

BIRD NEWS

Number 39

July 98



**Migration Watch 97 Report
White-rumped Sandpiper • Shoveler Word Game
One Swallow Makes My Summer**



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Articles, Letters and Comments would be welcomed by the Editor

Front cover: Golden Oriole by Tony Broome

Other illustrations by Tony Broome, Jeff Clarke & Thelma Sykes

Editorial

We may be experiencing one of the UK's grottiest summers since records began, but globally 1998 is proving to be the warmest year on record. Although some of this is being attributed to the effects of the El Nino, what is not in doubt, is that this is a continuation of a trend since the 1950's. If the current climate change continues, the experts contend that we may see an average 2°C increase in temperatures throughout the globe by the year 2030. This may not sound like very much, but it is likely to cause dramatic changes to the finely balanced ecosystems upon which much of our treasured natural heritage is based. This of course is a problem that can only be tackled through international co-operation. As such it leaves the individual with a feeling of helplessness and the constant diatribe of doom and gloom creates a pervasive malaise, an atmosphere of defeat and an acceptance of the inevitable ecological catastrophe about to befall the planet. Armageddon awaits, but if I were a betting man I would suggest that human kind are the 'form horse' likely to bring about their own destruction, rather than a cosmic body. It won't be a single cataclysmic event, more likely an iniquitous unravelling of the individual threads, which bind together the tangled web of life and we won't even notice what we've lost until it's gone.

So the answer may seem to be enjoy it while it lasts. Well you can if you want to, but not me. I prefer the maxim 'what we have, we hold'. Individually it's no good trying to fight fires on a global scale. We need to set our sights on achievable goals. The county of Cheshire still contains a treasure trove of biologically diverse jewels, but our wealth is draining away through the drip-drip erosion inflicted each time an ecologically rich nugget is traded in at the pawnshop of the economy. We often hear the phrase 'greenbelt' bandied around as if it was some sort of inviolate, ecologically fertile Goddess. Well maybe she was in some halcyon, sepia-tinted heyday. Today she's a barren tired old hag covered by a thin green veneer, which is patently transparent to those with the common sense not to be taken in by the Empresses' new clothes, whose genetically altered exterior becomes ever more susceptible to the ravages of time. It's time to stop selling the ecological silverware and start re-investing in our once green and pleasant land. If we think and act locally it is possible, in time, to have a global effect. It's no good asking the African nations to make great financial sacrifices in the cause of conservation and in the process providing food and natural resources for our millions of migratory birds, if we in turn can't be bothered to preserve the vital nesting and feeding habitats when they return to Europe to breed in the summer. Failure to act will mean "one Swallow will make our summer".

If we all accept that action is required, then the next step is to ask how to act? Start by building up a knowledge of the valuable wildlife habitats within your area. Don't just think birds; take a more holistic approach. Then check your local planning office and newspapers for any planning applications likely to have an adverse effect on the environment, particularly those effecting ecologically sensitive areas. Get pro-active; lobby your councillors, planning officers, environmental groups etc. to raise the awareness of ecologically sound management of land. Spreading the gospel may sound very much like a cliché, but it is possible to push out the message in more imaginative and inspiring ways. That's why CAWOS's exhibition at the Grosvenor Museum in Chester is going to include a number of 'hands on' elements. It won't be all doom and gloom, more a celebration of what we have. Much of the exhibition will appeal to young and old alike with a rich diversity of mediums employed to enthuse the viewing public. From the striking artwork of Thelma Sykes to the quality photographs of some of our best local bird photographers, to the fun elements of the giant 'feely box' and the competitive giant sized 'Swallow survival game'.

If you would like to contribute to a brighter future perhaps you could take a first positive step by helping at the exhibition. Contributions of all kinds are welcome. Why not start by showing this copy of the Bird News to your local councillor, farmer or landowner and inviting them along to view the exhibition. We only need to alter the perception of a few individuals to begin to make a difference. One rough field saved, one more unbuilt out of town shopping complex, all adds up. Time to man the barricades and make that difference. See you at the exhibition!

Jeff Clarke

[Note: Copy date for next issue will be the 7th September - please try to be prompt]

Imminent dates for your diary:-

Sunday 13th September

Migration Watch Workshop - see page 29 for details

Wednesday 30th September

Closing date for Word Game - see page 20 for details

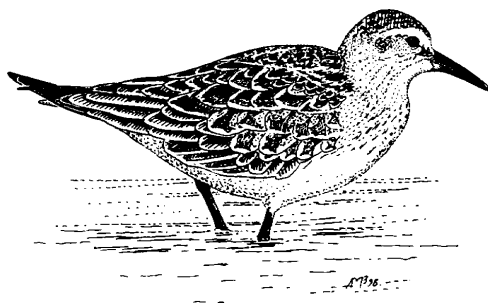
County Rarities

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER

It always seems that when you sift through a flock of roosting waders and you notice something a bit different, the feeling of excitement quickly turns to dread as you realise you have to eliminate and recall the age-related plumage characteristics of several problematical *calidrids*. However for me it's always size and shape that start that process of elimination, followed by ageing and then those infuriating plumage details. So if its more Dunlin sized than Little Stint sized, start with checking the primary projection, the body shape and the bill shape and length. It was probably the horizontal posture that first drew your eye to it, so if its obviously longer bodied, with wings extending beyond the tail, yet it is short-legged compared to the accompanying Dunlin, it probably isn't a Dunlin. Next focus on the bill, if it appears shorter, or rather more in proportion to the width of its head, it is not a Curlew Sandpiper. If you really have convinced yourself its not an odd Dunlin then you are pretty safe to be thinking you're onto either a White-rumped or Baird's Sandpiper. Time to reach for the notebook and start listing the features one by one.

Now of course you have to age it which, depending upon the time of year, will usually present you with either the brighter, rounded feather tracts with neat fringes of a juvenile or fresh plumage, versus the duller, worn, pointed feathers, sometimes with fringes missing, of worn plumage. So if it's an adult in summer plumage, White-rumped Sandpiper is a well-streaked bird, particularly on the breast and down the flanks and has a noticeable supercilium and rusty brown upperparts. Baird's always seems duller to me, more buff than brown, with neat, unmarked, clean flanks and only a small amount of breast streaking. Baird's also has an all-dark bill, usually straight, whilst White-rumped appears slightly decurved and close up shows a pale base to the lower mandible.

In juvenile plumage, the bill difference still holds true. But juvenile White-rumped Sandpipers appear bright birds, with a rusty streaked crown, whitish supercilium, well marked, dark-centred scapulars with rusty brown edges and white edges to the mantle forming a V shape; whilst the rest of the scapulars and coverts are dark centred with buff edges and white tips.



Some breast streaking may extend onto the flanks. Baird's Sandpiper is quite different, much plainer, with the entire scapulars, mantle and coverts more uniform with dark centres and neat, pale edges giving a scaly effect to the upperparts and clean, whitish underparts. Both winter plumage birds are drab looking and we really need to be in November to see birds showing this. White-rumped Sandpiper has more of a supercilium and streaks on the flanks, whilst Baird's shows a neat breast band and tends to be browner rather than greyer overall, with unmarked flanks.

In flight, whatever the plumage, White-rumped shows a diagnostic white band across the upper tail coverts, but it is not really white rumped and this band would appear a lot smaller than the white rump and upper tail on a Curlew Sandpiper. Baird's is very dark rumped and tailed. Both show a weak wing bar in flight and appear dark winged, Baird's more so. The flight call of White-rumped is a distinctive high squeak, eeet type of call; Baird's gives a Dunlin type of prret note, but shorter.

County records are less than one every three or four years, the total White-rumped Sandpipers recorded being around six or seven individuals. Only two Baird's have been accepted. One final point, White-rumped Sandpiper tends to be a shore and estuary bird, Baird's favours inland type of water habitats, but a migrant can turn up anywhere!

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 late March to May.

MARCH

Most migrants arrived on time with Sand Martins, Wheatears and Chiffchaffs appearing mid-month, while Garganey, Osprey, Marsh Harrier, Swallows, House Martins, Blackcaps and Willow Warblers all arrived in the last week of March. Other migrants arriving earlier than usual included **Common Sandpiper** at Rostherne Mere (15th), a very early **Cuckoo** at Fiddler's Ferry (16th) - a month earlier than the previous best there, a **White Wagtail** at Fiddler's Ferry (7th) - a week earlier than the previous best (with another at Frodsham on 29th being a more normal date) and a **Garden Warbler** was reported at Sandbach Flashes (22nd).

A **Black-necked Grebe** was at Rostherne (15th) and birds returned to Woolston Eyes from 11th. A **Bittern** was at Rostherne for a few days (4th-8th). The long staying **Little Egret** was on the Inner Dee Estuary all month, being joined briefly by a second bird. Up to 6 (five imms and an adult) **Spoonbills** commuted between Burton, Inner Marsh Farm and Parkgate all month. An adult **Greater Flamingo** was at Inner Marsh Farm (27th-31st) and the colour rings suggest that it recently escaped from Belfast Zoo. Three **Whooper Swans** were at Budworth Mere (28th) and several **Bewick's Swans** remained at Burton during the first week. The two **Tundra Bean Geese** remained at Inner Marsh Farm (1st-2nd). Three **Pink-footed Geese** visited Frodsham Score and 16 **Greylags** were at Redesmere (5th). Single **Barnacle Geese** were at Inner Marsh Farm and Sandbach Flashes. A pale bellied **Brent Geese** was at Burton (15th) and then at Parkgate (27th) with 12 still at Hilbre on the 21st. The female **Ruddy Shelduck** remained at Heswall all month but was also seen at Parkgate (27th). **Shelducks** reached 136 at Fiddler's Ferry (15th) and 31 at Sandbach Flashes (14th).

A pair of **Mandarins** were seen irregularly at Rostherne. Monthly maxima for **Wigeon** included 279 at Chelford SQs on 8th, 13 at Fiddler's Ferry on 15th and 650 at Sandbach Flashes on 8th. A drake **American Wigeon** was at Inner Marsh Farm (9th-15th) but plumage details suggested it may be a different bird to the drake seen last March. Two escaped female **Falcated Ducks** provided extra interest at Parkgate (14th-30th). A pair of **Gadwall** at Poynton Pool was an excellent local record (2nd) with 6 at Marbury No1 tank (31st). A drake **Green-winged Teal** was at Frodsham (4th & 6th). **Teal** numbers at Fiddler's Ferry peaked at 200 on the 1st. A drake **Garganey** was at Forge Bed, Marbury No1 tank and Neumann's Flash from 26th into April with a female at Forge Pool (28th). The monthly maxima of 306 **Pochard** and 200 **Tufted Ducks** at Woolston Eyes with up to 85 of the latter at Chelford SQs and 9 at Poynton Pool was an excellent count there. A **Scaup** was at Frodsham and up to 46 **Goldeneye** were at Chelford SQs. **Smew** lingered, with the pair still at Inner Marsh Farm (to 15th) and the drake at Woolston Eyes (to 11th). A female **Goosander** at Sandbach Flashes (23rd) was a good local record.

A **Red Kite** at Sandbach Flashes (29th) was the first ever record there. An early male **Marsh Harrier** was seen at Rostherne (29th). Two **Hen Harriers** remained at Frodsham all month with a female over Forge Bed (23rd) and a male over Neumann's Flash (29th). Female **Goshawks** were at Fiddler's Ferry (22nd) and Rostherne (29th). Up to 4 **Buzzards** were at Marbury CP and Rostherne, with another at Richmond Bank (27th). This latter site also had the first **Osprey** of the year on the 24th. A pair of **Kestrels** were nesting on a pylon at Fiddler's Ferry (15th). **Merlins** were at Fiddler's Ferry (22nd), Forge Bed (3rd) and Neston (29th). A **Red-legged Partridge** was an excellent local record at Forge Bed on 30th. Two **Water Rails** were still at Fiddler's Ferry mid month. An **Oystercatcher** at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton was a good record (16th). **Little Ringed Plovers** arrived at Chelford SQs (4th), the second earliest ever for Cheshire, Neumann's Flash (21st) and Sandbach Flashes (22nd). Up to 9 **Ruff** were at Inner Marsh Farm. Up to 3 **Jack Snipe** were at both Frodsham and Parkgate. Single **Woodcocks** were at Fiddler's Ferry (22nd) and Witton Brook (17th & 19th). Inner Marsh Farm had a new site record of 1,400 **Black-tailed Godwits** on the 11th. **Curlew** passage included 100 at Chelford SQs (8th) and 30 at Fiddler's Ferry (1st &

15th). Up to 15 **Spotted Redshanks** were at Inner Marsh Farm during the month with 600 **Redshanks** at Boathouse Flash, Parkgate (26th). Up to 3 **Green Sandpipers** were at Rostherne Mere all month.

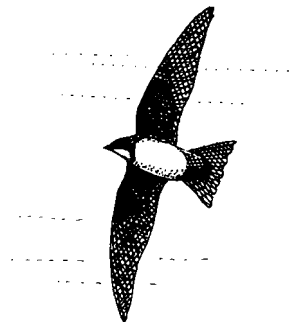
Mediterranean Gulls included 2 at Frodsham with single adults at New Ferry (12th & 14th), Parkgate (28th) and Richmond Bank (2nd). A passage of **Little Gulls** included 46 at Hilbre (14th) and 2 at Budworth Mere (29th), one remaining next day. A good count of 9000 **Black-headed Gulls** was made at Richmond Bank (2nd). An adult w **Ring-billed Gull** was at Richmond Bank briefly mid morning on 20th. The **American Herring Gull** was again at New Ferry. A 1st w **Kumlien's Gull** was at Richmond Bank (26th). **Iceland Gulls** included 3+ birds at Maw Green Tip, 2 at New Ferry and 6+ birds at Richmond Bank (incl. 5+ on 25th and 3 on 28th). **Glaucous Gulls** included 2 at Dane's Moss (ad & 1st w on 1st), 2nd w at Fiddler's Ferry (21st), 1st w at Maw Green Tip, 4+ birds at New Ferry and 8+ birds at Richmond Bank (incl. 4 on 19th-21st). An adult **Kittiwake** past Fiddler's Ferry (1st). Single **Barn Owls** were at Marshfield Bank (25th) and a bird at Red Lane Flash, Sandbach was picked up dead the next day. Four **Short-eared Owls** were at Parkgate (27th) with an unusual record at Richmond Bank (20th). An **Alpine Swift** at Budworth Mere (4th) was present for a couple of minutes only. Up to 5 **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** were seen together at Marbury CP during the month. The first arrival dates for **Sand Martins** were Budworth Mere (18th - only the day after the first wave of migrants into Britain), Chelford SQs (22nd), Rostherne (28th) and Sandbach Flashes (27th). The first **Swallows** appeared with birds at Anderton and Redesmere (both 30th).

