

BIRD NEWS

Number 41 January 99



Bean Geese • *'Tristis'* Chiffchaff
Frodsham Marsh • CAWOS Exhibition Report
Cheshire & Wirral Rarities - worth the trouble?
Grey Partridge Recovery Project Part 2



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OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

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Vice-Chairman : Steve Barber
Secretary : David Cogger
Treasurer : Brian Dyke
Recorder : Tony Broome

4 Larchwood Drive, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 2NU. Tel: 01625 540434

Membership Secretary : David Cogger

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

Newsletter Editor : Jeff Clarke

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

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Front cover: Tree Sparrow by Tony Broome

Other illustrations by Tony Broome, Phil Jones, Ron Plummer & Thelma Sykes

Editorial

I'm standing in rolling countryside. Hedgerows and scattered copses border the many fields. Acre after acre of stubble patchworks the landscape, punctuated by the occasional ploughed field and pasture. In the distance larger woods, some coniferous, but mainly deciduous, litter the horizon. A quarter mile from my standpoint a flock of over 5000 Woodpigeons dance patterns above the stubble as a succession of Sparrowhawks and Common Buzzards induce an air of edginess to the proceedings as they attempt to glean the field. To my left a vast flock of finches and buntings constantly flies up to hedgerow trees, only to drop back, just as quickly, into the stubble and the generous headland which borders the field. Well in excess of 100 Yellowhammers form part of the flock which is dominated by Chaffinches. Reed Buntings muster a creditable 50+. To my right I notice another large flock of passerines which includes at least 50 Corn Buntings. Overhead a procession of winter thrushes roams nomadically between the pastures. Sounds like a made-up scene doesn't it? Maybe I've travelled back in time 30 years, or perhaps it's somewhere in eastern Europe. The truth is, it is in the UK, but definitely not in Cheshire. In fact it's an area close to Oxtou in Nottinghamshire on 30/12/98. The experience was both magical and disturbing at the same time. The sheer volume of birds in the area was quite overwhelming. What's more the natives tell me that this is not out of the ordinary, so why do I feel so knocked sideways? The answer is staring me in the face. I'm in British farmland and I can see wild birds all around without having to move a single yard. To see the same number of birds in Cheshire and a similar variety of species I would have to tramp across many kilometres of rural countryside. Why?

The percentage of tree cover is markedly higher than for many equivalent areas of Cheshire, though some areas around Delamere don't look dissimilar, but where things do look markedly different is the percentage of winter stubble left for the birds to forage on. It was like stepping back to my youth. When I explored the local farm fields around Penketh and Sankey in the late 60s and early 70s large areas dominated by winter stubble were still frequently encountered. Even as a fledgling birdwatcher I had no difficulty getting to grips with Corn Buntings, Tree Sparrows and Grey Partridges. It's been obvious to me, and the rest of the birding world for a long time, that 'farmland' birds are in desperate straits. I just hadn't realised how bad things have become. The drip-drip leakage of bird populations, year on year, is like death by a thousand cuts. Each individual loss is barely noticed but the cumulative effect is fatal. Standing there at Oxtou made me remember what it is supposed to be like. So even though I was elated to see this thriving community of birds, I had a hollow feeling when I comprehended the utter devastation inflicted on the UK's farmland wildlife in recent decades. Probably the best long-term hope is the much heralded, but alas still mythical, 'greening' of the Common Agricultural Policy. Expansion of the European Union into the former Eastern Block countries makes this a more likely prospect, as the wealthier western European States cannot, or more truthfully do not want to, afford the extra burden to modernise their agricultural industries.

So, if the real hope for our farmland wildlife depends upon the Agriculture and Finance Ministers of the various EU countries, does CAWOS have a positive role to play in turning the current tide of misfortune? I believe the answer is a resounding yes. In fact we already do our bit by producing the *Bird Report*. The information held within succeeding reports paints a picture of long-term trends. We can help provide the ammunition for the Conservation Infantry (RSPB/BTO/Wildlife Trusts etc.) to fire at those with political influence. In truth though we can do a whole lot more, both individually and as a Society, by being more committed to gathering information in a systematic and co-ordinated fashion, or by supporting major initiatives such as the Grey Partridge Recovery Project. Spend a little less time chasing rarities and a little more recording species population levels in your local area. After all it would be a shame if the 'Young Turks' of the 21st century had to chase the length and breadth of the country to 'un-block' a Yellowhammer!

