

# **BIRD NEWS**

**Number 34      April 97**



**Woodlark • Gateworth Gull Workshop  
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*Articles, Letters and Comments would be welcomed by the Editor*

Front cover: Redstart by Tony Broome

Other illustrations by Ron Plummer, Tony Broome

# Editorial

I have quickly realised that as the editor of the newsletter I am in the advantageous position of setting the agenda for each issue. As most of you will already be aware I have a habit of mentioning Yellow-legged Gulls with monotonous regularity. There I've done it again. Well I promise not to mention them again for the rest of this year. Besides which the issue is fully covered in a brilliant paper published in the January 1997 edition of British Birds. David Quinn provided the plates for the article and ex Cheshire birder Martin Garner the text. Read Steve Barber's review of this milestone publication. Without pre-empting the article I'd like to pass on my compliments to both of them and say it's the best thing I've seen in 'BB' for a very long time.

'British Birds' does not have the monopoly on fascinating articles. This issue contains a great variety of illuminating information, including an amusing archive laden piece from Steve Woolfall. While Mike Hems gives us the lowdown on birding on the internet. Many other regular contributors have come up trumps again as well as new initiates. In fact the response has been so good on this occasion it has been necessary to hold several articles over to future issues. They will appear in due course and thank you to everyone who has assisted with the production of this issue.

This brings me neatly to the next topic. That is the disproportionate efforts made by some members, for the benefit of the whole society, and often at their own expense. I must stress that I am not talking about myself. Every word you read in each issue only arrives through your door because of a small group of people. For example, Geoff Blamire gives up much of his free time and energy into converting your articles into 'Bird News'. This burden is unfair. To reduce this burden we need to find a way of funding the printing out of house. My own current research into the problem suggests that to maintain the quality and frequency of reproduction we would have to raise the membership fee to £10.50 to cover the additional cost (this still means we would probably have to forego the colour cover). I hope this brings home to the membership in general and the finance committee in particular the responsibility we all share to ensure that this situation is resolved. So is there anybody out there with a printing house and a reluctance to charge exorbitant fees?

Finally this month, anyone who attended the recent Annual General Meeting will know that I raised the issue of the 'Avifauna'. For those members new to the society, the 'Avifauna' is proposed to be a compilation of information relating to many aspects of ornithology within the county and, in particular an analysis, species by species, of all the birds recorded in Cheshire and Wirral. We already have a substantial fund dedicated to the publication of this important work. The production of the 'Avifauna' was a cornerstone upon which the foundations of CAWOS were laid. Unfortunately we do not appear to have built much beyond the damp course to date. The members of the 'Avifauna Committee' are all busy, hard working people and the delays within the project are entirely understandable. That said, the Society needs a purpose to exist and I hope to be able to announce in the October issue a series of projects to be carried out by the membership over the next few years. These will be specifically designed to assist in the production of the 'Avifauna'. If my antenna is working properly I sense that the membership is chomping at the bit and ready to get on with the job.

**Jeff Clarke**

Note: copy date for the next issue will be the 7th of June.

Don't forget, anyone wishing to contribute to future editions can, if circumstances allow, present their articles on floppy disc (please include a hard copy of your article, just in case!) using MS Word or Ascii text format. To help speed up the editorial process double spacing at the start of each new sentence would be greatly appreciated.

# County Rarities

## WOODLARK

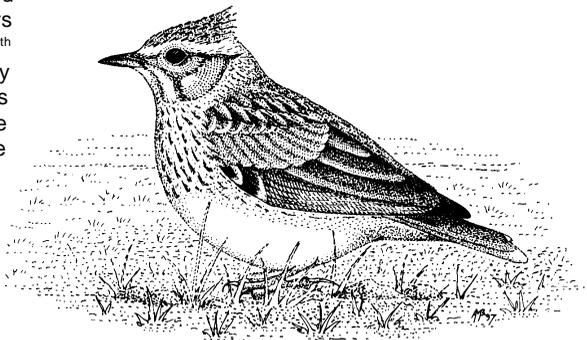
It's one of those, all too infrequent, occasions when you manage to grab a window of a couple of hours on a Saturday afternoon and head for the local patch, binoculars in hand... It's late January, a gale has been blowing, but things have calmed down a little, with just a hint of sunshine getting through. You pass an open area of wasteland on your way, a few scrubby Birches and dead stalks of last years cover. A small flock of Goldfinches catches your eye as they sprinkle their way into the taller trees at the rear. A Blackbird explodes from cover, alarm call deafening, when a smaller brown bird flits across your line of sight and settles on the open ground.

The immediate impression is of a small thrush without a tail, but the patterned upperparts don't fit. As you stop it flies again, this time settling low in one of the scrubby Birches. Through the binoculars, face on, it is an obvious 'lark'. But what is it doing here and why does it appear so well marked? It looks like a Skylark, but it gives the impression of being short and plump and almost tail-less. It's in a tree and you can see a prominent supercillium giving it a well marked head pattern of a dark eye, plain brownish ear coverts bordered by a dark line.

The remaining upperparts are equally neatly patterned, with dark tipped coverts on warm brown secondaries and primaries, with a noticeable dark and light patch on the closed wing. In contrast it has a white belly and streaked upper breast. It looks all wrong for Skylark and the plain sandy brown Short-toed Larks you queued on St Mary's to see, also bear no resemblance to this bird. The bird flies back down to the ground to feed, the wing pattern of white edged black wrist patches, short white tipped tail and lack of any white on the trailing edge of the wing confirms your suspicion that this is a Woodlark.

Traditionally rare away from known breeding or wintering sites, the above tale is probably as realistic a chance as any of coming across a vagrant Woodlark. Though they are hard to come by these days, they do seem to turn up at odd locations, as the recent record at Vicars Cross near Chester from Jan 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> 1997 shows. This was, however, only the seventh record for the county this century and the first since 1979. The records for Cheshire and Wirral have been as follows:-

Hilbre	25 <sup>th</sup> March 1956
Hilbre	8 <sup>th</sup> & 9 <sup>th</sup> May 1960
Hilbre	3 <sup>rd</sup> April 1960
Red Rocks	13 <sup>th</sup> October 1961
Neston	29 <sup>th</sup> September 1968
Hilbre	16 <sup>th</sup> May 1976
Red Rocks	7 <sup>th</sup> October 1979.



Other points to look out for are the call, a fluty "too-lleeet" note, usually given during the distinctive undulating flight akin to that of a woodpecker. I also think Woodlarks appear to feed like Shore Larks, head down and horizontal, rather than the head up alert Skylark pose and this often attracts you to the non-conformist in a mixed flock. Beware heavily scalloped well marked juvenile Skylark's, which can also appear short tailed. These, however, never show the strong supercillium and wing patch combination of Woodlark. A bird to savour when you get the chance.

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

**Comment:** The Vicar's Cross Woodlark was found by a local birder at a time when there was a countrywide influx, birds being reported as far North as Tyneside. It frequented a deep furrow next to a path in a field and the edge of a minor road about 100m distant. It frequently sat on the road and could be approached to 30-40 metres, only flying at the approach of a vehicle or pedestrians,

at which time it would utter a plaintive “too-ee”. It’s ridiculously short tail and deeply undulating flight was indeed reminiscent of a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, the image was shattered as it dropped to the ground in a plummet.

It was very much smaller than a Skylark and surprisingly had a prominent and erect crest, perhaps more alert than usual due to it’s unfamiliar surroundings. Shuffling about at the edge of the road on the muddy margin, where it looked to be picking at weed seeds, it would look up every so often. The obvious white supercillium met on the nape in a broad, finely streaked greyish patch, unlike any Skylark and thus attracted attention. The face pattern although similar to Skylark was distinctly different, the brighter warmer ear coverts being accentuated by a blackish eyestripe and rear border and a black moustacial and whiter sub-moustacial stripe. A prominent creamy white spot, below the eye in the ear coverts, stood out. The throat, head on, looked all grey being made up of very fine streaks and only the chin was plain creamy white. A pale creamy white breast made the heavy black streaking stand out and the warmest colour on the upperparts were the flanks.

On the wings, from behind, the tertials looked almost pinky-brown with broad black centres and covered all but two of the primaries. The upperparts generally were warm brown, with the exception of the greater coverts which were very grey and appeared almost as a grey panel on the wing. The primary covert/alula area was typically “white-black-white” and was even noticeable in flight, which, along with the off-white corners to the notched tail and the lack of a whitish trailing edge to the wings, gave the bird a most un-Skylark like impression.

It’s definitely one of those species where if you only, maybe, think it’s one, then it isn’t. The real thing hits you between the eyes and shouts “Woodlark”. It’s gross rarity status in Cheshire may be due to be eroded as the UK population appears to be expanding at a fair rate and it now breeds at sites in the Midlands. This bird though was likely to have been of continental origin, pushed across the North Sea by the severe weather. The survey of Woodlarks this year may just turn up our own breeding birds, especially if these continental visitors find suitable habitat.

My thanks must go to one particular Chester birder for mentioning the bird had been found and giving me the chance to enjoy such an enigmatic “little brown job”. I’m only sorry that it’s early departure deprived every other visiting birder from doing the same.

**Tony Broome, County Recorder**

## 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 December to early March.*

### DECEMBER

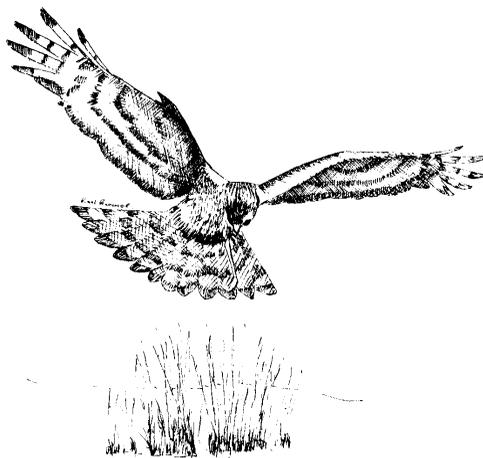
Birds of the month were the 2 **Shorelarks** which arrived at the Frodsham ICI tank from the 7th. These were the first there since 1972, the only other record for the site. Another bird was reported at West Kirby (14th and 27th), not surprising as this is the best site for Shorelark in Cheshire. Of the previous c18 records (c24 birds), all have occurred between 24th October and 2nd April. The record stay for a bird in Cheshire so far is 102 days set in the 1953/54 winter. As I write this these birds will go down as the most twitched Shorelarks in Cheshire history having been seen by many hundreds of birders.

A **Red-necked Grebe** arrived at Rostherne Mere (from 29th), probably displaced from nearby by the freezing weather. Up to 282 **Cormorants** roosted at Rostherne Mere while Poynton Pool had its first ever December record and a **Bittern** was at the former site. The **Mute Swan** flock at Doddington Pool reached 84 and the total seen at Kingsway Bridge, Warrington reached 129 for this year. A flock of 52 **Bewick’s Swans** at Burton Marshes (24th) included a ringed bird from the Pechora Delta in Arctic Russia with 2 at both Sandbach Flashes (21st) and the Weaver Bend (28th). Single **Whooper Swans** were at Fiddler’s Ferry and at Poynton Pool - a first here (both 1st) with 2 at Sandbach Flashes (14th). Skeins of **Pink-footed Geese** included 150 at Fiddler’s Ferry (25th), 200 at Frodsham (8th), 2 ‘on the deck’ at Red Rocks (31st) were unusual there, 220 at Rostherne Mere (1st), 150 at Tatton (29th) and 300 at Wilmslow (27th). A flock of 16 **White-fronted**

**Geese** in a field by the Saxon Cross Motel, Sandbach (from 12th) decreased to 14 by the end of December with 2 at Sandbach Flashes (from 22nd). The ringed, re-introduction **Lesser White-fronted Goose** appeared at Bar Mere (29th). A **Red-breasted Goose**, of unknown origin - arn't they always !!, was at Rostherne Mere (14th-16th) and Norbury Mere (26th). Hilbre had up to 8 pale-bellied **Brent Geese** with 11 (9 dark) there (14th), 5 at Catchpenny Pool (15th, first here since 1982), 2 dark-bellied at Frodsham Score (29th) and one over Knutsford Moor (27th), a first there.

A **Ruddy Shelduck** was at Sandbach Flashes (to 2nd) and the Shady Oak Pool, Beeston held 23 **Mandarins** on the 29th and the long staying male was still on the Bridgewater Canal. About 4000 **Wigeon** were at Frodsham Score (27th). Up to 6 **Gadwall** at Sandbach Flashes was a good count there. Up to 600 **Teal** were at Woolston Eyes and 450+ at Gatewarth SF (7th). At Arclid SQ, 140 **Mallard** were seen (13th) and 108 was the maximum count at Poynton Pool this winter. A high tide on the Dee produced 15,000 **Pintail** on the estuary. **Pochard** numbers peaked with 19 at Fiddler's Ferry (14th) - the lowest December maxima for the site, 12 at Poynton Pool (18th) - a good count here and 1441 at Rostherne Mere (30th). **Tufted Ducks** peaked at 516 on Rostherne Mere with 306 at Woolston Eyes. A small influx of **Scaup** occurred during the last few days of the month with a drake at Rostherne Mere (26th and 30th), a drake at Frodsham No6 tank next day followed by a female at Tatton, 7 off Thurstaston and a female at the Weaver Bend (all 29th), birds have been seen annually at the last site since 1977. Three **Goldeneyes** at Fiddler's Ferry (26th-29th), the first of the winter there, while a bird at Sandbach Flashes was unusual there. Two redhead **Smew** arrived at Frodsham (from 21st) with drakes at Inner Marsh Farm (23rd) and Woolston Eyes (28th). Single **Red-breasted Mergansers** were at Frodsham No6 (5th) and Melchett Mere (24th). **Goosanders** included up to 6 at Rostherne Mere while 5 at Woolston Eyes (21st) was the largest count of the month there. **Ruddy Duck** numbers reached 161 at Rostherne Mere (29th) with up to 100 at Chelford SQ's.

A **Hen Harrier** was a good find (8th) at Frodsham, this species has rapidly declined in the county with no regular wintering birds on the Dee estuary for the first time in many years, where up to 4 birds could be seen roosting only six years ago. Single **Buzzards** were at Crewe, Inner Marsh Farm, Lymm, Sandbach and Prenton, 2 at Rostherne and 4 at Frodsham. One or two **Peregrines** were at Beeston, Fiddler's Ferry, Parkgate, Rostherne Mere, Sandbach Flashes, Tatton and Toft. A covey of 11 **Grey Partridges** were at Frodsham (28th), up to 7 at Fiddler's Ferry and 21 were with 11 **Red-legged Partridges** at Weston, Crewe (1st) were of suspect origin, while one of the latter was at the Saxon Cross Motel, Sandbach (4th). A **Pheasant** in a Poynton Garden (24th) was a first there and narrowly avoided being put in the cooking pot for the next day.



The Hilbre/Red Rocks area had 6000 **Oystercatchers** (14th). Ten **Grey Plovers** were on Frodsham Score (28th) with the first ever December record, a single bird, at Sandbach Flashes (28th). About 400 **Golden Plovers** moved to Frodsham during the cold weather (27th). A flock of 6000 **Lapwings** were at Fiddler's Ferry (15th) with 3000 at Sandbach Flashes (13th) and 30,000 **Knot** around the Red Rocks area (14th). At least 60 **Sanderling** were at Frodsham Score (28th). Hilbre held up to 43 **Purple Sandpipers** and a bird at Frodsham (9th) was exceptionally unusual there. An exceptional record of 2 **Dunlin** came from Astbury SQ (3rd). Only 11 **Ruff** were at Sandbach Flashes (7th), well down on the typical recent winter numbers there. Tatton had 9 **Jack Snipe** (20th). At Middlewich Lime Beds there were 48 **Snipe** with 46 at Tatton and 135 at Woolston Eyes. Ten **Woodcocks** were at Toft during a shoot. The Hilbre/Red Rocks area held 500 **Bar-tailed Godwits** (14th). A **Spotted Redshank** was reported from Sandbach Flashes (29th) and a **Greenshank** also there was only the second December record. Wintering **Green Sandpipers** were at Marbury and Frodsham while Thurstaston had 3 **Turnstones** on the 29th.

