

BIRD NEWS

Number 36 October 97



**Lapland Bunting • Reed Warbler Chronicle
The County Rarities List • Computers and Records
Gull Workshop 1998 • The Great CAWOS Yule Log**



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4 Larchwood Drive, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 2NU

Newsletter Editor : Jeff Clarke

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

Membership Secretary : David M Cogger

113 Nantwich Rd, Middlewich, Cheshire, CW10 9HD, Tel: 01606 832517

Articles, Letters and Comments would be welcomed by the Editor

Front cover: Redwing by Tony Broome

Other illustrations by Tony Broome & Tom Lowe

Editorial

When I sit down to begin writing my editorial piece I often wonder if anybody ever reads this section. I have recently received solace on this point with proof positive that at least two of you do so. What's more I seem to have provoked Paul Hill into putting the case for the defence regarding the Mersey Forest (see the last Bird News); while Mike Holmes makes us aware of the dangers of planning blight on valuable wildlife habitat. Many other regulars contribute interesting articles, including Keith Massey who presents the final part of his 'Record's' trilogy. Bob Anderson has some issues to air on the County Rarities list, while Malcolm Calvert provides us with an insight into his ringing studies. As ever my thanks go to all those who have contributed to this issue.

As many of you will be aware, there will soon be a report from the Joint Raptor Study Group on the economic effects that Hen Harriers have on Grouse shooting. Currently there are many landowners with hunting interests who would like to see the legitimised control of raptors within the UK. This I find utterly preposterous. If landowners and their gamekeepers think that controlling the populations of predators is beneficial to their quarry species in the long term, they are very much mistaken. The removal of natural checks and balances within the ecosystem inevitably leads to a disfunctioning of the population dynamics within which the quarry species is adapted to operate. When prey populations achieve unnaturally high levels two things happen. Firstly, the stresses of overpopulation encourage the spread of disease, a phenomenon well known to occur within Red Grouse populations, and secondly a lack of food leads to poor health, making populations prone to starvation/dietary deficiencies. We then witness the classic boom and bust population cycles so prevalent in areas where man's interference has altered the natural conditions. Note the explosion in Red Deer populations and the attendant decline in the overall health and physical condition of the individual animals in the population.

Gamekeepers feel pressurised by landowners to produce the highest number of grouse possible for the guns. Many therefore take the easy option for short term gain and illegally destroy potential predators, notably Hen Harriers, with the unspoken consent of many landowners (See October 97 issue of British Birds page 411 which reviews a paper by Etheridge, Summers and Green 'The effects of illegal killing and destruction of nests by humans on the population dynamics of the Hen Harrier'). How strange it is that some of the most vociferous voices calling for the culling of birds of prey are some of these self same landowners.

So now we come to the point of this editorial. As we can see, the grouse hunting fraternity are fully prepared to take direct action in pursuit of their goals. The question is are we? I am implacably opposed to law breaking in general, particularly where violence is used. However, should the law change to allow the legal destruction of birds like the Hen Harrier and the Peregrine Falcon, I can see myself becoming involved in peaceful direct action. Let's hope that the recent change of government has altered the balance of power in favour of the conservation lobby. Maybe then I won't be forced to cross my own particular line in the sand.

Finally, I would like to hear from the membership how they feel about some of the pressing conservation issues facing the Society. Anything from the Cormorant debate to pigeon racing v Peregrines. Are we pro-active enough as a society in defending our corner? Should we shout louder about pressing issues and beggar the consequences? You are the 'society'. Your views count. Have your say and make sure the policies of the society reflect the wishes of it's members.

Jeff Clarke

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

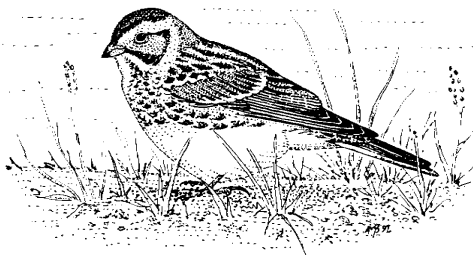
GATEWARTH ACCESS UPDATE

The new public footpath, which circumnavigates phase III of Gatewarth, has still not been officially opened. However, members of CAWOS have an access agreement with the Cheshire Waste Disposal Authority, valid until April 1998. Anyone wishing to visit the site should contact Jeff Clarke on 0151 423 4275. You will be sent an indemnity form which you must sign and return.

County Rarities

Lapland Bunting

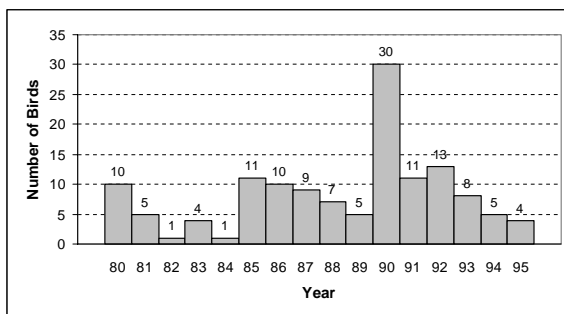
An uncommon bird for Cheshire and Wirral, described as a rare migrant and winter visitor to the coast and Dee estuary, but with a few inland records each year. If seen well, either in flight or on the ground, then Lapland Bunting is rarely mistaken with anything else. Reed Buntings in unusual places are the key confusion species. Usually, its a crisp “ticky ticky” call note, occasionally followed by a softer “teuu’ that alerts you to “something different” with an



overflying bird, one that looks tubby, short headed, and long winged with a direct strong flight quite unlike Reed Bunting's floppy stalling action. Once on the ground, Lapland Buntings may appear surprisingly tame, and let you approach to a few yards. Here, the bulky wide-bodied look (definitely the 747's of the bunting world!) and long wings, with primary projection as long as the length of the tertials is obvious, as the bird moves actively about, with a hunched up posture, in short grass, stubble or vegetation. They do tend to be very much ground birds and can occasionally prove to be very difficult to get good views of.

As with most buntings, the head/facial pattern is key to confirming the identification and autumn/winter Lapland Bunting has a plain faced look, made up of a yellowish bill, pale buffy lores, supercilium, and crown stripe, and a pale centre to the ear coverts, with a black eye stripe starting from behind the prominent dark eye and framing the ear coverts, appearing thickest at the corners. This is quite different from the less defined, brownish streaked and washed pattern of Reed, or the crisper, more colourful neat pattern of Little Bunting. Lapland Buntings often show an un-streaked, chestnut nape and with two white wing bars made up by white tips to median and greater coverts, which sandwich an obvious chestnut panel, the upperparts pattern is very unlike Reed Bunting, which has buffy wingbars and is more diffusely streaked. Laplands also have a longer primary extension, four to five primaries extend beyond the tertials, as opposed to three on a Reed Bunting. I always think they look cleaner cut than Reed or Little Buntings, and you get the occasional male with a black necklace even in autumn, whilst the black face, neck and reddish nape of a summer plumage male is a joy to behold. Apart from Rustic and Pallas's Reed Buntings, which are much daintier and streaked looking birds, no other western palearctic bunting shows the above plumage characteristics. The best way of picking a bird out is definitely on call and the majority of birds are indeed flyovers. To become more familiar with this charismatic bunting, a winter break to the east coast is called for, where flocks of 20 to 30 can be found in some years. They are worth the journey!

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



The Lapland Bunting until the late 1970's could be described as a "Scarce winter visitor to the Dee estuary in small numbers exceptionally recorded inland". Since then this species has declined to a low point in the mid 1980's however there was a good influx in 1990.

The majority of records between 1980-1995 have come from just two areas i.e. Burton Marshes/Dee Estuary (45%) and Hilbre/Red Rocks (35%). Only six other records came from the Wirral split between Meols, Leasowe and Moreton. On the Mersey, eight records have come from Hale, Frodsham has had five records and one record from Elton. Inland records have come from Sandbach (Watch Lane Flash on 12th Oct 1980 and Maw Green Tip on 31st Oct 1992), Blacon, Chester (6th Nov 1987), Hurlston Reservoir (two on 1st Dec 1991) and Ashton's Flash, Northwich (two on 3rd-11th Oct 1992 and two on 22nd Jan 1995).

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

Recent Reports

Before I start my "seasonal summary" I would like to know whether or not members wish to see Recent Reports continue in its present format. I currently receive records from about 10 regular and 20 other contributors, this is clearly only a small percentage of members. As the Editor recently pointed out to me much of the information is duplicated elsewhere and if more contributors are not forthcoming Recent Reports will be much reduced in both its length and quality. I am always grateful to hear any interesting records. My address and phone number are at the end of the article, please feel free to contact me with large counts, unusual behaviour or new local records. Please note that any sensitive breeding records will not be published but if possible a summary may be made.

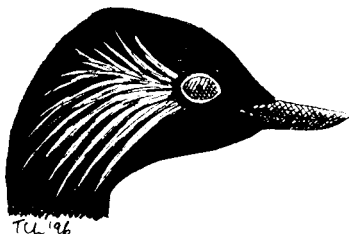
Some of these records may be unauthenticated and require review by the County Rarities Panel or the BBRC.

JUNE

June is when we tend to focus on breeding species and as usual it was swings and roundabouts for birds in Cheshire. Both Spotted and Pied Flycatchers had a good year with Grey Partridge and Tree Sparrows holding their own (although this latter species has shown a good increase on my local patch). Yet again Common Terns bred inland raising three young to fledging at last year's site. Anecdotal evidence suggest another pair also bred inland. Unfortunately two summer visitors on the verge of extinction have done badly, the first - Turtle Dove is now all but confined to its Delamere stronghold (perhaps only five pairs) with only two other breeding sites known this summer. This said, Turtle Dove was never numerous but if the downward trend continues much longer this species may soon have to be added to the county rarity list. Only a thorough survey of Cheshire will confirm or deny this rather pessimistic view.

The Ring Ouzel may have only bred at one regular site this year since the counties stronghold around the Three Shire Head area, which held four pairs in 1995, had no pairs this year, only the odd passage bird was recorded here and several pairs bred over the border in Derbyshire. The area bounded by the Cat and Fiddle Inn, Cumberland Brook, Cut Thorn Hill and Danebower Quarry held good numbers of other species including 100+ pairs of Meadow Pipits, 10+ pairs of Curlews, a dozen pairs of Wheatears and a pair of Little Owls. Just over the border the Hen Harriers had a successful time raising four young to fledging with Merlin, Short-eared Owl, Raven, Nightjar and possibly Hobby breeding in the Goyt Valley.

Only one **Great-crested Grebe** brood hatched at Rostherne Mere, 2 pairs bred at Tatton after last year's total failure and Poynton Pool had a good year. Up to 9 **Black-necked Grebes** were still at Woolston Eyes. Fiddler's Ferry had its first ever Fulmar on the 5th, perhaps looking for a nesting site on one of the cooling towers? A **Spoonbill** was at Frodsham (7th) and the **Lesser Flamingo** continued its stay at Frodsham. The Tatton moulting flock of **Mute Swans** reached 38, including the breeding pair and four young. A **Ruddy Shelduck** visited Neumann's Flash and 2 pairs of



Shelducks bred at Chelford SQ's with single pairs at Inner Marsh Farm and Sandbach. **Mandarins** bred in North Wirral for the first time at Raby Mere with 5 young seen. At least 8 broods of **Gadwall** hatched at Woolston Eyes with a maximum of 100 there. The drake **Green-winged Teal** reappeared at Frodsham No6 tank (15th-17th) and the male **Pintail** returned to Poynton Pool for its third summer. Up to 5 **Garganey** were at Frodsham, Inner Marsh Farm and Sandbach Flashes. Breeding at Woolston Eyes included 10 broods of **Pochard**, 12 of **Tufted Ducks** and 8 of **Ruddy Ducks**. Three Pochard at Sandbach (2nd) were unusual for the time of year and Tufted Ducks peaked at 61 at Rostherne Mere (29th).

Fiddler's Ferry had its first June record of **Buzzard** with birds at Rostherne on 3 dates. A pair of **Kestrels** nested in a pylon at Fiddler's Ferry. The only **Hobby** records were at Sandbach Flashes (18th) and Woolston Eyes (29th). A pair of **Grey Partridges** bred at Weston and at least 5 calling **Quails** from 4 sites included 2 at Congleton. At least 11 **Coot** broods were seen at Rostherne Mere and Poynton Pool had an excellent year. Four broods of **Little Ringed Plovers** hatched at Chelford SQ's with just a single pair at Sandbach. **Ringed Plovers** were in display flight at Fiddler's Ferry early in the month and a **Sanderling** was at Neumann's Flash (11th and 13th). Six **Little Stints** were at Inner Marsh Farm (7th) with a **Temminck's Stint** remaining there to the 2nd from late May. A **Pectoral Sandpiper** also visited Inner Marsh Farm (7th). **Black-tailed Godwits** reached 300 at Frodsham. The first returning **Green Sandpipers** were at Frodsham (14th) and Fiddler's Ferry next day. Single **Wood Sandpipers** visited Chelford SQ's (22nd) and Neumann's Flash (11th).

The first **Yellow-legged Gull** of the year at Fiddler's Ferry was an adult on 22nd and up to 6 were at Neumann's Flash (from 16th). Single **Common Terns** were at Budworth Mere (4th) and Sandbach (22nd and 2 on 13th). A **Black Tern** at Budworth Mere (1st) coincided with a small influx across Britain. A **Little Owl** was an unusual visitor to Budworth Mere (6th) but unfortunately was found dead. About 500 **Swifts** were at Fiddler's Ferry (15th) and 70 at Poynton Pool (2nd) was a good count. The most exceptional passerine was a **Wryneck** at Elton Hall Flash, Sandbach on the 15th. What on earth was it doing there in mid June? Perhaps there is a breeding pair in the county?

A flock of 200 **Sand Martins** were at Fiddler's Ferry (14th) and a small colony was found in a private area of Tatton. At Fiddler's Ferry singing warblers included 2 **Grasshoppers**, 7 **Sedges**, 3 **Reeds**, 14 **Whitethroats**, 4 **Blackcaps**, 1 **Chiffchaff** and 4 **Willow Warblers**. **Lesser Whitethroat** were completely absent from the Witton area due to a fire at the favoured breeding area and western Poynton had a blank year for this species. **Willow Tits** bred at Marbury No1 tank and Dog Wood, Tatton. Three **Ravens** were at Tatton (17th) with 1-2 on several other dates. The **Starling** roost at Rostherne Mere reached 1500 on 15th. The **Crossbill** invasion included 30 at Rawhead near Burwadsley (27th), 30 Black Lake, Delamere (28th) and 100 at Macclesfield Forest (28th).

