

BIRD NEWS

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**County Rarities • Recent Reports
Ringers Notebook • Notes & Letters
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Articles, Letters and Comments would be welcomed by the Editor

Front cover: Yellow-browed Warbler by David Quinn

Other illustrations by Tony Broome, Jeff Clarke, & Thelma Skyes

Editorial

"A few hours on a couple of evenings, maybe one or two prompting phone calls and you should be pretty well covered for each edition. All you've got to do then is the editorial". This is a gross misquotation, though accurate interpretation, of Richard Gabb's persuasive argument in encouraging me to take up the cudgel as 'Bird News' Editor. Several months later, having agonised over the birth pangs of this edition, my best advice to CAWOS members would be not to buy a secondhand car from this undoubted dissembler. All joking aside, my admiration for Richard's considerable editorial achievement, not to mention stamina, over the past seven years has been suitably enhanced. Having gained insider knowledge, I know that his efforts on the 'society's' behalf have been prodigious. Unfortunately I have only recently become acquainted with Richard and therefore leave the fuller and much deserved tribute to those people who know him best.

So what can you expect from your new editor? 'Bird News Ultra Plus' perhaps, or maybe the original recipe with 'added whistles and bells' for today's more sophisticated clientele. Whatever direction the newsletter follows over the coming period you can be sure that its primary aim will be to inform and entertain the whole of the CAWOS membership. No one interest group will be allowed to dominate the pages. Contentious issues should, indeed must, be debated, but this will be done in an even handed manner. Members will be encouraged to air their opinions employing arguments in which constructive criticism will have a legitimate role to play. I will however make it quite clear that criticism of a personal and abusive nature, be it of individuals or the society, will not be printed!

In this edition many of you will notice some minor changes to typefaces and layout style. Not merely for cosmetic effect, these alterations are intended to relieve the eye in what, at times, can inevitably be a sea of small print. It should be noted, this was only made possible by an arduous editorial team meeting at the Kilton Inn. Despite the somewhat comic picture this comment portrays the meeting did have a serious purpose behind it. We took the opportunity to re-examine the purpose and function of 'Bird News' within the society. One of the principle themes to come out of the discussion, was that the members of the society are bonded together by our common concern for the birdlife of Cheshire. All bonds need a gluing agent, and the newsletter constitutes, arguably, the most important active ingredient of that glue. With this thought uppermost in our mind, future editions will be seeking to consolidate on the successful formula employed previously, whilst at the same time developing new strands to appeal to the full spectrum of the membership.

This cannot be achieved without the active contribution of the members. The editorial team have outlined a number of initiatives, some of which are included in this issue, which are intended to motivate a greater proportion of the membership to become pro-active on behalf of the birdlife of Cheshire. This could be as simple as showing your copy of 'Bird News' to a birdwatching non-member, or maybe even contributing an article or two to the newsletter. Whatever the format of future editions of 'Bird News' it is vital that we receive feedback from the membership in order to effectively respond to its demands. Without the contributions from a significant proportion of the society's membership there can be no newsletter. Without the newsletter is there a society?

Thankfully this edition has benefited from contributions by several new literary initiates in addition to our regular stalwarts. Many of the articles are very thought provoking, none more so than Hilary Woodhead's review of the recent history of a field and the effects of change. Laurie Fairman questions the validity of the Jack Snipe's Cheshire status and employs alternative fieldcraft techniques to lend weight to his argument. While Keith Massey demonstrates his broad range of talents with a variety of articles and a decidedly ethereal poem. Thelma Sykes yet again proves her ability to create aesthetically pleasing images, in words and pictures, in a timely homage to the Redwing. Space precludes me from naming all the individuals who have contributed, in whatever form, but be in no doubt that your efforts are appreciated.

I hope you all enjoy reading this edition as much as I did. Finally thanks to the editorial team for nursing me through my first edition. Happy New Year!

Jeff Clarke

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

County Rarities

MEDITERRANEAN GULL *Larus melanocephalus*

Described today as a very scarce visitor throughout the year, predominantly on the Wirral coast, but rare inland, "Med. Gulls", as they are generally referred to, are one of those species where better observer awareness has almost certainly led to an increase in records county-wide.

Gulls were one of the first 'species sets' to get reviewed and scrutinised. Their identification was pronounced upon in the early 1970's, with a rash of papers and articles on their key diagnostic features, and as I regularly birded with the late Peter Grant et al, I always thought myself a student of gull identification! However I remember a day, when on scanning a flock of roosting terns, I picked out, what I took to be a

large, white, black capped tern with a red bill and promptly panicked, announcing to one and all that I had found a Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* at least, or maybe even a Royal Tern *sterna maxima* It was, of course, an adult Mediterranean Gull.

That cautionary tale highlights the key to gull identification in general, and Med. Gull in particular, in that one needs to see a combination of features, including jizz as well as plumage details to eliminate the commoner species. Basically between Common Gull *Larus canus* and Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* in size, Med. Gulls have a distinctive chunky head and body shape, with a thick bill, long, but rounded wings, plover like walk and also have a distinctive call for a gull. In adult plumage, the predominantly white primaries, black hood (which reduces to a black wedge around the ear coverts in winter), and dark red bill, mean they are not difficult to identify. In flight Med. Gull appears very white, almost ghostly! But as ever with gulls, it's those juvenile plumages that cause the real problems.

Med. Gull is a three year gull. The juvenile plumage has distinctively scalloped upperparts with chocolate-brown feathers edged in white, apart from a grey wedge of pale greater coverts. The thick dark bill and dark legs, pale breast with some mottling, and a rather plain bland head, complete the picture, with only juvenile Common Gull showing any of these features to a lesser to degree. Given this species current continued breeding success on the south coast, it is possible one could encounter a wandering juvenile in Cheshire and Wirral.

First year birds are also distinctive, but I would suspect are often overlooked. Compared to Black-headed Gull, the black ear coverts, thick, usually dark bill, combining with darker median coverts, tertials and solid dark tail primaries and a narrow tail band, give a "Common Gull look on a Black-headed Gull type body". In flight, first year birds resemble similar aged Common Gulls, but the wing pattern is cleaner, the back and greater coverts giving the pale saddle effect, which contrast with the dark primaries and those ear coverts give the game away, along with the underwing which has minimal brown edging to any flight feathers, and always looks pale, even see-through in strong sunlight.

As birds age into their second year, the plumage becomes more adult like, so brown edges turn to grey or white, and white wedges develop on the primaries and eventually only the outermost one retains any black at all. Again the bill and ear coverts rule out confusion species, and only the odd hybrid will prove difficult. However hybrid Med./BHG's don't look quite right in my experience, often appearing too white with no grey plumage areas and usually have mixed features which stand out as odd. I can't describe the call that well, but it's lower, more wailing, mewling note is not easily forgotten once heard.

In the county, places like Inner Marsh Farm and Frodsham rival the North Wirral shore for Med. Gull records, the former being the place to see them in 1996. However one suspects that a closer look at any local gull roost would produce more records almost anywhere county-wide.



Hugh Pulsford, 19 Tudor Way Congleton, CW12 4AS

Recent Reports

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 September to early December.

SEPTEMBER

Bird of the month had to be **Little Stint** due to the very large numbers involved. Most could be found at Frodsham No6 tank where numbers reached 103 on the 22nd, 182 on the 28th and an incredible 250+ next day. Many other sites shared the large numbers. At Sandbach Flashes, after the first bird on the 14th, numbers increased to 22 on the 21st with numbers decreasing from 20 on the 27th. 15 were at Marbury No1 tank (23rd) with 5 on the 18th, 2 on the 24th and 5 at Neumann's Flash (29th). Inner Marsh Farm held 5 or 6 on 3 dates and a max. of 16 on the 24th. Up to 6 were at Chelford SQ's between the 15th and 21st but Fiddler's Ferry could only muster a single bird. The numbers in Cheshire mirrored those throughout Britain and Western Europe (large numbers in Netherlands, Belgium and Germany where flocks of 1300, 800 and 600 were reported). The North West regional total was at least 1250 birds and the British total c8,000 birds during the month. Many sites held double figures and no less than 16 counties (mainly in the Midlands) set new records some of which were double or triple the previous records. Only 11 other British sites reached over 100 birds with the highest 182 at Borough Haven in East Yorkshire and a flock of 300 was at Tacumshin, County Wexford. Apart from the massive influx of this species in September 1960, when 350 were at Shotton ('old' Cheshire) and 311 at Frodsham both on the 22nd, only two other years (1988 and 1993) have had counts over 100 birds.

Two late **Little Grebe** broods including a bird sitting on a nest at Winsford and a newly hatched chick at Rostherne Mere (both 1st). A pair of **Great Crested Grebes** had a two day old chick at Budworth Mere (1st). Rostherne Mere had its seventh **Slavonian Grebe** on the 25th. A winter plumaged **Black-necked Grebe** visited Budworth Mere (1st) with possibly the same bird off Frodsham Score later in the month. Two **Storm Petrels** were off Hilbre (27th) where 3 **Leach's Petrel** were also seen (30th). 105 **Cormorants** at Frodsham No6 tank was a record count there with 6 over Sandbach Flashes (22nd), high for the time of year. An intriguing report of three **Little Egrets** seen on Farmland near Nantwich if confirmed would be an excellent inland find.

Mute Swans reached a max. of 22 at Kingsway Bridge, Warrington this month. A flock of 1000+ **Canada Geese** on the Burton Marshes was the third largest Cheshire count with 550+ at Sandbach Flashes (27th), the highest ever there. A **Ruddy Shelduck** was at Frodsham and 3 were at Hurleston Reservoir (15th). The male **Mandarin** on the Bridgewater Canal at Statham remained all month and occasionally visited Lymm Dam. A influx of **Wigeon** (8th) brought birds to Rostherne Mere, Tatton Mere, Frodsham, Budworth Mere and c300 at Inner Marsh Farm early in the month with numbers increasing from 23 at Sandbach Flashes (10th) to 120+ on the 28th. Five **Gadwall** visited Fiddler's Ferry (29th) and Rostherne Mere had a max. count of 134. **Teal** numbers increased to 191 at Sandbach Flashes, 143 at Gatewarth and 320 at Fiddler's Ferry. A count of 401 **Mallard** at Rostherne Mere was the largest count there for 3 years with 150 at Fiddler's Ferry (29th) and c400 at Sandbach Flashes (27th). 3000 **Pintail** were back at Inner Marsh Farm (30th) with the first returning bird at Gatewarth (20th). A single **Garganey** was at Inner Marsh Farm (until 15th, with 2 on the 9th) and at Fiddler's Ferry which had its first September record. Sites holding nationally important numbers (100+) of **Shovelers** included Fiddler's Ferry (130), Rostherne Mere (111) and Woolston Eyes (100+). The male **Lesser Scaup** continued its stay at Frodsham and Rostherne Mere had its first Goldeneye of the winter (19th). A **Red-breasted Merganser** on the river at Woolston Eyes was unusual so far inland.

Single **Honey Buzzards** were seen over Frodsham (1st), the M56 at Rostherne (7th) and Hoylake (7th), all possibly involving just one bird. **Marsh Harriers** were at Frodsham Marsh and Inner Marsh Farm. Fiddler's Ferry had its fifth **Goshawk** record with a male on the 16th. **Buzzard** records suggested a good passage with up to 14 in the air at once at Tatton and up to 5 at Rostherne Mere including a pair being mobbed by 2 **Ravens** (28th) while 6 were reported at Frodsham, 4 at Oakhanger near Alsager (6th) with singles at Forge Bed (15th), Marbury No1 tank (4th), Poynton (15th) - observer's first local record, Sandbach (7th), Woolston Eyes (14th) and Sandbach Flashes

(1st, 17th and 30th) with 2 there on the 15th. An unidentified Buzzard species over Sandbach Flashes (1st) was thought to be Honey rather than Common. A **Merlin** was at Frodsham where a Hobby was also seen. Other **Hobbies** were reported from Tatton (12th, 27th and 28th), Toft (last seen on 24th) and Sandbach Flashes (7th) with two at the later site (1st). **Peregrines** were also much in evidence with 3 birds at Fiddler's Ferry, Frodsham and Sandbach Flashes, 2 birds at Rostherne Mere and singles at Gatewarth and Marbury No1 tank where an immature male attacked a Little Stint on the 18th knocking it to the ground where it remained stunned for 10 mins before flying off.

Six **Grey Partridges** were at Lymm (25th) and a Quail was calling from Marbury No1 tank (8th) for 45 mins. **Water Rails** were at Sandbach Flashes (from 7th), Rostherne Mere (from 14th), Tatton (from 22nd) and Woolston Eyes. A **Spotted Crake** played hide and seek at Inner Marsh Farm (from 13th). Up to 1000 **Ringed Plovers** were at Frodsham and a passage bird visited Sandbach Flashes (22nd). 200 **Grey Plovers** were at Frodsham and two at Rostherne Mere (21st) were the sixth record there. Up to 1000 **Lapwings** were at Fiddler's Ferry this month. A juvenile **Pectoral Sandpiper** was at the Weaver Bend (7th to 10th). A good influx of **Curlew Sandpipers** occurred with the **Little Stints** including up to 108 at Heswall, up to 15 at Frodsham (including a leucistic bird) and up to 5 at Sandbach Flashes with singles at Inner Marsh Farm and Chelford SQ's. The influx totalled c350 birds in the North West with only Burnham-on-sea, Norfolk (103) and Abberton Reservoir, Essex (100) reaching three figures. Only six other years have had 100+ counts with the last being 134 at Frodsham in September 1988. Two **Dunlin** at Melchett Mere (19th) was an excellent site record but up to 2000 were at Frodsham this month. 17 **Ruff** were at Frodsham No6 tank (22nd). A **Jack Snipe** was unusual on Weaver Bend (6th) and 2 were at Inner Marsh Farm (23rd). Both Fiddler's Ferry and Frodsham had record counts of **Black-tailed Godwits**, with 1200 on the 22nd and 1748 on the 8th respectively, while 910 were present at the latter site (14th). A Bar-tailed Godwit was at Sandbach Flashes (3rd). **Curlews** peaked at 130 at Fiddler's Ferry and 53 at Sandbach Flashes. At least 10 **Spotted Redshanks** visited Inner Marsh Farm and 7 were at Frodsham (7th). **Greenshank** reached 56 at Inner Marsh Farm, a reserve record, with 26 at Frodsham. **Green Sandpipers** lingered at several sites including a max. of 3 at Gatewarth, Marbury No1 tank and Woolston Eyes, one/two at Chelford SQ's throughout and singles at Fiddler's Ferry, Frodsham, Inner Marsh Farm and Sandbach Flashes. A **Wood Sandpiper** occasionally visited Frodsham and a bird was at Inner Marsh Farm (21st - 25th). Passage **Common Sandpipers** included singles at Fiddler's Ferry (22nd and 29th) and 4 at Gatewarth (12th and 13th). The second **Red-necked Phalarope** of the year appeared at Inner Marsh Farm (9th - 11th).