Moreton Clay Pits held up to 3 adult and two 2nd winter **Mediterranean Gulls** throughout while single birds were at Frodsham (14th and 29th) and Gatewarth (2nd). On the 29th, the gull roost at Rostherne Mere totalling 21,000 birds (including 18,750 Black-heads) was the largest count there for 20 years. Poynton Pool had a record count of **Black-headed Gulls** with 500 on the 12th. At Moreton Clay Pits there were 7 'Heinei' (Russian race) **Common Gull** (29th) and 1-2 fuscus race **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were a first at Poynton Pool. **Yellow-legged Gulls** were at Moreton and Gatewarth. **Iceland Gulls** were at Astbury SQ (adult on 27th-29th, 2nd winter on 29th), Maw Green Tip (2nd winter and adult on 29th), Red Rocks and Rostherne Mere (both 1st winters on 29th). A 2nd winter **Glaucous Gull** was at Maw Green Tip (14th and a 1st winter on 28th) and another bird was at Moreton Clay Pits with 1000+ **Great Black-backed Gulls** at Gatewarth (31st). A flock of 100 **Stock Doves** at Fiddler's Ferry (29th) was a new record monthly maximum. **Short-eared Owls** were at Fiddler's Ferry and Middlewich Lime Beds (both 1st). A **Green Woodpecker** at Sandbach Flashes (8th) was an excellent record there and a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** was forced onto Frodsham Marsh during the cold weather at the end of the month with another in Crewe Town Centre (13th). **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** visited Peckforton, a Poynton garden, Sandbach Flashes (all in Christmas week) and a bird in a Cuddington garden was the second of the year there.

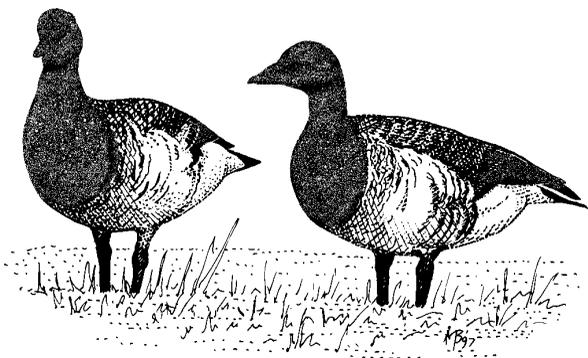
At least 300 **Skylarks** were at Frodsham No4 tank (9th). Up to 170 **Meadow Pipits** were at Frodsham with 120 at Woolston Eyes (28th). Up to 6 **Water Pipits** were at Neston Old Quay during the month and a single at Woolston (14th). At least 2 **Dippers** were in Bath Vale, Congleton (12th). Numbers of **Fieldfares** at Woolston reached 300+. Wintering **Blackcaps** were in gardens in Congleton, Elton, Statham and Wilmslow. Single **Chiffchaffs** were reported from Chester and Sandbach Flashes with 2 at Frodsham (8th). A flock of 50+ **Blue Tits** were at Fiddler's Ferry (8th) and 12 **Jays** were at Risley Moss. Up to 22 **Magpies** were at Poynton Pool and 44+ roosted at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (15th). Two **Ravens** were in the Rostherne/Tatton area with singles at Burwardsley (29th), Woolston Eyes (27th) and Chelford SQ's (29th) - the first for that area. Knutsford Moor had c1500 **Starlings** roosting (10th). Over 20 **Tree Sparrows** were at Toft and Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton. Flocks of 100+ **Chaffinches** were at Fiddler's Ferry and Neston Old Quay. Large flocks of **Bramblings** were at Neston Old Quay (140 on 31st), Parkgate (20+ on 15th) were "the best numbers for many a year" for one observer (RRB) and Fiddler's Ferry (16 on 14th). At least 100 **Goldfinches** were at Woolston and a birder in Wilmslow put out Niger seed for the first time with dramatic results!!, 50 at the beginning of the month increased to 175 on the 27th. This is the highest count for a garden according to David Glue of the B.T.O. who is studying Goldfinches in gardens - the previous highest was 150 in a Hertfordshire garden. **Siskin** reached c130 at Knutsford Moor (10th), the largest count of the winter there, with 50 at Poynton Pool (1st). Up to 50 **Linnets** were at Fiddler's Ferry. A 'Meally' **Redpoll** was at Rostherne Mere (29th) and a 'Lesser' at Fiddler's Ferry (25th) - only the second of the year there. At least 8 **Bullfinches** together at Fiddler's Ferry (8th) was a new monthly maximum. **Snow Buntings** included 3 at Frodsham (26th), up to 12 at Red Rocks and a single at Sandbach Flashes (1st) - only the third for the SECOS area. On farmland at Lymm 30 **Corn Buntings** took advantage of a stubble field before it was ploughed over.

## JANUARY

A **Woodlark** was at Broughton Heath, Chester on the 3rd and 4th. This was an excellent county record and the first since 1979 when a bird was at Red Rocks. The exact number of records for the county is unclear due to the lack of evidence relating to birds in the last century. Of the 8 records from this century 7 have come from Hilbre and Red Rocks, the other was at Neston. This is the first inland record this century and the first ever recorded in January. This bird arrived with 2 birds at Colemere, Shropshire (3rd-4th) and a bird at Clayhanger, West Midlands (4th) were probably dispersals from the Staffordshire breeding colony.

**Black-throated Divers** at Farmwood Pool (8th-9th) - the second for that area, a bird over Tatton (seventh here) then landed at Rostherne Mere (ninth here) 4 minutes later (12th) and at Bosley Reservoir (from 26th), all probably relating to the same bird. This is the second Diver at Bosley Reservoir after a **Great Northern** in 1992. **Little Grebes** peaked at an impressive 32 at Woolston Eyes while 21 **Great Crested Grebes** were at Astbury SQ (11th). The **Red-necked Grebe** remained at Rostherne Mere (to 5th) and a **Black-necked Grebe** was there (30th). A **Slavonian Grebe** was seen on the St Helens Canal, Sankey Valley Park (27th). Five **Bitterns** represented a mini influx with one at Rostherne Mere (2 on 19th), a bird at Inner Marsh Farm (13th-15th) and 2 at close

range at Radnor Mere most of the month. Up to 120 **Mute Swan** were at Winterley Pool - a very high count for Cheshire. **Bewick's Swans** peaked with a record 110 birds roosting at Inner Marsh Farm, birds spent most of their time at Shotwick Lake (Clwyd). This is one of the largest counts of this species in the county. A flock of 40 at Little Neston (10th) were part of this flock. Singles were at Budworth Mere (29th) and Gatewarth (15th), Frodsham had 3 on 1st and 7 on 12th, 9 at Hale (15th) and 3 at Rostherne Mere (1st). The only reports of **Whooper Swans** away from the Dee were 3 at Rostherne Mere (1st) and a single at Sandbach Flashes (19th). Several skeins of **Pink-footed Geese** were seen including 300 at Catchpenny Pool (5th), 140 at Congleton Park (5th), 90 and 180 at Gatewarth (15th), 200+ at Rivacre Valley (20th), and 180 over Wilmslow (10th). The 14 **White-fronted Geese** at the Saxon Cross Motel, Sandbach increased to 15 on the 4th and 2 were at Sandbach Flashes all month. About 200 **Greylags** were at Norbury Mere (26th) with the **Red-breasted Goose**. Large **Canada Goose** flocks included 960 at Catchpenny Pool (5th) and 1000 birds at Redesmere (3rd) was the fourth largest flock ever recorded in Cheshire. A report of 57 **Brent Geese** at Hilbre (4th) is the largest flock in the county this century but only 9 were present (31st) while 3 were at Astbury (6th) and 6 at Bosley Reservoir about the same time. Much debate surrounded a skein of 120 geese over Sandbach Flashes (1st) which included some Brents - the fifth record there.



A **Ruddy Shelduck** was at Shakerley Mere (17th and 31st). The monthly maximum of **Shelducks** at Fiddler's Ferry was 170 with 500 at Frodsham Score (18th) and 4 on the Shropshire Union Canal at Wimboldsley (31st) was unusual, the birds perhaps having been disturbed from the Winsford Flashes. The highest **Wigeon** count this winter at Chelford SQ's was 370 birds with 186 at Budworth Mere and 1200 at Inner Marsh Farm. A pair of **Gadwall** at Fiddler's Ferry (4th) was the first there since September last year. **Teal** peaked at 510 at Fiddler's Ferry (18th) with 10,000 on Frodsham Score, 538 at Hale (15th) and 400+ at Pickering's Pasture (5th). A total of 350 **Mallard** were at Redesmere and 90 were on a small area of ice free water at Poynton Marina. **Pintail** numbers reached 180 at Frodsham - possibly the largest ever count there. **Pochard** peaked at 2616 at Rostherne Mere, 164 at Tatton and 142 on the Weaver Bend. A female **Ferruginous Duck** at Weaver Bend (15th) and briefly on 18th. A record 2015 **Tufted Ducks** were also seen at Rostherne Mere (21st) - the previous best was 1828 in Feb 1991 at the same site - with 150 were at Fiddler's Ferry (12th) and 70 at Moore NR (18th). **Scaup** were at Astbury SQ (different birds on 2nd and 4th), Frodsham (2nd and 5th), Hale (15th), Meols (24th) with up to 4 at Rostherne Mere all month. **Goldeneyes** reached 35 at Woolston Eyes and a male at Fiddler's Ferry (4th) was the first January record since 1988. The influx of **Smew** (single Redheads unless stated) were at Bosley Reservoir (31st), Budworth Mere (drake on 13th-14th, female on 20th), Farmwood Pool (drake on 4th-5th), up to 3 at Frodsham all month (except for 6 on the 5th), Inner Marsh Farm (drake from 15th), Macclesfield Forest (3rd, fifth ever), Rostherne Mere (30th) and Woolston Eyes (most of the month). This represents the best influx since 1986 when up to 8 birds were at the Weaver Bend. A **Red-breasted Merganser** was seen at Frodsham. Larger than usual numbers of **Goosanders** included a massive 50 at Bosley Reservoir (30th), 11 at Doddington, up to 35 at Radnor Mere, 41 at Redesmere (22nd), up to 8 were at 9 other sites including a female at Fiddler's Ferry (4th) - the first January record there and 2 at Poynton Pool (9th) were quickly followed by 7 birds (12th) doubling the total number of birds seen here. **Ruddy Duck** reached a record 124 at Budworth Mere (25th) - previous best was 47, 54 at Frodsham (9th), a new county record of 244 at Rostherne Mere (21st) - the previous record was 212 on 3rd Feb 1996 and a record 129 at Tatton (16th) all due to cold weather and movement between the sites.

One or two **Buzzards** were at 6 well scattered sites but an impressive 10 were seen together over the River Weaver at Kingsley (24th). A **Merlin** was at Frodsham all month and a bird ascribed to

the Icelandic race (2nd) will be the first of that race if accepted. Up to 3 **Peregrines** were at Sandbach Flashes. Up to 4 **Grey Partridges** were at Denhall Lane, Gatewarth and Tatton while 26 were at Frodsham (13th). Of 10 **Water Rails** flushed by the high tide at Parkgate (11th), 7 were taken by **Great Black-backed Gulls** with others at Hatton Hey Lagoon at Kingsley, Knutsford Moor, Red Rocks, Redesmere and at Fiddler's Ferry on one date where birds are usually ever present. A count of 20 **Coots** at Poynton Pool was an unprecedented winter count there for recent years. Large numbers of **Golden Plovers** included 1000+ at Frodsham and c3500 at Pickering's Pasture. A wader count produced 2000 **Grey Plovers** on the Dee and North Wirral shore with a single at Sandbach Flashes (28th). The largest **Lapwing** flocks were 2000 at Fiddler's Ferry, 3700 at Frodsham and 900 at Pickering's Pasture. A massive count of 75,000 **Knot** at Hoylake was the largest count in Cheshire since 1989. A **Little Stint** was reported from Frodsham. A **Dunlin** was at Tatton Mere (4th) but the Mersey Estuary held 48,000 birds (15th) and c750 at Pickering's Pasture (5th), both high counts. A wader count produced 6000 **Bar-tailed Godwits** at Leasowe - the largest count in Cheshire for 17 years. Two **Green Sandpipers** were at Frodsham Marsh (12th), 2 on the Gowy Estuary (15th), singles at Middlewich Lime beds (12th), Moore NR (29th), Sandbach Flashes (5th) and Tatton Mere (4th). A **Common Sandpiper** was at the Weaver Bend (2nd). The Seacombe/New Brighton area held an incredible 1700 **Turnstones** (20th) - the largest concentration ever recorded in Cheshire.

Adult **Mediterranean Gulls** were at Budworth Mere (15th), Frodsham (16th and 18th), Maw Green Tip, Crewe (31st), Meols (24th) and Richmond Bank (24th) with a 1st winter at Budworth Mere (24th). An adult winter **Laughing Gull** was reported at Houghton Green Flash for over an hour on the 12th by one observer. This is the fourth county record, the first since 1985. An albino **Herring Gull** was at Ellesmere Port (23rd). **Yellow-legged Gulls** included adults at Ellesmere Port, Meols and Moreton with 4+ at Richmond Bank where a total of 30,000+ gulls were seen (24th). Single 1st winter **Iceland Gulls** were at Budworth Mere (11th), Vicar's Cross, Chester (5th) and Richmond Bank (4th and 18th) with a different 2nd winter at the latter site (4th), an adult at Farmwood Pool (25th) and a 3rd winter at Neumann's Flash (29th). Maw Green Tip had a 2nd winter (8th), an adult and 3rd winter (14th) and the adult again (19th). Two **Glaucous Gulls** visited Farmwood Pool with singles at Ellesmere Port (1st winter on 8th), Frodsham, Moreton (1st winter on 10th), Richmond Bank (adult on 25th) and Sandbach Flashes (1st winter on 3 dates). A flock of 1000 **Wood Pigeons** were at Frodsham (12th). A **Barn Owl** was seen near Crewe (18th) and a **Tawny Owl** was on eggs at Quaker's Coppice (7th). A **Short-eared Owl** was at Astmoor Marshes on the 18th and 5 **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** were at Sankey Valley Park.

