

BIRD NEWS

Number 37 January 98



**Long-eared Owl • From Russia with Love
BTO Update • Jizz and all That Jazz
Gull Workshop II • Birdwatching in 2048**



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Articles, Letters and Comments would be welcomed by the Editor

Front cover: Pallas's Warbler by Tony Broome

Other illustrations by Tony Broome, Jeff Clarke & Thelma Sykes

Editorial

Happy New Year to you all. With this edition of Bird News you should all receive a copy of the 1998 Birdwatchers Diary for Birdwatching events around the Dee and Mersey Estuaries. Thanks should go to Ellesmere Port & Neston Borough Council for providing this handy guide. It should also provide all those potential volunteers for manning the CAWOS stand at Parkgate plenty of notice!

Well 1997 certainly closed with a bang and the devastation wrought by the storms may well have some short term effects on Cheshire's woodland bird population. These changes however will probably only be detected by those people involved in the close study of particular areas. So unless you are a local patcher covering a woodland area or a Common Bird Census plot, you will have to rely on future editions of the Cheshire Bird Report to make sense of the aftermath.

After the famous hurricane of October 1987 many woodlands were rapidly cleared of their windblown timber. In terms of bio-diversity and regeneration this was not necessarily the best thing to do. Recent reports in arboricultural magazines testify to the fact that woodlands cleared and replanted have regenerated more slowly than those where trees were not cleared and regeneration was allowed to progress naturally. One of the principal reasons was that replanted areas suffered severe soil compaction slowing the development of saplings. Add to this the fact that the most bio-diverse woodlands contain as much as 70% dead wood and the effects of the recent storms could well prove to have longer term benefits which comfortably outweigh the short term deficit.

What will 1998 bring for CAWOS? As far as the publicity committee is concerned it looks like we have a very busy year ahead. We aim to produce an exhibition to be held at the Grosvenor Museum in Chester which focuses on the Red Data birds of Cheshire and their threatened habitats. It will also have the dual purpose of announcing the start of the new Cheshire Avifauna project. To make it a success we will require considerable support from the various wildlife artists and photographers in the region. So if you think you could help please contact us as soon as possible.

This brings me neatly to the contributors to this edition of Bird News. As you will see there are many familiar names scattered around the pages and I am very grateful for their efforts. I have received much welcome correspondence after the last edition, some of which is reproduced on the Letters section. This was almost universal in it's support of the efforts of the Bird News team and it's contributors. Incidentally my apologies should go to Phillip Barnett who was incorrectly titled "Barrett" in the last Bird News. A wonderful letter from John Headon contained some excellent constructive comments. It also contained some well deserved praise for Pete Hall's 'View from the Farmyard' column. The editorial team always enjoys Peter's wry observations on human as well as bird behaviour and he once again provides us with an article full of insight. Also in this edition Thelma Sykes evocatively traces the lives of the Dee Marshes Bewick's Swans in word and picture. While Brian Martin alerts us all to the need to think globally - act locally.

Whatever, or whoever, your likes and dislikes are within Bird News you should always keep in mind that this is your publication. All members of the Society have something to contribute to the magazine and it was pleasing to receive articles and letters from initiates such as Paul Morris. Despite this we have struggled for copy with this edition and as a result the production deadline well and truly overran. I therefore appeal to each of you to send us your thoughts and ideas. We are heavily dependent on one or two individuals for illustrations, so anybody with an artistic bent please help, as it is unfair to expect the membership to suffer from my art.

Whatever 1998 brings you I hope it includes some great birding and I look forward to seeing some of you at Gatewarth for the Gull Workshop in February.

Jeff Clarke

[Note: Copy date for next issue will be the 7th March]

Dates for your Diary:-

Saturday 21st February	Gull Workshop, Gatewarth - see page 28 for details
Saturday 21st February	CAWOS Photographic Competition deadline - see insert for details
Saturday 28th February	Parkgate Hightide Special - see page 30 for details

County Rarities

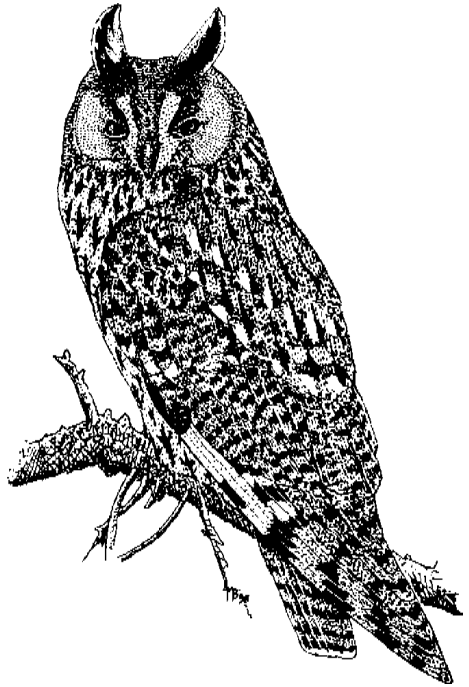
LONG-EARED OWL

A wizened old birder once told me that identifying owls was all about time, place and behaviour rather than tertiaries, bare parts and remiges, with the ones that cause the problems being sightings of migrants in unusual places. As a general guide, this is certainly true, with Long-eared Owls tending to be nocturnal, and favouring conifer woodlands, or areas of boggy ground with mature stands of willows or hawthorns, often in river valleys, particularly during the breeding season, or thick bushy environments at winter roost sites. Tawny Owls prefer deciduous woodlands and are often found in urban areas all year round, whilst Short-eared Owls are more frequently seen in daylight, hunting over rough ground, moorland or other open country habitats, again at any time of year.

So faced with a roosting owl in daylight, Long-eared Owls will appear quite small and slim, often perched upright up against the trunk, with prominent ear tufts usually raised when startled. These stand out due to the dark line which runs down the tufts to the bill and are exaggerated by a facial pattern of pale eye brows, bright orange eyes and orangy facial discs. Tawny Owl lacks the ear tufts and is a stocky bird, with dark eyes on a less distinctive facial pattern. In Long-eared, the rest of the plumage appears finely barred on the upperparts and streaked on the underparts right down to the feet, whilst in general, Tawny Owl appears more uniformly barred all over. Short-eared Owl is more likely to be noted on a fence post or on the ground, rather than perched high in a tree. It looks chunky, big headed, with short ear tufts raised if alarmed, and a facial pattern of yellow eyes set in black patches on pale facial discs.

At night, often it is the hooting call notes of Tawny Owl which are most familiar, with the shrill kee-wick note also heard. Long-eared Owls have a much softer hoot, more a repeated oo-oo-oo sound, along with various coughing and nasal noises which may be associated with wing clapping in territorial birds. Short-eared Owls have a very different almost yelping bark, often given in flight, with only displaying males hooting with a hollow boo-boo boo call.

But of course it's the occasion when you're standing at Leasowe, amongst several other observers getting to grips with some serious seabird passage, that you are faced with a migrant day time flying owl coming in off the sea towards you! Rather than remain quiet and put it down as an Owl Sp., the key features to look at are the upper and underwing patterns. Long-eared will generally appear darker and more finely streaked brown with broad round edged wings rather than the paler buff coloured, coarse blotched overall plumage of Short-eared Owl. The upperwing of Short-eared shows more contrasting barring on the primaries and secondaries, with a white trailing edge and a more prominent dark carpal patch which stands out against an obvious pale primary patch. This compares with the brown streaked upperwing of Long-eared, with a rusty coloured primary patch and no pale trailing edge. Both have pale underwings, with a dark carpal patch, but in Long-eared Owl, the ends of the



primaries are barred, whilst Short-eared appear black tipped. Short-eared also look paler overall, because its belly is usually unmarked, so the overall effect is to give it a long winged appearance. The tails of the two species are different also, Long-eared Owl shows 6 to 7 narrow dark bars on a deep buff background, whilst Short-eared Owl has 5 to 6 broad black bars on a much paler buffish ground colour, looking much more obvious on the rear view.

Long-eared Owl is thinly distributed across Cheshire and Wirral, but birds undoubtedly go unnoticed in some areas of mature conifer stands across the county.

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

Recent Reports

Some of these records may be unauthenticated and require review by the Society Records Panel or the BBRC. The records cover the period from early September to November.

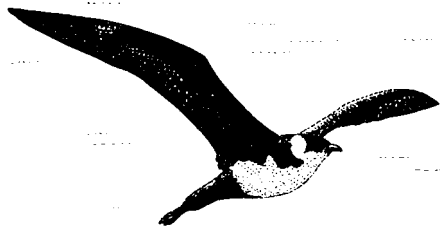
SEPTEMBER

Bird of the month must be **Leach's Petrel** with a total of over 2,100 recorded in the North West region between 4th-16th, including a total of c500 on 13th at six sites (New Brighton/Leasowe/Crosby Marina/Point of Ayr/Hilbre/Meols).

Date	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th	13th	14th	15th
New Brighton	30	12	143	70	nc	nc	23+	89+	34	nc
Leasowe	30	15+	123	70	nc	nc	21	120	13+	nc
Hilbre	4	38	140	252	nc	nc	nc	112	15	8

From the above table you can see the peak movements were 8th-9th and 13th with birds so plentiful that Peregrines fed on the petrels at Leasowe (7th) and New Brighton (8th). Smaller numbers elsewhere included 4 at Red Rocks (7th) and 4+ at Meols (14th). Three all dark petrels were seen during the month, all defying positive identification. The first was watched in the mouth of River Mersey (6th) for 10 mins, the second was seen at New Brighton (8th) and the final bird was watched at c200yds range for 15 mins by 20+ observers at Leasowe (14th).

Other species involved to a lesser extent included up to 10 **Manx Shearwaters** off New Brighton, Leasowe and Hilbre, a **Storm Petrel** past Hilbre (15th), single **Black Terns** off Leasowe (6th & 13th) with 6 past New Brighton (7th), the odd **Great Skua** and 13+ **Arctic Skuas** past Hilbre (6th) - the largest count of the month. Up to 15 **Little Gulls** past Leasowe and New Brighton on 13th when 41 **Fulmars** past Leasowe. A juvenile **Long-tailed Skua** flew past Hilbre (9th) and another juvenile was seen at Hilbre, Leasowe and New Brighton (all 13th), with possibly the same bird at Leasowe and Meols next day. Single **Pomarine Skuas** past Hilbre (6th, 9th & 13th), River Mersey mouth (7th), New Brighton (8th & 14th) and 2 juvs past Leasowe (13th). A storm blown **Grey Phalarope** was at Elton Hall Flash, Sandbach (3rd) with singles at New Brighton (7th-8th & 13th), Red Rocks (7th) and at Wirral CP near Leasowe Lighthouse (13th). Several **Sabine's Gulls** included singles past New Brighton (adult on 7th, juvenile on 9th & 13th, juvenile & 1st sum on 14th), Hilbre (adult on 8th), Hoylake/Hilbre (13th), Leasowe (1st sum on 13th) with 2 juvs New Brighton (13th) and 2 birds at Meols (13th).



A count of 79 **Great Crested Grebes** at Rostherne Mere (11th) was the largest there for 5 years. The **Black-necked Grebe** remained at the Weaver Bend (to 21st). Migrant **Cormorants** flew over Wilmslow and interestingly this coincides with regular movements of birds over Poynton Pool in autumn coming over the Pennines to Rostherne Mere. Three **Little Egrets** were on the Dee Estuary early in month with one regularly seen at Burton and an immature **Spoonbill** was at Burton

(1st-6th). Two white herons (Spoonbills or Little Egrets) flew over M56 at Frodsham (9th) but were not seen again. The first **Pink-footed Geese** flock of the autumn flew over Wilmslow on the 17th. Two early, pale-bellied **Brent Geese** flew past Leasowe (9th). Two **Ruddy Shelducks** were at Frodsham Score (4th-6th) with singles at Inner Marsh Farm (6th) and presumably the same bird at West Kirby (29th) and Hilbre next day. A **Mandarin** visited Rostherne (17th). Twelve **Wigeons** returned to Fiddler's Ferry on 28th and up to 4 were at Budworth Mere from 8th. Six **Gadwalls** at Fiddler's Ferry (28th) was a new Sept record for the site. The max. count of **Mallards** at Fiddler's Ferry was 184 on 27th. At least 2,100 **Pintail** were off Gayton (21st) but elsewhere a single female was at Neumann's Flash (5th-6th) then Budworth Mere (20th) and 4 flew south west over Wilmslow (30th). Three **Garganeys** were still at Inner Marsh Farm (6th) with 2 females/immatures at Fiddler's Ferry (20th), the second record this year here and a drake on Weaver Bend (4th). Two **Red-crested Pochards** at Frodsham most of month also visiting No6 tank (to 21st). Nationally important numbers of **Shovelers** were at Rostherne (167 on 30th) and Fiddler's Ferry (128 on 28th). Up to 70 **Tufted Ducks** were at Budworth Mere. A drake **Ring-necked Duck** at Frodsham (from 27th) was only the 7th county record and third in the last four years. Up to 3 **Goldeneyes** remained at Rostherne Mere all month where a **Common Scoter** was noted (28th).

Fiddler's Ferry had **Marsh Harriers** on 7th (adult female), 27th-28th (different adult female) and 21st (adult male) the latter being the first male here since 1994. **Buzzard** records continue to grow with 4 over Fiddler's Ferry (21st) - a new reserve record, 7 over Hulme Walfield, Congleton (27th), up to 4 at Rostherne and a bird over Wilmslow. **Hobbies** were seen on 3 dates at Rostherne. Three different **Peregrines** visited Fiddler's Ferry and another was seen over Wilmslow. An immature **Osprey** at Fiddler's Ferry (7th) was the first ever there and the only report of a very poor autumn. A covey of 8 **Grey Partridges** were at Fiddler's Ferry (6th). **Spotted Crakes** were at Parkgate (to 11th) and at Inner Marsh Farm (17th-28th) and an immature at Fiddler's Ferry (14th) was the fourth reserve record.

Single **Little Ringed Plovers** visited Neumann's Flash (5th & 14th) where the peak count of **Golden Plovers** was a low of 97 birds on the 27th. **Lapwings** reached 2000 at Fiddler's Ferry (21st). A juvenile **Pectoral Sandpiper** at Inner Marsh Farm (20th-23rd) also visiting Burton (23rd) was the third county record this year. A poor autumn for **Curlew Sandpipers** produced 10 at Burton Marsh (22nd), up to 11 at Frodsham and 5 at Hoylake Beach (6th). **Little Stints** fared even worse with up to 6 at Frodsham, 3 at Burton Marsh (22nd) and 4 at Hoylake Beach (6th). The odd **Knot** was at Frodsham with 2 at Neumann's Flash (28th). Passage **Ruff** counts included 23 at Frodsham No6 (12th). **Dunlin** peaked at 500 at Frodsham on 4th with a **Sanderling** there (4th & 6th) and up to 157 **Black-tailed Godwits** present. Six **Redshanks** over Tatton Mere (7th) was the highest ever count there. The occasional **Spotted Redshank** was at Frodsham. A large count of 72 **Greenshanks** was made at Parkgate (5th) with single figures at Fiddler's Ferry, Sandbach Flashes, Weaver Bend and Witton Limebeds. Up to 5 **Green Sandpipers** were at Marbury No1 tank (to 18th) with another at Rostherne (14th). **Wood Sandpipers** were at both Frodsham and Parkgate (6th). A juvenile **Purple Sandpiper** was at Hilbre (6th). A single **Common Sandpiper** was at Budworth Mere (6th & 8th).