Many of the articles contained within the pages of this issue provide food for thought on a whole range of issues, but none stands out more clearly than the need to balance an ability to identify individual bird species with a clear appreciation of the roles that birds play, and the ecological niches they occupy, within the context of the wider environment. So, many thanks to all the contributors and editorial team for their efforts in producing this thought-provoking edition of the newsletter.

Jeff Clarke

[Note: Copy date for next issue will be 7th March - please be prompt]

County Rarities

BEAN GEESE

Bean Geese in Cheshire are less than annual and usually cause much interest when they do turn up. More so these days with the 'splitting and lumping' fraternity assuring us that the taxonomy of the group is clearly split into two monotypic species, Taiga Bean Goose (*A. fabalis*) and Tundra Bean Goose (*A. serrirostris*). Taiga Bean Geese breed in the Taiga zone from Scandinavia across to eastern Asia and two small, but regular, flocks winter in Norfolk and the Avon Valley. Elsewhere in the country they are very rare indeed. Tundra Bean Geese breed in the Tundra zone, east of the White Sea eastwards to Northern Asia. It occurs in Britain in scattered small flocks, mainly in the east and often accompanies other goose species, Whitefronts and Pink-feet, elsewhere. It is actually the "commoner" of the two species. Both species are dark grey geese with paler breasts and pale-edged dark tertials, orange legs and orange and black bills. Separation on plumage features is unreliable.

Remembering that males are on average larger than females, Taiga Bean Goose is a large goose, somewhat similar in size to Greylag Goose, and much larger than Pink-footed Goose. It is slimmer than Greylag with a longer, thinner neck and a wedge-shaped head and long bill. Tundra Bean Goose is smaller than Taiga Bean, closer to Pink-foot, although it is actually fractionally larger. Its structure is more like Pink-footed Goose, being dumper than Taiga Bean, it has a more rounded head and the bill is deep-based and relatively short. The lower mandible 'bulges' more than in Taiga and it can remind the observer more of a Snow Goose bill, rather than the 'Canada Goose bill' of Taiga. Of course, it takes a lot of practice, good views and weather to get all this fine detail and posture can affect the impression you get. Take your time and with luck you'll do just fine.

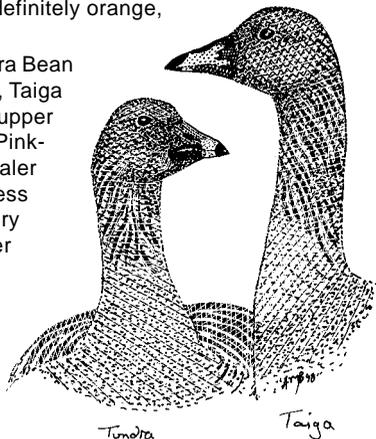
Orange billed you say? Oh yes, both have orange and black bills, and there is a degree of overlap in the patterning, which, although useful, isn't foolproof. Generally, Taiga Bean Goose shows an extensive orange bill with the black restricted to the nail area, the base of the bill and cutting edges, whilst Tundra shows a predominantly black bill with an orange subterminal band. Calls are pointers but unless you're very familiar with grey geese language, not very helpful. Taiga Beans do prefer to graze on pastureland and Tundras on crop fields but stray flocks could turn up anywhere.

Well that's the two sorted out, but how do you tell them from Pink-feet in the first place? Good question, especially when you consider that most birders can't tell what's pink and what's orange in the field. Honestly! How many times has someone in a crowd asked "What colour legs has that warbler got?" and there's a mixed chorus of 'Orange!' 'Pink!'..... 'flesh!' What colour is flesh? Orange can look pink and the reverse is true. Some Pink-feet can actually have orange legs! I remember standing fifty metres from a lone Bean Goose in Norfolk one year, with a small group of birders. Nobody could say what colour legs and feet it had! Pathetic or what?

But, I would say when it's pink it will look pink and when it's definitely orange, it will look orange. All the intermediate colours are tricky.

Anyway, back to Pink-foot. When viewed together, even Tundra Bean should look noticeably larger and longer billed than Pink-foot, Taiga looking even more so. Pink-feet are generally greyer on the upper parts, both Beans are browner. The heads and necks of Pink-feet are darker and more contrasty when compared to their paler greyer backs whereas the same areas on Beans are much less contrasty, looking more uniform. The tertials of Beans are very dark with contrasty pale edges; those of Pink-feet are greyer with less contrasty edges.