About 200 **Skylarks** were at Frodsham (12th) with 80+ at Gatewarth and 361 at Tatton (both 1st). Two **Shorelarks** remained all month at Frodsham. A **Rock Pipit** was a good find at Fiddler's Ferry (4th), the first there since April 1991. At least 25 **Pied Wagtails** were feeding at Prestbury SF (25th). A **Stonechat** was at the Weaver Bend (5th). Numbers of **Fieldfares** at Fiddler's Ferry reached 300, c375 at Tatton, 400 at Wall Hill Lane, Congleton and c450 at Wimboldsley. The largest count of **Redwings** so far this winter at Tatton was c300 on the 24th. Of at least 9 **Blackcaps** reported 7 were in gardens. A **Chiffchaff** was at Woolston Eyes and the 3 **Firecrests** on the outskirts of Chester included a bird at Overleigh Drive (18th). **Long-tailed Tits** totalled 80+ birds in Runcorn Town Park (4th). Two **Marsh Tits** were seen near Kingsley (24th) with a bird at Tatton the first there for over 5 years and up to 3 **Willow Tits** at Risley Moss and Sandbach Flashes. A melanistic **Blue Tit** at Sandbach Flashes (8th). Over 50 **Magpies** were present at Sankey Valley Park (28th) and 55 roosting at Lostock Hall Farm was the highest ever count there. Wandering **Ravens** included singles at Fiddler's Ferry (12th, fourth ever) and at Sandbach Flashes (26th, third ever) with 2 over River Weaver near Kingsley (24th) and 2 at Tatton (most of the month) - these birds also being seen at Wilmslow and Styal. Up to 12 **Tree Sparrows** were at Frodsham, Forge Bed, Northwich and Sandbach Flashes while Lostock Hall Farm had up to 31. A flock of 30 **Bramblings** visited at Frodsham (2nd), 40+ in a Cuddington garden (17th) and 4 in a Poynton garden were the first ever there. Toft had its largest ever flock of **Siskins** of c400 birds (28th) with 90 at Macclesfield Forest (31st), 90+ at Sandymoor (4th) and 160+ at Runcorn Town Park (4th). A party of 6 **Twite** were at Frodsham (2nd). An **Arctic Redpoll** was reported at Thurstaston Common (9th-11th) - the previous county records were a bird was at New Platt Wood SQ on 26th Dec 1995 (accepted) and others at Bromborough (Dec '95) and Thurstaston (Jan '96) have yet to be accepted. A Chester observer had his first garden record of **Redpoll** with 3 birds present while a 'Meally' bird was at a Wilmslow garden (7th). On the 10th, a **Crossbill** was at Wildboardclough and 5+ were at

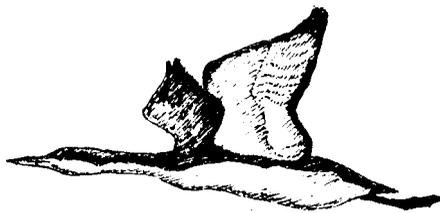
Macclesfield Forest. A flock of 12 **Yellowhammers** were at Hogshead Wood, Delamere (25th). A flock of 16 **Snow Buntings** were at Hoylake (10th). The Knutsford Moor **Corn Bunting** roost peaked at 25 on the 14th and 11 were at Wall Hill Lane (30th).

## FEBRUARY

We are all used to hearing about Summer visitors which now winter in the county. Wintering **Green Sandpipers** on the Shropshire Union Canal, Wimboldsley (22nd), River Dane at Bostock (27th) and Moore NR (22nd), a **Common Sandpiper** at Marbury (20th), **Blackcaps** at Chester, Elton, Frodsham, Willaston and a Wilmslow garden (pair), **Chiffchaffs** at Inner Marsh Farm and Woolston (two) all testify to this. However early migrants do occur and the most extraordinary has to be the earliest ever Cheshire **Sand Martin** record at Rostherne Mere on the 28th, this I later discovered was pre-dated by an even earlier record at Dane-in-Shaw Brook on the 13th, the earliest in Britain this year. The previous record was a bird at Little Neston on 1st March 1992.

The **Black-throated Diver** at Bosley Reservoir stayed to 13th. A **Red-throated Diver** and **Red-necked Grebe** visited the Weaver Estuary and Bend respectively (both 24th). All 3 divers were off Hilbre (11th) but included only a single Black-throated and **Great Northern**. Nesting **Great Crested Grebes** were on eggs at Sandbach Flashes and Poynton Pool by the end of the month. Several birds in the Rostherne Mere **Cormorant** roost showed signs of the continental race as did a bird at Fiddler's Ferry (23rd) where a colour ringed bird had come from Cambridgeshire. A **Bittern** was seen at Elton with one still at Rostherne Mere, 2 at Radnor Mere early in the month and at Woolston Eyes on two dates. The Inner Marsh Farm **Bewick's Swan** flock peaked at 80 on the 7th with singles at Budworth Mere (until 2nd) and Neumann's Flash (12th), the latter was ringed at the Pechora Delta (Russia), while 9 visited Hale (15th). The only **Whooper Swans** reported were 2 at Arclid SQ (5th) and one at Inner Marsh Farm (7th). Two swans at Nantwich lake (most of the month) were originally reported as Whoopers but later were confirmed as a Whooper and **Bewick's Swan**. The only large **Pink-footed Goose** movement was 200 over Toft (11th). The 14 **White-fronted Geese** at Sandbach (to 18th) with 2 still on the Flashes (28th). Shakerley Mere had a **Ruddy Shelduck** again (21st). A **Shelduck** was on Melchett Mere (15th) and returning birds at Rostherne (from 5th). A drake **Mandarin** was at Budworth Mere (23rd) and **Wigeon** peaked at 620 on Sandbach Flashes early in the month. Moore NR had 25 **Gadwall** (22nd) with 40 at Nunsmere (9th). A **Green-winged Teal** was at Rostherne Mere (25th) - the fifth ever there. **Teal** reached 1160 at Hale (15th). Milder weather reduced the numbers of both **Pochard** (Max 866) and **Tufted Duck** (Max 159) at Rostherne Mere with 103 of the latter at Frodsham (9th). A **Scaup** remained at Rostherne Mere and 2 at Houghton Green Pool (16th). The drake **Smew** stayed at Inner Marsh Farm all month with 4 redheads at Frodsham and a redhead at Woolston Eyes. During the high tide at Parkgate (8th), 8+ **Red-breasted Merganser** moved close inshore and 1-2 **Goosanders** were at 5 sites including Houghton Green Pool on the 16th - probably a first for the site with 12 at Langley Reservoir (9th) and up to 35 at Radnor Mere.

Single **Buzzards** were at Dane Valley and Fiddler's Ferry with a record 9 at Budworth (5th), 5 at Rostherne Mere (18th) and 6+ at Tatton (15th). **Merlins** were at Parkgate, Sandbach Flashes, Tatton and 1-2 **Peregrines** at Budworth, Fiddler's Ferry, Frodsham, Inner Marsh Farm, Parkgate, Richmond Bank, Sandbach Flashes, Toft (including a falconer's escape) and Woolston Eyes. A covey of 14 **Grey Partridges** was at Arpley (29th). The first inland **Oystercatchers** were at Budworth Mere (6th), Fiddler's Ferry (8th), Redesmere (25th), Rostherne Mere (22nd), Sandbach Flashes (23rd) and Tatton (25th). Passage **Ringed Plovers** moved through Neumann's Flash from 16th. Up to 1500 **Golden Plovers** and c5000 **Lapwings** were at Frodsham Marsh. A count of 51 **Purple Sandpipers** at Hilbre (11th) was the largest there since 1993. About 50,000 **Dunlin** at Frodsham Marsh was a record count here. At Blackmere, Delamere a **Jack Snipe** and 8 **Woodcock** were flushed on the 25th although up to 12 of the latter were seen in other parts of Delamere. About 1000 **Black-tailed Godwits** were at Hale (15th). Up to 81 **Curllews** were at Budworth, c700 were at Frodsham Marsh and 498 were at Hale with the first birds in the eastern Hills on the 21st. A full



albino **Redshank** was at Inner Marsh Farm (12th), a bird at Ridgeway Reservoir (21st) was exceptional there and 205 were at Hale (15th).

Adult **Mediterranean Gulls** were at Farmwood Pool (14th), Moreton Clay Pit (9th), Redesmere (18th), Richmond Bank (11th) with a single at Frodsham (5th), a 1st winter at Richmond Bank (11th-12th) and 2 birds at Rostherne Mere (23rd). Up to 15 **Little Gulls** were seen off Hilbre. A large movement of 2200 **Black-headed Gulls** flew over Mollington, Chester (9th) and up to 3000 birds were back at the Woolston breeding colony. A 'Heinei' **Common Gull** was at Neumann's Flash (2nd and 5th). **Yellow-legged Gulls** at Richmond Bank included an adult (11th), 2 adults (24th) and a 4th winter (29th). A 1st winter **Iceland Gull** was at Radnor Mere (22nd) and a 2nd summer was at the Richmond Bank on 3 dates. First winter **Glaucous Gulls** were at Fiddler's Ferry (8th), Sandbach Flashes (4th) and Richmond Bank (14th-15th) with a 1st summer there (9th and 29th). A **Barn Owl** was near Cranage late in the month. A **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was drumming at Toft (8th) and display was noted at Marbury CP by the end of the month. About 200 **Skylarks** were at Frodsham (9th) with the 2 **Shorelarks** all month. At least 5 **Water Pipits** stayed at Neston Old Quay. A **Robin** was on eggs in a Wilmslow garden (28th), about 6 weeks earlier than this species usually nests. Single **Ravens** were at Toft (5th), Marbury (8th and 27th) with 2 at Tatton (15th), Sandbach Flashes (9th) and the pair of birds at Chester moved from the Town Hall to the Cathedral. About 100 **Chaffinches** visited at Hale (15th) and 100 **Bramblings** at Parkgate with up to 4 at Rivacre Valley and Rostherne Mere. Up to 100 **Siskins** were at Rostherne Mere. Frodsham had 60 **Linnets** on the 9th with 80+ at Hale (15th). A **Twite** was at Parkgate (8th). A **Lapland Bunting** at Burton Marsh was flushed during a high tide (10th) and 17 **Snow Buntings** visited Hilbre (11th). A flock of 35 **Yellowhammers** were at Wall Hill Lane, Congleton (9th). Hale had 8 **Corn Buntings** on the 15th.

**STOP PRESS:-** March records so far include a Pacific Golden Plover near Chester (a County first), an Egret at Woolston Eyes, Spoonbill, Red-necked Grebe, Green-winged Teal and Shorelarks all at Frodsham with Black-necked Grebes back at Woolston by the end of March. The first migrants have included Garganey, Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs, Little Ringed Plovers, Ring Ouzel, Swallows and Sand Martins by the end of the month.

## PREDICTIONS FOR APRIL TO JUNE

By the end of April most of the common migrants will have arrived but only in low numbers and hopefully they will bring a few goodies with them. Waders passage in the past has produced a total of 23 Avocets including 3 flocks, two Stone Curlews, a Collared Pratincole and best of all a Stilt Sandpiper while other passage migrants (1981-95) have included 14 Black Redstarts, 11 Firecrests, 5 Great Grey Shrikes and 20 Ospreys. One of the best examples of May passage occurred on 1st-2nd May 1990 when Britain was dominated by high pressure and light easterly winds. Black Terns were affected most with up to 650 on the 2nd and a few Commic Terns. Overshoots arrived at the same time - Little Egret and Purple Heron (both 1st), while the Red Rocks/Hilbre area had a Long-eared Owl, up to 70 Tree Pipits, 45 Yellow and a Blue-headed Wagtail (all 1st) and next day Bluethroat and Black Redstart came from further east. Birding in June tends to be concentrated on breeding birds with some resident species on second broods by the end of the month. During the breeding bird atlas in 1983 one avid birder found a singing male Firecrest. Southern birds will dominate the first two weeks of the month with several Hobbies while Honey Buzzard, White Stork, Roller, Bee-eater, Red-backed Shrike and Wryneck are all possible.

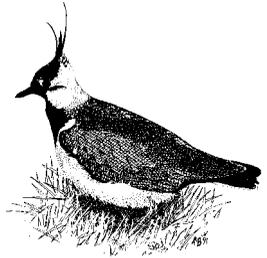
Please send in your first dates for migrants as well as last dates for winter visitors. I am also particularly keen to have counts of Chiffchaffs from any sites over the Bank Holiday weekend (28th-31st March). Please give date(s), location or area covered and the number of birds involved. I will give a summary in the next issue. If you would like to see your Cheshire and Wirral sightings featured here then send details to me, to arrive by early June.

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

Thanks/Acknowledgements for Recent Reports go to:- S & G Barber, P Barnett, Birdwatch and Birdwatching Magazines, R. Bonser, R. Bridson, Tony Broome, G. Brown, Jeff Clarke, D. Cogger, H. Fielding, Pete Hall (Toft), Inner Marsh Farm Log, K. Kirk, Geoff Lightfoot, Liverpool Wader Study Group Newsletter, Colin Lythgoe, Keith Massey (Fiddler's Ferry Reserve), W. Pamby, A. Parker, H. Pulsford, Bryan Roberts (Tatton and Knutsford Moor LNR), Rostherne Mere NNR log, Sandbach Log, C. Williams, WECG and anyone else who passed records on.

# The View from the Farmyard

I am starting to wonder if my presence on a farm has some form of catastrophic attraction to developers. Most of the farms I have worked on in the past have suffered a variety of fates, Unsworth Moss Farm M62 and M66; Jackson Fold Farm M66 and sand extraction; Bradley Fold Farm housing development and now here on Toft Hall Farm we are under the flight path of the new second runway for Manchester International Airport. We already have oil and gas pipeline's under us and the M6 is too close to ignore. One of the proposed routes for a Knutsford bypass would dissect the farm. So farming on the urban fringe has its drawbacks and the threat of encroachment from all types of development is constant. Added to the ever increasing background noise and it sometimes feels like you can hardly hear yourself think. Each spring, in the first week of May, I walk the whole farm counting singing birds. One of the questions which leaps to mind each year is does all this noise affect the success of breeding birds? Could a female pass close by and not hear the male's song and are territories smaller than in quiet countryside? I would be glad to hear if anyone has an opinion on this. It could just be that noise pollution has as much effect on the birds as it does on us. On days when the wind is from the M6, you almost have to fall over the birds to find where they are.



Pheasants have in many ways been the unwilling saviours of much of Cheshire's countryside. Without the annual shoots many of the woods would never have been planted and management by the keepers maintains a rich understory to suit the tastes of a variety of birds. Had the cover never been planted the plough would have rendered parts of the county as visually pleasing as Lincolnshire. It is also fortunate that access to these areas is restricted for much of the year. Public access, though popular, is of little benefit to wildlife, and as can be seen in such areas as Windmill Wood in Toft, the constant process of dissection by footpaths leads to smaller and smaller pockets of scrub repeatedly investigated by dogs roaming loose which give wildlife little chance to settle. I am a great believer in wildlife preserves alongside reserves. That is protecting areas for wildlife, rather than for public entertainment. Of course the reserve can work well in conjunction with preserves, as at Loch Garten and its Osprey viewing point where the public can be drip fed what they want at easily accessible points, leaving the vast majority of sites undisturbed. The ramblers and other organisations in favour of further access are in danger of destroying the very asset they wish to enjoy. Britain is very small and over populated so the provision of preserves on the American scale is clearly out of the question. I feel the hunting and shooting estates are about as close to preserves as we will get, and what's more they are here already. Yet some keepers are over zealous in their pursuit of raptors and this is a matter which needs addressing, but I feel the responsibility for this lies with the landowners as the keepers are their agents. If the landowners are to remain sole protectors of large tracts of land then some form of policing should be permitted. Wildlife rangers could work alongside keepers, caring for these areas in exchange for the continuing privilege of sole land ownership, more as guardian than feudal lord, with the right to protect or destroy as they please. Toft is fortunate in having a squire who appreciates the wildlife and protects many of the species which live here. With the recent ban on the shooting of wildfowl which lasted for only one week officially, Toft's ban lasted until the end of the season. Keeping here is low-key and where pheasant are under threat then action is taken to protect them but otherwise tolerance rules the roost. During my observations of raptors over the farmland I have often watched the birds in pursuit of prey, and have become intrigued by what each species does following an unsuccessful hunt. The Sparrowhawk is usually about the least interesting. Its stealthy approach and incredible agility, is seldom better displayed than at a nut feeder in pursuit of a tit or finch, as it almost turns itself inside-out to reach this way and that, or when dashing through dense vegetation where even smaller birds would hesitate to fly at such great speed. But having missed its prey a sit-down is in order to catch breath and re-orientate itself. Next in the list is the Kestrel. Having failed to drop on its prey it will often strut around until it comes across a beetle or worm so as not to have completely wasted the effort of the initial attack.