The regular adult **Mediterranean Gull** was at Leasowe on several dates with the same bird off New Brighton (7th) with two birds at Frodsham, a juvenile at No6 tank (7th) and another bird on the Weaver Bend (20th). A 1st winter **Little Gull** past Fiddler's Ferry (13th) with another at Frodsham. Single **Yellow-legged Gulls** were at Hoylake beach (6th) and different adults were at Neumann's Flash (9th, 11th & 14th). Several **Iceland Gulls** were at Red Rocks (1st winter on 7th), New Brighton (8th & 14th), Leasowe (adult on 9th-11th) and the same bird at Hilbre (14th). An adult **Glaucous Gull** was at Leasowe (7th). An immature **Roseate Tern** at Fiddler's Ferry (7th) was only the second reserve record with 1-2 **Common Terns** at Rostherne (to 27th). A **Black Tern** was at Budworth Mere (6th & 8th). **Short-eared Owls** were at Fiddler's Ferry (7th) and Woolston (20th). The last **Swifts** were at Frodsham (6th), Rostherne (13th), Wilmslow (16th) and Woolston (14th). The last **Sand Martins** were at Fiddler's Ferry (21st) and Woolston (28th) with young still being fed at this latter site on the 3rd. Up to 1500 **Swallows** roosted at Woolston and a total of 235 flew over Wilmslow. **House Martins** were still in occupied nests at Great Sankey (20th). Two **Tree Pipits** were at Neumann's Flash (10th) - only second record this year there and another was at Woolston (20th). A total of 496 **Meadow Pipits** flew over Wilmslow.

A **White Wagtail** was at Neumann's Flash (13th) and a late **Redstart** was at Rostherne (27th). A migrant **Stonechat** was at Melchett Mere, Tatton (30th) and a female **Wheatear** was also here on the 29th. A **Blackbird** influx in Wilmslow late in the month also included a continental type **Song Thrush** (29th). Ringing at Woolston on 27th included 3 **Sedge Warblers** and 6 **Reed Warblers** with one of the latter species still at Rostherne next day. **Whitethroats** remained at both Fiddler's Ferry and Frodsham ICI tank on the 6th and a **Lesser Whitethroat** was at the ICI tank (6th). A male **Blackcap** was in sub song at Fiddler's Ferry (28th) and singles still at Frodsham (6th) and Neumann's Flash (11th). An early **Yellow-browed Warbler** in Wilmslow (27th) coincided with a national influx in late Sept involving c100 birds. **Chiffchaffs** remained at Marbury No1 tank (13th) and Rostherne (28th) while the last dates for **Willow Warbler** included Fiddler's Ferry (13th), Wilmslow (11th) and Woolston (20th). Single **Spotted Flycatchers** remained at Rostherne (27th) and another at Tatton the same day was the latest ever site record. One or two **Ravens** were at Frodsham, Rostherne and Tatton. Of the 63 **Redpolls** trapped at Woolston Eyes during the month, 2 were considered to be Mealies (28th). The first **Siskins** of the autumn at Rostherne arrived on 3rd with a noticeable and larger than usual influx at several sites around mid month. Two **Twites** were on the causeway between Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes (15th).

Escapees and releases included the long staying **Lesser Flamingo** at Frodsham (4th & 6th) and 2 **Yellow-billed Teal** at Fiddler's Ferry on 20th were the first reserve record!

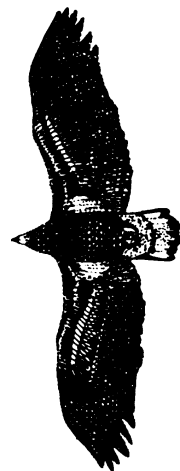
OCTOBER

Undoubted highlight of the month (at least for those who saw it) would have won the avian gold medal for acrobatics. The **Pallas's Warbler** at Hilbre (31st) was the third county record following birds at Bidston Hill on 25th-26th November 1980 and Moreton on 28th Oct 1988. This record was not entirely surprising as c120 were seen across Britain during October and early November including a record six in the North West region.

Another major rarity was the immature **White-tailed Eagle** which had flown over Brancaster in Norfolk some five hours earlier, circled over Farmwood Pool for 3 mins on the 28th at 2.45pm, before flying off west-south-west. It was seen in central Wales some weeks later at Tregaron being mobbed by Buzzards and Red Kites. The only three previous county records were in the 19th century. A late **Hoopoe** was well watched at Wallasey (27th-31st). The bird favoured market gardens but unfortunately was flushed by birders trying to get closer views.

Woolston had a max. of 28 **Little Grebes** and an autumn influx of 9 birds was noted at Tatton. **Black-necked Grebes** remained at Woolston (to 20th) with another at Budworth Mere (18th). Only two **Leach's Petrels** were reported during the month both on the 10th - past Leasowe and another at Hoylake/Meols. A **Little Egret** was again at Inner Marsh Farm (11th & 31st). An adult **Whooper Swan** was at Fiddler's Ferry on river Mersey (26th). Rostherne had its first skein of **Pink-footed Geese** on 12th with 51 over Fiddler's Ferry (11th), c1500 over Stockport (14th), c100 over Tatton (22nd) and 100 over Wilmslow (12th with 70 next day). A flock of 22 **Greylags** at Frodsham (18th) was a high count there. **Ruddy Shelducks** were again at both Frodsham Score and Heswall with 7,500 **Shelducks** off Parkgate (17th).

A drake **Mandarin** at Rostherne Mere (5th-6th) was joined by a female (6th) with 88 **Gadwall** there on the 22nd. A new monthly max. of 1,500 **Teal** was counted at Fiddler's Ferry (19th) with up to 250 at Marbury No1 tank. Fiddler's Ferry had 270 **Mallards** on 25th. A female **American Wigeon** was on the Weaver Bend, Frodsham (13th) with c120 **Wigeon** but could not be relocated. An immature drake Wigeon "hybrid" visited Budworth Mere (5th-8th). At least 5 **Pintails** were at Fiddler's Ferry with 800 at Inner Marsh Farm (11th) and 2,620 at Denhall gutter (13th). A **Garganey** remained at Inner Marsh Farm (2nd & 9th). Large numbers of **Shovelers** included 100 at Fiddler's Ferry (4th & 19th) and 176 at Rostherne (1st). Up to 217 **Tufted Ducks** were at Woolston and the drake **Ring-necked Duck** was at Frodsham (to 12th) before moving to Combermere (from 26th). Three **Scaups** were at Frodsham and the first returning **Goldeneye** at Budworth Mere was seen (17th) followed by up to 4 regularly. Frodsham had a high count of 80 **Ruddy Ducks**.



A **Red Kite** flew over Woolston Eyes mid morning on the 12th and a **Marsh Harrier** was at Frodsham (2nd) followed by a **Hen Harrier** there (7th). **Merlins** were reported at Parkgate and Woolston Eyes. Single **Buzzards** were at Budworth Mere (5th), Neumann's Flash (31st), Poynton Pool (19th) only the third ever there and 7 were at Rostherne (3rd). A late **Hobby** was at Vicar's Cross, Chester (18th). Three **Peregrines** seen together at Fiddler's Ferry (26th) included a juvenile. A pair of **Grey Partridges** frequented Tarporley on several dates. **Coots** at Frodsham peaked at 200 birds. Mid month **Water Rails** became more obvious with birds at Fiddler's Ferry, Inner Marsh Farm (2 on 8th), Parkgate and Woolston. The adult **Spotted Crake** remained at Inner Marsh Farm until the 12th.

Large counts of **Golden Plovers** included 500 at Frodsham and 434 at Neumann's Flash with a low peak of 52 at Fiddler's Ferry (25th). About 3000 **Lapwings** were at Fiddler's Ferry (19th) whilst at Frodsham at least one **Little Stint**, up to 20 **Knots** and a **Curlew Sandpiper** were present. Six **Ruff** were at Neumann's Flash and Inner Marsh Farm held 13 **Jack Snipes** early in the month with another at Rostherne Mere (19th). Eight **Spotted Redshanks** and 19 **Greenshanks** were on the Boathouse Flash, Parkgate (11th). **Dunlins** at Frodsham reached 4000 and up to 18 were at Neumann's Flash during the month. Frodsham also had 1000 **Curlews** and several **Green Sandpipers** with others at Birkin Brook, near Tatton (30th), Marbury No1 tank and Tatton Mere (26th). Lingered **Common Sandpipers** were at Neumann's Flash (9th) and at Tatton Mere from 29th into November. A juvenile **Red-necked Phalarope** was a unusual find on the shore at New Brighton (20th) as well as being late for this species.

Three **Pomarine Skuas** passed Hilbre Island (10th) and two **Mediterranean Gulls** were at Frodsham on 14th (2nd winter & 1st winter) with the regular adult at Leasowe (31st) and 2 adults there (10th). The only **Sabine's Gull** flew past New Brighton (10th). **Ring-billed Gulls** were reported at Frodsham and an adult was at Parkgate (12th). An adult **Iceland Gull** at New Brighton (13th) was probably the bird seen at Hilbre and Leasowe in September. Meols had an adult **Glaucous Gull** on the 10th with two **Arctic Skuas** seen there the same day. Four **Short-eared Owls** were at Frodsham with another at Parkgate. **Barn Owls** were at Marbury CP (4th) and Woolston (24th). A **Great Spotted Woodpecker** at Frodsham was unusual there. The last dates for **Swallows** were Fiddler's Ferry (12th), Neumann's Flash (18th), Poynton (26th) - the latest ever here, Rostherne (26th), Tatton Mere (30th), Wilmslow (14th) and Woolston Eyes (12th). **House Martins** remained at Budworth Mere (5th), Rostherne (5th) and Wilmslow (20th). Woolston Eyes had 200 **Skylarks** fly over mid month.

A large movement of **Meadow Pipits** included 356 over Wilmslow during the month with 157 on 11th (compared with 869 last year) and 100 over Woolston Eyes mid month. Neston Old Quay held 1-2 **Water Pipits** (from 11th) and another was at Parkgate (18th). A high count of 37 **Skylarks** moved over Wilmslow (18th). The **Grey Wagtail** roost at Poynton Pool formed again from the 15th and 84 **Pied Wagtails** flew over Wilmslow during the month. A late **White Wagtail** was still at Neumann's Flash (12th). Single late **Wheatears** were at Frodsham (21st) and a Greenland race bird at Neston Old Quay (18th) had a broken bill. The first dates for **Redwings** were Fiddler's Ferry (12th), Marbury CP (16th), Poynton (11th), Rostherne (12th), Wilmslow (11th) and Woolston Eyes (11th). There was a large movement noted at Poynton, Wilmslow and Woolston Eyes on 12th-13th when small flocks flew over in an almost continuous stream of birds - if this size of movement was mirrored across the county the movement may have involved a 20-30,000 birds. Other counts included 450 at Delamere (15th), 2,876 over Parkgate (17th) and a total of 911 over Wilmslow during the month.

The first returning **Fieldfares** were at Fiddler's Ferry (28th), Marbury CP (16th), Rostherne (26th), Wilmslow (13th) and Woolston Eyes (11th). The only large movement involved 3,260 over Parkgate (17th) and 472 passed over Wilmslow during the month but generally birds have been scarcer than usual. A **Blackcap** remained at Rostherne Mere (12th). One or two **Ravens** were seen at Eaton, Frodsham, Little Budworth, over A556 near Tabley, Tarporley and Tatton. During the large thrush movement at Parkgate (17th) at least 3,000 **Chaffinches**, 25 **Bramblings** and 50 **Siskins** were noted. Further records of Bramblings came from Poynton Pool (up to 5 daily from 27th), the first of the autumn at Rostherne (22nd) and 16 flew over Wilmslow between 14th-30th. **Crossbill** sightings came from Delamere (16 on 15th), Marbury CP (2 on 19th), Tatton Main Gardens (4th) and 4 flew south over Wilmslow (8th).

NOVEMBER

Three records of major county rarities dominated what is normally a quiet month. The first and largest of the three was the eighth county record of **Common Crane**. It was first seen over Burton/Inner Marsh Farm on the 1st at 4pm, the same area as the last county record in Aug 1986. Two days later it flew south-east over Moulton, near Northwich at 11.10am but was then relocated at Sandbach Flashes in the afternoon where it stayed for four hours before disappearing. It then reappeared there on 8th and 9th but only remained for less than a couple of hours on each day. The second was yet another **Pallas's Warbler** at Hoylake in Mark & Jane Turner's garden and stayed from 9th-12th. It was the first truly twitchable bird for the county and fourth in total. An exceptionally late **Red-breasted Flycatcher** reported from a Chester garden (17th) was the seventh county record and mirrored the previous November record of one at Tatton Park from 17th-20th November 1983.

Great Crested Grebe numbers remained lower than usual at Poynton Pool, perhaps a symptom of the mild weather. Up to 137 **Cormorants** roosted at Rostherne Mere and the **Bittern** there was seen regularly from 1st with 2 present on 15th-16th. The **Little Egret** remained on the Dee Estuary all month spending most of its time at Burton and Parkgate (with 2 birds at the latter site on 14th & 16th) but also visited Neston (24th). The juvenile **Spoonbill** was at Inner Marsh Farm (15th) before moving to the adjacent Burton Marsh next day. Up to 46 **Mute Swans** were at Frodsham and at Inner Marsh Farm up to 26 **Bewick's Swans** were present daily including the annually returning bird from the Pechora Delta, Russia. Frodsham had **Whooper Swans** on several dates from 7th and 5 flew over Woolston Eyes (1st). A large **Pink-footed Geese** movement took place on the 30th with flocks of 30 over Fiddler's Ferry, c1500 in several skeins over Mere, c2700 over Rostherne in 7 skeins, c825 in 4 skeins over Tatton (30th), double the previous record here and 60 and 30 over Wilmslow. Many of the flocks were seen at several sites and other large flocks were seen at Chelford and Sandbach. The only other record was 60 over Fiddler's Ferry (9th). A European **White-fronted Goose** was at Burton Marsh (3rd) and Inner Marsh Farm next day associating with 7 **Greylags** and probably the same bird was at Burton/Inner Marsh Farm (22nd). Six **Barnacle Geese** were at Marbury South Mere (9th) with singles at Inner Marsh Farm and Sandbach Flashes. At Poynton Pool **Canada Goose** numbers remained much lower than usual. The female **Ruddy Shelduck** (or Ginger Spice as it has now been dubbed by the locals) was still at Heswall (17th) and 4 **Shelducks** over Tatton Mere (1st) was a new record November count.

