

BIRD NEWS

Number 35

July 97



**Kentish Plover • Back from the Brink
Migration Watch 97 • Wader Workshop
Computers and Birds • Book Review**



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Articles, Letters and Comments would be welcomed by the Editor

Front cover: Bar-tailed Godwit by Tony Broome

Other illustrations by Tony Broome, Tom Lowe, Thelma Sykes &
Cheshire Countryside Management Services

Editorial

Here I sit before my PC gripped by mid-summer malaise, my mind is not a complete blank, but thoughts drift away to the light nights and the potential for appealing diversions. A round of golf, a tempting barbecue, catching up with rarely visited friends, all are worthy contenders for my leisure time and I'm sure many of you likewise find reasons for pursuing other interests. I wonder if my predecessor Richard Gabb found compiling the newsletter so difficult at this time of year.

Thankfully, many of this edition's scribes seem less encumbered and long may it remain so. Continuing the recent welcome trend for new contributors I would like to thank R L Howells and Philip Barrett for their well written articles. Philip's piece on migrating Meadow Pipits is particularly timely as CAWOS gear up for a county-wide migration watch. I hope many of the members will grasp the opportunity to take part in what can be an exciting and enjoyable form of birdwatching.

David Cogger's review of the recently published 'Back from the Brink', brought my mind round to current conservation concerns and strategies as well as the impact conservation activities have upon the environment. Probably the biggest single conservation led cause currently deployed within Cheshire is the development of the Mersey Forest. Much land has been set aside for it's inclusion within the 'Forest'. Though the term 'forest' is loosely applied, the reality is, in the majority of cases, areas designated as part of 'The Mersey Forest' are planted up with a variety of, mostly native, trees.

Cheshire has less than the national average percentage tree cover so an increase ought to be broadly welcome. Indeed where appropriate CAWOS should encourage the planting of 'suitable' native trees. Unfortunately, in my experience, far too many of the planting schemes are drawn up by planners with little regard for the ecological constraints upon which their decisions should be based. Or for the ecological consequences of the implemented proposals.

To add weight to my argument and illustrate my point, a local authority in the north west of the county dedicated a number of sites for the development of the Mersey Forest. One of these sites was formerly a chemical plant and the abandoned 'waste land' had gradually re-vegetated. The rubble and thin soil was festooned with many nitrogen fixing plants, notably Birds-foot Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*. Nothing very remarkable in that, except this site boasted the best colony of Common Blue's *Polyommatus icarus* within the borough. Of course the planners were not aware of this because they singularly failed to carry out any kind of environmental impact assessment or even a zoological/botanical audit.

The consequence of the resulting planting scheme was a massive decline in the population of this butterfly and a lot of stressed trees, severely retarded in their development, as the medium into which they have been planted was not suitable for their ecological requirements. I have little doubt that the planners acted with the best of intentions and carried out the bidding of their paymasters by returning an area of 'brown land' to the green belt. Sadly this act of conservation vandalism is not an isolated incident. That said, I am in favour of the big idea of the Mersey Forest and it is far from the only guilty party within the conservation movement. I just think too many of the actors involved with it are reading from the wrong script.

The message is clear, before carrying out any form of conservation work, it is essential that you have sufficient information upon which to base your conclusions. Only then should you draw up a strategy in order to carry out your conservation proposals. After all the conclusion may be 'do nothing'.

You may wonder what this has to do with CAWOS. The answer is simple. We are information gatherers. If we as an organisation, or as individuals, know of development proposals, whether they be industrial, agricultural or conservation, we need to make the planners aware of the existing environmental status of the site, as well as the likely consequences of any proposals. Only by so doing can we possibly hope to preserve the best of what already exists or maximise the potential of future developments. Anyway enough of the sermon, what's that I can sense in my nostrils? By crikey if it isn't the distinctive whiff of migration in the air. Well, that's me, I'm off. Good birding.

Jeff Clarke

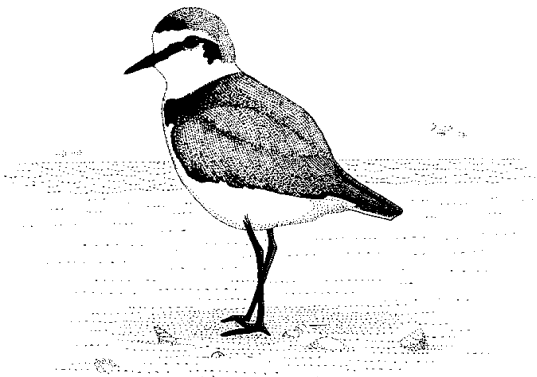
[Note: Copy date for next issue will be the 8th of September.]

~~ Volunteers wanted - see page 32 ~~

County Rarities

KENTISH PLOVER

Although described as a scarce passage migrant to Britain, Kentish Plover is a very rare bird for Cheshire and Wirral, as there have been only five records since 1974. These being the long staying male at Red Rocks between 1974 and 1979; one at the Weaver Bend on April 28th in 1977; one at Doddington on April 19th 1979; the male at Frodsham on August 8th 1982 and the female at Neumann's Flash on May 23rd 1991. In adult plumage, Kentish Plovers can be readily separated from Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers by their overall paler sandy appearance which usually alerts



you first to "something different", followed by noting the blackish legs, fine black bill and incomplete dark breast band that clinches the identification. But beware, juvenile Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers can also appear to show incomplete breast bands and dark legs, and there is the possibility that bleached birds may appear very pale and sandy coloured. Kentish Plovers also have a different jizz, in that they appear front heavy, almost round looking, when viewed head-on, and the short tailed, legs 'set-back' look adds to this effect, which is often noticeable as they tend to be more energetic in their movements in general. The head pattern is also different, lacking Ringed or Little Ringed black masked effect, but with a white forehead and supercilia instead, with the male sporting a neat black front and orange back to the crown.

In juvenile plumage, however, birds are more inconspicuous, but the key points remain the very pale sandy upper parts, which appear neat and scaly close up, due to buff fringes to most of the remiges; plain faced appearance accentuated by dark eye and fine dark bill; pale buff incomplete breast patches and those dark legs. The jizz too will separate a juvenile Kentish: large headed, short tailed and rounded head-on, from the bulkier, darker Ringed or the sleeker, long thin looking Little Ringed Plovers. In flight, the overall pale plumage is again obvious. The wing bar rules out Little Ringed, and the lack of dark contrasting primaries and trailing edges eliminates Ringed Plover. In addition, the short tail has more obvious white outer tail feathers. Although quite different from Ringed or Little Ringed Plovers, I have never found the call notes, a short, "chip" or "pwit" to be of much use, or in fact particularly noticeable, but presumably if heard well would further help distinguish Kentish from the others. One last point, there have been recent articles on the occurrence of Kentish Plovers with complete breast bands, but these would seem rare events and the other plumage features have remained consistent. Overall a bird worth sifting through those wader flocks for, and we are perhaps overdue one that stays more than a day and can be savoured by many.

Hugh Pulsford, 19 Tudor Way, Congleton, CW12 2AS

As a point of interest, one of the American races, known as Snowy Plover, will perhaps prove to be a separate species. They are generally greyer and sometimes show all white lores, but are very similar. Is it only a matter of time before one turns up in Britain, possibly Frodsham? Two other African species which are similar and worth comparing are Kittlitz's Plover which breeds as close to us as Egypt, and White-fronted Plover which reaches Gambia. Both are, however, mainly sedentary.

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 March to early June.

March

A **Little Grebe** at Poynton Pool (20th) was an excellent record there. A **Black-necked Grebe** was at Rostherne Mere (16th) with birds returning to Woolston Eyes (from 15th) and 4 there at the end of the month. A partial summer plumaged **Red-necked Grebe** was on the Manchester Ship Canal at Frodsham from the 14th to the end of the month. The peak counts of **Cormorants** at Budworth Mere and Fiddler's Ferry were 28 and 40 respectively (the later equalling the site record) but a continental type bird at Sandbach Flashes (28th) was a first there. A white **Egret** was seen at Woolston Eyes on 2 dates by different observers, views were brief and didn't allow the observers to confirm its true identity. A **Spoonbill** arrived at Frodsham No6 tank (11th) remaining for the rest of the month and was probably one of last years bird returning. The **Lesser Flamingo** remained at Frodsham Score all month and was still present in late May.

Possibly 20 **Grey Heron** nests were occupied at Macclesfield Forest early in the month was a high count there with a pair at Frodsham No6 tank for the second year running. Flocks of 11 **Bewick's** and 5 **Whooper Swans** made brief visits to Frodsham with singles of each at Nantwich Lake early in the month. A flock of 83 **Pink-footed Geese** were at Inner Marsh Farm (8th) and the 2 **White-fronted Geese** at Sandbach Flashes were last seen on the 12th. A single **Greylag Goose** at Fiddler's Ferry (16th) was the 7th reserve record. A flock of 4 **Barnacle Geese** were at Inner Marsh Farm (3rd). A **Brent Goose** flew up the Mersey past Fiddler's Ferry (30th) and was the 4th reserve record. A **Ruddy Shelduck** was at Frodsham Score (27th) and another reappearing at Sandbach Flashes (27th, 28th and 30th). Three **Mandarins** at Poynton Pool (20th and 23rd) was a record count there. **Wigeon** numbers remained high with 420 at Sandbach Flashes (9th) and up to 58 at Rostherne Mere. An **American Wigeon** at Inner Marsh Farm (14th-20th) was the 13th county record but the 4th there. A March record count of 11 **Gadwall** came from Fiddler's Ferry (9th) with 2 at Marbury No1 tank (27th) and 50 at Woolston Eyes (26th). **Teal** numbers at Marbury No1 tank declined from 255 to 51 during the month. A **Green-winged Teal** arrived at Rostherne Mere (4th-8th), before moving to Frodsham No6 tank (11th-30th). A female **Garganey** was briefly at Marbury No1 tank (27th) and a good total of 22 **Shovelers** were at Budworth Mere (19th). A high count of 428 **Pochard** were at Woolston Eyes (9th). Up to 29 **Goldeneye** remained at Rostherne Mere during the month. The drake **Smew** remained at Inner Marsh Farm until the 22nd and a redhead at Woolston Eyes until 12th at least. Three redheads remained at Frodsham No6 tank (to 9th, 2 until 13th) with one remaining until the 17th. During the High tide watch (9th-10th) both **Red-breasted Mergansers** and **Goosanders** were seen offshore with 3 of the latter at Poynton Pool (16th). **Ruddy Duck** numbers at Budworth Mere declined from 88 (1st) to 30 (28th).

A **Hen Harrier** passed through Rostherne Mere (11th). Single **Goshawks** were seen at Macclesfield Forest (3rd) and over Budworth Mere (17th). **Buzzards** were seen at Bostock, Bradwell, Crewe Cemetery, Dane Valley, Neumann's Flash and Sandbach Flashes, 3 were at Brereton (28th), 2 at Fiddler's Ferry (16th) and up to 4 regularly at Rostherne Mere. The first **Osprey** of Spring flew North over Frodsham (30th) and **Merlins** were at Sandbach Flashes (2nd), Woolston Eyes (9th) with 2 at Parkgate. **Peregrines** were at Rostherne Mere (8th), Toft (7th), Woolston Eyes (16th) with 2 at Neumann's Flash (2nd), Sandbach Flashes (9th) and 2 or 3 remained at Fiddler's Ferry. Two **Grey Partridge** were seen near Doddington Mere (26th). A **Water Rail** remained at Sandbach Flashes (to 25th).

Up to 7 **Oystercatchers** were in the Witton area with display noted also up to 4 displaying at Rostherne Mere. The first **Little Ringed Plovers** were at Sandbach Flashes (11th) and Neumann's Flash (26th). Up to 92 **Golden Plovers** and 800 Lapwing remained at Fiddler's Ferry during the month. Seven **Little Stints** were on Frodsham's ICI tank (29th-30th). A high count of 50 **Purple Sandpipers** were still at Hilbre (31st). Up to 12 **Ruff** were at Inner Marsh Farm. Only one **Jack Snipe** was flushed during High Tide at Parkgate (10th) with 4 at Mow Cop (22nd). About 70 **Snipe**

were flushed from Ashton's Flash (16th) with a Woodcock there (2nd). A count of c1200 **Black-tailed Godwits** at Inner Marsh Farm (15th) was a new reserve record, up to 1000 were at Frodsham Score for much of the month and 2 visited Sandbach Flashes (23rd). Up to 110 **Curlews** visited Budworth Mere during the month with c40 at Tatton (6th). Up to 12 **Spotted Redshanks** were at Inner Marsh Farm and the wintering **Green Sandpiper** was again seen at Sandbach Flashes (31st) with others at Frodsham (2) and Gatewarth.

An adult **Mediterranean Gull** was at Redesmere in early March with an adult on the Weaver Bend (10th) followed by at least 5 at Frodsham (mainly No6 tank) from 20th and 1-2 at Woolston Eyes (17th-31st). A probable 1st summer **Bonaparte's Gull** was at Frodsham No1 tank on the 29th and a possible 1st winter **Ring-Billed Gull** at Richmond Bank (7th). At least 4 **Yellow-legged Gulls** were at Richmond Bank during the month. During the month at least 9 separate **Iceland Gulls** were seen on the Richmond Bank (2 first winters, 2 first summers, 2 second winters, 2 second summers and an adult) with 3 birds together on the 15th and 21st. Possibly one of the above 1st winters visited Fiddler's Ferry on the 8th-9th (also an adult on 9th) and Frodsham on the 18th (also an adult on 22nd) and a different 2nd winter at Maw Green Tip, Sandbach (19th). During the month at least 7 different **Glaucous Gulls** were seen on the Richmond Bank (3 first winters, a first summer, a second winter, a second summer and an adult) including 3 birds together on the 18th. Two 1st winter birds were at Maw Green Tip (19th) and a 1st winter was a Macclesfield Tip (1st). Passage **Kittiwakes** included 2-3 on 3 dates at Rostherne Mere with a single at Woolston Eyes (5th and 19th). The earliest **Sandwich** and **Common Terns** were both off Hilbre (22nd), the latter being the earliest county record if confirmed.

A **Ring-necked Parakeet** over Poynton Pool (30th) was perhaps the reincarnation of the former resident. A single **Short-eared Owl** was at Fiddler's Ferry (8th-9th) and 2 hunted at Parkgate all month. A **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** at Sandbach Flashes (16th) was a good find there with 2 pairs were at Marbury CP. A leucistic **Skylark** at Arpley (from 6th) was photographed. Two **Shorelarks** remained on ICI tank, Frodsham until the 22nd. The earliest dates for **Sand Martin** were Astbury Mere (22nd), Budworth Mere (8th), Fiddler's Ferry (31st), Frodsham (22nd), Sandbach Flashes (17th) and Woolston Eyes (23rd), following on from the earliest ever Cheshire records at Dane-in-Shaw Brook (13th Feb) and Rostherne Mere (28th Feb). The earliest arrival dates for **Swallow** were over Ness (before 12th) and at Budworth Mere (12th) both very early birds with another at Astbury Mere (22nd). **House Martins** were at Budworth Mere by the third week. The first **White Wagtails** at Frodsham (11th), Hilbre (11th) and Sandbach Flashes (30th). Four **Waxwings** were at the Foreshore Street and Battersby Lane junction, Warrington (9th-23rd). An immature male **Black Redstart** was at Lower Withington, mid-month.