Almost joint top of my list is the Hobby. Pace and agility don't always make for a kill, especially when the prey is as quick and agile as a House Martin. On one occasion I watched as a Hobby made its entry to the arena. Flying low and fast it swept up in a banking curve to try to take a young martin from amongst the small group sitting on a power line waiting to be fed. The alarm was raised, and the air was filled with hirundines, a tremendous clamour spread through the whole flock and the attack was foiled. Watching the Hobby as it flew away until it was just a tiny dot, I struggled keep it in view as my 'bins' grew ever heavier. At what I judged to be about a mile due south it turned and flew in a huge arc to the north and I saw it begin its approach again, this time high in the sky. The martins settled into their usual routine of preening and feeding totally oblivious to the approach of the Hobby.

Top of the list is the Peregrine. This bird encompasses the very best of the other three raptors named, the stealth of the Sparrowhawk, the patience of the Kestrel and the sheer mastery of flight shown by the Hobby. Coupled with huge strength and endurance (once I watched a Redshank pursued by a Peregrine from Hilbre half way to Wales), this makes the Peregrine a great pleasure to watch even when it misses its kill. One particular instance springs to mind. The falcon began its descent from a pylon near to the M6. It crossed several fields, one containing a flock of Woodpigeons and not to miss an opportunity it made a passing attempt to take one, but its main intended meal was on the next field. At once 500 Starlings took to the air and wheeled and dived as one. The Peregrine swept up through them in an ascending spiral splitting the flock in two, each group becoming denser and then thinner once more. Finally turning and falling down through the flock and out low across the field without making a kill. The Peregrine, still on the lookout for a meal, hopped a couple of hedges into the middle of a small flock of Lapwings. Caught napping they scattered in a frantic flurry of wings, but flying so low the falcon was at a disadvantage, and lacking pace missed again. Still the Peregrine wasn't finished. Up almost vertically over the edge of the wood it climbed, mobbed by Rook and Crow until high enough once more to stoop at speed into the Starlings, then back over the M6 to Tabley. Peregrines it seems never give up.

**Pete Hall, The School House, Toft Road, Knutsford**

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## **CITED CHESHIRE BIRDS IN THE GROSVENOR MUSEUM, CHESTER.**

The natural history collections at the Grosvenor Museum, Chester are based on those of the Chester Society of Natural Science, Literature and Art founded by Charles Kingsley in 1871.

This article is an updated list of the historically important Cheshire bird specimens still housed in the Grosvenor Museum, which are cited in the county ornithological reference works. Details are given for each species of age, sex, where and when it was collected, with relevant references; some have additional archival notes. There are fifty-eight specimens in total; 51 mounts and 7 study skins. These include three firsts for Cheshire and two potential firsts for Britain.

The following abbreviations are used in the species' list: M - mount, S - study skin, ex Congreve - specimens from the collection of the Congreve family, Burton Hall, Wirral.

The main number on the right hand side of each species account is the Museum Accession Number. Numbers in brackets refer to the relevant cited works from the list of references. Species are listed in order of the Voous list. All quotes from articles are reproduced as written at the time, including all mis-spellings, incorrect punctuation and grammar.

I hope that you enjoy this article. As I spend more time these days looking at dead birds than live birds I feel it is important that we remember how much we owe the Victorian naturalists. Despite their apparent barbaric ways, there is a lot we would not know today without their dedication to scientific discovery. Also, some of the anecdotes conjure up wonderful pictures of well dressed Victorian gentlemen up to no good in the field - I still chuckle over the poor Gannet at Ince, but that could just be the museum curator's warped sense of humour!

All the birds listed in the article can be seen; some are on display in the Kingsley natural history gallery. If you would like a closer look at any of the Museum bird specimens please ring me.

**Steve Woolfall, Keeper of Natural History, Grosvenor Museum, Chester. Tel 01244 402015**

## SPECIES LIST

**Red-throated Diver**                      *Gavia stellata*                      1891.2697 M                      Adult summer  
Dee estuary, 1891. (6,12,14)

**Great Northern Diver**                      *Gavia immer*                      1892.7179 M                      Adult winter  
Helsby Marshes, 21st December 1892. (6). Note from the Liverpool Echo, 1893:-  
'An Arctic Visitor

TO THE EDITOR OF THE LIVERPOOL ECHO

SIR,- I was quite interested in reading an account of this rare bird (great northern diver) which I see by your Echo on Monday night was shot last Wednesday at West Kirby. I thought it may be interesting to know it is not the only one which has been secured. While crossing Helsby Marshes, December 21st, last year, I shot a great northern diver of beautiful plumage, which measured 30 inches from beak to tail and weighed 61/2 lbs. I sent it to Mr. Thomas Hutchinson, naturalist, 48, Frodsham-street, Chester, to be stuffed, where any information regarding it could be obtained if desired. The bird, which I now have at home, looks remarkably well.- Yours, &c, RICHARD FORSTER. Helsby.'

**Slavonian Grebe**                      *Podiceps auritus*                      1900.6292 M                      Adult summer  
Tatton Mere, c. 1860. (12)

**Fulmar**                      *Fulmaris glacialis*                      1976.2A M                      Adult  
Bank of the Dee, Chester, October 1894. (6, 28). Second Cheshire record.

**Kermadec Petrel**                      *Pterodroma neglecta*                      1908.7175 M                      Adult  
Tarpорley, 1st April 1908. (6, 10, 11, 19, 26). First Cheshire Record. Note from Bulletin of the B.O.C. No. CXLIII 142nd meeting of the Club held at Pagani's Restaurant, 42-48 Great Portland Street, London, on Wednesday 20th May 1908:-

'Mr. C. Oldham exhibited an example of Schlegel's Petrel (*Estrelata neglecta*) which had been picked up dead near Tarpорley, Cheshire on April 1st, 1908. It was seen in the flesh by Mr. Robert Newstead and immediately afterwards by Mr. T.A. Coward who recognised it as *E. neglecta*, an identification which was subsequently confirmed at the British Museum by Mr. F.D. Godman and Dr. Bowdler Sharpe.

The true home of this species was the Southern Pacific, especially the vicinity of the Kermadec Islands, about 1500 miles to the east of Australia.

This was the first instance of the occurrence of this species in Europe or in any part of the Northern Hemisphere. The specimen has already been exhibited at a meeting of the Zoological Society of London held on May the 12th.'

Additional footnote: The Kermadec Petrel is, of course, no longer on the British list and I am still researching into the story of its removal. The record appears to have been removed by the British Ornithologists' Union (B.O.U.) in 1971 (*Ibis*, 113, 1971) on the basis of Dr. W.R.P. Bourne's paper, 'Long Distance Vagrancy in the Petrels' (*Ibis* 109, 1967). This paper attempts to apply a universal formula to British petrel records instead of weighing up carefully the pros and cons of each individual sighting. The Kermadec Petrel seems to have been "damned by association". Since the article was written, flaws in Dr Bourne's article have been highlighted by other petrel records from around the world. Admittedly, the documentation on this specimen is not as full as we would ask for today - it was found dead in a field under a tree and nobody else saw the bird before it was bought by Robert Newstead at Chester market four days later on April 5th - but is it now time to re-open the case for this bird and look at it again with an unbiased eye? **SW**

**Manx Shearwater**                      *Puffinus puffinus*                      1892.3248 M                      Adult  
Upton by Chester, 1st September 1892. (6, 12, 14, 28). Picked up dead.

**Leach's Petrel**                      *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*                      1892.3249 M                      Adult  
Eccleston Meadows, Chester, 10th October 1892. (6, 12, 14). Taken alive in an exhausted condition.

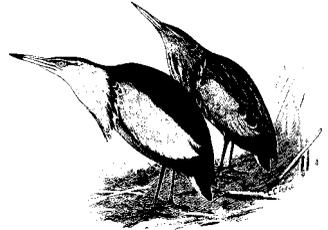
**Leach's Petrel**                      *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*                      899.7785 S                      Adult  
[Burton], October 1899. ex Congreve. (6) . Poor condition.

**Gannet**                      *Morus bassana*                      1911.7223 S                      Adult male  
Ince Marshes, 7th October 1911. (7)

"Obtained after the gale from Meadows between Ince and Helsby. Was seen alive by Leonard

Schofield: it flew about ten yards: he tried to catch it when it 'made for him', so he struck it with a stick and killed it. November 7th 1911. W.H. Dobie."

<b>Shag</b>	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	1901.7777 S	Adult
Burton Hall, Wirral 1901. ex Congreve. (2, 6)			
<b>Shag</b>	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	1911.7228 M	Immature
Ashton Hayes, Chester, 24th January 1911. (7). Six specimens seen, three were shot. Country covered with snow.			
<b>Shag</b>	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	1912.7224 S	Immature
Waverton, 25th January 1912. (7). "Shot flying round the Church Steeple."			
<b>Bittern</b>	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	1932.7988 M	Adult
Parkgate, 4th January 1932. (25). This specimen was ringed near Lauzitz, Saxony, Germany, 23 May 1931.			
<b>Little Bittern</b>	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	1893.3591 M	Adult
Marshes between Birkenhead Park Station and Wallasey, Wirral, 29th October 1893. (6, 12, 18). Second Cheshire record. Purchased by subscription for the sum of £5-00. Note from The Field, 1893:- 'The Little Bittern No. 3591 was shot by Mr. James Gibson, on a piece of waste land covered with "Flags" (Iris), between The Park Station (Birkenhead) and Wallasey. The bird was flushed by Mr. Gibson's dog.'			
<b>Spoonbill</b>	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		
<b>1900.6290 M</b>	<b>Adult</b>		
Tatton Mere, c. 1850. (6, 14). Possible second Cheshire record.			
<b>Pink-footed Goose</b>	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	1891.2703 M	Adult female
Tattenhall, 29th December 1890. (6, 12, 14). This bird was originally documented as a Bean Goose ( <i>Anser fabalis</i> ).			
<b>Brent Goose</b>	<i>Branta bernicula</i>	1884.10 M	Adult
Burton Rocks, Burton, 12th or 24th December 1884. (6, 12, 14).			
<b>Ruddy Shelduck</b>	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	1887.15 M	Adult female
Puddington, Wirral, 30th January 1887. (12, 14, 16, 19). Caught by a dog. Taken to Mr. Thompson, Frodsham Street. Probable escape.			
<b>Pintail</b>	<i>Anas acuta</i>	1891.2690 M	Adult male
Burton Rocks, Wirral, [23rd] January 1891. (12, 14)			
<b>Garganey</b>	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	1899.7778 S	Adult female
Burton, Wirral c. 8th August 1899. (6). ex Congreve.			
<b>Eider</b>	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	1894.3950 M	Adult female
New Ball, Near Saughton, Chester, [30th] November 1894. Died on December 7th 1894. (6, 12, 28). Claimed at the time as the first [inland] record for Cheshire. 'This specimen was captured alive by a dog on one of the pits in the above locality. The bird was in a very exhausted condition and not able to fly - it was however in very good feather. It was caught on or about the 30th of November and was kept alive for a few days by the donor, but it refused everything that was offered it.'			
<b>Long-tailed Duck</b>	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	1839.7189 M	Adult male
Burton, Wirral, December 1839. (6,12,14). ex Congreve.			
<b>Long-tailed Duck</b>	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	1886.4 M	Adult female
Northgate Street, Chester. (6, 12, 14). Bought fresh from a fish shop.			
<b>Goldeneye</b>	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	1893.3594 M	Adult female
Oakmere, December 1893. (6, 12, 14)			
<b>Smew</b>	<i>Mergus albellus</i>	1891.2686 M	Adult male
River Dee, Chester, 14th January 1891. (6, 12, 14, 16). One of a pair shot near the Dee oilworks on Ferry Road.			



- White-tailed Sea Eagle**      *Haliaeetus albicilla*      1863.3612 M      Immature female  
Near Eaton Hall, Eaton, 5th January 1863. (6, 12, 14, 27, 28) Second Cheshire Record.  
Presented by His Grace the Duke of Westminster who informs me that the bird was shot some years ago near the Hall. In The Field:-  
" a specimen of this species is recorded as being shot near Chester Jany 5th-1863, which is undoubtedly refereable to this specimen. The bird is in immature plumage. R. Newstead 10.1.94."
- Hen Harrier**      *Circus cyaneus*      1910.7202 M      Immature male  
Aldersey Hall Estate, 1910. (7,28)
- Merlin**      *Falco columbarius*      1956.36 a-d M      Four nestlings  
Near head of Crowden Brook, Longendale, Derbyshire, June 1894. (6, 12)  
From the original habitat display prepared by Robert Newstead.
- Hobby**      *Falco subbuteo*      1906.6927 M      Adult male  
Tarvin, August 1906. (5, 6, 28)
- Peregrine**      *Falco peregrinus*      1891.2831 M      Immature female  
Eaton, Chester, 17th November 1891. (6, 12, 14)  
Presented by His Grace the Duke of Westminster.
- Black Grouse**      *Tetrao tetrix*      1892.3362 M      Adult female  
Boughton, Chester, 21st November 1892. (6, 12, 14, 28)  
Shot by Mr. S. Sedsham Jnr. in his garden.
- Black Grouse**      *Tetrao tetrix*      1907.6992 M      Adult male  
Ince Estate, November or December 1885. (6)
- Quail**      *Coturnix coturnix*      1893.3583 M      Immature male  
Aldford, 9th August 1893. (6, 12, 14)  
'Shot by the donor, Mr. R.J. Smith from a covey of eleven and as the specimen is a young male it is highly probable that it was reared in the district. R. Newstead.'
- Spotted Crane**      *Porzana porzana*      1888.1114 M      Adult  
Upton by Chester nurseries, October 1888. (6, 12, 14)
- Corncrake**      *Crex crex*      1938.8170 M      Adult  
Boughton, Chester, 1st April 1938. (22, 24). Note from the North Western Naturalist XIII 1938:-  
'An Early Corncrake  
On Friday, 1st April 1938, it is interesting to note that a male Corncrake was found dead in a small front garden of No 13 Tarvin Road, Boughton, Chester, the home of Miss Jackson, who has given it to the Chester Museum, where it is on view. With the exceptions of a few fragments of the shell of a small mollusc and one piece of grit, the stomach was empty! The bird had flown against the telegraph wires which stretch over the site above named. The neck, ribs and sternum were broken and injured. A. NEWSTEAD Chester.'
- Black-winged Stilt**      *Himantopus himantopus*      1900.6291 M      Adult  
Latchford, c. 1860. (6, 12, 21).
- Knot**      *Calidris canutus*      1906.6812 M      Adult female  
Marbury, 30th December 1905. (5, 6). Note from the Zoologist, 1906:-  
'Knot inland in Cheshire.- On Dec. 30th 1905, a gamekeeper, when shooting Snipe on the borders of Marbury Mere, near Northwich, killed a female Knot. The bird, which is now in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester, was in very poor condition. Though Knots occur - sometimes in large numbers - almost every winter in the Dee Estuary, they are seldom met with inland in Cheshire; I only know of one other occurrence - a bird which struck the telephone wires in Bowdon on Oct. 24th, 1902 (Zool. 1902, p. 467)..... - T.A. COWARD (Bowdon, Cheshire).'
- Little Stint**      *Calidris minuta*      1897.7783[4] S      Adult  
Burton, Wirral, August 1897. Poor condition. (6, 12).
- Greenshank**      *Tringa nebularia*      1891.2878 M      Adult  
Burton, Wirral, 29th August 1891. (6, 12, 14). Shot from a flock with two others.
- Red-necked Phalarope**      *Phalaropus lobatus*      [1901].7787 S      Adult male  
Burton, Wirral, Autumn or Winter, 1899-1900. (6, 15, 19). ex Congreve. Poor condition.