Wigeon reached 11 at Budworth (30th) the highest count of winter so far. The first **Gadwall** of the winter was seen at Budworth Mere (30th), with 82 at Rostherne Mere, 45 at Woolston Eyes was a low November count. Peak counts of **Teal** included 709 at Fiddler's Ferry, 350 at Marbury No1 tank, 249 at Rostherne and 600 at Woolston Eyes, with this last site holding up to 30 **Pintail** this month with 4,840 at the Denhall Gutter (29th). **Shoveler** numbers remained high with 158 at Frodsham, 132 at Rostherne and 72 at Woolston Eyes. A very late **Garganey** was still at Inner Marsh Farm (1st). The drake **Ring-necked Duck** remained at Combermere (to 17th). Only one each of **Tufted Duck** and **Pochard** were at Fiddler's Ferry, when up to 100 of each should have been present. The first Pochard of the winter arrived at Poynton Pool (27th). Three **Scaups** were again at Frodsham and up to 15 **Goldeneyes** were at Rostherne Mere. The first **Smew** of the winter was a redhead at Inner Marsh Farm (11th-24th) and a **Red-crested Pochard** was at Barmere (9th). Seven redhead **Goosanders** over Neumann's Flash (9th) was a good count there and odd birds were at Rostherne Mere from 5th.

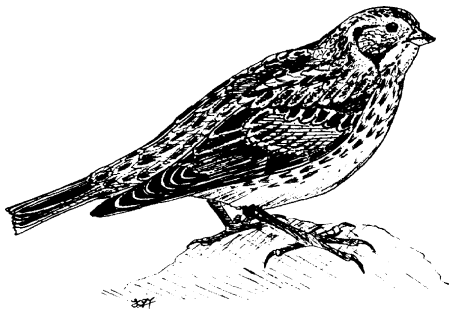
Merlins were seen at Frodsham, Parkgate and Woolston Eyes. More **Hen Harriers** were in evidence than last year's poor winter with a regular ring-tail at Parkgate all month. Other ring-tails were at Fiddler's Ferry (23rd) - first record since Jan 1995 and Frodsham No4 (4th). Up to 5 **Buzzards** were at Frodsham and Rostherne with a single at Woolston Eyes. Regular **Peregrines** were at Burton/Parkgate, Fiddler's Ferry, Frodsham and Sandbach Flashes. Several **Water Rails** were at Woolston Eyes with another heard calling at Taxmere. A **Grey Partridge** was considered unusual at Arclid SQ. **Coot** numbers remained higher than usual at Poynton Pool.

A count of **Golden Plovers** at Fiddler's Ferry (9th) was the highest of the winter but elsewhere there were 600+ at Denhall Lane, Burton (4th), 2,500 at Frodsham and 200+ at Wilmslow next to the Tesco superstore (28th). A flock of 500 **Grey Plovers** at Frodsham was a high count there. Fiddler's Ferry had a max. count of 60 **Dunlins** on the 2nd, up to 15,000 roosted at Frodsham

during the high tides, up to 7 were at Neumann's Flash and up to 15 at Sandbach Flashes was a good November count there. A partial albino **Lapwing** at Sandbach Flashes (6th) gave the observer's a few heart-stopping moments. Unseasonal **Curlew Sandpipers** were found lingering at Frodsham and Inner Marsh Farm. One or two **Jack Snipes** were at Inner Marsh Farm, Neston, Weaver Bend and Woolston Eyes. Three **Spotted Redshanks** were at Parkgate (4th) with 130 **Curlew** at Fiddler's Ferry (22nd). A **Green Sandpiper** was back for it's sixth winter at Little Budworth (18th) and three were at Frodsham's ICI tank (4th). The **Common Sandpipers** at Tatton Mere remained until the 9th making it the latest ever there.

Mediterranean Gulls were seen at Elton and Leasowe and **Ring-billed Gulls** were reported at Frodsham and Moore. An adult **Yellow-legged Gull** was at Gatewath (24th). An **Iceland Gull** was at Wallasey and adult **Glaucous Gulls** were seen there (13th) and at Maw Green Tip (11th). There appeared to be a significant influx of **Wood Pigeons** this month with 1,600 at Tatton (21st) and 2,765 over Wilmslow. Elsewhere 5,000 were at Rostherne and 1,000+ over Woolston Eyes. A dead **Barn Owl** in the east of the county was another roadside casualty of this species. At least five **Short-eared Owls** were at Frodsham with singles at Parkgate and more unusually at Woolston Eyes (15th-21st). Three **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** together at Woolston Eyes is an indication of the increasing Willow encroachment at this site. Three late **Swallows** flew over Wilmslow (3rd) while the autumn total of **Meadow Pipits** for this site was 852 between 9th Sept-6th November (compared with 1,511 in autumn 1995). The odd **Water Pipit** was seen at Neston Old Quay with eight there on 27th. The **Grey Wagtail** roost at Poynton Pool peaked at 12 during the first week and broke up on the 18th just before harsh weather set in. A **Stonechat** was at Frodsham where a flock of 200 **Fieldfares** was seen. The only large flock of **Mistle Thrushes** reported was 40 at Fiddler's Ferry (1st).

Three **Chiffchaffs** were at Woolston Eyes and 2 **Blackcaps** visited Wilmslow during the month. A **Firecrest** at Inner Marsh Farm (1st) was one of only a handful seen in the county this year. A **Great Grey Shrike** was briefly at Frodsham N6 tank (9th). Four **Ravens** were at Parkgate (2nd) with 1-2 at Rostherne and Tatton all month. Up to 1,000 **Starlings** fed at Frodsham. **Bramblings** became more widespread with small numbers (up to 10) at Rostherne, Tatton, Sandbach Flashes (a male here on



23rd was the observers first in 8 years of regular visits to this site), and 5 over Wilmslow. Up to 30 **Bramblings** were seen daily at Poynton Pool with c100 **Chaffinches** there (19th) both high counts for the site. Fifty **Goldfinches** were at Fiddler's Ferry (23rd) and up to 75 fed in Wilmslow. The only report of **Crossbills** was of a small flock at Blakemere (30th). Up to 100 **Siskins** visited Rostherne and Frodsham held up to 400 **Linnets**. Sixty **Redpolls** at Woolston Eyes included a mealy. A **Lapland Bunting** flew south over Neston (14th) and 8 **Snow Buntings** were at Red Rocks (30th) with other birds seen in the eastern hills.

PREDICTIONS FOR FEBRUARY TO APRIL

If the winter continues to be mild, the early breeding season which has already started in early January (eg Blackbird nest with eggs in a Christmas Tree at Nantwich) will soon be upon us. The mild weather of recent winters is likely to again increase the population of birds such as Wrens and Long-tailed Tits which can be particularly badly hit during hard weather. Watch for signs of early nesting activity in your garden as well as in local woodlands. Make a note in your diary for Feb 28th when there will be stalls and a guest speaker at the high tide birdwatch.

March brings our first summer visitors, traditionally from around mid month, but also unexpected cold snaps or even a heat wave such as that in March 1993. Start gearing up for spring now by listening to tapes or CDs of the common bird songs in anticipation of their arrival in April. Genning up on species such as Redstart and Pied Flycatchers is a must for all birdwatchers at this time. As the length of the days is increasing why not take an early evening stroll around your local patch. Watch large thrush movements for early Ring Ouzels and the usual large movement of Meadow Pipits mid month for Water/Rock Pipits.

One particularly interesting feature I noticed for the first time last year on my local patch in Poynton, was that during late March and early April there was a significant movement of Tree Sparrows with perhaps over 100 birds involved over a 2-3 week period. If you have a regular flock on your patch why not see if this happens? Does this movement occur annually, is it specific to certain sites or widespread across the county? Let me know what you find. Remember to keep notes on the first and last dates of arriving summer visitors and departing winter visitors.

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

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

Thanks/Acknowledgements for Recent Reports go to:- Steve & Gill Barber, Phil Barnett, Birdnet, Birdwatch Magazine, Birdwatching Magazine, Jeff Clarke, Mike Duckham, Robin Hart, Mike Jones, Keith Massey (Fiddler's Ferry Reserve), Bryan Roberts (Tatton and Knutsford Moor LNR), Rostherne Mere NNR log, Sandbach Log, Dave Walters (Witton Limebeds and Marbury CP) and anyone else who passed records on.

Please note that all records for the 1997 Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report are required by Joe O'Hanlon by Feb 28th at the latest for an early production of the Bird Report. Joe O'Hanlon's address is 31 Bridgewater Drive, Vicar's Cross, Great Broughton, Chester CH3 5LS.

Stop Press: Rarities in the County during the first few days of 1998 have included Spoonbill and Little Egret at Burton, 2 Tundra Bean Geese and Smew at Inner Marsh Farm and a Grey Phalarope at Red Rocks Marsh.

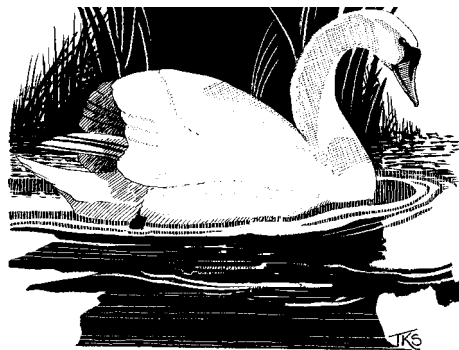
Very late news: Many of you reading this will be aware that since December 15th 1997, there has been a Dark-eyed Junco, an American sparrow, in Chester. Only put out publicly after a newspaper printed an article on the bird and published the address, it has now even been on national television. There have been at least 18 records of this transatlantic species in Britain. Identified as a first winter female, it's about as drab as the species gets, being basically a grey, brown and white bird with a pale bill. It could be the first accepted American passerine in Cheshire (although there is a strong case for the Sandbach Yellow-headed Blackbird) and probably turned up last autumn when there were a lot of Nearctic vagrants on this side of the Atlantic. The full story will unfold in the next issue of Bird News.... watch this space.

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FROM RUSSIA — WITH LOVE

Murky weather. The Dee waters were dark, reflecting the gunmetal blue of a glowering sky. The white plumage of the swans shone out against this backdrop, light catching the upper wing to mark each rhythmic downstroke. The swans flew in line, twenty five of them, and the bugle-like calls which kept the group together carried clear over the estuary.

Two Mute Swans graced the pool in front of us, but the skein of swans winging across the darkening sky, like pearls on jeweller's black velvet, were Bewick's — swans from the Russian tundra. Even at this distance their trumpet notes identified them as winter visitors; the Mute Swan does not call in flight.

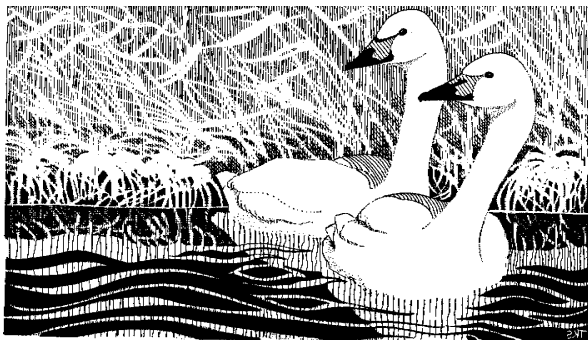


All twenty five Bewick's had been with the Mute Swans on the pool: a magnificent sight. We have not seen Bewick's on the Reserve over the last two winters so these were welcome, the more so because one of them has been here before. This bird has a fleshy growth hanging from the throat. I first saw him/her in November 1993; he was often on Oakenholt Marsh that winter associating with two other adults and two young of the year, the five always together. He was back in November 1994 and now, after an absence of two years, he is on the reserve again.

Since that first sighting in November '93 he will have flown some twenty thousand miles. Northern Russia, Novaya Zemlya, Taymyr — even the

names of the Bewick's arctic breeding grounds ring cold. Connah's Quay is a world apart, separated by several cultures and by a geographical distance of two and a half thousand miles.

I was moved to see that swan again this winter, recognised by his slight deformity. But with greater skill we can learn to know others on the estuary, for Bewick's Swans are recognised by the pattern of black and yellow on the bill. This pattern is unique to each bird — as individual as a fingerprint. It was only in the 1960's that this identifying character was confirmed, but researchers have already documented over eight thousand individuals. Slowly they piece together the jigsaw puzzle of their journeyings, their parentage and their offspring.



Individual recognition plays an important part in enabling the birds to breed in the far north. Bewick's need some 120 days in which to rear their young to be strong on the wing, — yet the ice free period is just 130 days. No margin for error. Whilst Mute Swan eggs are incubated for 35 days - the Bewick's eggs hatch after only 29. The Mute Swan cygnets fly within 120 to 150 days, but the young Bewick is on the wing at just 40 days old. There remains scant time to gain strength before the weather closes in,

and the young must be fit enough to follow their parents west, the arctic ice hard on their tails.

When the ice free period is so short, there is no time for prolonged courtship, therefore the swan pair bond is long term, and divorce is rare: a Bewick's must know it's partner and be able to start nesting immediately the weather allows. Nor is there time for unnecessary territorial dispute. Each bird must recognise the individuals who are its near neighbours so that aggression is directed only at intruders.

In winter, individual recognition helps to maintain the family unit. Young birds migrate with their parents, but if the young of the previous year survive they too will reunite with their parents on the wintering grounds. There is advantage in this for it is the size of the family group which confers status. Lowest ranking are single swans; pairs have higher status and pairs with young rank yet higher: the greater the number of birds in the family group, the higher the rank. When "our" swan was first noticed in '93 he was always with two other adults and two young. It is likely that the adults were his parents and that he was in his second winter.

The more we learn about the Bewick's the more questions there seem to be; but each new discovery gives increased understanding. With that comes greater respect and a still greater determination to do all we can to ensure that the Dee estuary provides a safe environment for them and their families in future winters. Then, come spring, they will be fit for their return migration — to Russia, with love.

Thelma K Sykes, Blue Neb Studios.

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JIZZ AND ALL THAT JAZZ

For a long time I have prevaricated (a comfortable and painless condition that all would-be contributors to Bird News will fully understand). This prevarication has concerned the writing of a series of articles under the above title. A couple of incidents at Frodsham have served to stir me from my lethargy. The first concerned a genuine birdwatcher I've met there on several occasions who recently pointed out, with some enthusiasm, a 'Slav' Grebe on the Weaver bend. We looked in vain but had to (kindly) disagree as the bird was a winter plumage Great Crested Grebe. There is no doubt that this birder **had** been shown a genuine Slavonian Grebe on the Weaver a few weeks ago. I was able to contrast this level of expertise with that of two friends (no names to spare their blushes). At about the same place on 25th August last year a small bird flew fast and high over the river and the I.C.I. tank. They gave an almost simultaneous shout of 'Tree Pipit' as it called faintly on route towards the Frodsham hills. There was no doubt about this rarity for the Frodsham marsh area. Now, most of us probably fall somewhere between these extremes, but I guess also aspire to improve our ability to quickly, accurately and confidently identify what we see, even if views are transient and less than ideal.