In flight, the wings are very much greyer on Pink-feet, especially about the upper forewing, palest on the greater and primary coverts and contrasting with the dark primaries and secondaries. Beans on the other hand have darker forewings, perhaps more like White-fronted Geese, much less contrasty and, given a good view, simple? Maybe



not... but speaking of the latter, immature White-fronts can catch the unwary out. However, they do have pale bases to the bills and no white tertial edges and may show black barring on their underparts. Both Beans can show a small amount of white at the base of their bills, so be warned! In Cheshire, Bean Geese were seen in 1981, 1984, 1988 and 1993 - only four years in the last twenty. A true county rarity, but which 'species'? The old records will have to be looked up to be reassessed, if it is possible. Any future sightings will of course be perfectly described.... won't they?

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

Recent Reports

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

SEPTEMBER

Highlight of the month was some impressive seawatching. A possible **Little Shearwater** flew west past Meols at 3.50pm (10th) and was later reported off Crosby Marina between 5-6pm. If accepted this will be the third county record. More interesting however was the incredible total of 14 **Mediterranean** and three **Sooty Shearwaters** past Hilbre (12th with three Sooties again on 13th). There have been only five accepted county records of Mediterranean Shearwaters (involving seven birds) and records of Sooty Shearwaters in four previous years in the 1990s. There was a large movement of **Leach's Petrels** which included 72 past Hilbre (12th and 35 past next day), five past Leasowe (13th with 15 on 16th) and 15 past New Brighton (12th with 10+ on 16th).

The peak count of **Little Grebes** at Chelford SQs was 16 on 27th. Post-breeding counts of **Great Crested Grebes** included 28 at Chelford SQs (6th), 18 at Fiddler's Ferry (19th) and 49 at Rostherne Mere (12th). Four **Little Egrets** were at Parkgate (from 19th) but birds also visited Burton, Heswall and Inner Marsh Farm. Three **Spoonbills** were on Burton Outer Marsh (6th & 16th) and Inner Marsh Farm (8th). A flock of 260 **Canada Geese** at Fiddler's Ferry was the largest ever count there and more than double the previous record set in Sept 1994. A record 700 Canadas were at Sandbach Flashes (14th) with 650 roosting at Arclid SQ (6th) and 91 at Queen's Park Lake, Crewe had seven **Greylags** and a **Barnacle Goose** for company. Greylag numbers reached 171 at Rostherne Mere (5th). Three **Ruddy Shelducks** visited Frodsham and one was seen on the River Mersey between Fiddler's Ferry & Spike Island (15th).

Ten **Mandarins** were at Raby Mere (18th) with two pairs at Radnor Mere all month, three imms at Rostherne Mere (5th) and a drake at Poynton Pool (3rd). First returning **Wigeon** were at Chelford SQs (6th), Neumann's Flash (3rd) and Richmond Bank (3rd) with 35 at Doddington Pool (26th). **Teal** numbers reached 110 at Chelford SQs (27th), 304 at Fiddler's Ferry (6th), 100+ at Gatewath (3rd), 197 at Sandbach Flashes early in month and a female at Poynton Pool (19th) was an exceptionally early record there. A post-breeding count of 400 **Mallards** at Sandbach Flashes (2nd) was high for the site and Poynton Pool had a Sept record of 103 on 1st. 1700 **Pintails** were at Burton Outer Marsh (6th) and 11 over Sandbach Flashes (2nd) was a high Sept count. Surprisingly there were no Sept records of **Garganey** reported. **Tufted Ducks** peaked at 132 at Chelford SQs on 27th. Fiddler's Ferry had 68 **Shovelers** on 24th while 146 were at Rostherne Mere (13th), 20 at Sandbach Flashes (27th) and one over Poynton Pool (26th) was very early there. Chelford SQs had its first double figure count of **Ruddy Ducks** this year with 15 birds on 6th. A female **Goosander** was at Arclid SQ (6th) with six at Radnor Mere (21st).