**Grey Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicarius* 1893.3613 M Adult summer  
Wallasey, Wirral, August 1893. (6, 12, 14). Shot by Mr. Robinson, a wildfowler, who took it straight to Mr. W. Cox, Liverpool to be preserved.

**Pomarine Skua** *Stercorarius pomarinus* 1902.6463 M Immature  
Saughall, Chester, 20th October 1902. (6, 23, 28)

**Great Skua** *Stercorarius skua* 1940.8186 M Immature male  
Cheshire side of River Mersey within five miles of Manchester, winter 1911-1912. (17). Note from the North Western Naturalist XV, 1940, p. 258:-  
Great Skua in Cheshire

'An immature male specimen of the Great Skua, *Stercorarius skua skua* (Brun.) = *Megalestris catarrhactes* (L.), has just been presented to the Chester Museum collections by Mr. George F. Gee, of Abbotsford, Cuddington, Cheshire. An extract of a letter accompanying the gift is quoted herewith. ALFRED NEWSTEAD'

"Killed, winter 1911-1912. The specimen was brought into Davies (taxidermist), who handed it to his outworker (C. Jarvis, late of Chester) with instructions to skin it out. I saw the bird, and Jarvis got the information that it was shot within 5 miles of Manchester. So approached T.A. Coward (Sale), who visited Davies, but at that time he could obtain no definite information as to where it was killed. Davies' customer didn't call again, and he consented to allow me to have the skin set up. Afterwards T.A. Coward (the late) had another interview with Davies, and Coward told me that there was no doubt left in his mind as regards the bird having been killed on the Cheshire side of the Mersey" - (Signed) GEORGE F. GEE.

**Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger* 1893.3599 M Adult male  
Oakmere, 22nd April 1893. (6, 12, 13, 14).

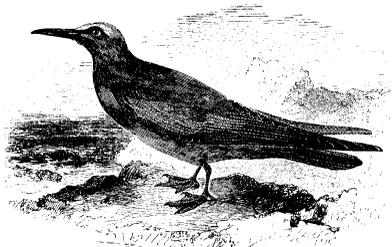
'Shot by Mr. A. Cookson, Keeper Oakmere. Two others were seen at the same time one of which was shot but got away wounded; the third bird left the district almost directly afterwards.' Note from the Zoologist, series III, XVIII. p. 227:

'Black Tern in Cheshire.- A bird of this species, *Hydrochelidon nigra*, in mature summer plumage, was shot at Oakmere on April 22nd, and fell into the hands of T. Hutchinson, taxidermist, who gave me an opportunity of examining the fresh skin. Two birds were said to have been shot, but only one was procured. The body was examined by Mr. Newstead, Curator of the Grosvenor Museum, Chester, who found it to be a male, and reported that the stomach contained chiefly Diptera (a large species), also two wing-cases of a bright green Chrysomelid beetle, and one specimen of *Aphodius punctato-sulcata*. - W. HENRY DOBIE (CHESTER).'

**Noddy Tern** *Sterna anaethetus* 1906.6910 M Immature  
Burton, December 1891. ex Congreve. (3, 4, 6, 12). First Cheshire Record. Note from the Zoologist, 1906, series IV, I. p. 510:-

'Noddy Tern in Cheshire.- The other day, when looking through a collection of stuffed birds, I saw and obtained a specimen which has since been identified as the Noddy Tern, *Sterna stolidus*, Linn.; it is in immature plumage, the grey on the crown being just visible. It was shot on the Dee marshes in winter about six years ago. As I believe this Tern has been only twice recorded in Europe, I think this specimen worth mention.- F. CONGREVE (Burton Hall, Neston, Cheshire).

P.S.- I obtained the Noddy from a small private collection belonging to Mr. Lawton, an ex-tenant of my father's. He killed and stuffed it himself. It is at present in our collection at Burton Hall, but it has been identified by the taxidermist of the Liverpool Museum, and by Dr. Herbert Dobie, of Chester.- F.L. CONGREVE.'



Additional footnote: This species is also not on the British list. My brief research into the record shows that there was very little information forthcoming from Mr. Lawton on the exact details of where and when he shot the bird. I suspect that the B.O.U. had no option but to reject the record on this basis. A great shame! SW

<b>Little Auk</b>	<i>Alle alle</i>	<b>1912.7229 M</b>	<b>Adult</b>
Old Dee Bridge, Chester, 13th January 1912. (7, 28)			
<b>Pallas Sandgrouse</b>	<i>Syrhapttes paradoxus</i>	<b>1976.37e M</b>	<b>Adult female</b>
Near Leasowe Castle, Wirral, early November 1863. (6, 12, 14, 19). Shot by Mr. Simpkins.			
<b>Long-eared Owl</b>	<i>Asio otus</i>	<b>1892.2874 a-b M</b>	<b>Two nestlings</b>
Saughall, Chester. (6, 12, 14)			
<b>Lesser Spotted Woodpecker</b>	<i>Dendrocopus minor</i>	<b>1890.2967 M</b>	<b>Adult female</b>
Saighton, Chester, 29th February 1890. (6, 9, 12, 14)			
<b>Blackbird</b>	<i>Turdus merula</i>	<b>1888.1122 M</b>	<b>Albino adult</b>
Ince, Cheshire. (6, 12)			
'This beautiful bird was shot by Mr. Hyslop in my Fathers Garden where it had been seen many times. R. Newstead.'			
<b>Bearded Tit</b>	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	<b>1893.3614 a-b M</b>	<b>Adult male and female</b>
Between Hoylake and West Kirby, Wirral, 2nd or 3rd September 1893. (6, 12, 14)			
Purchased by Mr. Dobie from Mr. W. Cox, a Liverpool taxidermist, January 1994.			
<b>Bearded Tit</b>	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	<b>1900.6293. M</b>	<b>Adult male (one of a pair)</b>
Whitley Road (between Warrington and Northwich) c. 1860. (6, 12, 14)			
<b>Nutcracker</b>	<i>Nucifraga carvotactes</i>	<b>1860.1617 M</b>	<b>Adult</b>
Vale Royal, Delamere, Northwich, 1860. (1, 6, 8, 12, 14, 19). First Cheshire Record.			
The thick-billed race.			
"There is no doubt what ever attached to this record". R. Newstead.'			
<b>Hooded Crow</b>	<i>Corvus corone</i>	<b>1889.1732 M</b>	<b>Adult</b>
Ledsham, Wirral, March 1889. (6, 12, 14)			
'This bird was killed from a family of 7 or 8 which spent most of the winter 88-89 about the neighbourhood of Ledsham. R. Newstead'			

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## THE FATE OF ETERNITY

Rising on the winds of change  
I'm still, on high in thought and mood  
The steam of power my view obscures  
When through a space of air I move  
With focused thoughts and feathers trim, I drop  
My body, close formation makes, I slip  
Between the layers of air, I go  
Forces tightly trimming my form, increasing speed and weight  
My vision jumping left and right  
With time and distance running out, I focus  
I close on fate, with empty talons bristling sharp  
To feed their need of fateful use  
I turn with speed and forcefully strike, my emptiness now filled  
Down I go with weights increased, the banks below my destiny seeks  
The need to rest now fills my being  
I gather strength and look around, content  
I view this form beneath my weight, it's inner self breaks free  
To soon it rises on untroubled airs  
With downward looks it's spangled form it took  
And saw the fate of life it's stillness form now makes  
And upward glances sees, it's fixed eternity now set  
With many reflections of bygone days, its form now takes  
And out of reach, the fingers of fates of life can't touch  
It's peaceful freedom now assured, it's mortal sweat of life dries up.



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

[The missing poem. Apologies to Keith and the readers over last month's mix up! That will teach me not to write the editorial before going to press. Eds]

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## BIRDING ON THE 'NET

The media has generally been at the forefront of technology since the first 'nature programmes' of cave paintings of animals and birds. Information for bird watchers is no exception, encompassing the printed word and illustrations, photography, film, radio, television, telephone hot lines, pagers and now the Internet. Unlike the other media, nothing seems to have been written about birding on the Internet - except of course on the Internet itself! Perhaps this article will whet the reader's appetite to explore the 'Net for themselves or even add to the growing wealth of information by creating new Web sites.

There is a wealth of birding information on the Internet and given the equipment, time and inclination, it can be put to good use. Like everything on the 'Net the scene is dominated by US information, although the UK and European scene is starting to develop as more users come on-line in these territories. One of the problems with the Internet is the time investment to keep information up to date, but enthusiastic people are working hard to make it a real information hotline alternative to pager services such as Birdnet.

Despite these potential drawbacks, the 'Net information can be used, even in the UK and Europe, for planning trips e.g. locations (where else can you find the map reference and directions to Inner Marsh Farm), bird lists, rarity information, etc. Bird images can be downloaded from a number of Web sites although it is not always obvious what birds are in the files based on the file names! Other sites offer information on specific birds. Most Web pages which are birding site-specific give, as a minimum, the location of that site. The information available is very variable in scope, content and quality. This largely reflects the fact that most Web sites are prepared and maintained by enthusiastic people with a wide range of computing skills and equipment as well as the problem of finding time alongside the real world of bird watching. However, there are some excellent quality sites prepared by both 'amateurs' and 'professionals' and some of these are described at the end of this article.

You might ask yourself, quite reasonably, what the Internet has to offer birders that cannot be gleaned from other sources. The straight answer is probably very little but it can be a convenient source of information at short notice, opens up a wider range of birding information and is often less costly than many other sources. The Internet is there at the press of a few computer keys if you have the access. I have found it very useful as my job requires very regular visits to the USA. Sometimes arrangements change at short notice which lead to opportunities for bird watching or even attending Audubon Society evening meetings. The 'Net has proved most useful for organising such trips.

So how can this birding information be accessed? Obviously it is necessary to have access to the Internet, but I do not propose to address how in this article except for some information on costs. Unless you are lucky enough to have free access to the 'Net through your employment or an academic institution, using the Internet can be (but need not be) a costly business and choosing the right service provider is important. There are many articles in Internet magazines that help in this area. If you have an appropriate computer there will be a one off cost for a modem of about £75 to £150. The annual usage charge including the subscription to the 'Net provider is unlikely to be less than about £100. Only you can decide whether the expenditure is worthwhile but once you have access to the 'Net there is a whole new world of growing information and services to the surfer!

In order to access an Internet site it is necessary to know it's Web address. This is in the form 'http://www.umbra.co.uk/CAWOS/CAWOS.HTML'. Not an obvious address and the slashes and full stops are important! One of the main problems in finding useful information on the Internet in the absence of a specific site (or Web) address is the wealth of information available. However, there are many software search tools (e.g. Yahoo, Infoseek) to help find information but using imprecise search words such as 'bird watching' can lead to a whole list of apparently unrelated Web sites. This is when Internet usage costs can become significant accessing the different sites to find what you really want. Also the different search software tends to cover different ranges of Web sites and it is necessary to try several of these so-called search engines to cover the full range of information needs. I prefer to use a global search tool such as Web Ferret which accesses several search engines defined by the user, is very quick and provides a more user-friendly listing of search results. Even so, searching on an apparently precise word such as 'RSPB' can produce as many as 100 or more search results and not all obviously related to RSPB!

Do not despair! Some kind souls have done a lot of the hard work for us in providing birding Web pages which cover a wide range of information needs and good links to other birding Web sites. You obviously need to find these sites to start with but some are listed at the end of this article. Other good places to start your search are by finding the Web pages of major cities, states in the US, counties in the UK and geographic regions. These often provide good links into bird sites directly or via local natural history sites. An added benefit is that they may contain accommodation information as well. Simply search the 'Net using e.g. Glasgow, West Wales, Clywd, etc. Surprisingly the RSPB and Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust do not have their own Web pages, particularly since similar organisations do seem to get free Internet services by some Internet providers. However, these organisations' birding locations are covered in other ways such as the excellent Clywd site. One site that must be mentioned of course is the CAWOS site! Another local birding site is that of the Knutsford Ornithological Society which gives trip reports, birding highlights, etc.

To save you time and bother and to whet your appetite for 'Birding on the 'Net', the following is a brief list of some useful and good UK and international birding Web pages along with their Web addresses. Go on - 'Surf the 'Net' and sample what is out there on this new communication medium. You never know, you may catch the 'bug'! The notes against each Web site describe the contents of the page but remember what is on the 'Net to-day may change tomorrow as the page authors do change the contents to meet changing needs.

#### **GENERAL AND LINKS TO OTHER BIRDING SITES**

**Birdnet** - <http://www.birdguides.com/cgi-bin/news2html?J>

A live on-line Internet implementation of the Birdnet rare bird alert.

**Birdguides** - <http://www.birdguides.com/index.html>

An excellent page with access to books, rare bird info, many links to international birding sites, etc.

**Birdlinks** - <http://www.phys.rug.nl/mk/people/wpv/birdlink.html>

Good general purpose site, links to many other sites. Covers N America, Central & S America, Netherlands, Europe, Australasia, Africa. Birding software. Bird tour companies. Checklists.

### **Bird On! - <http://www.birdcare.com/birdon/>**

Edited by Chris Mead (BTO). A developing site. Bird care area covering care & feeding, Bird News with scientific articles, bird diary, BTO press briefings, Bird Action - how to get involved in BTO projects. This site also contains the full text of Peter Weaver's Bird Dictionary for downloading.

### **The Bird Web - <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/~nhi019/intro.html>**

By Paul Doyle. Access to many international bird site Web pages.

### **Eyrie - <http://www.eyrieusa.com/>**

A developing site with some good but variable quality links to state birding sites. Good for Texas sites, check list for Florida, rare bird alert for Kansas.

### **CLUBS AND SOCIETIES**

#### **CAWOS - <http://www.umbra.co.uk/CAWOS/CAWOS.HTML>**

The CAWOS page with the current programme, committee and general info on Society.

#### **Knutsford Ornithological Society - <http://www.personal.u-net.com/~usher/>**

An excellent site with indoor/outdoor programme, trip reports, local sites, etc.

#### **The Audubon Society - <http://www.audubon.org/audubon/>**

Index of local chapters by State. Good source for local contacts.

### **SPECIFIC BIRD WATCHING SITES**

#### **The Clywd Birds Web - <http://io.newi.ac.uk/adamsdr/birds/>**

An excellent quality site by Des Adams with good information on all Clywd birding sites by habitat. Local and national organisation addresses, latest news and links to other sites.

#### **RSPB Weymouth Reserves - <http://www.resort-guide.co.uk/weymouth/rspb/intro.htm>**

Another very good site covering all reserves, latest sightings, events, bird pictures, accommodation.

#### **Suffolk Wildlife Trust - <http://www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/suffolk/index.htm>**

Provides listing of local reserves, habitats, etc.

#### **Hawk Mountain, Pa. - <http://www.hawkmountain.org/>**

A really excellent site for this premier hawk migration centre. Comprehensive location details, migration statistics to help plan the trip, daily hawk migration numbers, weather information.