A report of **Redstart** near Sandbach (2nd) will if confirmed constitute the earliest ever record for the county by nearly a month !!, the previous record was at Cholmondeley on 30th Mar 1958. Another early migrant was a **Whinchat** at Frodsham (30th) - the second earliest ever for Cheshire (earliest was at Moreton on 29th Mar 1981) with this site also claiming a **Stonechat**. **Wheatears** arrived on time at Frodsham (17th) and Woolston Eye (31st). Early **Ring Ouzels** were at Red Rocks (10th), Hoylake (11th) and Moreton. A flock of 250 **Fieldfares** were at Sandbach Flashes (22nd). About 500 **Redwing** were still at Macclesfield Forest (5th). A **Blackcap** singing at Weston near Crewe may have overwintered (18th) and others were at Bostock (27th), Marbury CP (16th), Poynton Pool (31st), Rostherne Mere (23rd) and Woolston Eyes (4th). The first migrant **Chiffchaffs** arrived at Inner Marsh Farm (1st), Budworth Mere (8th), Woolston Eyes (9th), on the 11th birds were at Barthomley near Crewe, Frodsham, Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton - the



observers earliest ever record by nearly 3 weeks, Pettypool Woods, Rivacre Valley (3 on 11th), Sandbach Flashes and Sutton Resr. Later records came from Rostherne Mere (12th), Whirley Pool (12th), Astbury (15th), Great Sankey (20th) and Poynton Pool (23rd). Over the Bank Holiday weekend totals across the county must have involved 250+ birds and included 10+ at Woolston Eyes (31st). A **Willow Warbler** reported at Fiddler's Ferry (22nd-23rd) was the second earliest ever there and may have been present 2 weeks earlier. A bird at Meols (11th) and then Leasowe (12th) was the second earliest county record (earliest was 10th Mar 1994 at Fiddler's Ferry). Single **Ravens** were over Crewe Cemetery (20th) - a first there, Fiddler's Ferry (9th) with 2 on 30th, Frodsham (15th), 2 over Neumann's Flash (22nd) and at Toft (3rd). **Tree Sparrow** numbers at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton reached a phenomenal 50 on the 25th, nearly a 40% increase on the previous site record. Up to 100 **Chaffinches** were at Redesmere (3rd) with up to 36 **Bramblings** at Frodsham, 25+ at Parkgate (9th) and 4 at Sandbach Flashes (29th-30th) were a good find there. About 400 **Siskins** were at Macclesfield Forest (5th). A **Twite** was reported from Mow Cop (22nd) and 3 at Frodsham (16th). A **Lapland Bunting** was at Frodsham (27th-28th) and 4 **Snow Buntings** were at Leasowe (16th) with up to 12 at Red Rocks. A flock of 17 **Yellowhammers** fed with **Chaffinches** at Brereton (25th).

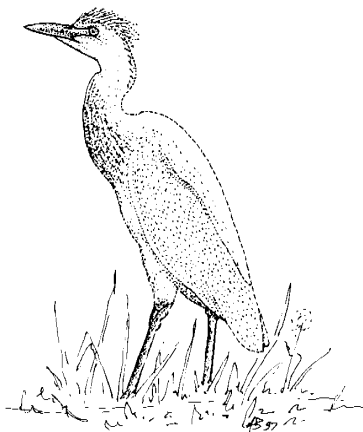
April

A **Cattle Egret** was seen separately at 6 acres pond by the A540/B5140 Junction at West Kirby from 8.15am-9.10am and was later seen in flight over Thurstaston at 12.30pm flying NW, both on the 30th. This if accepted will constitute the first county record. Other rare herons included a **Little Egret** which visited the Dee Estuary briefly and a **Spoonbill** at Frodsham all month with 2 from 22nd-27th.

The **Red-necked Grebe** remained at Frodsham (1st) before moving to Budworth Mere (2nd) and 7 **Black-necked Grebes** remained at Woolston Eyes (11th). Twelve **Greylag** at Fiddler's Ferry (13th) was a new site record. A male **Ruddy Shelduck** was at Marbury No1 tank (30th) with others at Rostherne Mere (24th) and Chelford SQ's on several dates in late Apr. A pair of **Mandarins** visited Tatton Mere (6th) from the nearby hall gardens. A drake **Chiloe Wigeon** arrived at Sandbach Flashes (29th) and a pair of **Gadwall** were there (20th). A drake **Green-winged Teal** remained at Frodsham No6 tank until 27th visiting the Score occasionally. The last **Pintail** at Sandbach Flashes departed (6th) with pairs at Frodsham No6 tank (19th) and Woolston Eyes (30th). A male **Garganey** visited Budworth Mere (1st-9th) with a pair at Inner Marsh Farm. On the 6th, 130 **Tufted Ducks** at Tatton Mere were accompanied by a redhead type hybrid with the latter bird still present later in the month. A male **Scaup** visited Inner Marsh Farm (9th). A flock of 12 **Goldeneye** were on Astbury Mere (3rd) with 33 at Tatton/Melchett Mere (6th) and 6 still at Macclesfield Forest (22nd).

A male **Marsh Harrier** at Woolston Eyes (5th) was the earliest ever there. Single **Buzzards** were at Sandbach Flashes on 4 dates, 1-2 were seen at Marbury and 3 at Fiddler's Ferry (27th) was the third ever record there. Single passage **Ospreys** visited Appleton Resr (10th), Frodsham (11th), Great Sutton (23rd), Inner Marsh Farm (singles on 2 dates), Radnor Mere, Rostherne Mere over the M56 (14th), Tatton (6th) and Woolston Eyes (12th). A **Merlin** was at Frodsham (1st). A **Hobby** visited Marbury No1 tank (25th) and one **Peregrine** remained at Sandbach Flashes (to 27th). At least 13 **Red Grouse** were in the Three Shires Head area (13th) and 13 **Grey Partridges** were at Frodsham (12th).

An **Oystercatcher** over a Poynton observer's house was a welcome garden tick (9th). The first **Little Ringed Plover** arrived at Inner Marsh Farm (13th) and Woolston Eyes (19th) while 8 were at Sandbach Flashes (19th). On Frodsham's ICI tank ten pairs of **Ringed Plover** were located nesting and 3 of them had young by the end of the month. A **Sanderling** dropped in at Sandbach Flashes (25th) and 7 **Little Stints** remained at Frodsham (1st). A lek of 9 **Ruffs** and 2 **Reeve's** was at



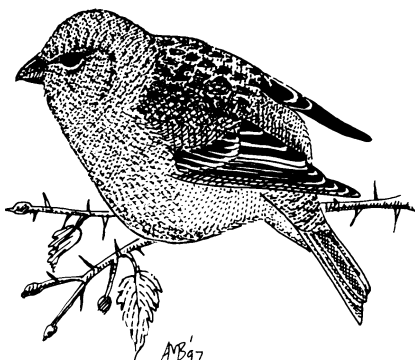
Frodsham (28th). At Inner Marsh Farm **Black-tailed Godwits** set another reserve record with 1200+ during the month, 1200+ at Frodsham Score and up to 3 visited Neumann's Flash on 3 dates. The first **Whimbrel** report was at Sandbach Flashes (5th) with 2 at Budworth Mere (18th). Inner Marsh Farm had 18 **Spotted Redshanks** on 3 dates. Single passage **Green Sandpipers** were Fiddler's Ferry (13th), Rostherne Mere (20th) and Sandbach Flashes (8th and 22nd). The first returning **Common Sandpipers** were at Frodsham (17th), Macclesfield forest (27th), Poynton Pool (25th), Rostherne Mere (27th), Sandbach Flashes (17th) and Woolston Eyes (19th). A **Turnstone** at Sandbach Flashes (27th) was a good record there.

A **Mediterranean Gull** remained at Woolston Eyes until the 4th and a 2nd summer was at Inner Marsh Farm (4th-13th) and Houghton Green Flash on the 20th. A 1st winter **Little Gull** was at Inner Marsh Farm (5th). A **Ring-billed Gull** was at the Weaver Bend (24th) briefly. At least 3 Yellow-legged Gulls were at Richmond Bank during the month and an immature **Glaucous Gull** visited Sandbach Flashes (6th) with a 1st summer at Richmond Bank (26th and 29th). A 2nd winter **Iceland Gull** was seen by the Gowy off the M56 (28th). A **Kittewake** was at Rostherne Mere (15th). A flock of 4 **Sandwich Terns** were at Budworth Mere (18th), the largest ever count there, where birds have been annual since 1992. An adult **Common Tern** passed through Gatewarth (29th) and 2 **Arctic Terns** visited both Budworth Mere and Rostherne Mere (26th). A **Black Tern** hawked over Rostherne Mere during a hailstorm (28th) and visited Pickmere next day.

An early **Turtle Dove** was at Moreton. **Cuckoos** were at Fiddler's Ferry (20th), Forge Bed (15th), Rostherne Mere (24th), Sandbach Flashes (20th) and Woolston Eyes (20th). A **Long-eared Owl** was at Marbury CP (7th). The first **Swift** was at Frodsham (20th) but most arrived on the 26th at Budworth Mere, Fiddler's Ferry - earliest ever by a week and Sandbach Flashes. The peak count of **Sand Martins** at Fiddler's Ferry (26th) was 51 with 70 at Tatton (6th) and 120+ at Budworth Mere (12th). The first dates for **Swallows** included Fiddler's Ferry (19th), Middlewich (5th), Poynton Pool (9th), Sandbach Flashes (3rd) and Woolston Eyes (5th). In contrast **House Martins** were scarcer than usual with the earliest arrivals at Poynton Pool (10th) - joint earliest ever, Sandbach Flashes (3rd) and Woolston Eyes (10th) with 60+ at Budworth Mere (12th). Passage **Tree Pipits** included a single at Marbury CP (20th) and 2 at Rostherne Mere (13th) with birds back on breeding territory by the end of the month. The earliest **Yellow Wagtails** were at Frodsham No6 tank (4 on 19th), Gatewarth (7th) - an early record here, Neumann's Flash (12th), Sandbach Flashes (12th) and Rostherne Mere (27th). A male **Blue-headed Wagtail** returned to the Weaver Bend (29th), presumably last years breeding bird. By the 27th, a high count of 10 **White Wagtails** were at Sandbach Flashes with birds at Neumann's Flash on 6 dates from 12th and a single at Rostherne Mere (13th). **Dippers** bred at Congleton again and another bird was at Dane-in-Shaw brook (4th). Single **Black Redstarts** were at Poynton (18th) and Langley (20th-22nd).

Passage **Redstarts** were at Catchpenny Lane, Chelford (20th), Sandbach Flashes (24th) and Rostherne Mere (12th-13th) with breeding birds at Tegg's Nose (23rd). Sandbach Flashes had a good passage of **Wheatears** with up to 6 on 6 dates (from 6th), with the first birds at Fiddler's Ferry (20th), Marbury CP (21st) and Poynton (10th). A male **Ring Ouzel** at Rostherne Mere (26th-27th) was a good record there. The last **Fieldfares** included 60 at Catchpenny Lane, Chelford (27th) and a few lingered next day, 39 at Macclesfield forest (22nd), 65+ near Poynton Pool (9th) and 8 at Sandbach Flashes (6th). The first **Grasshopper Warbler** was at Neumann's Flash (15th) but on the 27th an influx occurred with singles at Fiddler's Ferry and Rostherne Mere where this species is rare, 3 were at Woolston Eyes and 7 were reported from Hilbre. The earliest **Sedge Warblers** were at Butterfinch Bridge (26th), Fiddler's Ferry (12th), Frodsham No6 tank (12th), Poynton Pool (27th) - the earliest ever there, Sandbach Flashes (18th), Rostherne Mere (24th) and Woolston Eyes (18th). The first dates for **Reed Warblers** were at Butterfinch Bridge (17th), Croxton Flash (26th), Fiddler's Ferry (27th), Sandbach Flashes (12th) and Rostherne Mere (12th) was early for the last site. The only report of **Lesser Whitethroat** received was at Sandbach Flashes (30th). **Whitethroats** again arrived in good numbers with the earliest dates at Croxton Flash (26th), Fiddler's Ferry (20th and 11 on 27th), Frodsham (14th), Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (30th) - the earliest ever there, Marbury No1 tank (12th) and Sandbach Flashes (20th). An early **Garden Warbler** was at Marbury No1 tank (14th) while Fiddler's Ferry had its earliest ever by over 2 weeks on the 26th. A **Wood Warbler** was singing at Trentbank Resr (27th). Both **Blackcap** and **Chiffchaff** arrived at Fiddler's Ferry (both 12th) and 8 of the latter singing at Dog wood, Tatton (6th). The first dates for

Willow Warblers included Crewe Cemetery (8th), Fiddler's Ferry (5 on 12th, 8 on 20th), Marbury CP (2nd), Middlewich (9th), Poynton Pool (2nd) - the earliest ever there, Rostherne Mere (2nd) and Sandbach Flashes (8th). An early female **Pied Flycatcher** at Sandbach Flashes (12th) was a rare record there and 2 were back at Tegg's Nose (17th). A **Marsh Tit** was at Neumann's Flash (7th). Over 30 **Tree Sparrows** remained nearby at Forge Bed mid-month and 40+ still at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (11th). **Bramblings** remained at a few scattered sites: Macclesfield Forest (1 on 16th), Sandbach Flashes (2 on 7th), Rivacre (4 on 10th), Rostherne Mere (1 on 15th) and Weston (6 on 1st). A good find was a possible male **Pine Grosbeak** at Lingham Lane, Meols by the Lighthouse for 4 hours up to 5.30pm but not relocated by dark on the 26th. Unfortunately only the two finders saw this major national rarity but even if the identification is confirmed it is likely to be given a 'escapee' tag.

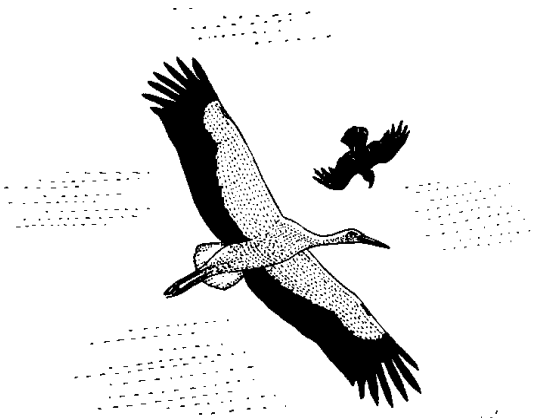


May

A Stork Species was seen flying West over Poynton at 10.40am (2nd) but not specifically identified however another sighting (30th) was confirmed as a **White Stork** flew SW over Poynton Station (and therefore flying directly over my house - although I was not in at the time!!). Other rare herons included a **Little Egret** which visited Inner Marsh Farm and Parkgate briefly mid-month and the **Cattle Egret** was again reported at a pool by the A540/B5140 Junction at West Kirby (2nd).