Pomarine Skuas were reported off Hilbre on several dates and a **Mediterranean Gull** visited Budworth Mere (26th). A **Little Gull** was the first September record for Fiddler's Ferry (29th) and 2000 **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were at nearby Gatewarth (9th). Gatewarth had 5 **Yellow-legged Gulls** (9th) with 2 there (20th) but Fiddler's Ferry could only muster a single bird. Frodsham chipped in with an **Iceland Gull** on the 4th. Inner Marsh Farm had 2 **Sandwich Terns** (24th) where this species is rarely seen. A late **Black Tern** was at Tatton (29th onwards). A flock of 37 **Collared Doves** in Poynton was the observer's highest ever local count (15th). A **Ring-necked Parakeet** flew south over a Wilmslow garden (1st) and it or another over Sandbach Flashes (7th). A **Barn Owl** roosted at a barn near Knutsford (30th). A **Long-eared Owl** returned to Woolston Eyes early in month. Last dates for **Swifts** were Frodsham (4th), Poynton Pool (6th), Rostherne Mere (1st), Statham (2nd) and a late bird at Tatton (26th) was the first for a month there. At Sandbach Flashes a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** watched perched on the railway pylons (27th) was an unusual sight. The last **Sand Martins** were 6 at Fiddler's Ferry (1st), one at Sandbach (15th) and the latest bird was at Tatton (21st). Up to 5000 **Swallows** roosting at Woolston Eyes was a large count there. Sandbach Flashes had 100+ on 14th but Fiddler's Ferry had its last on the 15th. A mixed flocks of **House Martins** and Swallows included c200 at Tatton (6th) and an incredible 450+ at Poynton (14th). At least 200 House Martins were at Sandbach Flashes (14th) with 200 at Middlewich Lime Beds (22nd). Two Tree Pipits were at Frodsham where this species is rare and one/two birds at Mow Cop on 3 dates up to the 22nd. **Meadow Pipit** passage included 30+ at Sandbach Flashes (27th), 65 and 104 at Mow Cop (8th and 15th respectively) with a record 132 over Poynton Pool in 1 hour (30th).

Yellow Wagtails moved through with 6 at Inner Marsh Farm (2nd), 5 at Frodsham (4th) and singles at Gatewarth (13th), Sandbach Flashes (21st) and Middlewich Lime Beds (22nd). A **White Wagtail** was at Budworth Mere (6th). **Redstarts** were at Frodsham and Inner Marsh Farm (21st). Up to 4

Whinchats were at Frodsham with one at Inner Marsh Farm (11th) and 2 at Mow Cop (22nd). Single Wheatears were at Tatton, Inner Marsh Farm, Middlewich Lime Beds and several birds at Fiddler's Ferry (8th). **Fieldfares** came in much earlier than usual with singles at Frodsham (17th), Tatton (21st), earliest ever site record and an early bird over Marbury No1 tank (22nd). A small fall of migrants at Fiddler's Ferry (8th) included 3 **Sedge Warblers**, 2 **Reed Warblers**, 3 **Whitethroats**, a **Blackcap**, a **Chiffchaff** in song and 2 **Willow Warblers**. A Sedge Warbler at Poynton Pool (13th) was the latest ever there. Other Reed Warblers were at Gatewarth, Tatton and Woolston Eyes. **Lesser Whitethroats** were at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (2nd) and Frodsham (29th). Sandbach Flashes had a singing Willow Warbler (27th) and a Chiffchaff was in song at Lymm (25th). Two **Spotted Flycatchers** remained at Sandbach Flashes (1st). Although the 2 adults and 3 juvenile **Nuthatches** seen at Rixton Clay Pits (2nd) were reported as the first for the site in the last issue, birds were seen there in 1995, it still remains a first breeding record. The juvenile **Woodchat Shrike** remained at Frodsham from 4th until 7th (fourth county record). Woolston Eyes held up to 20 **Jays** (28th). A pair of **Ravens** frequented the Tatton/Rostherne area from the 21st (third record for Rostherne Mere) with 2 also seen at Frodsham. At least 50 **House Sparrows** visited a Statham Garden all month and 200+ were at Gatewarth (12th). Flocks of 18 and 15 **Tree Sparrows** were at Heatley (20th) and Statham (26th) respectively. Tatton had c50 **Goldfinches** (13th). 30 **Siskins** were at Woolston Eyes by the end of month. A flock of 70 Linnets were at Lymm (9th).

OCTOBER

Bird of the month must be **Yellow-browed Warbler** with two found. A single at Moreton (14th) was typical in both date and locality, but more exceptional (and as predicted in the last issue) a bird was seen well inland by three observers at Rostherne Mere (20th). There have been only three truly inland records in the county:- in an Alsager Garden (13th October 1978, third county record), Bosley Reservoir (3rd October 1987) and Tattenhall (23rd October 1988). Just over the border inside Greater Manchester a certain Mr G. Lightfoot has found three birds in Ladybrook Valley since 1982 and all within 100 yards of each other. Since the first county record in 1973 there have been 19 birds seen (to end of 1994) all between Sept 24th and Nov 18th and all birds bar one have been single day birds.

Several **Red-throated Divers** were off Hilbre during the third week and an unidentified Diver circled Tatton Mere several times, but didn't land (8th). Woolston Eyes held 20+ **Little Grebes** following a small influx of birds (24th). Ten **Great Crested Grebes** at Fiddlers Ferry (8th) was a new monthly max and up to 25 were at Frodsham No6 tank. **Slavonian Grebes** were off Hilbre (25th) and at Catchpenny Pool (from 17th). On the 29th a North West gale (force 6) brought 18 **Leach's Petrels** past Hilbre with 7 in mouth of the Mersey (5th). At Fiddlers Ferry **Grey Herons** peaked at 11 on the 12th.

Inner Marsh Farm had 8 **Pink-footed Geese** (2nd) with larger than usual numbers at Rostherne Mere (Max 750 on 20th) and 171 flew SE over Gatewarth (22nd). **Canada Geese** reached 222 at Toft Pool (13th). Up to 6 **Barnacle Geese** were at Inner Marsh Farm, 3 at Toft Pool (13th), with singles at Frodsham Score and Budworth Mere. **Ruddy Shelduck** sightings included 3 at Frodsham Score (6th), a female/immature with Canada's on Budworth Mere (25th and 26th) and 2 at Fiddler's Ferry (27th), all of dubious origin. The male **Mandarin** on the Bridgewater Canal at Statham, all month, took a liking to mixed corn and a male was at Tatton. Gadwall could only reach 82 at Rostherne, a record 26 at Chelford SQ's (26th) with 7 at Gatewarth (15th). Peak counts of **Teal** included 250 at Fiddler's Ferry, 500 at Frodsham No6 tank, 1000 at Inner Marsh Farm and 420 at Woolston Eyes. Inner Marsh Farm held up to 1500 **Pintails** and the first returning bird was at Sandbach Flashes (11th). A late **Garganey** was on Budworth Mere (29th). A drake **Blue-winged Teal** was seen briefly at Budworth Mere (25th) in company with **Teal** and is thought to be the male seen at Pennington Flash in late September and early October. This is the third county record following a female shot on the Dee in the 19th century and a male at Inner Marsh Farm in May 1992. **Shoveler** counts included Fiddler's Ferry (130), Frodsham (120+), Rostherne (122) and Woolston Eyes (152). Frodsham had 2 Scaup with the male **Lesser Scaup** still present there (4th). A **Long-tailed Duck** seen on Tatton Mere was flushed by a boat 3 times (1st) and was the first there for 17 years, with 3 birds also off Hilbre and 1 in the Mersey (both 29th). Inland **Red-breasted Mergansers** included singles at Woolston Eyes early in month, Budworth Mere (5th) with 2 next day and Rostherne Mere (15th). The first **Goosander** of the winter at Rostherne Mere (19th) with a female at Fiddler's Ferry (27th) was the fourth reserve record. A record 70 **Ruddy Ducks** were at

Frodsham No6 tank and 120 were at Chelford SQ's (6th).

A female **Marsh Harrier** flew over Budworth Mere (8th) and another bird was at Inner Marsh Farm. **Buzzard** counts included an incredible 15 (a record Cheshire count) at Tatton (5th), up to 3 at both Frodsham Marsh and Rostherne Mere, 2 at Inner Marsh Farm with singles at Marbury No1 tank, Fiddler's Ferry, Sandbach Flashes and Neumann's Flash. A possible **Red-footed Falcon** was reported at Sandbach Flashes (12th) where 2 different **Merlins** were also reported. Single **Peregrines** were reported from Chelford SQ's, Fiddler's Ferry, Neumann's Flash, Rivacre Valley and over Crewe town centre (12th). A release of 40+ **Red-legged Partridges** took place at Denhall Lane. A covey of 18 **Grey Partridges** at Fiddler's Ferry (22nd) was a good Cheshire count and a pure white **Pheasant** was seen around Frodsham No4 tank. **Water Rails** returned to Fiddler's Ferry from 12th. The **Spotted Crane** remained at Inner Marsh Farm until the 1st.

Golden Plovers peaked at 210 at Fiddler's Ferry, 800 at Frodsham, 226 at Gatewarth, 398 at Neumann's Flash and 34 at Sandbach Flashes. A **Grey Plover** at Sandbach Flashes (6th) was a good record. Flocks of 1500 **Lapwings** were at Penketh (12th) including a partial albino bird and Frodsham (13th) while 1000 were at Fiddler's Ferry next day. Good numbers of **Little Stints** included 10 at Sandbach Flashes (1st) gradually reducing to the last bird on the 13th, c12 at Inner Marsh Farm (12th), singles at Neumann's Flash (1st, 22nd and 28th) with 3 there on the 2nd and up to 25 at Denhall Lane. Also in the same area were two juvenile **Pectoral Sandpipers** (7th-8th), the first multiple sighting of this species in Cheshire. These birds bring the total to four this year with only 1988 having more birds. Up to 25 **Curlew Sandpipers** lingered at Denhall Lane and Sandbach Flashes had up to 8 **Ruff** this month with up to 11 on Neumann's Flash. Returning **Jack Snipes** were back at Fiddler's Ferry from the 13th (Max 4 on 26th) with a single at Tatton (2nd), the earliest ever wintering bird there, and singles at Middlewich Lime Beds, Mow Cop and Woolston Eyes. Woolston Eyes had up to 40 Snipe. Two late **Whimbrel** were at Hilbre (13th). One/two **Green Sandpipers** were at Chelford SQ's throughout with singles at Marbury No1 tank (to 25th) and at Woolston Eyes (6th). A **Grey Phalarope** was reported from the coast.

A **Sabine's Gull** was off Hilbre (29th) during strong winds. Maw Green Tip held c1000 **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** (25th) with c500 at Gatewarth (15th) with 3000 **Herring Gulls** at Gatewarth that day. **Yellow-legged Gull** reports came from Fiddler's Ferry (4 birds), Maw Green Tip (1 bird), Neumann's Flash (1 bird), Penketh (1 bird) but Gatewarth had the most records (6 birds). The regular wintering **Glaucous Gull** returned to Hoylake with a bird at Richmond Bank (22nd), when a second winter **Iceland Gull** was also present. The previous day at Gatewarth, a 'white-winged' Gull was seen and specifically identified as an adult Glaucous x Herring hybrid. The **Black Tern** remained at Tatton (to 6th) and the same bird at Rostherne (8th). A flock of 100 **Collared Doves** at Fiddler's Ferry (12th & 16th) was a new monthly max with the same flock at nearby Penketh (12th). An observer at Gatewarth had his third record of **Great Spotted Woodpecker** (21st). A fall of 200+ **Swallows** occurred at Toft (4th) following a heavy storm and 20 were at Sandbach Flashes (6th). Last dates included Frodsham (4th), Rostherne Mere (11th), Sandbach Flashes (13th) and Statham (16th). **House Martin** flocks included 150+ at Toft (4th) following a heavy storm with 20 at Tatton (6th) and the last birds a Poynton Pool (6th), Toft and Sandbach Flashes (both 9th). A **Richard's Pipit** stayed at Moreton between 13th and 15th. A large passage of **Meadow Pipits** occurred on the 1st with 200+ in 2 hours at Gatewarth, 81 over Poynton Pool in an hour, c155 over Tatton in an hour, large numbers over Toft. Other large counts included 30+ at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (6th), 40+ over Poynton Pool (10th), 45 at Mow Cop and 35 at Middlewich Lime Beds (both 22nd), 200 over Woolston Eyes mid-month. **Water Pipits** were at Frodsham (22nd), Little Neston (26th), Parkgate (from 29th) and Woolston Eyes (19th). Frodsham had a Rock Pipits on 11th and 22nd with a bird well at Middlewich Lime Beds (22nd). A Rock or Water Pipit flew over Mow Cop (30th). The **Grey Wagtail** roost at Poynton Pool formed again from the 15th. A roost of 120 Pied Wagtails formed on the outskirts of Chester with 30+ at Gatewarth (15th) where 2 **White Wagtails** were also seen. Single **Stonechats** were at Fiddler's Ferry (5th and 26th), the later bird returning for the winter. The last **Wheatears** were at Frodsham (17th), Gatewarth (1st), Inner Marsh Farm (2nd), Mow Cop (22nd), Sandbach Flashes (23rd) and a bird at Melchett Mere (13th-17th) was latest ever for that site.

The first **Redwings** were at Poynton Pool (7th), Rostherne Mere (6th), Sandbach Flashes (12th) and Toft (2nd) with the first large arrivals mid-month. **Fieldfares** remained scarce with several parties of up to 50 and the first bird of the winter at Rostherne Mere (31st) arrived. A **Cetti's**

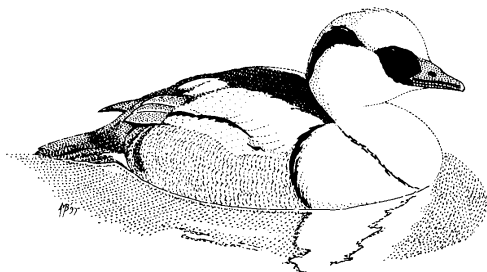
Warbler was reported at Redwall Reedbed, Frodsham Marsh (11th) and if confirmed will be the third county record. Previous records came from Frodsham (20th April 1984) when a bird was ringed and more recently a bird was found at Rostherne Mere (8th and 9th May 1989). A late **Reed Warbler** was at Woolston Eyes (6th). **Chiffchaff** were at Rostherne Mere (12th), Sandbach Flashes (6th), a singing bird at Tatton (6th), and four at Woolston Eyes (13th). The only **Firecrest** reported was at Hooton. A flock of 20 **Jays** were at Massey Brook Hall, Thelwall (8th). The pair of **Ravens** remained in the Tatton/Rostherne area, 2 were at Inner Marsh Farm (13th) with further singles at Marbury No1 tank (1st), over M56 near Chester (13th), Neumann's Flash (22nd) and Fiddler's Ferry on 3 dates with two present (12th) being the second reserve record. Up to 4000 **Starlings** roosted at Rostherne Mere. Flocks of 20 **Tree Sparrows** were at both Little Heatley (11th) and Satham (14th). A single **Brambling** at Tatton (29th) was the only record received this month and indicative of the beechmast crop failure. On the 22nd, a single **Twite** was at Mow Cop and 22 were at Frodsham. Seven **Snow Buntings** visited Hilbre. Six **Corn Buntings** were at Lymm on the 5th.