#### **And now for something completely different. . . .**

#### **How to tell the Birds from the Flowers! - A manual of Flornithology for beginners! -**

**<http://www.geocities.com/Vienna2406/contents.html>**

The text of many verses comparing birds to flowers and vegetables e.g. the Parrot and the Carrot.

Well .. the 'net is also a free expression medium!

**Mike Hems, 17 Greenfield Way, Cuddington, Northwich, Cheshire, CW8 2YH**

E-mail address: [mike@hems.u-net.com](mailto:mike@hems.u-net.com)

[Internet addresses are impossible to edit. I trust you've got them all correct Mike! Eds]

# Notes & Letters

## **CHESHIRE CHALLENGE - THE FINAL CHAPTER?**

In 1995 we inaugurated the Cheshire Challenge, a friendly competition to see who could record the most species from a year's birding in the County. An excellent race to the line ensued, with competitors in various degrees of seriousness enjoying the Challenge for what it was, a chance to do your birding within our recording area rather than elsewhere.

The 1996 Challenge was considerably less well supported by the CAWOS membership and for this reason I have decided not to renew the competition for this year, though anybody wishing to take it on in future years is welcome to try. However as a footnote I would like to mention the efforts made this year by Anita Shore, a CAWOS member living in Frodsham.

Despite dealing with some circumstances that make routine birding difficult, Anita, with the help of her family has managed to see an excellent 125 species. This is particularly remarkable given that the birds have been predominantly recorded from home or from the car in the Frodsham area. Well done Anita, as far as I am concerned you are the final winner of the Cheshire Challenge, and also thank you to everybody who has contributed to the competition over the last two years.

**Mark Turner, 12 Dovedale Road, Hoylake, Wirral, L47 3AW**

## OUR VANISHING COUNTRYSIDE

Hilary Woodhead's letter "A FIELD CHANGES HANDS" came as no surprise, as the loss of a favourite patch of land is all too common these days. However, as pointed out in the letter the loss may not be permanent and the return from agricultural use to scrub can take very few years indeed. In fact the actions of this farmer may well have preserved the land for just such a return. Had the land remained scrub and "waste" it could easily have fallen prey to developers. The small housing/industrial development would have caused a far more permanent loss (whether greenbelt or not). The recent housing green paper forecasts that 4.6 million new homes will be needed by 2030, 40% on greenfield site. The loss of agricultural land to urban development has been huge since 1901. 1.1 million hectares equivalent to 5 times the area of Cheshire has disappeared under tarmac and concrete in Britain.

% land use	AGRICULTURE	WOODS	URBAN	OTHER
1901	83.7	5.0	4.5	6.8
1939	81.3	6.2	8.0	4.5
1980	74.1	8.0†	11.6	6.3

† 0.25 million hectares from agriculture to woodland

People are often horrified by the reclamation of land but they must realise that farm land is being squeezed from all sides. Farms are businesses which support many jobs and provide affordable food to an ever growing population. The term 'improved land' is in fact very old in this usage and refers to the improved productivity. The term has only recently been scorned by a generation who seldom go hungry. In the 1850's an outbreak of cholera in Manchester close to Oxford Road station was attributed to the poor hygienic state of the dwellings and a lack of affordable fresh food for the masses. We are all guilty of our part in the loss of green land. Our unhealthy obsession with the car, our lust for foreign travel and ever increasing population are losing us more valuable habitat than can be afforded. The second runway at Manchester airport isn't being built out of necessity, it won't be importing vital food or medicines to better our lives, but simply enabling more leisure journeys. One runway would be more than enough for commercial usage. The airport, in it's environmental statement, makes note that the traffic volumes to and from the terminals are 52,000 journeys per day now rising to 124,000 by 2010. More roads, more services, more car parks and more concrete and tarmac.

The 1.84 million new homes to be built on greenfield sites in the next 40 years will use a huge amount of land. With roads for access and gardens to be landscaped the fate of more favourite patches of scrub and valuable habitat seems certain to be a more lasting loss than the retrieved farmers field. I do understand the comments by Tony Broome about the added value of diversity. Even under intensive agriculture many species stand a chance to cling on to some corner, but under 30cms of concrete it doesn't much matter if the seeds are lying dormant or not.

**Pete Hall, The School House, Toft Road, Knutsford**

## 'YELLOW-LEGGED GULL' - FRUSTRATION ENDS?

Avid readers of 'Bird News' and the 'Cheshire & Wirral Bird Report' can hardly have been unaware of a growing sense of frustration over the 'Yellow-legged Gull' problem. Recent Bird Reports have drawn attention to what the County Recorder and Bird Report Editors have seen as a far too simplistic approach by some observers to the identification of 'Yellow-legged Gulls'. This is against a background of experienced gull-watchers becoming fed up of having to complete rarity forms for what they see as a regularly occurring 'species' at the gull-laden areas they watch.

Both sides of the argument have been aware that a review of the identification features of the 'Yellow-legged Gull' was in the course of preparation. This has now been published in a double, January/February 1997, issue of 'British Birds'. Entitled 'Identification of Yellow-legged Gulls in Britain' it is written by Martin Garner and illustrated by David Quinn. These names should both be familiar to CAWOS members. Martin spent many of his formative birding days in Cheshire and was a regular watcher at Frodsham Marsh, he co-wrote 'The Birds Of Frodsham Marsh' with Bill Morton. David is a current Cheshire resident, his illustrations grace an increasing number of works including the covers of 'Bird News' and Bird Reports, he has spent many a happy hour studying the gulls at Neumann's Flash and has always been ready to offer the fruits of his research to the County Records Panel.

'British Birds' has devoted 38 pages to the paper, some indication of both the measure of importance of the issue and the complexity involved. The first point made by the author is that while the British Ornithologists Union Records Committee has yet to 'split' 'Yellow-legged Gull' from the argentatus/argenteus Herring Gull group, the paper nevertheless deals with identifiable 'forms' or races occurring within the Herring Gull complex. The importance of developing the right identification skills is stressed with emphasis placed on subtleties of structure, moult and wing-tip pattern and the pitfalls of the vagaries of the effects of light on colour. The author may well have finally laid L. a. omissus to rest. The meat of the paper is the detailed discussion, with the aid of illustrations, of the plumage features of what the author describes as L. (c). michahellis, adults and immatures are dealt with and various pitfalls considered. The incidence of L. c. cachinnans in Britain is discussed and again identification features of all age groups are thoroughly looked at. Finally, an appendix reviews 'yellow-legged gull' possibilities from further afield.

A glance through the lengthy list of references shows just how thoroughly the literature has been researched, while it is obvious from the paper itself just how much observation and discussion work the author and illustrator have put in. Despite the complexity of the subject matter the text is well laid out and clearly written. The illustrations are all superb, particularly the four pages in full colour featuring in-flight and standing views of michahellis and cachinnans from juvenile to adult plumage. 'Bird News' is not the forum for a full critical review of the paper; what is certain is that it is required and enthralling reading for gull enthusiasts and that the CAWOS Records Panel will be poring over it with a view to refining our policy regarding recording and descriptions. Martin and David recognise that there is more work to be done towards the understanding of the Herring Gull family and I am sure that with this paper they have provided a fine base which will be the essential reference for years to come.

**Steve Barber, 14 Thornfield Grove, Cheadle Hulme, Cheshire, SK8 6AZ**

## **HOLY RAVENS!**

With birds and birdwatching becoming more and more popular, and with the resultant increased coverage given to both on television and in the press, I should not have been surprised at the heading '*Ravens and Nest Boxes*' in a recent newsletter brought to my attention by a retired vicar in Mobberley. Except that it was in the March 1997 issue of Chester Cathedral News (not my usual reading matter!). It reads "As you may know already, the famous Chester Ravens, which reared three young on the clock tower of the Town Hall last year, have moved to the Cathedral! Since February 10th they have been busy building a new nest high up on the east face of the tower, with twigs plucked from the trees on the Dean's Field, or in the gardens of Abbey Street, or in the surrounds of the Cathedral itself."

It then goes on to say "The forty nest boxes put up around the Cathedral in February 1995 were examined for the first time in January of this year. We found seven complete nests (two Robins, one House Sparrow and four Blue Tit or Great Tit); two further nests partially completed (one possibly used); four other boxes containing small amounts of nesting material; one full of nut shells, presumably used by one of the local squirrels; and four empty boxes obviously used for winter roosting. If the garden at 13 Abbey Street is anything to go by, then the local population of small birds has definitely increased!"

The provision of nest boxes was encouraged by the BTO during National Nestbox Week in February (designed to coincide with St Valentine's Day!), but they probably did not anticipate such holy intervention!!

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

## **RARE AND SCARCE BIRDS IN THE NANTWICH AREA**

The Nantwich Natural History Society has recently published a book which is intended to cover all records of rare and scarce birds in their recording area. Work started on the book in October 1995, and was only completed in February 1997. The 40 plus pages are packed with records - from Little Bittern to Whinchat and from Pectoral Sandpiper to Black Tern - and is liberally sprinkled with artwork by Andrew Green (the Society's Bird Recorder) and Tom Lowe (whose work has featured in Bird News). Many of the records date back to the previous century - the earliest being 1850, and illustrate how productive this underwatched area of the county can be. At just £2.80, it is excellent value and copies are available at the Society's indoor meetings or from Mike Holmes (the Society's Secretary) on 01270-216890.

**Mike Holmes, 114 Merlin Way, Copenhall, Crewe, Cheshire, CW1 3RZ.**

## **REQUEST FOR INFORMATION - SPANISH CHIFFCHAFFS.**

Following DNA testing, Spanish Chiffchaff has been confirmed as a separate species; there are no official British records. We are aware of several records of this former race of Chiffchaff in Cheshire, indeed there have been at least five at Red Rocks. We are interested in collating records and would appreciate hearing from anyone who has seen or heard (tape recorded?) a Spanish Chiffchaff in Cheshire.

On April 29th 1990, we trapped a male Spanish Chiffchaff which had been singing at Red Rocks. The bird was photographed by a number of birders. At the time, the description we took was adequate to claim an unusual race but not sufficient to claim a first for Britain. Obviously we would be extremely pleased to have a copy of any photos of this particular individual.

**Mark Turner, 12 Dovedale Road, Hoylake, Wirral, L47 3AW**

[Does Spanish Chiffchaff pump its tail like our bird? Eds]

## **THE GREAT CAWOS YULE LOG 1996**

After several months of planning, this new event took place on Sunday 29th December 1996. Seven teams took part, all with very different strategies for how to tackle the day. There was certainly no shortage of birds to aim for as the following account will show - all proving what a great place Cheshire is in the winter. After a good day, racing mainly around the South Cheshire meres and woods with the Nantwich Natural History Society team and recording 82 species (giving a score of 84), I started telephoning around to collect the scores. We had enjoyed Lesser White-fronted Goose, Merlin, Whooper Swan, Smew, Shorelark, Barnacle Goose, Mandarin, Goosander, Buzzard, Peregrine and other goodies.

'Dippers Anonymous' were first on my list with a score of 54 species collected around the Chelford area. They recorded the first ever Raven for one site which they visited. They also went to Rostherne Mere where they relocated the Red-necked Grebe, and found an Iceland Gull in the biggest roost for many years. All in all a very good day and a good score for working a few local patches.

Next in was the 'Unstoppable Birding Machine' who had seen 88 species (giving a score of 90) after having suffered the bad luck of a problem with their car. They had enjoyed the day though. They gripped a few teams off with the White-fronted Geese at Sandbach, and gripped the Nant Nats off with Redpoll at Cholmondeley. They also saw Snow Buntings and Yellow-legged Gull around the county. A great team of young birders who will surely pull all the stops out next year and deserve to have some better luck.

The next team on my list was the 'Lesser Scaup Appreciation Society' with a massive score of 93 species, the most bizarre of which was possibly the Dipper seen by torchlight at Langley Reservoir. They had also managed Iceland Gull, plus Red-throated Diver, Red-breasted Merganser and Snow Bunting. With such a good score, it looked as though they would probably run away with the competition.

The next score came from the 'CAWOS' team who had spent a very pleasant day around Tatton Park notching up around 60 birds. They had Raven and Scaup, as well as a good collection of winter birds - again, proving the joys of patch work and showing that taking part is just as important as winning.

Then, news came from the young team of 'Tom Lowe and Co'. They rang to say that they were on 99 species and did I know of anything which would help them in the dark. I suggested Goosander on Astbury Mere and they set off, trying to think up a name for their team - they weren't happy with my suggestion of the 'Young Gits'. Anyway, they finally settled on 'The Little Bustards' (if I heard them right) and they not only got Goosander but heard Red Grouse calling from the snowy moors near the Cat and Fiddle to finish with a huge 101 species (giving a score of 105). They also had the only 'plastic' species for the day - Bar-headed Goose at Burton Point.

The final score to arrive was from the RSPB Stockport team who had recorded a very respectable 80 species (giving a score of 82) which included Smew, Mediterranean Gull, Shorelark and Snow Bunting - all top quality birds, and their site lists proved that the Weaver Bend area and Red Rocks had been very productive sites on the day.

Everyone who took part agreed that not only was it good fun, but it was a great day for birds, with around 120 species recorded on the day - as you can see, even teams which spent the day patch working rather than dashing around had a good time, saw some lovely birds and helped to show what a great county we are for winter birding.

One of my aims, which was to get CAWOS members to recruit non-members onto teams was reasonably successful too - over half of the teams had non-CAWOS members, although this challenge was mainly taken up by the "younger" members. Perhaps this gives us some hope for the next generation of birders. The other very rewarding part of the day, was the fact that it raised a bit of money for a good cause. At the time of writing, the teams have raised £10.00. (At £1.00 per team except for the Nant Nats and RSPB teams who gave a £1.00 per team member - all postage costs etc were covered by me). Thanks to Birdline North West who generously chipped in with £30.00. This means that the funds of the Witton Area Conservation Group will be £40.00 better off and hopefully it will go a little way towards helping them in the work which they do in this important area.

I will be organising another Yule Log for sometime in early 1998 (possibly Sun 4th Jan if you want to pencil it in your diaries). Moving the event to the New Year will hopefully get more people to take part and use it as a way of getting their Cheshire yearlists off to a cracking start. Judging by the number of people who were twitching the Frodsham Shore Larks on the day, a lot more teams could (and should) have taken part on the day - so why not give it a go next year ? After all, if you are going to be out birding anyway, you may as well take part.

As usual, I am always open to new ideas from anyone, so drop me a line if you think of a rule change or a way of making it more fun. I would be especially interested to hear from people who didn't take part. John Headon and I both fancied the idea of all meeting up at a particular site at the end of the day, maybe for a pint somewhere?

Cheers, and congratulations once again to the outright winners - 'The Little Bustards' - who have given us all a target to aim for next year.

Mike Holmes, 114 Merlin Way, Coppenhall, Crewe, CW1 3RZ

# Membership News

Welcome to the following new members: WL Johnson, A Fox, P Hackett, B and E Staton, A Plumridge, S Rowlands, R Bonser, Mr and Mrs M Bradshaw, G Flanagan, AMM Gold. As I write this on 4 March membership for 1997 stood at 249: about 80 of last year's members have not yet renewed and it is hoped that the vast majority of them will do so when they receive a reminder form with the 1995 Bird Report. Hopefully enough of them will do so to push our numbers into the 320s at least. The work of the Publicity Committee is beginning to bear fruit as several of these members have joined as a result of our presence at the Parkgate High Tides. Many thanks to those who volunteered to man the stand there, and indeed all those members who give help at indoor meetings and in other ways throughout the year.