A small passage of **Meadow Pipits** was noted over Fulshaw Park, Wilmslow (31st). A **Water Pipit** was at Neston (29th) with 2 reported at Parkgate (1st). A flock of 100 **Pied Wagtails** at Fiddler's Ferry (1st & 7th-8th) was a new site record, beating the previous record of 60 on 9th Feb 1993. A male **Stonechat** was at Fiddler's Ferry (7th-8th & 28th) with another at Marbury CP (21st). **Wheatears** were at Fiddler's Ferry (15th - third earliest ever), Neumann's Causeway (20th), Parkgate (27th), Poynton (30th - the observer's earliest ever local record), Richmond Bank (20th) and Woolston Eyes (29th). **Blackcaps** were back at Marbury CP (31st). The first **Chiffchaffs** were at Chelford SQs (11th), Fiddler's Ferry (25th), Frodsham (29th), Inner Marsh Farm (15th), Marbury CP (11th), Middlewich (11th), Moore (13th), Poynton (28th), Rostherne (21st) and Woolston Eyes (14th). **Willow Warblers** arrived at several sites during the last week of March including Fiddler's Ferry (29th - third earliest ever), Fulshaw Park, Wilmslow (29th - earliest ever there and possibly there since 25th), Marbury CP (28th), Middlewich (31st) and Rostherne (30th). A **Firecrest** was at Moore (13th). The **Magpie** roost at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton reached 48 on the 5th. The nesting pair of **Ravens** was again nesting on Chester Town Hall with 2 at Fiddler's Ferry (12th), 2 at Marbury CP (from 23rd into April) and 4 at Richmond Bank (20th). At least 20 **Tree Sparrows** remained at Sandbach Flashes feeding station with 15 at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (2nd). At least 90 **Goldfinches** visited a Wilmslow Garden (4th). Twenty **Crossbills** were at Lyme Park (30th) and 7 were at Tatton (18th). The **Dark-eyed Junco** stayed in Chester all month. A **Lapland Bunting** was at Hilbre (21st).

APRIL

The highlight of the month must be the large fall of migrants along the North Wirral shore on the 23rd which included 90+ White Wagtails, 8 Whinchats, 200 Wheatears, 6 Ring Ouzels, 8 Grasshopper Warblers, 8 Whitethroats, a phenomenal 1,355 Willow Warblers - undoubtedly a record fall for Cheshire and 5 Pied Flycatchers. The only rarity associated with this fall was a mobile **Alpine Swift**, which spent nearly four hours along the North Wirral shore between Red Rocks and Meols.

A summer plumaged **Black-throated Diver** was off Hilbre (27th). Single **Black-necked Grebes** were at Redesmere (12th) and Rostherne (25th) with 16 at Woolston Eyes (11th). Up to 26 **Cormorants** were at Fiddler's Ferry and a bird roosted at Poynton Pool (5th) for the first time ever. A **Great White Egret** was reported at Burton and then 2 hours later flying east over Goostrey near Holmes Chapel (24th). Fiddler's Ferry had a new April record



of 11 **Grey Herons** on 26th. A **Purple Heron** was seen briefly near Watch Lane Flash, Sandbach mid morning on the 16th and then seen briefly at Foden's Flash in the evening. This was a first for the Flashes. The 5 **Spoonbills** remained at Burton all month with an adult on 9th. The **Greater Flamingo** was at Inner Marsh Farm all month and the **Lesser Flamingo** was at Frodsham to 14th. Up to 20 **Mute Swans** were at Shropshire Union Canal near Middlewich, with 26 at Sandbach Flashes (11th). Three **Greylags** and a **Barnacle Goose** visited Frodsham. The female **Ruddy Shelduck** was still at Heswall (18th) and a drake was at Chelford SQs (21st & 25th) and Neumann's Flash (21st).

The pair of **Mandarins** were seen occasionally at Rostherne, but a bird at Frodsham was a very rare find there. Six **Gadwall** were at Fiddler's Ferry (4th), with 36 **Teal** there (19th) and 50 of the latter still at Chelford SQs (1st). A drake **Green-winged Teal** was at Inner Marsh Farm (4th-24th). The escaped female **Falcated Duck** was at Parkgate (6th & 24th). A count of 8 **Mallard** at Fiddler's Ferry (11th) was the lowest April maxima there since 1978. Drake **Garganey** were at Frodsham (5th-9th & 18th), Neumann's Flash/Marbury No1 tank (all month being joined by a female from 24th) and a female was at Parkgate (6th). A pair of **Shovelers** were at Fiddler's Ferry on 4 dates with 2 at Poynton Pool (26th) and 12 at Sandbach Flashes (4th). Up to 92 **Tufted Ducks** were at Chelford SQs and 3 **Scaup** visited Frodsham with a female at Inner Marsh Farm (16th-26th). The monthly maxima of **Goldeneye** at Chelford SQs was 44 birds.

A **Red Kite** over Hilbre (1st) was only the second ever there. A **Hen Harrier** was briefly at Marbury CP with one still at Frodsham all month and a male **Marsh Harrier** was at Woolston Eyes (29th). The **Goshawk** was seen at Rostherne on 2 dates. A count of 12 **Buzzards** in the air together at Helsby represented a high count for that area with up to 3 irregularly at Sandbach Flashes. Migrant **Ospreys** were at Elton Hall Flash, Sandbach (14th), Ellesmere Port (15th), Frodsham (2nd & 3rd - believed to be different birds), Hilbre (12th), Little Budworth (16th-17th), Macclesfield Forest (11th), Mollington (30th), Sandymoor Marina near Runcorn (6th), Tegg's Nose CP (22nd) and Worleston, near Crewe (22nd). A female **Merlin** was at Weston (9th) and **Hobbies** were at Rostherne (12th - earliest ever there) and Woolston Eyes (21st). A pair of **Peregrines** were seen displaying in the Eastern Hills (28th). A report of a calling **Corncrake** at Peckforton (30th) for 30 mins in the evening was unconfirmed.



An **Avocet** was at Budworth Mere (4th) and was the fourth record for that area. **Little Ringed Plovers** returned to Fiddler's Ferry (4th) when 10 were at Sandbach Flashes. Frodsham had 250 **Golden Plovers** (25th) and 3 **Little Stints** (3rd). Five **Purple Sandpipers** remained at Hilbre (21st) and a **Jack Snipe** was still at Tatton (6th). Inner Marsh Farm held 900 **Black-tailed Godwits** (16th) and 18 **Spotted Redshanks** (25th). Sandbach Flashes had 20 **Redshanks** on the 4th, while 16 at Fiddler's Ferry (18th) equalled the best ever April count there. The over-wintering **Green Sandpiper** at Chelford SQs was last seen 19th, with others at Frodsham No6 tank (9th) and Little Budworth (17th). The first **Common Sandpipers** arrived at Budworth (11th), with up to 4 by the end of the month, Chelford SQs (26th), Fiddler's Ferry (18th), Macclesfield Canal, near Whiteley Green (14th), Poynton Pool (15th) and Sandbach Flashes (11th). A **Turnstone** was at Inner Marsh Farm (22nd).

Mediterranean Gulls were at Frodsham (5th, 11th & 18th), 2 at Inner Marsh Farm (5th), adults at both Marbury No1 tank (18th) and Rostherne (13th). Two adult **Little Gulls** were at Budworth Mere (18th-19th with single on 20th), with a bird at Woolston Eyes (10th). The 1st w **American Herring Gull** was at New Ferry (12th-13th & 15th). Several **Yellow-legged Gulls** were at Richmond Bank during the month. A 1st w **Ring-billed Gull** was at both Richmond Bank and Woolston Eyes (10th). Four **Iceland Gulls** were at Richmond Bank during the month and a 1st year at New Ferry (3rd). Four or five different **Glaucous Gulls** were at Richmond Bank during the month, with a 1st w at Frodsham (4th) and a 2nd s on 25th. A few **Kittiwakes** were seen inland including an impressive

10 at Rostherne Mere (5th with 3 on 12th) and an adult at Budworth (18th). Three **Common Terns** were at Rostherne (22nd), with another at Budworth the same day.

The first **Cuckoos** of year were back at Chelford SQs (28th), Tegg's Nose CP (27th) and Neumann's Flash (23rd). A **Barn Owl** was seen on several dates in the Weston area. Up to 4 **Short-eared Owls** were at Parkgate. **Swifts** arrived back at Budworth (24th), Fulshaw Park, Wilmslow (22nd), Poynton Pool (24th - earliest ever there) and Rostherne (22nd). Up to 3 **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** were still at Marbury CP. A **Woodlark** was on Hilbre (27th) and was the second ever record there. Up to 500 **Sand Martins** visited Budworth and first dates included Fiddler's Ferry (5th), Wilmslow (2nd) and Middlewich (3rd). During the first five days of the month **Swallows** had arrived at Chelford SQs, Fulshaw Park, Rostherne and Sandbach Flashes, but birds didn't arrive back at Fiddler's Ferry until the 24th. A Swallow of the race transitiva was at Inner Marsh Farm (26th). Slightly later than Swallows, **House Martins** arrived at Budworth (4th), Chelford SQs (11th), Fulshaw Park, Wilmslow (12th with breeding birds from 24th) and Rostherne (5th).

Tree Pipits were back on breeding territory at Hogshead Wood, Delamere (22nd) a migrant at Hilbre (21st) and Neumann's Flash (25th). An early **Yellow Wagtail** was at Frodsham (4th), with others at Chelford SQs (26th), Hilbre (24th) and Sandbach Flashes (9th). A **White Wagtail** was at Budworth (5th). **Redstarts** were back at Macclesfield Forest (27th). Migrant **Whinchats** have been fairly scarce with 1-2 at Frodsham (28th), Hilbre (24th) and Neumann's Flash (24th). **Wheatears** were widespread with the first arrivals at Chelford SQs (26th), Rostherne (18th) and Sandbach Flashes (4th), with up to 7 at Fiddler's Ferry. The last **Fieldfares** departed with 300 at Chelford SQs (1st), 13 over Frodsham (13th), 5 over Fulshaw Park, Wilmslow (4th) and a single over Poynton Pool (19th) was the latest ever there.

The first **Grasshopper Warblers** were at Hilbre (21st), Witton Brook (22nd) and Woolston Eyes (18th). Woolston Eyes had the first **Sedge Warbler** (18th), with others at Budworth (23rd), Fiddler's Ferry (19th), Middlewich (28th) and Rostherne (24th). Rostherne had its first **Reed Warbler** of the year (23rd) followed by 3 in Marbury/Witton area next day and Middlewich (27th). The only **Lesser Whitethroats** reported were at Middlewich (26th) and Neumann's Flash (23rd). **Whitethroats** arrived at Fiddler's Ferry (19th - second earliest ever there, with up to 8 males by the end of the month), Lindow Moss (28th), Middlewich (26th), Neumann's Flash (24th) and Woolston Eyes (18th). The first **Garden Warblers** were at Crewe (9th), Macclesfield Forest (29th) and Marbury CP (24th). **Blackcaps** arrived back at both Fiddler's Ferry and Rostherne (4th), with 8 at the former site on 16th. Early **Wood Warblers** were at Neumann's Flash (28th) and Trentabank next day.

Willow Warblers were at Arclid SQ (1st), Crewe Cemetery (1st), Chelford SQs (5th), Dane's Moss (6th), Lindow Common (3rd), Macclesfield Forest (6th), Poynton (12th), Sandbach Flashes (5th) and Styperson Pool (6th), with 8 at Fiddler's Ferry (25th). Nesting **Pied Flycatchers** were back at Petty Pool (26th) and Tegg's Nose CP (27th). A **Jay** at Fiddler's Ferry (5th & 20th) was a rarity there, as was a bird at Frodsham. Two **Ravens** remained in the Marbury CP area all month and 6 in display flight over Inner Marsh Farm (5th) was an extraordinary sight. **Brambling** remained very late in gardens at Cuddington (20th), Poynton (30th) and Wilmslow (24th with 23 on 23rd), other sightings included 9 at Bollington (14th), 8 in Poynton village centre (12th), singing male at Poynton Pool (24th), several at Rostherne mid month and a pair at Tatton (6th). **Siskins** also remained late in gardens until 25th at Cuddington and 24th at Wilmslow. An unconfirmed report of a possible **Arctic Redpoll** was at Rostherne (25th) to 4.45pm before flying off south-east. Small flocks of **Crossbills** included 40 at Blakemere (28th) and 25 at Tatton (6th and 20+ still there 13th). Two **Hawfinches** were reported at Elton. The **Dark-eyed Junco** remained in Chester until 19th. A **Lapland Bunting** was a good find at Hilbre (27th).

MAY

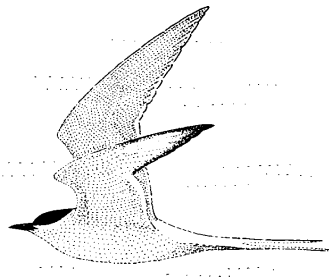
May is typically dominated by overshooting rarities like Bee-eater and Red-backed Shrike. All three choices for bird of the month unfortunately concerned unconfirmed reports. The first was about 2 **Serins** present at Meols by Leasowe Lighthouse (11th), with one remaining to 13th (only 4 previous records). Next was more predictable, a 1st s male **Golden Oriole** by the River Dee near Eccleston (18th). The last is an **Ortolan Bunting** at Hale lighthouse on the 28th (a potential county first, although there have been several records claimed).

A **Black-necked Grebe** was again at Rostherne (10th). Fiddler's Ferry had a new May maxima of 30 **Cormorants** (9th), increasing the trend for inland birds. An adult **Little Egret** which flew over Fiddler's Ferry (9th) was the first site record and was seen at nearby Spike Island (22nd-23rd), while the regular bird appeared at Burton (27th-31st). A **White Stork** at Sandbach Flashes (17th & 24th) was the first for the Flashes but was reported at several other sites in S.Cheshire/N.Staffs in the previous 2 weeks. The 5 imm **Spoonbills** remained at Burton Marsh/Inner Marsh Farm all month and were joined by a Dutch ringed adult (29th-30th). Two imm birds were at Frodsham No5 tank briefly (22nd) with a single on No5 and No6 tanks (28th-29th). The **Greater Flamingo** remained at Inner Marsh Farm all month and an escaped **Sacred Ibis** paid a brief visit there (20th-21st). Four pairs of **Mute Swans** bred in the Marbury CP and Witton area raising 23 young between them and 22 at Sandbach Flashes was a good count there. Up to 40 **Canada Geese** were at both Fiddler's Ferry and Sandbach Flashes. A **Barnacle Goose** was at Inner Marsh Farm (28th). The **Ruddy Shelduck** remained at Chelford SQs all month. The monthly maxima of **Shelduck** at Fiddler's Ferry was 82 birds.

Up to 3 **Garganey** were at Marbury No1 tank (from 17th) with drakes at Frodsham No6 tank (23rd & 30th), Inner Marsh Farm (11th-17th), Weaver Bend (24th) and Woolston Eyes. Up to 68 **Tufted Ducks** were at Chelford SQs with 15 at Sandbach (17th). A late male **Goldeneye** was at Budworth Mere (4th), up to 5 at Chelford SQs included an imm male still on the 31st and 2 at Frodsham No6 tank (3rd). A late **Goosander** was at Bosley Resr (2nd). An imm **Marsh Harrier** was at Fiddler's Ferry (3rd) with a female at Chelford SQs (16th). A ring-tail **Hen Harrier** was at Frodsham on the 9th-10th. The **Goshawk** was again at Rostherne (3rd). The good run of **Ospreys** continued with birds at Budworth (4th), Hatton Hey lagoon near Kingsley (15th) and Rostherne (25th). A **Hobby** flew over Wilmslow (30th). **Peregrines** were at Chelford SQs (10th) and Rostherne (25th). Single **Red-legged Partridges** at Pott Shrigley Hall (24th) and Rostherne (4th) were good local finds. A calling **Quail** was heard at Rock Farm, Disley (15th) but not heard again and an elusive bird was at Frodsham (24th & 27th-29th).