JULY

A juvenile **Black-necked Grebe** was at Chelford SQ's (18th) and Fiddler's Ferry had a new July record of 30 **Cormorants** on 27th. The moulting **Mute Swan** flock at Budworth Mere reached 50 and up to 70 **Greylags** were at Rostherne Mere. Two **Ruddy Shelducks** moved from Hilbre (2nd) to Hoylake (3rd-4th), then to Inner Marsh Farm (5th-12th) and finally Frodsham (13th). **Shelduck** passage was noted over Frodsham during the month with some flocks exceeding 20 birds. **Mandarin** bred at Blakemere (25th) with 2 young seen, with singles at Rostherne all month and Poynton Pool (18th). The odd **Pintail** record came from Rostherne Mere and Frodsham while the drake at Poynton Pool remained until the 24th. A female **Garganey** at Fiddler's Ferry (12th-13th) was the sixth reserve record, an eclipse drake was at Neumann's Flash (14th) and a female there (28th-29th), while up to 4 were at Frodsham. **Pochard** and **Tufted Ducks** both returned to Fiddler's Ferry on the 5th. Tufted Ducks bred at Gatewarth Tip and Rostherne had a maximum count of 161 on 20th. A partial eclipse drake **Scaup** was on Budworth Mere (12th). A pair of **Common Scoters** visited Frodsham No6 tank (5th).

A **Marsh Harrier** passed through the Inner Dee. **Hobbies** were reported at Aldford (26th), Brereton (13th), Sandbach Flashes on 5 dates, Rostherne on 4 dates, with an adult and juvenile at Ellesmere and 2 at Woolston Eyes. **Red-legged Partridges** were at Bent Farm SQ with 6 **Grey Partridges** at Bartomley. A **Quail** was calling at Spen Green near Sandbach (7th) and the most extraordinary record (if confirmed) was a **Corncrake** at Bartomley (13th). **Oystercatchers** at Poynton on two dates was an exceptional record there. The odd **Little Stint** was at Inner Marsh Farm and Frodsham.

A **Pectoral Sandpiper** was on Frodsham No5 tank on 6th only, despite reports elsewhere for the next day. **Dunlin** numbers there increased from 200 on 7th to 3000 on 19th. Wader passage at Neumann's Flash included up to 7 **Black-tailed Godwits** (on 10 dates), **Whimbrel** on 3 dates and up to 250 **Curlew** roosting. Up to 500 Black-tailed Godwits were at Inner Marsh Farm, with 340 at Frodsham and two at Sandbach Flashes (18th). **Curlew** numbers reached 2,500 at Heswall and 10 **Spotted Redshanks** at Inner Marsh Farm. Single **Greenshanks** were at Gatewarth (9th), Fiddler's Ferry on 4 dates, Tatton (28th) - where this species is rare, with 2 at Neumann's Flash and 6 at Frodsham. Up to 7 **Green Sandpipers** were at Chelford SQ's and Marbury No1 tank during the month. A **Wood Sandpiper** was at Inner Marsh Farm with 2 at Sandbach Flashes (2nd-4th) and another 15th-16th. A returning **Common Sandpiper** was at Rostherne (26th) with 2 at Fiddler's Ferry (5th and 12th).

Mediterranean Gulls included a 1st winter at Neumann's Flash (18th) and a 1st summer there (26th and 29th), an adult at Marbury No1 (25th), a juvenile at Budworth Mere (25th) and 2 different birds at Frodsham. Up to 2,000 **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** roosted at Chelford SQ's during the month with the odd **Yellow-legged Gull** there. Up to 3 of the latter were at Neumann's Flash on 4 dates and Sandbach Flashes on 3 dates. A "Comic" Tern was at Rostherne (27th-28th), 2 **Common Gulls** at Chelford SQ's (20th), 5 at Neumann's Flash (25th-30th), with 2 more at Budworth Mere (29th), 2 at Frodsham, 5 at Sandbach Flashes (10th) and up to 3 there on 7 dates. Two **Turtle Doves** were seen at Woolston Eyes with a single at Neumann's Flash (to 13th). A **Long-eared Owl** was at Woolston Eyes (25th). Fiddler's Ferry had its fourth ever July record of **Short-eared Owl** (27th), the last being in 1986 and **Grey Wagtails** bred again there. **Wood Warblers** bred at Timbersbrook, the first recent breeding in SE Cheshire, as did a pair of **Pied Flycatchers** while 3-5 pairs of the latter bred at Macclesfield Forest. Ten **Crossbills** were at Forge Bed (10th), a single there (14th) and at Woolston Eyes.

AUGUST

A count of 43 **Great Crested Grebes** at Chelford SQ's (25th) was a new August record there and up to 45 at Rostherne Mere. A **Black-necked Grebe** was at the Weaver Bend (from 22nd) and another visited Rostherne Mere (30th). A **Shag** was at Frodsham (10th). A **Little Egret** frequented Burton Marsh (from 22nd) with 2 at Inner Marsh Farm (22nd) and 2 reports of singles from Frodsham. An adult **Spoonbill** was Burton Marsh in Denhall Gutter (18th-22nd) with an immature there (30th). The post moulting flock of **Greylag Geese** at Rostherne Mere reached 348 on 31st, the largest count since September 1992. A record 14,500 **Shelducks** were on the Mersey (24th).

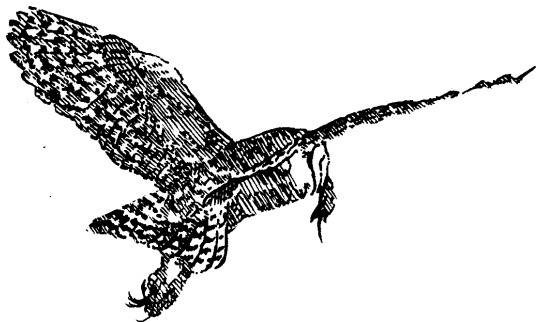
A **Chiloe Wigeon** appeared at Railway Flash, Sandbach (from 26th) and 87 **Gadwall** at Rostherne Mere (2nd) was a new August record, a pair with 3 young at Gatewarth (2nd) and a female at Poynton Pool (5th) was an excellent record there. **Garganey** reports included 2 at Inner Marsh Farm (22nd), a female at Neumann's Flash (9th) and a single at Sandbach Flashes (3rd), with odd birds at Frodsham. Up to 30 **Shovelers** were at Fiddler's Ferry during the month, with 65 at Woolston Eyes. Two female/immature **Red-crested Pochard** were at the Weaver Bend (from 22nd) including a leucistic bird. A pair of **Tufted Ducks** bred on Elton Hall Flash, Sandbach again, with 4 pairs at Chelford SQ's where numbers reached 278 on 25th, a record site count, but 247 at Rostherne Mere was the lowest August count for 3 years. A **Scaup** visited Frodsham and **Goldeneye** returned to Rostherne Mere from 9th.

A **Marsh Harrier** at Sandbach Flashes (from 17th) seen only occasionally was the fourth ever there, an adult female was at Fiddler's Ferry (24th and 31st) with one lingering between Parkgate and Inner Marsh Farm/Shotwick Lake (Clwyd) and Frodsham had a bird several dates mid month. Tatton had 7 **Buzzards** together on 22nd. **Hobbies** were at Bartomley (26th), Frodsham (26th), Middlewich (27th), Sandbach Flashes (24th and 31st), Rostherne Mere (19th) and up to 4 were at Risley Moss. Four calling **Quail** were at Burton (3rd). **Water Rails** began calling again at Rostherne Mere (from 23rd) and a **Spotted Crake** was at Parkgate (from 28th).

A **Little Ringed Plover** was at Gatewarth (2nd) and 1,200 **Ringed Plovers** were on the Mersey (24th). **Golden Plover** returned to Inner Marsh Farm from 4th and Fiddler's Ferry from 17th. A **Sanderling** was at Neumann's Flash (1st) while good numbers returned to the Red Rocks area. The odd **Little Stint** and **Curlew Sandpiper** were at Frodsham, Neumann's Flash and Sandbach Flashes. A **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** spent about 3.5 hours at Marbury No1 tank (31st) but was

only seen by 2 observers. It will be the first county record since 1986 if accepted as well as a first for Witton area. Four **Black-tailed Godwits** were at Sandbach Flashes (24th) with 80 at Fiddler's Ferry (3rd) and 2,183 on the Mersey wader count. Neumann's Flash had 487 **Curlews** roosting (20th) and 54 **Greenshanks** were at Parkgate, with up to 8 at Fiddler's Ferry. Up to 4 and 7 **Green Sandpipers** were at Chelford SQ's and Marbury No1 tank respectively. A **Wood Sandpiper** was at Sandbach Flashes (22nd-25th) with several records from Frodsham.

An adult winter **Mediterranean Gull** was at Neumann's Flash (26th) with another bird lingering at Moreton. Sandbach Flashes had single **Yellow-legged Gulls** on 3 dates with 1-2 at Neumann's Flash on 3 dates and occasional birds at Chelford SQ's. A **Kittiwake** was at Rostherne Mere (5th) and small numbers of **Common Tern** were at Fiddler's Ferry, Frodsham, Rostherne Mere and Sandbach Flashes, but 2 over a Poynton Garden was an unexpected garden tick. An **Arctic Tern** was at Sandbach (29th-31st). Two adult **Black Terns** were at Budworth Mere on the 27th with another at Neumann's Flash on the 31st. A **Ring-necked Parakeet** was seen over a Wilmslow garden (17th) flying south then east, perhaps heading for its long lost mate in Poynton?



Barn Owls appear to have bred at a central Cheshire site and a **Short-eared Owl** visited Fiddler's Ferry on 3 dates. Hundred's of **Swifts** were at Ashley hawking over a freshly cut field (2nd) but most birds had left breeding sites by the 10th. **Sand Martins** still fed young at Woolston Eyes No4 bed on 28th and up to 5000 **Swallows** roosted at No4 bed there. Single **Tree Pipits** passed over Frodsham (25th), Sandbach Flashes (18th and 25th) and Woolston Eyes (25th). A **Redstart** was at Frodsham on a few dates late in the month and a **Whinchat**

at Sandbach Flashes (31st) was a scarce bird there. **Sedge** and **Reed Warblers** at Fiddler's Ferry were still singing to 3rd and 25th respectively. A **Wood Warbler** at Rostherne Mere (20th-21st) was a good Autumn record there. A pair of **Pied Flycatchers** were at Neumann's Flash (30th) and up to 4 **Spotted Flycatchers** at Frodsham and Rostherne Mere. A flock of 30 **Tree Sparrows** were at Sandbach (3rd). A **Crossbill** over Sandbach Flashes (7th) was only the second ever here.

PREDICTIONS FOR NOVEMBER TO JANUARY

November and December are quiet ornithologically so it is a good time to get to grips with that difficult duo, Iceland and Glaucous Gull. Undoubtedly the best place to see these species is at Gatewarth Tip on the Mersey. Although typically not the best months for white-winged gulls there should be at least half a dozen of them amongst the 30,000+ gulls. It is therefore advisable to spend a couple of hours there. Other good sites include Frodsham, Maw Green Tip at Sandbach, Rostherne Mere and the North Wirral shore.

January always sees a flurry of birdwatching activity as birders start off the new year by notching up as many species as possible. With a reasonable amount of effort and a bit of luck you can be on 120 species by the end of the month, if we have a good selection of scarce visitors. If you are considering a year list it is essential to plan your time (ie no bunking off to Scilly in mid-October like some birders do) and always go for any rarity A.S.A.P. to avoid missing out on a useful tick. A few surprises will also be most welcome - remember last year's Woodlark?

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

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

Thanks/acknowledgements for recent reports:- S. & G. Barber, Birdnet, Birdwatch & Birdwatching Magazines, R. Bridson, J. Carroll, J. Clarke, M. Duckham, K. Kirk, Keith Massey (Fiddler's Ferry Reserve), Byran Roberts (Tatton & Knutsford Moor LNR), Rostherne Mere NNR log, Sandbach log, D. Walters (Marbury Cp & Witton Lime Beds), P. Walton and anyone else who passed records on.

REED WARBLER CHRONICLE

Diary of the 1997 Breeding Season at Rostherne Mere NNR

Reed Warblers begin to arrive in Cheshire from mid to late April with the stragglers not claiming territories until June or even early July. Rostherne Mere NNR, embracing the largest water in Cheshire, holds a thriving colony of the warblers, whose numbers have risen from twenty-five pairs (1973) to in excess of fifty pairs within the twenty-five seasons of my study. Only of the order of one thousand nestlings are marked annually within the UK ringing scheme and of these the Rostherne birds invariably represent between ten and fifteen per cent.

For a bird which is a long-distance migrant, the breeding season of the Reed Warbler is very protracted. The Rostherne first egg date has a mean of 18/19 May but exceptionally eggs are laid prior to 10th of May and a season's last clutch may not be completed until the second week of August.

The 1997 season was one of the most extensive on record and for the fourth successive year the warbler nests were free of Cuckoo parasitism.