So, what are the factors that those privileged few who are top birders use to such effect? There are many, but I've often felt there is something more than an amalgam of the most obvious, namely an expert knowledge of plumage and song. It seems a very long time ago now that I reflected in a Bird News editorial on how a latter day convert to bird watching, namely my father-in-law, could easily separate distant Corvids in flight through many hours spent in his Cotswold garden. A feat, which caused singular argument amongst so called experts one year on Scilly. Flight pattern and flight profile are obviously further important factors. Similarly, when perched or on the ground, the outline shape, movement, feeding and interactive behaviours are others. Yet still I have this nagging feeling there is more. Perhaps I can use an analogy. During my early working years as an industrial trainer I was taught to analyse manual jobs according to how skilled operatives use their six, (yes six) senses. Clearly sight, sound, touch and to a lesser extent taste and smell could be analysed and recorded for the benefit of trainees. But how about that sixth sense which was termed kinaesthetic. This was far less tangible and much more difficult to recognise. It can be described as the awareness of the body's position relative to other objects. For example, the skilled driver doesn't have to look for the gear lever to grasp it whatever the gear in use. Is there a 'sixth' sense at work within the best birders? Perhaps not, but I'm sure that there are many clues, which we could share to enhance our skills.

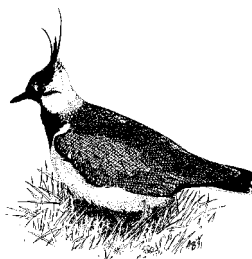
To come to the point. How about a number of articles that emphasises all those little points, other than plumage and song, which help with identification? I would gladly receive anyone's personal tips and suggestions and weave them in with due credit. A start will be made in the next issue of Bird News and although much will be 'old hat' to the initiates we must always remember the needs of the average birder.

Richard Gabb C.P.B. (with Bar & Bell), 72 Chester Road, Poynton, Cheshire, SK12 1HA

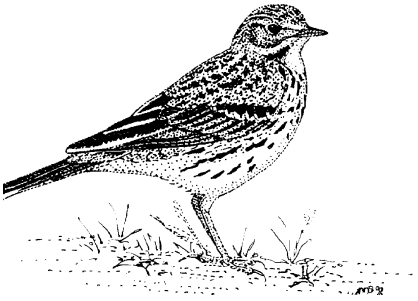
P.S. May I add my congratulations to my successor and now say how my own favourite article has always been 'View from the Farmyard' which says much about the great personality of its author.

The View from the Farmyard

When last year's acorn and beechnut crops were failures, the autumn and winter Woodpigeon flocks were notable by their absence. However 1997 has produced a bumper crop of all types of nut, the sweet chestnuts being particularly large and delicious. A truly vast supply of acorns have been gorged by ever increasing flocks of Wood Pigeons, each field and wood holding 50-200 birds. But the grand spectacle is the emergence of these flocks from their roost sites. On the morning of November 25th at around 8:00am, we stood in the farmyard totally in awe as the sky was filled with thousands of Woodpigeons. The flock visible from the farmyard was only a part of the whole, the estate builder observing from a more open position had witnessed a further two groups the size of ours. The total flock must easily have been in excess of 10,000 birds, possibly as many as 15,000. In past years I have spoken to pigeon shooters who have, when dressing birds for cooking, found 8-12 acorns in the crops of birds. The strength exerted by the gizzard when grinding acorns complete with shell must be phenomenal, and the total weight of nuts eaten by this particular flock vast. Faced with such odds other nut gatherers have to be quick to take their share. Squirrels dig shallow holes, first removing the growing tip of the nut to prevent germination, before burying the acorn. Jays on the other hand bury the nut intact, covering them with a thin layer of leaf litter or moss. I have heard it said that the spread of the oak forest after the last glaciation was chiefly due to the Jay's efforts to conceal its food from its competitors, and its poor success rate in re-locating it.



Spurred on by Philip Barnett's article about Meadow Pipit movement in the July 1997 Bird News, I carried out my own very unscientific research into the movement through one field in Toft. The first birds, in ones and twos, began to appear around the 10th September. By the 17th greater numbers were to be found, and a walk across the field disturbed 35 birds. Using part of my lunch break



each day, I sat in the centre of the field under a large chestnut tree and counted on various days, 53 in 20 mins, 21 in 30 mins, 16 in 20 mins and 61 in 30 mins, all going roughly south west. Then on October 2nd I became seriously concerned about the validity of these measurements, for in the last 12 days I had seen many birds flying south west, which I took to be all genuine passage movement. Though seen in 20 to 30 minute snapshots, were they providing a true picture of what was really going on? So on October 2nd I changed tactics by carrying out a 2 hour survey of the same site. In the first 45 minutes I observed 154 birds flying south

west, but watching their progress I became aware that many were coming to ground, some on the field behind me and others on the field immediately to the right, and one or two flying back overhead to where they had come from. Another change of plan was called for, this time to count birds travelling in both directions. Many groups south west bound and a small number northerly were as expected, but the intervention of a Kestrel into the proceedings sent 195 birds over me back in a northerly direction. Bringing the tally to minus 14 south west, so wait a minute what was I actually counting? On my short counts of 20-30 minutes there simply wasn't enough time to see the true picture, what was really happening was over a far larger time scale and involved a good deal of "two steps forward and one step back". Given fairly reasonable weather conditions, Meadow Pipits have little need to rush their migration and probably progress in short flights rather than in 100 mile marathons. The availability of food along the way causes them to stop and feed, on this farm spending much time in rough grass or in the maize stubble, and even allowing time to return in the opposite direction a short way, if predation threatens. To try to prove this theory I positioned myself with a good view along the line of passage. I discovered that many birds did in fact land within 1/4 to a 1/2 a mile after having passed over me, and if I moved to the position where they had alighted they once more flew on along the general line of migration, only to come to ground again one or two fields away. I conclude from this that migration is a series of short hops, small parties of birds responding to local events, predation, food availability, habitat etc. and in fact some birds have already reached their goal, and will remain here all winter.

My wife Elizabeth and I, fell in love with our house the first moment we saw it. In August 1979 we were to get married, so I was looking for a job which paid enough to keep the two of us, and any latter additions. As is often the case with my job a tied cottage is provided. This was particularly necessary as to rent or buy a house in Knutsford is far beyond my means. I got the job and we moved into the house in October 1979. This was great, but it rapidly became apparent that there was one major deficiency, no birds, not a one. The garden was a lawn at the front and a barren wilderness of black polythene at the rear, the previous tenant having spread a large sheet of plastic over the entire area presumably to suppress weeds, the effect was delightful. So we set upon the lengthy process of creating a place where birds and animals will come and feel safe enough to stay and feed, or even breed. Shrubs and trees, many grown from seed or taken as cuttings have transformed the garden. It's not what you would call beautiful to the eye but the wildlife have shown their appreciation of it with their presence. Many of the plants carry berries and all thrushes have visited both summer and winter. A male Blackcap in the winter of 1996 has been followed by a female in November 1997, and one day who knows we may get the seal of approval from the Waxwings. The other food provided in the garden regularly attracts 80 Black-headed Gulls, 10 Crows, 20 Rooks and up to 80 Jackdaws, 10 Magpies, 100 Starlings, Treecreepers, Nuthatches, woodpeckers and hundreds of tits. The satisfaction we reap from the success of our garden is immense, though our efforts are really quite modest. These birds are looked upon as our birds and though they seem to target my car rather too often, they have provided us with great pleasure. From our first silent October to the present day has been a constant case of trial and error, moving plants and feeders to try and find the best positions. The single most satisfying addition has been the construction of the pond, adding a whole new dimension to the birds' activities in our little nature reserve.

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

Notes & Letters

SEPTEMBER: HILBRE ISLAND: LEACH'S PETREL

A birdwatching trip to Hilbre is always an event, for with the tides, the elements and the isolation to contend with, some fore planning is essential. So, having selected a suitable day, the ninth of September and attire ourselves accordingly, my birdwatching friend and I found ourselves looking across the West Kirby sands. The plan was to visit Hilbre and be off again before high water, but a lift to the island in Vicky's Landrover (the Hilbre Island Warden who also kindly unlocked the hide for us), and an incredible passage of Leach's Petrel's in front of us, ensured that we remained as immovable as the rockpool Limpets for the duration of the high tide. Bird watching conditions were excellent apart from the inevitable head-on cold wind, the sunny weather highlighting the brown waves of the sea, which was banded darker with the passage of the clouds.

A full seven hours on the island produced a staggering 125 Leach's Petrels, out of an estimated 300 for the day, all of which were passing east to west over a moderate swell. We soon deduced their route, watching them flutter across the breaking white surf towards Red Rocks away to our right, they danced over the waves and troughs in front of the hide and then picked up speed with noticeably faster and deeper wing-beats as they angled into the wind and hurried out to sea on our left. Counting the birds and watching so many individuals was exhilarating, and noting such features as narrow pointed angled wings, shallowly forked tails, dangling legs, conspicuous white rump (very variable and sometimes partly bisected vertically with a dark line), and pale grey carpal crescents all soon became grist to the mill, and our attention could be turned to their behaviour. For instance on two occasions we watched individuals feeding diligently on fish scraps, hovering buoyantly over bobbing Grey Seals as they munched on fish presumably too big to swallow whole. One petrel was even unconcerned when a Great Black-backed Gull joined the free-for-all. Another petrel easily out-manoeuvred an adult Kittiwake during a short erratic chase, before settling down to eat a small silver fish it had caught.

All in all we decided that better views could not have been obtained, whether winging past the hide, foraging by foot pattering or occasionally alighting on the sea, when they took on the appearance of a small piece of driftwood, adding up to an excellent days birdwatching. In fact if we had not noticed a petrel for a short while, we found that it took just two full binocular scans, or less than two minutes, to locate a bird winging past, such was the constant procession of these enigmatic pelagics.

Finally the supporting cast, which included suprisingly few of the commoner, more expected, birds. Only three Fulmars, three Kittiwakes, two early Brent Geese and singles of Manx Shearwater, Little Tern, Red-breasted Merganser and Great Crested Grebe, among the more abundant Cormorant, Common and Sandwich Terns. A highlight was the locating of the first returning Purple Sandpiper, which later patrolled the slipway in front of the hide. We walked back to the shoreline well satisfied, with plenty of fine observations to think, talk and write about.

Paul Morris, Caughall Farmhouse Cottage, Caughall Rd, Upton-by-Chester, Cheshire, CH2 4BW.

OUTLINE PROPOSALS

I have just read Bob Anderson's and Tony Broome's discussion on local rarities. Whilst I undoubtedly fall on the recording side of the fence, I know that I am also one of those who tend to forget to take details of familiar birds and then end up wondering how I should create a record from months of old memories.

A prime example would be this September on Scilly when I disturbed an Ortolan Bunting on a footpath. I only looked at it for a matter of seconds before leaving it to alert others of my party. I know it was an Ortolan, and fortunately so do they as they got excellent close views, but if I were to submit an acceptable description I would have to lie.

That example can be resolved by other observers but that isn't always the case. One suggestion to ease matters might be worth considering.

If the description form were designed with a hollow outline to fill in, or even a list of feather tracts which people could put their remarks against, then the process would be a little easier. Obviously different birds would be different shapes but that would be easily resolved by supplying a one off sheet of shapes to members for the purpose of photocopying when the record is submitted, (or even trace over).

Those minded to do more detailed descriptions, or be artistic, would no doubt wish to do their own but I know I would be better able to draw what I remember of my Ortolan rather than trying put it into words.

Alan Roberts, The Croft, 24/26 Mill Street, Bradenham, Norfolk.

Many thanks for the suggestion Alan. It is a course of action I have been contemplating since David Quinn's Yellow-legged Gull article in 'Bird News' 32. Your letter is particularly pertinent as it is that time of year when we 'all' go back through our notebooks in preparation for submitting our records only to discover that umpteen county rarities will have received little more than a cursory comment, if they're lucky. Ed.

and in reply...

Whilst I can see the advantage of having a sheet of "outlines" handy when faced with an unusual species, I can see at least one big disadvantage, that of "hallucination".

Take this scenario: an unusual species is sitting in a bush in front of you, you get on it and immediately think "I know that, it's a..." and it's flushed by a Sparrowhawk. Desperately rummaging about for your sheet of outlines, you take many long, panic struck seconds and then have to decide which outline is relevant. Did it have a small bill, seed-eater type bill, etc etc? You decide on one outline and fill in the details you think you saw and remember... The human brain plays funny tricks and one of the most annoying ones that afflicts birders, is that of "hallucination". The rarity files are full of them - Canaries for Serins, Chiffchaffs for Paddyfield Warblers etc etc. You get the picture? We're all guilty of it, every last one of us, but it depends how determined we are to have the last say, that is, put a name to a bird. With some people it's all important. In my opinion, if you're not one hundred percent sure, then let it go, it doesn't matter. It may smart for a few days and you may wish "if only", but it is best left as the one that got away. An outline of a species may just tip some people over the edge into guessing features and naming a completely different species, wrongly.

I know what Alan is saying, he's seen hundreds of Ortolans, but there is nothing to beat a blow by blow description, no matter how brief. It makes you look at a bird, note the features you actually see (not imagine) and if complete, satisfactorily arrive at the correct decision. Of course, in the case of a lingering bird, sat there in front of you for many minutes, giving you the luxury of infilling a hollow outline, you may find such a procedure of great help. But, please don't imagine what you see, make sure you take a long, hard, critical look at the bundle of feathers in front of you, the chances are it's something relatively common!

Tony Broome, County Recorder

I suspect Tony's reply is overly sceptical and may be partially affected by the thought of the editor asking him to provide the outlines! Eds

COMMUNALLY ROOSTING BLACKCAPS?

Whilst carrying out locking-up duties, in freezing conditions, at Hadlow Road Station on the Wirral Way on New Years Day in 1996, I became aware of the harsh 'tack' of a Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* as it worked it's way along the hedgerow in the gathering gloom. Within a few seconds a second bird came tacking along the hedgerow from the opposite direction. Both birds entered a dense dog rose *Rosa canina* on the opposite platform and called loudly and persistently. This behaviour reminded me of Wrens *Troglodytes troglodytes* calling in neighbours to a communal winter roost.

One of the birds showed briefly at the top of the shrub and proved to be a male. A third bird then called from some distance and rapidly made it's way to the same shrub. A fourth bird then passed through the hedgerow in the now almost total darkness. Three of the birds appeared to enter a dense stand of ivy *Hedera helix* which shrouded the corner of the platform shelter and which flowed over the dog rose in which they had initially settled. The fourth bird was not seen to enter the ivy. Once in the ivy the birds fell silent. Further observations on the 5/1/97, in milder conditions with persistent drizzle, produced two birds but the calling was far more muted than on the first occasion and neither bird was seen to enter the original roost.

This was the first time I could recall seeing Blackcaps go to roost. Curious as to their normal roosting habits I consulted a variety of texts, none of which mentioned communal roosting. Consultation with others including Prof. David Norman also failed to produce any evidence of communal roosting behaviour in this species.

I strongly suspect, but as yet cannot prove, that Blackcaps may in periods of severe weather take to roosting communally as a means of improving their survival chances as per Long-tailed Tits *Aegithalos caudatus* and Wrens. When conditions ameliorate they once again resume their solitary roosting habits. If the numbers of wintering German Blackcaps continues to increase this may become a more frequently observed habit. Should similar periods of sustained freezing temperatures occur again this winter I shall attempt to observe any recurrence of this behaviour. Unfortunately the previous ivy roost has been cleared from the side of the old platform shelter, so my chances of locating a new roost are pretty slim.