NOVEMBER

Bird of the month must be the unidentified **Ibis** (probably Glossy) that was seen flying west over Inner Marsh Farm and at Burton Marsh (both 24th) and next morning at Burton Marsh again. If confirmed it will be the second county record. The only currently accepted record for the county is a well-twitched bird seen at Neumann's Flash between Oct 1st and 3rd in 1992.

Great Crested Grebes reached 8 at Fiddlers Ferry (10th) was a new monthly max. and 19 were at Sandbach Flashes. The **Slavonian Grebe** stayed at Catchpenny Pool until the 18th. Forty **Cormorants** on 9th and 17th was a new monthly max. at Fiddlers Ferry, ten more than the previous best set last year and 207 were at Rostherne Mere (30th). On the 30th, 76 **Mute Swans** were at Doddington Pool and up to 38 were at Kingsway Bridge, Warrington this month. Up to 35 **Bewick's Swans** were at Burton. Three **Whooper Swans** were over Rostherne Mere (3rd), a small number at Burton and another wandering bird was seen flying over Budworth Mere (22nd) and at Fiddlers Ferry (30th), the observer's first there 'on the deck'. A large movement of 530 **Pink-footed Geese** flew over Poynton (21st), 900 over Rostherne Mere (30th) and 100+ over Woolston Eyes (23rd). A **Lesser White-fronted Goose** was seen at Marbury Mere, but not the same bird that was seen there the last 2 winters, along with 7 **Barnacle Geese** (27th). A flock of 215 **Canada Geese** at Poynton Pool was the second highest count there, only 2 birds short of the record count. Two **Egyptian Geese** visited Bottoms Reservoir (2nd).

Two **Ruddy Shelducks** visited Fiddler's Ferry (2nd & 10th) and a female was at Sandbach Flashes on 5 widespread dates. A flock of 9 **Shelducks** was at Rostherne Mere (16th), a large count there. Six pairs of **Mandarins** were at Aldford Flood (26th) and the male at Satham all month. **Wigeon** reached 269 at Chelford SQ's (17th). Up to 124 **Gadwall** were at Rostherne Mere with 12 at Arpley Tip (21st) and 5 at Sandbach Flashes (28th) was a record for that site. **Teal** peaked 234 at Fiddler's Ferry, 300+ at Gatewarth and 239 on Marbury No1 tank. The monthly maximum of **Mallard** at Fiddler's Ferry was 180 on the 10th. Late broods hatched included a male and 7 chicks at Crewe Hall (8th) and a female and 2 chicks (less than a week old) at Quaker's Coppice (18th). **Pintail** numbered 15 at Fiddler's Ferry (23rd) and 15 at Farmwood Pool (17th) was an excellent site count. Rostherne Mere held up to 118 Shovelers with 176 at Woolston Eyes. A first winter male **Ring-necked Duck** was an excellent find on the River Dee at Aldford (10th) was the sixth county record. A male **Scaup** at Sandbach Flashes (30th) was a excellent find. Six **Common Scoters** were at Woolston Eyes (16th). Higher than usual counts of **Goldeneyes** came from Chelford SQ's (18 on 17th) and Rostherne Mere (28 on 17th) with 15 at Tatton (15th), 10 at Astbury Mere (14th) and a single at Gatewarth (13th) was unusual there. A male **Smew** visited Inner Marsh Farm (14th - 20th) and Budworth Mere (22nd and 23rd), any male Smew in Cheshire is now a rare sight. **Red-breasted Mergansers** included 4 at Rostherne Mere (16th) with another (27th). Up to 18 **Goosanders** at



Macclesfield Forest, 11 were at Doddington Pool (30th), up to 3 at Tatton/Knutsford Moor (from 26th), 3 over Poynton Pool (21st) and singles at Rostherne Mere on 2 dates, at Sandbach Flashes (13th) and the same bird at Astbury Mere next day. Ruddy Ducks on Budworth Mere peaked at 30 on the 28th with a drake at Sandbach Flashes now in its seventh year of occupation and a female at Poynton Pool only the fifth ever there.

A **Hen Harrier** was at Frodsham No5 tank (27th). A **Goshawk** was reported from Inner Marsh Farm (16th). Five **Sparrowhawks** visited Rostherne Mere attracted by the Starling roost. Single **Common Buzzards** were at Marbury CP, Middlewich Lime Beds and Sandbach Flashes with 2 at Fiddler's Ferry (2nd and 3rd), the first November record and first multiple sighting there. Two Buzzards were seen near Moore (7th), 3 at Walton Wood, Warrington (21st), 2 in the same area (30th) and 3 at Appleton Reservoir. Single **Peregrines** were seen at Fiddler's Ferry, Frodsham, Middlewich Lime Beds and 3 birds at Neumann's Flash. **Water Rails** peaked at 6 on Knutsford Moor (10th). A large count of 600 **Coots** came from Marbury CP. A Ringed Plover was at Middlewich Lime Beds (17th) and 250 Golden Plovers were at Fiddler's Ferry (16th). A **Grey Plover**, 2 **Knots** (one next day) and 18 **Dunlin** were at Neumann's Flash (16th) and 3000 **Lapwings** were at Fiddler's Ferry next day. 27 Dunlin at Gatewarth (15th) was a high count there and a bird over Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (13th) was a first for the observer. Four **Little Stints** remained at Denhall Lane until the 4th. Up to 5 **Jack Snipes** were at Middlewich Lime Beds this month but this was dwarfed by counts at Fiddler's Ferry of 12 on the 9th and 16 on the 17th was a new site record with further singles at Gatewarth and Sandbach Flashes. Double figure **Snipe** counts included 11 at Fiddler's Ferry (17th), 47 at Middlewich Lime Beds and 24 at Tatton. Eight **Woodcocks** seen during a shoot at Toft (30th) and a bird flew over the Sankey causeway in daylight (21st). Up to 1500 **Black-tailed Godwits** frequented the Denhall Lane area and 1400 on the Mersey at Mount Manisty. Three **Bar-tailed Godwits** at Neumann's Flash (16th) were a patch tick for one observer and a bird at Melchett Mere (23rd) was first site record for 20 years. **Curlew** numbers reached 250 at Fiddler's Ferry (17th). Single **Green Sandpipers** were at Middlewich Lime Beds, 2 were at Gatewarth (13th) with a single (21st) and a bird was back for it's sixth winter at Little Budworth (18th).

Two **Little Gulls** visited Tatton (15th). 8000 Black-headed Gulls and 15000 **Herring Gulls** were at Arpley Tip (21st). A second winter **Ring-billed Gull** was a superb patch find for one inland observer at Poynton Pool (8th) and was a typical date for the species. With 17 birds seen up to the end of 1994 this species remains exceptionally rare and all other records are from typical Gull sites such as Gatewarth etc. Single **Yellow-legged Gulls** were at Gatewarth (13th) and Neumann's Flash (2nd) with at least 3 on the Richmond Bank. A second winter **Iceland Gull** was at Arpley Tip (21st) and the same bird at Budworth Mere next day. A **Glaucous Gull** was at the Richmond Bank (2nd) with another at Frodsham. Two **Pomarine Skuas** were seen in the Frodsham area. A 'Commic' Tern was at Watch Lane Flash (1st) was the second latest there and one of only four November inland records of **Arctic** (2) or **Common** (1) **Tern**. A flock of 200 Collared Doves at Fiddler's Ferry (16th) was a new monthly max. A **Barn Owl** was found dead on the M6 at Alsager (6th) with live birds at Marbury Lane, Northwich (2nd) and at Middlewich (9th). A very late **Swift** was at Woolston Eyes (3rd). **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** were at Barlow Wood, Bradwell, Quaker's Coppice, Sandbach Flashes where this species is rare and a bird in a Poynton Garden was the observer's first in 25 years of garden watching. About 90 **Skylarks** were at Tatton (10th) and a **Richard's Pipit** flew west over Arpley Tip three days later. **Rock** or **Water Pipits** flew over Rivacre Valley (5th) and Gatewarth (21st), the former heading directly for Neston while 6 of the later were at Neston (22nd). The **Grey Wagtail** roost at Poynton Pool peaked at 12 during the first week and broke up on the 18th just before harsh weather set in. The only report of **Waxwings** so far this winter is of 12 at dusk in Central Knutsford (26th).

The **Stonechat** remained at Fiddler's Ferry but a female at Middlewich Lime Beds (22nd) was more unusual. The first **Fieldfares** and **Redwings** of the winter were at Fiddler's Ferry (10th) with 60 of each there on the 24th, c250 Fieldfare at Inner Marsh Farm, with both species reported as being scarce at Rostherne and Chelford SQ's. A male **Blackcap** was singing at Marbury CP (1st) and it or another at Neumann's Flash (24th) and another bird at Rostherne Mere (10th). **Chiffchaffs** included singles at Knutsford Moor in full song (2nd), Neumann's Flash (24th), Poynton Pool (14th) and Sandbach Flashes (7th and 17th). A **Firecrest** was seen at the Eaton Estate (26th). A massive flock of 100 **Long-tailed Tits** was seen at Frodsham. **Marsh Tits** were seen at Aldford Flood

(26th). A flock of 1200 **Carrion Crows** which fed on a stubble field at Lymm (27th) was considered an underestimate. A **Raven** was seen perched on a telegraph pole by the roadside at High Legh (18th) with 4 at Macclesfield Forest and several sightings from the Burton area. Flocks of 12 and 24 **Tree Sparrows** were at Lymm (27th) and Heatley (29th) respectively with 14 at Toft (10th) and 8 on the bird table at Sandbach Flashes (29th). Four **Bramblings** were first of the winter at Fiddler's Ferry (24th) with 2 present (30th), the first of the year at Toft (2nd), 6 were at Ridgeway Reservoir (21st) and one amongst 60 **Chaffinches** at Bradwell (22nd). A flock of 150 **Goldfinches** were at Woolston Eyes. Up to 70 **Siskins** were at Rostherne Mere and 60 **Linnets** were at Arpley Tip (21st). Single **Twite** were at Woolston Eyes (10th) and Sandbach Flashes (30th) was the first there since 1979. Tatton had c60 **Redpolls** on the 17th. Five Bullfinches at Fiddler's Ferry (10th) increased to 10 a week later, a new max. count there and 6 at Rixton Clay Pits (19th) caused one observer to comment "I seldom see this species these days". A single **Lapland Bunting** was at Frodsham (27th). **Snow Buntings** are exceptionally rare inland, with only 6 records (of 23 birds) between 1980 and 1994, so singles at Middlewich Lime Beds (17th) and Sutton Common radio mast (near Bosley) were excellent records. A small flock was also reported from Hoylake. The **Corn Bunting** roost at Knutsford Moor reached 18 on 26th.

EARLY DECEMBER

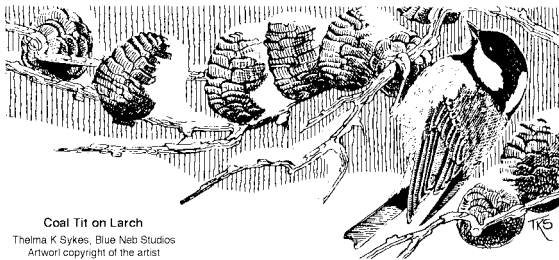
Best contender for Bird of the month so far is the **Shorelark** with two birds seen at ICI tank, Frodsham from the 7th onwards. There have been only 5 records (7 birds) in the county between 1981 - 1994. The last multiple sighting was of two birds in December 1986 at West Kirby. This species has always been very rare on the West Coast of Britain but numbers nationally have declined drastically since the 1970's. Keep an eye out for more birds on the way.

Two **Cormorants** over Poynton Pool (3rd) were the first December birds there. Rostherne Mere had 320 **Pink-footed Geese** over in 3 skeins (1st) with 60 over (7th). The **Ruddy Shelduck** remained at Sandbach Flashes until the 2nd at least. A count of 450+ **Teal** at Gatewath SF (7th) was highest count of winter there so far. Up to 18 **Goldeneye** were at Tatton with 5 at Astbury Mere (5th). A **Red-breasted Merganser** was on Frodsham No6 (5th). Two drake **Goosanders** were at Rostherne Mere (4th) with two females at Tatton (until 5th at least) with 11 **Ruddy Ducks** at the later site (1st). A **Jack Snipe** was at Tatton (5th) and a single **Bar-tailed Godwit** was at Fiddler's Ferry (1st). Gatewath on the 2nd hosted a first winter **Mediterranean Gull** (observer's first here), 10000 **Black-headed Gulls**, 15000 **Herring Gulls**, an *argentatus* **Herring Gull** with yellow legs, a **Yellow-legged Gull**, a 'strange', almost pure white Gull and 200+ **Great Black Backed Gulls**. A **Short-eared Owl** on the 1st was the first of the winter at Fiddler's Ferry. A flock of 250+ **Fieldfares** were seen near Gatewath (7th). A male **Blackcap** returned to a Poynton Garden (from 3rd) for the second winter running and a wintering **Chiffchaff** was at Gatewath (7th). A movement of 600 **Jackdaws** flew over Statham (2nd) to and from a nearby roost. A **Chaffinch** flock at Fiddler's Ferry reached 100 on the 1st with c100 **Siskin** at Tatton the same day. Five **Bullfinches** were still at Fiddler's Ferry (1st).



One observer (P. Barnett) deserves a special mention after mounting a migration watch from his garden at Fulshaw Park, Wilmslow spending 3 to 4 hours a day watching between Sept 6th and Nov 23rd. **Skylarks** passed through between late Sept and early Nov totalling only 23 birds. **Meadow Pipit** passage was exceptional with an incredible 1511 birds over between Sept 8th and Nov 8th including 633 during September (peak counts were 87 on 27th, 180 on 28th, 230 on 30th with 92% heading South or South-East) and 869 in October (peak counts were 481 birds over on the 1st in 5.5 hours - easily a record count here, 86 on 2nd, 89 on 10th, 55 on 21st with 94% heading South or South-East). Peak counts coincided with large counts from other sites particularly on October 1st. A good total of 58 October **Swallows** included 31 South on the 2nd with the last on 19th. In contrast only 16 October **House Martins** were seen with the last two on the 15th. An average 30 **Grey Wagtails** flew over. Passage **Pied Wagtails** totalled 156 birds from Sept 6th to Nov 14th.

High flying migrant **Dunnocks** flew South on Oct 6th and 15th following an influx here in early October. An influx of **Blackbirds** occurred in late October. **Fieldfares** were seen between Oct 22nd and Nov 23rd totalled 667 birds including 110 over on Nov 14th. From Oct 3rd into November **Redwings** totalled 946 birds including 224 over on Nov 14th. **Rooks** are uncommon here but a count of 40 on Sept 21st was the largest count here since 1970's.



Coal Tit on Larch
Thelma K Sykes, Blue Neb Studios
Artwork copyright of the artist

Between Sept 11th and Oct 28th a total of 1820 **Starlings** flew over, mainly West. Sixteen **Bramblings** passed through during two weeks in October. Three high flying migrant **Bullfinches** flew over on Oct 6th and an incredible 13 **Yellowhammers** flew over on 8 dates between Oct 2nd and 25th compared with only 3 previous records. Other migrants included **Mistle Thrushes**, **Jays**, **Tree Sparrows**, **Chaffinches**, **Greenfinches**, **Goldfinches**, **Siskins**, **Linnets**, **Redpolls** and **Reed Buntings** in small to moderate numbers. Also worthy of special mention is a migration watch carried out on 13th October at Denhall Lane over the 4 hours 7am to 11am when a total of 1316 Passerines were seen including 5 **Swallows**, 7 **Redwings**, 11 **Coal Tits**, 815 **Chaffinches**, 57 **Bramblings**, 151 **Greenfinches**, 31 **Siskins** and 119 **Linnets**.