Extracts and summaries from my field notes are as follows:-

- 12 April: Male singing in hawthorn hedge dividing willow carr/reedbed from sheep meadow.
- 20 April: The early bird, still on territory, is mist-netted and found to be carrying a ring placed on an adult male at the reserve on 5 June '93.
- 23 April: A second singing male is now present.
- 3 May: At least fifteen males are now evident. A complete nest, built on five old reed stems, is actually 'inside' the hawthorn hedge.
- 4 May: The nest is still empty. I am aware of the earliest Reed Warbler egg laid at Rostherne (6 May 1987).
- 6 May: The 'hedge' nest now contains two eggs, giving a record 'first egg' date of 5 May.
- 9 May: The nest now holds a single, cold, wet egg. The weather had been somewhat unseasonal with .61 inches of rain on 5 May and a temperature low of 1 C on the night of 7/8 May but the loss of an egg suggests a possibility of predation (see note of 20 June). At least thirty males now in territory.
- 16 May: Nine nest attempts known: the most advanced nest contains a single egg. Female with eggs mist-netted: weight of 14.6 grams is some 3 grams heavier than usual weight.
- 19 May: Complete nest constructed on stem of blackcurrant bush and single new reed at back of reed stand adjoining woodland.
- 23 May: Intruding male Reed Warbler chased into mist-net by 'owner' of territory and later chased into another net by another established bird some twenty-five metres along the reedbed. 'Blackcurrant' nest now holds single egg (but was to be lost to a predator a few days' later).
- 1 June: First hatching of young today.
- 7 June: Brood of six-day old nestlings, two birds ringed today. Fifty-one territories and thirty-six active nests indicate an early start to the season. Many nests now contain eggs. Some territories are very constricted: three nests are located within a stretch of sixteen metres. Reedbed damage noted from roosting of juvenile Starlings. This problem does not normally occur until late June or July.



- 11 June: A nestling of nine days calls to its parents and tries to leave its nest on my approach. Most birds remain in the nest until called out by the adults at eleven or twelve days.
- 15 June: Some nests include wool in construction - a new material only available since the recent introduction of sheep to the fields which border the reserve. Reed Warblers are opportunist builders, having used strips of polythene interspersed with reed leaves, reed flower heads and grass in some seasons. A nest is lost to predation within the Starling roost area and elsewhere another collapses due to wind damage. A clutch of eggs is of pale brown rather than of the usual greenish base colour. Young Blue Tit begin to invade the reed stands.
- 20 June: Nest built under clump of old reeds is concealed from roosting Starlings (nest proves to have successful outcome). Grey Squirrel seen travelling along inside of hawthorn hedge, presumably on look-out for bird nests.
- 22 June: Nest badly tilted through uneven reed growth - this is not normally a serious problem but exceptionally can lead to egg loss and clutch failure. At 2050 hours on dull evening, parties of ten to twenty Starlings drop into the reedbed as a lone Swallow feeds above the swamp and a Sparrowhawk circles overhead.
- 25 June: At least sixty territories established. Rare evidence of egg-dumping as a nest with complete clutch of four acquires an 'extra' egg resting on top of the others.
- 28 June: Young birds dead in badly tilted nest. Nest at such an acute angle that adult unable to brood young and shield them from rain. Adult approaching a nest sang briefly whilst holding craneily in bill. Nest found on two stems of poplar.
- 29 June: Unusual nest with normal 41/2 cms internal cup diameter but with additional 6 cms of material to hinge on reed stem. Young Swallow dead in mere probably linked with recent prolonged spell of wet weather.
- Fifty-four nestlings ringed in June from seventeen broods.
- 2 July: Only eleven birds in five broods ringed - another indication of weather related food shortages.
- 5 July: Nestlings experiencing slow growth: seven day-old birds appear one to two days younger. Juveniles now starting to be caught in mist-nets.
- 8 July: Young leave nests at eleven to twelve days but can't really fly until about sixteen day. Two 'hoppers' alongside mist-net are attracted by captured adults but both are able to display agility in evading their own capture.
- 12 July: Clutch of four eggs still being incubated but must be infertile as hatching is overdue.
- 16 July: One of four nestlings dead on nest rim having choked on wool nest lining.
- 19 July: One hundred and twenty-six nestlings now ringed.
- 23 July: No apparent food shortage now as twenty nestlings are marked from five broods.
- 26 July: Some adults are about to leave for their winter quarters as several females are re-feathering their brood patches.
- 31 July: A nest lies on its side due to recent gales but the three eggs, now on the nest wall, are still being incubated (see note for 8 August). Nest of four eggs, laid in late June and presumably infertile, replaced by nest of three eggs seven metres away. This clutch also failed when the eggs did not hatch during August.
- One hundred and fourteen nestlings were marked within July.
- 4 August: Three of five adults caught are heavy, weighing 14.1, 15.0 and 15.6 grams, and ready to migrate.
- 8 August: The second brood at the boathouse is ringed forty-one days after the initial brood. The current brood is of two birds from four eggs contrasting with five healthy young on 28 June. A very heavy adult female weighs 16.2 grams. The 'horizontal' nest is now missing and no doubt some of the material has been used to build the replacement nest a few metres away.
- 12 August: A single ten day-old chick remains in the nest whilst its siblings are fed in the reedbed nearby.

- 16 August: Two advanced nestlings sit on rim of nest waiting to be called out by parents. Spread of young production throughout season emphasized by ringing of nestlings on each of my consecutive visits to the reserve from 20 June.
- 17 August: Very few adults remain. Only two clutches of eggs are now being incubated.
- 22 August: Juvenile Reed Warbler dead in lowest shelf of mist-net: it had been pecked in the head. A Moorhen is suspected.
- 26 August: Two adult males of normal weight still busy feeding young.
- 31 August: Brood of two six day-old birds completes ringing of nestlings for the season - total is one hundred and ninety-six birds from sixty-five broods. Twenty-eight nestlings of eleven broods were marked in August. It is ironic that whilst some nests have collapsed in blustery weather, the two successive nests of one female (referred to on 31 July) have survived in good condition complete with infertile clutches.
- 6 September: Final brood of two young has failed to fledge. Very little activity in the reedbeds now but the surviving August broods will ensure that the species will be represented on the reserve until late September or possibly into the first few days of October. Of the ninety adults caught, forty-three had been previously marked at the mere with twenty-three of those ringed as nestlings and ten as juveniles. The oldest birds known to be present in 1997 were four ringed as nestlings in 1991, two of which were from the same brood.

June was a particularly wet month with 112.2 mms of rain recorded at nearby Manchester Airport, well in excess of the month's average (66.0 mms 1979-90). But the heaviest rainfall for that month was in 1987 with a total of 174.3 mms being the greatest recorded in the area since records began in 1877.

In 1987 the Reed Warbler had its longest breeding season of any within the current study. From the first egg laid on 6 May to the nest-leaving of the last chicks on 3 September spanned a remarkable one hundred and twenty-one days. Had the last brood of young survived, 1997 would have set a new record.

Thanks are due to the Manchester Weather Centre for the data recorded at Manchester Airport, seven kilometers east of Rostherne Mere.

Malcolm Calvert, 12 Hill Drive, Handforth, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 3AR

COMPUTERS AGAIN

TRIP REPORTS AND RECORDING

If any of you are planning on going on a birding holiday abroad, you might be interested in this. Martin Pennell and Andy Green went to Israel earlier this year, and I had a quick look on the Internet to see if there were any decent trip reports, site details etc. I found quite a lot of stuff which they said proved to be very useful. If you are thinking of going abroad, please feel free to give me a ring, and I'll have a look for you to see what I can find. I can't promise anything - some places are quite well covered and some aren't. For example, printing stuff out for Martin's forthcoming trip to Australia was easy, but the Gambia wasn't. Unless I start to get overwhelmed by queries, all I'll ask is that you cover the cost of postage and the paper/ink etc (which will vary according to how much stuff there is to send you) but shouldn't be more than two quid at the most.

Also, further to Tony Broome's article in the last edition of Bird News about computer systems for recording and analysing data, if anyone wants to come and have a look at the Nantwich Natural History Society's Data Logger, then they would be more than welcome. It is a DOS based system which allows you to quickly enter details of sightings. It stores them in a database, and then at the push of a button, you can get about 10 different reports out - with more just around the corner when I get chance to write the programs!! The current reports include:

- 1) Maps of our recording area, like the ones which were in the Cheshire & Wirral Breeding Bird Atlas showing where we get different species and in what numbers.
- 2) Lists of all records for a particular site.
- 3) Graphs showing how many records we have for each species over time so that we can see if they are declining or increasing.

We have already used it to provide data for Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council relating to 2 local planning applications. I can get it to kick data out into files which can be used by various word processing packages including Microsoft Word, and it would be straightforward to import records from elsewhere too if they were available from other computer systems. Data is regularly backed up and copies are kept safe - mainly on floppy discs but also on another computer to minimise the chance of losing any through some sort of accident. Like I say, anyone who wants to drop in for a cup of tea and a quick look will be very welcome - the more ideas the better!!

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

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RECORDS - LOVE or HATE (part three)

EDS: Keith requested that we do not alter anything without prior consultation.

This last of three parts on keeping and arranging personal records of birds should come as a relief to those who will actively use this monthly method.

You have laid out your daily records as stated in part one, without idiot boxes or vertical lines and not leaving any spaces between records. You have also used this layout to study birds you chose as stated in part two. You now need to arrange each monthly maximum to enable you to extract the records quickly when needed. Take a quick look at the layout below and you will see it is laid out similar to most bird reports, with my additions added on. Again use narrow ruled A4 paper, this will enable you to get around 40 years of monthly records on one sheet.

First you have to decide what and how much information you want to record. I just record each monthly maxima and dates they occur. You can record from weekly to monthly records and also male and female counts, if required. This will decide how deep each monthly box will be. Each box depth for each month must be the same depth for the whole year, otherwise you will get steps across the year which will make it more difficult to read the records quickly. You can have different depths for different years as long as they are the same depth for each year.

As your yearly records build up, you will see a pattern occurring with different species. Summer visitors from about March to October, winter visitors from about September to April with residents occurring in each month. Some species will only be recorded a few times in about ten years, all these patterns will tell you immediately what status each species as in your area. With summer and winter visitors you can also record first and last dates with counts by splitting the year box, and put the year in the right hand side and first and last dates in the left side, or the other way around.

One last thought. These layouts are for your personal records, when sending in records to any county you will need to send in your records according to their method of sending in records.

		SPECIES NAME											
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
		JAN	FEB	MAR	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
YEAR	YEAR												
YEAR	YEAR												
YEAR	YEAR												

← 15 mm →		JAN
FIRST DATE	YEAR	DATES
LAST DATE	YEAR	COUNTS
LAST DATE	YEAR	DATES
FIRST DATE	YEAR	COUNTS

First/Last date Summer Visitor sheet.

Last/First date Winter Visitor sheet.

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

THE COUNTY RARITIES LIST

The County Rarities list is an anachronism, and no longer has any rational basis; not only has it outlived its usefulness, but it is now an obstacle to efficient recording; it should be ended forthwith, and consigned to history! Let me explain. The County Rarities list appears to consist of some birds which are rarely seen in the county, though identification is not necessarily difficult when they are encountered (e.g. Ruddy Shelduck, Hoopoe, Great Grey Shrike); some which are hardly "rare", but where there is a possibility of confusion with other species (e.g. divers, white-winged gulls); and some to which both criteria apply (e.g. Honey and Rough-legged Buzzards, Marsh Warbler, Melodious and Icterine Warblers). In all cases, observers are asked to prove specific identification.

So far, so good: it sounds reasonable. Unfortunately, the List includes species which are now quite familiar to most observers (not necessarily in Cheshire); contains some peculiar anomalies; and almost certainly acts as a disincentive to submission of records.

When I was a boy (as I used to say when I wanted to annoy my children; indeed, come to think of it, I still do) birding was a very different affair from what it is today. Improved optics apart, there are three major changes which are relevant to the matter of county rarities. First, there has been an explosion of available information in the form of books and journals: younger members can have no idea of the impact of the Peterson guide in the fifties (now almost obsolete), at a time when there was little but Coward to bridge the huge gap between the Observer book and Witherby's "Handbook". Second, there has been an explosion in cheap travel, both within and beyond the UK: forty years ago a week on the East coast was a major holiday, quite likely undertaken without benefit of a car. Third, and a result of both of these, knowledge and identification skills have been transformed: for example, separation of Arctic & Common Terns in flight was then largely a matter of getting close enough views to confirm bill-colour, and the significance of primary projection on warblers was something yet to be established.

Our whole idea of what is and is not a "rarity" has changed. Identification skills have advanced, and continue to advance. In pursuit of life-lists or UK-lists or year-lists many observers travel widely, and even those who rarely travel abroad are likely to be familiar with species which may be less than common in Cheshire.

To take some of the more obvious examples, are Red Kite, Black Guillemot, Nightjar or Chough any less distinctive in Cheshire than they are across the border in Wales? Are Velvet Scoter, Black Grouse, Black Redstart and Bearded Tit so unfamiliar that we need to justify our identification of them? The list simply does not reflect the reality of contemporary experience and knowledge: birding is no longer a parochial activity, and few of us confine the activity to our home county. If our birding is national, why should we not stick with the national list?

Then there are the curious anomalies within the Cheshire list. Jeff Clarke has already, in an earlier issue of "Bird News", questioned the position on Yellow-legged Gulls (and "rumour" in the latest issue suggests he alone is submitting fifty records this year). There seems no reason for the continued inclusion of Hobby: at least 30 records in the 1995 Bird Report (more than for, say, Dipper, Ring Ousel and Firecrest, none of which is on the list), and no greater risk of confusion than there is with, say, Peregrine or Merlin. Mandarin (possibly also Hawfinch), though generally scarce, may be familiar in certain localities.

The case of Rock and Water Pipits is puzzling. I know from compiling that a similar number of records of each are received each year. In winter, Rock Pipits are regular in small numbers at Hilbre, Red Rocks and Hale Shore; both species occur on the Dee between Heswall and Neston; away from these areas, records are far more likely to relate to Water than to Rock. If the problem is over separation of species, why are not both on the list - especially in the overlap area on the Dee? If the issue is scarcity, why is Rock not on the list? We are less likely to encounter it away from the Dee and Mersey than Water Pipit.

There are two examples of discrimination by locality: "inland records" of Red-throated Diver and Snow Bunting. Years ago, I came across a little party of Snow Buntings feeding just off the M1 in, I think, Leicestershire; they looked just the same as Snow Buntings do at the coast. I'm not sure that I have ever seen an inland Red-throated Diver - but as a general rule I would suggest that it is easier to get good views of divers on inland waters than on the sea, because inland waters do

tend to be smaller. There is also an interesting question about future anomalies. At what point do we decide that some declining species (Corn Bunting, perhaps?) is so scarce that it should be on the list? And how will we all react to being asked for descriptions of a "common" bird?

The chief drawback of the list is that it acts as a disincentive to submission of records (it also makes for unnecessary work, as when half-a-dozen people submit records of the same Short-toed Lark, or whatever - but that is a lesser issue). This may not be surprising, when you consider what a tedious and daft activity this business of submitting local "rarity" records may be.

