellow-legged Gulls whose primary patterns may be less distinguishable from near-adults of some similar races or species. Bare parts and head-streaking may also be less typical than most older specimens.

First-years are indeed difficult and relatively little-understood in Britain. Juveniles and first-winters, however, may be fairly distinctive in appearance and, ironically, often exhibit a more conclusive combination of identification features than older individuals of second and third-year types. First-year Yellow-legged Gulls must still be identified by examining plumage

patterns of all wing-coverts, particularly greater-coverts and tertials, tail band and uppertail-coverts and rump, scapulars and the impression of the open wing from above and below. Head and neck patterns are often as distinctive as the white-headed appearance. Head and bill structure and bare part colours must also be described and compared, where possible with Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls of the same age. Needless to say the separation from these two 'more familiar' gulls is critical.



Yellow-legged Gull *michahellis*
 Juvenile moulting to first-winter

The uncertainties over the classification of the large gulls will continue for some time, no doubt. Regardless of any taxonomic decisions by British Birds, the BOU or CAWOS, the gulls are out there, unaware of their DNA Profiles and Morphometries. The problems for the birdwatchers remain. That the variable *michahellis* and 'nominat' *cachinnans* or Steppe Yellow-legged Gull, as it is now called by some, are occurring in England in mixed flocks of large gulls should underline the need for careful scrutiny of our local gull flocks. On a rubbish tip in Essex, I have seen many *michahellis* alongside *graellsii*, *argenteus* and *argentatus* (including yellow-legged of this race). It is like sifting through a gull soup with a smattering of 'nominat' *cachinnans* thrown in, like croutons, for good measure. The taxonomic debate can add spice to our birdwatching but it can become a distraction. It is important, at this time of new discoveries, to attempt to locate and record these distinguishable gull forms in the field. From Portugal to the Black Sea, Yellow-legged Gulls are making their way to Britain, so keep looking and send in as many details as you can for the time being. Let's not be complacent, for this 'Rarity for the Gullible' whatever it is, has some surprises and rewards in store for those who conscientiously search for and study Yellow-legged Gulls. Oh and by the way, they are often nice to look at too!

David Quinn, 24 Regent Street, Moulton, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 8NY

NOTE: A paper by ex-Cheshire birder Martin Garner, due for publication in British Birds in January 1997, will cover the identification of Yellow-legged Gulls in Britain. Colour plates and drawings by David Quinn will illustrate all ages from juveniles to adult of *michahellis* and *cachinnans*.

Notes & Letters

THE GULL WITH LONG LEGS

Being an avid seeker of yellow-legged gulls, *Larus michahellis*, I have noticed a consistent structural feature which I have hitherto failed to find in the current literature. When in the company of Herring Gulls, *Larus argentatus*, and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, *Larus fuscus*, (which they invariably are), they appear to be somewhat longer legged than the cousins. As yet I am not 100% sure whether this perceived "legginess" is the result of feathering on the tibia being less extensive than on it's congeners, or whether the tibia really is marginally longer on Yellow-legged Gull.

Conversations with several well known local gull experts failed to completely resolve the issue. David Quinn concurred that many of the Yellow-legged Gulls he personally observed did appear to be longer legged than the typical of the 'species', creating the appearance of long legs. Further to this he commented on an increasing number of Yellow-legged Gulls that appeared somewhat less leggy than typical specimens. Radical variation and the *michahellis/cachinnans* conundrum could all throw a royal spanner into the works.

That thorny issue aside, the specimens I observe regularly at Gatewarth, which appear to belong to the michahellis 'race' of Yellow-legged Gull, all give the impression of being longer legged than typical examples of the various races of Herring Gull or Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Next time you see a gull you regard as a Yellow-legged Gull, look for the structural feature, but remember to compare it with other species present. I would like to know your conclusions, negative or positive. You never know, this may be one way of helping to determine whether *Larus cachinnans* or *Larus michahellis* is filling your scope view.

Jeff Clarke, 90 Simonside, Hough Green, Widnes, Cheshire, WA8 4YN

YOC UPDATE IN CHESHIRE

At last my conscience has been pricked into activity, thanks to George Hill's article on "We were all Juv's Once" on Sandbach and Elworth YOC group in the July edition. I have been meaning to put pen to paper for several months now to give you an update on the RSPB junior section in Cheshire.

On taking up my voluntary role as CYO (County Youth Officer) in early '93 we had one YOC group in the County - Macclesfield. Since then groups are springing up all over the area. We now have successful groups in Chester, Crewe, Frodsham, Macclesfield, Sandbach and Widnes. Unfortunately Warrington is floundering although we are in the process of registering new leaders. Northwich has folded due to lack of leaders and support. I do have more groups in the pipeline, one being on the Wirral (Cheshire side). Most of the above groups are for the 8 to 13 year range.

In the past I have also tried, and I'm afraid without much success to interest and organise a group, or, events for teenagers, I know from correspondence from David Cogger that CAWOS is also concerned about the lack of members / enthusiasm from this age group. I'm afraid, at the moment, I cannot come up with any magic solution, apart from the problem this age group has with transport, they have to still rely on parents, or other drivers for this. If anyone has any suggestions on how we can encourage them to participate in anyway, please, please either contact me or any CAWOS committee member. The RSPB is also trying to address the problem and has launched its own teenage section, RSPB Phoenix, a group specially for 13 to 25 year olds. Teenage YOC members and young leaders were consulted about what they wanted, and in fact they chose their own name and designed their logo.

YOC groups get up to all sorts of things, from light-hearted events to the real serious stuff. Examples of both being:- Earth walks, parties, craft nights, pond dipping, conservation days, nest box construction and litter picks, we even managed to birdwatch!! Leaders and helpers also get a lot of fun and satisfaction out of it. Have you ever seen the expression on a child's face when they see their first Puffin or some other bird they've only heard about or seen on the TV, it's great! YOC leaders are not experts in anything, but it helps to know a little about most things, ranging from acorns to zebras.

Referring back to "We were all Juv's once" and with no disrespect to George, may I please put the record straight. All leaders and assistants have to be registered and "vetted" in accordance with the Childrens Act and Youth Organisation policies (the RSPB included). This is particularly important for outdoor activities and indoor meetings ran on premises other than schools (unless the meeting's held on school premises are independent from the school itself - all teachers are automatically vetted before they can take up a teaching post). However parents staying with their children do not require "vetting" and as George quite rightly states, you do not have to become a YOC leader to give assistance on the occasional meeting, be it indoor or out.

Finally (thank goodness do I hear you all say!), may I please take this opportunity to thank the George Hill's and David Cogger's of Cheshire (the YOC leaders assistants and helpers (in fact anyone who gives assistance to YOC groups. Without them Cheshire would not have as many YOC groups). It pays us to look after and encourage the youngsters interests because as I've said before, we owe it to ourselves to give them a sound background, as today's youth are tomorrow's conservationists and custodians of our countryside.

Jean Crouch, Cheshire CYO, 4 Blenheim Close, Poynton, Stockport, SK12 1ON, 01625 873147

PS I'm also a YOC leader of one of the Stockport Groups, which technically is in Greater Manchester, hence me not mentioning it above.

BREAKER, BREAKER

You either love them or hate them, but they do come in useful, especially when that awful feeling of isolation descends on you after an hour without seeing anyone at the north end of St Mary's, Isles of Scilly. The next person you meet however, has one of the usually frowned upon C.B.'s - citizen band radios, hanging by their side and within minutes of exchanging information, you can carry on your way, safely knowing that you're not missing any rarities.