Three pairs of **Oystercatchers** were at Chelford SQs. The first **Little Ringed Plover** of the year at Rostherne was seen (16th), with 6 at Acre Nook SQ (8th). One observer located 6 pairs of **Lapwing** during the BTO survey in square SJ87 compared to 11 pairs in 1987. **Sanderlings** were at Budworth Mere (23rd), Frodsham (23rd), Inner Marsh Farm (24th) and 11 at Fiddler's Ferry (31st) was a new site record. Single **Little Stints** were at Frodsham No5 Tank (23rd) and Inner Marsh Farm (24th). A **Temminck's Stint** at Frodsham No6 tank (18th & 20th-21st) was a welcome record. A **Curlew Sandpiper** was at Frodsham No6 tank (29th-30th). A **Black-tailed Godwit** was at Marbury No1 tank (28th) with 450 at Frodsham No5 tank (3rd) and 1,150 at Inner Marsh Farm (15th). Single **Whimbrels** were at Acre Nook SQ (8th), Budworth Mere (2 on 13th with another over Forge Bed on 18th), Decca Pool (8th) and Fiddler's Ferry (9th-10th), the first there since August 1986. Twelve **Redshanks** at Fiddler's Ferry (9th) was a new May maxima there. Single **Wood Sandpipers** were at Inner Marsh Farm (11th, 18th-24th) and Sandbach Flashes (29th). A **Turnstone** was at Frodsham briefly.

An adult **Mediterranean Gull** was at Frodsham (3rd), with 2 birds at Inner Marsh Farm (30th). A 1st s **Little Gull** was at Frodsham (18th-30th). A 1st s **Iceland Gull** was at Richmond Bank (7th), other birds were at Rostherne (6th), 1st year at Sandbach Flashes (17th) and an adult at Weaver Bend (2nd). Frodsham laid claim to the first ever breeding of **Great Black-backed Gull** in the county. Two **Sandwich Terns** were briefly at Inner Marsh Farm (24th). Six **Common Terns** were at Budworth Mere (12th) and 13 were at Rostherne (3rd) with one on 8th. There was a massive inland movement of **Arctic Terns** through the Midlands (2nd-4th), but the only bird reported to me was at Budworth Mere (2nd), which was followed by a **Black Tern** there (11th). **Cuckoos** were at Fiddler's Ferry (3 on 24th & 31st), Fulshaw Park, Wilmslow (21st), Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (3rd), Middlewich (1st) and Rostherne (9th). A **Barn Owl** was seen in the Winsford area (7th). **Swifts** arrived at Farmwood Pool (30 on 1st), Fiddler's Ferry (10th), Great Sankey (8-9th), Middlewich (8th) and Redesmere (1st). Two new **Sand Martin** colonies formed at Fiddler's Ferry totalling 70 nests.



Single **Redstarts** were at both Frodsham No5 tank and Rostherne on the 10th and the latter site had its first **Whinchat** on the 3rd. A male **Ring Ouzel** at Frodsham (3rd) was an exceptional record there. Fiddler's Ferry had its first **Grasshopper Warbler** of the year (16th) with others at Frodsham (18th), Styal Woods (early in the month) and a high count of 13 at Woolston Eyes mid month. Sixteen **Sedge Warblers** at Fiddler's Ferry (1st) was a site record, at least 29 sang at Frodsham (10th) and 202 were at Woolston Eyes mid month. Up to 4 **Reed Warblers** sang at Fiddler's Ferry, Frodsham and Redesmere, with 37 at Woolston Eyes. **Lesser Whitethroats** were at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (10th) and Rostherne (4th). The first **Whitethroats** of the year at Poynton (1st) and Rostherne (8th) with 90 at Fiddler's Ferry (16th), nearly treble the previous best total of 32 on 23rd May 1995, 16 were at Frodsham (10th) and 140 at Woolston Eyes mid month.

The earliest dates for **Garden Warblers** included Chelford SQs (10th), Fiddler's Ferry (24th), Middlewich (1st), Poynton (21st) and Rostherne (3rd). Eight **Blackcaps** singing at Fiddler's Ferry (31st) equalled the site record, but the 59 at Woolston Eyes mid month was a site record. Two **Wood Warblers** were at Anderton (18th), 3 at Delamere (22nd) and Stapledon Wood. Woolston Eyes also had 17 **Chiffchaffs** and a record 126 **Willow Warblers**, during the annual mid month count there. Four **Spotted Flycatchers** were at Marbury CP (16th) with singles at Poynton Pool (25th - the first there since 1993) and Rostherne (17th). Rostherne had a **Pied Flycatcher** which briefly held territory and birds returned to Stapledon Wood. A **Willow Tit** was feeding young at Wimboldsley Wood, near Winsford on the 7th. **Crossbills** were at Delamere (70 on 4th & 20 on 22nd), with single birds south over Fulshaw Park, Wilmslow (13th) and at Tatton (8th). **Corn Buntings** were singing at Catchpenny Pool and Little Budworth.

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

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

Thanks/Acknowledgements for Recent Reports go to:- S & G Barber, P. Barnett, Birdnet, Birdwatch Magazine, Birdwatching Magazine, D.Cogger, M. Duckham, H.Fielding, M. Jones, K. Kirk, Colin Lythgoe (Sandbach Log), Keith Massey (Fiddler's Ferry Reserve), Rostherne Mere NNR log, D. Walters (Marbury CP & Witton Lime beds), P.Walton, C.Williams and anyone else who passed records on. Apologies to Dave Walters who was inadvertently missed off the credits for the last recent reports.



Marbury Country Park and Witton Limebeds 1997 Annual Report Review

Any regular visitors to this prime birding area will find the investment in this comprehensive report very worthwhile. The clean layout makes the sometimes detailed information contained within eminently readable. Some of the commoner species are well covered, which is not always the case with reports of this nature. For instance, the Mute Swan information provides a fascinating insight into the movements of a species little regarded for its migratory potential. If your natural history interests stretch a little further than birds then this report provides additional sustenance in the form of a Butterfly Report and a provisional macro moths listing. My only minor quibble involves the inclusion of stock shots of particular species via the Internet. I'd far rather see line drawings (witness the superb cover illustration from Dave Quinn), notebook sketches or photographs of birds taken on site. At the price of £3.00 I thoroughly commend this report to all regular or potential visitors to the Marbury/Witton area. To obtain your copy contact: Dave Walters 43, Forster Avenue, Northwich, Cheshire, CW8 3BJ.

Jeff Clarke

ANAGRAMS

Some anagrams to amuse you. Can you do better? Answers at the bottom of the page.

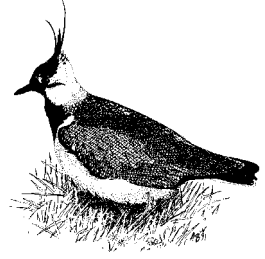
- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------|
| 1) 'Angry age' or 'Gay anger' | 4) 'Wooing dope' |
| 2) 'Adore song' or 'Roads gone' | 5) 'Crooked pew' |
| 3) 'Giant pram' | 6) 'Fresh coin' |

Keith Sheel, 11 Bridgecroft Road, Wallasey, Wirral, L45 7NX

(Anagram Answers: 1) Garganey; 2) Garganey; 3) Ptarmigan; 4) Woodpigeon; 5) Woodpecker; 6) Rosefinch)

The View from the Farmyard

Variety is said to be the spice of life, so most birds, knowing this, eat a varied diet. On the fringe of each species are birds willing to experiment with new sources of food. If the new source of food is found to be wholesome and reasonably plentiful, then it will no doubt be taken full advantage of. The pioneer birds pass their new found knowledge to others in their social circle. On one visit to my mother, I noticed a small flock of Blue Tits flying down to a patch of tulips close to the lounge window. Each bird chose a flower and clinging to the stem immediately under the flower, bent it down with their weight until almost horizontal. They then proceeded to peck a small hole in the base of the petal to expose the nectar source within. Just how these birds had learned to do this we shall probably never know, but I have no doubt that their methods employ a good deal of trial and error. I have watched similar small groups in my own garden doing much the same thing with Flowering Currant and Mahonia.



Grey Herons are regularly seen flying from their colony at Tabley to feed at Toft, Booths or Knutsford. One bird, easily distinguished by three missing wing feathers, was once more seen to be returning to Tabley, this time with an ornamental carp the size of a size 9 shoe in its beak, the kind of fish someone somewhere will really miss!

Jackdaws also are always on the lookout for new food resources and with their keen eyesight, and I would say above average intelligence (for birds), they seldom miss a trick. John, who farms the next farm to here, observed that the Jackdaws were paying a great deal of attention to one of his fields. Upon closer investigation it was found that patches of the grass were stunted and slightly yellow, this it seems was due to a heavy infestation of leather jackets (Crane Fly larvae). These inch-long, fat, brown larvae were munching their way through the grass roots and the Jackdaws in turn were munching their way through the larvae, and very nutritious I'm sure. Other Jackdaw delicacies this spring were garden snails smashed on a stone and served on the orchard wall in the style favoured by the Song Thrush. And to add a touch of the sinister to the Jackdaw's behaviour I relate this tale. Cycling home from work one evening, a Jackdaw crossed my path. Startled by my proximity it dropped a brown mass which it was struggling to carry. I dismounted and walked over to take a look. On the ground was a small, half-dead rabbit, it was clearly doomed so I dispatched it. Now possibly it had been a road casualty and the Jackdaw, doing its best to keep the place tidy was just moving it to somewhere else. Or was it possible that the Jackdaw had brutally attacked it? This question may have been answered some days latter, when on another part of the farm I saw a bird hacking with its beak in a most savage way at an adult rabbit which had strayed too close to where it was feeding. The rabbit cowered and turned to run, but the Jackdaw proceeded to mount up onto the back of the rabbit and hack at the head and face, the terrified animal at last making the cover of a hole.

In the stable cottage, close to an upstairs window, a narrow gap between the bricks provided a pair of Nuthatches with a splendid nesting hole. The pair not only shunned the trees for nesting, but also spent much of their time foraging for food around the window frames and doorways of the old stable block. The gutters were also used for bathing and drinking, so the whole life of the pair was centred on the small cobbled yard and its buildings. One particularly hot afternoon one bird was lying on its side on the hot slate roof, its wings spread to collect as much of the sun's rays as possible. Some believe that the heat stirs parasites into activity, enabling the birds to 'nitter' them out more easily, but its hard to deny that many species of birds seem to just love sunbathing. The choice of the brick-built home paid handsomely and six healthy youngsters were successfully fledged, taking to the wing on May 8th.

The Lesser Spotted Woodpecker doesn't feature too often in my notebook, so the records probably don't paint an accurate picture of this species in Toft. Records of odd males or females are interspersed with the occasional family group, suggesting that breeding may well be taking place within the parish. Early March 1998 has proved particularly fruitful as regards this member of the

woodpecker family. Almost all records refer to Garden Wood which, as its name implies, was once part of Toft Hall's pleasure grounds. Many different species of tree were planted including Wellingtonia, Yew, Lime, and Hornbeam to name but a few. These exotics complemented the usual range of Oak, Beech, Alder and Birch. There is also a good understory of Rhododendrons, Elder and thornless Raspberry. In Oliver Rackham's book "The Trees and Woodland in the British Landscape" he states that a wood functioning correctly and with a full range of species and ages of tree, would in its most healthy state contain as much as 60% dead wood. Garden Wood isn't at that stage yet, but is showing all the signs of middle age. So to help complete the scene, the Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers have moved in. A male, calling and drumming for much of the spring, was joined by a second, the two on their chosen trees calling and drumming in competition with each other. One day this went on almost continuously for two hours. The bird which had arrived first became quite aggressive to his opponent after a little time and tried to repel the new boy by flying at him, but each time just before contact was made, the second bird would fly to another branch. It seems rather unfortunate that all this spent testosterone doesn't seem to have attracted a female yet.

Ruddy Ducks were one of Toft Pool's regular breeders. From the late '70s to 1992 they nested annually and in some years more than one pair were to be found. But by the late '80s fewer displaying males and then a reduction in pairs, eventually led to a failure to breed since 1992. For some reason four males and two females found their way here this year. Perhaps water levels or even quality have had some bearing, maybe the absence of nesting Great Crested Grebes, or Mink, who knows?

In the medieval records of many estates a not too uncommon entry was the word "Dearth", this marked the bad years when crops failed and starvation was a real possibility. I have decided to revive the use of the word in my bird records, not to mean a lack of food, but to mark the disappearance of bird species. With the starvation felt to the spirit when no Cuckoo is heard all spring, then on hot sultry summer days the buzz of insects is all that is to be heard where Corn Bunting and Yellowhammer once sang (two birds so much a part of our countryside), that I find it difficult to find much positive about man's impact upon the world. Mr Hough, the old gamekeeper, once told me in his typically logical country manner that, "if we can't farm with nature, then we can only fight against it, and nature won't stand for that for too long". I'm afraid that this time nature's revenge, may be the dearth we inflict upon ourselves.

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

Jizz and all that Jazz

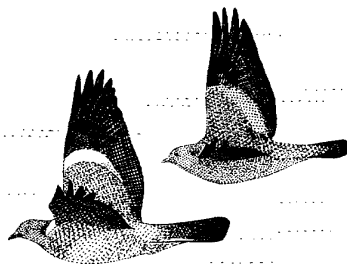
'SHOOT' THAT PIGEON (OR DOVE)

This series aims to list quick indicators to identification other than specific plumage detail, calls or song. In the first article we covered Corvids and I was pleased to receive some comment, as I've mentioned in the Letters section. I live in hope that this second contribution will generate further tips. The title shows we are looking at the pigeons and doves in this edition and doesn't mean I've joined our gun-toting counterparts!

The family Columbidae covers some 304 living species, quite a few of which are threatened. Another seven have become extinct including the most famous of all, the Passenger Pigeon (wouldn't you like to have seen the Red-moustached Fruit Dove?). Only six members of this family are accepted on the British List. Of these we will look in detail at four, omitting Rock Dove, as there is such similarity to the feral town pigeon, with 'pure' Rock Doves only likely to be seen around the remoter coasts of Scotland. Also, we will not cover Rufous Turtle Dove, which is a very scarce vagrant from Central Asia. It is perhaps worth noting that the last of the five confirmed sightings of this species was first identified by a 19-year-old at Spurn in November 1975. He is now (happily?) our County Recorder! The remaining four birds comprise three residents, Woodpigeon, Stock Dove and Collared Dove, together with a summer visitor, the Turtle Dove. It will be helpful to contrast these birds in two pairs, the Woodpigeon and Stock Dove which often feed together, and the Collared and Turtle Dove which have a superficial similarity.