One winter, the late Stewart Gibson found a very nice Bearded Tit at Thurleston, and called three of us out to see it; someone unkindly pointed out that it needed a county rarity description (despite the fact that we were all quite familiar with the bird), and that as the finder he should do it. He appealed in vain to our better natures, and we left him sitting in the sludge bed with his notebook while we disappeared to the warmth of the pub (though we did, to be fair to ourselves, get his pint in). And I once found a very competent observer, who had just identified a Lapland Bunting by flight-call, struggling to find a way to describe it which didn't sound as though he had just copied it from a guide (not easy, especially with Lapland Bunting); quite a pointless activity, since everybody knew he was "good for a Lapland Bunting", as Records used to say. Or again, Terry Francis, former Chairman of COA, told the tale of seeing a Goldfinch on Fair Isle and being required to produce a field description ("and Goldfinch is a hell of a thing to write a description of!") - of a bird which nested in his garden. Frankly, I think this sort of bureaucratic nonsense brings recording systems into disrepute.

Some of us are pretty bad about submitting records anyway, and having to produce a field description of an obvious or familiar species may be the last straw. I know that this has been true of me in the past (I've tried to reform lately!), and can recall records of Mandarin, Hobby and Hawfinch at least which have never entered the system.

I believe it is true of others. Perusal of Bird Reports, and the absence of some records of which I have heard, suggests under-reporting of several species. There is a page-and-a-half in the 1995 Report taken up with "unconfirmed" reports (including almost as many Hobby records as those confirmed), most of which are probably perfectly sound. And as a compiler I simply don't believe that only three or four people each year actually visit the Old Quay to get Water Pipit on their year lists - though only three or four submit records. Not everyone is as blunt as the birder who said to me "if they expect me to do a field description of Black-throated Diver they can do without my records", but there are probably a number who just don't bother. The List may actually distort knowledge, by reducing record submission.

Now, I must make it clear that I am not endorsing the practice of non-submission (I took care to knock out a couple of Hobby descriptions before settling down to write this!). While we have the

system, we should work it. That doesn't mean we should accept it uncritically. Of course, I recognise that some of the species on the list are difficult; any species can be difficult in the right (wrong?) circumstances. And there has been concern in the past about overconfident identification of some of them - for example, long-range divers and skuas, and white-winged gulls. I don't think this can be used to justify a wholesale hoovering-up of all records of nearly a hundred species.

The Rarities Panel already acknowledges that "in most cases just a few lines will prove adequate" - and I know this to be true from acceptance of my own pretty skeletal notes. The Panel also "may require" details of other species in particular circumstances. Putting these two together, can't we do away with that forbidding Rarity Report Form, ask for a few lines on any unusual or difficult species to be added to records submitted, and then leave it to the Panel to call for more details if they think it necessary? It might not be necessary, for example, if two hundred observers had all seen the same bird, or if the Panel knew that the observer was competent with the particular species.



So, I have questioned the worship of the written report, the idea that records must “stand the scrutiny of future generations”, that “it is not enough that the present generation recognise the competence of individual observers”.

I didn't mean to attack two sacred cows in one article, but it seems to have worked out that way. Let me just say that if I want to string a record, I reckon it is easier to do so on paper (why do Universities have oral examinations for borderline candidates?), and that ultimately the Records Panel does have to make a decision about the competence (and honesty) of the observer. Not that I am convinced that posterity will be all that worried about our records; if it is, the interest is far more likely to be in their provenance (how reliable the observer was) than in their content.

But this is a diversion. Back to the point. Much has changed quite dramatically in the fifty years during which I have been watching birds; the idea of the County Rarities List has not. I may have overstated the case in calling for its complete abolition, but at the very least we need a much shorter and more discriminating List, probably accompanied by more selective submissions to the Panel, to make it relevant to the present day. Piecemeal tinkering (withdrawal of a species here, addition of one there) is not the same as radical overhaul - which I believe is now needed.

Bob Anderson, 102 Crewe Road, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 6JD

THE COUNTY RARITY LIST – A REPLY

Eeee, when I were a lad, a yooost to dream of owning a Hertel and Reuse telescope. Me Dad yooost to sellotape two milk bottles together and tell me they were binoculars. Eeee ... them were the days! Yes Bob, some things have changed dramatically over the past fifteen years, optics, field guides, the advent of pagers etc. etc. Birds are on tap, birders can pick and choose which species they twitch. It couldn't be easier ... or could it?

The one thing that hasn't changed over all these years is people's ability to identify birds. In some respects, it's worsened. Field craft is not learnt, notebooks are not carried and there is a reluctance to supply records, let alone descriptions.

So then you may ask “Why do we need a bird report? Why does it have to be so accurate?” Wouldn't it be easier to accept every species submitted and perhaps get a lot more records? It's not all a question of posterity. I think the bird report gives county birders a focal point, other birders names become familiar. The nice thing about birding to me is the fact that you never stop learning. No matter how many hours you spend in the field, you always see something new. I record what I see and submit my records at the end of the year like everyone else so that the annual bird report is as complete as possible.

I meet a variety of birders out in the field and read a lot of submitted descriptions. The county's ornithological expertise ranges from absolute beginner to expert and the descriptions are, to their credit, generally very good. I've find less than 5% unacceptable and that is because some people can't write descriptions, rather than can't identify birds. However, in some instances, people do make mistakes. In both cases, the included records in the report are accurate and true, a fact that I feel is of paramount importance (a report full of gobbledegook may just as well not have been written).

Cheshire doesn't do anything different to anyone else. All the county bird report committees request descriptions and all have some birders who refuse point blank to supply them.

One point I must make is that we don't differentiate between well-known experts and beginners, this is perhaps unknown to the majority of birders. It's a level playing field and we don't favour anyone. All I will say to your friends who thought it our loss if his Black-Throated Diver wasn't submitted with a description, is that he/she should be setting an example to others if he's so good, instead of adopting a superior “I don't need to” attitude. I meet people like this all the time and they make as many mistakes as the rest of us! They just don't admit to them.

For every species you mentioned as “anomalies”, I can give you a cast-iron reason why they are still on our rarities list. If you're very experienced it's true that most on the list will be simple to identify but conversely, writing descriptions for them should be easier shouldn't it? As a matter of interest Derbyshire request descriptions for Manx Shearwater and Fulmar – that would keep you busy!

Gulls? Look in the September British Birds to see just how easy “Yellow-legged” are. The truth is they aren't! I'd defy anyone to identify juvenile and first or second year birds correctly all the time.

Glaucous and Iceland – I've seen "experienced" observers give up on them! A puzzle? Water Pipit? What is a puzzle is why everyone who visits Neston Quay sees Water Pipits. I've been stood next to birders who confidently shout out Water Pipit and log the same as a little dot disappears into the distance, leaving me wondering if they've actually considered Rock, for that's what the majority of sightings are! The twitching scene calls it "mass hallucination", expecting to see a bird and seeing it whether it's there or not. It happens all the time. It's a fact that not many birders can correctly identify Water Pipits in flight or on call, as they are usually seen. In October's British Birds, p431, in their 'Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain' the difficulty of identification is also touched upon with their comment:-

"Any eventual status summary will also need to take into account the likelihood that the data probably include some misidentified Rock Pipits *A. petrosus* of the Scandinavian race *littoralis*."

We have trimmed the list again this year Bob, have a look. I'll ask you to go through it and let me know which you think should come off and why. I'll reply to each.

So for now, the "unconfirmed" list stands, at least they're not forgotten records. Some counties don't bother to print them at all. This year, a lot of this list will comprise of Birdline records, phoned in by birders who either think they're automatically passed on to us or who just can't be bothered to do both. Shame isn't it? But I think that overall, compared against some counties, Cheshire's birders are good at playing by the rules. I can honestly say that the majority of the descriptions we receive are of high quality and I thank all those individuals concerned for taking the time. It is appreciated.

I'll end with a "couple" of observations. If Corn Buntings become so rare that the current population of birders doesn't know what they look like, yes they'll go on the list. Even in these days of enlightenment one was identified as a Yellow-breasted Bunting by hundreds of birders on the East Coast last year – many red, well-known, faces!! Lapland Bunting in flight: Snow Buntings are frequently mistaken for them in flight, I've seen it from Cheshire to Scillies. "Real" Lapland Buntings in flight can provide a good few lines of notes!

A shorter list? Sorry Bob, not just yet! For all those who "feel pretty bad" about submitting records, I'd like to quote from the September's British Birds, p397, I don't think they'd mind:-

"We have a firm belief that regular watchers in a county should do two things: first, support the county bird club and secondly, submit details of their observations to the county recorder. Sadly, large numbers of birders these days fail to do either". The Norfolk Bird Club.

Stuart Gibson was an excellent birder who played by the rules. He once told me that if you want to change anything, do it from within ... a number of us did and CAWOS was born. Good eh?

Hope my answers are as expected and yes, your Hobby descriptions are appreciated, except that they're off the list for 1997 records!

Tony Broome, County Recorder.

Rumours... Rumours ...

- I hear (belatedly) that two Tatton regulars were seen taking a midwinter paddle in the Mere. Apparently they were rescuing a Goldeneye entangled by discarded fishing line. The bird was later sighted again on Mobberley road with its head sticking out of a Tesco bag. Fortunately after first aid it was successfully returned to the Mere.
- Is it true that a Cheshire birder tried to see wild Turkey in Florida last Christmas Day?

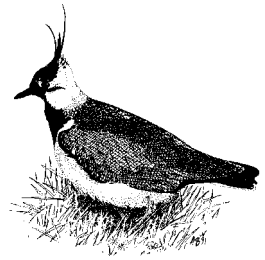
HOUSE MARTIN SURVEY

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

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

The View from the Farmyard

Swallow arrival was somewhat more condensed than in most years, with 10 birds in the farmyard during the week after the first birds returned. The older, experienced birds are the first to return and quickly occupy the prime sites. Often these birds take over and repair the nests of previous years, of course adding the compulsory layer of white feathers. The ability to return early and to use previously constructed nests, buys the occupier a valuable lead over the late arrivals. Birds which commence nesting later are often the young and less experienced birds or birds in poor condition with some arriving 30 days after the first birds who then have to begin building a nest from scratch. This can take 2-3 weeks by which time the early birds have fledged their first broods. On one occasion, a second brood coincided with the latecomers first brood at fledging. 1996 was the first time in recent years that a third brood was produced here. The exceptional group arrival of 1997 have managed to produce 11 first, 10 second and 3 third broods. More often than not the first brood consists of 5 young, 3 or 4 in second broods and 2 to 3 when a third brood is produced. A fortnight of foul weather during the period just after hatching resulted in the parent Swallows curtailing hunting activities, directly causing the loss of at least two Swallows. Similar problems occurred for the House Martins. Starvation killed an entire brood on the farmhouse the dead being ejected from the nest by the adults, who quickly got on with a replacement brood.



One of the most enjoyable things about Swallows is the fact that they are willing to trust humans during possibly the most important part of their year. Nesting in our buildings, often only inches above our heads, the young, when first fledged, spend several days near the nest. In the milking parlour the fledglings sit on the wires during milking, cocking their heads to one side watching our every move, only disturbed when the cows are entering or leaving the stalls. The arrival of one of the parents through the open window, sends all of the young into gape mode, the clamour of their calls ceasing almost the instant the recipient mouth is chosen. I can't think of any farm on which I have milked cows that didn't have at least one pair of Swallows nesting above the cows. However it seems the days of having Swallows in the milking parlour are numbered, for new directives from the dairy include a stipulation that no vermin (and that includes Swallows) should have access to the milking area. Sad times indeed. It remains to be seen if it is possible to implement this, as man has been trying to exclude vermin from his homes and buildings without much success since agriculture was first practised. This directive reminds me of one health inspector's comment some years ago. Inspecting the parlour and dairy is routinely done and on each visit the inspector would point out areas requiring improvement, and we would be expected to have taken action before the next visit. On this particular occasion we appeared to have got it right and he was at a loss what to complain about. But not wanting to break with tradition he decided to comment on livestock, and must have wished he hadn't bothered after we broke into disrespectful sniggers at his pronouncement that "no cattle should be in the milking area whilst milking was taking place". Unfortunately we haven't been able to comply yet – though I'm sure the EU are working on it!

The old bell tower and weather vane on the stable block are under repair. The job is a considerable one and it took a huge crane to lift the old tower down. The builders have stripped the roof and replaced many of the large timbers which have supported the roof for 250 years. Scaffolding surrounds the building and in the midst of all this a pair of Spotted Flycatchers have raised 4 young. Directly under the tower is an archway and it was just within this that the pair built their nest on top of an old flycatcher nest from about 6 years ago. The adults had just completed laying when the scaffolders moved in, with the brooding bird sat tight supplied with food by the other bird. I made the builders aware of the nest, and they showed great interest in trying to give the pair as much chance of success as possible. So for 8 hours a day the floor below was a joinery shop with men up and down scaffolding hammering and banging, playing loud music and shouting. Despite all this the pair brooded and fed the young and eventually 3 young fledged, the forth sitting tight on

the edge of the nest. One of the builders offered to give it a push, I even caught him giving it verbal encouragement. As the day wore on the builders became more concerned about the “almost” fledgling, stopping me almost every time I passed to seek my opinion. Fortunately the bird flew, but alas after the joiners had gone home. The speed the van entered the yard the next morning, it was obvious what the priority job was. A quick inspection of the nest satisfied the men that the bird had finally flown, and it was on with the main job of the day i.e. plugging the kettle in and making a brew.

On warm summer evenings the Swifts come to visit the farm from their colonies in the Knutsford area, charging about over wood and field in pursuit of our abundant fly population, their screams breaking the sultry silence (artistic licence taken thanks to Manchester airport). On days when the air is moist and the insects are forced to fly low it is not uncommon to find yourself surrounded by swooping, darting parties of feeding Swifts. However, one day in August it was a very different flock which I encountered. All the birds were focused upon direct flight, holding a course of 180° south, they faced in one direction and no screaming was to be heard. The flock was perhaps 30yds wide and took 2-3 minutes to pass over. I would estimate 600 to 700 birds in all. I watched as the flock flew over in silent procession intent on departing, the silence of the birds creating an air of solemnity. The following weekend I visited Knutsford and no Swifts were to be seen, the courtyards and narrow streets missing the exuberance of the breeding birds and their young. This was the first time I have witnessed Swift migration, and the birds seemed as sad to go as I was to see them leave, the playful feeding flight replaced by melancholic determination. No doubt over some distant lake they will pause to feed up and resume their incredible aerial acrobatics.