**David Cogger, Membership Secretary**

## **GATEWARTH GULL WORKSHOP REVIEW**

On Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> March twenty eight brave souls set out in gathering winds to partake of the best gull watching to be had in Cheshire. As leader I was anxious that everyone should have a good time, see some exciting birds and hopefully acquire some additional knowledge into the bargain. Certainly the middle ambition was comfortably achieved, whether the same could be said of the other two is open to debate.

The weather on the day was a real curates egg. The prayed for, largely overcast, dry but bright, conditions duly arrived. Unfortunately the ever tightening isobars meant that we began in a stiff westerly while the latter part of the workshop was carried out in a full blown gale.

The loss of my fellow workshop leader Tony Broome, to yet another unfortunate accident, resulted in me running up and down the line of people like a headless chicken as I endeavoured to get the whole group looking at a particular species in a particular plumage state. I fear that in this exercise I failed. The combination of howling gale and large group size inevitably reduced my ability to acquaint everyone with the relevant identification features present on each species, let alone ageing and sexing the differing species. I'm sure like me many members of the group felt frustrated by this. I'd just like to thank them for their patience and good humour.

Initially the wind strength was such that we managed to get excellent views of most of the species

present, even if we did have to get lower than a grasshoppers knee to reduce the 'wind shake' on the scopes. Several star birds were on show. In fact a 2nd Summer Iceland Gull *Larus glaucooides* was virtually the closest bird. Everyone was able to enjoy the key structural features displayed by this species. As luck would have it we were able to compare this directly with a 2nd Summer Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*. The conditions prevented 100% confirmation of ageing, as the bill tip and eye colour could not be discerned beyond doubt. A Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans michahellis* in 3<sup>rd</sup> Summer plumage was a first for most of the group.

Sadly the increasing velocity of the wind prevented a thorough grilling of the Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* in search of the two Mediterranean Gulls *Larus melanocephalus* that had frequented the area all Winter. Though much excitement was generated by a completely albino Black-headed Gull. Many examples of Scandinavian Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus argentatus* were present alongside their British counterparts *L. a. argenteus*. Whilst the Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus* were clearly represented by more than one race. At least one bird was noted which showed characteristics consistent with the northern Scandinavian form *L. f. fuscus*.

The last bird mentioned was observed by Mike Duckam and Jonathan Williams, to whom many thanks are due for acting as spotters on the day. They enabled the group to see many of the birds rather more easily than might have been the case had they not been present. At the end of the session the majority of people appeared to have enjoyed, as well as endured, the experience, even if they were a little frustrated by the weather conditions. Several of the party retired to the Ferry Tavern to chew over the birds as well as the rather tasty food on offer. A further positive outcome from the day was the recruitment of at least two new members to CAWOS. All the participants appeared to enjoy each others company and I for one thoroughly enjoyed the experience, despite the variety of hiccups fate conspired to fling into our path.

A final thank you must go to the Waste Disposal Authority, and Dr. Chris Randle in particular, for their kind co-operation in allowing the visit to go ahead. I'm sure this event will go a long way to cement good relations between CAWOS and the WDA and enable much valuable bird research to be carried out at Gatewarth and other closed landfill sites within Cheshire in the future.

**Jeff Clarke, Workshop co-ordinator.**

## **1996 CAWOS PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION RESULTS**

This was the best supported year so far in that we received 79 entries overall, compared to 68-69 in previous years. Again the majority were in the foreign category (36 slides and 5 prints), with 25 slides entered in the Great Britain section. We are grateful yet again to Tony Bond FRPS, for giving up his time to judge the 1996 competition. His comments are reproduced below. The 13 humorous entries were judged at the A.G.M. by a panel of CAWOS members, who also took into account the accompanying caption when deciding the winning photo. Unfortunately one of the entries was disqualified due to the caption being too rude! The results are as follows:

### **CATEGORY 1 - FOREIGN**

#### **1st. LIMPKINS, FLORIDA - SHEILA BLAMIRE**

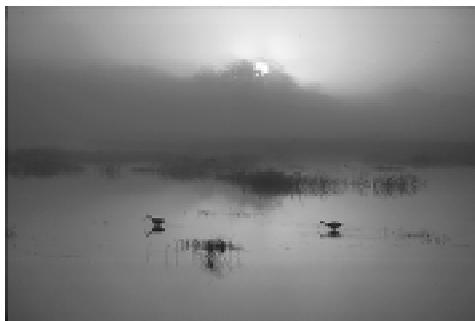
I expect this will be a controversial choice - is it a bird photograph, a habitat shot or a landscape? But does it really matter? It stood out on the first round and did not fade on further scrutiny. It captures the spirit of birding in Florida to perfection. If it had not been for a slight misunderstanding at a set of traffic lights I might have got something similar when I was there!

#### **2nd. Nankeen Night Heron, Australia - Simon Rowlands**

This could have been impossibly contrasty, but it has been well handled and the bird is shown very well. There is inevitably some out-of-focus foreground but this is unobtrusive and does not direct attention away from the bird.

#### **3rd. White Ibis/Sacred Ibis, Australia - Simon Rowlands**

A superb flight shot. Exposure is spot on, which is not always easy to do with an essentially white bird against the sky.



**Highly Commended Green-backed Heron, Florida - Sheila Blamire**

This delightful little heron has been shown very well. The bright, out-of-focus stem running across the picture is unfortunate.

**Highly Commended Great White Egret, Florida - Sheila Blamire**

A conscious attempt has been made to enhance the picture by including the reflection and the result is all the better for it.

**CATEGORY 2 - GREAT BRITAIN**

**1st. DOTTEREL, LLANDUDNO - PETER GOLBORN**

This is just about the best of the Dotterels but they are all good, and presumably the same bird. I selected this one because of the pose of the bird and the absence of an intrusive foreground.

**2nd. Bar-tailed Godwit, New Brighton - Simon Rowlands**

I regard this and the Black-tailed as perhaps our most elegant waders and have not got a really good picture of either. I am therefore envious of this as it does show the bird very well. The water is flowing downhill slightly (over excitement?). This could easily be rectified by repositioning the slide in the mount.



**3rd. Fulmar, Mull - Simon Rowlands**

An excellent flight shot. It is not easy to fill the frame like this without a cut off wing tip. The only point of criticism is that the bird is flying out of the picture rather than into it.

**Highly Commended Common Terns, Seaforth - Peter Golborn**

This is a good arrangement with all posts occupied. It is just unfortunate that the birds are looking all over the place, but I expect that it was a very fluid situation with birds coming and going all the time.

**CATEGORY 3 - HUMOROUS**

**1st. "NAR, YOU'RE LOOKING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION!" - SHEILA BLAMIRE**

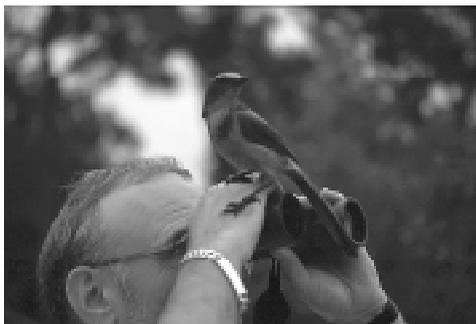
An self-opinionated Florida Scrub Jay butting in uninvited.

**2nd. "Well he did tell me to get knotted!" - Sheila Blamire**

Great White Egret in the Florida Everglades with its neck apparently tied in an elaborate knot.

**3rd. "What a time to lose your head!" - Sheila Blamire**

A Florida Limpkin diving off a branch into oblivion, apparently without any sign of its head.



So, who will provide the winning photos in 1997? There's eight months to go so get snapping. You too could get your name in lights, well in Bird News anyway! And there's a £5 prize for the winner of each category, for those members of a more mercenary nature.

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

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## **Rumours... Rumours ...**

- Tatton Park proved a dangerous place to visit recently for one 'literary' CAWOS member, due to the painful connection of Jack Russell teeth and his Gluteus maximus muscle. The unfortunate dog however, picked the wrong target and came off considerably worse after connecting with the victim's boot!
- Probably more fact than rumour, as this was seen on the Internet, (of course you can't believe all you read can you?). Tatton Park apparently saw some interesting visitors when the Mere was almost completely frozen over on 29th December 1996 - "1 female Scaup, 1 female Gadwall, plus the County Recorder (a rare vagrant), also 130 Pink-footed Geese flying south-east."

# Projects and Surveys

## PESTICIDE ANALYSIS OF CHESHIRE PEREGRINE EGGS

Members of the regular wardening teams at Cheshire's Peregrine breeding sites at Beeston Castle and Helsby Hill know that we have been studying the nests to collect as much useful information as possible. This has included completing Nest Record Cards for submission to the national archive at the BTO, analysing prey items, ringing the chicks, and also sending off for analysis any unhatched eggs. As Peregrines are specially protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981), all this work is done under licence. This brief report is intended to inform CAWOS members of the results of analysis of eggs from three of the nests.

The eggs have been sent to the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, Monks Wood, Abbots Ripton, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE17 2LS, where they analyse corpses and unhatched eggs to monitor the health of our wild bird populations. It costs them about £80 an egg to undertake the detailed chemical analysis to detect the minute quantities of pesticide residues, present in a few parts per million. It typically takes about a year to receive the results, and we are still waiting for those from Beeston in 1996. The Beeston egg taken in 1994 was already broken in the nest, with part of the shell and the contents missing, so ITE were not able to analyse it. They are mainly interested in the 'top predators', either aquatic (Great Crested Grebe, Grey Heron, Kingfisher, ...) or terrestrial (Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Peregrine, ...) because some of the poisons, especially the persistent organochlorines, can accumulate up the food chain, possibly to lethal levels in raptors. It is this poisoning that led to the widespread deaths of many of our birds of prey from about 1947 to the 1960s. More insidiously, sub-lethal levels of pesticides led to reduced breeding success, mainly because affected females laid eggs with shells so thin that they tended to crack. So, the ITE also measure the egg-shell index, the mass of the dry egg divided by the product of its length and breadth, as a measure of the thickness. The results of the analyses are shown in the table below.

Site	Helsby	Beeston	Helsby
Date	1993	1995	1995
Embryo	None	None	None
Shell index	2.10	1.78	1.95
HEOD	0.11	0.007	0.029
pp'-DDE	1.80	0.220	0.651
PCBs	3.20	0.361	2.242
Hg	0.48	0.34	0.502

HEOD is the active ingredient derived from the insecticides dieldrin and aldrin, and values of up to 0.5 are regarded as 'normal' background levels. The chemical pp'-DDE is the principal metabolite from the insecticide DDT, for which values of up to 5 are regarded as 'normal' background levels. The values of these insecticide-derived chemicals in our Peregrine eggs are thus very low. PCBs are the industrial polychlorinated biphenyls, widely used in plastics, lubricants (including oils) and insulating materials, and released into the environment in various ways. It may well be significant that the Helsby eggs, from adults that often feed in the industrialised Mersey area, have higher levels of PCBs. Information on heavy metals, especially mercury (Hg), in wild birds is still being gathered, so the significance of the figures is not yet known.

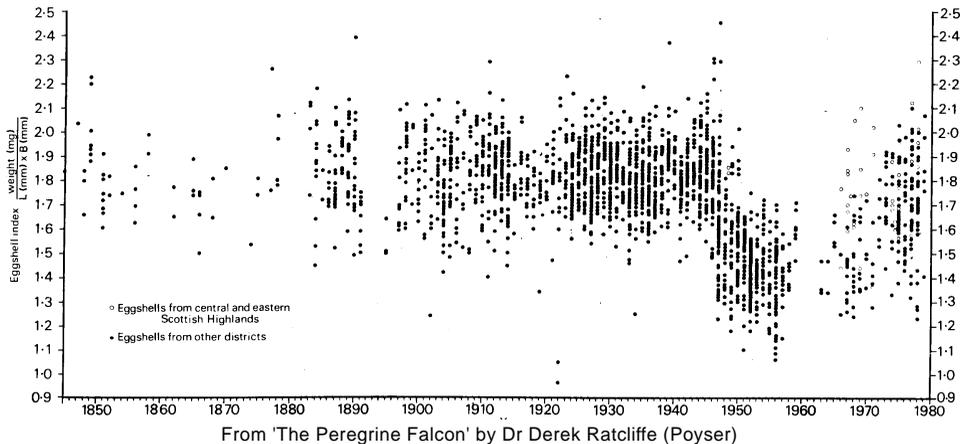
None of the eggs was taken from the nest until long after the normal incubation period, and in fact the row headed 'embryo' shows that no egg was fertile.

We can place the shell indexes into context by looking at the plot of eggshell thickness depicted in the Figure, taken from Derek Ratcliffe's Poyser book 'The Peregrine Falcon'. It was Dr Ratcliffe's seminal detective work, summarised in a very readable account in his book, that unravelled the factors leading to the disastrous decline in the Peregrine population. He examined all the clutches of eggs that he could find – many of them taken illegally by oologists who were persuaded by Desmond Nethersole-Thompson to let Ratcliffe handle their precious collections – and measured their dimensions and weights to give the index of shell thickness. It is clear from the Figure that shell thicknesses declined sharply in 1947 and subsequent years, coinciding with the introduction

of DDT/ DDE, first as a powder applied to homing pigeons to control external parasites, then as an insecticidal agricultural seed-dressing. Most eggs in the central and eastern Scottish Highlands were unaffected, as the Peregrines nesting there were far removed from the intensively cultivated lowlands. Shell indexes recovered gradually from the 1970s onwards, following the gradual introduction of bans on the chemicals. Comparison with the Figure shows that the eggs measured from Beeston are around the mean historical value, while the Helsby eggs have been towards the top end of the thickness range.

Thus, these analyses show that the Cheshire eggs have been relatively free from residual pesticides, and well up to normal thickness levels: the good news is that our breeding Peregrines are healthy.

**Professor David Norman, Rowswood Cottage, Ridding Lane, Sutton Weaver, Runcorn, WA7 6PF.  
Colin Lythgoe, 11 Waterloo Road, Haslington, Crewe, CW1 5TF.**



## HOUSE MARTIN SURVEY 1996

The CAWOS House Martin survey, now in its 5th year, aims to address specific issues such as local population trends and breeding success, rather than attempt a more formal population census to cover the whole of the county.

### Numbers and distribution

Information was received from 20 observers (including 6 new), on 57 colonies, with a total number of nests recorded as 540. This compares to a total of 596 nests from 61 colonies by 21 observers in the 1995 survey (with some variation in sites). For the complete list of areas covered see acknowledgements at the end.

As stated before, in much of its breeding range the majority of colonies consist of less than 5 pairs and this holds true in Cheshire, with nearly 50% of colonies consisting of 1 to 5 nests and a further 19% with 6 to 10 nests. The notable exceptions were colonies of 51 at Toft Hall, 40 at Zeneca HQ (the first time a survey has been reported at this site), 30 at Warrington Hospital and 111 at Winwick Hospital, Warrington (though this could well be the last breeding season before demolition begins and the site is redeveloped).

### Type of site and age of building

Again a wide variety of buildings were used, from houses, farm buildings, shops, offices, schools and hospitals, to a nursing home, a golf club and one pub (there were four pubs surveyed last year!) The age of the buildings ranged from newly built to early 18th century (c1720). The majority of nests were built under a medium sized overhang. Where noted, the majority of nests used were old or repaired nests (69%), with only 30% pairs building from new. As stated before, there does not seem to be a consistency between the direction the nests face. At Toft Hall where 54 nests were completed (only 51 actually used) they were aligned as follows: 5 NE; 5 N; 11 NW; 13 W; 7 SW; 13 S; with none facing SE or E.