On Scilly, they're commonly used, although at times, even here, on these magical islands, they do tend to become obtrusive if used thoughtlessly. A volume control left on full, can suddenly crackle very loudly or boom a voice out and scare the very bird that's just been announced over it. But in general, used properly, they're a bonus. It's a mystery though why they're not used in the rest of the country. I've never seen anybody in Cheshire using CB's, although in a lot of cases, they'd be very useful. Imagine trying to cover Frodsham Marsh with two of you, it's hard work. Split up, and you can cover a much larger area, communicating with CB's so that the chances of missing a bird are minimised. Local patch work could benefit. Only one or two people cover Tatton Park. If each had a CB, the coverage would once more be increased and perhaps more birds found.

So, all those 'good buddies' out there reading this, let us know if you do use CB's in the county and how effective they are. Which are the best and how much do they cost? Are there a limited number of models available that are suitable for birding?

There again, if you can't stand the hiss and crackle

Tony Broome, "Sibirica", 9 Vicarage Lane, Poynton, Stockport, Cheshire, SK12 1BG

The above title was not meant to be 'humorous' but could have read 'arm-breaker, arm-breaker' copy? Seriously, I happen to know Mr Broome is rather coy as to his handle (call-sign) when he owned a CB. Please submit your suggestions as to what it might have been. (My very last contribution!!) ED

ESCAPED FEMALE REDHEAD - BUDWORTH MERE 19TH JULY 1996.

Circumstances: The bird was found in the company of two Male and a Female Pochard at around 11:00. It was active, casually swimming with the Pochard but not too closely as they seemed slightly wary of it. Good views were obtained as the bird remained in the area in front of the Coward Reserve throughout. When first found it was alert and swimming (11:00 to 11:15) I then left, assuming the bird to be a Redhead but wishing confirmation from others, returned with some literature and Tony Murphy (11:40 to 12:20). The bird was less alert now and spent some time asleep. It awoke at about 12:10 and started to dive. Present in the immediate area for comparison, in addition to Pochard, were Tufted Duck and Mallard. The bird was still diving when we left.

Size and Structure: Noticeably larger than Pochard with a less angled head having a steep forehead and slightly slimmer and shorter bill giving the bird a more classic "duck like" appearance. It was commented that the head shape was similar to Red-crested Pochard. The rear end of the bird rode higher above the water than Pochard and it constantly carried its tail erect. A more rounded back was evident. The bill shape was distinctive having a slight hooked tip giving the appearance of a drop of water hanging from the tip whilst the whole bill appeared more curved overall than Pochard.

Head and Body: A deeper, richer brown than Pochard almost coffee coloured. From the eye downwards this started to diffuse to a dusky white which was evident on the lower cheeks, throat and foreneck. Upper body was coloured as the head with little or no mottling or variation. The under body was not noted. A whitish golden eye ring was seen with no trailing markings as with Pochard.

Wings: The upper wing was coloured as the body with a slightly darker colouring on the various coverts. Primaries were a paler brownish grey tipped with a darker brown, whilst the secondaries were a distinct grey brown (more grey) thinly tipped with white. This grey colouring was particularly noticeable even at rest. All coverts on the under wing were pure white with the remaining feathers a dirty white.

Tail: Slightly longer than Pochards and held more erect. Coloured slightly darker than the body. The undertail coverts were coloured off white on the upper half and mottled coffee brown on the lower with a distinct division between the two.

Bare parts: Legs were grey as Pochard with a pea green ring above the knee joint on the right leg. This was occasionally visible when the bird was at rest. The bill was dark grey with a small black tip (not that much darker than the rest of the bill) and a subterminal band between the tip and the remainder of the bill, which covered two thirds of the width but did not go to either side. The black line at the base of the bill was not noticed but could have been present. At no time did the bird show itself to be any tamer than the accompanying Pochard.

I last visited the Mere on July 16th, a trip to South Wales and a minor car crash prevented me from visiting on the two in between days. The bird was not present then nor were the Pochard. Tony Murphy has obtained video footage of the bird at 30x magnification. Tony and I felt that all features pointed towards a Female Redhead with the exception of two:

- 1) The subterminal band on the bill. We felt it should be complete as noted in all the available literature.
- 2) The undertail coverts had a rather strange division mid covert. This looked unusual.

However the following information came to light in the form of a photograph in *Birding World* vol 9 no3, page 95, (Arthur Morris/Windrush) showing a female Redhead with an indistinct subterminal band on the bill and apparently divided undertail coverts as the Budworth bird showed

Additionally I visited Hillside Wildfowl collection in Mobberley when five female and two male Redheads are kept. The bills of two females were closely examined at almost touching distance and seen to be exactly the same as the Budworth bird. The sub-terminal band only spanned the inner two thirds of the bill and the black tip was not that much darker than the rest of the bill. It is therefore apparent that the available literature describes birds in breeding condition and does not give a description of a post breeding bird. The undertail coverts of these two birds were also examined and were both seen to be different from each other and the Budworth Mere. The upper portion of the undertail coverts contained varying amounts of off white with a mottled pale brown on the lower portions with a rough but distinct division between the two. Although not exactly the same as the Budworth bird they were in the same vein and filled in a hole not covered by any reference quite nicely.

In conversation with the owner he assured me that all his birds were ringed but with no apparent system ie it appeared that any type of ring or colour had been used. There was one constant, all the birds that were rung all had rings below the knee joint not above as on the Budworth Bird. After walking around the collection I did find that many of the birds were in fact not rung and even more worryingly a male White-headed Duck was seen to fly the full length of its untopped enclosure. I was told that he had not lost a Redhead although at £65.00 a pair it wouldn't be considered much of a loss any way. According to *Birding World*, Vol 9 No 3 page 97, Redheads are kept in only six British collections in Cheshire, London, Norfolk, Suffolk, Surrey and Sussex. One checked five to go.

Upon reflection this was like trying to find a needle in a haystack. After several telephone calls it has become apparent that the question "Have you lost any Redheads" can be taken offensively so I gave up. I took a million to one chance and wrote to the American Birding Association and promptly and somewhat impressively received a reply from a sub-branch of the Department of the Interior who disappointingly informed me that in their opinion there was no way that this bird had originated from North America or Canada. No great surprise there. During a conversation with Ted Abrahams it became apparent that a female Redhead was observed very well on Eccleston Mere, St Helens, 4th May 1996. This bird also carried a pea green ring, so I would say that it was almost definitely the Budworth bird. This bird showed a full white sub-terminal band thus proving that in post breeding condition the band recedes.

In conclusion I shall say that this bird was an escaped female Redhead. Various literature quotes occasional records of hybrid aythya's vaguely resembling male Redheads, but to the best of my knowledge a female type hybrid has never been reported in a non-enclosed state in Britain. The, hopefully, wild male in Nottinghamshire and the escaped female in St Helens and the same bird on Budworth Mere. Even though the bird was ringed and was definitely an escape the whole situation still provided those involved with a stimulating identification challenge and also perpetuated the myth that if there is any species of remotely dodgy wildfowl in the country it will, at some point, find it's way onto the Mere.

Dave M. Walters, 43 Forster Avenue, Weaverham, Northwich, CW8 3BJ

DISGRACEFUL!

A first for Cheshire and out of the hundreds who dashed down to see it, only ONE person has put a description in for it, G Bellingham - well done! What am I talking about - the male Lesser Scaup found on Frodsham's No 6.

Maybe nobody else feels confident to claim it - I don't on my view I must admit - in eclipse and against the sun, the perfect get-out clause. But at least I wrote notes on what I saw, even if they were inconclusive..... Joking apart, we really do need a lot more in the way of descriptions - come on, some of you must have decent notes on the bird. Don't leave it to one man for one date - what about the rest of the time?

And Mr Bellingham's done the same again with the Thurstaston Arctic Redpoll - but where are all the others? Another ace rarity, almost a first, and nobody has bothered to send a description in!

BBRC are requesting descriptions for the first dates for both birds. Please don't let these two goodies go incorrectly documented - send them to me ASAP.