PREDICTIONS FOR JANUARY TO MARCH.

January tends to be largely influenced by cold weather from the North with hard frosts or snowfall. This weather concentrates the wildfowl onto the larger lakes such as Rostherne Mere which rarely freeze completely. This site offers an almost guaranteed chance of seeing Smew but they may turn up on any unfrozen water. Other wandering wildfowl may include common ducks such as Wigeon, Teal etc. displaced from the smaller lakes and meres. Any wintering inland waders will also move to the coast as indeed may Kingfishers if the weather is particularly severe.

February see the first signs of Spring and Great Crested Grebes and Coots will already be finished nest building by the end of the month. Woodland birds become more active with the increasing day length but early nesters like Tawny Owl and Crossbill may already have eggs if conditions are mild. The best chance of finding Crossbills are at either Delamere or Macclesfield Forest. Now is the time to seek out both Willow and Marsh Tits at favoured sites like Aldford and Hawfinches at Eccleston.

Mark the **10th of March** in your diary as it is the highest tide this century at Parkgate and with an onshore wind the day is sure to be spectacular. Numerous Water Rails will be flushed from the marshes only to be taken by Grey Herons or Greater Black-backed Gulls. By the third week of March early migrants will have arrived, including Little Ringed Plovers, Sand Martins and Wheatears, so remember to make a note of the first dates for the Bird Report and Recent Reports. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker will become more conspicuous and should be easily seen amongst the bare branches, try Marbury CP for the best chance.

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

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

Thanks/Acknowledgements for Recent Reports go to:- Steve & Gill Barber, P Barnett, Birdwatch Magazine, Birdwatching Magazine, George Brown, Jeff Clarke, Mike Duckham, Pete Hall (Toft), Ron Harrison, Andy Hearn, Inner Marsh Farm Log, Mike Jones, Ken Kirk, Geoff Lightfoot, Colin Lythgoe, Keith Massey (Fiddler's Ferry Reserve), Bryan Roberts (Tatton and Knutsford Moor LNR), Rostherne Mere NNR log, Sandbach Log, Bernard Shakey, James Smith, Dave Walters (Witton Limebeds and Marbury CP) and anyone else who passed records on.

Please note that all records for the 1996 Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report are required by Joe O'Hanlon by Feb 28th at the latest for an early production of the Bird Report. Joe O'Hanlon's address is 31 Bridgewater Drive, Vicar's Cross, Great Broughton, Chester CH3 5LS.

RECORD SUBMISSION

You will read elsewhere in this issue that the ACRE conference at Swanwick was a success with regard to inter-county co-operation. However, one thing was very clear with regard to submission of records, that is, there has to be a deadline, and a deadline that is very inflexible. This year we have failed to produce the bird report for 1995 in the twelve months following that year. This part was due to late submissions, as late as August in some cases.

Clearly this problem has to be rectified, nobody, including the report team, wants to be in this position again, which has also meant members being tied to the computer for several long months, instead of three or four. **This year's deadline is February 28th**, that is eight weeks in which to submit records. Unless Cheshire enjoys six BBRC rarities a day for the next eight weeks, in which case we'll understand a delay of a couple of days, we're having to say February 28th, and only February 28th. For the majority of observers this won't pose a problem, most of you submit your records by this date....please carry on doing so! As for descriptions - I'll stretch a point and ask for them by March 31st - generous to a point! Please help us to give you a quality report **ON TIME**, I know you can do it!

Tony Broome, County Recorder

Red-letter Days for Redwings

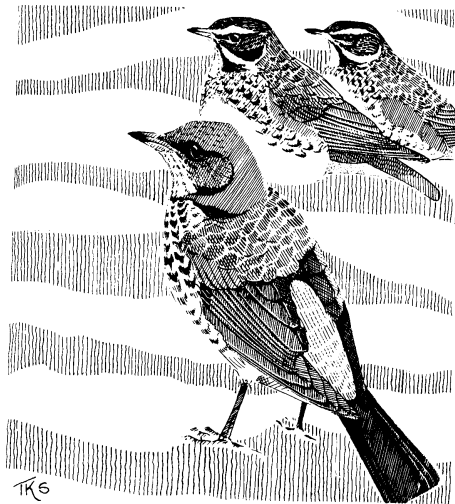
I have been counting Robins! Not the birds in my garden, you understand. Robins in winter are so frantically territorial that any count of garden Robins is likely to stop at one. No, it is Christmas card Robins. I number them off, knowing that there would be a lot, for the Robin is firmly identified with "Season's Greetings". When the first postmen were kitted out with red waistcoats as part of their uniform they carried the nickname Robin. So Robin brought the mail. It is a short step to picturing the bird itself carrying Christmas letters in its bill.

Yet in winter it isn't the redbreast I look for, but the Redwing. Who could fail to welcome a bird prepared to cross the North Sea to winter here when all our Swallows and martins have deserted us? It is such an attractive bird, smaller than its cousin the Song Thrush. I think of the Redwing as the Thrush with eyebrows. It has a creamy white stripe above the eye, continuing almost to the back of the head and this combines with pale stripes below the eye and from the corner of the bill to give the Redwing a change of expression from fiercely stern through supercilious to frankly down-in-the-mouth.

The flash of red might not strike you at once. The flanks are a rich chestnut colour, but this can be hidden by the loosely-folded wing. The red which gives it's name to the bird, isn't apparent while it is at rest - for it is on the underside of the wing. Unleashed to view in flight, it often then appears dark as the bird becomes silhouetted against the sky.

To see the colour at its best, search out berry-laden hedgerows where Redwings flock to feed. They are great ones for Hawthorn and as they reach for fruit, wings stretched for balance, the warm orange-red is revealed. Then the Redwing has alternately all the grace of the ballerina or the tumbling acrobatics of the clown. The hedge becomes a riot of movement and colour, clustered red berries among the leaves, rich russet revealed and concealed in the flutter to reap the harvest.

Redwings wintering in this country come from Iceland, Scandinavia and Finland but they are nomadic and will move on if weather conditions worsen or food becomes scarce. An individual may winter in Britain one year and travel the next to south-eastern Europe or the Near East.



FEILDFARE AND REDWINGS
by Thelma K Sykes, Blue Neb Studio
(Artwork copyright of the artist)

At this time of year (end of the old year, start of the new) fruits have been depleted and you will find Redwings flying and dipping in loose flocks over damp pasture where they will search for earthworms. Their undulating flight contrasts with the stronger, straighter flight of Fieldfares. As winter progresses, these two species are more often to be found together. Behind that fact lies a strange tale.

Like Redwings, Fieldfares spend summer months in Fennoscandia, and fly west and south to find a milder winter climate. Larger and bolder than the Redwing, the Fieldfare sports striking ace-of-spades markings on the breast and blue-grey head. The grey of the rump contrasts clearly with the dark wings and tail.

Both Redwings and Fieldfares take fruit, but depend upon creatures such as earthworms as winter progresses. They are the increasingly to be found on pastureland. So perhaps it is likely that they will be found feeding together. Or is it?

I remember especially a cold, bright December afternoon - a low sun creating fascinating shadowscapes from the glacial mounds and hollows which characterise this part of Shropshire. I am watching the largest flocks of winter thrushes that I have ever seen, but the field in front of me is full of Redwings, nothing else, just Redwings. The field over the right holds hundreds of Fieldfares. There are no Redwings in the Fieldfare field, no Fieldfares among the Redwings.

Yet I have seen them feeding together, even tend to think of them in flocks together. Why were these birds so clannish?

Redwings, it seems, are remarkably adept at finding earthworms and not surprisingly, go for the big ones. They search out old grassland, fields which have been laid down as pasture for four years or more. Worms are larger here and there are more of them. Grass is denser too, making worms more difficult to detect but that doesn't deter super-sleuth Redwing.

Fieldfares, for all their brasher ways are comparative duffers at finding worms and go for easy pickings on new pasture. There are fewer worms and they won't be as big, but grass is sparser and catching a meal easier.

The species choose different fields, according to their differing abilities. As winter deepens, the Fieldfares have worked over the new pastures and the food supply is running out. There are fewer worms here and because they were small, the Fieldfares had to consume more at each feeding.

Now Fieldfares change strategy, using the Redwings as indicators to show which pastures still have a good worm-supply and which parts of the field make best hunting. When the two species are together it's because the Fieldfares have joined the Redwings, rarely the other way round.

If the winter is prolonged there is a chance of attracting both species to your garden. They will come for any waste fruit put out for them. If the fruit isn't soft, cut each piece in half, leaving the exposed side uppermost to attract the birds, I have an arrangement with my village shop and am allowed to take any apples and pears which become unsaleable - strictly for the birds, of course. In fact I'll scatter some apples on the lawn just now and hope that I might have a Redwing or two to watch now I have finished counting my Robins.

Thelma K Sykes, Blue Neb Studio, 18 Newcroft, Saughall, Chester, CH1 6EL

[The above article was first published in The Countryman and is reproduced with their permission. Eds]

Records - Love or Hate

It amazes me when I talk to birders about their records and they reply "what?" ! After your binoculars and bird books, keeping records has to be the next most important aspect of any ornithologist's life. No matter how few records you may make they will be important. Whether species noted, counts, or area covered, you will be creating ornithological history which will be of interest to people in the future who have similar interest. Without putting your sightings of birds into a form that can be used by yourself, you will miss out on doing your own studies, thereby increasing your knowledge and enjoyment of your particular interest: birds. You might just discover something new, of ornithological importance in your own area and will almost certainly find out when the best time is for certain species. Without submitting all these bird records to CAWOS, you would have no bird report and no data to fight for conservation measures in identifying important areas to save. It does not, in some cases, have to be of a national or international interest, there are plenty of local issues for which more help is needed which may in turn eventually have a bearing on a national level.

I find people at times are just too lazy to find a suitable way of treating their own records. Over the last 20 years or so my method has changed little. Even CAWOS changed their record forms. The last change followed similar lines to my own way of setting out a recording form for different species. When I first looked at the different ways people have for recording their bird sightings, I found most, if not all, used a card system, square or rectangle in shape and although these systems were all right for storing records, these were no good for extracting information.

My method for keeping records is shown below. I used an A4 size loose leaf binder with narrow ruled paper. The more information on a single sheet of A4, the easier it is to see patterns of interest when studying your chosen species.

— Year

1996						
MALLARD						
WEATHER	DAILY TOTAL	MALES	FEMALES	DATE	LOCALITY	COMMENTS
WINDY SW		8	6	JAN 1ST	MERSEY BANK	LAST HIDE
CLOUDY	256	10	6	JAN 1ST	C LAGOON	
			226 34	JAN 1ST	" "	
CALM, MIST		7	7	JAN 3RD	C LAGOON	
		106	66	JAN 3RD	D LAGOON	
	336	18	8	JAN 3RD	" "	
			190 22	JAN 3RD	C LAGOON	
SE 0-1		16	14	JAN 6TH	MARSHES IN FRONT	
SUNNY		100	50	JAN 6TH	OF HIDE	
	265		30	JAN 6TH	C LAGOON	
			25	JAN 6TH	D LAGOON	

— Species

weather
Daily Totals circled for monthly maxima
Sexes noted and unsexed flocks
date
specific locality
any comments

When you have a year of monthly counts you can look down the left hand side of the totals and quickly see which month had the highest totals. Over a few years this will show which part of the year is best for a species. This is an easy way to see how the species on your local patch changes with time of year and weather. It will also help the county society to assess your records easily if it is presented clearly in this way.

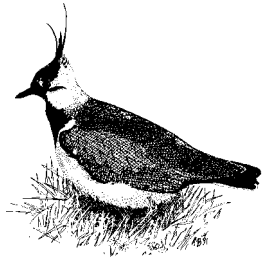
In part two of RECORDS - LOVE or HATE I'll show you how I developed my own way of studying certain species and recording in a different way rather than just leaving them scribbled in your note books. I'm sure you will soon start to see ways of doing you own studies.

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

[Comment: I've taken the essence of Keith's methodology and can only urge county birders to adopt similar ways to present their notes. It does make compiling a lot easier! AMB County Recorder]

The View from the Farmyard

I was brought up on a typical north Manchester housing estate, by parents who both had a great love of the countryside and wildlife. The garden of our home was the place where I was introduced to many of the common bird species. My father always commented on the Starlings bullying and strutting as being like a bunch of Nazis pushing around the smaller birds. Despite his dislike of the bird, which probably had more to do with the Nazis than Starlings, I had quite a regard for them and chose to see their comical side rather than the sinister. One bird in particular amused me, as thanks to the local window cleaner, it had mastered the wolf-whistle. This it used to great effect, the bird that is, not the window cleaner, I am sure many a housewife smiled a private smile thinking some unseen admirer was about. No doubt this bird did much to enhance the window cleaners reputation too. Here in Toft, we have on occasion been treated to exhibitions of expert mimicry. It is possible to chart a progression through manmade electronic noise. The trim phone of the yuppie years, the advent of the car lock beep-beep, Toft Hall's alarm system and car alarms. All have had their day, starlings seem to use each of these only while the novelty lasts, I can't remember the last time I heard a trim phone mimic, probably the late 80's. It would appear that sounds are mimicked only during the "novelty" period or until a better sound comes along. Some copied calls evidently come from nest or roost sites as birds in Toft have reproduced Golden Oriole, Curlew and Buzzard mewing. My particular favourite was the Golden Oriole which quickened my heart beat until the culprit was spotted. Similarly a Mistle Thrush mimic featured in my note book as a November singing thrush until recently, the rendition immaculate, but alas a fake.



Shortly after most of the House Martin second broods had fledged, I observed as in previous years, what appears to be a master class in nest building techniques. Fifty young martins accompanied by ten adults were to be found in the farmyard collecting mud and applying it to the walls of one of the farm buildings. The adults clearly displaying the various methods of mud extraction and application and the youngsters attempting to copy. The classes generally take place in the late morning and last for one to two hours. The final constructions consisting of lines of mud approximately the length of a nest base, but never on the walls which the colony use for breeding sites.

Buzzards are becoming far commoner in Cheshire than in recent years, which allows more time to observe their behaviour. In the past my Buzzard observations were made in Wales or the Welsh borders and Scotland. So I look upon their colonisation of nearby areas with some excitement. Close encounters with Buzzards are now far more frequent and some of their behaviour has come as a surprise to me. Consigned to an afternoon of discomfort chugging up and down a field in a tractor at 2mph I was on the lookout for anything to break the monotony and thankfully my relief came in the form of a splendid Buzzard. My companion for the afternoon stayed near for almost two hours dropping from its perch as I passed and flying up again on my return, the longer this went on the bolder the bird became. I was surprised to find a bird, which I had previously regarded as a master of the up-draught, grubbing around for worms and strutting around looking from a distance not unlike a cock Pheasant. Eventually the rotovator turned up a mole which the bird tossed violently to the side, then retrieving it, flew to the safety of the woods to consume at it's leisure.