The first **Great Crested Grebe** chicks at Rostherne Mere hatched on 29th and 8 at Fiddler's Ferry (25th) was new May maxima. **Black-necked Grebes** at Woolston Eyes remained all month with 2 pairs breeding with a pair at a further site (location withheld). A count of 22 **Cormorants** on 18th at Fiddler's Ferry was a new May record there. A **Ruddy Shelduck** remained on Frodsham Score throughout. A pair of **Shelducks** at Chelford SQ's hatched 6 young by the end of the month with 730 at Frodsham Score and a pair of Mandarins visited Rostherne Mere (11th). A male **Wigeon** at Fiddler's Ferry (10th and 31st) was first ever May record there with 6 at Frodsham in late May. At Woolston Eyes **Gadwall** numbers reached 72 on the 30th and 12 at Inner Marsh Farm (24th) was a new May record there. At Rostherne Mere on the 3rd, 9 **Mallard** broods were seen and Poynton Pool had it's best ever season so far. A female **Pintail** was still at Inner Marsh Farm in late May and a male visited Poynton Pool (12th). A drake **Garganey** at Rostherne Mere (3rd) was the first there since 1992, 1-2 drakes at Inner Marsh Farm all month, single at Woolston Eyes (28th) and the first of the year at Frodsham on 11th, increasing to 3 males on 29th. A pair of **Scaup** stayed on Budworth Mere (15th-18th). The last **Goldeneye** left Rostherne Mere (4th) and the first **Ruddy Duck** brood of the year at Woolston Eyes (30th).

A **Honey Buzzard** was reported flying South East of Lymm at 3.30pm towards M56 junction 8 it may have landed in wood just east of Lymm, north of the motorway (22nd). The only report of **Marsh Harrier** I have received this Spring was a female at Frodsham (17th) with the lack of reports from the Inner Marsh Farm is puzzling as this area regularly has birds moving through in Spring. At the Cat and Fiddle (15th) a male **Hen Harrier** quartered the Moors and was the male from a breeding pair just over the border in Derbyshire. An immature male **Montagu's Harrier** past both Red Rocks and Hilbre (17th) and another **Buzzard** was at Fiddler's Ferry



(25th) with 3 nearby at Woolston Eyes (25th). Passage **Ospreys** were at Redesmere then Appleton Resr (5th) with another at the latter site (7th) and Mollington (6th). Only 4 records of **Hobbies** included singles at Budworth Mere (18th), Frodsham (4th), Inner Marsh Farm (4th) and 2 at Rostherne Mere (23rd). A **Peregrine** at Rivacre Valley (5th) was only the third ever there. At least 4 pairs of **Grey Partridges** are breeding at Fiddler's Ferry and a bird at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (24th) was an excellent local record. The only **Quail** record came from Frodsham with 2 calling on the 26th.

A pair of **Oystercatchers** bred at Chelford SQ's with young seen from mid-month with up to 5 at Sandbach Flashes. Very poor wader passage at Neumann's Flash included up to 6 **Little-ringed Plovers**, 2 **Ringed Plovers** (on 2 dates), 2 **Sanderling** (3rd), up to 7 **Dunlin**, a **Whimbrel** (4th) and 2 **Greenshank** (17th-18th with 1 on 25th) with no reports from Marbury No1 tank or Budworth Mere. Four summer plumaged **Little Stints** were at Frodsham No5 tank (28th) with 2 at Inner Marsh Farm (4th). Most of the 500+ **Black-tailed Godwits** at Inner Marsh Farm were first summer birds. A **Whimbrel** was at Gatewarth (2nd) and several pairs of **Curlews** were reported breeding in the eastern hills. A **Greenshank** at Rostherne Mere (31st) was a rare record there. A **Wood Sandpiper** was at Inner Marsh Farm (23rd) and Sandbach Flashes mid-month. Two summer plumaged **Turnstones** at Gatewarth (2nd) was a very unusual record there.

A 1st summer **Mediterranean Gull** was at Dove Point (18th) and **Little Gulls** at Rostherne Mere (28th) and Woolston Eyes early in the month. A 1st summer **Bonaparte's Gull** was reported at Woolston Eyes on the evening of the 3rd. Of the 2000 **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** at Gatewarth on the 8th about 95% were non-adults. Two **Yellow-legged Gulls** were on Neumann's Flash (28th) with 4 at Gatewarth (8th). Single 1st summer and 2nd summer **Iceland Gulls** were at Richmond Bank (2nd and 13th respectively), a 2nd summer was at New Brighton (3rd) with an unaged bird at Hilbre (9th). First summer **Glaucous Gulls** were at Dove Point (18th), Frodsham (1st-15th) and Gatewarth (2nd). **Sandwich** and **Common Terns** passed through Woolston Eyes mid-month. A Common Tern visited Chelford SQ's (17th) with 2 passed through Rostherne Mere (17th) and 1 next day. A few **Black Terns** arrived in the County with 7 at Tatton (2nd), 5 past New Brighton (3rd), 3 at Woolston Eyes (3rd), a single at Inner Marsh Farm (15th), two at Budworth Mere (17th) and a single at Frodsham No6 tank (24th) - a much better showing than the last 2 years.

Turtle Doves were reported from Neumann's Flash (16th and 20th). Only single **Cuckoos** were calling at Poynton, Rostherne Mere and Fiddler's Ferry with several in the eastern hills and possibly 12 at Woolston Eyes (17th). A new **Barn Owl** nesting site was discovered and the most easterly pair of **Little Owls** was discovered at Cut Thorn Hill. A **Short-eared Owl** at Frodsham (12th) was very late. A **Hoopoe** was reported near Woolston Eyes mid-month. A **Green Woodpecker** heard from a Poynton garden was the first there. A flock of **Swifts** at Rostherne Mere (10th) was estimated at 1000 birds with 2000 **Swallows** hawking over the mere (8th). Fiddler's Ferry had its first **House Martin** on the 12th. **Yellow Wagtails** have been very scarce this Spring with 1-2 at Chelford SQ's on 2 dates a good example of the poor year so far. A red spotted male **Bluethroat** was at Red Rocks (where else !!) on the 18th but only early morning. It may have been the same bird that was at Seaforth (16th-17th). The Woolston Eyes annual warbler count (17th) produced 8 **Grasshopper Warblers**, 219 **Sedge Warblers**, 21 **Reed Warblers** - high total, 4 **Lesser Whitethroats**, 109 **Whitethroats**, 40 **Blackcaps** - record total and 110 **Willow Warblers** also a record total. Other Grasshopper Warblers were at Fiddler's Ferry and Gatewarth. Twelve Sedge and 4 Reed Warblers were singing at Fiddler's Ferry (18th) with at least 19 Sedge's at Frodsham (12th). A total of 19 singing male Whitethroats were at Fiddler's Ferry (25th) and **Garden Warblers** were at Hogshead Wood (14th) and Rostherne Mere (5th). A **Spotted Flycatcher** at Rostherne Mere (22nd) was the only record there so far this year but 2 at Rivacre Valley (11th) were unusual there. Fiddler's Ferry had its second breeding record of **Long-tailed Tit** (11th). Migrant **Golden Orioles** were at Poynton (singing male on 18th) and Dungeon Wood, Thurstaston (singing female on 20th). Single **Ravens** were at Fiddler's Ferry (19th) and Frodsham (17th and 26th) with a pair at Cut Thorn Hill (3rd). Five singing male **Chaffinches** was new site record at Fiddler's Ferry (25th). A **Corn Bunting** at Woolston Eyes (24th) was a good record there and 3 'jangled' at Frodsham. A touch of the bizarre was provided by a **Red-billed Quelea** at Hilbre arrived the same day (18th) as a **Bluethroat** and **Golden Oriole**, should we therefore dismiss it as an escapee when it could be a first for Britain!!

PREDICTIONS FOR JULY TO SEPTEMBER.

By July we are already in the middle of a massive Crossbill invasion with several thousand birds arriving across Britain. Three large flocks have been reported in Cheshire already and more birds are on their way. It's worth checking any flock for the rarer Parrot Crossbill (no records yet) and Two-barred Crossbill (only record is a dead male at Bebington on 22nd Oct 1966). Both species require careful separation. In 1990 the year of the last major invasion, over 250 birds arrived in the county and that total has already been exceeded. By August, wader passage should be well under way with White-rumped Sandpiper top of the wader list for the month with 7 of the 12 Cheshire records during this month. Other vagrant waders have included 2 Avocets, 6 Temminck's Stints, 3 Pectoral Sandpipers, 2 Dotterel, a Kentish Plover and Buff-breasted Sandpiper all since 1981. Ignore any passerines at your peril and you may miss out on a Wryneck or Melodious Warbler.

September is always the best month to see our emblem, the Leach's Petrel. In Sept 1978, Cheshire witnessed one of the largest ever movements in British history. Numbers peaked at 328 on the 15th, 663 on 17th, a phenomenal 959 on the 27th (probably the largest ever day count for any British site) and an estimated 800 on the 30th, all counts came from Hilbre except the last which was from New Brighton. On this last date birds littered the nearby coastal fringe with at least 5 birds inland including one at Sutton near Macclesfield. Other species involved (on 30th) were: 1 Storm Petrel, 3 Grey Phalaropes, 6 Pomarine Skuas, 35 Arctic Skuas, 4-6 Long-tailed Skuas, 24 Great Skuas, 100 Little Gulls, 6+ Sabine's Gulls along with a few Fulmar, Manx Shearwaters, Gannets and several hundred Kittiwakes. A repeat of such large numbers would go down very well with most of us.

If you would like to see your Cheshire and Wirral sightings featured here then send details to me, to arrive by the first week in September.

Phil Oddy, 4 Swan Close, Poynton, Stockport, Cheshire, SK12 1HX. tel 01625 877855

Thanks/Acknowledgements for Recent Reports go to:- S & G Barber, Birdnet, Birdwatch and Birdwatching Magazines, Jeff Clarke, D. Cogger, Pete Hall (Toft), Inner Marsh Farm Log, K. Kirk, Keith Massey (Fiddler's Ferry Reserve), Bryan Roberts (Tatton and Knutsford Moor LNR), Rostherne Mere NNR log, Sandbach Log, D. Walters (Marbury CP & Witton Lime beds), WECG and anyone else who passed records on.

BACK FROM THE BRINK

This article is a summary of a booklet, Back From The Brink, which reviews the present state of birds of prey in the United Kingdom. The booklet has been produced by a consortium of many environmental groups including RSPB, BTO, WWF, WWT, the Wildlife Trusts and the National Trust and begins by outlining the conservation status of our birds of prey. On the red list (species of high concern) are Hen Harrier, Marsh Harrier, Merlin, Osprey, Red Kite and White-tailed Eagle. The amber list (species of medium concern) is made up of Golden Eagle, Honey Buzzard, Kestrel, Montagu's Harrier and Peregrine. While the green list (species of low concern) comprises Buzzard, Goshawk, Hobby and Sparrowhawk.

Then comes a description of the historical background to the present position. Persecution of birds of prey increased in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but after 1914 a recovery took place due to a mixture of government legislation, protection and the decline of gamekeeping. However the Second World War and its aftermath led to a worsening situation; Peregrines were persecuted in wartime because of their impact upon message-bearing carrier pigeons, gamekeeping revived and organochlorine pesticides such as DDT poisoned many birds of prey. Restrictions on pesticides, active conservation and protection measures together with reintroductions of certain species have resulted in an improved status for birds of prey today. However, they are still relatively uncommon and below the level that the countryside could support; only the Hobby has shown increase beyond previous known levels. Numbers will not however, increase indefinitely, but will stabilise at a level determined by food supply and nest sites.

Although birds of prey have enjoyed full legal protection since 1954/1961 illegal destruction, by poisoning, shooting, trapping and destruction of eggs and young is still frequent. Between 1990 and 1995 there were 456 incidents, with Buzzard, Peregrine and Hen Harrier the most frequent targets. The difficulty of securing sufficient evidence limits the number of prosecutions.

Three individual species are restricted by illegal killing. Golden Eagle has remained static at about 420 pairs since 1982. Persecution on grouse moors has resulted in more failed breeding and illegal killing than in deer forests. Buzzard has recovered from the myxomatosis outbreaks of the 1960s, which decimated their main food supply, and is now at about 12,000 pairs. It is spreading into East and Southern England from its traditional habitats and is slowly increasing, due in part to a decline in poisoning. Hen Harrier, on the other hand, is showing a decline to about 690 pairs. This fall is due to a variety of factors, among them illegal destruction on grouse moors, where nests are easily accessible, and the growth of mature forestry plantations which reduce the required habitat.

Five species were brought to extinction, or near extinction, in the United Kingdom by 1954. White-tailed Eagle was extinct by 1916 but a programme of reintroduction, begun in 1975, led to the first fledging of a wild chick in 1985 and 12 nest attempts, 7 of them successful, in 1996. Egg collecting and persecution, plus a slow rate of natural growth, limit their recovery. After extinction in 1883 Goshawk was re-established in the 1950s and has increased to about 400 pairs, though persecution, especially in the Lowlands, is hampering expansion. Marsh Harrier was reduced to one breeding pair by 1971 but numbers now about 160 pairs. Osprey was persecuted to extinction by 1916 but its re-establishment in Scotland in 1954 led to a population of 14 pairs by 1996 and the prospect of its reintroduction in England. Protected in Wales, Red Kite was just saved from extinction and has now increased to about 200 pairs, of which about 50 are reintroduced pairs in England and Scotland.

Several species were adversely affected by organochlorines. Peregrine was reduced to 360 pairs by 1963 but has now increased to about 1200, despite a decline in some areas. Pesticide poisoning had driven Sparrowhawk out of much of the south and east of England by the 1960s but by 1990 recovery had been such that there were about 34000 pairs. There is, however, some evidence that the decline in song birds is having an adverse effect. Kestrel, our commonest bird of prey, stands at 51000 pairs; like Sparrowhawk it has recovered from organochlorines but populations in lowland Britain are declining, probably due to agricultural intensification causing a reduction in prey species. Merlin fell to 550 pairs in the 1980s but has since recovered to 1300 pairs in 1993/4; loss of breeding habitat is likely to be the main factor inhibiting increase.

Of the other species, Hobby has increased to about 900 pairs and has spread northwards; the reasons for this are unclear but increases in dragonfly prey are a likely cause. Montagu's Harrier and Honey Buzzard are both scarce summer visitors at the edge of their range.