Tony Broome, "Sibirica", 9 Vicarage Lane, Poynton, Stockport, Cheshire, SK12 1BG

PS On a national scale, neither the Great Orme Black-eared Wheatear or the Conwy Marsh Sandpiper have been submitted. If you want a chance to see your name in print, send them in, no one else is bothering.

FLYING A KITE

Firstly, what a good read July's bird news was, very enjoyable. However, I would just like to reply to Tony Broome's remark about my letter. As I mentioned the letter was purely and simply written for inclusion in Tony's own "Rumours" section. I used the word Rumour persistently for emphasis. This directly implies that I possessed no facts and my letter was speculative at best. The rumour regarding the "Large dark raptor" was just that, something someone told me in the pub on the Scillies (Yes, a Scilly rumour!). Thanks to Judith for clearing that up so concisely. The Bee-eater was more tangible and the scenario depicted by the various information services did not match up to the facts (yes facts) as recently presented by Tony. Thank you Tony, that is exactly what I wanted to hear.

I guess that should make me a happy bunny because my two "questions" were competently answered and my worries about suppression in the county have been soothed.

However, I do not feel Tony's remark about checking contentious letters was really necessary. My letter was not designed to be contentious and my demeanour could have been checked retrospectively (for example before publishing July's Bird News) then I would not have been miffed by Tony being miffed! (That was me being lighthearted!)

Secondly, I would like to say a thoroughly deserved "Well Done" to James Walsh's and Dave Walter's teams who have just done so well in the recent "In-Focus" bird race. James is perfectly correct when he says 150 is achievable. I was part of Hugh Pulsford's team who set the 149 record. We managed a totally unofficial and totally hypothetical 150 by two team members only seeing a Marsh Harrier at Inner Marsh Farm. I could not direct the rest of the team onto the bird so we were forced to "throw it away". Still it is great to see people so keen to challenge established records. Keep it up lads.

Finally, I would like to record that I totally agree with Tony Broome's personal view point on fishing and fishermen. I too am fed up of them extensively tidying and managing the banks of ponds, meres, canals and rivers. On the odd occasion when I do run into them I find they block tow paths and footpaths and very begrudgingly move aside (oops, that sounds like twitchers too!) I am sure there is a case for "live and let live", if only they saw it that way as well.

Mike Crawley, 9 Leeside, Heaton Mersey, Stockport, SK4 2DN

P.S. I for one am looking forward to the Yule Log, but where will I find a car large enough to carry all my cold weather gear for the day?

IN REPLY:

Thanks Mike, point taken. What I should have done was to reply to your original "Rumour" note in the same issue and avoided any confusion from the beginning. Sorry if the reply was ill-timed. Your comments on the other two topics are welcome. I wonder who will be the first to break 150 for

the county, a total incidentally far in excess of other west coast county possible totals. Even the infamous Lee Evans with his thirst for listing and totals, questioned the probability of so many species away from the east and south coast hot spots. But the proof is in the pudding. In fact, if you look in the September 96 issue of Birdwatch Magazine at the UK Bird Race write up, only the "In Focus Flyers" of Norfolk managed more, with 151 species in a day. The Kent team saw 146 species, another Norfolk team 149, and the Yorkshire lads, 144. As you can see, Cheshire and Wirral is right up there with the best of them.

I'm sure one of our excellent up and coming teams will crack it, the magical 150 that is, in the next couple of years. It also shows how much the county has to offer

Tony Broome, County Recorder

THE CAWOS YULE LOG 1996 - UPDATE

So far, I have had about 3 people say that they will probably enter teams for the planned Winter Bird Race, but no-one has actually entered. Since this is the last Bird News before the event, here is a quick reminder. This brand new competition will take place on Sunday 29th Dec 1996 - because this gives a midday high tide on the Dee. Teams must be made up of 2 or more people and the aim is to log as many species as possible. If someone wants to enter a team of 10 then that's fine, but everyone in the team must see or hear the bird. Any bird seen 'in the wild' can be counted. You can also include subspecies which have been considered at any time by the BBRC (Green-winged Teal for example). Teams with a CAWOS member, and at least one non-member, can add 2 points to their score. If any of the non-members are under the age of 18, the team can add a further 2 points. So, this means that a CAWOS member setting up a team containing a young non-member can claim a maximum of 4 extra points, and enjoy knowing that they may have helped enlist another youngster to the cause. In the event of a draw the winning team will be the one which records the most species in Categories A, B and C of the British list.

It costs £1.00 to enter and all teams entering can vote on what to do with the money left over after postage costs have been taken out. Suggestions made so far include giving the money to various conservation charities e.g. RSPB, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Birdlife International, BTO, Save our Skylarks campaign, so that the money provides some direct benefit for the birds. Birdline North West are also donating £30 to the chosen cause.

So, that's it. To enter, simply send a £1.00 coin and the following information to me at the address shown below and I will then send you a recording sheet, and further details. Come on, what else would you be doing apart from watching loads of Christmas repeats on the telly and eating far too much - who knows, you might find a Christmas cracker !!

- Name of your team
- Name, address and home phone number of the Team Captain
- Names of other team members (if known at this stage)
- Suggestion(s) about what to do with the entry money
- Any other suggestions about what might make the event more fun. (For example, the rules could be altered so that all teams have to meet up at Parkgate at dusk which is conveniently located next to the Boat House pub, and offers the chance of Hen Harrier coming in to roost)

Mike Holmes, 114 Merlin Way, Coppenhall, Crewe, Cheshire, CW1 3RZ. Tel 01270-216890

ONE FOR THE ROAD

You may be interested in my encounter with a Great Crested Grebe in June of last year. I was returning to my car after having been bird watching in Marbury Country Park woods. As I walked over the canal bridge on Marbury Lane, I saw a Great Crested Grebe sitting in the middle of the Road! It did not appear distressed at all - in fact it looked as serene and at home as if it was swimming in the water (it obviously had not tried diving at this stage!).

Avoiding the enthusiastic stabs at me with it's sharp bill, I finally managed to pick it up. The nearest water was obviously the canal and I placed the bird on the water. It immediately dived and within a matter of seconds, surfaced - with a fish in it's bill! Now that's what I call "COOL"!

John Wright, 3 Hield Cottage, Hield Land, Aston by Budworth, Northwich, CW9 6LP.

HEAD IN THE CLOUDS

Tony Broome's piece on skywatching and the editors request for memorable flyovers brings to mind one of my truly subliminal birding moments.

Whilst tending my back garden on 13th June 1993, in itself a most unexpected occurrence, I had been enjoying the delights of the neighbourhood House Martins. Tearing myself away from their aerial cake walk, no doubt following a verbal warning from my long suffering wife, I bent down to pick up a bundle of uprooted herbage.

Suddenly a little voice inside my head said "look up now". A Starling with advanced avionics crossed my line of vision. The 'voice' screamed "It's not a Starling, look harder". "It can't be what I think it is", I told the voice, "they don't fly over smelly old Widnes". As it careered away over the rooftops a glint of sunlight illuminated its golden mantle and tantalised my mind with a paintbox full of colours. Disbelief turned to delirium.

I dashed inside to telephone a birding friend in direct line of flight. Unfortunately he thought I was pulling his leg. By the time he made the door, just a distant "kroop" traced the passage of a stunning Bee-eater.

"I heard it too", said the voice.

Jeff Clarke, 90 Simonside, Hough Green, Widnes, Cheshire WA8 4YN

THE FIRST STEP TO PREDICTING THE OCCURRENCES OF RARITIES

Rare waders are perhaps the most sought after of Cheshire's unusual visitors quite simply because they seem to be the easiest to find. It always seemed to me that places such as Frodsham and Sandbach received more than their fair share. Was there something else that linked these hot spots? We all know that a lot of birds use rivers as a sort of motorway whilst migrating overland, what I didn't know was to what degree the rare waders of Cheshire used this form of navigation.