Several of the Elder bushes behind the buildings have reached quite a size, and in these sheltered positions carry a very heavy crop of juicy berries. The berries, when ripe, are irresistible to a variety of birds. All the thrushes and most of the tits and warblers join the Starling flocks to gorge on the feast. Even Nuthatches, Chaffinches and Wrens are to be found swallowing whole the plump bubbles of fruit juice. For several weeks each autumn the bird droppings turn to pink and purple, staining tree branches and rooftops at the favourite resting places, especially of the Starlings. Generally on the farm, Elders are looked upon as weeds, and being shallow rooted are easily removed, but thankfully not all. 1996 has seen the total failure of acorns and beech mast, and chestnuts are only small and in short supply. Squirrels have been making an even greater nuisance of themselves recently, raiding bird feeders in

the garden and even entering the farm's grain store and feasting on the Barley. Rapidly they are becoming the most destructive rodent on the farm. Last year one took to eating the gutter of my house. What makes that quite remarkable is that my gutters are made of 4mm thick lead and this squirrel must have consumed about a kilo. Considering it's damaged brain, the thought of a crazed rodent running round the trees in my garden worries me somewhat. Should it slip I, for one, don't want to be struck by a squirrel containing a kilo of lead.

Watching a pair of Jays rooting about in last years beech mast it was plain to see that scant pickings were left at a time when the crop is usually thick on the ground. A group of Magpies eating sunflower seeds in my garden were displaying some differing modes of survival. One bird took what it could eat and then began to hide seeds in the lawn, covering each with a tuft of moss, clearly laying in store what it couldn't eat. However the other birds didn't take the risk of coming close to the house to feed and they just followed the first bird around stealing what it had just hidden. Which birds were using the right strategy for success? The first bird displaying admirable planning for an uncertain future, or the thief following it's opportunistic instincts. Unfortunately the planner is unlikely to gain any advantage because laying in stores is generally reliant on some form of communal regulation, as in our society. But the keen competitive and opportunistic instincts of the Magpie means that the most likely recipe for success will be "He who eats today lives to eat tomorrow" - predators and pestilence permitting...

Pete Hall, The School House, Toft Road, Knutsford

Notes & Letters

If possible, please send letters and articles for BIRD NEWS to the editor, on a 3.5" floppy disc, PC or Mac format, as either Word, Wordperfect, Ami Pro or ascii text files. Please include a paper copy and indicate if you want your disc back. Many thanks, Eds

A CHORE OF A CHALLENGE

Reading David Quinn's letter, on submitting descriptions of Yellow-legged Gulls, had me wondering just how much more he thinks you can write down, in a description of a gull. Adults in particular, mostly white, from head to vent on underparts, with grey/black upperparts, black wing tips with white mirrors, or all white wing tips and bare parts colouring with slight structural differences, and that's it. Keeping your descriptions to a "bog standard" as Mr Quinn puts it, and repeating it as I have done over the years, enables you to keep a watch on how many birds you could have occurring at a particular time period, but only if you find something identifiable of an individual. His remarks of Jeff Clarke's 40 Yellow-legged Gulls is clearly misunderstood. Jeff may have 40 sightings of the species but he will be lucky to find between 6-8 different birds at once and more likely it was between 4-6 birds. I have been watching Gatewarth far longer than anyone else and know the site better than anybody. A lot of the time you will only get a limited amount of viewing time with gulls. And you will not always see, in particular, the primary pattern. So you concentrate on the "bog standard" to ensure you do not misidentify a species. Just occasionally you may find a few marks heavier or lighter than normal, or bare part colours showing a slight difference to the norm. To enable to see all these features you will need good viewing conditions and good light, and all gull watchers know how rare these weather conditions occur. Come to think of it do they ever occur? If a bird fits a description completely it will not matter if you see it in different months or years it will still be the same description. And no matter how long you look at the gull it will still be the same. Lets concentrate on recording a certain species in a certain description until we can buy a pair of binoculars that can identify individuals for certain, with the DNA as added interest. Now that would be a good pair of binoculars to buy. If Jeff Clarke thinks he is seeing 100 different Yellow-legged Gulls in a year, then all I can say Jeff, every time you go down to the Mersey at Gatewarth, cover your mouth and nose. The Mersey is known to addle the brain when it's smells fill the mouth and nose and can still be potent today. Unlike the 50's and 60's, when if it filled your mouth and nose, you needed a friend to give you a slap at the back of the head, to clear your nose and throat.

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

[Hack, Snort, Gurgle, Cough, Slap! - thanks Ed]

LONG LEGGED YELLOW-LEGGED GULLS

In reply to Jeff Clark's letter in BIRD NEWS No 32 October 1996 "THE GULL WITH LONG LEGS", I found that the long-legged appearance in Yellow-legged Gulls was noticeable, regardless of the feathering on the tibia. And having seen 124 different birds since I recorded the first for Gatewath and Fiddlers Ferry in August 1984, long legs have always been a feature that you could not miss. P J Grants book "Gulls" refers to *Michahellis* having wings and legs proportionately longer than *L.a.argenteus* / *L.a.argentatus* on page 96. It also mentions that the winter head pattern of *L.michahellis* as very light streaking with grey smudges around the eyes. When I first identified *L.michahellis* I discovered that the light streaking on the crown of winter birds was also present on the crown of summer birds. No one, at that time, had recorded this feature on birds occurring in England.

Keith G Massey, 4 Hall Terrace, Great Sankey, WARRINGTON, Cheshire, WA5 3EZ

[Serves me right for only having a first edition copy of "Gulls". Eds]

A FIELD CHANGES HANDS

Surely one field cannot make any difference to our lives. Or can it? The field in question had been neglected for many years and was full of weeds, a small self sown coppice, rough grass, old dying trees and criss-crossed with footpaths made by the regular passing of villagers walking their dogs or going to the river to fish.

To the uninformed and unobservant eye, this was just a wasteland doing nothing. It was certainly not earning its keep, neither was it particularly beautiful. To the watchful, it was a haven for wildlife. Long grass provided excellent breeding sites and hiding places for birds, small mammals and butterflies. When summer was in full swing, thistles bloomed alongside St Johnswort. Myriads of Skippers both Large and Small abounded as did Gatekeepers and Meadow Browns. The bird life included Quail, Grasshopper Warbler, Meadow Pipit and other rough meadow species.

Then the field changed hands. The old trees were felled. The coppice destroyed. Barricades were erected to stop the villagers having access to the area and the river. All in the name of farming and earning money. Where now are the butterflies and birds? The land has been "improved" by putting in drainage and changing the biodiversity to monoculture. The straggly, unkempt hedges ripped up, the thistles ploughed in, the character of the place changed. But will this be for ever or will the land revert to what it was formerly? Whatever the future holds, the populations of Meadow Pipits, Yellowhammers, Grasshopper Warblers and Skylarks among others have been decimated, the food plants and shelter been turned into "green manure". The perching and roosting sites for Kestrel, Long tailed Tits, Whitethroats, and Tree Sparrows, which once thrived, are burned. The birds which benefit are Rooks, Jackdaws, Carrion Crow and Magpies alongside flocks of hundreds of Feral Pigeons. Mallard also use the stubble field to feed and roost.

A field has changed hands. For better or worse, richer or poorer. Is it now sick or healthy? So much depends on a point of view.

Hilary Woodhead, 9 Gerrard Drive, Weaverham, Northwich, Cheshire, CW8 3LG

[Comment: Sickly and definitely much poorer! The big test is to compare the number and diversity of plants and animal species present before and after "improvement". The majority of humans, including many farmers, are completely oblivious to the real value of "waste" land. It's a sad world! Tony Broome]

GATEWARTH - THE TRUE STORY

Recently published incorrect information in BIRD NEWS regarding Gatewath Richmond bank area Urges me to put the record straight and blow my own trumpet, having watched the area for over 30 years. The area is not a new site or been under watched, as mentioned in BIRD NEWS, it was well watched by myself from the mid 1970's to the beginning of the 1990's when the tip was moved to the south side of the Mersey, putting it out of my reach to cycle to before going on to Fiddlers Ferry Power Station. It was only after this time the area was under watched. The true locals who live in Sankey Bridges, Great Sankey and Penketh have known the area for wildfowling and bird watching



for decades. In my early days there access to the sludge pools and Richmond Bank had a serious health risk, if you got caught by the farmers, so records are few for that time. Even now there is not free access as mentioned in BIRD NEWS, it is still owned privately by council/farmers and remember trespass is now a criminal act, you have been warned. I was fortunate to have been the only one watching the area as it turned into a prime Cheshire site for birds, from the late 1970's. Recent claims of new species for the area are incorrect. Steve Holmes in bird watching magazine had Scaup last winter as a new species. I have three records of Scaup for March, April and December 1981, the March bird staying eight days on the Mersey around Richmond Bank. A recent new record of Raven is incorrect, my record of Raven dates from March 1981. Last winter, again in bird watching magazine, it mentioned the number of white-wing gulls was exceptional for Richmond Bank / Gatewarth tip. I established the site for white-wing gulls from the early 1980's. The first record of Glaucous Gull for the area from July 1977 and Iceland Gull from Jan 1981.

From that time, I was seeing so many white-wing gulls close up, that I was able to identify them individually. I spent the next three years putting my ideas to the test with success. I think I was the first to attempt this, I know of no other persons that did. I discussed my technique with Mr Eric Hardy who had also not heard of anyone doing this with species of gulls. Identifying gulls individually was taken up a few years later successfully with Mediterranean Gulls by birders at Seaforth Pools. By identifying individual birds you could get a good idea of how many were occurring each winter or summer. It helped to keep the possible numbers of the birds down to an acceptable level. Maximum numbers of Glaucous Gulls was of five birds in my field of view at the same time in February and again March in 1985, with 10 different birds each month. Over these two months I identified at least 16 different birds. The year 1985 had the maxima of 26 different Glaucous Gulls. Over these years February was always the best month for this species. Iceland Gulls maximum was never more than three birds together with the best yearly maximum being 16 birds in 1983. April was always the best month for this species, with the maximum number of these birds being 7 in April 1984. In all these years of watching white-wing gulls I have identified at least 124 Glaucous Gulls and 73 Iceland Gulls with all ages for both species recorded, up to the beginning of the winter of 1996/97.

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

IN REPLY...

Keith Massey, in his previous letters, suggests that information supplied by myself on Gatewarth, in the April 96 issue of BIRD NEWS was incorrect on several points. Firstly, that it was claimed as a new site. At no point did the article in question state or infer that the site was 'new', the purpose of the article was to bring Gatewarth's potential to a wider audience.

Keith also contends that the site is not underwatched. Well Keith may have been able to attain almost daily coverage through the seventies and eighties but I'm lucky if I manage four visits a month. Prior to the article I hardly ever met any other birders, excepting Tony Parker on one or two occasions and also Keith himself once or twice in the early eighties (Les and Brian Tollitt were the regular ringers at nearby Gatewarth Sewage Farm but work commitments mean their visits have all but ceased).

Since the article was published, I have enjoyed the company of several other well known Cheshire birders, including Dave Walters, Jonathan Williams, Chris Done, James Walsh and Mike Duckam, plus the umpteen other souls in search of the April Lesser Yellowlegs. The presence of so many birders on the 'yellowlegs' first day resulted in several other county rarities being found. Thus demonstrating that increased observer coverage produces better results. QED.

I wouldn't wish to lessen in any way the contribution that Keith has made to the recording of birds in the Gatewarth area, or the work he continues to do at Fiddlers Ferry. The county as a whole benefits greatly from the efforts of people like him. Keith and others have many interesting records of species for Gatewarth which I have so far been unable to duplicate. So claiming any new species for the area is fraught with danger. I learned several years ago not to fall into that trap, I have added several species to my own personal list for Gatewarth in 1996, but it requires all those with records for Gatewarth, to combine efforts, to compile a complete list of species occurring there over the last 30 years. A useful task for the near future!

Keith will be glad to know that I too also find it relatively simple to identify individual 'white winged' gulls. Yellow-legged Gulls are a different affair altogether. All the age groups are largely consistent in plumage detail and the infrequency of my visits combined with the perversity of plumage wear

and bare part colour changes render individual identifications unreliable. It is for this reason that I need to produce a rarity form for each bird encountered. Keith has a perfectly valid point to make about Yellow-legged Gulls records and I suspect that most of my records could be distilled down to less than thirty individual birds. The difficulty lies in proving or disproving the case one way or the other. Also there's seldom anyone around at Gatewarth, to "slap the back of my head and clear my nose or throat", should I be overcome by chemical inhalation.

Finally Keith's point about public access at Gatewarth. The whole site is owned and operated by the Waste Disposal Authority (WDA). Phase III of the tip is currently a 'hard hat' area as the development of the Nature Reserve is underway. The first part of which is the construction of a 'run off' ditch and pedestrian access footpath, together with it's shielding bund to prevent disturbance of birds roosting on the Richmond Bank. Access to phases I and II will also be formalised shortly as this area is being 'turned over' to the Mersey Forest. A full report on the changing conservation status of Gatewarth will appear in a forthcoming 'Bird News'.

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

REFERENCE BOOKS - GOOD OR BAD?

Most birders collect bird books and there are some seemingly excellent reference guides these days with whole families of birds covered: Sparrows and Buntings, American Sparrows, Kingfishers, Woodpeckers, Crows and Jays etc. etc. All the problems of the past concerning identification are over...or are they? Take a closer look at these works of art. Are they just pretty pictures which are adequate if the bird you're trying to identify is straightforward. If it isn't, they may fail to live up to your expectations. I'll see if I can explain.

Over the past few months there have been several birds that have demanded further attention for a variety of reasons. The Grey-headed Gull at Middleton Moor was thought to be a third year bird, then an adult. Was it even certain a Grey-headed Gull? Two closely related species are Hartlaub's Gull and Silver Gull, from South Africa and Australia. Being absolutely 100% sure isn't easy with existing references, the information is sketchy to say the least.

Next, Buff-bellied Pipit, Scilly last October. Expertly identified, in flight, on call by Paul Holt. Trying to prove it to myself using current field guides proved to be a different exercise with the illustrations not resembling the bird on a number of counts. Was it even "*japonicus*" the eastern race? Not streaked enough, dark enough etc. but it's all relative. If you haven't seen either, how do you know what the differences are? It wasn't easy as the bird was darker than I imagined, much more heavily streaked and much less buff.

The Cleveland Great Knot, easy to identify, but what age was it? This species has a second summer plumage and none of the books were very clear on the differences between it and adult plumage, especially at the usual range of 3-400 metres. Lost again!

Isabelline Shrike, Stocks Reservoir. Yes it was one but which subspecies? Possibly important if they're split in the future. There are two, "*phoenicuroides*" or "*isabellinus*". Try sorting out first year birds in the books. There is a very little to work on.

The Midlands Hooded Merganser, a female without doubt, but was it an adult or a first winter. The books are virtually useless.

So there you are, just a personal observation on the current literature. They're not all bad mind you. The illustrations and text in "New World Warblers" enabled relatively simple ageing on both of the "Scilly" Black and White Warblers an exception to the rule?