Migrant **Marsh Harriers** were at both Fiddler's Ferry and Frodsham Marsh on 13th. An **Osprey** visited Frodsham, while possibly two different birds were at Poynton Pool on 14th and from 21st onwards. Three **Buzzards** were at Fiddler's Ferry (22nd), seven at Rostherne Mere (13th) and at least 24 birds were seen in squares SJ87 and SJ77 on 19th. The last **Hobbies** were at Chelford SQs (24th), Doddington late Sept, Frodsham (20th), Little Budworth (24th) and Sandbach Flashes (30th). Returning **Peregrines** were in evidence with four birds at Fiddler's Ferry. At least eight **Red-legged Partridges** were flushed at Weston (7th) and a **Pheasant** at Poynton Pool (27th) was only the second record there in the last 10 years. 212 **Coot** were at Chelford SQs (12th). **Spotted Crakes** were at Inner Marsh Farm (one or two remained to 19th), Sandbach Flashes (9th-16th) and Wooston Eyes (remaining to 5th).

Little Ringed Plovers lingered at Marbury No1 tank to 11th and at Chelford SQs to 12th. An **Oystercatcher** at Fiddler's Ferry (27th) was only the third Sept record for the site. Fiddler's Ferry had 17 **Ringed Plovers** on 12th where up to 1200 **Lapwings** were seen with 670 at Chelford SQs (13th). Ten **Knots** visited Frodsham with a single at Sandbach Flashes (11th). Good numbers of both **Curlew Sandpipers** and **Little Stints** were at Frodsham with 45 & 50 respectively of each. Curlew Sandpiper sightings included four at Chelford SQs (12th), 10 at Fiddler's Ferry (12th), 18 at Inner Marsh Farm (10th), five at Neumann's Flash (4th-5th) - the first there for several years and up to five at Sandbach Flashes most of the month. Counts of Little Stints were one at Chelford SQs (8th-13th), one at Fiddler's Ferry (12th), nine at Inner Marsh Farm (14th-15th), 13 at Neumann's Flash (18th) and 18 at Sandbach Flashes (12th). A **Sanderling** at Chelford SQs (8th-15th) was an excellent find. Peak counts of **Ruff** included a single at Chelford SQs (13th-15th), 46 at Inner Marsh Farm (3rd), nine at Marbury CP (19th) and 23 at Sandbach Flashes (7th). An early returning **Purple Sandpiper** was at New Brighton (18th). A count of 63 **Snipe** at Marbury No1 tank (21st) was exceptionally high for the site. A WeBS count found 1200 **Black-tailed Godwits** at New Ferry (28th) with one at Chelford SQs (12th). Up to 2000 **Curlews** were at Frodsham while the peak at Fiddler's Ferry was 200. Migrant **Whimbrels** visited Fiddler's Ferry (27th) and Neumann's Flash (19th). A juv **Spotted Redshank** visited Sandbach Flashes (from 29th). **Greenshank** reached 85 at Inner Marsh Farm (9th), a reserve record, with up to six regularly at Witton Limebeds. Two **Green Sandpipers** were at Rostherne Mere (2nd & 13th) with four at both Sandbach Flashes (11th) and Marbury No1 tank (2nd). Single **Wood Sandpipers** visited Frodsham (20th), Inner Marsh Farm (14th) and Sandbach Flashes (13th & 20th).

Three **Pomarine** and two **Long-tailed Skuas** were reported past Hilbre (12th) where 25+ **Arctic Skuas** were seen next day. Elsewhere a Pomarine Skua passed Leasowe (13th) and a sub-adult Long-tailed Skua was at Frodsham ICI tank (19th). An adult **Mediterranean Gull** visited Doddington Mere (10th) with a 1st w at Sandbach Flashes (27th). Maw Green Tip, Crewe held a record 11 **Yellow-legged Gulls** (17th) with seven at Richmond Bank (2nd) including a 1st w *cachinnans* bird (1st-2nd). Other adult Yellow-legged Gulls were at Fiddler's Ferry (12th), Neumann's Flash (roosted on 6th) and Parkgate (from 28th). An adult **Glaucous Gull** was at Richmond Bank (2nd-3rd). A **Gull-billed Tern** was reported north past Hilbre at 1pm (20th). A sprinkling of **Black Terns** included eight at Budworth Mere (5th), two at Doddington Mere (1st, 4th & 10th), 11 at Frodsham, single at Inner Marsh Farm (14th-15th), two at Rostherne Mere (2nd) and one or two daily at Watch Lane Flash, Sandbach (12th-21st). A flock of 40 **Collared Doves** was in fields by River Mersey at Fiddler's Ferry (22nd). A **Long-eared Owl** was hunting along by the River Mersey (1st) and a **Little Owl** calling at Poynton Pool (11th) was unusual there. A late **Cuckoo** was at Frodsham (20th). Last dates for **Swifts** were Poynton Pool (11th) - the latest ever there, Rostherne Mere (6th) and Sandbach Flashes (30th). Frodsham No6 tank and Fiddler's Ferry both had "migrant" **Great Spotted Woodpeckers**.