There have been sixty three individuals accepted by the BBRC for Cheshire and the Wirral of eighteen species (this includes Dowitcher sp.). These have been distributed through eighteen sites (taking the Frodsham area as one site and the Witton Limebeds and Marbury Country Park as one site). Nothing unusual so far. So which rivers links them and in what way?

River	Site	Distance
Coastal	West Kirby	n/a
	Hoylake	n/a
Mersey	Newferry	Adjacent
	Penketh	Adjacent
	Latchford	Adjacent
	Thelwall	Adjacent
	Woolston Eyes	Adjacent
Weaver	Walton Reservoir	1 mile
	Frodsham Marsh	Adjacent
	Acton Bridge	Adjacent
	Witton Limebeds	1/2 mile
Dane	Kingsley	1/2 mile
	Billinge	1/2 mile
	Bereton Park	1 mile
Dee	Griffiths Road Lagoons	1 mile
	Inner Marsh Farm	Adjacent
	Burton Marsh	Adjacent
Wheelock	Sandbach Flashes	Adjacent
	Middlewich	1 mile

(Sites 1/4 mile or less from the river are termed adjacent. No attempt has been made to distinguish estuary from river. The two records from Altrincham Sewage Farm have been omitted for no other reason than I do not own an O.S. Map for that area)

From this we can conclude that all of the sixty three individuals that were not coastal, have without

fail, occurred within 1 mile of one of five of Cheshire's main rivers. Many additional variables can be used to explain this, eg quality of site, observer concentration, etc. Even so, I still find it absolutely remarkable that this should be the case. Obviously in Cheshire shorebirds rely on these aquatic freeways 100%, explaining the shared rarities that have occurred between Frodsham, Witton Limebeds and Sandbach. The Wheelock joins the Dane which in turn joins the Weaver, thus providing the birds with a handy route from site to site.

Given these facts we can comfortably predict that the next rare wader in the county will occur within one mile of one of these rivers. As my old mother was fond of saying "give me one reasonable constant and however variable the remaining variables I will confidently predict..."

Dave M Walters, 43 Forster Avenue, Weaverham, Northwich, Cheshire, CW8 3BJ

SCILLY TALES

Your hard working editorial team, with one notable exception, is unselfishly slaving away here on St. Mary's, proof reading this Bird News. No matter how often the pager bleeps to inform us of Buff-bellied Pipit, Bobolink, Black and White, Arctic, Barred, Dusky, Icterine or Yellow-browed Warblers, Red-eyed Vireo, Semi-palmated Sandpiper, Hoopoe or Red-breasted flycatcher, we stick to our duty. Yes, it must be guilt at missing yet another October 1st deadline. Never mind I'm sure you will excuse us as, under a new Editor, matters can only improve. Unless, that is, he is persuaded to visit these magical islands, in which case ...

THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN

August - we're in the middle of the final compilation of the 1995 Bird Report and as ever, there are a few facts and figures that may be of interest to society members.

There were well in excess of 700 "individual" bird sightings that were submitted which required descriptions. That is, if everybody that saw these birds sent a description in with their annual records, we'd have 700+ neatly documented "field notes" to file and support the sightings. In reality, we only require one decent description per bird and that would bring the total down to around 350+, thus avoiding unnecessary duplication of effort.

On the positive side of things, we actually received more in the way of descriptions this year than in previous years, which is pleasing. However, we still fell short by over 100 and did have to send gentle reminders out to quite a lot of observers, requesting their descriptions to enable us to complete the systematic list. People do forget, it's easy to do so, I know. But if during January, during those long, dark nights, you can muster the enthusiasm to copy out your descriptions and send them in, we'd appreciate it. Alternatively, you can always send them to me during the year if its less arduous, which ever method suits you.

One of the things that we have in common with the BBRC (British Birds Rarities Committee) is the "someone else is bound to have submitted it" syndrome. It's strange really. Even finders of national rarities sometimes leave it to the masses who twitch their bird to supply documentary evidence to the committee. Just why isn't clear, because if birders are competent to identify the bird in the first instance, surely they are capable of a few clear field notes. To me, it's part and parcel of watching a bird, even one I haven't found. It serves two purposes, the first of which is to make you look at the bird for more than a couple of minutes before walking off shouting "next!" and the other is to improve your own description taking abilities. I won't go on (my previous notes on the subject have been lengthy) but it DOES get easier.

Descriptions are particularly welcome from reserves where the warden will not have time to write them up, even if he's seen the bird. Please don't assume somebody else has done it - SEND IT IN! County species that perhaps require more attention than others and should always be written up are listed in the front of the annual report. It is reviewed each year and as species become more regular and observers become more competent at identifying them, we remove them from the list. Marsh Harrier's a good example.

I'd like to thank everyone who has taken the time and trouble to send descriptions in, your efforts are admirable. That stalwart of the Fiddlers Ferry reserve, Keith Massey, supplied many dozens of lengthy field notes and we are never wanting for anything from this superb reserve. It would be nice if access was easier, and Keith may be cajoled into writing up an article detailing the habitat and species recorded over the last few years. Watch this space!

So, what were the highlights of 1995? Great Northern Divers gave very close views, even if the Watch Lane individual got the local fishermen red around the gills. When will they learn? It was a beautiful bird. A Slavonian Grebe put in a lengthy stay at Catchpenny Pool and one of the wintering Bitterns returned to Budworth Mere for the second year, giving excellent views for the patient, or lucky. Little Egrets appear to be regular and Frodsham Marsh their favoured spot. Did they really build a nest (let me know!). The Great White Egret at Inner Marsh Farm and at Parkgate in July and August attracted large crowds as it fed outside a pub terrace. A county first, it was perhaps long overdue. Nice though! The Ruddy Shelduck invasion of 1994 wasn't repeated although up to five could be found along the Mersey in the autumn. Other wildfowl of note were three American Wigeons and a Ferruginous Duck, the latter briefly at Woolston Eyes. Sharp eyed observers, (meticulously note-taking no doubt), were able to differentiate between two different male American Wigeons at Budworth Mere in the autumn, one an eclipse male, the other a 1st winter male. All credit to them. The dedicated band of observers here don't miss much and most birds are documented. Friendly competition between the birders here ensures almost 100% coverage!

Long-staying, but no doubt frustrated, the wing tagged female Red Kite abandoned Tatton Park in February. What a pity. Many people enjoyed watching her antics with the local Buzzards. Marsh Harriers hunted over many sites and the question has to be asked - if the reedbeds of Frodsham Marsh's No 6 tank had been developed, would they have stayed to breed? I think so.

Hobbies continue to summer in good numbers as their expansion northwards continues. Anyone with possible breeders is urged to contact myself or Colin Wells. A measure of protection is assured. An early White Stork at Bulkely Hill in April only stayed one day and was only seen by one very fortunate, dog-walking birder.

A Spotted Crane found whilst I stood watching one young lady drawing the Elton Hall Flash Pectoral Sandpiper, gave excellent views during its stay. I only had to run 10 metres to see it, which makes a change. Rare birds normally turn up at the other end of the county to me. Incidentally, the drawing of the Pectoral Sandpiper was quite a good effort in the field and it's a pity she didn't submit it, or her notes. A lady birder who can draw birds in the field is rarer than either the above species. I should have taken notes!

Seawatching was generally poor and but for odd Sabine's Gulls and Skuas, and a few days of Leach's Petrels, there wasn't much to note. Mediterranean Gulls are now familiar to most field birders and surely it won't be too long before they attempt breeding. Counts into the teens emanate from Seaforth on the other side of the Mersey. Common sense tells me they must all visit our side! Yellow-legged Gulls continued to drop in on their favourite sites, Fiddlers Ferry notching up more than anywhere else. Three Ring-billed Gulls were reported and it's a shame that only one was looked at well enough for the notes to reflect the observers identification. They must be a lot more regular than they seem to be.