Tony Broome, "Sibirica, 9 Vicarage Lane, Poynton

BIRD POPULATIONS AND RINGERS

For those of you who regularly count the birds you see whilst out birding, how many of you realise that all your totals at the end of the day are only a representation of the true numbers involved? This probably applies to most passerines and near passerines more than the rest, but even so, wader and wildfowl counts are only as accurate as the visibility and location allows. Discussing the subject with the Greater Manchester Recorder, Judith Smith, she highlighted the value of constant site ringing, where a group of ringers regularly trap birds at the same locality throughout the year.

One area that only ever holds a flock of fifty Goldfinches at most would be reported as such and the data used in future research. It may be said that the flock is "the usual fifty birds" and perhaps would be deemed unimportant if the land was to be developed. However, the true picture could be vastly different. As Judith pointed out, ringing at one such site in Greater Manchester revealed over 500 Goldfinches using the area. There's a bit of a difference isn't there?

The Woolston Eye's ringing team puts a lot of effort into monitoring their site and a glance at the 1995 Bird Report at some of the totals they provided, makes fascinating reading. Look at these.....

Grasshopper Warbler	= 9 reeling birds on May 13 th /14 th	No figures for autumn
Sedge Warbler	= 240 singing birds on May 13 th /14 th	538 ringed in late summer
Reed Warbler	= 9 singing males on May 13 th /14 th	248 ringed in late summer/autumn
Whitethroat	= 110 singing birds on May 13 th /14 th	420 ringed in late summer/autumn
Garden Warbler	= 2 singing birds in spring	29 ringed in late summer/autumn
Chiffchaff	= 2 singing birds on May 13 th /14 th	103 ringed in autumn
Willow Warbler	= 94 singing birds on May 13 th /14 th	442 ringed in autumn

For those of you who have visited Woolston during the above period, I bet your notebooks only logged a fraction of the birds. Warblers are perhaps a good example because they are easily caught using normal trapping methods. Even so, on the days trapping wasn't carried out, many more birds would be passing through, nevertheless it proves a point.

It's well known that garden birds show the same sort of densities, relative to actual birds seen. I used to ring birds in a garden in Bramhall in the 1970's and whereas the peanut feeders only ever attracted a maximum of 20 Blue Tits, 10 Great Tits, 4 Coal Tits, 6 Greenfinches and the odd Chaffinch, the overall winter ringing totals were very different. 500 Blue Tits, 300 Great Tits, 40 Coal Tits, 60 Greenfinches and 40 Chaffinches. No wonder the food never lasts long!

Ringing roosts provides further insights into bird populations. Grey Wagtail roosts may hold 20 birds at any one time, but treble that number can be ringed in an autumn/winter season, proving birds are passing through.

Ringing is a valuable tool when trying to develop the real picture with regard to bird densities and populations. As far as the field birder is concerned it should be a reminder to look just a little bit harder at that "flock of Linnets" in the stubble field. One day the majority are males, the next, most are females or immatures. As well as counting them, why not try sexing them? Ardent patch workers could double or treble their local species totals but the majority of you will be saying "I already know that"..... wont you?

Tony Broome, "Sibirica" 9 Vicarage Lane, Poynton

[Thanks to all the Cheshire ringing groups that regularly supply totals for use in the Bird Report . If , however, you don't and would be able to give similar information to the "Woolston Warbler Totals", please contact either myself or the editor]

YOUNG ORNITHOLOGIST OF THE YEAR

There's over £2,500 up for grabs by the three winners of this title in 1997, including a complete set of Harper Collins field guides in print (60-70 books!) for the senior winner and Swarovski binoculars for the intermediate and junior winners.

Age groups are under 14, 15 to 17 and 18 to 21, so anyone who will be under 22 on 1st September 1997 can enter. All that's needed is a field notebook plus any notes written up at home afterwards. Surely there must be at least one worthy entrant in every county!

Are there any Young Ornithologists worthy of such an award in Cheshire and Wirral? If you know of someone, perhaps in a local RSPB group, CAWOS urges you to tell them of the competition - let's have a local winner!!

The competition is supported by BB, the BOU, the BTO, the RSPB, the Society of Wildlife Artists and the YOC. Entries must be in by the **10th September 1997** and should be sent to:-

**Young Ornithologist of the Year,
British Birds, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford, MK44 3NJ**

WISH YOU WERE HERE!

As the new year is upon us I have decided to give a list of the ten most likely new birds for the County in 1997. My top ten choices for new county birds are (in order of most likely occurrence):-

1. Ortolan Bunting - Two unauthenticated records from Red Rocks hints that this species is possible. In recent years there have been several birds seen in the North West with a bird at Shotwick Lake in September 1992 coming tantalisingly close. Best months are May and September with offshore islands a favoured site, so try Hilbre.
2. Common Rosefinch - A dead certainty within the next few years. Many records from the surrounding North West counties, particularly Gwynedd, where the species is virtually annual. Again offshore islands and coastal areas are favoured. Try Hilbre, Red Rocks or Moreton in late May or early June for the best chance.
3. Surf Scoter - Another good bet with several long-staying birds off the North Wales coast in recent years. A drake was seen off Hilbre on 23rd November 1969 by three observers but the record was never submitted, more recently a bird was seen off Hilbre in October 1996. Again coastal areas in winter offer the best chance, inland birders take heart though as at least six birds have occurred at inland sites with passage Common Scoters.
4. Sardinian Warbler - A recent upsurge in records of this species has produced birds at Formby Point, Lancashire (May 1992), Great Orme (May 1994) and Bardsey (June 1994), both Gwynedd. This is the best bet for a new warbler species in the county. Birds prefer Gorse bushes in a sunny hot sheltered area so try the Wirral coast between Red Rocks and New Brighton.
5. Cattle Egret - Another sure bet given the recent influxes of this species and with five birds in the North West, a number that is sure to increase. Most records are in late winter or spring, at both coastal and inland sites. Freshwater sites such as Sandbach and coastal sites like Inner Marsh Farm may offer the best chance with good areas of grazed farmland nearby. In 1987 a bird spent two weeks in the New Mills area of Derbyshire a mere stones throw from Cheshire. If we can have a Great White Egret why not a Cattle Egret?
6. Ross's Gull - An unauthenticated record of a bird off Meols in January 1994 indicates the possibility of this species occurring in the county. This is the only major gull species missing from the county list but with only four records from the North West, including birds as close as Oakenholt Marsh in Clwyd and Seaforth on Merseyside just a wing beat from New Brighton, its a long shot.
7. Lesser Grey Shrike - A longer shot with only five North West records, the closest at Shotton in September 1961. Most likely in Spring and Autumn, with careful separation required from Great Grey and 'Steppe' Shrikes. A record of a bird came from Frodsham in November 1990 but it was not accepted. Could turn up anywhere but most likely along coastal habitats.
8. Pacific Golden Plover - One of the few waders needed for the county list. A much overlooked wader very similar to American Golden Plover so careful separation is required. With only two North West records, including a bird on Oakenholt Marsh, Clwyd in August 1990, this bird is a real crowd puller with July and August the favoured months. Try Burton Marshes.
9. Red-eyed Vireo - The most common American landbird to arrive in Britain with c95 records including two in Gwynedd and eight plus on the East coast. We are long overdue for an American landbird and given the events of last Autumn it would seem even Black-and-White or Blackpoll Warblers are not out of the question. Could turn up anywhere in a sheltered, sunny, insect rich area during October.
10. Now for something completely outrageous for my last prediction, as extreme rarities seem to pop up almost anywhere, how about a Marmora's Warbler from Africa, Steller's Eider from the Arctic, a Red-flanked Bluetail from Russia or a Sandhill Crane from America? Any of the last four would cause you to be one of the most famous birders of the year and would ensure the gratitude of up to 6000 twitchers should it stay a few days.

Wood B. Twitcher

NB The North West region means Gwynedd, Clwyd, Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Lancashire and Cumbria.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

First of all, apologies because last issue's comments on membership did not make sense owing to faulty communication. Total membership for 1996 stood at 309, three more than the previous year. Although numbers are still rising the increase is slowing down and if you know anyone who has not yet renewed, please encourage them to do so. Welcome to the following new members: M Simms, JR Richards, Birdnet, PA Walton, A Morgan, Nantwich Natural History Society, DA Ross, M Duckham, Mr and Mrs DB Jones, JK Clarke, AJ Williams, Hale Ornithological Society, F Coppenhall, RG Sturman, AP Capper, Mrs E Bartlett, D Roughsedge, RJ Harvey and MD Maher. Gillian McKaigue and RJ Davidson have resigned.

I have received a letter from British Birds about a competition for anyone under 22. £2500 worth of prizes will be given in September for the best field notebook (plus other notes written up at home). The prize for the senior winner is a copy of every Harper Collins field guide in print (60 - 70 books); junior and intermediate winners will get Swarovski binoculars. All three winners will get Barbour jackets and more bird books. Anyone interested should write to British Birds, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford, MK44 3NJ.

Every six months I am updating members on Council meetings. There has only been one full meeting this half-year, at which we decided to reduce the number of Council meetings per year to four, the minimum allowed under the constitution, and to encourage sub-committees to meet more frequently. The Publicity sub-committee has been revamped and is coming forward with new ideas, including a CAWOS presence at future Parkgate high tides. Council thanked Richard Gabb for his work as editor of Bird News and agreed to send a gift token to him as a small mark of the society's appreciation; Richard has very much kept the society together with Bird News and has improved both its quality and quantity - we are all much in his debt.

David Cogger, Membership Secretary

MEETING REPORTS

OCTOBER - "The Birds of Tanzania" by Mike Wilkes (or was it New Zealand?)

Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society held their first meeting of the season on Friday, 4th October, in the Civic Center. Unfortunately the designated speaker on "The Birds of Tanzania", Mike Wilkes, one of Britain's top wildlife photographers, was stuck on the M5 and never even made it to the M6! However the Society Treasurer Brian Dyke stepped into the breach, so instead of Tanzania we were whisked away to New Zealand. Brian gave an excellent account, beautifully illustrated, of the birds of the remote islands and forests. His slides of penguins, albatrosses and petrels were quite stunning. The landscape of the South Island was shown in all its magnificence with wonderful vistas of Mount Cook and the nearby fjords.

NOVEMBER - "Birds of Prey in Wales" by Iolo Williams

The second meeting of the year was held on Friday, 1st November, at Knutsford Lower School. A large audience hear Iolo Williams, the Welsh Species Officer of the RSPB, gave an excellent talk on the raptors of Wales. The talk fell into three parts. He showed some stunning shots of the birds including Red Kites, Peregrines, Harriers and Buzzards. Iolo outlined the populations of these birds indicating some successes. The Goshawk, eradicated from Wales 200 years ago, reappeared in the 1960's due to a rapid expansion of the forested areas and is believed to have a population of some 300 pairs. The failures included the Merlin and the Kestrel, the latter declining everywhere except for motorway verges!

In the second part of his talk Iolo gave an insight into the work of the Species Officer in stopping egg thieves, illegal trapping and poisoning of these beautiful birds.

The final part looked to the future. He hoped to see the increase in populations continuing and perhaps the return of the Golden Eagle, to Sonwdonia, and the Ospreys to the lakes and valleys of Wales.

DECEMBER - "The Land of the Griffon" by Allan & Sue Parker

On a cold December night, Friday 6th, Allan and Sue Parker brought a touch of sunny Spain into foggy Cheshire at a meeting of CAWOS members and friends. As a professional photographer

who usually covers weddings Allan used his expertise to photograph the wildlife seen on their tour of Southern Spain. Their slides of migrating birds such as harriers, buzzards and the smaller migrants such as wheatears on their way to the UK, showed that there is much more to the Costas than sangria and sun. Most photographs had been taken a few kilometers from the high rise blocks of the Costa del Sol. To an audience of bird lovers the flowers were a revelation, the audience agreeing with the speaker's hopes that this part of rural Spain does not fall to the developers or the intensive farming of the EU.

Laurie Fairman, Press Officer

REPORT FROM ACRE MEETING

David Steventon and Tony Broome attended a meeting of the Association of County Recorders and Editors (ACRE) held during the BTO Conference at Swanwick on 8th December 1996. The meeting was chaired by Mike Shrubbs and the minutes taken by Tim Sharrock. About 18 of the 80 member organisations were represented, including Avon, Borders, Cheshire & Wirral, Derbys, Dyfed, Hereford, Leics, Northants, Northumb, Oxford, SOC, Shropshire, Surrey and Sussex. The following are some random notes from the points discussed at the meeting.

Initials in Reports: There is no consistent approach. It was recommended that the policy for inclusion of initials should be stated in the report, and it was a good idea to underline the finder of the rarity, if there are several initials against the record and the finder is known.

Local rarities review meetings: It was concluded that each county had to have its own criteria for what constituted a record requiring a supporting description. Mike Shrubbs was surprised to be told that if he submitted a record of a Gannet over Leics without a supporting description (a hypothetical situation!), the record would not be accepted - but on the other hand was glad to hear that all observers, whether experienced and well known or otherwise, would be treated consistently. It was suggested that where records were circulated around a panel of experts, the routing should be varied so that different people take it in turns to be first on the list. This is because it is easier for the experts seeing comments by previous reviewers to come to a judgement than it is for the first reviewer on the circulation - who has nothing to go on but the record itself. Better approach, if expense of postage allows, is to distribute to all members of the panel simultaneously.

Computerisation of records: The intention had been to have several different packages available for inspection, but the organisers of this part of the session had not been able to make it to the meeting. Instead, there was discussion on the merits of computerisation in general and of packages such as COBRA, Avianstore, Bird Recorder and others. There is no obvious contender at the moment for preferred/recommended package. All recognised the use of word-processing to save time and the potential of recording databases to sort and analyse records. However, few users had given consideration to security/backup/long-term viability of electronic storage media. David Steventon was commissioned to write up a review for the next edition of NewsACRE.

Storage and use of records: There was discussion on where to archive records - few counties have yet got it organised. At least in Cheshire & Wirral, they are in the hands of a recognised third party, the Grosvenor Museum. Other counties have experienced problems of 'ownership' of records after they have been used for a report and more than one county has lost past records through not having a policy. The meeting ran out of time to discuss the issue of charging commercial organisations for access to and use of the base records for e.g. public enquiries/planning applications.

Deadlines: All report editors reported suffering from late submission of records. The general picture is that it takes six months from receipt of the last records through the compiling, editing and printing process to issue of the report, so that overall, October was about the earliest that county reports were ready for distribution. There is a compromise to be made between completeness of a report and timely issue of a report. Mike Shrubbs summed it up with the message to GET TOUGH - leave out late submitted records from the publication process, although still archive them.

POSTSCRIPT: Given the later than planned publication of the C&WBR for 1995, due to late receipt of records holding up the compiling process, the intention is to get the next report out in the next six months. You would be well advised to heed the warning that records received after 28th February will not be included in the compiling process, although they will still be archived for posterity. The next report may be a little thinner in consequence, but we have got to start somewhere.