Pete Hall, The School House, Toft Road, Knutsford

Notes & Letters

AS THE LITTLE BUSTARDS SAW IT

After returning from a day in Scotland, it was time for probably the last bit of decent birding in 1996 - the Yule Log Bird Race. The team consisted of myself, Tom Lowe and Kieran Foster and considering we were all 18 or under, the Little Bustards seemed an appropriate team name.

December 29th started with freezing temperatures, though this was hardly noticeable as we ticked off Tawny and Little Owl from the car at Hockenhull. The drive to Burwardsley gave us a Little Owl, sitting on a fence post, near Tattenhall but little else. We were at Burwardsley for dawn and the first bird here was Pheasant. A Raven was picked up on call and then seen in the half-light as it flew away from us. As we walked towards the wood, a huge bonus came in the form of a Woodcock though more predictable species included Treecreeper, Great-spotted Woodpecker, Marsh Tit and Bullfinch amongst others. Redpoll at Burwardsley was a good sighting, one which we had not predicted at this site.

A short drive to Beeston provided us with excellent views of Peregrine, as well as Stock Dove. Nearby at Peckforton luck was with us as we picked up the tit flock, and almost immediately we were treated to views of a Lesser-spotted Woodpecker. The most noticeable bird here was Nuthatch, with 2 seen and many others heard. The Shady Oak Pool gave us 23 Mandarins, this high count due to the nearby canal being frozen. The journey to Frodsham was uneventful though a site in Frodsham itself provided us with one Tree Sparrow. The two Shorelarks were performing well when we arrived, as was a female Scaup, two redhead Smew and one Ruddy Duck on The Weaver Bend. No.6 tank was relatively quiet due to it being frozen over though the Score (viewed from No.4 tank) was very good value. Whilst scanning through the huge flock of Shelduck, Tom found two dark-bellied Brent Geese and a male Merlin was sitting on the same post of No.5 tank, as it had been the day before. Two Buzzard and about six Grey Partridge were also seen at Frodsham. By midday our list was on 81 species, with the Wirral still to come.

A brief stop at IMF provided us with Shoveler although there was no sign of a reported Stonechat. At nearby Denhall Lane, one Whooper was picked out from the Bewick's flock. At Neston Old Quay, a couple of Bramblings were seen with Chaffinches and we managed to flush two Water Pipits and a Grey Wagtail from the small stream there. There was little at Parkgate, except a brief talk with James' and Chris' team. With limited light left, a visit to Thurstaston provided views of

Turnstone but not Red-breasted Merganser. The remaining bit of light was spent in the Hoylake/Red Rocks area. Our rewards were a small flock of Snow Buntings, Grey Plover, Sanderling and one Ruff. One Rock Pipit was a nice bonus as were two Pinkfeet on the tideline. Light had faded with our score on 99 species. We wanted 100 but Water Rail at Neston and Parkgate did not oblige.

A brief stop at my house revealed that Goosander had been seen in the east of the county. Armed with a torch and my Leica scope, we set off for Astbury Mere. When we arrived, I was surprised how well my scope performed in the dark! Due to its light plumage, a drake Goosander was seen as well as many Black-headed Gulls asleep on the water. 100 - but we still wanted more and so we travelled up to The Cat & Fiddle in driving snow and strong winds. Our prize - a Red Grouse calling at 21:23pm. This was to be our final bird of the day despite trying for Whitefronts at Sandbach! The Little Bustards therefore finished on 101 species but this would not have happened if Mike Holmes had not had the ace idea of organising this most enjoyable event. This was to be the last birding of a very enjoyable 1996.

Richard Bonser, Townfield Corner, Townfield Lane, Mollington, Chester, CH1 6LB

[Excellent day lads, I take it that county rarities will all be supported by descriptions? Tony Broome (CR)]

FIELDFARE BEING MOBBED BY OTHER BIRDS

At about 15.00 on 1 January 1997 in Wilmslow I saw a Fieldfare fly down from a tall tree to a bush by the garden pond. The usual nervousness, which Fieldfares exhibit in the garden, seemed to be compounded by the alarm calls of several passerines, particularly a very agitated Coal Tit. It became apparent that the Fieldfare itself was the cause of the alarm. A group, variously comprising 8 to 13 birds, began to mob the Fieldfare, similarly to the way owls are mobbed. The species involved were Robin, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit and Chaffinch. They perched around the Fieldfare directing alarm calls to it. This continued for about ten minutes, the Fieldfare remaining virtually motionless. The garden's other birds, including several Goldfinches and Blackbirds, whilst not engaged in the mobbing, appeared rather nervous, either because of the Fieldfare or the mobbing itself and did not resume feeding until the Fieldfare left the garden. The fact that the Fieldfare, rather than some other unseen threat, was indeed the object of the mobbing, was confirmed when it flew back up to the tree. The mobbing continued there for about another 5 minutes until the Fieldfare flew off.

This was the first Fieldfare of the winter, in the garden, so perhaps some of the garden's resident birds were unfamiliar with it. It is interesting to note that there is some similarity between the colour schemes of the Fieldfare and Kestrel. On occasion I have noted that the sudden arrival of a Mistle Thrush causes a brief mild panic amongst the garden's birds which probably mistake it for a raptor. Something similar may have happened here but instead of the birds 'realising their mistake' a mobbing behaviour developed driven by a momentum of its own. I remain puzzled, however, that such a seemingly inappropriate behaviour should occur in this prolonged and concerted fashion.

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

HOLY RAVENS UPDATE

Following the note 'Holy Ravens' in the April 1997 edition of Bird News, which reported on the article 'Ravens and Nest Boxes' in Chester Cathedral News in March 1997, I received a letter from Miss J. Anne Warden, the Voluntary Leader of Chester YOC. Anne would like to point out that "the Chester YOC not only helped build the cathedral nest boxes, but also assisted in putting them up in February 1995. It was the Chester RSPB Members Group who actually put the idea of the nest boxes to Canon Trevor Dennis, who as a keen birder, was very enthusiastic. The members of the Chester YOC were then invited to participate as it is important that they should be involved in conservation work."

If any other readers have examples of groups or individuals carrying out conservation work, on any scale - large or small, please let us know and we will publish these examples in future editions of Bird News. Perhaps we should consider an annual award for special projects? **Let us know what you think.**

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

FINCH CHARMING

I can still remember the first Goldfinch I ever saw. A roadside of thistles glimpsed from the car held two excitingly unfamiliar birds. The sparks of colour brought a touch of the exotic to that urban scene. I knew I'd seen something like it in my Observers Book of Birds. Then came a flash of recognition as I mentally matched the painting of a Goldfinch with the finch-of-paradise I'd just seen.

It's funny how birds seemed more brightly coloured when I was a boy. Even so, many Goldfinches later, I still get a frisson of pleasure every time I see that combination of red, black, yellow and the warmest of warm browns. It's just a brilliant design - whoever's responsible deserves an award!

Being chairbound, the garden and its wildlife has become very important to me. So when two Goldfinches put in a brief appearance, I felt honoured. A couple of days later seven came and fed on birdseed. They seemed to be increasing daily. To have twenty feeding on the lawn just outside the window seemed remarkable enough, but then fifty came, then seventy!

Over the last couple of years numbers had dwindled, seemingly edged out by squirrels and pigeons. Then last December I discovered niger seed, and like the woman in the soap powder ad, I'm glad I made the switch. It's a Goldfinch magnet. To my delight flocks, or should I call them 'megacharms' arrived almost immediately. Fifty at the beginning of the month rapidly increased to an amazing 175 by the 27th. I was expecting a white Christmas not a Goldfinch coloured one.

This was quite a sight - my very own suburban, wildlife spectacular. They would arrive at daybreak. The garden seemed to be their first port-of-call after leaving their roosts. Small groups arrived from all directions, homing in on our willow tree. A tinkling, twittering chorus built in volume as the flock topped a hundred. They seemed for all the world, to be comparing notes. Then all of a sudden it went quiet and the Goldfinches cascaded down like coloured snow. Where there had been lawn there was now a tapestry of birds - a carpet made of feeding, squabbling Goldfinches.

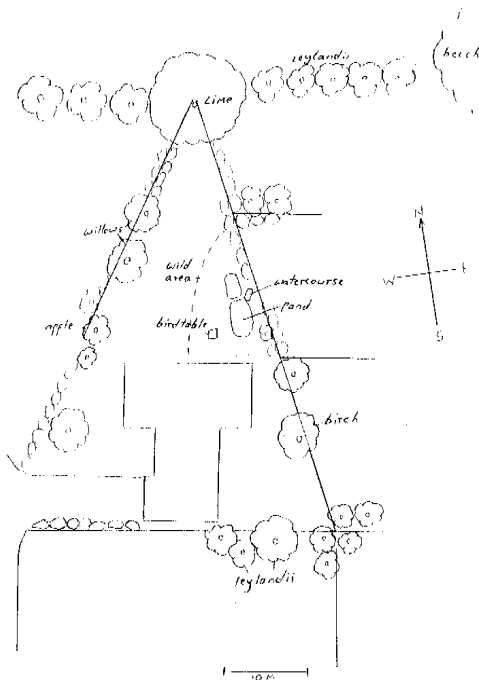
While one Goldfinch is jumpy, a hundred together are positively neurotic, so almost immediately they were off. Sometimes they seemed so skittish that they hardly seemed to do any feeding at all. With a hundred nervous individuals there was always one to spot some danger; real, or more often, imaginary. In trade-union fashion, once one left they all did. On one occasion even the opening bars of a Robin song set them off. This behaviour has survival value, of course. Despite the frequent attentions of a couple of Sparrowhawks they never got near the flock.

During January's cold snap the Goldfinches revealed hidden talents in the field of snow clearance. On one morning an inch of fresh snow blanketed the garden. At first a few landed on the snow and seemed rather nonplussed. Then reinforcements arrived. After a bit of judicious shuffling they were down to the seeds and in no time a patch of snow had been cleared. Perhaps they could rescue people in the Alps. Perhaps they should be renamed St. Bernard's Finches.

I wrote to David Glue at the BTO who is studying Goldfinches in gardens. He replied saying it was the largest garden flock he had heard of. What a privilege - after all there can't be a lot of gardens that have so many Goldfinches that they trample the lawn!

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

[A shortened version of the above appeared in a recent issue of the RSPB magazine 'Birds'. Eds]



'RUSE'TING !!

During the course of my usual autumn pastime of watching the Swallows go to roost, I observed an unusual variation to the regular pre-roost flight format. Generally Swallows form up into loose flocks which grow ever denser as dusk approaches, swooping low over the chosen roost site before eventually going to roost. However on this occasion the pre-roost flight had been regularly disturbed by the attentions of raptors and the presence of a roosting Buzzard in a nearby pine tree. The Swallows finding it hard to settle were most ill at ease with the closing darkness and yet were reluctant to settle into the roost. They turned instead to faking where they had chosen for the night! Swooping low across the top of a nearby plantation they feigned dropping to rest, only to appear from the side of the plantation 60 metres further down and only a few meters from the maize field into which they darted at low level and considerable speed, not to emerge again before dark and presumably dawn.

Pete Hall, The School House, Toft Road, Knutsford

FANTASTIC DAY

We poor undernourished west coast birders are frequently regaled with tails of dramatic falls of birds, oft regarded as commonplace to our east coast cousins, where exhausted migrants pitch in to the nearest available cover disorientated and distressed. Seldom in this quarter do we witness anything remotely comparable. But it can and does happen on this side of the Pennines and those people fortunate enough to be gathered at Parkgate on the 17th October 1997 beheld one of the best west coast visible migration passages for many a long year.

Any students of migration know that to observe any substantial amount of passage it is essential to be in position early, preferably at dawn, as passage normally peaks about an hour after sunrise and typically peters out by about 10:00am in October. This was not the case on this memorable day. I arrived at Parkgate around 9:45am to begin preparations for the ensuing High Tide Birdwatch. As one of the Cheshire County Council Rangers it is my job to lead these events (it's a dirty job but somebody has to do it.). Even on the approach from the Chester High Road it was obvious that something notable was afoot. As I opened the car door the calls of migrant passerines evinced the airborne cavalcade processing overhead.

The low grey cloud and gentle southerly breeze were the essential ingredients in a subtle cocktail of factors stirring this potent mix of migrants. This was no retina searing stare into the blue with frustrated darting eyes. No fruitless search for that lone caller scraping the ozone layer. This was a wide screen format, broad canvas, bold brushstroke, in your face, fly-by. Wave after wave, like squadrons on a mission.

These were not lost migrants desperate for sanctuary, they were powerful, brimful of life and purpose. Driven by instinct and bestowed with the confidence that they were nearing their objective. Nor were they rare, in fact it was their familiarity that made the occasion so memorable. A celebration for the return of old friends.

First to show were the Redwings, flocks of 150 birds regular, mostly they progressed in loose groups of twenty to thirty birds at a time. Barely did one group disappear from view when another party would betray their approach with a volley of slurred 'seeep' calls. All the time handfuls of Chaffinches 'chopped' their way by, many barely clearing the low bushes bordering the Old Bath Site. By 10:30am so many birds were passing that it was almost impossible to accurately assess the numbers involved. A sizeable flock would pass low overhead and as you mentally counted you became aware of other groups much higher up. When the High Tide Birdwatch began at 11:00am a crowd of some eighty people stood spell bound as the Redwings peaked at roughly 3-400 birds every quarter hour.

Then just as the Redwings started to slacken off other species came to the fore. Flock after bounding flock of Chaffinches coasted towards our position, the bulk in single figure flocks, forming a feathery stream mostly babbling by with the occasional spate. With the torrent of Chaffinches came, those enigmatic Scandinavians, the Bramblings. Tiny numbers by comparison, but 'zinking' away for all they were worth, just so you didn't overlook them.