The number of Woodpigeons in some flocks must run into many thousands. With regular roosting sites often a long way from favourite feeding areas, the dense morning flight in late autumn from woods, such as those near my house northeast towards the Pennines, seems never ending. The return flight in the afternoon extends over a longer period and involves many smaller separate groups. It is all too easy to dismiss any passing flock as 'pigeons', yet in most rural areas even those fringing suburbia, there are likely to be small numbers of Stock Doves. Woodpigeons fly quite fast with their relatively small heads appearing 'held up' over deep barrel chests. Their broad wings have primaries which are swept-back with a pale curved bar across the middle of the wing, contrasting with dark ends. The tail profile is long, broad and with a slight taper, ending in a slight curve and a black band. Distinguishing Stock Doves in flight involves looking for a smaller bird with a more triangular wing, which gives a less swept-back appearance. Wing beats are steadier than Woodpigeon but even faster, with an overall dark blue-grey appearance, grey underwing and dark border to the upperwing. The tail in flight is shorter than Woodpigeon and is only slightly tapered into a more rounded end with more extensive black, which shows less of a discrete band. Display flights can be distinctive and provide good clues to separate the species. Both Woodpigeon and Stock Dove fly up steeply and clap their wings at the top of the climb, but the Woodpigeon has fast clattering wing beats, whilst those of the Stock Dove are slow, deep and quiet. The downward flight is also different with the Woodpigeon raising its wings, holding them stiff and gliding down in an arc. The Stock Dove barely raises its wings and often glides in a circle.

At rest and at feeding Woodpigeons look (and are) large, fat birds. Against the light, the pale line along the edge of the folded wing from the bend is noticeable. Stock Doves are smaller and more compact, with a thick black border to the end and the back of the folded wings. This is one of the best indicators. Other pointers are the white neck patches contrasting with a darker head; and a pale eye on the Woodpigeon, although note that young birds lack the pale patch and have a dark eye. Stock Dove have no such white patch but adults have an emerald green neck patch, which can only be seen at relatively close quarters. The Woodpigeon has a distinctive walk, holding its body level whilst its head bobs backwards and forwards. When flushed from cover (and they can sit tight) there is much crashing of twigs and clattering of wings, often accompanied by a rise in the observer's heart rate! Woodpigeons also clatter their wings on landing. Stock Doves often feed in association with Woodpigeons but they are always less conspicuous and are easily overlooked. They are the most wary and often fly first from mixed flocks.



Collared Doves arrived in this country from the East in the last 60 years and have become almost ubiquitous. Their population growth can be contrasted with an accelerating decline in the number of Turtle Doves, to the extent that the latter are on their way to becoming a county rarity. Collared Doves in flight shows more rounded wings than Turtle Doves, which have more angular wings giving a more swept-back appearance. These differences give rise to a slower, bounding flight that is more direct than Turtle Dove, which flies faster and in a 'pitching' manner. Collared Doves often cock their tails on landing. Tail size and shape also differ. Collared Doves have a relatively long tail, half white from the tip when seen overhead. Turtle Doves have a smaller, shorter and more tapered tail, with only a white tip when seen from below. At rest Collared Doves can seem to be more upright than Turtle Doves and have a uniform, pale sandy appearance. Turtle Doves in contrast have a plumper appearance and seem more hunched, perhaps due to the tortoiseshell patterning on the upperparts and the orange breast. Adults in Western Europe have a black and white barred neck patch, Eastern European birds tending to show a grey and white or even a pale blue and white neck patch. Juveniles don't show any neck patch. At close range these are the most noticeable features. The display flight is similar in both species, with a straight rise followed by a glide on down-swept wings, with the tail fanned to show the undertail markings. The neckband on Collared Doves is obvious given close views, although it is obscure on juveniles, which are also greyer in colour. Habitat preference is of course a more likely determinate of the species, with Turtle Doves only likely to be seen in open, arable farmland and particularly in this country around weedy sand quarries, a habitat especially suited to their requirements.

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Notes & Letters

BUZZARDS IN NORTH CENTRAL CHESHIRE

The Buzzard population of Cheshire was estimated not very long ago at 1-3 pairs (The Breeding Bird Atlas of Cheshire and Wirral, 1992). Now there are known populations in several localities and in the last two years I have encountered increased sightings of Buzzards closer to home, which has encouraged me to study their population locally. Having read Tubbs' work I realised the potential of Cheshire and set about finding local Buzzards and mapping their territories.

Buzzard territories are remarkably small:- Tubbs gives densities of more than one pair per square mile, with average distances between nest sites of between 0.8 and 1.2 miles, for his study of Buzzards in the New Forest. Pairs defend a nesting territory of about one square mile or less. Feeding territories can overlap with those of adjacent pairs and are in the order of 3.0-3.3 square miles, (or roughly a circle with a one mile radius).

Most of us are used to seeing Buzzards circling on thermals and hunting over seemingly large areas of uplands in Wales or SW England, giving a mistaken impression that they are raptors of wide open spaces, hunting from great heights and ranging over miles to find food. In lowland Britain and Europe this is not the case (and nor, it would appear, in the uplands). Buzzards can and do obtain their food from a small area, sometimes feeding within a single wood – even when they have young in the nest. Soaring birds, especially when there are several birds together, are more likely to be defending or re-establishing territories than hunting; this happens in spring and again in late summer/early autumn.

With all this in mind, I set about studying my local Buzzards more carefully and found a remarkable number of birds. Covering an area of about 40 square miles, I found a population of around thirteen territory-holding pairs, though I have yet to prove breeding. What is more, I have discovered that the territory density (and therefore the potential breeding density) to be very similar to those that Tubbs and others have found, with nest sites around a mile apart in some places.

There is a great deal yet to be studied and much of Cheshire has still to be covered, but these birds and those in other parts of Cheshire point to a healthy population, which could colonise those parts of the county having suitable habitat, which is most of it!

Richard Hargreaves, 52 Orpington Lane, Orpington, Lymm, Cheshire, WA13 0QJ

NEST FIT FOR A KINGLET

I am sure most of you like me assume that birds build nests with a practised eye, instinctively knowing where to place the initial fixing points and building from the established bridgehead. However this spring I witnessed a pair of Goldcrests *Regulus regulus* in a state of high excitement, exploring the ivy-covered trunk of a White Poplar *Populus alba*. I stood quietly at the base of the tree as the pair played about me at eye level. After a few moments the male briefly disappeared, but returned with a fragment of moss attached to a spiders web. The female twittered around the male excitedly as, at only six feet from ground level, the male began attempting to attach the nesting material to the Ivy branches at the point at which they forked. After a few attempts he gave up, moved a few inches higher and tried again. At this point my face was barely three feet from the birds, though they ignored me completely and it was possible to see the male twisting the material this way and that in an effort to gain a purchase. He again failed and the process was repeated every few inches up the trunk. After about five or six minutes the birds had reached a thicker area of ivy, partially obscuring them from view, at about twelve feet from the ground. The male then flew from this final location and returned several times with nesting material.

Though I could no longer see clearly what was taking place, I felt sure that the male had finally found a suitable nesting location. What was apparent through this whole process was that the bird tried to place the material at a similar fixing point on each attempt. As though he had a specific search image innately embedded in his brain, but the final nesting site was gained through trial and error. Allied to this, I had not realised that the male Goldcrest actually chose the nest site. I had always assumed it to be the female.

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

CAWOS YULE LOG

January 4th had finally arrived, it was the day of the great CAWOS Yule Log. Scott Kennedy and I had decided to take part in the contest to see the most bird species in the Society's area during the course of one day. We had recruited Chris Benson and Dave Bowman from amongst the other Woolston Eyes' wardens on to the team and decided on 'The Eyes String Quartet' as a suitable 'fun' name.

During the run-up to the big day, we had checked out various sites, including a trip from Frodsham to the Wirral on New Year's Day, when we saw Common Sandpiper, Arctic Skua and Eider - all species we were destined to miss on the 4th. The preparation really paid off on the day, enabling us to visit the most productive sites only, while the work put in on species/site lists gave us back-up locations for awkward species. Disaster struck on the evening of the 3rd when Chris rang to say he couldn't make the trip, so the quartet was reduced to a trio.

The first site we visited was Woolston Eyes to get some species we thought may be difficult elsewhere, and the list was started with a Robin, singing close to the entrance to the reserve. Our first stop here was to be No 2 bed, where Water Rails had been calling regularly for the previous month or two, and a minute after we arrived, a bird duly obliged. A Tawny Owl called nearby, as various species of waterfowl were heard on the main pool. A stop close by didn't produce the hoped for Long-eared Owl, but this was quickly remedied with a bird in another area on the reserve.

We left Woolston with thirteen species under our belt, and made our way to Marbury Country Park, picking up Little Owl at Whitley Reed on the way. At Marbury, we saw most of the expected species, while Kingfisher and Siskin were less expected. We returned to Whitley Reed hoping to see Tree Sparrow in an area where I had seen them regularly, but all we saw was a Dunnock, along with our only Fieldfare of the day. Not to be discouraged we tried another, nearby site for Tree Sparrow and were rewarded with the sight of three on nut feeders in a garden. Opposite the garden was a small wood where we had found Woodcock a few years previously, so, with all the optimism of rabid day listers, we went exploring and were rewarded with one bird being flushed and giving excellent views.

At this stage, we were faced with something of a dilemma, return to Woolston and hopefully see Redpoll, Jack Snipe and Willow Tit or go to Moss Side, which was on our way to Frodsham. In view of the limited time available, we decided to go to Moss Side, where we picked up Willow Tit, Ruddy Duck and Wigeon. We quickly moved on to Frodsham where Smew and Ruff were the biggest bonuses. At Denhall Lane, we saw most of the expected species along with Pink-footed Goose and Merlin, while at Parkgate we were very lucky to see the long-staying Little Egret, as it landed on one of the pools near the road. While we were looking at this bird, everything on the marsh took flight, so deciding there was a raptor present, we checked through the mass of waders and wildfowl before seeing the Peregrine in their midst.

Shortly afterwards we arrived at Hoylake at an ideal time, with the incoming tide pushing in the waders and enabling us to see most of the target species and allowing us to make a quick visit to New Brighton, where the only species added to our list was a lone Kittiwake in the Mersey mouth. We decided that we had sufficient time to call at Red Rocks to see the remaining waders that we needed. It was here where we had our largest slice of luck when I picked an interesting, dark looking wader flying from Hilbre towards us. As it reached the shore it started to fly along the shoreline, enabling us to identify it as a Purple Sandpiper. As dusk approached, we headed off to Parkgate, arriving in the gloom to be told that two Spoonbills were out on the marsh, and after being informed of their approximate location and hastily setting up our telescopes, we quickly found them to finish our day on 102 species, equalling last year's record.

We met the organiser of the event, Mike Holmes, shortly after at the nearby Boathouse pub, and after a quick chat, he felt we would be the eventual winners, which was confirmed during the following weeks. While we realise we had some luck during the course of the day, I feel the high score could be put down to local knowledge, preparation (we visited many sites before the day) and the use of Dave Bowman's Land Rover, which gave us a much better view than most other cars, while having the speed needed on 'big days'.

Overall, it was an excellent day and I would like to thank Mike Holmes for the tremendous organisation of the event.

Dave Riley, 10 Thornton Road, Great Sankey, Warrington, Cheshire, WA5 2SZ

WILDGOOSE CHASE

For the last three years I have carried out monthly WeBS counts in the Aldford area (these are coordinated counts on preset days for wildfowl and waders on estuaries and inland waters). The area I cover is basically the lakes on the Eaton Estate, but when the Aldford Brook and sometimes the River Dee flood, then there is a wider area to cover. Very heavy rain in the period from last November to the end of January this year produced marvellous flood conditions so, in addition to the monthly counts, I undertook counts on many other days in order to assess conservation needs in the area. In addition to the Estate I covered Aldford Flood, the Dee floods at Townfield Lands in Aldford and the area between Crook of Dee and Aldford bridge. The results were sometimes spectacular and always interesting, particularly to see how quickly wildfowl found these new, temporary feeding areas.

The autumn counting year in 1997 started pretty quietly with the highlights being counts of 36 Mandarin and an immature drake Wood Duck (origin?) in October on the Fishponds in the Estate and a very large Greylag flock of 430 around the Serpentine. The first significant rains at the end of November half-filled Aldford Flood and immediately attracted the Greylag flock which now also included a single Pinkfoot and Whitefront. The local farmer started shooting to discourage them from his fields of winter wheat and they moved to a flood near Crook of Dee where, on the 30th of November, they were joined by 340 Canadas. Duck numbers were still pretty low, but Teal and Wigeon were building up with a few Pintail and Shoveler. Duck numbers continued to build up through December, but extensive flooding around the turn of the year increased them quite a bit. Wigeon increased almost daily to a maximum of 216 at Aldford Flood, with smaller numbers elsewhere and Pintail to a high of 102 on the Flood. Teal reached a spectacular 500 in the flooded reedbed at the Flood and Shoveler, Tufted Duck and Pochard peaked at 16, 40 and 20 respectively on the Flood itself. A couple of Ruddy Duck, a Goosander and a Shelduck were relatively unusual visitors.

The largest numbers of duck were at Townfield Lands towards the end of January, when the Dee flooded across both banks and created a huge lake between Aldford and Pulford. It was almost impossible to count because many birds were hidden behind half submerged hedgerows, but minimum numbers were Pintail 750, Wigeon 150, Teal 100, Shoveler 20, with 4 each of Goosander and Gadwall. A spectacular 1300 Lapwing took flight on January 25th. At the same time the Flood and Estate continued to hold the same numbers as outlined above so that the overall totals were pretty impressive and indicative of birds continuing to move into the area. Then the rain stopped, the floods disappeared and so did the birds!

So what of the geese? The Greylag flock started to disperse between the various sites in early January and only a total of 120 were left by January 17th. However, the Canadas built up to a maximum of 470 at Aldford Flood on January 11th and from December 30th they were joined by small numbers of Barnacles. At this time they favoured the Crook of Dee where they were easy to count. A maximum of six birds were present on December 31st. Thereafter they began to disperse and were difficult to count in the flooded fields at Townfield Lands, but by January 17th only a single Barnacle remained. Interestingly a single Barnacle has associated with the local Canada flock for the last few years - were the other five birds "wild" or feral birds from elsewhere in the county? Similarly were the single Pinkfoot and Whitefront in November wild or feral? More intriguing - and frustrating - were the three grey geese present with the Greylags at Aldford Flood on January 11th. They were a long way away across the Flood, but I'm 90% sure that at least two of them were Tundra Bean Geese. Unfortunately I failed to relocate them the following weekend, but was told that four Bean Geese had been with Greylags on the Eaton Estate during that week. I'm not sure how reliable that information was but it was an interesting, if frustrating, conclusion to a month's fascinating birding.

Neil Friswell, 8 Oaklands Crescent, Tattonhall, Cheshire, CH3 9QT

A LOCAL PATCH YEARLIST

After reading Tony Broome's note in January's issue of the Newsletter, regarding an attempted yearlist at Frodsham during 1998, I thought it may be of interest to readers that there was a light-hearted year list 'competition' run on Hilbre last year between several Bird Observatory members. Despite the usual cynicism which 'listing' is always greeted with in some circles, the 'competition' was great fun for those who took part and it helped to liven up the birding at normally perceived

quiet times of the year. For example, March is usually just a quiet month until the first signs of spring arrive towards the end. However March 1997 produced several 'blockers' for Hilbre listers and probably helped to decide on the eventual placings of the top two listers!