David Steventon, Editor, Bird Report

PUBLICITY SUB-COMMITTEE REPORT

Last October we held the first meeting of the 're-vamped' publicity sub-committee, to discuss ideas, projects and priorities for the future. We spent some time brain-storming what we are trying to publicise and why! We ended up with a long list, including (in no particular order), the existence of CAWOS; cooperation with other societies; meetings and conferences; education; surveys; threats to bird populations etc etc etc. We pooled ideas of how we could go about the above; which media/approach to use; who we should be targeting; what benefits it would bring; how we could measure our success (or failure!) and the commitment/time needed and by whom to make any projects worthwhile.

We tried to be realistic in identifying specific areas which we would concentrate on and whether these should be classed as short-, medium- or long-term ventures. These include for example a CAWOS stand at Parkgate high tides (on-going); contacting newspapers and journals to advertise meetings, surveys, items of interest etc (on-going); organising identification workshops (medium-term); targeting prime bird-watching sites in Cheshire such as Frodsham (still under discussion); and a Photographic Exhibition by renowned North-West wildlife photographers to celebrate Cheshire's birdlife (long-term).

The next step was to allocate responsibilities within the committee to undertake or, to be more precise, to organise the above. This is shown within the organisational chart shown below. The Bird Report and Bird News 'teams' have been included for completion. What is obvious to all concerned, is that only a limited amount can be achieved by just the seven people currently on the committee ('The Magnificent Seven'?!). Help will be needed from the main body of CAWOS members to make realistic and sustainable progress.

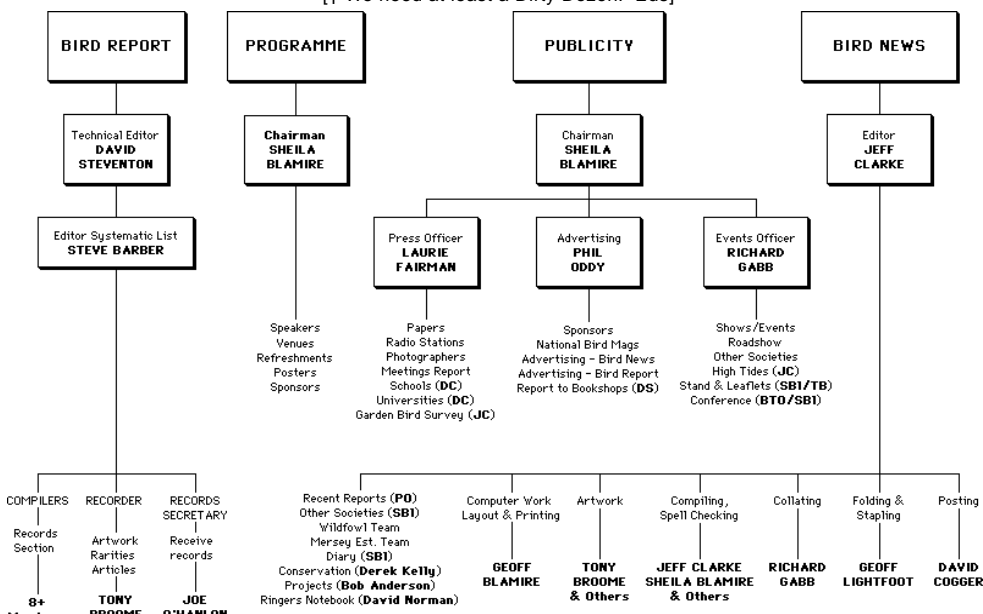
This could be in various guises (and time committment) such as:-

- Manning the stand at Parkgate high tides (see appeal in the diary section) and meetings, shows etc.
- Distribution of leaflets at reserves, hides, 'twitches' etc.
- Identification of future advertisers, sponsors and speakers.
- Help with organising/running workshops, conferences and other events.

All offers of help will be gratefully received and followed up (which has not always happened in the past!). Go on - drop me a line or give me a ring, while it's fresh in your mind - make it a late New Year's Resolution!

Sheila Blamire, Chairman, Publicity Sub-Committee

[† We need at least a Dirty Dozen! Eds]



Projects and Surveys

BROSBI (What's that?)

It's the project for Bird Recording On Sites of Biological Importance. Year one is coming to an end and we are about to enter year two of this five year project.

SBI's are designated by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust (CWT), Cheshire County Council and English Nature as being sites of importance for nature conservation within the county. They are intended to complement Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which are nationally important sites.

The SBI system evolved in the early 1970s and sites have been under review since 1990, with the intention of reviewing each of the 566 sites in the CWT area every five years. This area covers all of Cheshire, the Wirral and Stockport & Tameside.

Most of the recent surveys have been carried out by CWT members. This has resulted in good records of habitat and plant species but generally rather poor records of birds.

To overcome this problem CAWOS has agreed to organise a project jointly with CWT, with the aim of surveying each SBI every five years to determine its status so far as birds are concerned. This will also have the benefit of providing additional bird records to CAWOS' report.

The survey is relatively simple and will involve a minimum of four visits to a site, during a year, to record all bird activity there. At the more ornithologically rich sites there will be a need for additional visits. Detailed guidelines and recording forms will be provided to all participants. To achieve sufficient coverage participation is open to all CAWOS members and also members of local bird clubs in the county.

During 1996 there have been sixteen (out of 309) members of CAWOS and six (out of 14) local bird clubs involved. The results for 1996 are not yet in, but it is anticipated that around fifty five sites will have been recorded during the year. So it is likely that this five year project could take ten years to complete!

More volunteers are needed. Please consider whether you can afford to give four mornings a year to this important project. If so then please contact me so that we can agree on which site(s) to cover in 1997.

Colin Lythgoe, 11 Waterloo Road, Haslington, Crewe, CW15TF. Tel: 01270 582642

A CO-ORDINATED MIGRATION WATCH FOR CHESHIRE

Many of you may remember Tony Broome's article "The Cheshire Gap" in the Bird News 28 about the lack of large scale visible migration within Cheshire. Well now is your chance to prove Tony wrong and simultaneously put your 'local patch' on the ornithological map. In October 1997, to coincide with World Birdwatch Weekend, sites throughout Cheshire will be taking part in a co-ordinated diurnal migration watch. October is generally regarded as the best month for observing diurnal migration as it coincides with the peak passage of those species which undertake this form of migration. Notably the winter thrushes, larks, pipits, finches and buntings.

You can take part in two ways. Firstly, for those wishing to have a gentle introduction to this sort of activity you can join other birders at one of several public watchpoints. Here you will be in the company of experts who can guide you through the complexities of using jizz and calls to aid the identification of overflying migrants. Secondly, for those of you who prefer to birdwatch away from the crowd, you can man a watchpoint on your local patch or another site chosen for its potency for attracting overflying migrants.

To give you a taste of the potential for this type of activity I can point you to other recent migration watches held locally. Denhall Lane near Burton on the Wirral does not, on the face of it, appear particularly brilliant for observing diurnal migration. However birds here habitually fly along the contours of the Dee Estuary producing on occasions, quite spectacular passages of day flying migrants. On the 16th October 1994 almost 5000 Redwings and over 700 Fieldfares flew past overhead in three hours from dawn. It was a thrilling experience as squadrons of birds headed south east. Many of these birds had also passed Red Rocks and Parkgate Old Baths a few minutes earlier. We know this was so because we were able to trace the peak flock densities over the period of time the watch took place.

Another watch held on 13th October 1996 produced few thrushes at Denhall, however some 815 Chaffinches, 151 Greenfinches, 119 Linnets and 57 Bramblings did fly over in a four hour period from dawn. This on what was not a particularly good morning for movement due to the strong SE breeze up to force 6.

Why are we running this migration watch?

- 1) To promote CAWOS, recruit new members and encourage it's existing membership to take part in a useful and enjoyable information gathering exercise.
- 2) To reveal the potential of some previously under-watched birding sites within the county.
- 3) To demonstrate the importance of Cheshire for birds.
- 4) To have fun whilst doing all of the above.

All the watchpoints will use standardised recording sheets and the recording sessions will take place over a stipulated period. If you are considering manning your own chosen site, I recommend at least one other person should assist you as it is very difficult to record and watch at the same time.

The guidelines for using the recording forms are very simple and a full 'Migration Watch 97' pack will be sent to all those manning a watchpoint in due course. If you want to man your own watchpoint, but would like a practice before the actual event, contact me on 0151 423 4275 and I will organise a morning session for the weekend prior to World Birdwatch.

If you want to take part contact me anytime in the next few months. An update will appear in the next issue of Bird News.

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

IN SEARCH OF 'WHITE WINGED' GULLS.

Gulls! It's amazing how many experienced birdwatchers' eyes glaze over when that word appears. Why? Is it because they tend to frequent unsavoury habitats? Or that they congregate in unfathomable numbers leading to an eye condition akin to snow blindness? Possibly! Perhaps, as I suspect, it's because they are difficult to identify, particularly in their pre-adult plumage's.

When things get a little dicey one solution is to stick you're head in the sand and pretend the situation doesn't exist. This is a scenario I repeatedly employ, (sorry dear can't do the dishes just now, I've got to finish this article), in my domestic life. The trouble is, the result is invariably the same. That same old nagging feeling just keeps coming back to haunt me. So I've decided to take 'the cure'. What's more you can take it too. All you have to do is join me and a few other Gatewarth gull fanatics, on **Saturday 1st March**, to take part in an identification workshop, at Cheshire's best site for gulls.

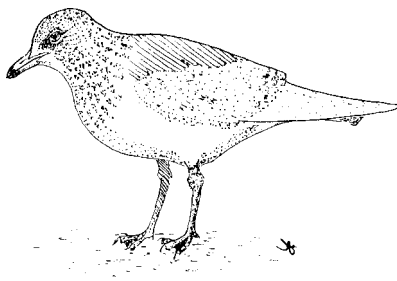
The chances of connecting with Iceland and Glaucous Gull, as well as Yellow-legged Gull, will be very high. So, even if you are not turned on by the tertial patterning on first winter Herring Gulls, the prospect of a year, or even life tick might tempt some of you to escape the winter doldrums. What's more, at the end of the workshop, we can all retire to that excellent hostelry 'The Ferry Tavern' for reviving sustenance.

If you wish to attend the four hour workshop there will be a nominal charge of two pounds (£2). This will be used to help finance the 'Bird News'. If you bring along a non-member, who joins CAWOS on the day, there will be no charge for the workshop. If you would like to book your place or require more details please telephone Jeff Clarke on 0151 423 4275.

If you do attend please make sure you put on twice as many clothes as you think you will need to keep warm, make sure the top layers are waterproof, then add an extra couple of layers for good measure. Bring a telescope if you have one and a flask of warm drink would be a good idea. If it's a blustery day we will need to keep low to avoid 'wind shake'. In these circumstances bring something portable to sit upon. A piece of high density foam covered by a plastic bag is ideal and it will fit in a small rucksack.

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

PS. If you get fed up looking at gulls, Gatewarth has many other ornithological attractions.



INLAND WINTERING WADER PROJECT

How many members are aware that the wintering flock of Curlew to be found in the Holmes Chapel/Northwich area is one of only a handful of inland wintering flocks in England? In the late 1970s Dennis Elphick mapped the fields favoured by Curlew and Golden Plover, but little work has been done recently to ascertain the numbers of Curlew still using the fields or even if the fields are still suitable. Reference to recent Cheshire and Wirral Bird Reports shows that flocks of over 50 have been recorded on a few dates at Sandbach, Billinge, Byley and New Platt Wood Sand Quarry.

The Cheshire Wildlife Trust, as part of its Vale Royal Nature Conservation Audit and Strategy, would like to find out more about the wintering of Curlew in the County away from coastal sites. The Trust would like to hear from CAWOS members who know of regular wintering Curlew sites, especially the following details:

Size of flock, sex composition if possible (males have smaller bills), location (ideally six figure grid reference), habitat (e.g. pasture, stubble, arable), date, time and (if in flight) direction of flight.

Details can be sent to either **Paul Hill** or **Jenny Bull**, **Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Grebe House, Reaseheath, Nantwich, Cheshire, CW5 6DG. Tel: 01270 610180**

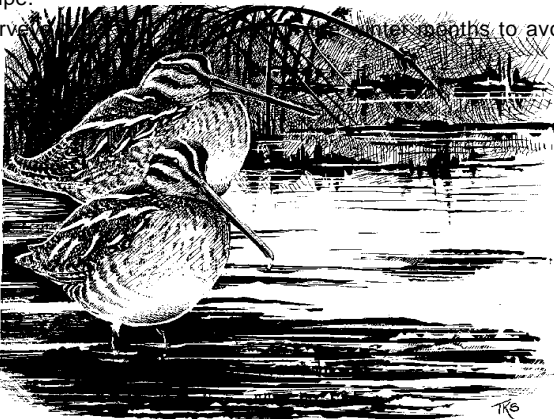
A SURVEY OF A CHESHIRE MARSH

Ad hoc observations over the years lead me to question the reports of the numbers of Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) and especially Jack Snipe (*Lymnocyptes minimus*). These I thought may be underestimated in our region.

By chance I came across a small (0.25ha) marshy area next to a very much visited Cheshire mere - quite representative of hundreds of such areas within our county.

The marsh is triangular in shape, a regular isosceles with an apex angle of about 110°. The method of survey was fairly simple; the dog and I walked a line across the marsh parallel with the base (the water) about 5m from the waters edge. This was a good way of flushing out the Common Snipe, but Jack Snipe will not fly out until you are within 1m of them; so the numbers recorded represent a fair count of the Common Snipe but are an under representation of the Jack Snipe.

Snipe by Thelma Sykes, Blue Neb Studios



over several months to avoid disturbance of breeding birds.

The results were:-

Common Snipe

Year	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
90-91	3	2	3	6	1
91-92	12	2	2	2	2
92-93	12	3	3	1	5
93-94	2	5	6	6	5
94-95	2	0	2	2	2
95-96	5	4	4	4	6

Jack Snipe

Year	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
90-91	3	2	6	2	4
91-92	1	2	1	2	1
92-93	0	1	0	1	3
93-94	1	0	0	2	1
94-95	1	2	1	2	1
95-96	3	4	6	1	0

Discussion

Recognition was done without the aid of binoculars (try focusing your bins on a fast flying bird whilst sinking in a swamp, one leg faster than the other) the jizz being quite different for the two birds, the shorter bill of the 'Jack' being the main diagnostic separator. Additionally it was observed that on being disturbed the Common Snipe flew off the marsh and away from the mere, whereas the Jack Snipe flew a short distance to an adjacent marsh some 300m off.

There is no correlation between the two populations though generally November and March are

the most prolific months. This suggests birds readily leave the area for more southern or western climes in advance of harder weather or call in on migration.

The CAWOS 'Bird Report' lists the Jack Snipe as a "scarc winter visitor and migrant". Population estimates of this bird in its breeding locations are all very low. Cramp et al in "Birds of the Western Palearctic" estimate the numbers in Norway at 60 pairs, in Sweden 20-260 and Finland 11,000 pairs. Noting that the Jack Snipe is "thinly distributed and readily overlooked due to its unobtrusive habits". In conclusion I am led to the belief that the above figures are quite representative for the status of the Common Snipe in Cheshire, but indicate that the Jack Snipe is very much under-recorded in our county and elsewhere. It would be a fascinating exercise to mist net the birds and carry out a detailed survey to answer the host of questions about this enigmatic little visitor.