European Starlings, a much maligned species and frequently disregarded as a migrant, yet they matched the Redwings bird for bird. Speeding by in wolf pack formation, had these birds left

Falsterbo a day or two before? One thing for sure these were not locals, milling around over the marsh, these were seasoned travellers and lunch could wait.

12:30am and still it continued unabated, the cast may change but the show goes on. Top billing now went to the Fieldfares. Their ragged 'chacking' flocks spread across the sky like oil on water, languid yet stately progress, less frenetic than their smaller relatives. A half mile wide swathe sometimes silently save for the odd 'zeep' of a comfort seeker.

And so it went on with the gathered humans, experts and beginners alike, transfixed by a once in a decade west coast experience, the birds of the estuary almost forgotten. It's the kind of spectacle that makes you aware just what a special and wonderful place this blue planet is. It's what we are fighting for. It's why we need to keep punching home the conservation message. I started birdwatching when I was five, the same age my daughter is now and thirty years down the line a morning like this makes me feel like a child again. And what wouldn't I give to be stood with my daughter thirty years from now watching the same mesmeric spectacle. It is the duty of our generation to ensure that all our sons and daughters have the chance to witness one of the great wonders of the world. Migration, don't you just love it?

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

Just for the record the species totals were as follows, Redwing 2750+, Fieldfare 2500+, Starling 2500+, Chaffinch 1500+, Skylark 100+, Siskin 50+, Brambling 20+.

GOING JAPANESE

I read James Walsh's letter on his problem stint at Frodsham along with the editorial comment around why can't a rarity show aberrant plumage and structure as well, with more than a touch of deja-vue. Whilst birding near Osaka in Japan in August, I was sifting through a large mixed flock of Red-necked Stints, Dunlins, Lesser Sand and Kentish Plovers, and Grey-tailed Tattlers, when I came across a juvenile stint on its own which looked noticeably longer legged, shorter winged, blunt ended, with a longer bill than the adjacent Red-necked Stints. First impression was of a Little Stint as it also showed a darker crown but it lacked an obvious supercilium with no 'split' effect, and thus had an in-between facial pattern. The upper parts had more than a hint of a mantle 'v' but it lacked dark centred lower scapulars and tertials, having the characteristic grey centred ones with the Red-necked obvious lozenge shaped tips and even though the underparts were well streaked on the upper breast, it didn't seem as pale as obvious juvenile Red-necked Stints were. Also the bird fed differently, being more active. I called over a couple of locals and we poured over the text books (Japanese birders always carry at least two field guides apiece!), as Little Stint is a very, very rare bird in Japan, (less than 5 records) and such a claim would require multi-descriptions and photographs for acceptance, but in the end I had to bow to their view that it had more Red-necked than Little plumage features, and that it was just a slightly strange and aberrantly plumaged Red-necked Stint. Interestingly I think the problematical plumage accentuated the jizz differences which added to the effect. So clearly within any population, aberrant plumage / structure in individuals can occur, and there is nothing in ecology to say that abnormal behaviour i.e. reverse migration or whatever, and aberrant plumage can't go together. Food for thought perhaps, but it is worth remembering that aberrant plumaged rarities have occurred in the UK, ie the Varied Thrush in Cornwall in 1982 and the Saltholme Dunlin x Pectoral hybrid.

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

SPARROWHAWK EATING DRAGONFLY

One day in September, at approximately 12.15, I was walking down the side of Toft pool looking for damselflies and dragonflies, when my attention was drawn to the presence of a Sparrowhawk by the alarm calls of House Martins. The hawk flew towards Toft pool at approximately eye level and observing it through my binoculars I saw it take a large Brown Hawker dragonfly. This it did whilst flying in a slow and fairly straight glide, reaching out with its legs and grasping the dragonfly firmly, whilst correcting its flight with a couple of wing beats. As the hawk turned to the right it reached forward with its legs and down with its head, and dispatched the dragonfly, then swooped into a small wood for cover. On the same day as I observed this, British Birds (vol. 90, no. 9) was delivered to my home, and on page 357 was a description of a Sparrowhawk taking insect prey and eating it in flight. Is this more common than previously understood? For Dr Ian Newton, referring to the BB note, commented that this is, so far as he is aware, a new observation!

Pete Hall, The School House, Toft Road, Knutsford

HOME GUARD

I would like, through Bird News, to express my thanks to Derek Kelly and Bryan Roberts for the assistance they gave me recently as I battled to save my local patch from being turned into a housing estate. Let me explain

When my baby daughter was born, I found that it was no longer possible to go whizzing off round Cheshire for year ticks every spare minute - in fact I never have a spare minute nowadays! So I started to watch the fields alongside Moss Lane in Coppenhall about 5 minutes walk from our house. I get out about once a week for an hour, and I have built up a site list of about 60 species. Not bad, you might be thinking, but it's hardly Minsmere is it? Well no, I have to admit that, but it is only a small site, just a few grassy fields and hedgerows with hardly any standing water (but what bit there is has Great Crested Newts in it). I think my best birds were a pair of Wheatears on Spring passage this year - a pretty good Crewe tick which even attracted a few local twitchers. But lets look at what else is there: breeding Tree Sparrows (down by 86% over the last 20 years), breeding Linnets (down by 56%), breeding Greenfinches and also breeding Song Thrushes. Plus we get large Redwing and Fieldfare flocks in winter, and a wide range of summer visitors from Swallows to Whitethroats. Throw in a decent range of butterflies, plus a few mammals and you have a nice site. And all of this on the edge of a huge housing estate - so it is also one of the few places where the locals can take the dog a walk, jog in peace, have a bike ride or just take the kids for a stroll. Now the crunch. An outline planning application to build 300 houses on it all. A hastily convened residents group started to fight it. I sent all of my bird records to the Council's planning department. More coverage of the site turned up more records almost daily. Along with 1,000 people I signed petitions. Along with 60 people I submitted questions to the Council. The Council's files weigh more than 3 lbs. Questions focused on increased traffic, increased pressure on local resources (shops, schools, doctors etc), poor consultation procedures, and of course the impact on wildlife - all of which is nominally protected by the 1981 Wildlife & Countryside Act. The Planning Committee meeting was packed, more people asked more questions than for any other local application in recent memory and tempers flared. But still, the Planning Committee voted it through unanimously, despite various policy guidelines which advise rejecting developments which will lead to increases in private motoring etc.

I have written to all sorts of people. I wrote to Tony Blair. I wrote to John Prescott. I wrote to other MPs. I wrote to various conservation/wildlife groups. As I said at the beginning, I am very grateful for the advice and encouragement given to me by Derek and Bryan. I got nothing back from Cheshire Wildlife Trust, not even an acknowledgement. At present (August 97) I am still engaged in correspondence with our local council officials - I have a file so thick that I am in danger of giving myself a hernia trying to carry it. I am also waiting for the results of an investigation being carried out by the Local Government Ombudsman - they are looking into several complaints which myself and others have made about the handling of this affair.

I am fairly sure that I have lost. There seems no way that this development can be stopped. The only bright point is that the developer has been asked to carry out a 'ecological survey' to find out what species are on the site. How thorough will it be? Your guess is as good as mine. I doubt that it will include a detailed study of the spiders, plants, birds, mammals, amphibians, butterflies, moths and everything else, so I have asked for a copy of it when it is ready. I understand that my comments and those of any other interested party will be passed to English Nature. They will then provide advice to the developer who will have to put together a mitigation package - basically a plan to show what they propose to offer in compensation for the loss of habitat. This could be good, bad or indifferent. Re-read Jeff's excellent editorial in the July 97 Bird News to see how a thriving colony of Common Blue butterflies was wiped out so that a few straggly trees could be planted instead.

So how has this been allowed to happen? Well, basically it looks as if the legislation to protect our flora and fauna is focused on extreme rarities. If we had breeding Dodo's on the site, it might be OK. Having a good sprinkling of species in serious long term decline isn't enough. Neither is the fact that loads and loads of people protested about it - after all, look where it got Swampy and his mates. Even having plenty of data isn't really enough. There are numerous loopholes, and although common sense tells you that the site should be left alone, if there are no planning constraints, then

it gets passed. The Council managed to lose all of the data I sent them too, so it wasn't taken into account at the Planning Committee meeting. Now, they say it would have made no difference. Also, the site isn't an SSSI or an SBI or anything like that. So even though it is a good spot, it has no legal protection.

One thing I have learnt from all of this - you have to get in so early, that its probably already too late to save your patch!! Once land has been allocated for residential use in the Local Plan (whatever that is?), then you've basically got no chance of saving it - and in this case that allocation and the Local Public Enquiry surrounding it happened years ago and I knew nothing at all about it. I probably didn't even live here then so I had no chance of stopping it. You need eyes in the back of your head and you should always keep your eye on the public announcements section of the local paper. Apparently a small notice was stuck in a hedge on the site - I never saw it and I visit regularly. Kids could have ripped it down, the weather could have got it. Even people who live opposite weren't directly informed. Just because its YOUR patch, don't assume that you will be told what the Council and developers have got planned for it.

So what can you do to save your local patches? I don't know in all honesty - the odds are stacked in favour of the developers and I am very naive when it comes to the labyrinthine complexities of local government and planning. But if you want to try to avoid getting stuck in this sort of mess why don't you have a good think about where the good spots are near you - not just the ones like Sandbach Flashes or Frodsham Marsh - think about the little quiet spots where you get Spotted Flycatchers and Bullfinches breeding or whatever - then write to you local council and ask them whether the site has been included in any local plans or whatever so that you are forearmed. Ask them to send you copies of any planning applications. Get in there NOW before someone starts building on it and don't rely on big wildlife or conservation bodies to save your site. And make sure that you have a chat with Derek and Bryan because they know their stuff and can give you good advice.

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

THE TOP CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL (4 MAN) DAY LISTS

I am writing in response to Jeff Clarke's comment on the omission of his daylist score from the article included in the 1996 North West Region Bird Report. Cast your mind back to Bird News no 24 October 1994 when an article on this subject was printed with the comment "These particular lists were well publicised and as far as I can tell accurately represent the highest unless you know differently".

Below is what I finally believe to be the definitive top Cheshire and Wirral day lists. However if there are any other high scores floating around out there then please let me know and I will not hesitate to write another veiled apology.

While the popular Yule Log competition is a great idea why not organise something similar for May?

All birds must be seen or heard by three or more members of a four man team

1st	149	2/5/93	J. Adshead, M. Crawley, P. Marie & H. Pulsford.
=2nd	142	2/5/92	A.M. Broome, H. Pulsford, J. Turner & M. Turner.
=2nd	142	5/5/96	P. Antrobus, H. Fearn, J. Gregory & D. Walters.
3rd	141	4/5/96	C. Done, T. Lowe, S. Naylor & J. Walsh.
=4th	131	8/5/93	P. Antrobus, J. Gregory, D. Hall & D. Walters.
=4th	131	9/5/93	J. Clarke, A. Butler, P. Hughes & I. Appleton.
=4th	131	15/5/94	H. Fearn, J. Gregory, D. Walters & A. Williams.
5th	130	3/5/97	P. Antrobus, H. Fearn, J. Gregory & D. Walters.

Mention should be made of Enid and Tony Murphy who completed a daylist on May 2nd 1997 scoring 130. This must be the highest two man score yet.

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

CHICK IN A BASKET

On Saturday 8th and Sunday 9th November 1997 Cheshire birders will have the chance to take part in a practical conservation task with a difference. Rivacre Valley Local Nature Reserve in Ellesmere Port is the venue for a willow weaving workshop with the express purpose of producing a series of baskets designed for Long-eared Owls. These baskets have proved very successful in other parts of the country and with extensive suitable feeding habitat in the vicinity the prospects for the project look promising.

No prior skill is required, in fact the whole thing is child's play, so why not bring along the entire family. Jeff Allen, an expert weaver, will be on hand to give help and advice. It should be possible to produce a basket from start to finish in three hours. So you could even combine the session with a spot of late autumn birding on the Wirral or Frodsham Marsh.

Birdwatching gives us a huge amount of pleasure and this gives people the chance to contribute in a truly manageable, practical sense to the conservation of a rare breeding bird within Cheshire. The workshops, which run from 10:00am until 4:00pm, are free, so get weaving and have fun learning a traditional craft in the pleasant, bird-rich, surroundings of Rivacre Valley LNR.

To get to Rivacre Valley LNR exit junction 7 M53 and follow signs for Overpool/Whitby. This leads you down the Netherpool Road, first right into Rivacre Road, third right into car park. The Ranger Centre is adjacent. For further information contact Jeff Clarke at the Ranger Office on 0151 357 1991.

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

Membership News

Welcome to the following new members: S Edwards, Miss J Mackey, Mr and Mrs Tanner. Writing this on 2nd September our final membership for 1997 stands at 333, 14 more than last year, our presence at the Parkgate high tides brought at least a dozen new members, though the mailing to BTO members in Cheshire and adjacent counties was less successful. Thanks to all those who have recruited for us during the year.

At July's Council meeting the following matters emerged:

- Fieldtrips were well covered by local societies and RSPB groups so we felt that our own would be advertised as workshops or as information points.
- Derek Kelly was co-opted as Conservation Officer.
- Bob Anderson was to convene a meeting of those likely to be involved in the Avifauna project.
- The 1996 Bird Report was on target for a late autumn publication.
- CAWOS would have an input into the literature for the Gatewarth reserve.
- Various records and reports, some dating back to the inter-war period, had been handed to the Society for safe keeping.

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

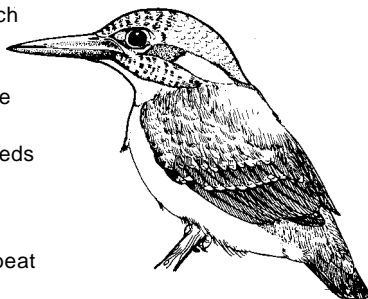
THE GREAT CAWOS YULE LOG 1998 - ENTER NOW!!