A super, close photo of the Little Auk on Winsford Bottom Flash in November was submitted. Unfortunately it apparently only stayed for a day. Huge numbers on the east coast and many at sites in the Midlands never reached us.

A Bee-eater which, although only seen or heard on three occasions, may have spent over a month in the Warrington and Woolston Eyes area, from late April to early June. It survived after being picked up off the road in Warrington by a postman. Much more obliging were the 'early' Hoopoes at Thurstaston and Neston, atypical for this species in the county. They're normally very elusive. The Thurstaston bird attracted quite a crowd during its stay in early April.

Perhaps the best bird of the year for me, was the Short-toed Lark found by Barry Barnacal at Leasowe on May 5th. It stayed until the next day and gave good views on a bare rolled field alongside Skylarks.

Not as rare but much 'prettier' was the Neston Shorelark. Initially very difficult to see, it settled down later in its stay and shared its foreshore with a couple of Water Pipits, Wheatears and a stunning male Brambling. It was the first twitchable Shorelark in years.

A male Blue-headed Wagtail paired with a female Yellow Wagtail at Frodsham Marsh and produced two hybrid young. This was possibly the first breeding record for the county.

Two very fortunate observers located a singing Nightingale at Allostock in June. As expected, it didn't stay. Is this species trying to creep northwards?

The beginnings of the biggest Waxwing invasion ever began towards the end of the year on the east coast. Four birds at Fiddlers Ferry on Dec 30th were the first of the year, but many more were to follow in the first two or three months of 1996.

A little known reserve in the south of the county, Quakers Coppice, near Crewe, attracted up to three Firecrests in March. Supporting my comments earlier, I've only received a description of one of them. Did the others exist? Drop me a line if you've any notes. They're much too rare to omit from the report for the sake of a few lines.

There are always those birds that frustrate all attempts to see them. A singing Golden Oriole in Tatton on May 9th surprised two observers who were walking under the tree at the time. Also, even then, only one of them saw it! The assembled twitch shortly on the scene failed even to sniff them.

Quality is always better saved to last and the next two birds are certainly that. Ringers at a private site near Knutsford couldn't believe their luck when they pulled the county's first Dusky Warbler out of their net in mid November. Their photos ensured a speedy acceptance by BBRC. Late December saw a huge influx of Mealy Redpolls into the county, accompanied by relatively large numbers of Arctic Redpolls. One of the latter, a male, was found by Paul Hill at New Platt Wood Quarry and was also accepted by the BBRC, the second county first in only a few weeks.

So, what did we miss. Lots no doubt. Lesser Golden Plover and Least Sandpiper spring to mind and also three big black birds soaring over the cooling towers on May 1st at Fiddlers Ferry. Reported as Black Storks, the notes proved to be inadequate. What a pity. As you can see, the county's got a lot to offer, and I know that after reading this, your descriptions for 1996 will be in on time and perfectly composed. By the way, was that a pig that's just flown over? Probably!

Tony Broome, County Recorder

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Welcome to J Naughton, M Simms, JR Richards, PA Walton and Birdnet. This brings the total membership for 1996, as on 17th September to 307 - one more than last year, the first time for several years that membership has increased; it was 306 in 1995. This is disappointing. Please do all you can to encourage others to join; there are still birdwatchers mentioned in Bird News who are not members. If you can display any posters or membership forms advertising the society please contact me.

Subscriptions are due on 1 January and a membership form is enclosed. As reported in the previous issue, there is a straight increase of one pound in all categories of membership, the first for three years. Please note that we shall no longer automatically send out the January 1997 Bird News to all last year's members but only to those who have paid their subscriptions by the time Bird News is distributed, usually in the second half of the month. Please therefore return membership forms and subscriptions promptly.

Those who pay by Standing Order will have to fill in a new form (enclosed) and send it to their bank (NOT to me). If you do pay by this method please do not do as a third of you did last year and send a cheque as well, causing us extra work and expense in repaying you! Payers by standing order need not send in the membership form unless any details have altered or unless they no longer wish to use this method; I shall assume that they will automatically renew, unless I hear otherwise, and shall send them the January Bird News. Anyone wishing to pay by standing order who does not already do so should contact me for a form.

I have details of a holiday cottage at Bowness-on-Solway and self-catering accommodation in Great Yarmouth. Contact me for details. Included in this mailing is a leaflet offering a 25% reduction in the price of a subscription to British Birds. Those wishing to take advantage of this offer should send the complete order form to British Birds.

Peregrine Watch: one chick fledged successfully at Beeston towards the end of June. Thanks to all CAWOS members who participated. Anyone who would like to take part next year and who has not been involved before please contact me.

David Cogger, 113 Nantwich Road, Middlewich, Cheshire CW10 9JD, 01606-832517

DESCRIPTIONS FOR 1996

This will be the last Bird News that you will receive in 1996, the next being the January one in 1997. You will have little over two months left before you stop everything you're doing and begin to write up your notes and descriptions!

Before you thankfully lick the envelope to seal it and send it off to me, just have a read through the descriptions or get somebody else to read them back to you.

Do they make sense? Would you know what the bird was if described using your own notes, or do your notes merely describe your walk along a muddy footpath, how heavy the rain was and what you had for dinner?

You may chuckle or even be indignant that anyone could even begin to think your notes were anything less than perfect, but the truth is, that out of the hundreds we receive, there is a noticeable proportion of habitat and personal daytime "log" descriptions, metrological reports and lists of friends.

Quite often I will read through the most captivating saga of how an observer found a county rarity only to be deflated at the end when they say words to the effect of "so it had to be a". BUT, they haven't said WHY, it was! It's so frustrating. This is still true of some very experienced birders with many years in the field, both at home and abroad.

So, as your Christmas present to me, at not much extra effort from yourselves, please check and double check your descriptions. The ones that do lack enough details cannot be accepted for publication and then you wonder why, possibly even if you're a victim of some grand conspiracy to discredit you, and you get upset. There's no need to, just read your own descriptions.

Try to follow these few simple steps

1. Describe firstly, why it was a particular family of birds ie. if a bunting, WHY a bunting and not a finch, WHY a skua and not a gull etc.

2. Once definitely in the correct group, WHY it was the particular species you claim - WHAT MADE IT DIFFERENT from the others in the group? Rather than, "it was a female Cirl Bunting because it wasn't a Yellowhammer" which is unacceptable, try describing plumage features, the olivaceous rump of a female Cirl Bunting rather than the rich rusty brown of a female Yellowhammer. It's so simple, honest.

3. Describe what it was doing at the time. It helps. You're unlikely to see a Pectoral Sandpiper stood on top of a Hawthorn bush eating berries, or a Yellow-browed Warbler diving for molluscs off the coast. But if you don't say in your notes, how do the panel know? The least we have to assume, the better.

4. Don't over simplify your description. If you say it was big, say "how big". Qualify, compare all your remarks.

I had to get some kind of sermon in. I know it's repetitive, but an acceptable description from you means an acceptance by us. It makes everybody happy.

If of course you feel your description was adequate and we're nit-picking, get in touch. I'm always ready to discuss your descriptions.



WHAT MAKES IT AN AMERICAN WIREN ?
- OH THAT'S EASY, IT'S ACTING LIKE ONE...IT

Tony Broome, County Recorder

PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION REMINDER



**You have two months left to take that
winning photograph!**

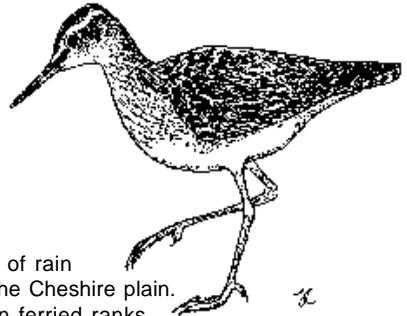
There will be three categories which can be either slides or prints:-

1. **Foreign**
2. **Great Britain**
3. **Humorous** - this section will be decided by a panel of judges and all entries should be accompanied by an appropriate caption. The photo & caption which draws the most laughter will be the winner.