Treecreeper and Gadwall are very rare birds on Hilbre and both occurred on the same day in March 1997. Such birds as Blue and Great Tit received much more attention than usual, being 'good' birds for Hilbre, as were Rook, Jackdaw and Magpie.

May is usually one of the best months of the year on Hilbre and 1997 was no different with the highlight being a superb 1st summer male Montagu's Harrier (17th). Birds such as Redstart, Spotted Flycatcher and Garden Warbler can all be seen if you are there on the right days, but Turtle Dove (17th) and Wood Warbler (10th) are extremely uncommon on Hilbre and for the listers were considered 'blockers' with no chance of 'pulling back' later in the year.

Unfortunately summer 1997 will not be remembered for good birding at Hilbre, but the autumn certainly made up for that with some excellent sea-watching, including 3 Sabine's Gulls, a single Long-tailed Skua, Storm Petrels, Black Terns and some very good Leach's Petrel days.

The highlight of the year, for those who saw it, was undoubtedly the first Pallas's Warbler for Hilbre, found by Alan Wraithmell on the 31st October. Many of the regulars have not seen Yellow-browed Warbler on Hilbre despite there being four records, so the Pallas's more than compensated for that! Although a superb bird, just as good from a 'listing' point of view were a Hen Harrier, a Little Owl and 6 Whooper Swans all seen during a two day period 31st October to 1st November.

The winner for the year saw 135 species and four listers saw over 125 species during 1997. The total number of species recorded at Hilbre during 1997 was 153 - an excellent year all round. In case any of the cynics out there think that this is all a bit frivolous and a waste of valuable time then think again! Firstly, the 'competition' increased coverage on the island with more days covered during 1997 than for several years. This no doubt increased the number of 'good records', but it also meant that the commoner species were recorded more often. Secondly, the greater coverage meant that Ringing numbers were up and consequently some good controls and recoveries were obtained (for example a French ringed Sedge Warbler and a Hilbre ringed Ring Ouzel recovered in the Midlands). Thirdly, as another spin-off from the increased coverage, particularly at 'quiet' times of the year, other work by the observatory such as Butterflies, Moths and Mammal recording all benefited. Finally, from a personal point of view, a mini network developed between the competitors (and other regulars) which meant that more people got to see more of the birds.

We have started another yearlist competition this year - again just for fun. Already (by 7th April 1998) there have been several good records, including Ring-billed Gull, another Treecreeper, Blue Tit, Long-tailed Ducks, Velvet Scoter and our second ever Red Kite. It has again helped to improve coverage and Ringing numbers are once again up with the best number of Goldcrests ringed for some years (as well as a control, which could be from anywhere!).

Anyway my suggestion to anyone thinking of doing a local patch yearlist is give it a go, its great fun, very sociable and who knows what it will turn up?

Steve Williams, Hilbre Bird Observatory

Note: Anyone interested in purchasing a Hilbre Bird Observatory Report for 1996 or 1997 should send £1.50 (incl. p&p) per report, stating which year they require to:

Hilbre Bird Observatory c/o 129 Ennisdale Drive, West Kirby, Wirral. L48 9UG

Copies of "Checklist of the Birds of Hilbre and Surrounding Area" are also available at £1 (incl. p&p).

CORVID CUNNING

In response to Richard Gabb's jizz article in the latest Bird News, the cunning of corvids has always intrigued me. I have seen a Carrion Crow dunking stale bread in the Bollin to soften it for eating and more recently, witnessed a variation on that theme by a pair of Magpies.....

We are having a small extension put on our house and the foundation trenches were dug during the wettest April on record. The battlefield outcome produced mounds of saturated clay which I saw being quarried by the Magpies, presumably to add the finishing touches to their own home extension. A hot, dry spell of weather soon followed, much to our relief, but to the frustration of the Magpies. However, they quickly adapted to the new conditions, at least according to my detective

work. I found the birdbath full of soft, yellow clay, no doubt the remains of one of the rock-hard nuggets of the stuff littering our garden. One has to admire their resourcefulness.

Another piece of corvid cleverness was relayed to me in this morning's post by David Birchall (53 Beggarmans Lane, Knutsford). Pretty well verbatim, it is as follows:

"A 'drama' happened outside the house last week. I was woken by the noisiest row between crows and Magpies that I've ever heard. When I looked out of the bedroom window, there on the opposite grass verge was a ginger cat with an apparently dead Magpie under its paws.

The Magpie's mate was facing up to the cat and the resident crows were enjoying the rumpus too. There was absolutely no sign of life from the Magpie as the cat rolled it over and pawed it. After about 15 minutes, maybe more, the cat began to get bored and washed a paw. Meanwhile the 'dead' Magpie's mate had taken to dive-bombing the cat from an adjacent tree, keeping up the awful racket with the crows all the time.

In the end, the cat got up to stalk off and as it did the 'dead' Magpie seized its chance and flew away! I think its mate was as surprised as my wife and I were, for it kept returning to the spot and couldn't quite work out where its 'dead' companion had disappeared to!"

Peter Walton, 13 The Meade, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 2HF

'JIZZ AND JAZZ' – THE CORVID QUESTION

All right, I'll finally admit it, my cynicism regarding the likelihood of a nil response was totally unjustified. I had not one but two notes from Effie Bartlett of Willaston, who remembered a relative saying that Rooks walk as if they had sore feet! Now Effie is an active, octogenarian birdwatcher, which may be a lesson in itself to some younger members. Thank you Effie.

Then Prof. David Norman from Sutton Weaver made a contribution in another personal note. He comments that "Ravens are just below the wing loading at which soaring is better (energetically) than flapping. Roughly speaking, small birds flap and big birds soar. More strictly it depends on the weight / surface area. What this means for Ravens is that they can easily soar provided there is some updraught – a thermal or cliff-face for example – whereas other corvids cannot (or they have to flap more often)." As he says this kind of information adds interest to watching them. And we are bird watchers aren't we?

Finally, Peter Walton has a letter in this issue which illustrates the cunning of the family. Having always appreciated Peter's poems when I was editing Bird News, I was delighted to hear from my two Frodsham confederates that there will soon be an illustrated anthology of some of his poems in print. I hope to obtain a signed copy.

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

A TALE OF MURDER AND MYSTERY

We have quite an assortment of bird feeders in our garden, but one peanut feeder is particularly popular, though not necessarily for the right reasons! It consists of a central holder, surrounded by a square, large mesh, wire cage with spaced, slightly larger, rounded holes, designed to only allow access to birds of Great Tit size or smaller (apologies to the family of Great Spotted Woodpeckers currently visiting the other, more conventional peanut feeder). Unfortunately or otherwise, depending on your viewpoint, this caged peanut feeder attracts the regular attention of a male Sparrowhawk, which is occasionally successful in surprising a feeding bird and catching it as it makes a dash for freedom to the nearby hedge. Most spectacular is when the Sparrowhawk manages to grab the tit through the mesh cage, usually from underneath. For what seems an eternity, the raptor will hang upside down under the cage, trying to pull the unfortunate bird through the mesh holes. Sometimes it succeeds and flies to a nearby plucking perch to devour its reward. Sometimes the outcome is a frustrated Sparrowhawk flying off to try his luck elsewhere, leaving a ruffled, but otherwise unscathed Great or Blue Tit to live another day! Sometimes the outcome is disastrous for both birds, as the Sparrowhawk is forced to abandon a firmly wedged, dead bird in the mesh wall of the cage.

This has happened three times in the last few weeks and each time we have managed to retrieve the corpse and leave it on the nearby bird table for another animal to benefit. Twice the body has disappeared without us seeing who took it. Was it one of the eight squirrels that feed in our garden? Or was it one of the Carrion Crows nesting nearby? Was it even a Great Spotted

Woodpecker that made off with the prize? I was determined to witness which species benefited from the last unfortunate, but very dead Great Tit to be extricated from the feeder. I did not have long to wait. Within ten minutes a Jackdaw flew on to the bird table and started to pluck and eat it. Another quickly joined it and this second bird eventually managed to steal the free meal and fly off with it. What would someone else make of this situation if they subsequently saw this Jackdaw with a dead, adult Great Tit? Would they think it had killed it and if so, under what circumstances? It just goes to show we should not jump to conclusions regarding bird behaviour, particularly if part of the scenario is missing.

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

EXCERPTS FROM THE KOS WEB SITE

Back in the early '70s, before the advent of the various 'Birdlines' and mobile phones, many local birders used to make the Observatory at Rostherne Mere their last call of the day, giving gull aficionados a chance to show off their skills and the rest of us the opportunity to count the Cormorant roost. As I recall it stood at about 40 in 1972 and during the intervening years has grown to around 300. This is not to everyone's satisfaction of course and our 'friends' the fishermen are less than impressed, somehow contriving to show a good correlation between this increase and their own lack of success - but we all remember their protestations about Mute Swan populations and lead fishing weights don't we! It appears that someone is trying to cut through the emotion and collect some data by ringing the species, for a bird seen at Tatton for the past few years has been observed to have a colour ring on its left leg and I recently got close enough to have a good look at the ring. It is two coloured, red at the top and white below, the white area is marked with a red C and the red half with a white 4. There is also a metal BTO type ring on the right leg - if anyone has any details about this ringing scheme please let me know.

Once upon a time before even Eric Hardy was born, Cheshire was covered by sea water and Alderley Edge was called Alderley-on-sea. As the water slowly receded large deposits of salt and sand were the only signs of the County's nautical history. The sand left is of the highest quality and quarried commercially for use in glassmaking by companies such as Pilkingtons in St. Helens. The redundant sand workings provide excellent wildlife habitats. Some, such as Chelford's Farmwood Pool, have formed deep lakes that in the summer are home to many species of waterfowl and a safe haven for roosting gulls in winter. Mobberley's last sand quarry closed in 1966 and by the autumn of the following year a shallow lake covering about 6 acres had formed - in the early years Redshank and Little Ringed Plover both successfully nested there. The sand slowly vanished under emergent vegetation, but for over 20 years the site provided us with some excellent records, as it proved to be something of a magnet for migrant waders, especially in the spring. A reduction in water level over the past few years has reduced the lake to a muddy puddle by early summer, but perhaps all is not lost - the heavy and prolonged rain of the past few weeks has been most beneficial and Mobberley SQ is looking much more like its former self - just think, Green and Wood Sandpipers before work again!

Tony Usher, 113, Town Lane, Mobberley, Cheshire, WA18 7EU www.personal.u-net/~usher

SISKINS IN A TRANCE?

Our garden mini-flock of Siskins (half-a-dozen or so) never arrives to feed before the New Year, but then is a welcome fixture for three months. Apart from their plumage and the steadily growing songs of the males, the attractiveness of Siskins lies in their restless behaviour. Sometimes, however, I have noticed what seems almost to be a reaction to this hyperactivity. There will be an occasional lull around the nut feeders, and a single Siskin will find itself feeding alone. Under such circumstances I have been intrigued to see the bird become virtually immobile - to fall into a trance while clinging to the nut, only glancing about every so often. It's as if it relishes the chance to relax in its otherwise frenzied lifestyle. I suspect this phenomenon has more to do with digestion than meditation, but it does show another side to this likeable little finch.

Peter Walton, 13 The Meade, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 2JF

SHORELARKS - correction

The record stay for Shorelarks in Cheshire was during the 1982/83 winter when three birds fed on Heswell Shore for 147 days, beating the 102 days in 1953/54 (quoted in Bird News No. 34) by 45 days.

Dave Wild, 16 Heather Road, Heswell, Wirral, L60 5SY

ONE SWALLOW MAKES MY SUMMER

The Reserve is OUT OF BOUNDS. Well it was to me over last summer - and how I missed going there. Birdwatching was limited to garden and village, yet was never dull; so let me share with you my experiences with the Swallow.

St Bartholomew's Church, on the Sealand road, held its third Exhibition of work by local artists, including some of my linocuts. Work hung in the window alcoves and spotlights were brought in to show the paintings to best advantage, whilst a marquee graced the front of the Church offering home-made cakes to eat at little tables set out on the lawn. That was the idea, but June weather dictated otherwise. Dark skies and torrential rains throughout the festival had everyone scurrying for shelter and the tables and chairs migrated into the tea-tent.

The church porch is tiny. Dark inside, an oak overshadows the entrance, but light enough for the pair of Swallows who chose to nest there above the arch of the door. Unless you stopped in the porch, turned and allowed your eyes to become accustomed to the gloom you would not see them there.

But tragedy struck. One of the Swallows flew into the church itself, confused by the spotlights which now made the church interior brighter than outdoors, and on the following afternoon, when I went to see the exhibition it was still entrapped. I suggest that the vicar turn out the lights and open both doors into the porch - he had already tried that. None of the upper windows open. It seems hopeless. The Swallow flies around the roof of the church but keeps perching and is exhausted. It seems entirely inappropriate that it should make its long migration from Africa only to perish within yards of its nest. I fear that the nest itself is already doomed by the adult's absence.

It is impossible to enjoy the pictures, my mind caught up in the plight of the bird. Many crazy notions for rescue come and are dismissed, and then suddenly there's one of the crazy notions so simple that I just have to try it. If we couldn't identify the escape route by sight could we possibly do it by sound? The vicar willingly agrees to my scheme to play taped swallow songs and calls inside the porch to see if we can get a response.

You may remember my friend John Kirby, whose name appeared on so many RSPB films as sound recordist. I have some of his recordings of Swallows gathering on the wires at his home in Wensleydale. I record and re-record this until I have ten minutes or more of Swallow. I include some House Martin as well on the grounds that if this Swallow isn't convinced by Yorkshire Swallows the martins might just fool it. Back to the church, still in the rain, with the tape player and a selection of extension cables. Several visitors are looking round the exhibition, but the vicar explains why I want the church empty and they willingly troop out to the tea-tent thereby creating an unaccustomed rush on the Bakewell tarts.

We turn off the lights. The vicar and my friends crouch in the dark against the back wall whilst I set the taped Swallows chattering loudly in the porch before going outside - by now I am appreciably bedraggled and still the rains come. Inside the church, as soon as the tape begins, the Swallow leaves its perch. It flies back and forth above the door into the porch getting lower at each pass. It seems an eternity as I wait in the rain, but in fact it is less than two minutes. Then startlingly the Swallow shoots through the gloom of the porch, and past me to soar up and around the church tower. It happened so quickly - have I imagined it? The grins on the faces of those watching from the tea-tent tell me it isn't a dream. Within a few minutes a Swallow is back at the nest.



There's a postscript. Three days later I went to collect my work. When I came out of the church, there, newly fallen on the porch floor, were the two halves of an eggshell - the first hatching. A week later I watched four, or was it five, healthy Swallow nestlings clamouring for food, and still later saw them wing stretching on the rim of the nest. They little know what journey lies before them, but I wish them God speed. Now there is a rumour in the village that it was all a well-hatched plot to get visitors to part with money in the tea-tent - I want you to understand that the rumour is unfounded.

Thelma K Sykes - Blue Neb Studios

Membership News

Welcome to the following new members: B Machin, B Bolton and K Sheel, PJ Hodgson, OE Wright, CJ Faulkner, R Donkin, AJ Firth, J Bourne, C Twiss, R Lyne, NR Savage, CP Fryer and LG Fryer. As I write this on 6th July membership stands at 343. 31 of last year's members did not renew, hopefully some of them will do, so that, with other new members, we will top the 350 mark by the end of the summer.