One thing that has always surprised me is the lack of provision of artificial nests by those taking part in the survey, though the number did increase this year by 100% (from one to two!). Over the years, we have put up about six artificial nests under the eaves of our house, with, it must be said, varying degrees of success. I was therefore interested to read in RSPB Birds magazine that it was probably Gilbert White's brother who was the first to experiment in trying to attract House Martins all those years ago. In his journal for 5 June 1782, Gilbert recorded that "*Thomas nailed up several large scallop shells under the eaves of his house at South Lambert, to see if House Martins would breed in them. These conveniences had not been fixed half an hour before several pairs settled upon them; and expressing great complacency began to build immediately. The shells were nailed horizontally with the hollow side upwards; and should, I think, have a hole drilled in their bottoms to let off moisture from driving rains.*" I would not recommend scallop shells as the most effective material to use, but what do CAWOS members generally think of providing artificial nestboxes? One household in Chester has now put up an artificial nest to encourage their House Martins to return in 1997, after the original nest fell down during house painting after the birds had left.

### **Age of colony**

The age of the colony was not always accurately known, but only 4 colonies in Cheshire and Wirral (to my knowledge) are known to have been in existence for between 30 and 50 years and just 1 colony for 60 to 70 years (Brook House Farm monitored by A.W. Boyd in 1929).

### **Habitat and feeding habits**

Information regarding the habitats near to the House Martin colonies was similar to last year. The majority of sites had open areas close to the colonies and these consisted of one or more of the following:- fields, grassland, parkland, cricket ground, playing fields and a golf course. About 50% had woodland nearby, many were sited near open water i.e. reservoir, lake, river or canal (presence of water is often an attraction, although not essential) and as expected, the majority were close to other buildings. A local source of mud for building or repairing nests was reported from a few sites, including manmade sources. As last year, where feeding was noted by observers, this was mostly over open countryside of one form or another, particularly in drier weather. Some colonies again favoured town centres in warm weather.

### **Breeding biology**

The majority of birds arrived back at their nest sites during the last week of April or the first week of May, with some not arriving until the end of May, or even later at a couple of sites. Although three House Martins were recorded over Marbury Mere as early as March 24th, the earliest arrival date back on territory reported in the survey was 12th April (compared to 3rd April in 1995). Most birds started nest building within 1 to 2 weeks of their arrival.

As many sites were only visited once, success (or otherwise!) was not always recorded. However, of the 207 pairs where 1st brood success was recorded, approximately 50% of these (107 pairs) went on to have 2nd broods, of which the majority were successful (this compares to 66% having 2nd broods in 1995). One recorder experienced difficulty in deciding when first broods had left and second broods started, as it seemed that young birds were always to be heard in the nest! House Martins usually have two broods, with 3 broods only very occasionally recorded throughout their breeding range and this was repeated again in our County. It is not unusual to see young still in the nest in mid-September, but one pair were still at their nest with two young, on 5th October at Zeneca HQ.

The majority of House Martins started to depart from early September, with few birds lingering at their nest sites into mid October. Countywise, the last birds I heard of were at Toft and Sandbach Flashes both on 9th October.

### **Use and abuse of nests**

Again Cheshire House Martins were not without their problems in 1996, including painters destroying nests, unsympathetic owners putting up chicken wire during the winter to deter nesting (this site had provided two nests and two broods each since the survey started) and another where two nests were destroyed by householders before the first brood had fledged. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 makes it an offence to intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of a House Martin when it is in use or being built. If you require help or advice regarding possible contravention of this Act, please contact me.

Sparrowhawk predation (or attempted predation) was reported from several sites. Sparrowhawks breeding nearby to Zeneca HQ, took at least 20 (presumably) recently fledged young. Reports

were also received of detrimental Magpie activity. Many nests were used by other species during the winter, particularly Blue Tits and Wrens, but at one site all the nests were already occupied by House Sparrows before their rightful owners returned. However Blue Tits attempting to breed in one nest where evicted by more assertive House Martins.

### **Population trends**

The majority of recorders thought their House Martins had had a successful year in 1996. At Toft Hall the colony expanded by 50%, despite predation from both Hobby and Sparrowhawk (up to 51 occupied nests from 34 in 1995 and 24 in 1994). Other sites also seemed to be showing a recovery of numbers eg. at one site in Whitley Reed, which was deserted two years ago following painting, there was a significant increase from one to 14 pairs. Winwick Hospital, possibly the most important site in the County, increased to 111 pairs from 93 pairs in 1995 and 79 in 1994, but still down on 120+ pairs in 1993 and 1992. As stated at the beginning of this report, this could well be the last breeding season before demolition begins and the site is redeveloped (an update on the situation should appear in the July Bird News). At Warrington General Hospital the colony increased to 30 occupied nests from 17 in 1995, the best ever showing since first counted in 1993.

Changes to the buildings at Brook House Farm, Newton by Daresbury (where A.W. Boyd found 49 occupied nests in 1929), have considerably reduced the attractiveness to House Martins, but 1996's population of just two pairs was the lowest ever that the farmer could recall. However the uncertain future faced last year by House Martins at the recently sold off Plumley Railway Station proved unfounded, as a total of 20 occupied nests were found here and at a newly discovered site nearby.

### **Looking forward to 1997**

I would like to thank everybody (both members and non-members) who took part in this survey and hope they and additional observers will participate in 1997. Though many observers are able to send in very detailed records, information from even just one visit (July is probably best), is still valuable, particularly if the site is an important or traditional site which needs to be monitored every year.

Please get your friends and neighbours to join in and also encourage children to monitor any school House Martins. If you have taken part in previous years, but missed 1996, please try to record information again for 1997. If you would like any further information or advice, please contact me.

Happy House Martin Hunting in 1997!

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

### **Contributors**

Brian Ankers (Eastham Docks), Hubert Birch (Handbridge), Sheila Blamire (Mere), Shirley Couzens (Moore), Peter Day (Audlem), M. F. Ealden (Port Sunlight), Laura von der Fecht (Kinnerton), Dr P. Griffiths (Nantwich), Peter Hall (Toft), David Jones (Hale Barns), Alan Kimber (Congleton), K. Kirk (Chelford), H. J. Kynaston (Eastham), Brian Martin (Warrington), Susan Newton (Chelford), Hugh Pulsford (Zeneca HQ), Ann Pym (Swettenham), Mrs E Scott (Frodsham), Jeff & Chris Sherrin (Mottram-St-Andrew), Shelagh Thurlow (Wallasey).

# Ringers Notebook

Further evidence has come in of the movements of Cheshire Mute Swans to moulting sites in North Wales, with three birds caught and one found dead in July/ August 1996. Another bird died in Ramsey Harbour, Isle of Man, on 11 August.

It is usually bad news when a ringed bird of prey is reported, and the recent records have been no exception. A Sparrowhawk chick, ringed near Warrington, moved 23 km in only a few days after fledging, only to be found sick and taken into care in Bolton, while a Peregrine, fledged at an industrial site, was found dead a month later in a vat of oil.

Nice examples of the wide-scale wanderings of first-year Sand Martins come from birds ringed at a Sandiway colony. Two moved west to a roost 123 km away on Anglesey, at the end of July. Another, ringed at the same colony on the evening of 17 July, was caught the following evening in Northamptonshire, having moved 157 km in one day. An adult male, breeding at the same site in 1995, had been ringed on 1 August 1994 at Veurne, West Flanders in Belgium, 431 km away, although obviously it had been to West Africa in between. Another juvenile, ringed at the Woolston

roost in autumn 1995, was caught during its spring return journey, on 24 April 1996, near Gerona at the easternmost tip of Spain, 1302 km south of the ringing site.

Three of the gulls, two Lesser Black-backed and a Herring Gull, ringed by Merseyside Ringing Group at landfill sites in the Warrington area, were culled in May 1996 at their breeding colony at Tarnbrook Fell, Lancashire, 65 km north, as part of the programme to try to stop the birds taking over the heather moorland. Four Lesser Black-backed Gulls have further reinforced the connection with landfill sites in Gloucestershire and Hereford & Worcester, being caught here in June and there in November on their southward migrations. Another four Black-headed Gulls in Scandinavia are almost routine, two in Sweden and two in Finland, albeit on quite early dates of 22 and 27 April; some variety is provided by the records of two found dead in North Yorkshire on 11 and 14 June so presumably at or near to their breeding sites. One of them had been ringed as a chick in the Woolston gullery in 1992.

Most birds are quite faithful to a breeding site from one year to the next, but one of the female Pied Flycatchers using a nest-box in Lyme Park in 1996 had switched areas, as she had been ringed as a breeding female in 1994 in a box at Glyn Arthur in Clwyd, 84 km west.

An adult female Sedge Warbler caught at Poulton near Chester on 7 July 1996 had been ringed as a juvenile on 29 July 1995 at Winterset Reservoir in West Yorkshire, 113 km north-east. A juvenile Reed Warbler ringed at Bidston, Wirral on 25 July 1994 was caught again almost two years later, on 21 July 1996, by ringers in Cleveland, 176 km north-east. An adult Reed Warbler, ringed on spring passage at Meols, Wirral on 4 May 1996, was retrapped three months later and 60 km north, at Fleetwood, Lancashire.

Finally, to balance all the records of long-distance movements, a male Blackbird that I caught at Norton Priory, Runcorn on 21st December 1996 was at exactly the same site at which it had been ringed, but over ten years later: I ringed it on 13th November 1986, as an adult, so it had hatched in 1985 or earlier. Eleven-and-a-half years old is close to the maximum recorded age for wild Blackbirds.

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



## MAY

- 13 ADNHS "CHARLES TUNNICLIFFE THE WILDLIFE ARTIST" by Anne Mason
- 13 MRSPB AGM & members slides
- 14 HO "COASTAL AND WETLAND BIRDS" by Dr Mark Hamblin ARPS
- 14 SECOS Evening Walk - TBA
- 16-18 MCOS Trip to Devon - details to be arranged
- 16-18 MRSPB Weekend to Yorkshire - contact Ian Taylor 01260 275248
- 18 CADOS Haweswater / Leighton Moss, depart 7:00am
- 18 HO Haweswater, Coach departs 8:00am
- 18 SECOS Anglesey, by mini-bus
- 18 WRSPB Woolston Eyes, meet at Two Mills Little Chef time tba
- 19 SRSPB Goyt Valley, meet Errwod car park 7:30pm
- 21 CADOS IMF/Frodsham, meet Caldly Valley Community Centre 7:00am
- 21 CRSPB Hockenhull Platts, meet 6:30pm, leader David Cummings 01244 332410
- 22 MRSPB Teggs Nose, meet Bottoms Reservoir car park 6:30pm
- 23 KOS Goyt Valley, meet Sessions House 6:30pm
- 30 LOG "FLOWERS OF THE EASTERN PYRENEES" by Mrs Porter
- 31-1 CADOS East Anglia, contact Nick French 01978 856522
- TBA LOG Suffolk weekend

## JUNE

- 1 CRSPB Long Mynd, meet 8:00am, leader Rob Adams 01829 270654
- 2 SRSPB Teggs Nose, meet Trentabank car park, 7:30pm
- 4 MRSPB Evening Walk - meet Thornycroft Lakes (nr Siddington) at 6:45pm

- 8 LOG Dane Valley
- 8 WRSPB South Stack, by coach
- 10 ADNHS Members Evening
- 10 WRSPB Stapledon Wood, meet Kings Drive car park Caldly 7:00pm
- 11 HO "HOOK AND EYE" by Keith Offord
- 11 SECOS Evening walk - TBA
- 12 CADOS Gronant & Nercwys, meet Caldly Valley Community Centre 6:00pm
- 14 ADNHS Bolton Abbey Woods, meet 9:00am, contact Margaret Hickson 0161 860 5104
- 14 HO Long Mynd, Shropshire, Coach departs 8:00am
- 14 KOS Lake Yyrnwy, meet Sessions House 8:30am
- 15 MCOS Bempton & Blacktoft Sands, meet Bempton at 9:30am
- 18 CRSPB Nercwys, meet 8:30pm leader Bernard Wright 01829-782243
- 19 MRSPB Greenway Country Park (nr Biddulph) - meet visitors centre at 7:00pm
- 21 CADOS Anglesey, meet Caldly Valley Community Centre 8:00am
- 22 SRSPB Bempton Cliffs & Flamborough Head, by coach depart Grand Central, Stockport at 7:30am
- 24 WRSPB Ashton Park, West Kirby, meet south entrance 7:00pm
- 27 KOS Merebrook Reservoir, meet Sessions House 6:30pm

## JULY

- 5-6 CADOS Farne Islands, contact Dave King 0151-327 7212
- 5-6 BIRDWATCHERS SUMMER FAIR, Middleton Hall, Tamworth, 10:00am to 6:00pm, £3.50
- 6 CRSPB Bempton Cliffs, coach trip, leave 8:00am, contact Brian Roberts
- 8 WRSPB Dibbinsdale, Bebington, meet main car park 7:00pm
- 9 HO Members Evening
- 9 SECOS Evening Walk - TBA
- 10 LOG Botany Trip, evening
- 13 CADOS Butterfly hunt, meet 6:00am, leader Graham Stanley 01244-318499
- 13 KOS Anglesey, meet Sessions House 8:00am
- 20 WRSPB Inner Marsh Farm, meet at the reserve 10:30am
- 26 KOS Summer Bar-B-Que

## AUGUST

- 9 KOS Seaforth, meet Sessions House 9:00am
- 9 LOG Botany Trip, afternoon
- 17 WRSPB RSPB NW Shorebirds Festival, Banks Road, Lower Heswall 9:00am
- 19 CADOS Frodsham meet meet Caldly Valley Community Centre 6:00pm
- 20 RSPB Hide Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate 11:30am
- 22 KOS Lower Moss Wood, meet Sessions House 6:45pm
- 29 LOG "BIRDING IN JAMTLAND (SWEDEN)" by David Edwards
- 30 CADOS Top Hill Low/East Coast, meet Caldly Valley Community Centre 7:00am
- 31 Hilbre Island, to book ring Jeff Clarke 0151 357 1991

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 Caldly 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
- CRSPB Chester RSPB Group, mtgs St Mary's Centre, Chester 7:30pm. Prog Sec. Rob Adams 01829-270654
- CWT Grebe House, Reaseheath, Nantwich, Cheshire, CW5 6DG. 01270 610180
- HO Hale Ornithologists, mtgs St Peter's Assembly Rooms, 7:45pm, Prog.Sec. Barbara Vercambre 0161 980 8362
- HPRSPB High Peak RSPB Members Group contact John Durell 0161 427 3018, Ken Hodgson 0161 427 6828
- KOS Knutsford Ornithological Society, mtgs St Johns Church Centre 7.45pm, contact Roy Bircumshaw 01565 634193
- LOG Lymm Ornithological Group, mtgs Lymm Village Hall 8.00pm, Prog. Sec. Colin Antrobus 01925 635337
- MCOS Mid-Cheshire Ornithological Society, mtgs Hartford Village Hall 7.45pm, contact Paul Kenyon 01606 77960
- MRSPB Macclesfield RSPB Members Group, mtgs Senior Citizens Hall 7.45pm, contact Peter Kirk 01625 829119
- NNHS Nantwich Natural History Society, mtgs The Gables at 7:30pm, Sec. Mike Holmes 01270 216890
- 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 Peter Hugo 0161 485 4024
- 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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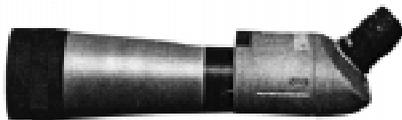
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