The competition is open to members only and restricted to those photographs taken in 1996.

Entry forms will be set out with the January Bird News and the closing date will be **Saturday 8th February 1997.**

Sheila Blamire, Woodruff Cottage, Clamhunger Lane, Mere, Cheshire, WA16 6QG



STORM HARVEST

Heat! Mosquitos ripple the surface like so many drops of rain
Dust thickened air from a thousand harvested crops on the Cheshire plain.
Gulls shimmering, dancing in the haze, as they stand in ferried ranks
Wet mud glistens at their feet as the tide ebbs from the Mersey's Richmond Banks.
Thistles and midges ravage bared skin and horseflies suck your blood
Man and bullocks for once in harmony praying for Autumn's flood.
A herald calls out, memories evoked a signal to prepare
The harbinger on starch stiffened wings arcs to shore, a Common Sandpiper.
The first of many or just a few, time alone will tell
But distant rumbles on holographic hills may break this indolent spell.
Dark and deadly "Anvil Head" appears, all fire and ear splitting crack
Sudden on rushing wind, prelude to a deluge, sky turning black.
It's precipitous cargo is unleashed to drench both man and beast
And in it's wake a new banquet is spread, complete with Tringa feast.
Cleaned air, sharp focus, the crisp edged Pennine chair no longer distant humps
Sandpipers bob, feed, preen, storm tossed jewels flashing their white feathered rumps.

Jeff Clarke, 90 Simonside, Hough Green, Widnes, Cheshire WA8 4YN

Projects and Surveys

WITTON AREA CONSERVATION GROUP

The proposed National Angling Centre has meant a huge effort over the last six months to alert local residents, councillors, together with the officials and members of a wide variety of environmental groups, concerning the threats to wildlife in the Witton area.

Therefore it was pleasing to see CAWOS raising its conservation flag aloft in the summer issue of Bird News. Witton Area Conservation Group would like to thank CAWOS for the coverage of the issues. There cannot now be a single CAWOS member unaware of the cloud hanging over one of Cheshire's last all round birding and natural history sites.

You are likely to be reading this some two months after this letter was written. By then, the situation will have changed, for better or worse. Whatever, it has to be said that WACG's funds are now running low. As a CAWOS member you may therefore like to join WACG for the current minimum of £6 - any donation on top would be especially welcome. Your membership will run to 31 December 1997 and in due course you'll receive WACG's 1996 Annual Report. More importantly you'll be kept up-to-date with developments and you will also be directly contributing to the sharp end of conservation.

David Cogger happens to be our Membership Secretary as well as performing that role for CAWOS. His address is on the inside front cover of this magazine.

To CAWOS officials and members - thanks for your previous and future help.

Bryan Roberts - Witton Area Conservation Group

LIVERPOOL BAY WADER STUDY GROUP

Article from Birds May-July 96 "*Wintering waders protected*"

The Mersey Estuary is of international importance for its wintering Pintail, Teal, Shelduck, Dunlin and Redshank, as well as supporting numbers of several other species. For several years the RSPB has been trying to establish a reserve within the estuary, particularly to strengthen its hand in combating threats to nature conservation interest.

We are glad to have reached an agreement with the Manchester Ship Canal Company, owners of a 93-hectare (230-acre) saltmarsh at Stanlow Banks near Runcorn, to regard it as a reserve. It is particularly valuable as a high-tide roost for ducks and waders. We intend to extend this area by negotiation with adjacent owners.

Please note that visiting is unfortunately not permitted to this site because of access difficulties. (*Birds, May-July p14*)



WeBS Low Tide Counts: For over 40 years WeBS has been the main source of information for assessing the importance of UK estuaries to waterfowl at regional, national and international levels. Where WeBS counts are carried out on estuaries, they usually take place at high tide when the birds are gathered together in communal roosts and relatively easy to count. This means that, whilst being excellent for assessing the overall importance of an estuary for wildfowl, the figures cannot be used to show how the birds distribute themselves when they are feeding. Information that identifies the key feeding areas for different species is becoming more and more important when assessing the likely impacts of various changes to the estuarine environment. For example, low tide counts were vital during the Mersey Barrage Feasibility Study and Mostyn Docks public enquiry on the Dee. Often, changes such as development or land claim affect only a proportion of an estuary. In the past, this type of information has had to be gathered at short notice, usually in response to immediate perceived threats. As a result, there are many estuaries for which there is only anecdotal information on where birds feed.

In 1992 the National Low Tide Count Scheme was initiated, funded by the RSPB and BTO, but run in close co-operation with Wildfowl and Wetland Trust and Joint Nature Conservancy Council. Its

aim was to provide the sort of systematically-collected information on low tide distribution which was previously lacking. The success of the scheme during its first year led to its incorporation into WeBS, thus becoming the WeBS Low Tide Counts. A new recording form was introduced in November 1994 as part of this integration process. This allows standardisation of recording from all sites and is very similar to the WeBS Core Counts form, meaning that all additional information, such as weather, is also standardised between the Core Counts and the Low Tide Counts.

Low Tide Counts are more labour-intensive than Core Counts and so, to avoid overloading counters, only the 60 or so highest-priority estuaries were targeted, and a programme of coverage was adopted in which about a dozen estuaries would be counted once every five years or so on a rotational basis. In the Liverpool Bay area this includes the Dee, Mersey, Alt and Ribble. The Clwyd was not on the original list but low tide counts have been carried out there because of potential development threats. The methods used were originally developed for carrying out low tide counts on the Severn and Mersey as part of the barrage feasibility studies on those estuaries. Each estuary is divided into a number of sections. As far as possible, the boundaries of each section are chosen to coincide with the sector boundaries used in the Core Counts, so that comparison between low and high water counts can be made. However, the majority of these sectors are too large for one person to count at low tide and it is necessary to divide them up. Each subdivision can then be counted by a single volunteer. To maximise count accuracy, each counter is provided with instructions on how to further subdivide their section into a number of smaller count areas ("mudflats"). Sections are usually divided into between one and ten mudflats, depending on the intertidal areas, using permanent features which can be identified at a later stage for repeat counts.

Each counter is provided with two copies of a map of the area, on which they mark the mudflat boundaries and, if necessary, the features used to recognise them. One copy is returned to the BTO and the other retained by the counter.

It was decided that the counts should focus on the winter period, when bird numbers fluctuate least, and that they should take place frequently enough to provide the right amount of information for conservation purposes, without overloading the counters. Consequently they take place once a month from November to February inclusive, usually on a different day to the Core Counts, both to avoid confusion between the two sets of counts and because high tide and low tide do not often occur in daylight on the same day during the short winter days. Wherever possible, all Low Tide Counts on a particular estuary are carried out on the same day but on a small number of occasions this is not possible. In these situations counters are asked to count on a date as near as possible to the one originally decided. All counts take place within two hours of low tide, the period of the tidal cycle when bird distribution is likely to vary least. (letter received from Julianne Evans, BTO) Local count organisers are Colin Wells (RSPB) and Tony Parker (NMGGM)

Maltese report recommends relaxation of shooting regulations.

In 1993 the Maltese government issued a new bird protection legislation. After 2 years of deliberations, the Authority of Review has issued its report. Recommendations are: an extra 10 days of shooting in spring for Quail and Turtle Dove, the opening of the bird trapping season for finches for 13 days in spring; the removal of the bird sanctuary at Gozo. The report also suggests expanding the list of birds that can be hunted legally to include Moorhen (which bred for the first time in Malta 3 years ago!) and Ruff, which the Council of Europe is insisting should be protected. Other worrying recommendations include lowering the minimum legal shooting age from 21 to 18, and a suggestion that Malta is not an important staging post for migratory birds.