Council: At the Council meeting on 2nd April Simon Edwards was welcomed as a newly-elected member, while Jeff Clarke, Laurie Fairman and Richard Gabb were co-opted for the year 1998-9. No particular decisions were made but there was discussion on various on-going plans such as the Exhibition, and also some announcements can be expected before the end of the year. Records collected by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust in the form of postcards from the general public would be passed on to CAWOS for inclusion in the Bird Report.

How members can help: Thanks to Keith Sheel, who has volunteered to look after the distribution of the Bird Report and to those who have volunteered to help man our stand at Parkgate High Tide this year - if you have not volunteered and would like to do so Richard Gabb would be only too willing to receive your name on 01625 262946.

You will receive, or already have received, a separate letter asking for your help in manning our exhibition at the Grosvenor Museum in the autumn - I hope you can respond. And please don't forget those sightings for the Bird Report!

David Cogger, Membership Secretary

THANK YOU TO MEMBERS

I would like to say a big thank you to all those members who responded to the request for old field guides and optics in Bird News No 37. As a result, we were able to donate several field guides and two pairs of binoculars to aid scientific staff to carry out survey work in Eastern Europe. Thanks as well to Richard Gabb who delivered them to Dave Paynter at WWT Slimbridge on our behalf. If anyone else 'uncovers' old or little used equipment please be assured we can find a good home for it!

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

HOUSE MARTIN SURVEY

There is nationally a great concern over the late arrival of House Martins this year and also their apparently reduced numbers, which could be down by as much as 40%. Having spoken to several CAWOS members about the situation in our County, it appears that both the late arrival and the reduction in numbers is mirrored in Cheshire and Wirral and that we should start to worry as well! It is therefore vitally important that as many people as possible take part in the annual House Martin Survey, particularly recording the large, traditional colonies, but any news of new sites would also be very welcome. Remember, **any** information is welcome, even from just one visit to count occupied nests. If anyone requires further survey forms please contact me.

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

RUMOURS... RUMOURS...

All readers of Bird News will be familiar with the constant requests for help, articles and particularly artwork, so a fitting comment was made at the last CAWOS Council meeting during a discussion about the Bird Report, when a certain 'overworked' artist was referred to as a "Resource bottleneck"!!!

Rumour has it that during a visit to Romania, a certain Council member got into a fight with two dogs, who had got in her way whilst she attempted to photograph a White Stork's nest. Both animals suffered minor injuries whilst the other was badly shaken. The authorities decided not to prosecute the person involved!

[Actually her injuries have turned out to be serious and debilitating. We wish her a speedy recovery. Eds]

SHOVELER WORD GAME

Test your skill on this word game by finding as many words as possible in the name 'Shoveler'. Your prize will be fame and acclaim in the next Bird News! To get you started, Shoveler forms the anagram 'Loves her', so your first word is loves – only another ? to go!!

Rules

1. No plurals by adding an 's'
2. No proper names, nor foreign words
3. No words less than 4 letters
4. Letters may only be used the number of times they appear in 'Shoveler'
5. Please send your entries to Keith at the address below
6. Closing date for entries is **30th September**
7. The judge's decision is final!

Keith Sheel, 11 Bridgecroft Road, Wallasey, Wirral, L45 7NX

THE ART OF JIZZ

What is jizz? To most birdwatchers, 'jizz' refers to the characterisation of a bird species. A particular nuance that sets it apart from its close allies. Its origins lie in the corruption of the military term GIS: an acronym for General Impression & Shape, used for deciding if a plane was friend or foe when decals and other identifying features were not visible.

When do you use jizz? You use jizz all the time. For the majority of inexperienced birdwatchers, it mostly serves as an additional back-up or cross-check to standard plumage identification. As you gain experience you will gradually impart more use of jizz in your identifications. This is mostly an unconscious act!

How do you learn jizz i.d.? There are no short cuts to appreciating jizz. It isn't even something you can particularly practice. The only way to gain confidence is to watch individual species regularly and gain a good understanding of the way they move and the character they project. Everyone can use jizz. You already use it to recognise your friends. You can see someone you know in the street and even though you can't see their face you know who it is. That's jizz!

Can you learn jizz from a fieldguide? The simple answer is NO. Few fieldguides have sufficient room to impart even the most meagre snippet of advice on jizz. Some, such as 'Birds of Europe' by Lars Jonsson, do contain basic information in a very limited form. Only one 'fieldguide' is currently available which does justice to this type of identification 'Birds by Character - The Fieldguide to Jizz Identification' written by Rob Hume and published by MacMillan ISBN No 0333490541, but it is currently out of print. There is no use just getting this guide, its illustrations are not designed to depict every single plumage detail. You will need to use it in conjunction with a standard fieldguide.

Where to start. The easiest place is your garden, or the nearest place with good numbers of common birds. Start with just a handful of species with which you are already familiar e.g. Robin, Blackbird, House Sparrow etc. Watch them intently and compare their shape and movements with those of other nearby birds, particularly those of a similar size. See for yourself what marks them out from the crowd. What is it that gives them their character?

Don't forget the voice? Where possible always try to match the sounds made by a particular bird, with its jizz profile, particularly the 'calls' as opposed to the 'song'. The combination of voice and jizz provide a 'super stimulus' to the memory and speeds up the process of identification.

When is jizz most useful? The angle and quality of the light greatly affects plumage colours. In some circumstances e.g. backlit, colours are lost and only a silhouetted image is seen. At such times you are wholly reliant on jizz and voice to enable an identification to take place. Similarly the dimly lit understory of a dense thicket usually means that fleeting glimpses of a moving shape are obtained. At such times jizz can be a very useful aid to identification.

What else should I remember? It's always useful to keep in mind the following:
Does the species I think it is normally occur in this habitat and at this time of year?
Have I seen this species before and in what circumstances?

FIELD CRAFT

What is 'fieldcraft'? - it is the use of guile, ingenuity and common sense that allows you to get the best possible view of a bird.

- Plan a route that avoids looking into the sun.
- Where looking into the sun is unavoidable make use of angles, views won't be ideal but are better than nothing.
- In windy conditions find a solid object to brace yourself against e.g. a fence post.
- In open areas keep low to avoid wind shake, particularly when using a telescope.
- Work the lee side of woods and hedgerows as most of the birds will be here.
- Try to avoid clothing that flaps about, fills like a wind sock, or creates a loud swishing noise.
- Try to avoid being outlined on the horizon.
- Never approach birds directly, use oblique angles.
- If a bird looks nervous don't look directly at it, sit down and appear disinterested, wait until it appears relaxed before moving again. Approaching downwind also helps, birds can hear!
- Always use available cover and ground contours to cover your approach.
- When approaching a diving bird e.g. a grebe, wait until the bird has dived before moving in close.
- When birding in small groups it makes sense to have the smallest person at the front on a narrow path. This way the people behind have a chance of seeing any fleeing bird.
- When working a hedgerow or woodland edge you can maximise your chances by walking a few metres away from the edge. This gives you a better angle at which to see the birds. Otherwise you will mostly see the fast retreating backs of small passerines
- If you are skywatching for raptors etc. it pays dividends to look at the patches of cloud as opposed to blue sky.
- It is possible to attract small passerines by 'pishing'.
- Listen out for the mobbing activities, escape flights, or warning alarm calls of various birds that can alert you to the presence of a predator.
- Watching from a vehicle can be useful where practical, they act as a portable hide.
- Try to soften your movements, frantic arm waving guarantees no birds!

[We intend to go into a little more depth about the use of fieldcraft within different habitats in future editions of Bird News - as always if you have any tips or suggestions of your own - please send them in. Eds]

MIGRATION WATCH 98

Sunday 4th October	7:00am - 11:00am
(World Birdwatch Weekend)	
Sunday 11th October	7:15am - 11:15am
Saturday 17th October	7:30am - 11:30am



Anybody wishing to take part in one or more of this year's co-ordinated visible migration watches can do so by contacting **Jeff Clarke on 0151 357 1991 (W)**. Dates and recording times as above.

It is hoped that at least ten watchpoints will be covered for each session. Recorders can nominate their own watchpoint or be designated one of the selected sites. All recorders will be sent a Migration Watch 98 pack which contains the official recording forms. Anybody who would like personal instruction on how to use the forms can attend the Migration Watch Workshop to be held at Denhall lane, Burton on Sunday 13th September - see page 29 for details.

At least two sites will be open for CAWOS members and the public on Sunday 4th October, should anybody wish to participate without being an official recorder. The public sites to date are Denhall Lane and Hale Lighthouse. You can turn up at anytime during the recording period, though if you want to witness the main action the first two hours are usually the most productive.

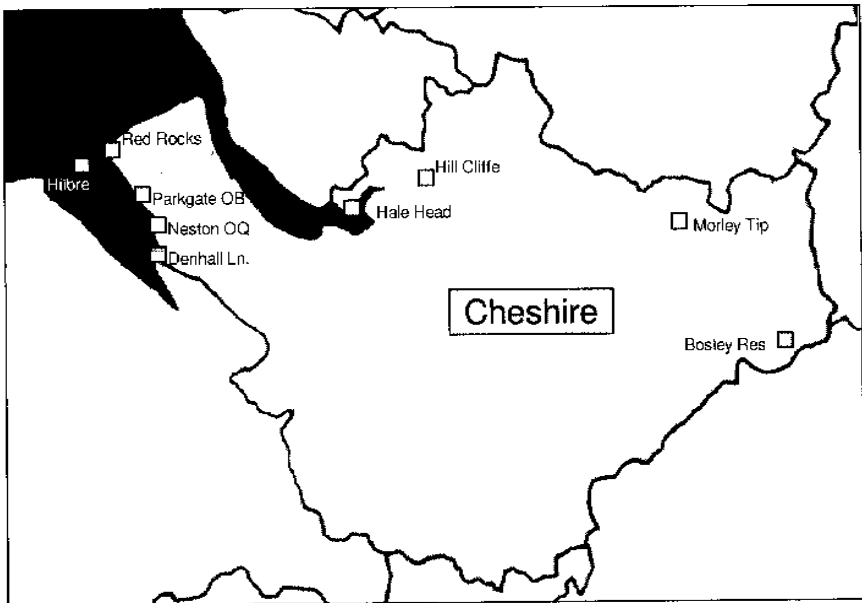
Projects and Surveys

MIGRATION WATCH 97 REPORT

Since 1992 annual visible migration watches have been carried out in the Cheshire and Wirral area as well as other locations in the Northwest region. 1997 was no different and as usual the dates chosen fell in October, the most reliable month for witnessing this form of bird behaviour. In total three dates were selected, the weekend of the 4th and 5th October and also Sunday 19th October. As ever the vagaries of the weather dictated the variety of species noted and also the numbers of birds observed. Picking dates, months in advance, is something of a lottery and anybody at Parkgate or who read Bird News 37 will know that Friday October 17th proved to be the best day of the month for visible migration, when some 9000+ birds of eight species passed southwards overhead. Despite this, the chosen dates did throw up their own surprises and demonstrated the potential for this type of observation in the Cheshire and Wirral area.



Migration Watch 97 watchpoints in Cheshire



On each day the co-ordinated watches began before sunrise at 7:00am on the 4th and 5th and 7:30am on the 19th October. Each recorder logged passing birds for a total of four hours, with a separate recording sheet for each hour. Each hourly recording sheet was divided into quarter hour intervals and only birds genuinely believed to be undergoing active migration were noted. To assist in this task some site knowledge was an advantage. It is inevitable that a degree of subjectivity and observer bias governs what is regarded as a migrant and what is not. No doubt a number of genuine migrants were discounted and other birds undertaking local feeding movements included in the results. Overall however, there is a consistency in the species and number of birds recorded, particularly on adjacent sites.

On each recording sheet the observers noted the various weather conditions at the start of each hour's recording, as well as any intervening dramatic weather changes, including wind speed and direction, cloud cover (measured in eighths e.g. $\frac{3}{8}$) and temperature.

Saturday 4th October 1997

Weather: In western areas WNW force 4 occasionally 5, decreasing to force 3 in the final hour, winds in eastern areas lighter force 2 - 3 throughout; $\frac{7}{8}$ to $\frac{8}{8}$ cloud throughout; 8°C at start reaching 12°C in final hour.

Hilbre: The vast majority of passerines here can be considered migrants and the excellent local knowledge of the observers makes mistakes less likely than at most other sites. Twelve species were noted as migrants, with Meadow Pipits comfortably in the majority with a total of 294 all south or south east. Linnets were also noted in moderate numbers totalling 90, though none were noted until the second quarter of the second hour. Grey Wagtails with 7 noted, comfortably outnumbered Pied Wagtails, which mustered just a single individual.

Parkgate Old Baths: A poor total of only 80 migrants made things hard going for the observer, at what at times can be an exceptionally good migration watchpoint. However, consistency with the previous site was maintained with Meadow Pipits forming the majority of sightings with 34 recorded mostly heading west or south-west. Linnets also showed in the figures with 15 passing on a WSW heading. A small passage of Skylarks took place in the final 1½ hours with 27 WSW.

Neston Old Quay: Unfortunately the observer here could only stay until 9:00am so missed the period when the majority of birds moved. Perhaps the most interesting observation concerned Ravens, when 3 birds headed NW in the half hour period from 7:30am. Interestingly there was a negative return on migratory Meadow Pipits and Linnets, but 4 Grey Wagtails were recorded heading south between 7:15am and 7:44am.

Denhall Lane, Nr Burton: A low total of only 247 migrants at this notable migration watchpoint testified to the poor migration conditions on the day. The pleasing aspect from this site was the consistency of results when related to other nearby sites. Once again Meadow Pipits formed the biggest total with 50 on a SE heading, closely followed by Skylarks with 48 SE and Linnets with 42 perversely heading NW. Greenfinches also bucked the trend with all but one of the 22 passing by heading NW. Is this something specific to *carduline* finches as 33 Chaffinches felt it more appropriate to coast SE. It is often very difficult to decide if the passing birds are genuine migrants, or birds indulging in local feeding flights and the 28 Stock Doves which headed north between 7:15am and 7:59am, certainly fall in to this latter category. In all probability they were local birds heading for their regular feeding sites off Parkgate. Yet they have not been recorded on migration watches previously at this site and they were not recorded the following day. Does anybody have ringing data for this species? One unambiguous migrant was the single Swallow which 'bombed' SE shortly after 7:30am.

Hale Lighthouse: Situated on a promontory jutting into the Mersey estuary, this location frequently scores well on visible migration watches, but not on this occasion. Only Meadow Pipits (15 south), Skylarks (37 south and 18 north) and Pied Wagtails (13 south), made it into double figures.

Hill Cliffe, Warrington: Inland sites rarely score better than coastal migration watchpoints and the 4th October overall totals verify this. However, the observer here must have been shocked to record Goshawk as his first migrant of the day. An escaped falconer's bird was later known to be frequenting the Frodsham Weaver Valley area and probably accounts for this individual. No Skylarks were recorded and only a handful of Meadow Pipits and Pied Wagtails headed south-west. The top scoring species here was Mistle Thrush with a total of 22 heading south in two separate flocks. 12 small unidentified thrushes headed south-west shortly after 10:15am.