In conclusion, the recovery of many species is to be welcomed as evidence of some improvement in certain aspects of the environment. Birds of prey are important; they are part of the United Kingdom's biodiversity and are indicators of environmental health. They are a popular part of our national and cultural heritage and in some areas contribute to local economies through tourism. They are, however, very vulnerable to varieties of human impact and for that reason their existing legal protection is fully justified and must not be weakened. The government should see that bird of prey habitat is maintained, together with full legal protection; it should stop illegal persecution and ensure that the population is adequately monitored.



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18 Newcroft, Saughall Chester CH1 6EL

The booklet then looks at three contentious issues affecting birds of prey. Firstly, the killing of domestic pigeons by Peregrine, Goshawk and Sparrowhawk. This is a concern from pigeon fanciers, who claim losses are high. But there is little objective evidence to support these claims. Pigeon fanciers often overlook other causes of loss (e.g. pigeons losing their way or joining feral flocks) and their demands for control by killing are inappropriate as a very large number of birds would have to be removed to have a reasonable impact. They must accept that releasing domestic birds into the wild involves losses to predators and to other natural hazards. There is need for research to evaluate losses and to develop methods of minimising losses without killing birds of prey. Pigeons could be managed to reduce risk of predation (e.g. by routing them away from known birds of prey territories). Techniques such as the use of noise in flight or markings to deter attacks should also be investigated.

Another issue, often raised by bird lovers themselves, is the impact of birds of prey, especially Sparrowhawk, on songbirds. However there is no evidence that Sparrowhawk predation is a significant cause of songbird decline and many major prey species (eg Great Tit, Woodpigeon) are not in decline. The fall in the number of songbirds is almost certainly linked to the intensification of lowland farming resulting in loss of cover and loss of food supply. This development is also affecting of Sparrowhawk numbers and needs remedying by encouraging farmers to manage their land for farmland birds.

In upland areas, concern is felt that predation by Peregrine, Hen Harrier and Golden Eagle has reduced the grouse population. However this has been in decline for decades and only in exceptional circumstances is it likely to be linked to predation. A decline both in the quantity and quality of heather moorland due to a combination of afforestation and reduction in management is far more likely to be the major reason. A report on the effect of birds of prey on grouse bags and population is due out in June 1997, but any form of licensed control would be difficult to enforce and would require an unacceptably large number of birds of prey being killed. Methods of enhancing the quality of heather moorland would be far more likely to increase the grouse population.

One copy of this booklet was sent to CAWOS, hence this synopsis so that all members can understand it; anyone wishing for their own copy, or needing fuller details, should contact:-

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

COMPUTERS AND BIRDS

This is a well discussed subject amongst anyone who either submits records or reads Bird News, but perhaps one that will, in the future, play a very major role in the bird recording of the county. The records panel are faced with the annual task of compiling nearly a hundred pages of bird report from 100,000 records. All of them are individually assessed, normally for suitability and then manually cut up and compiled, again by hand. So, how can this burden be made easier? In an earlier edition Mike Holmes and John Heddon advocated the use of computers as being the only way forward. Is this really as simple as it sounds?..... read on.

Judith Smith (County Recorder for Greater Manchester) inputs all her county records herself and so it takes an awful long time. She deals with perhaps 20,000 records. The Sussex Ornithology Society (SOS) processed 30,000 records for 1995 using twenty three volunteers, which meant that if each person did an equal amount of work, they would input about 1300 bird sightings. A quick calculation at this point, based on this last average, would mean CAWOS needs seventy seven volunteers, all of whom own their own computers. That's just under a quarter of the membership! Which software packages are available? There seem to be three main ones worth consideration, "Avianstore", "Cobra" and "Club Recorder". Avianstore is at the cheap end of the market, with the other two relatively expensive. Greater Manchester, i.e. Judith, uses Avianstore, the BTO use Club Recorder and Sussex use Cobra.

In Club Recorder, bird records are held in five tables, relating to species, locations, sightings, observers and lists. It has a full Western Palearctic list of bird species which can easily be customised and added to should this be required. Locations are held in three sections, site, major site and region. Grid references can be applied as well as altitude and so habitat codes. Observers can be given unique initials and a list of contributors can be generated for use in annual bird reports. The list table will hold 254 lists, customised to suit individual

requirements. Using the sightings table enables you to input records using initial letters, providing there are comprehensive tables of observers and locations. Perhaps most importantly, there are built in links with Microsoft Word and Ami Pro word processing packages, both widely used in the home PC market. To use Club Recorder for Windows you have to be running Microsoft Windows version 3.1 or later. The latest version has an interface with the DMAP* mapping software package which can produce grid lined maps in a variety of forms. It also has additional graphics. Several graph style options are available allowing the best use of information.

The Cobra system is also compatible with DMAP and as with Club Recorder has improved considerably since its conception in 1989. Cobra, is perhaps, a little more sophisticated. Importing records is made easy with Cobra's ability to either use ASCII files generated by a SOS tailored program or by direct importation from other databases. Its flexibility is similar to Club Recorder and both Norfolk, using this package, and Sussex using Cobra can recommend computer storage of bird records.

Avianstore, written by a local, Les Halton, is purpose written for bird recording and is a data managing system. It stores the species either by name, BTD code or Western Palearctic name, number, location (index number in "library"), activity and age. When the record is typed in, the program looks for similar records on similar dates and asks the operator whether both or only one should be included, thus avoiding duplication. MPRO, written by Campbell Systems of London, is a versatile system that can be customised to suit a particular requirement. As with the other two, it is DOS based and can utilise DMAP. Although it's not marketed widely on a commercial basis, several clubs use it and at £90.00 per copy, is considerably cheaper than the Cobra system.

There you have it! Or have you? What is the purpose behind submitting records and producing the bird report? Apart from the present generation of birders being able to enjoy reading about last year's county birds and being able to research a particular species from all the raw material that wasn't used, every year's records are available for future generations.

And this is where the crunch comes! The idyllic scene of the County Recorder in the year 2020 retrieving archived material from our floppy discs is perhaps just a dream or a nightmare. Archivists, the custodians of the raw material of tomorrow's history, are worried. In 30 years time, our computerised material could amount to a pile of unintelligible gibberish. An old computer industry joke is "the world is divided into two classes of people: those who have lost data and those who are about to". How many people, or bird clubs, are in this second category?

It's likely that the original storage system will not be readable using future, more advanced, technology. Several computer companies, Apple and IBM amongst them, have declared they will preserve at least one good example of each generation of computers to prevent future problems of this nature. That according to the archivists, is not the solution. It certainly wouldn't help CAWOS in thirty years time! (Keeping copies means 30 years work would have to be re-inputted to be useful in a computerised world). One senior national archivist is quoted as saying "we will have failed as archivists if we are unable to preserve the records of our own generation". Perhaps it could also apply equally as a failure of ornithologists.

Another specialist in the field, working for the centre for Electronic Records at the US National Archives, likes to humble computer experts by reminding them that whilst papyrus scrolls have survived thousands of years, a text file on a floppy disc could have totally degraded in a decade. He's quoted as saying "no electronic medium can ever be considered permanent".

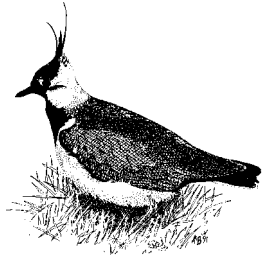
David Steventon and myself attended a meeting of ACRE (Association of County Recorders and Editors) at Swanwick, Derbyshire on Sunday 8th December, where a number of bird recording systems were on show. They do have advantages, can be very expensive (several hundred pounds for a limited Cobra system) and they do need manpower. Perhaps it is the way forward but are they still evolving. What happens if the software writer dies or moves on and you've got problems? Answers and volunteers, on a postcard please!

Tony Broome, County Recorder

References: BTO News and the Telegraph Newspaper
Definitions: DMAP - Distribution Method by Area Population

The View from the Farmyard

On the stubble field to the rear of the stackyard, two pairs of Lapwings have spent weeks sorting out their territories, but when the time came in April to plough the field nesting had not actually taken place. This made it very difficult for me to arrange any protection, the whole field took only a few hours to plough and within a week a crop of maize had been sown. The sparse cover afforded by the stubble was replaced with a dusty wilderness. The Lapwings abandoned the field, but were found only a few days latter on a potato field over the other side of the farm, territories sorted and lookouts posted. The speed with which they had achieved this implied that laying was imminent on the previous site, and that given a second suitable site relocation is possible if only just.



Whilst on holiday I purchased a copy of the Argyll bird report for 1995, it contained an article about the birds of Scotland based on "Birds of the West of Scotland including the Outer Hebrides" by Robert Gray and published in 1871. One of the references quoted was an act passed by the old Scottish parliament which ordered the destruction of "Peeseeweeps" (Lapwing) eggs, so that "these birds might not go south and become a delicious repast to our unnatural enemies the English". Lapwings were also much disliked for their behaviour of loud protest at nest sites, which would draw the redcoats to meeting places of covenanters, forced to hold their services in secluded glens for fear of persecution for their beliefs. It was reassuring to have my wife with me on holiday (ex-patriot Scot) just in case some large highlander decided to stand on my Peeseeweeps eggs!

Many of the summer migrants arrived back early this year, the Swallows were back with a rush. In a normal year one or two birds are in the yard weeks before the bulk return. Within the first 7 days of the first arrival we had 10 birds in the yard, not only was this unusual, but nests were in the process of being repaired and lined with the regulation white feathers. The one nest which was at this stage by the same time last year, went on to successfully raise three broods of young. It will be interesting if this could be repeated by more pairs this year. Toft's summer resident Canada Geese flock is in decline, with fewer adults present over the last three or four summers, however production of young is similar to previous years. The main decline has been in the resident-not-breeding flock who have perhaps been reduced in number by the culling policy practised on some local estates.

I have noted in past autumns, that the migrant Song Thrushes which arrive from the north, are far more at home in the open fields than are our resident birds. Often small flocks are to be seen in tree tops and in exposed positions, whereas our birds skulk to cover. During our recent family holiday in the Inner Western Isles, I found Song Thrushes far more common than at home and displaying a similar ease with the exposed positions favoured by our winter migrants. The far higher Song Thrush population density correlates with higher mollusc and insect population; and the almost total absence of Magpie and Jay, with low intensity agriculture. The abundance of suitable scrub for feeding and nesting, even in farmed areas, makes the Song Thrush almost the most commonly encountered bird in the region. I cannot say which is the most significant, difference in competition or environment between the Scottish or English habitats, but I suspect that each factor plays its part. However, what is plain to see, is that the Scottish population is in a far healthier state than ours. How much longer this will continue for is in some doubt. One farmer I spoke to told me he was receiving £100 for each cow and £30 for each sheep in EC subsidies. With this aid, stock numbers will surely increase and this will lead to the degradation of upland scrub, and an incentive to use spray and fertiliser to improve pasture almost certainly at the expense of insect and mollusc population.

One of the regular markers which tell spring is really here is the arrival of the cuckoo, this alas has become a much less reliable occurrence these days in Toft. Following the first bird being heard on the 20th of May, with the exception of another on June 1st, no other has been heard. Three records in 1994 and one in 1995 preceded a total blank in 1996. It would be a great loss to country life if the call of the Cuckoo were to go the way of the Corncrake. It has, I'm sure, been listened for by adult and child alike for centuries, each vying for the honour of claiming the first call. Each

year the broad sheet papers have their crop of claims mailed in, some highly dubious and receiving the due ridicule from informed bird watchers. One of my favourite and most played CD's features Handel's Concerto No 13 in F Major. This music was written to be played during the interval of "Israel in Egypt" and was first performed in 1739. The reason I mention this is that the piece is nicknamed "The Cuckoo and the Nightingale" and features the song of both birds, each an important part of English country life then as now.

Its a rough, tough world out there and I cannot understand why people bother with TV soaps, when a brief trip to the farmyard will provide an avian version of Dallas. The once happy and content pair of Swallows nesting in the milking parlour have had their lives turned upside down by the arrival of a gigolo fresh from the African sunshine. Intent on splitting the couple up and having the female and nest for his own, he has embarked on an aggressive campaign of being there when he shouldn't. The resident male can't leave to collect mud or insects or the drifter is there cooing up to his girl. So desperate action was called for. This consisted of the resident male attempting to couple with both his female and the gigolo at every opportunity! As you can imagine this had the desired effect and nothing has been seen of the playboy since.

The Collared Doves seem to have decided not to portray the image of peace like their white cousins, as two birds were on top of the silage shed tearing into each other like nudity had just come into fashion. This now provides me with an alternative answer to where the piles of feathers come from which I used to attribute to the actions of raptors. Not to be left out of the scandals are the House Sparrows. The colony is on the up, almost doubling its size in the last four years, this in turn has brought problems as suitable nest sites are now subject to some demand. Male House Sparrows could fall out with themselves!, so when the best nest holes are still on the open market they become the cause of some serious "argy-bargy". Brawling groups of sparrows tumble from building to bush to ground, oblivious to all around them, like mods and rockers on Brighton prom on bank holiday Monday. All this agro and sleaze makes me glad humans don't behave like that, well not in Knutsford anyway.

Pete Hall, The School House, Toft Road, Knutsford

[According to the "Nolan Report", Knutsford is a hot bed of sleaze! Eds]

RECORDS - LOVE OR HATE (Part Two)

Editors Comment: Keith was unhappy with the format we chose for part one of "RECORDS - LOVE OR HATE". He felt that the use of boxes in the illustration adversely affected the article and has offered to provide an original copy of his article to anyone sending him a self addressed and stamped DL size envelope. Whilst not wishing to tamper with, or radically alter, anyone's contribution, the Editorial team reserve the right to make changes where necessary. In this case the County Recorder was asked to edit the article as the outcome could directly effect record submissions in the future.

Now that you have your records laid out as shown in Part One you can do your own studies on your chosen species. First you have to decide which species to study. Choose a species which is close to where you live. Migrants which pass though your area and don't breed are ideal, or one that only breeds in small numbers. Next, how often can you get out? Every day at the same time is the best or every other day, anything less will be hopeless. You need to cover your species through each week, from the first record to the last one, regardless of the weather.

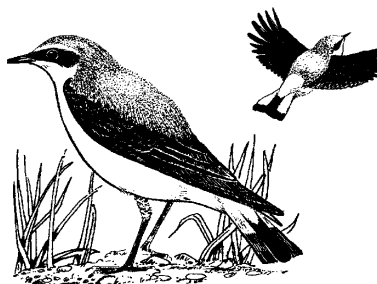
My studies have attempted to find out how many of a certain species passes through my chosen area each year. With your records laid out as shown in Part One, I will demonstrate how to calculate totals for spring passage, using my own records of Wheatear in 1994. Wheatears are mostly a spring migrant in my area but only make the return passage in small numbers. The other species I studied was Common Sandpiper. Only a few birds are recorded in spring, but return passage can start as early as the second week of June and end in October.