As promised in the last Bird News, the next Yule Log will take place on **Sunday 4th January 1998**. Last year several teams took part and all enjoyed themselves. They spent a day birding around Cheshire, seeing as many birds as they could and helping to prove that Cheshire is a first rate county offering a wide range of habitats for our winter visitors - everything from estuaries to woods and from reservoirs and meres to rubbish tips. **For a copy of the simple guidelines and a checklist for the day you should contact me at the address shown below or phone me now.** Basically, teams can be any size from 2 upwards. You get one point for each species - including any dodgy stuff like Lesser Flamingo. If you manage to encourage a non-CAWOS member on to your team you get bonus points for that. If you have a youngster on your team you get bonus points for that too. The team with the most points is the 'winner'. Last year, the youngsters led the way, when the Little Bustards team recorded 101 species. But really, I must stress that this event isn't just about getting loads of day-ticks, it is about getting out, enjoying Cheshire's countryside and birds, and hopefully showing non members and youngsters how enjoyable and fascinating birding can be. Once again, the event will raise some money for a worthwhile cause. It will cost £1.00 per person to enter this year, and I am delighted to be able to tell you that Birdline North West will be sponsoring the event again this time - in fact they have increased their sponsorship to £50.00. You will get your chance to vote for the most worthy Cheshire based conservation cause(s) when you get your checklist etc. Come on, if you didn't take part last year make sure you don't miss out this time, **ring me NOW** before you forget. If nothing else, it will get your 1998 Year List off to a good start and you might find a Christmas Cracker !!

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

STORM BIRD

Bobbing, up, down, sideways courting
Collecting food, down below sorting
Back up on high on reeds of perch
Swaying and bending in winds of search
Bars of reeds prison like makes
Trunks of forest to forcefully penetrate
A maze of confusion of death and of life
A constant reminder of daily strife
A flashing of orange breast, high on reeds
Traffic lights fixed on stop, it reads
Life is too busy, to stop for a rest
Onwards driven, to clear life of mess
The wind is increasing, the reeds are beat
Lower and lower the ground to meet
The forest of reeds, a raging sea
Tossing and turning to disagree
With forces unseen but power felt
Bobbing on reed tops like fisherman float
On surface of water, while fish below bite
Reel in the prizes on lines that are tight.



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

Projects and Surveys

INLAND WINTERING WADER PROJECT

Firstly, it is good news to hear that a new study of wintering Curlews in the Northwich, Middlewich, Holmes Chapel area has been instigated. Dennis Elphick (DE), in particular, will be very interested to see the changes which might have occurred since his study in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Is it that long ago! From memory, usage of the Northwich roost was apparently changing during the mid-1980s with smaller satellite roosts occurring at Sandbach and possibly Middlewich and what had appeared to be a fairly stable and predictable situation during DE's study was changing to a less predictable one. However, his observations by this time were much more sporadic and less predictable in themselves! The current project is planned as a winter enterprise although Curlew used to use the Northwich roost and associated feeding fields regularly from the third week of July (the first birds used to arrive 23rd-27th) to the first week of the following May (last bird usually about 10th-15th) with both autumn (peaks in both August and September) and spring passage (peak in March/April) integral features.

As a slight sideline, but because it is also an integral part of the use made by Curlew of the Cheshire Plain, Tony Ford's (AAF) observations at Arclid SQ listed below are pertinent. He has visited the quarry more-or-less on a daily basis for 15 years or so and notes that sightings of Curlew there are unusual - virtually all records relate to single or small numbers of birds moving on an east-west axis in spring and late summer. He assumes these are birds moving between coastal wintering grounds and their breeding territories in the hills. However, DE notes that his experiences of the mid-Cheshire flock suggest "local" (British) breeders left the area in February with a subsequent influx of (presumed) continental breeding birds passing through in March and April. It could be that more southerly continental birds such as those from Holland (one ringed at Northwich bred on Texel) leave in February and that the March/April peak consisted of more northerly Scandinavian birds (one ringed bird was shot in Denmark on return autumn passage). The composition of the autumn peaks was far less clear-cut and undoubtedly consisted of both continental and British birds.

Meanwhile, back at Arclid SQ, the larger flocks noted during March/April were very notable because of their infrequency and because they were not using the W-E axis. These records have been published individually in the relevant CBRs but an attempted analysis of them as a "job-lot" is perhaps of interest to the current debate:

17/3/86 (ca 17.45)	:	1 N-S
12/3/91 (18.00)	:	26 N-S
17/3/91 (ca 18.00)	:	26 on to adjacent fields to SQ & Taxmere - probably to roost.
13/4/91 (19.15)	:	2 N-S
3/4/92 (19.30)	:	56 E-W
11/3/93 (ca 18.00)	:	100 N-S
13/3/93 (ca 18.00)	:	35 N-SW
15/3/94 (17.45)	:	63 N-S (three groups of 33, 18 & 12)
14/3/95 (17.55)	:	57 N-S high
22/3/96 (16.25)	:	ca50 N-S
15/4/96 (19.20)	:	73 N-SE

As indicated above, AAF was a regular observer at Arclid SQ throughout most of the 1980s and the lack of records prior to 1991 is a true reflection of the situation. Also, it is pertinent to note that there are no records of birds flying north at any time of the year. Hence, these records are a recent phenomenon which may tie in with possible changing patterns to the species' behaviour in mid-Cheshire referred to above.

The similarity of some dates year-on-year and closeness of others during the same year are intriguing. Because AAF's visits were daily and generally at dusk during March/April, these records are certainly single-day movements as opposed to those associated with a regular roost flight line. Whether the birds roosted further south or continued flying into the night is not known.

During DE's study there was a regular spring feeding flock of 100 or so birds at Brereton / Bagmere. This site was only used when the March/April influx occurred at the Northwich roost and almost certainly contained continental birds although there is no direct proof of this. Birds from here certainly used the Northwich roost, as a series of cannon-netting sessions for ringing and colour-dyeing purposes proved. However, if AAF's records were of birds from Brereton going to roost at Sandbach Flashes, the flocks would more likely be on a NE-SW axis and out of sight of Arclid and would, in any case, be on a regular daily basis even if only for a few weeks. In any event, the Arclid observations are more recent with no corroborative evidence that birds still occur at Brereton.

Are AAF's observations at Arclid to do with the departure of birds using the Brereton feeding fields for breeding grounds, possibly on the continent (via the M6, A47 and Harwich), Shropshire, Welsh Borders, Mid/Central Welsh uplands, South/Central UK lowlands, Somerset Levels, Exmoor, Dartmoor, Bodmin ...? Probably not the UK sites as Curlew numbers have been declining and local birds are more likely to winter relatively close to the breeding grounds. So, just where are these birds going? We are interested in other's views on this, particularly in the light of any recent data.

Dennis Elphick, 14 Lyte Lane, West Charleton, Kingsbridge, Devon TQ7 2BW
Tony A Ford, 48 Brookfield Drive, Sandbach, Cheshire, CW11 2LX

SEEING THE WOOD FOR TREES

The editorial in the last issue of Bird News made reference to work undertaken as part of the Mersey Forest in the north west of the county, and an area where tree planting had been undertaken at the expense of a colony of Common Blues. As chairman of the Witton Area Conservation Group I found this comment rather amazing. Our group have had a very good working relationship with the Mersey Forest in the Northwich area, but perhaps we haven't made enough noise to highlight the fact. Birdwatchers throughout the county have visited Marbury Number One Tank near Marbury Country Park and used the hide there to watch the various waders on the reclaimed scrape. But how many of those visitors knew that the scrape was designed by the Witton Area Conservation Group after they were consulted by the Mersey Forest, who then sought and obtained the funding to carry out the works? How many know that the hide, although always open to the public was funded by the Witton Area Conservation Group?

Perhaps all too often birdwatchers sit back and enjoy a site, make notes on the birds (and in some cases the butterflies, dragonflies and plants they see), but do little when it comes to consultation and action. We at Witton have taken the opposite attitude. We have enjoyed the birds and other forms of natural history on our patch, we have made notes on our sightings, but then we have used our knowledge and passed it on to the local and county councils, who have then acted on our knowledge and familiarity with the site. They recreated Marbury Number One Tank as a wetland habitat and they are managing areas for butterflies and plants. But we have not become complacent and have continued to work with them at the design stage of other areas around the Witton Lime Beds. The next phase of work at Witton is to include the creation of more ponds for dragonflies, damselflies and amphibians - our group will be heavily involved at the design and construction stages; a small reedbed is planned and new grasslands will contain plant species that are food plants and nectar sources for a variety of butterflies and moths.

The best news though came on Saturday 13th September when the County Council unveiled their work programme for the next five years. In year three they hope to start work on Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes. The concept includes a series of interlinked lagoons on Neumann's, whilst Ashton's will be managed for its floristic and butterfly interest. Our group are looking forward to working with the planners on the scheme, to produce a mini-Minsmere in the North-west. The scheme is going to require funding and we intend to work alongside the County Council to seek that money. Support for the scheme is also needed, we have to persuade the Council's elected members that it is worthwhile, when that time comes we may well ask you, as members of the birdwatching community, to send in letters of support.

Had our group not existed, then Neumann's and Ashton's may have vanished under trees, or, if you can think back to last year, a National Angling Centre. We are only a small group but we make ourselves heard, as Jeff implied in his editorial share your information - it could save a valuable conservation site in the county.

Paul M Hill, 1 Clive Cottage, London Road, Allstock, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 9L

[Thanks Paul, my point precisely. If it wasn't for the likes of Witton Area Conservation Group and others obtaining the initial ecological information and then disseminating it to the relevant authorities, many well meaning conservation minded schemes would destroy more than they conserve. For instance, if it had not been for a chance meeting between the Cheshire Engineering Chemist and myself at Gatewarth, that site would have drowned under a welter of trees - one of Cheshire's best sites for ground nesting birds, such as Skylark, Meadow Pipit and Grey Partridge. So heed the wise words of both Paul and Mike in this issue. Eds.]

HALE HEAD FARMLAND CENSUS: 1997 UPDATE

The annual B.T.O. Common Bird Census at Hale Head was started in 1989 and the results reported in the July and October issues of Bird News in 1996. The 1997 Census is now complete and the results for those species holding six or more territories are shown in the table.

SPECIES	NUMBER OF TERRITORIES			
	Average:	1989-95	1996	1997
Skylark		14	22	14
Corn Bunting		14	15	11
Blackbird		6	7	10
Wren		9	6	10
Linnet		5	4	9
Chaffinch		3	8	7
Pheasant		5	3	7
Robin		4	5	6
Whitethroat		3	4	6

The most remarkable feature of the 1997 census is the difference between the fortunes of the field nesting species (Skylark, Corn Bunting, Yellow Wagtail, Lapwing, Meadow Pipit and Grey Partridge) and those nesting in the hedges or woods (Blackbird, Wren, Linnet, Chaffinch, Pheasant, Robin, Whitethroat, Blue Tit, Dunnock, Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff).

The six field nesters each held fewer territories in 1997 than 1996, the number falling by 40% from 50 in 1996 to 30 in 1997. In contrast to this, 11 of the 12 hedge or wood nesters showed increase in territories, the total number rising by over 50% from 47 to 72.

Although the fall in total number of field territories is partly due to the drop in Skylark numbers from the peak in 1996, the total 1997 figure is still 20% below the average for 1989-95 and also the numbers for Corn Bunting and Grey Partridge are the lowest recorded during the 9 years of the study.

The increase in the number of hedge and wood nesters (Wren especially) may be due in part to recovery from the severe winter of 1995-96. The main crop difference between 1996 and 1997 is the presence of oil seed rape in 1997. This probably accounts for the marked increase in Linnet numbers, which tend to be greatest when oil seed crops are sown (see Bird News, July and October 1996). Although rape occurred in only about 15% of the plot, it was the site of 50% of the 70 Linnet sightings. Another interesting feature of the rape crop is its use as a nesting site for Sedge Warblers. At least 2 pairs occupied one small rape field in preference to the tidal marsh reeds, where only one pair nested.

Colin Oglivie, Woolton Park, Liverpool

WADER WORKSHOP REVIEW

The Scene: Nine wind-blown souls gather at the famous Frodsham Marsh bird log.

The Date: 7th September 1997.

The Mission: Code Name 'Tricky Tringa'.

The Aim: Exchange mutually beneficial information on strange mud loving creatures.

De-Brief: The group were in general agreement that the exercise was worthwhile. There was extensive dialogue on diagnostic jizz features on several species. This proved essential for two reasons. Firstly, most waders observed were viewable at a distance more suited to the Hubble telescope, thus obviating the need to discuss the minutia of tertial notching on potential American vagrants, and secondly the variety of waders on view were decidedly limited.

Despite this, most of the group were showing distinctly twitchy mannerisms. The scent of salt water wafted in the nostrils, sinews stiffened and with the magnetite compass alarm ringing in our heads, we all turned hypnotically towards the North West. With a cohesiveness seldom displayed by even the most diligent synchronised swimming team, we set off as an amorphous mass for that premier seawatching location New Brighton. Well, who in their right mind persists with a wader workshop when Leach's Petrels are passing yards offshore?

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

BLAKEMERE MOSS RESTORATION PROJECT

Visitors to Delamere Forest over the last twelve months will have noticed the large amount of clear-felling undertaken at Blakemere Moss, the area to the north of Linmere Railway Station. This work has been carried out as part of a conservation project to restore Blakemere Moss as a wetland and moss. As part of the project, I have been carrying out a Common Bird Census on the clear-felled area for Forest Enterprise, to monitor the changes. It is anticipated that in the short-term all of the moss will be flooded. Eventually a water level will be established which will allow a series of wet depressions and open moss to develop. It is this change in habitats that I will be monitoring over the coming years together with the fluctuations in breeding bird populations.

1997 was the first year of the CBC and I made ten visits to the site during the spring and early summer, mapping all birds showing any territorial behaviour. To add a bit of interest and to help draw comparisons, birds present within the surrounding 50 metres of woodland were also mapped. (If I hadn't done this the constant mapping of Wrens could have got rather monotonous). By the end of my tenth visit I had amassed a series of maps with lots of symbols and notes that required transferring to species maps, so that territories could be plotted and populations assessed or estimated.

Thirty-eight species of birds were noted during the survey of which 16 are believed to have bred within the survey site. Of these 15 were detected during the CBC visits, and one, Moorhen, was found on a later visit. This latter species was found with recently hatched young on one of the small ponds at the east end of the site. The other 22 species were either passage birds, birds that bred elsewhere in the forest and visited the area or birds using the site for roosting purposes. Of these 22 species, some late arriving summer migrants may have bred within the survey area, such as Wood Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher and Garden Warbler, had the CBC work continued into June; two others, Tawny Owl and Yellowhammer, were only recorded on one visit, but activity suggested they were breeding within or just on the edge of the survey site. The table below details the breeding species and the estimate of the number of pairs / territories held.