BirdLife Malta has appealed to the Maltese courts to stop the Government from adopting this report. They are also urging all European BirdLife Partners to support them by writing to the Prime Minister and the Minister for Environment, requesting them not to accept these recommendations.

World Birdwatch 18:1 (Mar 96)

Ringling News

The Highland ringing group has dye marked 120 Oystercatchers at a pre-breeding roost. Keep a look out for returning birds to our estuaries. (BTO News 203 p16).

Highland Ringing group's regular wader counts in the Moray Firth since 1985 have shown that Redshanks tend to be faithful to their wintering sites. (Birdwatch July '96)

BTO GOLDEN PLOVER AND LAPWING SURVEY

This winter will see the launch of a pilot survey across the country to provide population estimates, geographical distribution and habitat preferences for Golden Plovers and Lapwings. When all these local sites are mapped out, along with those across the rest of Britain, a full survey will be undertaken.

If you have any local flocks in excess of 50, drop me a line. Include flock total, habitat and if you can a six figure O.S. reference (if not, the name of the nearest farm and/or village will help).

Tony Broome, County Recorder

HALE HEAD FARMLAND CENSUS: 1996 UPDATE

The results of the B.T.O. Common Bird Census at Hale Head from 1989 - 1995 were reported in the July issue of Bird News. The 1996 Census has now been completed and in the table below, the numbers of territories held by the 6 commonest species at Hale Head in 1996, are compared with the average for 1989 - 1995 and the figures for 1995.

	1989-95 average	1995	1996
Skylark	14	18	22
Corn Bunting	16	16	15
Chaffinch	3	5	8
Blackbird	6	8	7
Wren	9	11	6
Yellow Wagtail	3	4	6

Whereas the number of Corn Bunting and Blackbird territories have remained steady, Chaffinch and Yellow Wagtail numbers have doubled over the last 2 years and there has also been a 50% increase in Skylark numbers. Indeed, the number of territories held by each of these last three species is the highest recorded in the 8 years of the census. In contrast to this, there has been a fall in the number of Wren territories to the lowest recorded during the last 8 years.

The fall in Wren numbers may be due to the relatively severe winter of 1995-6 but the increase in the other species are less readily explained especially in view of current concerns about the disappearing Skylark. Certain features which exist at Hale Head are known to favour Skylarks and, to some extent, Yellow Wagtails too. These include the variety of crops (rape, winter wheat and especially spring planted root crops which occupy about one quarter of the plot), the scanty low hedges and the extensive adjacent area of tidal marsh.

Finally, it may be worth mentioning the influx of Grasshopper Warblers to the Hale plot in 1996. There were four separate singing males on April 28th and two on June 15th but no proof of breeding.

ERRATUM: in the July issue of Bird News, the symbols on the map were interposed. The Yellow Wagtail territories (⊗) should have been shown adjacent to the shore and/or root crops and the Linnet territories (⊗) adjacent to the rape fields. (It is of interest that in 1966, when no rape was sown, there were fewer Linnet territories and these were evenly distributed throughout the plot).

Colin Ogilvie, The Riffel, Woolton Park, Liverpool L25 6DR, 0151-428 3472

HOUSE MARTIN SURVEY REMINDER

This is a reminder to return all survey forms to me as soon as possible (give me a ring if you require forms). Please remember **any** information would be welcomed.

**Sheila Blamire, Woodruff Cottage, Clamhunger Lane,
Mere, Cheshire, WA16 6QG, tel: 01565 830168**

RUMOURS..... RUMOURS....

- Greece 1996, one very well known local birder and a Penguin! Rumour has it that whilst visiting a cafe that boasted a small collection of birds in less than natural conditions this particular character noticed a penguin looking forlornly at him from a concrete pond. Disgusted at the bird's predicament, he mounted a special services type operation at night which entailed wrestling the bird to the ground and stuffing it in a rucksack. "It struggled like hell" he said, "but when I let it go in the sea, it swam off like a good-'un. ...".

There will be a lot of you reading this who will sympathise with his quest, but surely, no one else who would attempt such a rescue? It's probably homing in on him at this very minute, padding north up the French coast...

- Rumour has it that in the big September fall along the east coast this year, one very prominent county birder spent only a couple of hours at Spurn before leaving for home. His tally for the day was a Booted Warbler and a few minor rarities. His early departure resulted in him missing Lanceolated Warbler in the hand! Why did he commit birding suicide you ask? Apparently he had a party planned in the evening and he wanted to make sure he had enough time to get ready... Mind you, they say that mascara is a devil to get right...

Ringers Notebook

Professor David Norman has sent his apologies for missing the deadline for publication. He explains that this is only the second time in 32 issues and is due to the B.T.O. re-writing its processing software so preventing their issue of the data on ringing recoveries for several months.

I would like to take this opportunity of using his normal slot to let all our members know that David has been appointed to the Council for English Nature. Public advertising attracted over 300 applicants for three additional posts, so we all send our congratulations. It is clear from the breadth of his interests with us, the Mersey Estuary Conservation Group and the B.T.O., that he is eminently suitable.

How he combines all this with his "day" job as Assistant Director of Synchrotron Radiation at the Central Laboratory of the Research Council's Daresbury and Visiting Professor at the University of Liverpool I'll never know. But at least for all of us who ever wondered what David was Professor of, now we know! (or do we?)

Well done again, Eds

PS and a special thank you from myself for being such a reliable contributor to Bird News

WANTED - WATERFOWL COUNTERS

The following waters, in, or very close to, our area are not currently covered by counts for the national Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS):

Arpley Meadows

Hatchmere

Marton Sandpit (Newchurch Common)

Moreton Pits Complex

Oakmere

The Mere (Mere)

Dunham Pool

Little Budworth Pool

Moore Nature Reserve

Nunsmere

Petty Pool

Winsford Bottom Flash

WeBS counts are made on one set day in every month. However even if this can not always be managed it is better that a site is counted irregularly than not at all. Volunteers would be very welcome and anyone interested in covering the above sites should contact **Tony O'Neill, 285 Marsland Road, Sale, Cheshire M33 1UN Phone 0161-962 2449**

1997 - 99 BREEDING BIRDS SURVEY

The first complete survey of breeding birds of Lancashire and North Merseyside will be undertaken during the next three years.

Would you like to be part of this survey?

Do you enjoy birding in you own area?

Are you willing to help collect data for this survey?

If so and you live south of the Ribble contact:-

Dr P Golborn, 48 Earls wood, Skemersdale, Lancs, WN8 6AT. (01625 725824)

If you live north of the Ribble contact:

Mr R Pyefinch, 12 Bannistre Court, Tarleton, Preston, Lancs, PR4 6HA (01772 814348)



OCTOBER

- 22 ADNHS "THE CONSERVATION OF BIRDS OF THE DEE ESTUARY" by Colin Wells
- 25 KOS "AUSTRALIA: South Queensland & Southern Tasmania" by Tony & Brenda Holcombe
- 25 LOG "AN AMERICAN EVENING" by Members
- 25 WGOS "THE HOOK AND EYE" by Keith Offord
- 27 CADOS East Coast, contact Chris Done - 01928 724994
- 27 SRSPB Sale & Chorlton Water Parks, meet 9:30am by Sale W.P. Visitors Centre