The first bird each spring is always the worst. You often wonder, have I missed an earlier one, but once migration gets under way its plain sailing. Ensure you get out every day you can through each week until spring or autumn passage stops even if the weather is

bad. For example, below you can see my first Wheatear in March 1994 occurred on the 13th. The second bird on 20th, third bird 24th, first female on 26th making the fourth bird. Then on 29th 26 birds came in making at least 29 different birds. The 31st showed most of the birds on the 29th had passed through my area. The second of April had five males and five females on site of which one male and three females were probably new birds to add on the end of March 29 birds. Just carry on adding new birds until the end of migration.

Count the sexes separately and usually you will get a higher count at the end of the period than if you counted the sexes together. Mark your calculations in pencil on the right hand side of the month and any mistakes can easily be rubbed out. You find most birds will pass quickly through your area with only odd ones staying a few days. Make certain you do not double count any of these birds. The passage of Wheatear in the spring of 1994 ended on the 17th May. A late bird was recorded by Brian Swan on 5th June making the total number at least 90 birds.

1m		13th March
1m		15th March
0	0	17th March
0	0	19th March
1m		20th March
0	0	22nd March
1m		24th March
1m	1f	26th March
1m		27th March
15m	11f	29th March
4m	2f	31st March
5m	5f	2nd April



Cheshire Countryside Management Services

With 90 Wheatear on spring passage and Common Sandpiper in the autumn numbering less than 50 birds you can see they are an easy number to work with and calculate each year. Anyone can do this in their own area.

After a few years of laying out your monthly records as I have shown you will have the first of many volumes of monthly counts. You now have to carry your records layout one stage further. In Part Three I will show how to arrange your records to enable you to check over 40 years of monthly maximum counts in seconds on an A4 size page, if you get that far with your records.

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

SEA-PIE

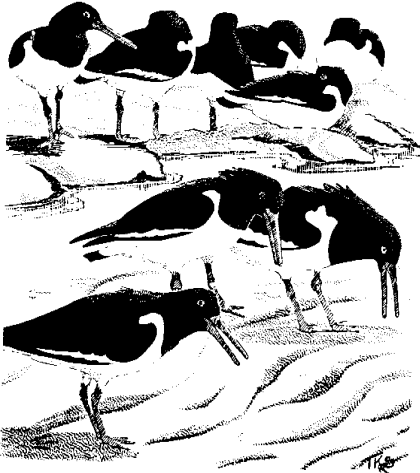
Perhaps it's because as an artist I enjoy working in black-and-white that I feel a special affinity for the Oystercatcher. But anyone who has ever spent any time on a beach in the autumn will have been caught up in the busy lives of these exuberant black-and-white wading birds.

At rest the plumage is a clear black above and pure white below but the Oystercatcher is seldom at rest for long. When the bird flies, the bold pattern on stiffly flickering wings contrasts with the colour of sea or sand and the vernacular name of Sea-pie becomes richly appropriate.

Autumn high tides bring concentrations of hundreds of Oystercatchers together. They prefer their own company and seldom mingle with the other waders. While I marvel at the sight and sound of such large flocks at this time of year, I cannot see them without remembering one particular bird with whom I shared a summer tide.

Her nest was a small scrape on a remote shingle beach on Findhorn Bay in the Grampian region of Scotland and the eggs were so well camouflaged that I was fortunate to see them in time to prevent them from being crushed underfoot. Of the Oystercatcher and her mate there was no sign.

Quickly I sketched the nest because it seemed to have been purposefully arranged. Larger pebbles had been thrust to the nest surround and the two eggs rested on shingle decorated with scraps of cockle-shell and the dried roots of heather. One pebble, too large for the bird to have moved and



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

Oystercatcher. If the eggs were washed out, I had in mind that I might move the nest above the strand line. After all I had my sketch-book to work from: I could recreate the setting down to the placing of each decorative cockle.

As the tide inched across the mud and fingered its way over the shingle, I resisted every bit of its way. The Oystercatcher sat tight. It wasn't my opposition, however, but that of an offshore wind, which turned the tide and the female was still sitting a little beyond the furthest reach of the water. Now, when I watch autumn flocks on the shore and pick out young birds of the year by their paler pink legs and the chocolatey cast to their plumage, I think of the dangers they have already run and wonder about the risks they have yet to face. Autumn and winter are hard times for young Oystercatchers. They have to learn a very specialised feeding technique and it takes two or three years to become proficient, so that young birds face a real risk of starvation. Despite their name, the Oystercatchers on the shore feed mainly on other shellfish, especially cockles and mussels. They can feed only when the tide is not full and each bird may need to take as many as 300 cockles each daylight tide to survive.

Shellfish are not easy prey and Oystercatchers seem to have two main methods of dealing with them. Some birds opt for force and hammer the shells open with the bill. Others prefer guile and stalk prey when it is submerged in shallow water with two parts of the shell slightly open. In a surprise raid the bird stabs the bill between the shells and snips the muscle which will clamp them together.

An Oystercatcher will always feed by one method or the other - once a hammerer always a hammerer. It seems that the young bird learns the technique from its parents; those raised by hammerers become hammerers themselves. Often a hammerer can be distinguished by the blunted end to what began as a chisel-shaped bill.

With such distinctive feeding method to be learnt, it is not surprising that the young Oystercatchers lose weight in their first winter and often in their second and third winters too. Best not to disturb them when they are feeding - every minute counts.

And yet they never look as if life is grim. They are burly and boisterous birds, coming together in noisy, piping parties of three, four or five birds. Bills pointing downwards and heads hunched into shoulders, they strut and circle, kleeping away with their noisy calls until suddenly tension seems to go and the piping stutters away like a clock running down. Oh yes, I have to confess a very great liking for the Oystercatcher.

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FERRIES

I first became aware of the possibilities of ferries as birdwatching platforms shortly after I started birdwatching (at a fairly advanced age!) on my first trip to Shetland in May 1985. On the ferry St Clair going up from Aberdeen I saw my first ever Great Skuas, Puffins and Black Guillemots. And from the inter-island ferries on my way up to Unst my first Great Northern Diver, and an Arctic Skua, a bird that symbolises Shetland for me. The return ferry journey to the Scottish Mainland was on the calmest sea I ever saw on the crossing, and the ferry skipper took the boat between Mousa (home of the Storm Petrel) and the Mainland. It turned out to be an omen, as south of Fair Isle I added to my British firsts with four Stormies.

May 87 saw me posted to Shetland for three years, and the chance was there to travel many more times on the ferries, and for me to become blasé about the auks, skuas and divers to be seen from them. I particularly remember a series of 5 trips to Whalsay in the winter of 87/88 in search of a banana bill, but seeing only Little Auks and every other shade of diver. Finally in February 88, I went out to Whalsay and the captain deviated to investigate an object in the water which turned out to be a floating bale. On the return trip (with two other birders) I caught a brief sighting of a diver on the opposite side of the ferry to where I was standing. The captain decided that as the tide was setting to the south I had probably seen the diver, and obligingly turned and set off after it. My friends spotted it again and I rushed across the bridge wing to join them. Sure enough it was my first White-billed Diver. And if that was not enough for the trip, my first Iceland Gull flew into the wake of the ferry as we neared the Mainland. It was a fine reward for so many hours craned over the side of that particular ferry.

In July 1988 I visited Out Skerries, seeing the usual Shetland goodies from the ferry *Filla*. On the return trip between Out Skerries and Vidlin, it was choppy and windy, and I was surrounded by the three green faces of my family, studiously avoiding the claustrophobic lounge. Trying to keep the binoculars steady, I caught my first close views of Manx Shearwaters, as three were disturbed by the ferry and took to the air. And in November of that year, on a twitch to Unst for a Pacific Golden Plover (plus the added attraction of a Short-toed Lark), there were 6 Pomarine Skuas and 80 Snow Buntings on the Yell Sound crossing between Toft and Ulsta, and three Pomarine Skuas on Bluemull Sound between Gutcher and Belmont. And I was lucky with both plover and lark!

My final ferry-related bird in Shetland came as I was literally walking up the St *Sunniva's* gangway in Lerwick in August 89 to take my family back to England. The RSPB warden's wife (who had come to see us off) hauled me off (but without too much protestation on my behalf) to see Shetland's first Laughing Gull at the north end of the harbour. I missed the juvenile Sabine's Gull at the same site, but I did manage to rejoin my bemused family before the ferry sailed!

Ferries faded from my life (as unfortunately did bird-watching) for a time, but reappeared in August 1994 with a cross Channel trip from Southampton to Cherbourg. Staring over the side for most of the five hour trip, I recorded Fulmar, Kittiwake and Gannet off the Isle of Wight, and some 45 more Gannets on the French side. The return journey in early September was interesting, as about an hour out from Cherbourg, two *Flava* wagtails came aboard, and I saw both Arctic and Great Skuas. Another Arctic Skua as we approached the Solent completed a successful trip.

1995 was the year of the Irish holiday, with 110 Manx Shearwaters, Gannet, Razorbill, Guillemot, Kittiwake and Fulmar recorded as we approached Dun Laoghaire. As part of my holiday, I made the pilgrimage to Cape Clear Island to try for the larger shearwaters. On the ferry journey out I saw some of the same species listed above, but the real prize was a Storm Petrel on the way in. Coming back from Dun Laoghaire to Holyhead, I lost count of the number of Manx Shearwaters seen on both Irish and Welsh sides, as well as a number in the middle of the Irish Sea. I have found during my ferry-watching experiences, that most seabirds are seen about 2 - 5 miles offshore, and that there seem to be fewer in mid-journey.

In May 1996 the scene switched to Turkey, and the ferries on the Dardanelles between Eceabat and Canakkale. I was staying on the Asian side of the Dardanelles but visiting the battlefields of Gallipoli, on the European side. I made five trips in all, and there was plenty to take the attention during the journey, from impromptu folk concerts from Turkish farm workers to the ubiquitous glasses of chai (tea) constantly available. When I was able to turn my attention outboard during the crossings,

I used them to good effect. I observed many Yelkouan Shearwaters, and was able to see the difference between their brownish colouration and the blacker British Manx Shearwaters. I also saw several Slender-billed and Mediterranean Gulls, and my first Gull-billed Tern. A later ferry crossing at the eastern end of the Sea of Marmara also brought in a Slender-billed Gull, and a possible Caspian Tern. The latest ferry trip was a day trip to Calais from Dover, and the outward journey was a real bust. Windless conditions and an incipient fog kept the birds at bay. By the time I returned, the fog had cleared and the sun was shining. Off Calais I saw a Black-throated Diver scurrying north, followed by 18 Common Scoter. Kittiwake, Fulmar and Razorbill added depth to the list. It was this latest trip that brought the subject of the watching I'd done from ferries to mind. It is certainly a way of killing the boredom of travelling (or of taking your mind off the queasy feelings being given out by your stomach), and it can add species to that all-important list. There's always that excitement for the unknown - that mega-rarity just a wave-top away. Come to think of it, there was that large seabird off Calais with colouring reminiscent of a juvenile Gannet, but not the jizz. It seemed to have a stiffer wing action than a Gannet, and the proportion of bodylength to wingspan was all wrong. Now just what does Harrison's "Seabirds" have to say about Albatrosses in northern waters?

RL Howells, 41 Tatton Drive, Sandbach, Cheshire, CW11 1DZ

Notes & Letters

PROBLEM STINT AT FRODSHAM

Whilst scanning through the wader roost at the west end of Frodsham No.6 tank at 1.00pm on Sunday 15 September 1996, I found a short-billed wader feeding on it's own.

It was watched, rather distantly - probably about 500 yards, for the next 2½ hours by, among others, Pete Berry, Adam Davison, Dave Walters, Chris Done and Jonathan Williams in fairly bad light (varying sunlight) through a variety of optics.

The bird was a lot smaller than Dunlin but noticeably bigger than three nearby Little Stints (with which it was occasionally in the same view); a fact that could be picked out with binoculars even at the distance involved. It's size, elongated appearance, well-defined pectoral band and (although fine wing detail could not be appreciated in the light and at such range), the pale fringes giving the bird an overall "scaly" effect initially pointed us all towards the possibility of a Baird's Sandpiper.

In continued observation we noted it's feeding action to be quite different from the Little Stints, feeding fairly sluggishly along the same stretch of mud, with wading forays into the water submerging the whole of it's legs (à la Curlew Sandpiper), as opposed to the Little Stints which fed actively ranging up and down a long stretch of mud edge (and never entering the water).

Although most of us felt it almost "had" to be a Baird's we decided not to put any news out but to wait and see if we got closer views and in particular a good view of the rump/tail (on very brief views we had confirmed it wasn't white rumped).

After about 1½ - 2 hours looking through a Leica Flourite on 60x we realised it had, although not very obvious, pale mantle braces and flight views revealed the bird had extensive white on the rump and tail with just a thin dark vertical band down the middle which ruled out Baird's and it became apparent that we had been watching possibly the weirdest Little Stint in the world!

Discussing the bird in the evening with Tony Ainsley, he referred me to the December 1986 British Birds article on four problem Stints in which there are photos and a description of a bird almost identical to ours.

The similarity of this bird, which was seen at Covenham Reservoir, Lincolnshire, 7th-19th September 1974, is uncanny - "the body looks peculiarly long It's tail projected slightly beyond the wing-tip" (although we couldn't tell whether the primary tips or tail were longer our bird appeared very elongated), "careful field observations over long periods clearly showed that it was 10-15% larger than accompanying Little Stints" (again spot on for our bird), "It fed steadily without the usual dashing activity of Little Stint". The Frodsham bird stayed over the next couple of days and was still being picked out from increasingly larger number of Little Stints.

The only differences between the Frodsham and Covenham bird were the latter's long bill (Frodsham bird bill was right size for Little Stint) and the formers more extensive pectoral band.

The BB conclusion for the Covenham bird was "It was probably just an extremely large, long-billed Little Stint but there remains a possibility of some other explanation for it's unusual appearance". The same applies to the Frodsham bird apart from the bill, so may be it was the 2nd weirdest Little Stint in the world - or perhaps one of a very rare steroid taking race!

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

[Just a thought, but why can't Baird's show faint moult braces and yet Little Stints can not only display aberant plumage and structure but behavior as well? Eds]

THE SUB-CULTURE!

Why does a bird have to attain full specific status to make it worth a tick for most birders? Are we taking a narrow minded or blinkered view of the birding world? And is anybody else as bemused as I am as to why some species are readily split into two or more species, while other, seemingly valid candidates are left gathering dust on the taxonomic shelf?

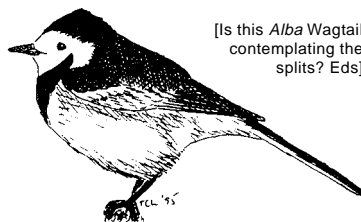
I regard the current taxonomic debates, played out with regularity in the birding press, as a typical microcosm of modern society. As the man says, "not everything in black and white makes sense". But in today's world everything appears to require a finite definition. There has to be a right and a wrong. Everything has a price, or in the case of birds, a worth. Full species are worth more than races or sub-species. Now that half the birding population appears to be a fully paid up member of the UK 400 Club the potential for ticking new species is diminishing. Answer! Create new species. Of course every evangelical crusade causes disquiet among 'the establishment', followed by a predictable fundamentalist backlash. The polarised debate, from irrevocably entrenched positions, endangers the whole faith and threatens to put us all in the dock on a disrepute charge.