If you have observed any behaviour in Blackcaps that may suggest communal roosting can occur in this species I would be delighted to know.

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

INSIDE STORY

I was most interested to read the account by Mike Holmes (BN 36) regarding his battle to save his local patch from development, not least because I am a Borough Councillor in the Crewe area (one of the very few to oppose this application). Mike rightly points to some of the problems in 'fighting' the developers.

I think there are two main problems - firstly, that by the time the locals get to hear about proposals (through a planning application) it's already too late because the Local Plan has already allocated the site for development. Secondly, so many people will get very worked up about proposals on their own doorsteps, but fail to recognise the importance of the bigger picture. You can get hundreds of people to petition against a site-specific (local) application, but talk to them about the general scale of development across the Borough or County and their eyes glaze over. Time after time I have heard councillors speak vehemently against new house building (in their own words), then vote in favour of higher and higher building rates across the Borough - and then fail to recognise any possible inconsistency!

The County Council is currently preparing it's Strategic Plan to 2011. The pre-May 1997 (Con/Lib Dem) Council voted to scale down the rate of housing development across Cheshire, but since taking control in the May '97 elections the (now) Labour Council have pushed the figure back up again. This will mean more pressure on 'Greenfield' sites, but the public just shrug their shoulders and assume this extra house building will go elsewhere (out of site, out of minds....).

Can CAWOS have a role? Honestly I'm not too sure, but would a 'current affairs' column dealing with the politics (small p) of the Cheshire environment be useful? Certainly CAWOS members should question candidates on their attitudes at future Borough/County elections.

Finally, Mike is right to be sceptical about the 'ecological survey'. A few years ago the Department of Transport carried out such a survey here, by paying an 'expert' to spend two days walking three alternative routes for the Shavington by-pass. He recorded Tree Pipit (quite a find round here!) and Brambling in June! Pardon my cynicism....

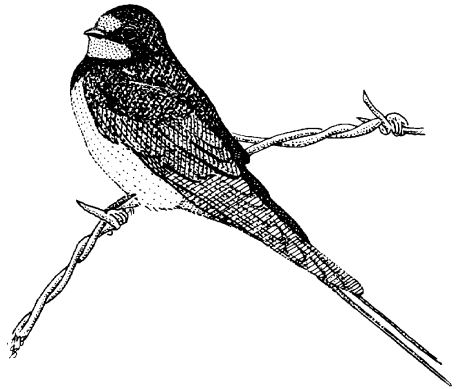
Gwyn Griffiths, 18 Holly Mount, Basford, Crewe, Cheshire, CW2 5AZ.

Well Gwyn you've really stirred the pot there and raised many questions in my own mind as well as confirming my belief that too many ecological surveys are lacking in depth and accuracy. I hope the particular surveyor you cite was a better botanist, entomologist, mycologist etc. than he was ornithologist. Mind you those mistakes are reasonable when you consider that he was probably running at the time in order to complete the three routes in two days.

I agree that we could benefit from a regular column highlighting some of the pressing issues which are affecting the Cheshire environment. The danger though is in becoming too doom laden. For instance I stopped getting BBC Wildlife magazine some years ago because every time I opened the pages I became deeply depressed at the devastation we were wreaking on the environment and my helplessness to change the situation. However if we employ that popular maxim 'Think Globally - Act Locally' then perhaps we can have a hand in a few minor victories for the environmental lobby. So, if you are offering to help put together such a column your contribution would be warmly appreciated. Eds.

HARD ACT TO SWALLOW

I read with much interest and sympathy Mike Holmes' article "Home Guard" in the October 'Bird News'. I have experienced similar feelings of frustration in fighting rearguard actions against the development of good wildlife sites and agree that the planning system appears to be biased in favour of developers. Nevertheless, there are actions which can be taken within one's own "patch" to raise the profile of conservation and ensure that Local Authorities and others are aware of not just the SSSIs and SBIs but also the unprotected, but good, wildlife habitats.



For many years I have been surveying as many undeveloped parts of Warrington and surrounding areas as time allows, and I have submitted the data to the Local Authority and in some instances the Cheshire Wildlife Trust. This has led to two SBI designations (Winwick Hospital and Houghton Green Pool), both of which would still be unprotected without regular recording over a number of years. I accept Mike's point that this still does not offer long-term protection for sites, but at least it is a start and provides a means for having an input into possible future developments. Winwick Hospital, for example is scheduled for demolition in the near future, but as a result of its Grade A SBI status I have been consulted about the site on a number of occasions by the Local Authority and have been invited to meetings with prospective developers. This has provided a constructive means of influencing the future of the site, and hopefully monitoring the important House Martin population there.

Surveying one's own patch can be as rewarding (more so in my opinion) than concentrating solely on the 'hot spots'. My son and I, for example, found two breeding pairs of Buzzards in 1997 during unrelated fieldwork. Visiting House Martin sites in Warrington and north Cheshire revealed, as a spin-off, the large - and increasing - number of Swallow breeding sites which have been lost to barn conversions. In my own village of Grappenhall I wrote to the Parish Council, which responded sympathetically and commissioned from me a survey of those Swallow sites which remain. As a result they have given an assurance that they will examine closely any proposed developments that may adversely affect breeding Swallows in the Parish.

The CAWOS survey of summering Swifts which I organised, revealed many outstanding, previously unrecorded, populations. The largest and most dramatic is on a Council estate in Crewe. After much hard work by Colin Lythgoe the data obtained has been used to designate the estate an SBI. In addition the BBC 'Country File' programme has expressed an interest in filming this exciting Swift spectacular, which has even attracted the local Mayor. These, it seems to me, are examples of conservation at its best, and show how important it is to forge links with local politicians and the media.

My contention therefore is that, depressing and one sided though the planning process can seem, it is possible to influence developments. To do so, however, requires hard work and much commitment. I would like to see CAWOS becoming more proactive in conservation by encouraging members to carry out local site surveys, the results of which would inevitably lead to more SBI designations. It saddens me that so little effort is put into conservation by most birdwatchers. Birds give us so much pleasure. Is it too much to expect that we should repay this by giving some of our time to trying to protect their habitats?

Attempts within CAWOS, notably by Derek Kelly, to address conservation issues have generally failed from lack of support. This situation has to change. We cannot expect the Cheshire Wildlife Trust, RSPB etc. to take on all issues of concern, given their limited resources. CAWOS and its members could take a much more active role and in the process raise the profile of the Society. Failure to do so will result in more hand wringing and letters like Mike's in the years to come.

Brian Martin, 45 Albert Road, Grappenhall, Warrington, WA4 2PF.

FRODSHAM AND RED ROCKS

There is an intention to attempt a record year list at Frodsham Marsh this year by Broome, Gabb and Morton (It sounds like a firm of solicitors, doesn't it?). Working out the current list was interesting and since the publication of Bill's 'The Birds of Frodsham Marsh', the total appears to be 249, with a further one likely to be added for 1997 and two unaccepted BBRC records from the seventies and eighties, Little Bittern and Purple Heron. *If anyone has details of these two species, can you please submit them, it would make the list more accurate....*

In conversation with Jane Turner, the Red Rocks list is at present 252, on a par with Frodsham Marsh. The main difference is that Red Rock experiences a wider spread of species throughout the year and many of them are more frequent, flocks of migrants instead of singles, for example.

There can't be many sites in Cheshire that can equal these two and birding at them can be both exciting and rewarding. Even so, they are usually devoid of birdwatchers until a rarity turns up and the pagers spread the news. Just think of how many species would be added to both lists if both sites were regularly covered by more than the normal local patchers!

If you can help provide details of any rarity you know has never been submitted, then please do so. A singing male Bluethroat at Frodsham Marsh was supposedly seen by two people but died a death, no details ever emerged. See what you can do.....

Tony Broome, 4 Larchwood Drive, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 2NU

CORMORANT UPDATE

Members of CAWOS might like to hear about the outcome of the Cormorant controversy, which caused quite a stir last year! A claim that the editor of an angling newspaper incited readers to kill protected birds was thrown out by a court at the beginning of November. Peterborough magistrates backed a defence submission that there was no case for him to answer. He had denied two charges under the Countryside and Wildlife 1981 Act that an edition of Angling Times would encourage the killing of Cormorants.

The prosecutor told the court that a front page last year carried the headline 'These birds must be killed' alongside a picture of a masked, armed man and four dead birds. Inside was an interview with a gamekeeper, Mr X, who admitted illegally killing Cormorants, information on how to do this and a sympathetic editorial by the former editor, branding the birds a 'fish-mincing menace'.

The defence claimed disagreeing with a law was not the same as inciting someone to break it!

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

HOME GUARD - EPISODE 2

If you have a pretty good memory, you might remember that I wrote a piece in the last Bird News about my local patch, and the planning application to build loads of houses all over it. Well, there have been some developments. I therefore thought I would write another piece, so that anyone reading it can learn from what I have seen going on - before it is too late for your own patch.

What do you think the Wildlife Trusts do? Down in my area, my only contact with them has been when they wanted us all to help save Neumanns' Flash, when I did some SBI survey work and when they wanted data about local Barn Owls. I always thought that they must be pretty active conservationists and the sort of people you could turn to to help you stop your local patch being bulldozed. According to The Birdwatcher's Yearbook and Diary - that indispensable book of facts - "The Wildlife Trust is a nationwide network of local Trusts which work to protect wildlife in town and country." It goes on to say that the WT is dedicated to achievement of a UK richer in wildlife managed on sustainable principles. So, all in all, a pretty good bunch I always thought.

Well, you might be interested in my recent dealings with them so far as my local patch is concerned. When I found out that the site was going to be covered with houses, (Quick recap : 60 odd bird species including Linnets, Tree Sparrows, Song Thrushes etc, plus Great Crested Newts) I wrote to one of the Wildlife Trusts for help. I got nothing back. The planning process rumbled on, consent was given to build houses, but the developer was told to commission a survey and provide some mitigation to protect any rare species which were found. I had grave misgivings - after all, if you don't survey the site very thoroughly, you won't find anything, and so you won't have to spend any money protecting it. Anyway, the survey report and details of the mitigation duly appeared.

I had a few questions so I rang the people who had done the report - Cheshire Ecological Services. The phone was answered by someone who said "Cheshire Wildlife Trust". I was told by the person on the phone that Cheshire Ecological Services is the consultancy part of Cheshire Wildlife Trust. So basically, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, in the form of Cheshire Ecological Services, have been involved in carrying out a survey and preparing some mitigation for the fact that we will be losing lots of fields and wildlife to house building - affecting many important species. No wonder they didn't take up my plea for help really is it?

The survey itself was done on a tiny handful of dates and mainly covered plants, trees and the pond life on the site. The one really good bit is that it uncovered a handful of pretty rare aquatic invertebrates including an extremely rare Red Data Book species called the Lesser Silver Water Beetle for which this is about the best site in Cheshire. Practically no birds, butterflies or mammals were included and there were no spiders, moths, mosses etc. In short, it is really just an uncritical rationalisation of housing development on this valuable wildlife habitat. There is some mitigation - tree planting, some hedges and some new ponds but because the survey missed out so much, we have no idea what rare spiders, moths, mammals, mosses and so on will be destroyed. Nor do we know whether anything will benefit from the mitigation. No assessment is given at all of the likely impact of the building work on the wildlife of the site. The inevitable increase in kids, cars and domestic pets doesn't get a mention. I am not quite sure where we are up to with it all at the moment - as I said last time, I'm a bit naive in these matters - but I understand that the report is currently being re-done, and I hope that it tackles some of the issues mentioned above.

So, in conclusion I offer you another word of warning. We tend to hear about conservation and environmental groups getting involved in a site and think "Oh well, if there is anything worth saving, they will fight hard for it" or we think "Great - the experts are involved. That will help". But you can't relax - people are overworked and lazy in the conservation movement just as elsewhere. They will try to do the minimum amount of work necessary to justify their jobs. They will try to gloss over details that would be too much trouble to sort out, whilst furthering their careers by publicising bits of work with the odd glamorous species and sites. Surely, conservation groups should be pressing for sites with Red Data Book species to be given better legal protection, rather than just accepting more and more houses as inevitable. I know that some people will take a pragmatic view and say that the houses were unstoppable given that the land was earmarked for building in the Local Plan and that it would have been a waste of scarce time and resources to try to fight harder - but I just can't accept that. I think that the whole planning process is stacked against our wildlife and countryside and it needs changing. People who read Bird News and who care about birds, butterflies, plants and wildlife in general should wake up to this and to the fact that there may be little more to some conservation groups than glossy pictures and campaigns to save well known sites when it suits them.

M.D.Holmes BSc (Hons) FSS, 114 Merlin Way, Copenhall, Crewe, Cheshire, CW1 3RZ.

PATCH AS PATCH CAN

It's the time of year when you sit down and plough through your notebook in pursuit of ornithological nuggets to pass on for publication in the Bird Report. Cue the glazing over of eyes from at least a third of the membership. Oh no! Not another pontificating, jumped up, member of the committee extolling the virtues of sending in records. Ha! Fell into my trap didn't you? Zo you atmit zat zending in der rekords is not vat you can be bozzerd vith. Eh. (No letters please. This bit is meant to be read in a hammed up German accent.) Bevare ve haf vays of making you rekord. Fail zis mission ant you vill zuffer a fate verse zan a fate verse zan death.

So, why is it that many of the members fail to send in records? There are probably as many reasons as there are members, but I suspect that a significant proportion don't use a notebook and some of those that do find it difficult to judge precisely what information is worthy of publication. So, how do you persuade people to send in their records? To be honest I haven't got a clue. But I do know what turned me on to keeping notes was working a local patch. Covering a local patch on a regular basis enables you to develop a sense of perspective and helps to place your observations in context. If you go to the extent of recording your sightings it is but a small step to extracting the relevant details and sending them off to the Bird Report compilers.

Is covering a local patch important? Well that depends upon your own priorities. It should be remembered that some of the county's most ardent twitchers also cover a local patch and even the most dedicated 'patcher' sometimes succumbs to the lure of the siren. However try listing all the good birding sites in Cheshire without reference to literature. Then look in the gazetteer in the back of the 1994 Bird Report and see just how many places you've never visited or even heard of. I'll wager the vast majority you miss are local patches visited by less than a handful of people, until they turn up a rarity that is.

So is this ramble leading anywhere? Yes. The new 'Cheshire Avifauna'. If this mythical creature is ever going to rise like a Phoenix and wing it's way to all good book shops, it will only do so on the backs of the membership, particularly those, who trudge their patch and diligently record their observations. Hanging on the every word of Birdline North West, or the buzz of your Birdnet bleeper, has it's place but it won't contribute a 'tinkers cuss' to the production of the avifauna.

This next bit is directed at those who have never previously worked a 'local patch'. The rest of you can skip this segment as I don't want any Mr Angry letters objecting to my patronising attitude.