Laurie Fairman, 59 Northwich Road, Knutsford, WA16 0AR

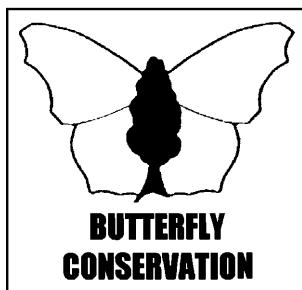
[Comment: Myself and Geoff Lightfoot have done several similar counts of the above species at one site in late December and counted 18 Common and 19 Jack Snipe. It is interesting to note however that the Jack Snipe prefer one particular area of the marsh which is different to the preference of the Common Snipe. A single walk through the marsh may not give a true picture of the status of both species, being biased towards one or the other. Tony Broome]

NATIONAL ANGLING CENTRE REPRIEVE

At the eleventh hour Andico, the developers proposing the National Angling Centre at Marbury Country Park and Witton, stated that, for the time being, they no longer wished to progress with their scheme. This announcement came less than a week before the deadline for Millennium bids - a source of Lottery Funding that was to be applied for by Andico.

Initially the news was treated with some scepticism, as it was not confirmed, but over the next 24 hours, the news was confirmed by the County Council at both officer and member level. The big question was, should the nature conservation movement in the county pat itself on the back or wait to see what developed. It became apparent that the given reason for the postponement of the scheme was a lack of support for the "Centre" from angling's national governing body! This though, as far as Andico are concerned, is only a minor setback and reports in the Northwich papers in early December state that plans for the site and the National Angling Centre will be made public in May. To date this has not been confirmed by either the County Council or Vale Royal Borough Council - most bodies seem to be of the impression that the scheme has actually gone away and that all the recent press coverage is a face saving exercise by Andico.

What now remains to be seen is whether the proposals re-surface and in what form. If, as seems likely, they are no different to plans already seen then the Witton Area Conservation Group, CAWOS and CWT are likely to be opposing them. So whilst all is quiet at the moment, your support may still be needed to defend Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes, Marbury Number One Tank and Marbury Country Park from the "Return of the National Angling Centre".



CHESHIRE AND PEAK DISTRICT BRANCH

Butterfly Conservation is Europe's largest voluntary body dedicated to the conservation of butterflies. It is not, though, simply a national organisation. CAWOS members may be interested to learn that there is a Cheshire and Peak District Branch of the society, established in April 1985 with the aim of promoting the conservation of butterflies and their habitats in South Manchester, Cheshire and the Peak District. The branch promotes its activities at local shows and conservation fairs, carries out research and recording work, arranges talks and slide shows to interested bodies and liaises with and supports the work of other local conservation and natural history groups.

Although the Cheshire and Peak District Branch of BBCS have nearly 200 members and CAWOS have over 300, only 12, yes 12, people are members of both organisations, yet over 40 CAWOS members contributed their butterfly records to Barry Shaw for the forthcoming Cheshire Butterfly Atlas!

The activities of the Cheshire and Peak District Branch include summer field trips to enable members and their friends and families to meet informally in pleasant surroundings, to study or simply enjoy

watching the behaviour of a variety of British butterflies at all stages of their life cycle. In many cases it is possible for the Branch to obtain permits to visit nature reserves not normally accessible to the public and hence less common species and a wealth of other wildlife may be seen. During the winter a series of indoor meetings on butterflies and related subjects are arranged. In addition members take part in the physical side of conservation, carrying out practical conservation work on nature reserves in the county. Several of our members are active in other ways. We have an active Conservation Officer (who is also a member of CAWOS) who comments on planning applications and other conservation matters; there is a Churchyard Project Officer, looking at how churchyards can be managed to benefit wildlife as well as the congregation; and there is the usual group of committee members. All members receive copies of Butterfly News, an A4 colour magazine twice a year, and the local newsletter three times a year keeping members posted on all the latest issues, sightings and field trips.

Butterflies are often amongst the first creatures to suffer if a habitat is changed and can be indicators of how all other creatures and plants are surviving. The conservation of butterflies goes hand in hand with the conservation of our all our flora and fauna. Over the years eight species of butterfly have vanished from Cheshire. It is Butterfly Conservation's aim to ensure that this trend does not continue.

If you would like to help then you can join Butterfly Conservation by sending a cheque for £25.00 to the Membership Secretary, Butterfly Conservation, PO Box 222, Dedham, Colchester, Essex CO7 6EY. This amount includes a £6.00 joining fee, which is waived if you subscribe by Direct Debit, and also £5.00 for your local Branch Membership.

Rumours..... Rumours....

- Rumour has it that one very prominent member of the Bird News Team decided not to go to see a Citrine Wagtail, only half an hour away from where they were, because the pager message was misread. "N/hants" was misinterpreted as "North Hampshire", over 100 miles away. As soon as the mistake was realised, however, it was warp factor six to Pitsford Reservoir and the adult female Citrine Wagtail parading amongst 60-70 Pieds. Relief all round!!
- A Raven friend of mine tells me that the Tatton Rangers have developed a new bird flushing technique. Apparently she was perched up with her boyfriend, having a bit of a preen and bill clean, when racing over the horizon came one of the company land rovers. Foot to the floor, downhill, achieved speed sufficient to launch at the tree. As she said, we didn't wait for the impact we were off to Rostherne sharpish!

BTO News - Local Update

The British Trust for Ornithology have a busy season ahead for us with a series of surveys on specific birds/ families as well as the regular Breeding Bird Survey, no doubt to be part of the 1997 fixture list. We are set to pass the 1900 plots mark in 1997 and if there is anyone who would like to take on a survey square next season, then please let me know for an extra allocation - we have volunteers for many of the allotted squares, but in the south of the County we are desperate for help with only 2/3rds of the plots being covered in 1996. It would be useful too, and enjoyable to extend the coverage if possible in all areas.

Other items of note for CAWOS members who might like to help are:

- Wintering and Breeding Skylark Survey.
- Grassland Plover survey (Golden Plover and Lapwing) - information on known flocks is requested now.
- A Sawbill Survey and Woodlark Survey are planned too, but rather unlikely to prove rewarding in Cheshire!

For other news there has been an award of Lottery cash to boost the computerisation of archive data, which the BTO have now to match by raising new funds. The archive, if made more accessible,

will be a very valuable asset and could enable new historical comparison work / monitoring changes in distributions and population trends. Also (and I'm sure everyone is aware of this) there is a National Nest Box Week planned for 14th to 21st February. The catchphrase is "Britain needs more holes" and who could argue with that? If interested, you can apply for an Information Pack with ideas and advice available in January at £2.95. (National Nest Box Week, Freepost 1155, Canterbury, CT3 4BR)

Locally, the extremely cool May had a dramatic effect on nest success. Tits and flycatchers reliant on the leaf burst and defoliating caterpillars, were greatly set back by the weather. Interestingly though, some local populations seem very robust and capable of adjusting their timing and bouncing back after adversity. Other species such as Dipper and Tawny Owls carried on quite normally and had a good 1996. This year is in surprising contrast to 1995 when the Common Birds Census and constant effort ringing sites showed population increases for most species. Such are the ups and downs of natural history! This year saw the Rookery Survey too, with many 1km squares covered in Cheshire. Unfortunately some volunteers did not see a Rook, let alone a rookery! No doubt the National results will give a proper comparison with previous work - I'm looking forward to seeing this, hopefully in the next BTO News. The pilot "Set-aside" survey is proving interesting - on one farm, there were fair numbers of birds in the hedges and the non-cultivated fields, but few in the monoculture winter wheat and grass crops. However, because the rules for farmers allow treatment by herbicide and ploughing, by say May, any beneficial effects of set-aside fields, seemed totally lost. This is anecdotal but the point about farming methods affecting wildlife was brought home to me.

On behalf of the four BTO reps. for Cheshire, can I thank all those who helped in 1996. Colin Lythgoe covered the south of the County until very recently, and having been a regional rep. for 9 years has resigned, and handed over to Charles Hull from Nantwich. Colin is to concentrate on his many other bird activities, and all at the BTO wish him well.

Clive Richards, "Fairhaven", 13, The Green, Handforth, Cheshire.

Ringers Notebook

I do not think that Stock Dove has been mentioned in these Notebooks before, so the record of a chick ringed in its nest near Pilling in Lancashire on 1st July 1995, taken by a predatory bird at Marton near Congleton on 10th December 1995, 91 km distant, is especially noteworthy.

On 5th November 1995 I caught a small flock of ten Starlings in my garden. Remarkably, two of them have featured in long-distance movements: one was found on 4th March 1996 in Humberside and the other was in Sweden, 1191 km away, on 27th April. Another Warrington-ringed Starling was also caught in Humberside, on 15th March. These were presumably all continental birds.

We are well used to reports of locally-ringed Black-headed Gulls in Scandinavia, so birds in April in Denmark (two) and Norway, and two June records in Sweden, fit the pattern. One ringed as a chick in the Woolston colony in 1992 appeared to have moved to breed in a different area, being found freshly dead near Settle in North Yorkshire on 11th June 1996. Most British-bred Lesser Black-backed Gulls move south for the winter, such as the one ringed at Risley on 17th June 1995 and caught at a landfill site in Hereford & Worcester on 4th November 1995, and one that made the opposite journey to be caught at Risley on 22nd June 1996. Four of the Herring Gulls caught at Risley on 9th March 1996 had been ringed as chicks in Scottish island colonies, two on the Isle of May (306 km north) and two on Shetland (747 km north).

An Oystercatcher found dead at Red Rocks on 24th March had been ringed 16 years earlier at the Point of Air, Clwyd.

A Siskin ringed near Warrington in February 1995 was caught by a ringer in Grampian (469 km north) three times in spring 1996, on 17th February, 10th March and 17th March. A Woolston-ringed Sedge Warbler from 1995 was caught on 26th April 1996 as it made its way north through Jersey. A Willow Warbler ringed at Meols on 21st April moved quickly north to be trapped again at Loinnbuie, Highland, 492 km north, eight days later.

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

Gull Identification Workshop at Gatewarth

Saturday 1 March 1997 at 9.00am - 1.00pm.

£2 per person

(or free if accompanied by a non-member who joins CAWOS on the day)

Join a team of experienced gull watchers to get a better understanding of age classes, subspecies and how to pick out those exciting scarcities.

To reserve your place contact Jeff Clarke on 0151 423 4275

WANTED

Volunteers to man the CAWOS stand at Parkgate high tides.

Can you spare a couple of hours on either Sunday 9th or Monday 10th of March?

For further information please contact our new Events Officer:-

Richard Gabb, tel: 01625 262946



FEBRUARY

- 6 CADOS "BIRDS OF YORKSHIRE" by Dr Mark Hamblin
- 7 **CAWOS** "ISLANDS" by Roger Wood
- 8 Parkgate High Tide @ 11:37am (10.1m) meet at 10:00am
- 9 Parkgate High Tide @ 12:23pm (10.3m) meet at 11:00am
- 9 CADOS Tregaron, contact Don Pawlett - 01244 677477
- 9 HO Shrophsire Meres, cars depart 8:30am
- 9 KOS The Wirral, meet Knutsford Sessions House 9:00am
- 10 SRSPB "30 YEARS OF LEIGHTON MOSS" by John Wilson
- 11 ADNHS "FLOWERS, MOUNTAINS AND COASTS OF MUNSTER" by Vincent Pedley
- 11 MRSPB "THE SWANS FLY IN" by David Cummins
- 12 HO "A FLORIDA SPRING" by Steve Knell
- 14 MCOS "RUFF PASSAGE" by John Wyatt
- 14 SECOS "SEABIRDS" by Roger Wood
- 16 MCOS Leighton Moss & Woodwell, meeting point to be decided
- 16 MRSPB Marbury Country Park, depart Duke Street car park at 8:30am
- 16 SECOS Fairburn Ings, by mini-bus
- 21-23 HO Solway Weekend, by coach
- 22-23 CADOS Northumberland Weekend, contact Nick French - 01978 856522
- 25 ADNHS "NIGHTFALL" by Mike Berry
- 28 KOS "UP RIVER, THE GAMBIA" by Paul Hill
- 28 WGOS "SWANS" by David Cummings

MARCH

- 1 CADOS Marshside & Seaforth, contact Ron Shewring - 0151 399 0696
- 2 MRSPB Leighton Moss, depart Duke Street car park at 7:30am
- 2 SRSPB & WGOS Tregaron/Rhayader by coach, ring for departure times
- 6 CADOS AGM & Members slides
- 7 **CAWOS AGM & Members evening**
- 7-9 SECOS Suffolk Weekend, by mini-bus

- 9 KOS Pennington Flash & Hope Carr, meet Sessions House, 9:00am
- 9 Parkgate High Tide @ 11:20am (10.2m) meet at 10:00am
- 10 Parkgate High Tide @ 12:04pm (10.4m) meet at 10:30am
- 10 SRSPB "MIGRATION TO MASAI COUNTRY" by Keith Offord
- 11 ADNHS :FOLLOW THE BADGER TRAIL" by Brian Unsworth
- 11 MRSPB "THE NORFOLK YEAR" by Malcolm Cox
- 12 HO "UP THE OKAVANGO " by Charles Brown ARPS
- 14 MCOS "BIRDS & ANIMALS OF THE KENYAN BUSH" by Mike McAvett
- 14 SECOS "BARN OWLS" by George Bramall
- 15 ADNHS Local walk & lunch, tickets from committee
- 15 HO Spurn Point, Coach departs 8:00am
- 20 NNHS "ORCHIDS" by Derek Alsop
- 21 KOS "BIRDING ON THE NORTH NORFOLK COAST" by Susan & Allan Parker
- 21 WGOS "FROM YNYS HIR TO ITALY" by Phil Collier
- 22 SECOS Eccleston and the Dee at Eaton, by car
- 23 MCOS Swallow Moss

APRIL

- 8 ADNHS AGM & short talk
- 8 MRSPB "MAGICAL MADAGASCAR" by Roger Wood
- 9 HO "A COUNTRY LANE" by Michael Lane FRPS
- 10 ADNHS Brockerdale & Fairburn Ings, meet 9:00am, contact Anne Mason 0161 860 5104
- 11 MCOS AGM
- 11 SECOS AGM
- 12 KOS Leighton Moss, meet Sessions House, 8:00am
- 13 MRSPB Aldford (nr Chester), depart Duke Street car park at 8:00am
- 13 SRSPB Kingsbury Water Park, by coach depart Stockport Grand Central 8:00am
- 14 SRSPB AGM & speaker TBA
- 17 NNHS "BRITISH DRAGONFLIES" by Brian Bailly
- 22 ADNHS "RECENT TROPICAL TRAVELS" by Keith Edwards
- 25 KOS AGM
- 25 WGOS AGM & RSPB Films
- 26 HO Consall & Swallow Moss, Cars depart 8:00am
- 27 MCOS Ynys Hir RSPB reserve, meet at reserve 9:30am
- 27 SECOS Peckforton, by car
- 28 SRPSB Etherow Country Park walk, meet 7:15pm at car park

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
- HO Hale Ornithologists, mtgs St Peter's Assembly Rooms, 7:45pm, Prog.Sec. Barbara Vercambre 0161 980 8362
- 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
- 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. Jowitt 0151 337 7940

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