If the birding worlds ethics on species validity and worth were applied to *Homo sapiens sapiens* we would be setting foot in very treacherous terrain indeed. No right minded person would suggest that the racially distinct human forms found around the globe were anything other than well marked regional variations and that all these variants were of equal worth.

There in lies a potential answer to the current taxa wars. Racial equality. Make each sub-species or race as scientifically valuable, or tickable, as every single species and you could nullify the arguments of both camps. The taxonomists could be left in peace to carry out their detailed research and publish their conclusions without undue pressure being exerted to announce their findings in haste, only for them to repent at a later date. There would also be less likelihood of them being vilified for their pronouncements. At the same time the twitching end of the spectrum would be given the equivalent of an à la carte selection, with a whole greatly expanded menu at affordable prices.

The serious benefit of this proposal, one that has been highlighted recently in the popular birding press, is the increased environmental benefit. Endemic races of pan-European species will be given greater protection. Perhaps the clearest British example would be 'Scottish' Crossbill *Loxia scotica*, whether or not you subscribe to the view that this is a valid species wouldn't matter a jot. The fact that it is an identifiable species, race, sub-species places an unequivocal burden of responsibility for it's protection upon the country in which it resides. The European Union would have to think twice before allowing the degradation of habitat in which geographically isolated and racially distinct populations of otherwise common European birds exist. Will the Great Wood of Calladon clothe the Glens of Scotland once more?

Does this process have any implications for the 'birders' of Cheshire? If nothing else it might encourage people to look with a more discerning eye on species groups such as the Wagtails (after all some authorities are calling for a split in *Alba* Wagtails), Pipits and Wheatear. Whilst the 'Gulls' present a whole gamut of possibilities. The CAWOS Bird Report could provide ever more illuminating information on the movements of what might currently be regarded as 'standard fair'. For instance how many races of Dunlin *Calidris alpina* occur on a regular basis and what are the percentages of the racial mix. The answer has previously been the province of the dedicated ringer. Now the twitchers may come to



[Is this *Alba* Wagtail contemplating the splits? Eds]

their assistance by finding a bird of the *hudsonia* race from North America as they scan the vast flocks roosting on No.5 tank at Frodsham, whilst trying to sort out their *alpina*'s from their *schinzii*. Just for a year tick you understand.

Just think how much more information we would have for the forthcoming "Avifauna". For instance Lesser Black-backed Gull is a frequently encountered species throughout the county at all times of the year, but the fact is we have three distinct races namely *Larus fuscus graellsii* (West European breeding birds), *L.f.fuscus* (Baltic area & Northern Norway) and *L.f.intermedius* (Southern Norway Sweden & Denmark), occurring within Cheshire, in varying proportions, at different times of the year. With greater regard given to sub-specific identification the information supplied in the "Avifauna" is more likely to paint a truer, more accurate, picture of the bird life of the county.

In the last issue of "Bird News" Tony Broome commented on the likelihood of greater numbers of individuals, within a species, being dependant upon particular feeding areas than may otherwise be apparent. Sub-specific detail, as with the above species, could provide further evidence to back up this claim. Information like this is crucial to achieve the desired level of protection that many areas deserve.

A final thought on the subject. Perhaps the current vogue for 'splitting' is due to people's distrust, or dislike, of the word 'sub-', which portrays an image of inferiority. Perhaps people would take greater notice if we used a term like 'intra-species', or 'proto-species'. After all prototypes are often seen as something a bit racy, even dangerous, and are normally seen in a positive light. And ask yourself the question what are 'sub-species'? Answer. Prototype species. The next step in the evolutionary process.

Adapt or die. The maxim of evolution. The 'birding' movement runs the risk of being discredited by pointless infighting amongst it's various strands. Time for the twitchers and the establishment to evolve into a 'super-species', before we go into a de-'cline' and end up as a 'relict' species.

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

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER

For the last 12 years we have religiously put out a mixture of peanuts, sunflower seed and wild bird seed for the great variety of birds which visit our garden all year. We put this food out all year, though supplement this in the winter with apples, moist bread, also fat, fruit and seed 'cakes' and occasionally mealworms, which the Robins particularly love. We have had significant numbers of some species over the years, the highlight of which must be a flock of Tree Sparrows building up to 62 individuals in 1993. Always entertaining, a male and female Great Spotted Woodpecker regularly visit the garden, feeding principally on peanuts in 'squirrel-proof' containers. We also often see a male Sparrowhawk looking for an easy (and well-fed) meal, with the female less frequently observed. Our neighbours are very tolerant and take over these duties whenever we are away, as once you've started feeding you really do need to continue!

There has been a long and sometimes heated debate on whether you should continue putting out food for the birds into spring and summer. Some people fear that if food is provided during the breeding season unsuitable items may be given to nestlings, which may choke or become undernourished. Peanuts in particular cause such a concern. But as the BTO Garden Bird Survey has shown, tits and finches in particular occupy gardens in good numbers in the spring, when the vagaries of the weather often make their food supply uncertain. It does appear that given the choice of natural or artificial food, adult birds choose the former. In addition, adult birds benefit from the artificial food themselves during the busy time of feeding nestlings (an adult Great Tit may make over six hundred visits a day to a large brood of youngsters).

To get back to the Great Spotted Woodpeckers, every year from around the beginning of June, they start to bring their offspring into the garden, to supplement their diet with this artificial, though obviously welcome, food source. This year we have had the pleasure of watching three youngsters competing for their share of bits of peanut. I have had the odd qualm of whether we are doing the right thing, and whether or not the juveniles are getting a balanced diet, though they do go missing for periods, so I have assumed they are off seeking more 'natural' food items elsewhere. The sheer variety of foods which these birds will consume was forcibly brought home to me the other day, when I observed two juveniles competing noisily for a food item which the male had brought in.

I was amazed to see it was a newly hatched nestling (species unknown). It is usually Magpies and Crows who are painted as the villains where raiding nests are concerned, but woodpeckers may commonly include both bird eggs and nestlings in their diet during the summer. They are not so easily observed of course, as the large, bold, noisy Magpie, who many people just love to hate - unjustifiably so as recent evidence has proven.

Have other readers any similar tales to tell about other (more unusual) species preying on nests?

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

[Members in the south of the county may be interested to hear about a juvenile Great Spotted Woodpecker photographed in a Malpas garden this June. The bird displayed highly aberrant plumage - partially albino, the wings were largely white, with a shadow effect on the normally black areas. The normal red tones were distinctly pink on both the cap and the vent. The remaining plumage was off-white with just the odd dark trace. So Tony beware of any potential rare Woodpecker claims! Eds]

SURVEYING A MARSH

In replying to Laurie Fairman's comments on under recording of Jack Snipe numbers in Cheshire, I developed a way of checking a marsh similar to Laurie's. No matter what shape the marsh is, visualise a grid on the marsh with each box no bigger than three foot square. The idea is to walk slowly through the centre of each grid box. Start at the edge of the marsh, by taking two steps into the marsh. Look up ahead and pick a point in line with the edge of the far side of the marsh you will be walking towards and keep a parallel line. When you reach the far side of the marsh turn around looking back the way you have just come and take two steps further into the marsh and walk back parallel to the line you just walked. Then just carry on the same way till you have covered the whole of the marsh. Look at few feet in front of you as you move along the marsh. You will be able to see the Jack Snipe before they fly off. I have managed to get to within two inches of a Jack Snipe before it took off while photographing it. One point Laurie did not mention was that Jack Snipe very rarely make any noise when they fly off. Over the last ten years of counting I have only heard them make a very low harsh call on rising. If you find a Jack Snipe before it flies off and you approach it closely you would normally expect it to fly away from you, wrong. One bird I got close to suddenly flew up and over my left shoulder, just missing my face. For a while after the event, I visualised a Jack Snipe flying around with one of my eye balls skewed half way along its bill. A warning, please do not disturb Jack Snipe or any other wader species when the weather is freezing or frosty. These birds will find it hard to find food and they need to conserve energy. Just wait until the weather improves.

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

NETWORK FOR RAPTORS

As reported in the May edition of *Birdwatching* magazine, the latest raptor information is now accessible on the Internet. Terry Pickford of the North West Raptor Protection Group, is maintaining a raptor conservation web page, which is regularly updated with recent sightings of birds of prey, as well as the continuing gloomy picture about the persecution of many species of raptor. Terry is well known to many CAWOS members and after his latest lecture to the society last February, which was on Golden Eagles, he updated us regarding the 'war' raging between Peregrines and both game wardens and pigeon fanciers alike. Already the government has funded a £20,000 project to look into allegations that these fabulous birds of prey are wrecking one of the country's longest established sports.

The tremendous recovery in Peregrine numbers has angered pigeon fanciers, who argue that numbers are now so healthy that a cull can be justified to curb their sport's losses. A recent report '*Birds of Prey in the UK: back from the brink*' says "The legalised killing or taking of birds of prey to protect domestic pigeons cannot be justified. Pigeon fanciers who release birds into the wild must accept that some will be killed." The Peregrine is still classed in Cheshire as a 'rare breeding species' and we wait to hear of it's breeding success (or otherwise) for this year. So far there is good news from Beeston where one chick survived out of three eggs laid and has now successfully fledged.

NWRPG's Internet address is <http://www.blackpool.net/nwrpg/>. Choose option 7 for the latest update.

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

[*Birds of Prey in the UK: back from the brink* is summarised elsewhere in Bird News. Eds]

WHO DO YOU WANT TO JUDGE YOUR RECORDS?

Most birdwatchers who submit records, especially county or national rarities, will be aware of the process by now. At county level, records are judged by a rarities panel belonging to the county ornithological society, in your case, CAWOS. It is open to new members, should they have adequate experience and be voted on to the committee. Judgements can be questioned at any time, presumably in the case of "not provens", by the person(s) who originally submitted the record. It is simple and very effective, we have few complaints.

At a national level, the British Birds Rarities Committee are responsible for making decisions. All observers are urged to submit rarities descriptions, via the county recorder who takes a copy for future reference, as soon after the sighting as possible.

All county societies support this procedure. It may at times be frustrating to wait for a decision, and you may feel it is the wrong one, but everyone plays by the same rules and overall it is a balanced system. The people sitting on the panel are experienced field observers and are well able to adjudicate. Of course, they do get things wrong, they can't be 100% right every time, and at the end of the day, if you know you've definitely seen a certain rarity, what does it matter? You will count it won't you?

So, where is this leading to? It has recently become more apparent that one leading birder doesn't agree with this system and has decided to publish his own rarity decisions. Of course for anyone who knows him, Lee Evans is a competent birder in many ways and is a very good statistician, publishing annual reports and running the UK400 club. Whatever you think of Lee, his enthusiasm for birding has to be admired.

But some of his decisions have been based solely on hearsay, rumours and his own personality profiles of the finders. He never sees descriptions of the birds, so how can he even begin to adjudicate? They are, in these instances, totally without justification and very unfair to the people involved. Lee is not in a good position to be taking this stance and it has been said that all county recorders and the BBRC are against these tactics.

A lot of young birders do see Lee as an alternative to the "proper" system. After all, they want ticks and Lee gives them ticks. It wouldn't really matter except that good birders who correctly identify rarities and submit descriptions to the BBRC are seeing "rejects" published by Lee without any explanation. It is grossly unfair on them.

If you find Lee amusing then great, I can live with that. But please, if you find a rarity submit it to the BBRC through me or any of the other county recorders. It may take longer for a decision to reach you, but you'll have the greater satisfaction knowing it's been properly treated.

Tony Broome, County Recorder.

HEN HARRIERS

For the first time in well over over 100 years, a pair of rare Hen Harriers are nesting in Derbyshire's Goyt Valley, just across the border from Cheshire. The nesting attempt surprised both conservationists and the land-owners, North West Water, as it started late in the breeding season. As Hen Harriers are one of the UK's most persecuted birds of prey, an around-the-clock nest protection operation was quickly established by the RSPB, with full encouragement from NWW. Many Cheshire and Wirral members have taken part in this 24 hour watch and will be delighted to know that at least four chicks have hatched to date.

Although the harriers (and their 'minders') have had to put up with some of the most atrocious winter-like weather, with cold winds and torrential rain, there has not been any problems so far from 2-legged human predators (touch wood!). The harriers have, however, had 'run-ins' with other 2-legged feathered predators. Peregrines have taunted the male harrier, showing up his inferior aerial manoeuvrability and power, Merlins have left the harriers standing where speed is concerned and recently, both harriers were forced to remonstrate with a Red Kite that was in the area for a couple of days. In addition to resident Short-eared Owls and frequent sightings of Kestrel and Sparrowhawk, Goshawk and Hobby have also been seen!

Let's hope that these spectacular birds of prey can be assured a bright future within the Peak District, an area which is a popular location for visitors. Of course, if they would like to venture over the border next year, they would be made very welcome!

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

THE GREAT CAWOS YULE LOG 1998

If you are one of those people who didn't take part in the first Yule Log, then don't despair. The next one is only about 155 days away !!!! Yes, the date of the Great CAWOS Yule Log 1998 has been fixed for **Sunday 4th January**. Make sure that you put it in your diary **NOW**. I haven't sorted out sponsorship and stuff yet, but I hope to have much more details available for you in the October edition of Bird News. I know that as you read this, sunbathing on Hilbre or whatever, January will seem a very long time away, but you have 101 species to aim for, and that takes a lot of planning. What better way to kick start you 1998 list than a day birdwatching in one of the best counties in Britain. So get your **diary** out and help raise a bit more money for a good cause.

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

Membership News

Welcome to the following new members who have recently Joined us: F Coppenhall, RG Sturman, AP Capper, Hale Ornithologists, Mrs E Bartlett, D Roughsedge, RJ Harvey, MD Maher, DJ Buchanan, M Washington, Mrs M Connolly, MD Fairclough, J Bryant, Denise Vickers, T Davies, S Downs, C Buckland, CS Millington, S Round, RA Brannon, Mrs R Cavanagh, Chester RSPB Members Group, Mrs LB Owen, A Orton, R Bithell, A James, I Ransom, Isobel Hay, Dr and Mrs DH Smith, Wirral RSPB Members Group, RS Davidson, M Hibbert, Mrs J Ainsworth, BD Tollitt, SV Atkins.

The following have resigned: R Barber, RJ Davidson, Mrs J Hurton, A Padmore, M Pigott.

Writing this on 10th July our membership for 1997 stands at 329, 20 more than last year and a new record. We gained many new members, especially from Wirral, as a result of the society's presence at the Parkgate High Tides; however it is unfortunate that about 24 of last year's members have not as yet renewed their subscriptions; had they all done so we would be over the 350 mark.