NOVEMBER

- 1 **CAWOS** "BIRDS OF PREY IN WALES" by Iolo Williams
- 1-3 HPRSPB Bangor Weekend, contact Joyce Wilson
- 2 NCRSPS Autumn Fair at Frodsham Church Hall from 10:15 to 13:00
- 4 HPRSPB "HEBRIDEAN SPLENDOUR" by Gordon Yates
- 7 CADOS "SOUTH AFRICA" by Don Coan
- 7 LOG Denaby Ings
- 8 MCOS "THE HOOK & EYE" by Keith Offord
- 8 SECOS "ARISTOCRATS OF THE FOREST" & "PENNINE BIRDS" by Gordon Yates
- 10 KOS Rostherne / Tatton, meet Sessions House, Knutsford 9:00am
- 10 SECOS Conway Reserve & North Wales Coast, by mini-bus
- 11 SRSPB "IN SEARCH OF HIMBRIMI" by Gordon Yates
- 12 ADNHS "BUTTERFLY TRAVELS" by Peter Hardy
- 12 MRSPB "HEBRIDEAN SPLENDOUR" by Gordon Yates
- 16 CADOS Dee Estuary, contact Don Coan - 01244 660621
- 16 NCRSPB Hilbre Island, meet Dee Lane car park at 10:00am
- 17 HPRSPB Fairburn Ings, meet Marple 8:00am
- 17 MCOS Tregarron Bog, meet Devils Bridge car park at 9:30am
- 21 NNHS "BIRDLIFE OF SOUTH CHESHIRE" by Dave Meredith
- 22 KOS "LUNE TO LOON" by Stan Craig
- 24 MRSPB Dee Estuary, morning only visit, depart Duke Street car park at 7:30am
- 26 ADNHS "CHESHIRE GEOLOGY" by Tony Browne
- 29 LOG "ARISTOCRATS OF THE FORESTS / PENNINE BIRDS" by Gordon Yates
- 29 NCRSPB "ICELAND" by Val McFarland
- 29 WGOS "NIGHTFALL" by Mike Berry

DECEMBER

- 1 MRSPB Styal Woods, depart Duke St. car park 8:30am
- 5 CADOS "BRAZIL" by Dr Roger Wilson
- 6 **CAWOS** "LAND OF THE GRIFFON" by Susan & Alan Parker
- 8 KOS Martin Mere / Marshside

- 8 HPRSPB Southport & Hesketh Marshes, meet Marple 8:00am
- 8 LOG Tatton Park
- 8 NCRSPB Hale Duck Decoy, meet Child O Hale car park 10:00am
- 8 SECOS Shropshire Meres, by car
- 9 SRSPB "TEXAS - BIRDING IN THE LONE STAR STATE" by Paul Rogers
- 10 ADNHS "ALPINES" by Hilda Summersgill
- 10 MRSPB "A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF A GARDEN ROBIN" by David Tideswell
- 13 KOS Christmas Party
- 13 LOG Christmas Party
- 13 MCOS "A WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER ABROAD" by Michael Leach
- 13 SECOS "THE BIRDS OF SOUTH WEST CHESHIRE" by David Merideth
- 13 WGOS "WILDLIFE OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS OF SCOTLAND" by Steve Knell
- 14 ADNHS Local morning walk, meet 9:30am, leader Maureen Carter - 0161 973 9692
- 14 NCRSPB Southport & Marshside, meet Marine Drive 10:00am
- 14 SRSPB Inner Marsh Farm and Parkgate, by car phone for details
- 15 CADOS Shropshire Meres, contact Norman Scott - 01244 314873
- 15 MCOS Seaforth/Marshside, meet Seaforth docks at 9:00am
- 16 HPRSPB Christmas Party, Marple, admission by ticket only
- 19 NNHS Members Evening

JANUARY

- 3 CAWOS "NORWEGIAN ARCTIC SUMMER" by Eric Pithers
- 4 ADNHS New Year Party
- 9 CADOS "THE SCILLIES" by Dr John Raines
- 10 MCOS "A LOOK AT YORKSHIRE BIRDS" by Mark Hamblin
- 10 SECOS "BIRDS OF CYPRUS" by Paul Trigg
- 11 CADOS North Wales Coast, contact Don Pawlett - 01244 677477
- 11 KOS Carsington Water Complex, Ashbourne, meet Sessions House, Knutsford 8:30am
- 12 MCOS Anglesey, meet Penrhos Nature reserve at 9:30am
- 12 SECOS Drakelow Wildfowl Reserve, by mini-bus
- 13 SRSPB "NEW ZEALAND - THE SUB-ANTARCTIC ISLANDS" by Val McFarland
- 14 ADNHS "MANCHESTER SHIP CANAL" by Barbara Frost
- 14 MRSPB "GRIFFON VULTURES" by Allan & Susan Parker
- 18 MRSPB Carsington Water Reservoir, meet visitors centre at 10:00am
- 24 KOS "BIRDS OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN" by Clifford Heyes
- 26 SRSPB North Wales coast & Conway RSPB Reserve, by coach depart Stockport 8:00am
- 28 ADNHS "SWANS" by David Cummings
- 31 WGOS "IN SEARCH OF THE LOON" by Gordon Yates

Will all **affiliated societies** wishing to advertise their future meetings, please send their programme to Sheila Blamire, Woodruff Cottage, Clamhunger Lane, Mere, WA16 6QG tel: 01565 830168

SOCIETIES

- ADNHS Altrincham & Dist. Natural History Society, mtgs Hale Methodist Church Hall 7.30pm, Sec. Vincent Pedley 0161 748 4717
- CADOS Chester & Dist. Ornithological Soc, mtgs Caldy Valley Community Centre 7.30pm, Prog. Sec. Don Coan 01244-660621
- CAWOS Cheshire & Wirral Ornithological Society, mtgs Knutsford Civic Centre 7.45pm, contact Sheila Blamire 01565 830168
- CWT(Mid)Cheshire Wildlife Trust Mid-Cheshire, Kingsley Community Centre 7:30pm, Eric Thurston 01606 74889
- CWT(N) Cheshire Wildlife Trust North Group, meetings All Saints Church Room, Altrincham, Margaret Hickson 0161 860 5104
- CWT(S) Cheshire Wildlife Trust South Group, Anne Blacklay 01270 625851
- CWT(Wrl)Cheshire Wildlife Trust Wirral Group, Willaston Memorial Hall 7:30pm, Jim Gilmour 0151 625 9349
- HPRSPB High Peak RSPB Members Group contact John Durell 0161 427 3018, Ken Hodgson 0161 427 6828
- KOS Knutsford Ornithological Society, mtgs St Johns Church Centre 7.45pm, contact Roy Bircumshaw 01565 634193
- LOG Lymm Ornithological Group, mtgs Lymm Village Hall 8.00pm, Prog. Sec. Colin Antrobus 01925 635337
- MCOS Mid-Cheshire Ornithological Society, mtgs Hartford Village Hall 7.45pm, contact Paul Kenyon 01606 77960
- MRSPB Macclesfield RSPB Members Group, mtgs Senior Citizens Hall 7.45pm, contact Peter Kirk 01625 829119
- NNHS Nantwich Natural History Society, mtgs The Gables at 7:30pm, Sec. Mike Holmes 01270 216890
- NWNU North Western Naturalists Union, Sec Jane McHarry 01565 651036
- SECOS South-East Cheshire Ornithological Society, mtgs St Peters Church Hall, Elworth Sandbach 7.30pm, Sec. John Barker 01270 60288
- SRSPB Stockport RSPB Members Group, mtgs Stockport College, Theatre A 7:30pm, contact Janet Fairfield 0161 485 2665
- WGOS Wilmslow Guild Ornithological Society, mtgs Wilmslow Guild HQ 7.45pm, Prog. Sec. Miss Diana Hall 0161 429 0405
- WRSPB Wirral RSPB Group, mtgs Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead 7.30pm Prog. Sec. D. Jowitz 0151 337 7940

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Index Etc

Page 1	Editorial	Page 14-24	Notes & Letters
Page 2-3	County Rarities	Page 26-28	Projects & Surveys
Page 3-9	Recent Reports	Page 29	Rumours
Page 10-11	View from the Farmyard	Page 29	Ringers Notebook
Page 12-14	Submitting Descriptions	Page 20-31	Diary

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BIRD NEWS HAS A NEW EDITOR!

Jeff Clarke has now taken over as editor of Bird News. If you need to get in touch with him, or send in your contribution, his address is:-

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