It came as no surprise that the commonest species was the Wren with 16 territories mapped, but the runner-up with nine territories was the Coal Tit. During my visits I didn't recall making so many registrations, but on the final analysis, the registrations showed nine clear clusters or territories.

My work at Blakemere does not stop at the breeding birds and visits have been made throughout the year and will continue to do so. One winter visit revealed several Woodcock, numerous Snipe and a Jack Snipe on the moss, whilst one autumn visit was greeted by the sound of 12 Crossbills 'jyping' their way through the pines. Other birds encountered have been Buzzards on a couple of visits and overhead waders such as Curlew and Golden Plover.

Anybody who would like to join in the survey work are welcome to contact me for further details, and anybody visiting the site can contribute to the project by forwarding any records of birds, butterflies or dragonflies to me.

ENGLISH NAME	LATIN NAME	TERRITORIES HELD
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	2
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	1
Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	1
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	15+
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	1
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	5
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	2
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	2
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	4
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	9
Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	1
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	6
Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	1
Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	1 or 2
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	1
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	6

Paul M Hill, 1 Clive Cottage, London Road, Allostock, Knutsford, Cheshire, WA16 9LT.

Round Robbin'

The **Daily Telegraph** features in this column for the first time. In an article by Roger Highfield entitled "Here's the forecast for 2002", he looks at how the influence of the oceans could be exploited to make long-term weather predictions. It appears that the upper layers of the North Atlantic are well 'stirred' by the atmosphere and retain a 'memory' of atmospheric conditions over a period of months to years. Small changes in the temperature and salinity of North Atlantic sea water produce rhythmic changes in ocean circulation patterns. Scientists have found a predictable pattern of warming and cooling in the North Atlantic over a roughly 12 year period, and although the temperature changes are tiny, this can exert an effect on weather systems because of the vast heat capacity of the oceans compared to the atmosphere. Whilst it remains for scientists to unravel the physical processes that link the currents and temperatures in the Atlantic with events in the atmosphere, one of the scientists involved states that "if the next decade follows the pattern of the previous few, we would expect to see a tendency for the average strength of westerly winds blowing over the central North Atlantic to increase". Now, how does this affect birders? Clearly, an increase in the strength of westerly winds sweeping over the Atlantic might increase the number of vagrant American birds reaching these shores. Many birders have claimed that bumper Yankee years come once every decade - often citing 1975, 1985 and 1995 as examples. But 1996 was amazing too, so what can we expect from now on. An increase in American birds year on year ? Bumper years every 10-12 years? Or a combination of the two? Who knows, but keep watching the Wirral coast line in the Autumn!!

Trawling through **Birdwatch** and **Bird Watching** to find High Tide times recently, leads me to issue a quick word of warning. I was looking at the Morecambe Bay times, which are published in both

magazines. On 2nd August, Birdwatch shows 1134 whilst Bird Watching shows 1044, similarly for the 16th August one shows 0906 and the other shows 1015. I suspect that this difference - always about 1 hour and consistent for all locations - is due to one of them making the Summer time adjustments, and the other not doing. But in neither case was it clear which was which. I guess that those of you wanting to find Hilbre high tide times should double check with an independent source first - you have been warned.

If the reason that you were going to Hilbre was for a spot of autumnal sea watching then I have another warning for you. **Bird Watch** carries the cautionary tale of a large skua which turned up in Spain this May. It was well photographed down to 10m, and lots of local birders saw it and took detailed notes. It had a mottled medium greyish brown/off white back and an off white forehead and forecrown as well as an off white throat. In flight it showed a very pale head and body which contrasted with dark underwings and a conspicuous white flash. Along with other features, the bird was identified as South Polar Skua. The description was spot on - the only problem was the ring on its left leg, the number on which proved that it had been ringed as a pullus on Shetland in 1983, so it was a Great Skua after all. Without wishing to rehash the entire article, the best explanation I can give is that the confusion was caused by the extremely degraded state of the birds head and body feathers which had got very worn and bleached. So hey, let's be careful out there!!

Finally from **British Birds** comes more information about the work of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. Set up in 1972, the panel was set up to collate and report records of the rarest breeding birds in the UK. They hold their records in computerised format (hurrah!!) and this means that they can easily make information available to national conservation bodies to monitor trends, assist in protection of important sites and so on. They have always monitored species with fewer than 300 pairs, but a recent review of their activities has shown that there are a number of species in the 300-1500 pair range for which no national monitoring scheme exists. Because of this, the Panel is extending the range of species which it covers, so that all of the species on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act will be monitored. This means that species like Gadwall, Pochard, Goshawk, Merlin, Hobby, Peregrine, Little Ringed Plover, Barn Owl and Kingfisher will now be monitored - most of which are relevant to Cheshire based birders. A further change means that non-native and introduced birds will be monitored as well, with the exception of already widespread species like Little Owl, Pheasant, Canada Goose and Ruddy Duck. But if you know of a small colony of Monk Parakeets somewhere, speak now or forever hold your peace. It is hoped that this data will assist conservation agencies and the UK government to fulfil Article 8 of the Biodiversity Convention, and other international treaties which put stress on the need to ensure that releases of non-native species do not cause ecological conflicts with native animals and plants.

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

GULL WORKSHOP

SATURDAY 21ST FEBRUARY 1998

After last years successful Gull Identification Workshop, CAWOS will once again be hosting a Gatewarth 'gull grilling' session. The 'good' news is that the ever expanding Arpley Landfill, on the opposite bank, will be in prime position to allow close scrutiny of the majority of the site's 30,000 gulls. Last years workshop provided excellent views of Glaucous, Iceland and Yellow-legged Gull (*michahellis*) as well as several races of Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gull. All things being equal we should do at least as well this time around.

The workshop will take place on the morning of Saturday 21st February 1998 and will run from 9:00am to 12:00 noon at least. Anybody wishing to take part should contact Jeff Clarke on 0151 423 4275. These I.D. workshops are aimed at experts and beginners alike. The idea behind them is to allow all members to benefit from pooled knowledge.

There will be a charge of £2 for the workshop with all moneys raised going to support 'Bird News'. The workshop is open to non-members and if you bring along a non-member who joins CAWOS on the day you both get the workshop free of charge. So if you know someone who has toyed with the idea of becoming a member, or you know someone who ought to be, encourage them to take part in what should be an excellent mornings birding.

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

Diary

NOVEMBER

- 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
 12 MRSPB "CENTRAL SPAIN" by Nick Williams
 11 HO "BIRDING THE GREAT LAKES IN SPRING" by Moss Taylor
 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 HO Parkgate, cars depart 8:30am
 16 LOG Wirral, contact Peter Tonge for details on 0161 891274
 16 MCOS Cors Caron / Devil's Bridge, contact Mike Hems 01606 888525
 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
 7 KOS Martin Mere / Marshside meet Sessions House 9am
 7 CADOS Park Hall/Cheshire Meres, meet Caldly Valley Community Centre 9:00am
 7 LOG Pennington Flash, by car, contact Peter Tonge for details on 0161 891274
 7 MCOS Rossall Point & Pilling Marshes, contact Ray Evans 01829 752494
 7 SRSPB Leighton Moss, by coach, depart Grand Central, Stockport at 8:00am
 7 WGOS Inner Marsh Farm by car, meet at Denhall Lane at 11:00am
 8 SRSPB "BIRD CONSERVATION - MYTH OR REALITY?" by John Armitage
 9 ADNHS "SCOTLAND" by Hilda Summersgill
 9 MRSPB "NEW ZEALAND" by Valerie McFarland
 10 HO "PEREGRINE CONSERVATION IN THE NORTH WEST" by Terry Pickford
 12 KOS Christmas Party
 12 LOG Christmas Party
 12 MCOS "MAPS, MEASUREMENTS & MOULTS" by Steve Woolfall
 12 SECOS "IN SEARCH OF BIRDS" by Charles Owen
 12 WGOS "SUB-ANTARCTIC ISLANDS OF NEW ZEALAND" by Val McFarland
 13 ADNHS Local morning walk, contact Maureen Carter for details (0161 973 9692)
 14 CRSPB Conway & Spinneys, contact Brian Roberts 01352 714758
 14 HO Marshside, cars depart 8:30am
 14 SECOS New Platt Wood and Astbury Water Park by car
 14 WRSPB Point of Ayr, meet Two Mills Little Chef car park 8:30am
 17 CRSPB "MEMBERS IN FLORIDA" by Brian Webster, Brian Roberts & Bob Adams
 18 NNHS Members Evening

JANUARY

- 8 CADOS "ETHIOPIA" by Peter Rathbone
- 8 SRSPB "BIRD CONSERVATION - MYTH OR REALITY" by John Armitage
- 9 **CAWOS** "**BTO GARDEN BIRD SURVEY**" by **Andrew Cannon**
- 9 MCOS "IN THE SHADOW OF MOON MOUNTAIN" (Eilat/Negar) by Dave Cotteridge
- 9 SECOS "NATURALIST IN MALLORCA" by Colin Smith
- 10 ADNHS New Year Party at "Oak Road" ring for details
- 10 HO Frodsham & Delamere, cars depart 8:30am
- 11 CRSPB Shrewsbury, contact Bob Adams 01829 270654
- 11 KOS Tatton Park, meet Dog Lodge 9am
- 11 SECOS Rossall Point, contact Colin Lythgoe, 01270 582642
- 12 SRSPB "A THIRD OF THE WORLDS BIRDS" by Adam Davison
- 13 ADNHS "BUTTERFLIES OF THE TROPICS" by Peter Hardy
- 14 HO "BIRDS OF NORTHERN INDIA" by Mike McKavett
- 15 NNHS "BRITISH MARINE LIFE" by Jack Woodward
- 18 CADOS North Wales Coast, meet Caldy Valley Community Centre 9:00am
- 18 MCOS Woolston Eyes & Pennington Flash, meet 9:00am at Woolston Eyes
- 18 WGOS Pennington Flash by car, meet at Pennington Flash at 9:30am
- 21 CRSPB "BIRDS OF WALES" by Roger Lovegrove
- 27 ADNHS "SWAN STUDY" by Wes Halton
- 28 KOS "BIRDS OF VENEZUELA & CHILE" by Brian Dyke
- 30 WGOS "ISLAY, JEWEL OF THE HEBRIDES" by Gordon Yates
- 31 ADNHS Martin Mere, meet 9:15am contact Jackie Johnson 0161 928 7896

FEBRUARY

- 1 CRSPB Gigrin Farm / Gilfach / Elan Valley by coach, contact Brian Roberts 01352 714758
- 3 MCOS "TANZANIAN EXPERIENCE" by Mike Wilkes
- 5 CADOS "BIRD MIGRATION IN CYPRUS" by Paul Triggs
- 9 **CAWOS** "**AN EVENING OF THE ANTARCTICA**" by **Tony Ord**
- 9 SRSPB "KOOKABURRAS, CURRAWONGS AND CROCODILES" by Keith Offord
- 10 ADNHS "A SHORT STINT IN SIBERIA" by Michael and Catherine Pettifer
- 11 HO "DORSET REVISITED" by Charlie Owen
- 13 MCOS "TANZANIAN EXPERIENCE" by Mike Wilkes
- 13 SECOS "HOOK AND EYE" by Keith Offord
- 14 KOS Gouthwaite Reservoir, meet Sessions House 9am
- 14 CADOS Marshside / Seaforth, meet Caldy Valley Community Centre 9:00am
- 15 HO Point of Ayr, cars depart 8:30am
- 15 MCOS Slimbridge WF & WT, meet 10:30am at reserve.
- 18 CRSPB "WAY DOWN SOUTH" by June Hargreaves
- 19 NNHS "THE WORLD OF INSECTS" by Steve Garland

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 Caldy Valley Community Centre 7.30pm, Prog. Sec. Don Coan 01244-660621
- CAWOS Cheshire & Wirral Ornithological Society, mtgs Knutsford Civic Centre 7.45pm, contact Sheila Blamire 01565 830168
- CRSPB Chester RSPB Group, mtgs St Mary's Centre, Chester 7:30pm, Prog. Sec. Bob 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
- HPRSPB High Peak RSPB Members Group contact John Durell 0161 427 3018, Ken Hodgson 0161 427 6828
- KOS Knutsford Ornithological Society, mtgs St Johns Church Centre 7.45pm, contact Roy Bircumshaw 01565 634193
- LOG Lymm Ornithological Group, mtgs Lymm Village Hall 8.00pm, Prog. Sec. Colin Antrobus 01925 635337
- MCOS Mid-Cheshire Ornithological Society, mtgs Hartford Village Hall 7.45pm, contact Paul Kenyon 01606 77960
- MRSPB Macclesfield RSPB Members Group, mtgs Senior Citizens Hall 7.45pm, contact Peter Kirk 01625 829119
- NNHS Nantwich Natural History Society, mtgs The Gables at 7:30pm, Sec. Mike Holmes 01270 216890
- SECOS South-East Cheshire Ornithological Society, mtgs St Peters Church Hall, Elworth Sandbach 7.30pm, Sec. 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

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We need someone to join the Editorial & Records team, to be responsible for distribution of the Bird Report each year upon publication. Distribution of the report to the 300+ CAWOS members is dealt with by the Secretary, so we need someone to deal with sales and distribution of 150 - 200 copies to non-members. Full training will be given!

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Claim expenses from the Treasurer on a regular basis.

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Own a typewriter, or better still, have access to a word processor and printer. Standard letters, despatch notes and invoices are already saved on disk in Microsoft Word so can be provided in this or some other common software format, to save re-typing (just change the date each year). Live close to a post office, to have parcels weighed for the correct postage amount and to obtain receipts.

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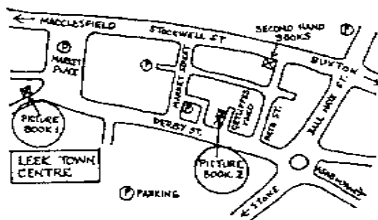
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