So for those of you who would like to take a more active role in your birding activities ie patchwork. Where do you begin? Keep in mind that a 'local patch' should be no more than a short drive from your residence, even better if it's within walking distance. Next get a local map preferably an O.S. 'Pathfinder' or 'Landranger'. These contain sufficient detail to make some value judgements regarding relief and likely suitable habitat without actually visiting every potential site. If no suitable public locations are available it may be worth contacting landowners for access permission if an outstanding private area is obvious and within range.

Rule number one when choosing a local patch. Select an area with some water in it. Try to find a site which combines a variety of habitats. Areas with good access, particularly those with circular route options, usually prove the most rewarding. It is important to be aware of potential conflicting activities e.g. fieldsports, or paintball war games, as splats of blue paint on your Leica's can put a dampener on the day.

The advantages of working a local patch soon become obvious. For a start you quickly become familiar with the regular birds, so picking out the unusual or the oddities is easier. Subtle changes in populations from year to year, or season to season, become more apparent. You will become very aware of the migratory movements even within the residents. You'll know that there are an extra fifty Blackbirds in the hedge one October morning.

There is however one big downside to all this. I'm afraid that once you try this you are likely to become an addict. There is no known cure, though the side effects vary from individual to individual. In the worst case scenario some addicts have been known to go 'cold turkey' whilst on sumptuous exotic holidays and vow never to leave Fiddlers Ferry again. So you have been warned. But what the heck! You only live once, so give it a try. Go on, you know you want to.

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

BIRDWATCHING IN 2048.

What will birdwatching be like in 50 years, one can only guess.....

Red-necked Grebes bred again in the county for the third consecutive year following an increase in the British Population to 30 pairs. Only 2 Leach's Petrels were seen from Hilbre this year, but 6 Little Shearwaters was a record for that species. A Dalmatian Pelican, now annual along Britain's south coast with the nearest colony in Belgium, was the first county record bringing the Cheshire list to 421 species. A pair of Night Herons bred at Rostherne for the first time, where 3 pairs of Bittern also bred. A flock of 5 Cattle Egrets visited Sandbach during June and July. The Little Egret colony at Frodsham was decimated by an oil spillage on the Mersey in spring, but the Budworth colony still held 3 pairs. Twelve pairs of Spoonbills bred, including 3 pairs at Woolston.

At least 7 Greater Flamingo's overshot their Kent breeding grounds in spring.

Canada Geese flocks peaked at only 300 at Frodsham and Inner Marsh Farm continued the downward trend of this species over the last 20 years. About 30 pairs of Garganey were found across the county in late spring. The last breeding British pair of Ruddy Ducks were shot at Chelford SQ's signalling the demise of this once common species, although its DNA will be sent to the Mars colony for the Unique Species Collection there. It's compatriot the White-headed Duck continued to grow with 3 pairs breeding

at Frodsham Marsh out of a British population of 200 pairs. Ring-necked Ducks appeared at Frodsham, Sandbach and Budworth. A King Eider wintered off Hilbre and was the first British record for five years. Record numbers of Red Kites were recorded this year (c20 individuals and 3 pairs breeding) and 5 Black Kites. Kestrels continued to decline with only 10 pairs left in the county, but Buzzards remained unchanged from recent years with up to 30 at Tatton. An overshooting Short-toed Eagle flew over Tatton in May. Ten Red-footed Falcons and 20 Merlins was an average year. A Red Grouse at Cut Thorn Hill in June was the first county record for ten years.

Oystercatchers and Black-winged Stilts both peaked with three figure counts on the Mersey in autumn. Unusually large numbers of Golden Plovers were on the Mersey with counts approaching 25,000. Only 2 Purple Sandpipers wintered off Hilbre, where 110 Little Stints, 204 Curlew Sandpipers and two Red-necked Stints were counted in April. White-rumped, Baird's and Upland Sandpipers were all reported for the third year running. Twenty Green and 9 Common Sandpipers wintered at Marbury. Red-necked Phalaropes were reported from five sites in spring and a further four sites in autumn. Breeding Mediterranean Gulls reached c1500 pairs at Woolston and c475 pairs at Inner Marsh Farm, with an Audouin's Gull at the latter site for the second year running. Only two records of both Glaucous and Iceland Gulls were seen this year. A Lesser Crested Tern frequented the Burton area in July. Only a handful of Black Terns reached Cheshire despite the fact they are breeding in Norfolk and Suffolk.

A Turtle Dove in spring was the first county record for 17 years and attracted nearly 1,000 people to see it. Single migrant Scop's and Eagle Owls were at Hilbre and Red Rocks respectively, both in October. Four Alpine Swifts was a poor showing but a Pallid Swift at Woolston was another first for the county. A flock of 17 Bee-eaters flew over Neumann's Flash, a new record count of this species in Cheshire. Hoopoes bred at ten sites as last year, with migrant Wrynecks at Hilbre, Tatton and Poynton Pool. Woodlark numbers continue to grow with 5 pairs at Delamere. A Crested Lark at Sandbach was a welcome tick there following last years bird at Marbury CP. House and Sand Martins passed through in record numbers this spring along with up to 7 Red-rumped Swallows seen.

Yellow Wagtails continued to have a toehold in the county with a single pair at Frodsham under 24 hour guard by the RSPB. Nightingales have now spread to Wirral with the first proved breeding record at Bidston Hill. A Black-eared Wheatear arrived at Moreton in May. A Grey-cheeked Thrush at Red Rocks in November was the fifth there. A mixed flock of c300 Mistle and Song Thrushes was an excellent record from Delamere.

Savi's Warblers sang at eight sites along the Mersey. A Fan-tailed Warbler at Rostherne in August was the third British record in three years. Icterine and Melodious Warblers passed through in good numbers with double figure counts from several sites. Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroats continue to decline with only a handful of pairs each left in the County. About 20 each of Yellow-browed Warbler and Red-breasted Flycatcher were reported in Autumn, mainly from Red Rocks and Hilbre. Bearded Tits increased to 15 pairs at Rostherne and 3 pairs at Budworth. Red-backed and Woodchat Shrikes bred at both Moreton and Delamere. Starlings are now rare migrants in the county following persecution by many landowners. House Sparrows have now become extinct on Wirral following the last pair there two years ago, Tree Sparrows however, fared better extending their range to three new areas. All Corn Bunting nests were again under 24 hour protection following thefts from three nests last year.

American vagrants flooded into Wirral where Hilbre will soon be renamed New Scilly, following the demise of the Scilly Isles as a vagrant hotspot some ten years ago, due to the changing weather patterns in the Atlantic. Four Red-eyed Vireo's, two Northern Parula's, a single Black-throated Green Warbler, five Bobolinks, a Vermilion Flycatcher (second county record) and a Rose-breasted Grosbeak were reported from the Wirral. Further birds inland included Common Yellowthroat in a Chester garden and Ovenbird in a Stockport garden (which was reclaimed by Cheshire in 2042 following boundary changes enacted by England Minster Lightfoot).

The above article is purely fictitious and most of it is unlikely to come true, but some of the predictions are loosely based on current factual knowledge and so I will try to explain the serious messages behind this article.

Firstly, it is predicted that Global Warning will raise sea levels by at least a metre by 2050 and average temperatures may increase by up to 2 degrees C, hence southern Britain will feel more like the Mediterranean. This will increase the occurrence of southern European species such as

Cattle Egret, Red-footed Falcon and Woodchat Shrike, which regularly overshoot in small numbers. At the same time many species which currently only have a foothold in Britain, such as Little Egret and Savi's Warbler, will move northwards with the warmer temperatures and hence also squeeze out many of our winter visitors such as Purple Sandpiper. Small birds will benefit from warmer winters, hence more warblers will overwinter and species like Bearded Tit will benefit as cold winters can decimate these birds. Other scientists however believe this global warming could in fact be the prelude to another Ice Age.

Many of our declining species may near extinction, such as Turtle Dove, Yellow Wagtail and Corn Bunting, with other species such as Kestrel, Red Grouse, House Sparrow and Starling rapidly declining due to lack of information on the species (hence decline was not noticed and reasons behind the decline were not found out until it was too late) and also persecution. Habitat destruction is also likely to play a major role in the bird populations in the future. Several currently well protected species will undoubtedly increase with Red Kite being the best example. Other species will benefit from protection of specific habitats such as Delamere forest, while others such as Golden Plover may increase for unknown reasons.

Changing weather patterns in the Atlantic may bring North American waders and passerines further north in the British Isles reducing the influence of sites such as the Scilly Isles and Cornwall. It would be exceptionally unlikely that such a high concentration of American passerines would occur in such a small area as Wirral but who knows? Weather patterns are also likely to increase the number of Siberian/Far Eastern vagrants such as Yellow-browed Warbler and Red-necked Stint.

Finally, technological changes will mean that you won't have to leave your home every day, because the art of prediction will be so good you'll know exactly what weather conditions will produce all these birds. Technology may also be used to remove or genetically alter certain species such as Ruddy Duck which contaminate other species DNA. Genetic engineering may also bring back previously extinct species, such as the Great Auk, using their own DNA. The word "dip" will become defunct because all birds will be available on the VRBN (Virtual Reality Birding Network), which is where I'm off to now!!

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

IDEAS ON THE AVIFAUNA

By the end of this year the first proper steps on the long road to destination 'Cheshire Avifauna' should have been completed. The decision regarding the format of the avifauna has not yet been taken. The membership therefore have several months in which to express their opinions and ideas. You may wish to comment on the best way to present species profiles, maps, or carry out the forthcoming research. Whatever your preferences, or prejudices, it is no use waiting until publication before venturing a considered comment. In the same way it's no use complaining about the government if you didn't bother to vote at the election.

What follows is my own personal preference for an avifauna publication. It in no way reflects the current thinking of the 'Avifauna Committee' for I am, as yet, not aware of their initial proposals. Feel free to comment on my ideas, lambaste them or love them, if they get you thinking that's all that counts.

Traditionally bird books have been just that, books! But for something like an avifauna that may not necessarily be the best option. One of the major problems with publications of this nature is that they are invariably out of date almost as soon as they leave the press. Of course revised editions are a common phenomena in the bird book industry but for a small group like CAWOS, with limited funds and potential sales, this is an expensive and inappropriate option. So is there an alternative?

Well I'm sure there are a number of alternatives but so far I can only think of one that has any logical value. My preferred option for an avifauna would be a loose leaf, arch levered, ring bound, enclosed, hard boxed publication.

Why hard boxed? Well anyone who has had a book for a significant number of years need only look at the discoloration of the pages caused by condensation, dust and oxidised moisture from damp fingers. By enclosing the printed pages in a sturdy (probably plastic) box this problem would be greatly reduced. In addition it is probably the simplest way of accommodating a ring bound volume.

Ring binding is essential if we adopt a loose leaf format. Loose leaf binding can have it's problems particularly if you are heavy handed, as you can damage the link holes even if they are re-enforced.

However for this form of publication they have one big advantage, if and when revision of text becomes necessary we would only need to have the relevant pages reprinted, these could then be made available to registered purchasers as and when available. In this way the new Cheshire Avifauna could retain a relevance and acquire a longevity well in excess of the norm. Indeed I can envisage a scenario where the initial publication is some three hundred pages long, but after a decade and the publication of additional information from ongoing research it is many pages longer. Such dynamism would obviously require imaginative page labelling to allow for potential expansion.

The ring bound format would automatically allow for this flux in textual content and in this case functionality would win over elegance. If one keeps in mind that this is the sort of publication to dip in and out of repeatedly and not to be read from cover to cover once, then never removed from the book shelf again, it's functional appeal grows. This is a hard working reference manual not a pretty dust gatherer.

What about the content of the pages? Well I haven't thought about this in any great detail, but whatever we produce it should have an accessibility to the general public, as well as too those with a specific interest in birds. One way would be to link it to the National Curriculum, for instance, through demonstrating the methodology for working out population levels, breeding densities etc. It wouldn't be easy to achieve, but as education is an essential element of our constitution, it is our obligation to pass on our knowledge and commitment to future generations.

With the phenomenal improvements in information technology, it may also be possible to produce an accompanying CD-ROM, hopefully with an interactive element. If this were so, then potential sales through schools could be significant. We could also put the publication on the World Wide Web and achieve revenue through this modern medium.

There are probably many avenues I haven't even thought about or explored, so it's over to you to illuminate the path to enlightenment. Remember, we need your ideas now, as many of the important issues surrounding the avifauna are going to be hammered out in the near future. Whatever we decide to produce it should be a landmark for the Avifauna of Cheshire.

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

Membership News

Membership News - After our record-breaking membership of 334 in 1997, it is pleasant to welcome more members for 1998. Welcome to the following: Mr and Mrs Morgan, Roy Orford, Mr and Mrs Greenstreet, N McMorrان, J O'Neill, Mrs MJ Alcock, Mr and Mrs Ash, Mr and Mrs Pearce, P Sherwood, K Westall, R Stonier, LW & P Smythe, Mr & Mrs B Burke. As I am writing this on 18 November it is also good to be able to thank all of you who have paid your 1998 subscriptions so promptly.

Donation - Mrs M Turner, who is leaving the area and the society, has donated a complete set of Cheshire Bird Reports from 1969 to 1995. We thank her for this; they will be held by the Society and will be available for borrowing - contact Sheila Blamire.

Reminder - British Birds. My apologies to British Birds - when we included the subscription forms for this publication in with the October Bird News, we forgot to include a note drawing members attention to the special subscriptions price of £34.50 available to members of societies such as CAWOS. If you have lost your form the address to write to is Mrs Erica Sharrock, British Birds (Circulation), Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

Patchwork - Recently I received a letter from someone who feels that local patch watching is inadequately covered by current birdwatching magazines and who proposes to set up a monthly journal entitled Patchwork. It aims to enable patchers to share their findings and to provide information on trends in bird species across the country. Anyone interested in writing articles for this magazine or in receiving it should write to Jon White, Patchwork, Penny Hook, Periton Road, Minehead, Somerset TA24 8DR.

Bird-trapping in Spain - Earlier this year I wrote on behalf of the society to support GEPEC and GECEN, two Spanish environmental organisations, in lobbying the regional government of Catalonia not to legalise bird-liming and tape-luring in that area. They have now spread their protest to the

Valencia region, where the problem is the greatest, and ask bird lovers to send protest letters to the person responsible for hunting affairs in Valencia. If you would like to help them, please write to ILMO, Sr Conseller de Medio Ambiente, C/ Arquitecto Alfaro, 39, 46011 Valencia, Spain. They think the Valencian government would be very concerned at the prospect of a tourist boycott.

Rutland Water - With this copy of Bird News is a flier with full details of the proposed trip to the British Bird Fair at Rutland Water, which we are hoping to organise for August 1998. As I write this the full costs are not yet known, the more people who come, the cheaper the cost of the coach. So be environmentally friendly – leave your car at home and join us!!

Council - At the November meeting the following items were agreed or discussed:-

- Laurie Fairman was again co-opted as Press Officer for 1997-8.
- Details of the Local Environment Agency Plan for the Weaver-Dane basin had been received and will be responded to by February 1998.
- CAWOS would be involved in greater co-operation over the Agenda 21 record cards.
- the proposed Local Records Centre, which would collect all natural history records and make them available to all, was discussed. Members of Council were involved in discussions about this scheme; it would be valuable in that site records would be kept in one register but there were problems over issues such as confidentiality, validation and ownership.
- Grants, the exact total to be decided later, were approved to the Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens for re-equipping and for signs, and to the Woodland Trust for the likely purchase of a wood near Alvanley with wildlife value. In both cases it was hoped that the society would obtain some publicity.
- A small group would shortly meet to make decisions on the future of the Avifauna.
- Publicity should be a high priority in 1998.