So far this year there have been two Council meetings and topics discussed included:

- Agreement to send out a leaflet about the society to all BTO members in Cheshire and adjacent counties in the hope of attracting new members. We were able to do this because of our membership of the BTO/Bird Clubs partnership scheme, which gives us access to their facilities.
- Opposition to the second runway at Manchester Airport had been unsuccessful.
- Jet skiing was to be banned at Pickmere.
- Some concern was expressed about the number of recording programmes set up in the county under Agenda 21, and about the reliability of some of them; however we welcomed the principle of involving the public and were contacting those organising the surveys to express our views and hopefully play a more active part.

David Cogger, Membership Secretary, 113 Nantwich Road, Middlewich, Cheshire, CW10 9HD

In Search of Waders

A CAWOS Identification Workshop

Frodsham Marsh - Sunday 7th September 9:00am to 12:00 noon

Following on from the enjoyable Gull I.D. workshop back in March, CAWOS will be hosting a Wader Identification Workshop for members and non-members at Frodsham Marsh. If you are circumspect about making *Calidris* claims, or tentative about *Tringa*'s, then this is the workshop for you. Several of the County's top wader watchers will be on hand to guide you through the complexities separating out the various species, sexes, and age classes.

In order for participants to get the best from the day the numbers will be limited. To reserve your place contact Jeff Clarke on 0151 423 4275. As with the March workshop a charge of £2 per person will be made, but the workshop is **FREE** to any members who bring along a non-member who joins CAWOS on the day. All funds raised from the event will be used to assist with covering the costs of 'Bird News'.

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

Questions & Answers

The advent of severe freezing weather on the Continent is usually the precursor to the arrival here of substantial numbers of the Thrush Family. This also coincides with more extensive garden feeding and on my part closer bird watching. With regard to the influx of large numbers of Blackbirds this year I wonder if you can comment upon three observations.

1. In my garden the number of male birds always exceeds females by a substantial amount, on severe days the ratio was 12:1.
2. At first light my lawn and lower garden (which is not extensive) held up to twenty Blackbirds. Their behavior of keeping a fairly regular distance apart but moving in an almost synchronous manner intrigued me as it didn't appear to be related to aggression or possession of the main feed area.
3. On one occasion I saw a female showing considerable aggression to a small object, which I thought might have been part of a dead mammal. Repeated rushes, picking up the object and throwing it in the air was accompanied by much flapping of wings. This continued for perhaps a minute before the bird resumed normal behavior. Subsequent examination showed the object to be just half a Horse Chestnut shell!!

Richard Gabb, 72 Chester Road, Poynton, Stockport Cheshire, SK12 1HA

Unfortunately due to pressure of work Professor David Norman is unable to answer the above questions. So here are my ideas on the subject:

1. Migratory flocks of Blackbirds in the Autumn are largely comprised of 1st year males, mostly from Scandinavia. They are less able to compete for territory than mature males and are consequently forced to seek less stringent winter quarters. Possibly the females are forced even further South, including birds from our own region, wintering perhaps in the Iberian Peninsula and we therefore see relatively few in the UK. As a result, the birds Richard sees in his garden during the Winter are predominantly male and I would venture to suggest that close examination would reveal them to be mostly 1st year males.
2. Birds live much faster lives than we do and it is probable that the birds are maintaining their minimum feeding distance and that the nuances of their behaviour elude the speed of our perception. It is likely that the loose flock formation and their apparently synchronous movements are being dictated by one or two dominant individuals and that the subordinate flock members adjust their 'fight or flight' distance accordingly.
3. It is very difficult to judge this particular piece of behaviour without witnessing it for ones self. It is possible that the female was exhibiting 'diverted aggression'. This often occurs when a bird is agitated possibly by a potentially more powerful rival close by. To avoid a direct conflict, the bird transfers its frustration and aggression against a less dangerous foe, in this case the Horse Chestnut shell.

If anyone agrees or disagrees with my brief ideas we would like to know.

Jeff Clarke, Editor

Rumours... Rumours ...

- Following the late publication of the Cheshire and Wirral 1995 Bird Report, many members will remember the Bird Report Team's statement that the deadline for submitting records would, in future, be strictly adhered to. The County Recorder wrote in Bird News "...nobody, including the report team, wants to be in this position again.....**This year's deadline is February 28th.**" Having put the fear of god into us, we all (or nearly all) duely complied. There was, however, a notable exception, which only came to light during the compilation by the Systemic List Editor, who was suddenly struck dumb with the dawning realisation that he had completely forgotten to submit his own records!
- Rumour also has it that the Bird News Editor is currently busy putting his imagination to the test, to come up with a viable excuse as to why he has not yet submitted over 50 rare gull descriptions for 1996!!

Projects and Surveys

AUTUMN MIGRATION OF MEADOW PIPITS IN 1996

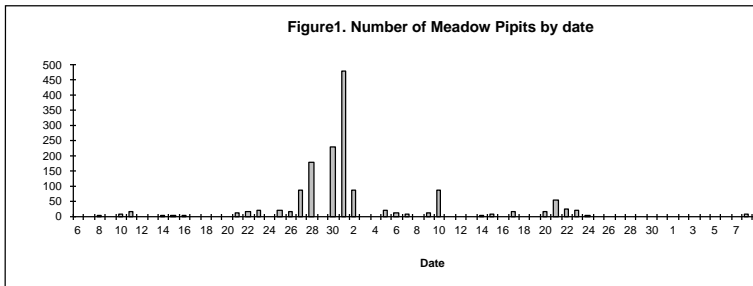
(A personal perspective from a Wilmslow garden)

In previous autumns I had noticed fairly large numbers of Meadow Pipits flying over the garden. In 1996 I decided to keep daily records of the numbers involved, as well as direction of flight, flock size, daily timing and weather conditions. My field of view spanned a corridor of 'air-space', running North/South, with an approximate width of 400m. I had an indoor and an outdoor watch point. I do not consider that there was a great difference in my ability to detect Meadow Pipits between the two situations. Calls were easier to pick up outside, but on the other hand the greater comfort of the indoor situation made for easier scanning of the sky.

Observations were made every day during the migration period, starting at around sunrise on most days and continuing while Meadow Pipits were passing overhead.

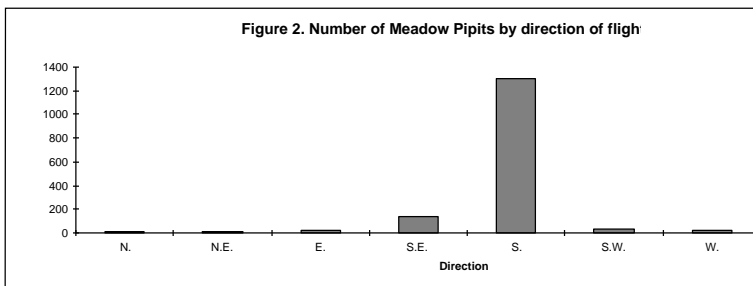
Results

A total of 1,511 passed overhead between 7 Sept and 8 Nov. A pronounced peak occurred between 26 Sept and 2 Oct when 70% of the Meadow Pipits flew over. The largest daily total was 481 on 1 Oct, followed by 220 on 30 Sept and 180 on 2 Sept.



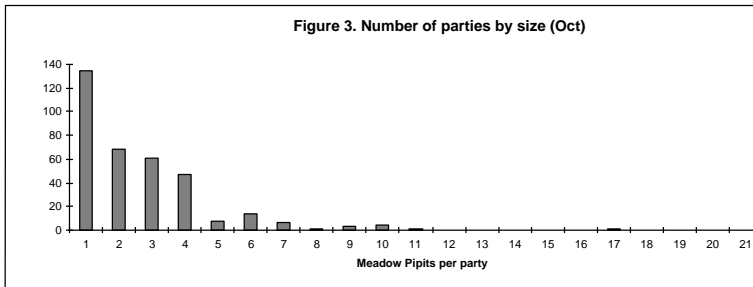
Direction

South was by far the most common direction of flight. 84% flew south followed by 9% south-east and 2% south-west. Less than 1% flew in each of the other directions. This pattern was more or less constant throughout the period except for the first half of September. During the period 7 Sept to 16 Sept, 55% flew east and 20% south.



Size of party

In October (this data was only taken in Oct), 40% of the parties/singletons that flew over comprised of one Meadow Pipit. The mean number of Meadow Pipits per party was 2.7. The three largest parties (comprising 22, 17 & 11 respectively) all flew over on the day with the largest passage, i.e. 1 Oct.

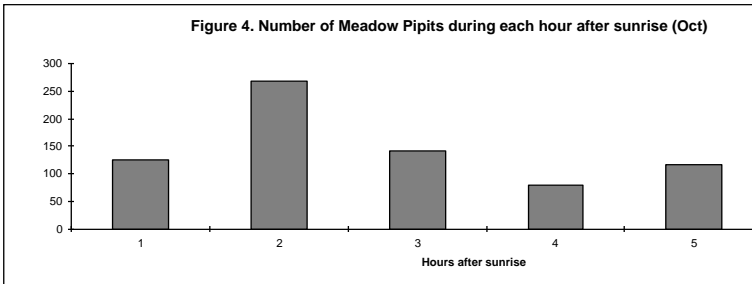


Daily timing

The first Meadow Pipits were usually noted shortly after sunrise, the largest numbers typically occurring about an hour later. The time of peak passage was however variable, for example on 27 Sept it occurred at around 10.00 am, whereas on the next day it was at around 8.30 am. Very few flew over after midday (excepting 1 Oct), the latest being 5.55 pm.

The length of time during which passage occurred was, more or less, proportional to the number of Meadow Pipits on a given day. By far the most protracted passage occurred on the day with by far the most pipits i.e. 1 Oct.

During October records were kept of the number of Meadow Pipits in each hour after sunrise. However, 55% of the pipits which flew over in October did so on 1 Oct and the secondary peak shown in figure 4, is almost entirely due to such a secondary peak which only occurred on that day.



Weather conditions

Wind strength. This was the factor which best correlated with Meadow Pipit numbers. There was a sudden drop-off in numbers once wind speed went above 4 on the Beaufort Scale ('light breeze'). On days with wind strength 4, or above there was an average of 0.4 Meadow Pipits, whereas on days with wind strength less than 4 the average was 23. This was well illustrated on 29 Sept, a day with strong wind and no pipits, which was sandwiched between two days with light winds and 180 & 230 pipits respectively (see figure 1).

Wind direction. This factor also correlated well with pipit numbers. Any conclusions here will be based, however, on very limited data. For example there was a north, north-east and south-east wind on only two mornings each. Mornings with north and north-west winds had the largest average numbers. The average numbers of Meadow Pipits on days with given wind directions were as follows: N 134, NW 80, W 31, NE 18, SW 7, S 5, E 4, SE 3.

Cloud cover. On cloudless mornings fewer Meadow Pipits tended to be recorded (average 7) than on cloudy mornings (average 30). This may have been because fewer were flying on those mornings, it also possible though, that they were flying higher and so went unrecorded.

Precipitation. Rain occurred on only 5 mornings (and only light drizzle on 4 of those) when the average was 20, compared to 25 on dry mornings. Again this data is very limited.

Associated species. On 3 occasions single Pied Wagtails were seen flying with Meadow Pipits. This was the only species which showed a direct association.

Discussion

1,511 Meadow Pipits was more than expected. In 1995 the number recorded was 663 when, admittedly, a less systematic count was carried out. There were however, several reports from Cheshire and elsewhere of diurnal migration being good in 1996, particularly so for Meadow Pipits. How many went unrecorded? Pipits would not have been recorded if: a) they flew over before or after recording was being carried out, b) they were flying too high to be seen or heard, c) they could have been recorded but were simply missed. All three factors are likely, to a greater or lesser extent, to have been at play. A very rough guess then, would be that half of those which flew over were recorded.

Migrants are believed to (amongst other things) use leading lines and landmarks to navigate. This location *appears* not to have any such characteristics, which would concentrate over-flying Meadow Pipits. However, the numbers recorded compare well with those at traditional 'migration watch-points'. Two of the possible interpretations this suggests are: a) there could, in fact, be some subtle factor which makes this location favourable, or b) these numbers are nothing special and could be encountered 'anywhere'.

If (and it's a big if) we assume b) to be the case then these figures could be extrapolated for the whole of non-coastal Cheshire, given my field of view and the breadth of the county. This is of course, highly speculative, but would yield a figure with the order of magnitude of 100,000.

Philip Barrett, 11 Oak Lee Avenue, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 1QL

MIGRATION WATCH 97 - Volunteers Wanted Now!

Few aspects of birdwatching can be more exciting than witnessing visible migration in progress, particularly when large numbers of birds are involved. This year we are encouraging members of the society to take part in a county wide co-ordinated migration watch.

We need volunteers to man a series of migration watchpoints throughout Cheshire. Participants can nominate their own migration watchpoint or have a site selected for them by the co-ordinating team.

Migration Watch 97 Dates and Times

Saturday 4th October	7:00am to 11:00am	World Birdwatch Weekend
Sunday 5th October	7:00am to 11:00am	World Birdwatch Weekend
Sunday 19th October	7.30am to 11.30am	

A significant proportion of Cheshire's birders are likely to be exiled on the Isles of Scilly for one or more of the dates chosen, not least 80% of the editorial team, but if you can only participate in one of the above dates this should not dissuade you from taking part. Besides it's much more exciting recording an overflying Richard's Pipit on your local patch than watching one trot around St. Mary's Airport.

If you would like to attend a migration watch workshop, rather than man your own site, you can join Jeff Clarke at Denhall Lane, near Burton on the Wirral, where the Cheshire Countryside Management Service will be holding a public Migration Watch event.

Selecting a Watchpoint

If you wish to man your own site there are a number of things to keep in mind to make your watch successful:

- Try to choose a site with a good unobstructed view.
- Sites with natural flightlines tend to fair better than those without. Coastal edges, escarpments, river valleys, passes through hills, even railway lines, all encourage birds to fly along them.
- Sites with a natural North/South axis tend to be better than those aligned East/West. Though this is somewhat weather dependant.
- Good site knowledge and familiarity with the regular birds helps to sort out the potential migrants.

Guidelines for Effective Recording

A huge range of variables can and will affect the recording process, the most significant of which is the weather, which can single-handedly make or break a migration watch. However the following suggestions will improve your success and the reliability of your data:

- A sound knowledge of 'jizz' and calls are essential.

- If you expect to be recording hundreds, rather than handfuls, of migrants at least two people should be at the watchpoint, one to record and one to watch (these duties are interchangeable).
- Do not watch from a hide otherwise you will miss the majority of overflying birds and affect the results.
- Use the recording forms supplied, not your notebook, as the recording period is broken up into quarter hour time periods.
- When sending in your recording forms it is worth adding your own comments on some of the more interesting sightings, as they help in the assessment of the results and help to increase the readability of the finished report.

If you wish to be involved in Migration Watch 97, contact the co-ordinator:-

Jeff Clarke on 0151 423 4275 (Home), or 0151 357 1991 (Work)

WINTERING CURLEW PROJECT IN VALE ROYAL

Although the final analysis has yet to be undertaken, the data illustrates that Curlews favour fields around Billinge Green, Holford Moss, Lower Peover, Hales Pasture Quarry and Lach Dennis. Flock sizes varied between 30 and 190 birds: it seems likely that the actual winter population is around 200 birds. Night time roosts have formed on the Griffiths Road Lagoons and at Hales Pasture Quarry.