Morley Old Tip, Wilmslow: Barely a handful of migrants crawled onto the list here but the recorders no doubt thought the effort worthwhile as they included the star bird of the day: a juvenile Long-tailed Skua, which floored the observers by landing close at hand and giving stunning views before drifting off to the east. A single flock of 39 House Martins slowly passed westward. Meadow Pipits were the only other migrant with a paltry total of 10 south or south-west.

Bosley Reservoir: Low cloud and light drizzle certainly hampered observations here and the observer did well to make it through to 10:00am before conceding defeat. However, negative results can be just as valuable and help to demonstrate the effect local weather conditions can have on visible migration. Only two species were noted: Pied Wagtails (8 south) and Meadow Pipits (7 south-west).

Migrant hourly totals for 4th October 1997

Location	0700 - 0759hrs	0800 - 0859hrs	0900 - 0959hrs	1000 - 1059hrs
Hilbre	100	106	166	57
Parkgate	11	7	41	21
Denhall Lane	63	72	76	36
Hale Head	9	28	31	18
Hill Cliffe	1	4	28	14
Morley Tip	2	0	40	8
Bosley Res.	5	10	0	no return
Hourly Total	191	227	382	154

Sunday October 5th 1997

Weather: The day dawned dull and overcast, $\frac{8}{8}$ cloud gradually thinning to $\frac{1}{8}$ by the final hour, winds were generally light WSW force 2-3 throughout and the temperature was a mild 12°C+.

Red Rocks: Renowned in Cheshire as probably the best visible migration spot in the county. It is also easier to decide what is and isn't a migrant here due to the rather small number of resident species. After a slow start the morning proved eventful, with finches in particular putting on a good show. The vast majority of birds passed heading south or south-west. Two species dominated the morning's activity: Greenfinches with 336 and Linnets with 239, out of a grand total of 1058 birds, from 25 species noted as migrants. No winter thrushes were recorded. Among the more unusual migrants on the list could be counted Great Spotted Woodpecker 1, Coal Tits 4, and House Sparrows 6. Perhaps the bird of the day here was the female Alexandrine Parakeet. The observer did show commendable restraint by suggesting it was probably not a genuine migrant.

Quarter hour species comparisons for Red Rocks

	7	15	30	45	8	15	30	45	9	15	30	45	10	15	30	45	11
Greenfinch					64	48	24	53	50	84			5	3	1	5	1
Linnet					68	14	43	17		2	2		18	17	6	40	12

As can be seen from the above table both species showed a remarkably similar period of movement. The fact that no movement was recorded for these two species until the latter part of the first hour after first light, is consistent with observations over several years of the Migration Watch. The fact that movement subsides around three hours after first light, also matches the trend expected from previous Migration Watches.

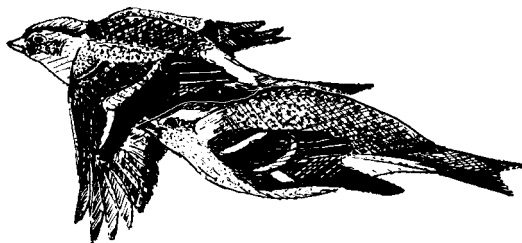
Parkgate Old Baths: The dominant species here was Skylark, though undoubtedly a percentage of the total involved local feeding excursions and where possible these have been eliminated from the results. The observer here believed the recorded Skylark total was lower than the true figure as many passing birds could be heard but not picked out of the increasingly blue sky. Surprisingly only a handful of Linnets featured in the totals, but Greenfinches comprised a substantial total of all migrants logged. Meadow Pipits also featured strongly, but candidate for top species goes to Spotted Redshank, all 8 of which arrived from high and descended to feed on the Boathouse Flash. The majority of migrants were on a south-west heading with approximately 20% heading south-east.

Quarter hour species comparisons for Parkgate

	7	15	30	45	8	15	30	45	9	15	30	45	10	15	30	45	11
Skylark								63	7	4	6	41	2	50			17
Meadow Pipit			1		27	10			3	3	2	6	2				
Greenfinch			12		9	7	9	4		3	3	1					1

Denhall Lane, Burton: One of the features of this site is the pre-dawn arrival of Lapwings which blast in 'wing drummingly' low from the inland fields, where they have presumably been feeding overnight, to roost on the marsh. Observers unfamiliar with this behaviour could be mistaken for interpreting this as the arrival of overnight migrants and therefore emphasises the benefit in local knowledge when trying to interpret the results. The timings and species mix involved here shows a high degree of consistency with the results from Parkgate and Red Rocks. Some 497 migrants were logged during the watch with Skylarks

having the largest share with 102 heading south-east. Also well represented were Chaffinches with 96 SE and Meadow Pits with 65 SE, 34 Greenfinches also headed SSE. Bramblings were also of note here, mustering a total of 13 SE, whilst 2 Swallows zipped by also heading SE. Ironically a flock of 300+ small thrushes (probably Redwings) passed heading north-west 20 minutes after the watch ended.



Quarter hour species comparisons for Denhall Lane

	7	15	30	45	8	15	30	45	9	15	30	45	10	15	30	45	11
Skylark					17	19	6	9	13	1	8	8	3	1	16	1	
Meadow Pipit				20	8	8	6	9	4	1	3	2		4			
Chaffinch					12	8	8	9	12	1	14	6		23	2	1	
Greenfinch								3				1	3		7	19	1

Hale Lighthouse: As so often happens on migration watches very little happened for the first thirty minutes and as at other sites on this day Skylarks started to feature in the second hour. Though only small numbers of migrants were noted, the species involved did show some consistency with other participating locations. The biggest surprise of the day was a juvenile Green Woodpecker in the lighthouse garden at 7:44am. The observer speculated as to whether this was the first species record for Hale. The last action of the day saw 26 Swallows head south (the consistent heading for all migrants here) in the final quarter of the third hour. The observer reflected on the paucity of migrants in the final hour by suggesting "I've seen more life in a tramp's vest". Strange what some folk get up to in their spare time isn't it?

Bosley Reservoir: The total of migrants logged here would no doubt have caused even greater distress to the Hale observers, for the trickle of six different species mustered only 28 individuals. But save for the lack of Skylarks, the species mix was similar to other locations. All the birds were oriented on a south or south-west track. Pied Wagtails scored top with just 10 individuals, while a flock of eight Swallows passed by shortly after 8:00am. No migrants were recorded beyond 9:30am. The very low cloud at this site probably suppressed passage here.

Skylark comparisons for all sites

Location	7	15	30	45	8	15	30	45	9	15	30	45	10	15	30	45	11
Red Rocks													3	2		1	3
Parkgate							63	7	4	6	41	2	50				17
Denhall Lane					17	19	6	9	13	1	8	8	3	1	16	1	
Hale Lighthouse				1	43							12					
Bosley Res.																	

The consistency of results in peaks of movement are well demonstrated in the table below. The only anomalous results come from the high ground around Bosley Reservoir which was possibly effected by the low cloud on the day. The second hour after first light is demonstrably better for witnessing visible migration than any other time of the day, given reasonable weather conditions, a fact that has been consistent since the inception of Migration Watch in 1992.

Migrant hourly totals for 5th October 1997

Location	0700 - 0759hrs	0800 - 0859hrs	0900 - 0959hrs	1000 - 1059hrs
Red Rocks	173	360	202	136
Parkgate	33	204	85	83
Denhall Lane	76	228	103	90
Hale Head	9	63	41	0
Bosley Res.	14	8	6	0
Hourly Total	305	863	437	309

Sunday 19th October

Weather: Conditions in the northwest of the county were dominated by fog and light south-easterly winds force 2, increasing to force 3 in the last 2 hours, the fog only partially lifting in the final hour and a half. Further east and south skies were clear with a light and variable, mostly SE wind.

Unlike the previous two dates, today's watch began at 7:30am and lasted until 11:30am, the time difference taking account of the shift in sunrise times. This ensures that all recordings remain relevant as they are all started from the nearest quarter hour to first light. Despite the difficulties encountered with the fog, the watch on this day provided strong evidence of the localised effects that weather conditions can have on migration. Of course the majority of migration goes on unnoticed beyond the reach of binoculars or the most bionic ears. Coasting migrants can have their movements severely disrupted by fog, heavy rain, adverse winds etc. The results on this day will also show that sometimes a nil return from a recording station/watchpoint is just as valid as another watchpoint recording masses of movement.

Red Rocks: The recorder here ended with a creditable total of 550 birds of 24 species apparently undertaking migratory movements, with most birds orientating on a southerly heading. When the observer first arrived to be greeted by thick fog, he must have expected very little. Linnets scored top with a total of 112, closely followed by Starlings with 105. These are well known migratory species, but Red Rocks is also famous for recording tit species on migration and today was no different with an impressive total of 46 Blue Tits, 34 Long-tailed Tits, 3 Great Tits and 4 Coal Tits. Only 2 Fieldfares were noted, a total equalled by Rock Pipits. The species chosen for the comparison tables are included for their combination of individual significance and cross watchpoint relevance.



Quarter hour species comparisons for Red Rocks

	30	45	8	15	30	45	9	15	30	45	10	15	30	45	11	15	30	
Starling			35				8				20		6	36				
Chaffinch	1				4	2	2	2	5	13	4		2	4	2	4		
Linnet						3				32	2	60	10	2		2	1	
Greenfinch					1			4		19	11	4	20	3				2
Blue Tit				1		2		20		12			8	3				
Meadow Pipit			1	1	1			3	1		7		10	2	1	1	4	3

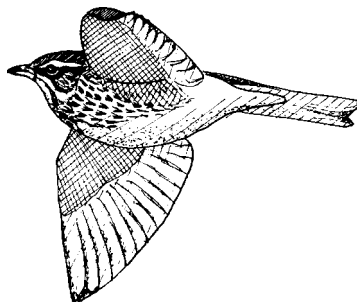
The above figures demonstrate perfectly the adverse effect upon recording totals pre 9:30am; after this time the fog lifted and the following hour provided the maximum movement. In the final hour the numbers again fall off, this time in line with normal reduction in movement recorded in other migration watches.

Neston Old Quay: Results here were more severely disrupted than at the previous site. The fog barely lifted after 9:30am and only really cleared after the finish time. Results were similar to Red Rocks, the main difference being the presence of small numbers of Redwings 50 and Fieldfares 9 all south-east. Occasionally it is possible to track particular birds or flocks between recording stations and it is likely that a party of three Mistle Thrushes heading south-east here after 7:45am were the same three birds logged a couple of miles further on at Denhall Lane after 8:00am. As one would expect here, the vast majority of birds were orientated south-east.

Quarter hour species comparisons for Neston Old Quay

	30	45	8	15	30	45	9	15	30	45	10	15	30	45	11	15	30	
Starling			2		30	20	15	22	26	26	41	47	18					
Chaffinch	1	10	13	19	17	9	5	9	2	7	4	9						
Linnet																		
Greenfinch					1			5										
Blue Tit									3				4					
Meadow Pipit					1	1				1								

Denhall Lane, Burton: A total of 535 migrants were logged, including an unexpected Green Sandpiper which appeared briefly after 9:00am before disappearing into the mist heading east. The best bird of the day though remained an enigma until later, when audio tapes revealed its identity as a Snow Bunting, which passed high south-west at 10:45am. The species mix and totals were similar to the previous two sites. The variability in flock sizes and timings of passage between Denhall and Neston were more marked than normal and could be accounted for by the fact that the only birds visible were those passing directly overhead. Birds passing within earshot but out of site were severely under recorded at both sites. For example, only one or two Redwing calls may be heard and the total goes down as 1, but in reality there may have been a flock of significant proportions passing overhead.



Quarter hour species comparisons for Denhall Lane

	30	45	8	15	30	45	9	15	30	45	10	15	30	45	11	15	30
Starling											8	26		16	23	14	51
Chaffinch	11	1			3	2				9	1	12	2	11	13	20	10
Linnet			1	4	43	28			1				1				12
Greenfinch															4		
Blue Tit																	
Meadow Pipit	6	2				1			2						6	10	11

The fog in this area was very thick until the final hour and the totals recorded reflect that fact.

Bosley Cloud Reservoir: In contrast to the previous two watches the observer here had excellent early results. Unfortunately he was unable to complete the final two hours but the findings show that although species mix was limited, the totals were reasonable given the clear sky conditions and inland location. All the birds were orientated south or south-east and the total of 202 Meadow Pipits contrasted favourably with the watches on the 4th and 5th October.

Quarter hour species comparisons for Bosley Cloud Reservoir

	30	45	8	15	30	45	9	15	30	45	10	15	30	45	11	15	30
Meadow Pipit	70	14	22	12	19	26	14	25									
Chaffinch			3		30												

One observer who had planned to cover Tatton Park was diverted to Mid Wales. Thankfully he still made the effort to participate and his results provide an excellent demonstration of the true effect of the weather in the Cheshire area.

Tonfannau, near Tywyn, Gwynedd: Although the observer had limited knowledge of local birds he made the sensible provision of discounting abundant local species such as Linnets and Pied Wagtails, also those proportions of the included species which appeared to be undertaking local feeding movements were also discounted, including Meadow Pipits, Starlings and Chaffinches. A note of interest in the results was the passage of 8 Blue Tits and 9 Long-tailed Tits south along the railway line. The nearest trees were 1km to the north and 0.5km to the south. It is probable that these birds were indeed actively migrating even if only a matter of a few kilometres. The fact that they were following the railway line illustrates a known phenomena and one which is observable in Cheshire at Inner Marsh Farm. Other movements of significance not covered in the following table involved Bramblings 14 and Skylarks 79. All the birds recorded were orientated southwards. In all a total of 1381 migrants were logged despite a slightly early finish. It is unlikely that anything of significance was missed as the observer stated that the passage had all but petered out by that stage. However his observations of Small White, Speckled Wood and Red Admiral Butterflies passing south along the railway line may prompt a later finish in the future.

Quarter hour species comparisons for Tonfannau, Gwynedd

	30	45	8	15	30	45	9	15	30	45	10	15	30	45	11	15	30
Starling			110	242	54	49	85	20	48	49	8	12	12	19			
Chaffinch		2	38	64	55	71	42	15	32	39	31		17	10			
Linnet																	
Greenfinch					10				32								
Blue Tit																	
Meadow Pipit			6	4	7	10	16	22	4		3	2	2				

Once again, given fair conditions, it demonstrated that movement begins in approximately half an hour after first light and passage peaks in the second hour from the inception of a dawn watch. The figures here also demonstrate just what coastal Cheshire was missing on this particular day.

Migrant hourly totals for 19th October 1997

Location	0730 - 0829hrs	0830 - 0929hrs	0930 - 1029hrs	1030 - 1129hrs
Red Rocks	66	96	305	67
Neston Old Quay	114	162	173	
Denhall Lane	62	87	153	223
Bosley Cloud Res.	235	121		
Tonfannau	495	552	283	71*
Hourly Total	792	1018	914	361*

Despite the poor weather conditions, overall the figures conform to the norm from previous watches, with the second hour from first light being the most productive. The figures from individual sites and even between adjacent sites show a high degree of anomaly. This is readily explained by the highly localised fog conditions, with the fog lifting and thinning progressively earlier at Red Rocks followed by Neston and then Denhall, where visibility only really became acceptable for the final hour and a quarter. The clear skies at Tonfannau and Bosley Cloud reflect their high totals for the first two hours of the watch.