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

THE CAWOS RARITIES COMMITTEE 1998

As in previous years, records of rarities will be assessed by the CAWOS team who are part of the Editorial and Records Committee. At present the members are Tony Broome, Jane Turner, Hugh Pulsford, Steve Barber and David Steventon.

Some members may express a wish to join the panel and with the AGM coming up in March, it would be the best time to voice your interest. Anyone who thinks that they are qualified to judge rarities records should be proposed by two people and their names sent to David Steventon. They must be able to show a certain expertise in identification and candidates will be expected to attend meetings and help out with the production of the Bird Report in some way, perhaps as a compiler. We look forward to seeing you...

Tony Broome, County Recorder

WANTED – USED FIELD GUIDES

Used field guides are wanted to donate to birders in parts of eastern Europe (where such things can be very rare). Those that are available are generally poorly illustrated. Western guides, perhaps surprisingly, feature about 95% of the appropriate species. These publications are needed by scientific staff to carry out basic surveys and hopefully to enable the establishment of an equivalent to the Wetland Bird Survey. Used optical equipment would likewise be greatly appreciated. Please contact Dave Paynter at WWT Slimbridge or I would be willing to collect any such items and make sure they get to WWT for onward transmission to eastern Europe.

Sheila Blamire, Woodruff Cottage, Clamhunger Lane, Mere, Cheshire. Tel: 01565 830168

INFORMATION / REQUESTS

Lesser White-fronted Goose: The requests for descriptions of this species in the Bird Report refers to wild individuals only. The Swedish re-introduction birds are not in this category and so are not required by the BBRC for authentication. The bird that has been hanging about around South Marbury presumably flew from Scandinavia to Britain of its own accord, but nevertheless is not deemed to qualify. All Lessers' should still be recorded and submitted to the county committee who will publish the records anyway. A genuinely wild bird should be rung into me straight away of course!

Photographs: Any photographs of county rarities, past and present, would be welcomed by myself for a collection, possibly resulting in a publication in the future. The idea would be to have the

equivalent of a Steve Young or Dave Cottridge photographic guide on a county level. Photos would be paid for at the going rate for a print (£1.50 at present) and moneys raised would be donated to CAWOS. The viability for such a project would of course depend on the response from yourselves, the photographers.

Great Grey Shrikes: Please note that any future Great Grey Shrikes found in Cheshire will have to rule out the recently split Southern (Steppe) Grey Shrike. An article dealing with the key features of this eastern vagrant was published in *Birding World* Vol 8 No 8 and anyone fortunate to have a 'lucky shrike' should take an adequate description, bearing in mind that it is a BBRC rarity. I do intend to review all the past records as far as possible to determine if Steppe Grey Shrike is already on the list and would urge anyone with any suspicions to drop me a line. As a matter of interest, did anyone see the bird at Frodsham No 6 on November 15th 1997?

Yellow-browed Warbler: Another species split by the taxonomists means that identification of Yellow-browed Warbler is now more of a challenge. Hume's Warbler is the 'old' subspecies that winters in the Indian subcontinent and it's status in Britain is thought to be a 'vagrant', although further research may prove it to be more regular. Plumage differences are subtle and again, descriptions should reflect the complexity if BBRC are to accept a sighting. There have been claims of Hume's in the past in Cheshire but none stood up to closer scrutiny. Another trawl of the old files may reveal it's presence on the list already. The '97 December issue of *British Birds* deals with the identification of this species and it is illustrated beautifully by our own Dave Quinn. Just listen for the call!

Western Bonelli's Warbler: Yet another split. Eastern and Western Bonelli's are now two distinct species. They will be dealt with, regarding their identification, in the popular birding press in the near future no doubt. As far as Cheshire is concerned, there has only been one record, that of a "Western" in Delamere Forest on May 19th 1963. I don't suppose anyone has any photos?

Records: I would like to thank all those people that went to great lengths over the past year to submit records and descriptions. The '96 Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report will be with you by the time you read this and you should feel proud that it is once again a professional publication. I'd also like to thank the team who put it together - they do sacrifice a lot of their time...THANKS!

The Avifauna Project: This highly complex publication has once again been resurrected and plans are afoot to make some real progress. Anyone interested in helping write or illustrate parts of it will be welcomed. Maybe you have some thoughts on what it should contain? Let us know. It's going to take some time, but it'll be worth it in the end. As we approach the 21st Century, a review of the status of the county's birds is particularly apt.

Tony Broome, County Recorder

REQUEST FOR HELP

City of Chester Countryside Ranger Mike O'Kell is looking for volunteers to carry out breeding bird survey's at three sites, namely Caldly Nature Park (where the 100th species was recently recorded), Blacon Nature Park, and the Chester Meadows. All three sites would make excellent local patches so anyone looking for a change of scene, or for a suitable birding area within Chester, look no further. For more information contact **Mike O'Kell on 01244 881048**.

BIRD REPORT REVENUE

Brian Dyke, the CAWOS Treasurer, recently presented the Council with some illuminating facts and figures regarding the Bird Report. He demonstrated how, despite year on year increased membership of the society, the revenue generated by the Bird Report has declined markedly over the same period. In fact in 1990 the Society had 276 members. In that year the Bird Report generated an income of £908.50. Despite a rise in membership to 334 in 1997 the income from the Bird Report is now a paltry £251.45. The answer to the discrepancy is simple. In the same time span, the external sales beyond the membership have fallen drastically. Total sales of the 1989 Bird Report was 281, whilst the 1996 Report is currently a meagre 61. The greatest change has come in the area of Reports placed with outlets on a Sale or Return basis. 124 1989 Bird Reports were sold on this basis, to date the figure is 0 for the 1996 Report.

This is not a healthy state of affairs. The solution is however simple. All that is required is for one or more volunteers to step forward and take up David Steventon's job offer published in the last edition of *Bird News*. So read on for the repeated details...

WANTED - BIRD REPORT DISTRIBUTOR

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!

Responsibilities:

Send out the copies to the British Library and the Agent for the Copyright Libraries.

Send out the copies with invoice to those who have the report on standing order - ITE, RSPB, Cheshire Libraries etc.

Send out about 20 complimentary copies to the editors of the contributory reports.

Send out copies of the reports to people who request them during the course of the year, after reading the notifications in BTO News, British Birds and the Country Diary in the Guardian.

Organise the distribution of reports on a sale or return basis to the likes of Wirral Country Park, Martin Mere, Leighton Moss, Jardines book shop (Knutsford) etc.

Account for report sales income to the Treasurer on a regular basis.

Claim expenses from the Treasurer on a regular basis.

Provide an annual stock check to the Treasurer, for valuation of unsold copies of the last three years' reports in the accounts.

Generate some fresh ideas on how and where to sell more copies of the report to non-members.

Qualifications:

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).

Have sufficient storage space - back numbers of the reports are already boxed up by year and take up 54 inches of shelf space 16 inches deep and 24 inches high.

Interested persons please apply to:- **DAVID STEVENTON, 01625-421936**



HIGH TEA

Purposely soaring on thermals up high
Wheeling around in a cloudless blue sky
All life below is composed of small spots
When on life's broad canvass is arranged in large dots
Clearing the senses of body and mind
Puts them on edge to service in kind
Each feathers trim and works to perfection
To render their needs in total detection
Downwards I'm drawn, my menu to fill
The quality and quantity of food to kill
Stretched out below me, descending to meet
My order, a main course and one sweet to eat
I spit out the fur or was it the feathers
To get to the meat, to full fill my pleasures
Sweet or main course, which is second/first
Both the digestive system can certainly curse.
Now that my brim is full to the top
Over flowing with flavour, with a spring in my hop
I stretch out my broad wings and flex my short tail
And jump on a thermal and soar upwards again.

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

Apologies to Keith for misidentifying the bird in the last issue's poem.
I'll be more cautious this time and let you make your own minds up. Eds

Projects and Surveys

JANUARY UPDATE FROM THE CHESHIRE BTO REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

The British Trust for Ornithology have set us another busy year with the Winter Skylark Survey currently in hand, and two bird surveys of note on top of the usual ongoing Breeding Bird Survey. We would be grateful of any offers of help to run a pilot survey of a stretch of river or canal involving three visits per year. We will need about eight volunteers over the County to collect data. This project is being funded by the Environment Agency and is seen as an important trial. The existing Waterways Bird Survey will continue in parallel.

Also, 1998 sees the Survey of Breeding Lapwings prompted by the decline of lowland pairs to under 50% of previous levels. The precise causes are not known but the decline needs to be accurately assessed now. The last survey work was in 1987 and comparisons will be made with that year and to an even earlier 1956 - 65 study, when populations of this bird were also estimated. The fieldwork will be in the latter half of April. This really is a case of needing help to get cover for all the chosen squares. A single visit is all that will be required. Details are expected from Thetford HQ soon.

The Breeding Bird Survey is still proving very valuable and indeed enjoyable. For me an extra bonus is seeing mammals (and these are recorded too, by the way). I came face to face with red deer, plus fox at close range in 1997. The survey work stipulates coverage of some out of the way corners of our countryside and hence unexpected encounters. Similarly, one gets to meet the landowners (to get permission) and these can also throw up some equally unexpected questions. Last year was "Where have all the Lapwings gone?". Yes, exactly.

Other "events" of 1997 included the chance necessity to survey a tetrad square for Skylarks which was included in the second runway land-take. (Survey squares are often chosen randomly.) Of course this work had to be during the time of the various demonstrations and occupations by protestors! No birds were recorded at the time, but ironically many are seen within the airport perimeter! Generally, Skylark work was disappointing in N.E. Cheshire, with several "nil" counts. Of course negative results are still important and are used to complete the picture and to form a baseline for future work, but somehow it doesn't seem so helpful or rewarding, does it?

On behalf of the four BTO reps. for Cheshire, can I thank all those who helped in 1997. If you are able to offer help, especially with the two 1998 jobs above, please let me know.

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

BROSBI: THE PROJECT FOR BIRD RECORDING ON SITES OF BIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE.

Year two is coming to an end and we are about to enter year three of this five year project. SBIs are designated by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust (CWT), Cheshire County Council and English Nature as being sites of importance for nature conservation within the county. They are intended to complement Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), which are nationally important sites. The SBI system evolved in the early 1970s and sites have been under review since 1990, with the intention of reviewing each of the 566 sites in the CWT area every five years. This area covers all of Cheshire, the Wirral and Stockport & Tameside.

Most of the recent surveys have been carried out by CWT members. This has resulted in good records of habitat and plant species, but generally rather poor records of birds. To overcome this problem CAWOS has agreed to organise a project jointly with CWT, with the aim of surveying each SBI every 5 years to determine it's status as far as birds are concerned. This will also have the benefit of providing additional bird records to CAWOS for the annual bird report.

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

Progress so far has been steady rather than spectacular. Results from the survey of 42 sites have so far been completed and passed on to CWT. It is anticipated however, that this number will be doubled when the results of all fieldwork carried out in 1997 are finally received. These results will generally be valuable additions to the SBI database held by CWT. This enables a factual case to be put up against any proposed development that may adversely affect an SBI and so give sites some additional protection.

So far there are 17 individual recorders carrying out fieldwork, together with members of 5 bird clubs/groups. However, there is no fieldwork being carried out in Chester & District or Mid-Cheshire.

If you are already involved then please let me have any outstanding results and let me know whether you need any new sites for 1998. If you are not involved but want to be, then please let me know so that we can agree on which sites you can cover.

Colin Lythgoe, 11 Waterloo Road, Haslington, Crewe, CW1 5TF. Tel: 01270 582642

GODWIT NEWS: INFORMATION FROM THE LIVERPOOL BAY WADER STUDY GROUP

River Mersey Low Water Counts: Winter 1996-7

A series of three monthly low water counts were undertaken on the Mersey Estuary from December 1996 to February 1997 on behalf of the BTO. A shortened summary of the results is shown below.

Oystercatcher: Highest counts in the New Brighton-Seacombe area, Dec: 1532, Jan: 1273 and Feb: 824.

Ringed Plover: Highest counts in the New Brighton-Seacombe area, Dec: 68, Jan: 109 and Feb: 60.

Golden Plover: At Hale-Pickering's Pasture - Dec: 3500, Jan: 1200 and Feb: 2000.

Grey Plover: 400 at Hale and 352 at Stanlow during Dec were the highest counts.

Lapwing: Distribution as Golden Plover. Dec: 3500(Hale/P.P), 1520(F.Ferry), 1500(Spike Island) and 550(Stanlow). Jan: 3500(F.Ferry) and 2500(Stanlow-Frodsham). Feb: 4000(F.Ferry), 3570(Stanlow-Frodsham) and 3000(Hale/P.P)

Knot: 2 in the Poole Hall Sands-Mount Manisty area in Feb were the only ones found.

Purple Sandpiper: 3 in the New Brighton area during Dec were the only ones.

Dunlin: Stanlow - Dec: 27000, Jan: 36000 and Feb: 38000. Also at Hale/P.P - Dec: 5000 and smaller numbers at New Brighton/Seacombe and Poole Hall Sands in Jan and Feb.

Black-tailed Godwit: Mainly at Hale - Dec: 735, Jan: 168 and Feb: 1000. Smaller numbers at Stanlow-Frodsham in Jan: 171 and at Poole Hall Sands in Dec: 18.

Curlew: Dec: 690(Stanlow-Frodsham), 551(Hale/P.P) and 58(Poole Hall Sands-Mount Manisty). Jan: 579(Stanlow-Frodsham), 359(Hale-Oglet-P.P) and 68(Mount Manisty). Feb: 426(Stanlow-Frodsham), 693(Hale-Oglet-P.P) and 53(Mount Manisty).

Redshank: Dec: 1552(Stanlow-Frodsham), 1450(Oglet-Hale), 430(M.Manisty), 288 (RockFerry). Jan: 1325(Stanlow-Frodsham), 304(Rock Ferry), 385(M.Manisty), 443(New Brighton-Seacombe). Feb: 731(Stanlow-Frodsham), 241(Rock Ferry), 1270(M.Manisty) and 570(New Brighton-Seacombe).

Turnstone: Mainly between New Brighton and Seacombe - 62, 1717, 1511 in Dec, Jan, Feb. (As an addition to this, 1785 birds were counted on Feb 5th 1997, representing some 2.5% of the British population and probably the highest concentration in Britain, including 1316 birds in just 600 metres.)