This survey will continue throughout the summer, to find out when Curlews return to the area. Special attention will be paid to the known roost sites during June, July and early August - in past years between 750 and 1000 birds have been recorded in July. If you wish to get involved with the survey please contact Paul Hill at Grebe House (01270 610180), or alternatively send in any records of Curlew sightings, giving the number of birds involved and the location (with 6 figure grid reference if possible).

DID YOU KNOW?

Over 250 species of birds have been recorded in the Borough, of which almost 100 species nest here most years. Many of these breeding birds, such as the Skylark and Tree Sparrow, are species of Nature Conservation Concern.

Extracts from the "VALE ROYAL NATURE CONSERVATION AUDIT NEWSLETTER"

Round Robbin'

We start this time with **Bird Watching Magazine** and their regular Garden Watch feature. During the Summer months, many of us will come across vulnerable fledglings or injured birds. Les Stocker, the founder of St Tiggywinkles Wildlife Hospital offers some advice. Birds which are scratched by cats need antibiotic treatment from a vet to ensure they do not die from infection. If there are no cuts, put gasping birds quickly into a cardboard box with a thin cloth on top for 24 hours and then release them. Offer food and if the bird is alert enough to stand, some water. Never try to drop water into the birds mouth, give it a shallow water bowl instead. If you try to help an orphan, you must have plenty of spare time. They need feeding every 20 minutes from dawn until dusk!! Keep them in small pots lined with tissues, and an overhead light will keep them warm. They need careful syringe feeding with Tropicana (powdered food from pet shops). It is vital that you get the amount of food right and do not allow any of it to enter the glottis (the hole down to the birds lungs, which is immediately behind the tongue). If all of this sounds like too much responsibility then you can find out where your nearest rescue centre is by calling St Tiggywinkles on 01844 292 292.

Meanwhile over in **Birdwatch** the Reality Birding League continues to prove popular. The little known CAWOS outpost of Norwich features this month, with Tom Lowe (joint winner of the first Cheshire Challenge and now studying at the University of East Anglia) riding high in 3rd place. Rik Bonser (last year's winner) is twelfth despite his GCSE commitments this year and Paul Hill is 51 (although he doesn't look quite that old!!). **Birdwatch** also features a

great article by Paul Hill and Colin Twist about sites for butterflies and dragonflies. Cheshire based birders who are joining the growing band of people interested in all sorts of other wildlife could try Vale Royal Locks at Moulton (SJ 641706) for Banded Demoiselle, Hairy Dragonfly and Red-eyed Damselfly or even Migrant Hawker later in the season.

Some rather worrying news from **British Birds** for all you warbler watchers out there. They documented a 'Mead Warbler' some time ago, which looked like Reed but sang like Marsh, and they have also featured a Sedge x Reed hybrid which looked like Black-browed Reed Warbler (*A. bistrigiceps*). Well now, a medium sized *Acrocephalus* warbler in Germany has been shown by mtDNA analysis to be the hybrid offspring of a male Reed Warbler and a female Great Reed Warbler. You have been warned rarity hunters!!

We come full circle to finish with **Bird Watching** magazine, who are warning us once again about Lyme disease, a parasitic infection caused by ticks. The tick lurks in grass, bracken or other vegetation waiting for you to brush past so it can hitch a ride and a free meal. Signs of infection include a reddish circular rash (2-12 inches across) and flu-like symptoms. In high risk areas (The Brecks/The New Forest) try to avoid being bitten by using insect repellent on your clothes and footwear. Keep your sleeves down and tuck your trousers into your socks. I know it doesn't look cool, but better safe than sorry. If you get bitten, remove ticks slowly and carefully with tweezers and apply antiseptic cream. Check for a rash and watch for flu-ish symptoms. If you get them go to the doctors. It is treatable with antibiotics.

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

Book Review

NORTH WEST REGION BIRD REPORT 1996

Cheshire based birder Dave M. Walters has done an excellent job in compiling such a comprehensive and informative report on the scarce and rare birds of the region. Not only that, but the actual document was published in double quick time and this review only just missed being included in the last issue of Bird News. Birdline North West are able to produce the report so promptly as they have to worry less about the provenance of the phoned-in information or wait for BBRC to pontificate upon the validity of any gross rarity claims.

Despite the occasional curious tone of the writing, for instance a Red-rumped Swallow was described as "...losing points for it's durability", I found the text generally very readable. Cheshire birder Howard 'Fred' Fearn provided the illustrations which are liberally scattered throughout. I particularly liked the Smew and the Red-rumped Swallow (Fred how about some illustrations for Bird News?).

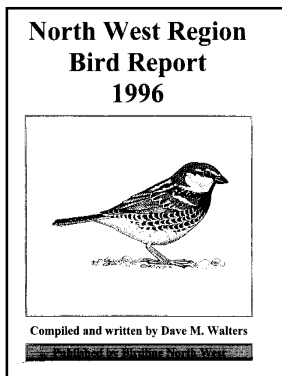
Also within the document can be found various tables giving lots of instantly understood data for various species. The background grid for these tables is too bold for my taste and is slightly distracting, but this is a minor quibble.

The last quarter of the report contains a variety of articles, including a review of top Cheshire and Wirral day lists, though I noted that my teams total of 131 in 1993 was omitted from the roll of honour. So I look forward to challenging Dave Walters and Co. in the forthcoming Yule Log competition.

I thoroughly recommend this report for all those with an interest in the rare or scarce birds of the region, which would probably be 99% of us. Well done Dave and the Birdline North West team. Anybody wishing to purchase this publication can do so by contacting David Walters on 01606 853640.

Jeff Clarke, 90 Simonside, Houghton Green, Widnes, WA8 4YN

NOTE: If you want to know which rarities pass muster with B.B.R.C. you will have to read the 1996 Cheshire Bird Report.



Diary

AUGUST

- 9 KOS Seaforth, meet Sessions House 9:00am
- 9 LOG Botany Trip, afternoon
- 17 WRSPB RSPB NW Shorebirds Festival, Banks Rd, Lower Heswall 9:00am (HW 11:04, 9.1m)
- 19 CADOS Frodsham meet meet Caldly Valley Community Centre 6:00pm
- 20 Hide Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate 11:30am (HW 13:23, 9.9m)
- 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

SEPTEMBER

- 4 WRSPB "JOURNEY TO THE SOURCE OF THE DEE" by Ray Roberts
- 6 KOS Hilbre Island, meet Sessions House 9am
- 7 **CAWOS Wader Workshop, Frodsham Marsh, 9:00 to 12:00, contact Jeff Clarke**
- 7 CRSPB Frodsham, contact Brian Webster 01244 851026
- 8 SRSPB "BIRDS ON THE MALABAR COAST" BY Paul Willoughby
- 9 MRSPB "CHURNET VALLEY, RHINELAND OF STAFFORDSHIRE" by Michael Swales
- 10 HO AGM & Speaker
- 12 MCOS "QUEST FOR THE LEACH'S PETREL" by Jo Moran
- 12 SECOS "SEARCH FOR THE ROADRUNNER" by Susan & Alan Parker
- 17 CRSPB "FOULA - ISLAND OF BIRDS" by John Gittins
- 18 NNHS "MAMMALS IN CHESHIRE" by Steve Woolfall
- 20 CADOS Cheshire Wader Watch, meet Caldly Valley Community Centre 8:00am
- 20 HO Inner Marsh Farm, Cars depart 8:15am
- 21 WRSPB Weaver Bend, meet Two Mills Little Chef at 9:30am
- 21 SECOS Hilbre Island by mini-bus
- 21 Rivacre Valley, meet at Rivacre Valley Rangers Centre, Ellesmere Port at 7:00am
- 23 ADNHS "DERBYSHIRE MOORLAND BIRDS" by Charles Linfoot
- 26 LOG TBA
- 26 KOS "In Search of Himbrimi" by Gordon Yates
- 26 WGOS "HAVE BINS - WILL TRAVEL" by Keith Offord
- TBA LOG Dungeness weekend

OCTOBER

- 2 CADOS "BIRDS OF SCOTLAND" by Val McFarland
- 2 WRSPB "BESIDE THE SEASIDE" by John Lintin Smith
- 3 **CAWOS "HOOK AND EYE" by Keith Offord**
- 3/5 KOS Holy Island weekend
- 4 SECOS Marbury Country Park by car, meet at Marbury
- 5 CRSPB Seaforth/Marshside, contact Malcom Leigh 01244 348238
- 5 WRSPB World Birdwatch Day, Thurstaston Visitor Centre 10:00am
- 10 MCOS "IN SEARCH OF THE LOON" by Gordon Yates
- 10 SECOS "QUEST FOR LEACHES PETREL" by Joe Moran
- 13 SRSPB "UP THE OKAVANGO" by Charles Brown
- 14 ADNHS "HILBRE WILDLIFE AND HISTORY" by Vicky Seager
- 14 MRPSB "BRITISH OWLS" by Alan Gladwin
- 15 CRSPB "RSPCA VETERINARY HOSPITAL" BY Andrew Routh
- 16 NNHS "URBAN WILDLIFE" by Brian Hallworth
- 17 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate 11:00am (HW 12:41, 10.1m)
- 17 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate 12:00pm (HW 13:23, 10.0m)
- 18 SRSPB Carsington Water, by coach depart Grand Central at 9:00am, Hazel Grove 9:20am
- 19 SECOS Leighton Moss and area by mini-bus

- 19 LOG North Wales Coast, contact Peter Tonge for details on 0161 891274
- 19 WGOS North Wales by coach, meet Wilmslow Guild at 8:00am
- 19 CADOS East Coast, meet 6am - please ring for meeting place
- 19 WRSPB Leasowe for late autumn migrants, meet Leasowe lighthouse car park 9:00am
- 20 CADOS East Coast, contact Chris Done for details on 01928 724994
- 24 KOS "WILDLIFE OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS OF SCOTLAND" by Steve Knell
- 31 LOG "RARE PLANTS OF N.W. ENGLAND AND N. WALES" by Colin Twist
- 31 WGOS "SPRING IN SPAIN" by Mike Wilkes

NOVEMBER

- 2 CRSPB Leighton Moss, by coach, contact Graham Dixon 01244 324268
- 2 Hide Tide Birdwatch, Banks Rd, Lower Heswall 9:30am (HW 12:05, 9.4m)
- 2 Hide Tide Birdwatch on Hilbre, to book tel: 0151 648 4371/3884
- 6 CADOS "ICELAND, LAND OF ICE & FIRE" by Gordon Yates
- 6 WRSPB "BIRDS IN ACTION!" by Graham Bell
- 7 CAWOS "BIRDING IN TURKEY" by Nick Williams
- 9 WRSPB Leighton Moss, by coach, bookings by 4th September
- 10 SRSPB "ISLAY - JEWEL OF THE HEBRIDES" by Gordon Yates
- 11 ADNHS "THE BARN OWL IN CHESHIRE" by George Bramhall
- 11 MRSPB "CENTRAL SPAIN" by Nick Williams
- 14 MCOS "BIRDS OF PREY IN WALES" by Iolo Williams
- 14 SECOS "WORKING WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER" by Ron Thomas
- 15 KOS Parkgate High Tide, meet Sessions House 9am
- 15 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate 10:00am (HW 11:21, 9.9m)
- 15 CADOS Leighton Moss / Heysham, meet Caldly Valley Community Centre 9:00am
- 16 LOG Wirral, contact Peter Tonge for details on 0161 891274
- 16 SECOS Potteric Carr by mini-bus
- 16 WGOS Top Hill Low Nature Reserve by coach, meet Wilmslow Guild at 8:00am
- 19 CRSPB "SOUTH AFRICA" by Val McFarland
- 20 NNHS "BRITISH BUTTERFLIES" by Nick Hatton
- 22-23 NORTH WEST BIRD FAIR, Martin Mere WWT 9:30am to 5:00pm
- 25 ADNHS "PUTTING WILDLIFE ON THE MAP" by Jane McHarry
- 28 KOS "TANZANIA SAFARI" by Philip Robinson
- 28 LOG "HEBRIDEAN SPLENDOUR" by Gordon Yates
- 28 WGOS 30th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION - FALCONRY DISPLAY by 'Gauntlet'

DECEMBER

- 4 CADOS "QUEENSLAND & THE RED CENTRE" by Don Coan
- 4 WRSPB AGM & quizzes, fun and mince pies...
- 5 CAWOS "TANZANIA" by Mike Wilkes

Will affiliated societies, who wish to advertise any meetings of relevance to CAWOS, 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 Cheshire Wildlife Trust, 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
- HRSPB 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. Colin Lythgoe 01270 582642
- 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

Any Volunteers?

High Tide Birdwatch at Parkgate Old Baths

We require volunteers to help man the information stand on the following dates:

Wednesday	20 th Aug 1997	Start 11:30am (HW 13:23, 9.9m).
Friday	17 th Oct 1997	Start 11:00am (HW 12.41, 10.1m).
Saturday	18 th Oct 1997	Start 12 noon (HW 13.23, 10.0m).
Saturday	15 th Nov 1997	Start 10:00am (HW 11:21, 9.9m).

We need to raise the profile of CAWOS to both the casual and expert birdwatcher alike.

So why not lend a hand in what is always a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere.

For further information or to volunteer contact Jeff Clarke 0151 423 4275.

INDOOR MEETING PROGRAMME FOR 1997/98

- 3rd October THE HOOK AND EYE Keith Offord**
Keith's talk will cover a brief review of the key families; behavioural aspects such as breeding biology and migration; and finally highlights some of the major conservation issues they face.
- 7th November BIRDING IN TURKEY Nick Williams**
Nick's talk tonight covers the area from Ankara to Birecik and will intriguingly feature the 'dead body' story and being held up at gunpoint! Birds include Pelicans, Slender Billed Gulls and Purple Gallinule at the nest.
- 5th December TANZANIAN EXPERIENCE Mike Wilkes**
For the birdwatcher Tanzania is home to many rare and endangered birds, as well as to the more well known and spectacular birds of East Africa.
- 9th January BTO GARDEN BIRDS SURVEY Andrew Cannon**
Tonight Andrew will be able to update us on a full 3 years' data, showing whether the variations seen so far demonstrate a true trend in the fortunes of the birds.
- 6th February VOYAGE TO THE EMPERORS Tony Ord**
The spectacular results from Tony's voyage to this outstanding area of beauty should not be missed.
- 6th March AGM & MEMBERS SLIDES**

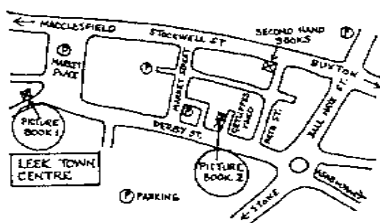
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