Hopefully this report demonstrates the potential for visible migration watching within Cheshire and also how even minor differences in local weather conditions can effect the results. Altogether some **5953** migrants were logged over the three dates. This total may sound impressive, but had we been fortunate enough to hit on one or more wave days, the total might well have exceeded 20,000 with ease. My thanks go to all those who took part in Migration Watch 97, whether as casual observers at public watchpoints or as official observers. I'm sure that the majority of people who took part will testify how enjoyable and productive the exercise can be. Every year has turned up surprises and this time around the Blue Riband goes to the Long-tailed Skua at Morley Tip, which just goes to show that migration watches are worth doing in the most unlikely places.

I hope your appetite for future watches has been whetted and that more of you will participate in Migration Watch 98, the dates of which are Sunday 4th October, Sunday 11th October and Saturday 17th October. If you would like to take part on one or all of these dates contact me on 0151 357 1991 (W), or 0151 423 4275 (H) for details and to receive your Migration Watch 98 pack.

Jeff Clarke, 90 Simonside, Hough Green, Widnes, Cheshire, WA84YN.

Acknowledgements and list of observers: Barry Barnacal (Hilbre), Ken Mullins & Tom Mawdsley (Red Rocks), Alan Roach & Maureen Roach (Parkgate), Ted Abraham (Neston old Quay), Jeff Clarke (Denhall Lane), Anthony Brandreth, Rob Cockbain, Rob Smith (Hale Lighthouse), Colin Antrobus (Hill Cliffe), J.C. Hillier & J.M. Thompson (Morley Old Tip), Alan Kimber (Bosley Reservoir), Brian Roberts (Tonfannau).



'Visible Migration through the Southern Pennines' by Keith Clarkson

Friday October 2nd CAWOS Meeting

It will be very interesting to compare and contrast our experiences with Keith's at the first CAWOS meeting on October 2nd 1998. Keith is lucky enough to witness the migration of millions of birds passing through the bleak moors of the southern pennines each year. He records vast movements of Meadow Pipits, Chaffinches, Woodpigeons, Fieldfares and Redwings; plus the occasional party of Snow and Lapland Buntings. Richard's Pipits have even been seen in four out of the last five years!



Migration Watch Workshop

Sunday 13th September 1998
Denhall Lane, Burton, South Wirral
7:00am - 11:00am



This is a free workshop for all CAWOS members wishing to participate in the forthcoming Migration Watch 98 or for those who just want to know more about carrying out a visible migration watch. The workshop will cover topics such as identifying overflying migrants by call and jizz, how to use recording forms and interpreting the migratory behaviour you witness.

To book your place on the workshop please contact Jeff Clarke on 0151 357 1991 (work) or 0151 423 4275 (home). Don't forget, one of the aims of these workshops is to encourage new members, so please bring along any birdwatching friends.

Friday 6th November CAWOS Meeting

Please note: This meeting, 'NEPAL - a Himalayan Journey' by Tim Loseby, is being held in **The Lecture Theatre, Grosvenor Museum, Chester** (tel: 01244 402008) and *not in Knutsford as usual*. The Museum is in the City Centre at 27 Grosvenor Street, Chester, just 3 minutes walk from The Cross. The nearest parking is at Little Roodee, by Chester Castle/Grosvenor Bridge, again just a few minutes walk away. Tickets can be reserved or purchased in advance (75p members, £2.00p non-members). Please send a cheque and SAE to **Sheila Blamire, Woodruff Cottage, Clamhunger Lane, Mere, WA16 6QG. tel: 01565 830168**



SEPTEMBER

- 6 KOS Hilbre meet Knutsford Sessions House 7:30am or West Kirby 8:30am
- 6 CRSPB Hilbre & Thurstaston, meet 7:45am, ring Norman Sadler 01244 340236 for details
- 6 MRSPB Alt Carr estuary, meet Duke St. car park at 8:00am, contact David Tolliday 01625 432105
- 7 HPRSPB AGM, followed by 'A PERSONAL VIEW' by Joan Potts at Marple
- 8 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate, 11:00am (HT 13:11, 9.8m)
- 8 MRSPB 'NIGHTFALL' by Mike Berry
- 9 HO AGM & Speakers
- 11 SECOS 'ISLANDS OF GEESE, RAPTORS & WAXWINGS' by Gordon Yates
- 12-13 CADOS Norfolk Weekend contact Nick French 01978 856522
- 13 **CAWOS Migration Watch Workshop, 7:00-11:00am, ring Jeff Clarke 0151 357 1991 for details**
- 14 SRSPB 'A NATURALIST'S WAY' by Clifford Heyes
- 16 CRSPB 'IN SEARCH OF THE HIMBRINI' by Gordon Yates
- 18 NCRSPB 'WILDLIFE IN CHILE' by Tony Baker
- 19 HO Freckleton & Little Dock, cars depart Public Car Park, Cecil Road, Hale at 8:00am
- 20 HPRSPB Blacktoft Sands and Fairburn Ings, meet Marple 8:00am, contact John Durell
- 20 CADOS Hilbre/Wirral coast contact Don Coan 01244 660621
- 20 MCOS Hilbre Island, ring for details
- 20 SECOS Hilbre Island, ring for details
- 20 NCRSPB Humberside, meet at Sainsbury's Car Park, Warrington at 8:00am
- 22 ADNHS 'ISLANDS OF GREAT BRITAIN' by Val McFarland
- 23 HPRSPB 'KOOKABURRAS, CURRAWONGS AND CROCODILES' by Keith Offord (at High Lane)
- 25 LOG 'THE LYMM ORNITHOLOGY GROUP IN LESBOS' by Bob Unsworth
- 25 KOS 'ISLAY - JEWEL OF THE HEBRIDES' by Gordon Yates
- 25 WGOS 'GATEWAY TO AFRICA' by John Armitage
- 26 ADNHS Delamere for fungi, meet Public Car Park, Cecil Road, Hale, at 9:30am
- TBC LOG Gibraltar Point, coach departs Lymm Cross at 8:00am, contact Peter Tongue 01606 891274

OCTOBER

- 1 CADOS 'SERENGETI SAFARI' by John Raines
2 CAWOS 'VISIBLE MIGRATION - THROUGH THE SOUTHERN PENNINES' by Keith Clarkson
4 CAWOS **Migration Watch 98, 7:00-11:00am, ring Jeff Clarke 0151 357 1991 for details**
4 CRSPB Hale Decoy, meet 8:30am, ring Ian Owens 01244 328037 for details
6 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate, 10:00am (HT 12:06, 9.9m)
7 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate, 11:00am (HT 12:49, 10.0m)
8-11 KOS Holy Island Weekend ring for details
9 MCOS 'THE COMPLETE OWL MAN' by Michael Leach, Hartford School, 7:30pm
9 SECOS 'THURLSTONE OWL SANCTUARY' meeting with live owls
11 CAWOS **Migration Watch 98, 7:15-11:15am, ring Jeff Clarke 0151 357 1991 for details**
11 HPRSPB Cheshire Meres, meet Marple 8:30am, contact TBA
11 WGOS North Wales, by coach, depart Wilmslow Guild at 8:00am
12 SRSPB 'BIRDS OF SOUTHERN TEXAS' by Mike Wilkes
13 ADNHS 'BRITISH ORCHIDS & BROOMRAPES' by David Edwards
13 MRSPB 'A LOOK AT YORKSHIRE BIRD LIFE' by Mark Hamblin
15 NNHS 'SWANS' by David Cummings
17 CAWOS **Migration Watch 98, 7:30-11:30am, ring Jeff Clarke 0151 357 1991 for details**
18 LOG Tregaron, coach departs Lymm Cross at 8:00am, contact Peter Tongue 01606 891274
18 MCOS Spurn, ring for details
18 SRSPB Spurn Point coach trip, departing 7:30am – ring for details
18 SECOS Humber Estuary, ring for details
19 HPRSPB 'INTRODUCED BIRDS, GOLDEN PHEASANTS & THE BTO' by Dawn Balmer (at Marple)
21 CRSPB 'BIRDS OF THE WEST MIDLANDS' by Mike Wilkes
23 KOS 'BIRDS OF BELIZE' by Paul Triggs
23 NCRSPB AGM and FILM SHOW featuring 'Osprey' and 'Mud Matters'

24 Oct - 22 Nov

- CAWOS 'CHESHIRE - A WEALTH OF BIRDS' EXHIBITION, Grosvenor Museum, Chester**
24 NCRSPB Hilbre Island, meet at Frodsham Station Car Park at 10:00am
25 CADOS East Coast contact Dave King 0151 327 7212
25 MRSPB Spurn by coach, depart 7:30am, contact Ian Taylor 01260 275248 for details
27 ADNHS 'THE WITTON NATURE RESERVE' by Paul Hill
30 LOG 'WETLAND WILDLIFE' by Steve Knell
30 WGOS 'THE LAPWING' by John Lintin Smith

NOVEMBER

- 4 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate, 10:45am (HT 10:45, 9.9m)
5 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate, 9:30am (HT 11:28, 10.0m)
5 CADOS 'WADING ABOUT' by Brayton Holt
6 CAWOS **'NEPAL - A HIMALAYAN JOURNEY' by Tim Loseby at Grosvenor Museum, Chester**
7-8 MCOS Devils Bridge and Tregaron, ring for details
8 KOS Cheshire Meres meet Knutsford Sessions House 9:00am
8 WGOS Seaforth and Martin Mere, by coach, depart Wilmslow Guild at 8:00am
8 MRSPB Etherow Country Park, meet Duke St. car park 8:30am, contact Lin Townsley 01625 829373
9 SRSPB 'A CELEBRATION OF BIRDS' by Gordon Yates
10 ADNHS 'HOW TO AVOID BEING EATEN' by Malcolm Edwards
10 MRSPB 'IN SEARCH OF THE GREAT NORTHERN DIVER' by Gordon Yates
13 NCRSPB 'THE SEYCHELLES' by Valerie McFarland
13 SECOS 'GATEWAY TO AFRICA' by John Armitage RSPB
13-15 HPRSPB Solway Coast weekend, contact Joyce Wilson 0161 427 1932
15 LOG Shropshire Meres, coach departs Lymm Cross 8:00am, contact Peter Tongue 01606 891274
15 NCRSPB Shropshire Meres, meet at Frodsham Station Car Park at 9:00am
18 CRSPB 'FROM THE DUNES TO THE FALLS' by Keith Offord
19 HPRSPB 'THE BARN OWL UNDER THE CLOAK OF DARKNESS' by Mike Read (at Glossop Town Hall)
19 NNHS 'GARDEN MOTHS' by Dr R J Raines
20 MCOS 'CALIFORNIA – BIRDS OF THE WEST COAST' by Paul Doherty

- 21 CADOS Shropshire Meres contact Peter Hale 01244 341074
- 21 NCRSPB Autumn Fair at Frodsham Church Hall from 10:15am to 1:00pm
- 22 CRSPB Martin Mere by coach, meet 9:00am, ring Graham Dixon 01244 324268 for details
- 22 SECOS North Wales Coast, ring for details
- 24 ADNHS 'ASTRONOMY' by Graham Sinagola
- 27 LOG 'SPLENDOUR IN THE COTTON GRASS' by Gordon Yates
- 27 KOS 'DORSET REVISITED' by Charles Owen
- 27 WGOS 'BIRDS OF THE MERSEY VALLEY' by Adam Davison
- 29 HPRSPB Tittesworth Reservoir, meet Marple 8:30am, contact David Knass
- 30 HPRSPB 'IN SEARCH OF HIMBRINI: THE BIRDS OF ICELAND' by Gordon Yates, at Marple

DECEMBER

- 3 CADOS 'COSTA RICA' by Roger Wilkinson
- 4 **CAWOS 'BIRDS OF LESBOS' by Richard Brookes**
- 4 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate, 9:15am (HT 11:11, 9.8m)
- 5 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate, 10:00am (HT 11:58, 9.8m)
- 5 NCRSPB Marshside & Martin Mere, meet at Sainsbury's Car Park, Warrington at 9:00am
- 5 KOS Martin Mere/Marshside meet Knutsford Sessions House 9:00am
- 6 LOG Marbury Park, by car, contact Peter Tongue 01606 891274
- 6 WGOS Marbury and Neumann's Flash, meet at Marbury at 9:30am
- 6 MCOS Anglesey, ring for details
- 6 SRSPB Tatton Park, meet at Mallard Close, off Knutsford to Mobberley Road, at 9:30am
- 6 CRSPB North Wales coast, meet 8:00am, ring Brian Roberts 01352 714758 for details
- 7 SRSPB 'CONSERVATION WITHIN NORTHWEST WATER' by Roy Rhodes
- 8 ADNHS 'FROM JOHN O'GROATS TO LANDS END' by Hilda Summersgill
- 8 MRSPB 'MIGRATION OVER THE BOSPHORUS' by Richard Raines
- 11 LOG Christmas Party
- 11 KOS Christmas Party
- 11 WGOS 'A LESBOS SPRING' by Steve Knell
- 11 MCOS 'MIGRATION TO MASSAI' by Keith Offord
- 11 SECOS 'TUNNICLIFFE'S ANGLESEY' by Paul Rogers
- 13 HPRSPB Conway/North Wales Coast, meet Marple 8:00am, contact Gordon McConnell
- 13 CADOS Marshside contact Don Pawlett 01244 677477
- 13 MRSPB Rudyard Reservoir, meet Duke St. car park at 8:30am, contact Rob Hutchings 01625 432030
- 13 SECOS Shropshire Meres, ring for details
- 14 HPRSPB Members Christmas Evening, at Marple, admission by ticket only
- 16 CRSPB Members Evening
- 17 NNHS Members Slides
- 19 ADNHS Local morning walk + pub lunch, meet Public Car Park, Cecil Road, Hale at 9:30am
- 26 HPRSPB Boxing Day Walk, Disley, meet Disley Station 10:30am, contact Irene Blagden 01663 764091

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 Caldy Valley Community Centre 7.30pm, Prog. Sec. Don Coan 01244-660621
- CAWOS Cheshire & Wirral Ornithological Society, mtgs Knutsford Civic Centre 7.45pm, contact Sheila Blamire 01565 830168
- CRSPB Chester RSPB Group, mtgs St Mary's Centre, Chester 7:30pm. Prog Sec. Rob Adams 01829-270654
- 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. Stephanie Harrison 0161 428 5462
- WRSPB Wirral RSPB Group, mtgs Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead 7.30pm Prog. Sec. D. Jowitt 0151 337 7940



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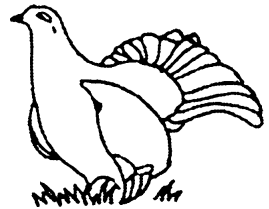
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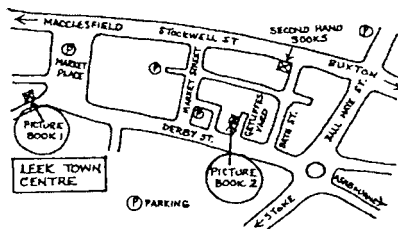
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