CAWOS Comment: *These counts show the importance of the Mersey Estuary for our wintering waders. Over 10,000 Lapwings, 38,000 Dunlins, 1,000 Black-tailed Godwits, 1,100 Curlews, 2,800 Redshanks and nearly 1800 Turnstones in February alone, prove the point. When you add all the birds on the Dee Estuary, it is obvious that Cheshire is vital for the survival of migrant waders (& wildfowl).*

Oystercatchers and Cockles

Between 1956 and 1969 mass culls of Oystercatchers resulted in 16,000 being killed in Morecambe Bay and 11,000 in the Burry Inlet. This was in the belief that Oystercatchers were directly responsible for the limited catches of the cockle industry and 'scientific' research by MAFF appeared to support this. It was also believed that Oystercatchers from other areas would not replace the birds that had been killed. Subsequent reviews of the data showed that the conclusions from the original research were false because they had ignored a number of factors responsible for cockle mortality

besides Oystercatchers. Both the birds and the fishermen prey on second-year cockles and once this age has fallen below a certain threshold in numbers, the Oystercatchers either turn to other prey items or move on. They do not eat every last cockle! Furthermore, the reduction of second-year cockle densities triggers large subsequent spat-falls. Oystercatchers appear when and where cockle numbers are high and then move on. Culling would not affect the cockle population but would undoubtedly affect the national Oystercatcher population, as birds moved in to replace those that had been killed. The culls were not repeated and no further evidence of the impact on the cockle industry was forthcoming.

The Weather of 1996

The early cold of 1996 was followed later by hot weather and drought with thunderstorms. This had a profound effect on breeding waders and less Redshanks, Oystercatchers and Lapwings were found on certain coastal and upland sites, reductions probably caused by winter mortality. Ringed Plovers penetrated further inland and Avocets nested at three freshwater sites. Heavy rain showers also played a key role in the fortunes of many ground nesting species including Golden Plovers and Avocets. Rivers in spate and flash flooding affected Lapwings and Ringed Plovers and torrential rain and high late spring tides washed out many nests of Oystercatchers and Redshanks. Courtesy of Tony Parker.

1997 - Wader Breeding

Even Lapwings decline on RSPB reserves. On the Dyfi Estuary they were down by 40% and at Old Hall Marshes they were down from 20-25 pairs to just four.

319 pairs of Avocets did however produce 110 young on RSPB reserves. 12 pairs of Black-tailed Godwits bred on the Ouse Washes with others on the Nene. Icelandic birds pass through Liverpool Bay in good numbers but the really large numbers appear further west in Ireland.

Ringing News

Wader ringing does produce some interesting movements, some of which are listed below.

Lapwing - ringed Moreton 20.01.90; recovered in the Netherlands 05.01.93 (killed by Buzzard).

Knot - ringed Wirral 26.02.89; caught and released Holme, Norfolk 16.10.93.

2 Knots - ringed Wirral 26.03.89; caught and released Holme, Norfolk 16.10.93.

Dunlin - ringed Paris 14.05.88; caught and released Frodsham Marsh 02.08.92.

Dunlin - ringed New Brighton 16.12.90; caught and released West Germany 23.04.94.

Redshank - ringed Moreton 04.11.78; caught and released Lincs 21.08.93.

Redshank - ringed Wirral 26.02.89; caught and released Frodsham Marsh 02.08.92.

Colour Marked Waders

The contact for reporting or registering these is Stephen Browne at the BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU, Tel 01842 750030, Fax 01842 750030

GULL WORKSHOP TOO! A REMINDER

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. All participants will receive detailed site directions. 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 morning's birding.

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

Location:- Gatewath is sandwiched between Warrington and Widnes on the north side of the River Mersey. The best landmark to guide you in is the Fiddlers Ferry Power Station, which dominates the skyline to the west. Grid reference for the Ferry Tavern car park:- 563867, pathfinder map SJ 48/58.

Round Robin'

At the time of writing (early November 97) birders everywhere are getting used to shorter days, with less time for birding but relishing the prospect of winter flocks of gulls, waders, ducks, and woodland species to sift through in the hope of finding a really juicy rarity. **BBC Wildlife** magazine urges us not to overlook the roosts of the humble Starling. These often maligned birds have their numbers swollen during the winter by birds hopping over from the frozen Continent. It is a bit of a mystery why they form such huge flocks, with ideas such as 'safety in numbers', 'increased foraging efficiency' and simply 'warmth' being bandied about. What is certain though is that the seething noise and spectacle of such a sight makes it pretty spine tingling for most birders. Check out Runcorn Bridge which has had a roost for 200 years, or maybe Piccadilly Square if you are late night shopping in Manchester.

With the darker nights drawing in, the arrival of the November edition of **British Birds** is always one that many of us look forward to because it contains the Annual Report on Rare Birds in Great Britain - always a fascinating read. The latest one (1996) is packed with mouth-watering goodies including the first British records of Redhead, Cedar Waxwing, Eastern Bonelli's Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler and Black-faced Bunting. Lavishly illustrated with colour photographs and field sketches, it remains good value at £10.00. Cheques to British Birds Ltd, at Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford, MK44 3NJ (special subscription price available to CAWOS members - see Membership News). Excellent Cheshire records include a Long-billed Dowitcher at Budworth Mere and a Lesser Yellowlegs at Gatewarth.

Hopefully all CAWOS members already put food out in their gardens for the birds. If you do, you will no doubt be aware that there is an ever increasing range of products available - black sunflower seeds, sunflower hearts, niger seeds etc - and in response to this, **Bird Watching** magazine recently asked the question 'Is the peanut dead?' Their expert verdict was a resounding NO, mainly because they are cheap and practical, but the piece was accompanied by some pretty interesting facts. Smooth pink or red skinned nuts may look nicer, but sometimes wrinkled nuts are better due to their higher oil content. China produces some of the best nuts but this years crop has failed because of flooding, so South African nuts will probably be your best bet this winter. South American nuts are mostly poor quality and are badly stored. An Indian nut called Bold Bombays are excellent quality and mostly used in oil pressing. Birds prefer bigger nuts because their greater surface area means that they are easier to get at through the wire mesh feeder. If you want to try something more exotic than the humble peanut, Chris Mead of the BTO recommends fat bars - all sorts of birds (including woodpeckers) love them.

Birdwatch gave details of two separate reports on the breeding status of birds in this country. Firstly, a new RSPB report into 'Birds in the Balance' highlights 18 threatened species (incidentally, several newspapers and magazines covered the fact that the RSPB recruited its one millionth member recently, and the flagship reserve at Minsmere is fifty years old this year). In a nutshell (pardon the pun), Corncrakes were up for the fourth successive year, Red Kites are still thriving and Roseate Terns and Stone Curlews are doing well too. On the down side, Bitterns were down to 11 booming males in 1997 (there were 22 in 1996) and Capercaillie and Black Grouse are both declining. Echoing the last **Bird News** editorial, Hen Harriers continue to have a rough time, with persecution in some areas putting the British population at risk. The results from the first Breeding Bird Survey organised by the BTO in conjunction with the JNCC and RSPB paint a promising picture. Twice as many species were found to be increasing as those which were decreasing. On the positive side are Bullfinch, Grey Partridge, Buzzard, Yellow Wagtail, Redstart and Raven. Species faring less well included Corn Bunting, Yellowhammer, Wood Warbler and surprisingly Sparrowhawk and Swift.

Well, that's it for another year. Round Robin' has been chugging away since April 95, and as the next edition will therefore be it's third birthday, now seems a good time to remind you that if you read something (especially in the newspapers because I can't cover them all), which you think might be of interest to the rest of us, let me know. Best wishes to all Cheshire based birders for a very happy 1998.

M.D.Holmes BSc (Hons) FSS, 114 Merlin Way, Copenhall, Crewe, Cheshire, CW1 3RZ.



BIRDWATCHERS DIARY - ERRATUM - WRONG NUMBER

Anybody wishing to purchase tickets for the Parkgate Special which includes a meal and after dinner talk at the Parkgate Hotel on Saturday 28th February should telephone Sue Tonelli on 0151 648 0930.

FEBRUARY

- 6 CAWOS **"VOYAGE TO THE EMPERORS"** by Tony Ord
- 6 NCRSPB "WILDLIFE IN CHESHIRE" by Andy Harmer
- 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
- 13-15 LOG The Solway, contact Peter Tonge 01606 891274
- 13 MCOS "TANZANIAN EXPERIENCE" by Mike Wilkes
- 13 SECOS "HOOK AND EYE" by Keith Offord
- 14 KOS Gouthwaite Reservoir, meet Sessions House 9am
- 14 High Tide Birdwatch, Kings Gap, Hoylake Prom, 11:00am (HT 12:53 9.1m)
- 14 CADOS Marshside / Seaforth, meet Caldly Valley Community Centre 9:00am
- 15 HO Point of Ayr, cars depart 8:30am
- 15 MCOS Slimbridge WF & WT, meet 10:30am at reserve.
- 15 NCRSPB Llanfairfechan & Penmaenmawr, meet Conway RSPB reserve 10:00am
- 18 CRSPB "WAY DOWN SOUTH" by June Hargreaves
- 19 NNHS "THE WORLD OF INSECTS" by Steve Garland
- 20-22 HO Solway weekend, by coach
- 20-22 HPRSPB Lindisfarne Weekend, details from Joyce Wilson
- 21-22 CADOS Norfolk Weekend, contact Don Pawlett 01244-677477
- 21 CRSPB "BIRDS OF WALES" by Roger Lovegrove
- 21 SECOS Rutland Water, contact Colin Lythgoe 01270 582642
- 22 HPRSPB Tatton Park, meet Marple 8:30am or Tatton Park 9:30am, contact Alan Monks
- 24 ADNHS "KASHMIRI CANTER" by Patrick Milligan
- 25 HPRSPB "THE FLORA AND FAUNA OF NE DERBYSHIRE" by Steve Knell, at High Lane
- 27 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate, 9:30am (HT 11:27, 9.9m)
- 27 KOS "BIRDS OF POLAND" by John Raines
- 27 LOG AGM & "AUSTRALIA" by Norman Catchpole
- 27 WGOS "A NATURALIST'S PHOTO DIARY" by Mark Hamblin
- 28 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate, 10:00am (HT 12:11, 10.1m)

MARCH

- 1 CRSPB Hest Bank / Morecambe Bay, contact Brian Prince 01978 353427
- 1 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate, 11:00am (HT 12:56, 10.1m)
- 5 CADOS AGM & Members Slides
- 6 CAWOS **AGM & PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION RESULTS**
- 6-8 SECOS Dumfries & Galloway weekend, contact Colin Lythgoe 01270 582642
- 7 HO Tregaron, coach departs 8:00am
- 8 CADOS Tregaron, meet Caldly Valley Community Centre 8:00am
- 9 SRSPB "TIGERS AND TOCANS" by Mike Mockler
- 10 ADNHS "A HISTORY OF BRITISH MAMMALS" by Derek Yaldon
- 11 HO "WILDLIFE OF WOOLSTON EYES" by Brian Martin
- 11 NCRSPB Film Show at Frodsham community Centre, includes "PUFFINS", HERITAGE OF THE FOREST" & "FLAMINGO TRIANGLE"
- 13 MCOS "A SMALL WARWICKSHIRE NATURE RESERVE" by Eric Harvey
- 13 SECOS "NIGHTFALL" by Mike J Berry
- 15 KOS Carsington Water, meet Sessions House 9:00am

- 15 LOG Southport, coach departs Lymm Cross at 8:00am
- 15 MCOS Conwy & N Wales Coast, meet Conwy RSPB Reserve 10:00am
- 16 HPRSPB "WILDLIFE POISONING AND TRAPPING" by Tim Mason ADAS at Marple
- 18 CRSPB "GATEWAY TO AFRICA" by John Armitage
- 19 NNHS "WELSH COAST WADERS" by Peter Challinor
- 21 SECOS Frodsham by car, contact Colin Lythgoe 01270 582642
- 24 ADNHS AGM followed by short talk (TBA)
- 27 KOS "LESBOS" by Steve Knell
- 27 LOG "TEXAS BIG BENDS BIRDS" by Mike Wilkes
- 27 WGOS "FOLLOWING FALCONS" by Terry Pickford
- 28 NCRSPB Wirral Coast, meet Frodsham Garden Centre at 9:00am
- 28 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate, 9:00am (HT 11:06, 10.0m)
- 28 HPRSPB High Tide at Inner Marsh Farm, meet Marple 8:30am, contact Bob Staton
- 29 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate, 11:00m (HT 12:51, 10.1m)

APRIL

- 3 CRSPB Lady Bower Reservoir, contact Bernard Wright 01829 782243
- 3 NCRSPB "BIRDS AND ANIMALS OF NORTHERN INDIA" BY Mike McKavett
- 4 KOS Conway and North Wales coast, meet Sessions House 9am
- 8 HO "BIRDS OF MEXICO AND GUATEMALA" by Brian Dyke
- 15 CRSPB AGM at 7:00pm followed by "JIZZ" by Jeff Clarke
- 16-1 LOG Lesbos
- 16 NNHS AGM and "LOWER MOSS WOOD NATURE RESERVE" by Ray Jackson
- 17 MCOS AGM and members evening
- 19 ANHDS Moore and Frodsham, meet 9:30am contact Mervyn Fairclough 0161 775 4880
- 19 HO Black Grouse & Migrants, cars depart 8:00am
- 20 SRSPB AGM followed by a talk by Brian Hallsworth
- 22 HPRSPB "THE WILDLIFE OF NORTHERN FRANCE" by Roy Croucher, at High Lane
- 24 KOS AGM and Members slides
- 24 LOG T.B.A.
- 24 WGOS AGM and RSPB FILMS
- 26 HPRSPB Haweswater RSPB Reserve, meet Marple 8:00am, contact Alan Monks
- 26 NCRSPB Swallow Moss & Coombes Valley, meet Cat & Fiddle at 9:30am
- 26 MCOS Seaforth & Marshside, meet Seaforth 9:00am
- 26 SECOS North Wales, contact Colin Lythgoe 01270 582642
- 26 WGOS Attenborough Gravel Pits by coach, meet Wilmslow Guild at 8:00am
- 26 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate, 10:00am (HT 11:43, 9.9m)
- 27 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate, 10:30am (HT 12:30, 10.0m)
- 28 ADNHS "GARDEN BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY" by Stuart Wetters

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

AFFILIATED SOCIETIES

- ADNHS Altrincham & Dist. Natural History Society, mtgs Hale Methodist Church Hall 7.30pm, Sec. Vincent Pedley 0161 748 4717
- CADOS Chester & Dist. Ornithological Soc, mtgs Caldly Valley Community Centre 7.30pm, Prog. Sec. Don Coan 01244-660621
- CAWOS Cheshire & Wirral Ornithological Society, mtgs Knutsford Civic Centre 7.45pm, contact Sheila Blamire 01565 830168
- CRSPB Chester RSPB Group, mtgs St Mary's Centre, Chester 7:30pm. Prog Sec. 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
- NCRSPB North Cheshire RSPB Members Group, mtgs Appleton Parish Hall, Appleton, Mem. Sec Pam Gibson 01925 817874
- 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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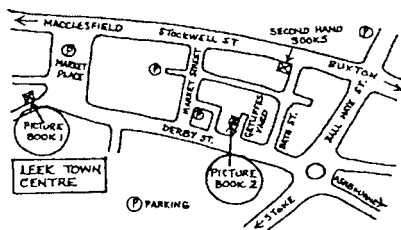


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