Sand Martins were still in nest holes at Fiddler's Ferry (13th) with others at Chelford SQs (19th), Rostherne Mere (13th) and Sandbach Flashes (20th). Up to 1000 **Swallows** were at Fiddler's Ferry with 100+ at Hazelbadge, Poynton (6th) and 300+ at Watch Lane Flash, Sandbach (2nd). There were 100+ **House Martins** at Hazelbadge, Poynton (6th) and 400+ at Watch Lane Flash, Sandbach (2nd), whilst those at Poynton Pool (27th) and Rostherne Mere (20th) were the last recorded for those sites, though not the latest for the county. **Meadow Pipit** passage included 30 over Arclid SQ (21st), 300 at Frodsham, 35+ over Poynton Pool (26th) and 70+ over Poynton next day. A **Richard's Pipit** was at North Wirral Country Park, Meols (26th). Two **Yellow Wagtails** remained at Gatewath to 4th and a large count of 50 **White Wagtails** was reported at Arclid SQ

(21st). Two **Wheatears** were still at Fiddler's Ferry (29th) and a **Stonechat** visited Frodsham. A female **Redstart** was at Rostherne Mere (3rd) where 27 **Mistle Thrushes** had gathered (6th). A **Cetti's Warbler** was trapped at Woolston Eyes (26th) and will be the third county record following birds at Frodsham (trapped on 20th Apr 1984) and Rostherne Mere (8th-9th May 1989). The last **Willow Warblers** were at Chelford SQs (12th) and Rostherne Mere (15th). The last site also had a **Garden Warbler** to 13th. Six **Spotted Flycatchers** passed through Frodsham, a late bird at Sandbach Flashes (20th) was quickly followed by a **Pied Flycatcher** at the latter site (22nd). At least five **Jays** passed through Frodsham and two at Fiddler's Ferry (6th) were equally unusual. Four **Ravens** were at Rostherne (13th) with one over Little Budworth (28th). Maw Green Tip, Crewe had c150 **Goldfinches** on 5th. A possible **Serin** was reported at Frodsham No4 tank (23rd & 26th) but could not be confirmed.

OCTOBER

A **Little Grebe** at Poynton Pool (23rd) arrived at a time of very high water levels there. Single **Black-necked Grebes** were at Frodsham mid-month and at Rostherne Mere (4th). Small numbers of **Leach's Petrels** were seen from mid-month including two at Hilbre (17th) followed by three on 26th and 10 past New Brighton (29th) with a single **Storm Petrel** there (28th). 225 **Cormorants** at Rostherne Mere (30th) was a new Oct record there. A **Bittern** was reported at Budworth Mere (18th) and one was seen irregularly at Rostherne Mere (from 11th). Four **Little Egrets** remained at Parkgate (to 6th) with three remaining for rest of month. The **Lesser Flamingo** at Frodsham Score was seen again (7th). **Pink-footed Goose** passage included 220 over Rostherne Mere (25th), 23 over Tatton (4th) with 40 over there on 8th and 180 over Woolston (17th). 39 **Greylags** at Capesthorpe (25th) was a high count there. A dark-bellied **Brent Goose** was on the Mersey at Spike Island (7th). Two **Ruddy Shelducks** were at Frodsham Score (30th), where up to 2300 **Shelducks** were seen. A Ruddy Shelduck/Shelduck hybrid at No6 tank (17th & 23rd) confused some observers.

Wigeon counts included 1000 at Frodsham Score, 126 at Sandbach Flashes (4th), a male at Poynton Pool (11th-12th) where they are very scarce and 88 at Chelford SQs (25th). Up to 11 **Adwallers** were at Budworth Mere with a male at Poynton Pool (23rd) during a period of very high water levels there and six at Tatton (4th). Peak counts of **Teal** included 133 at Chelford SQs (11th), 400 at Fiddler's Ferry (18th), 248 at Marbury No1 tank (11th), two at Poynton (11th) and 102 at Rostherne Mere (24th) - a very low maximum there. A drake **Green-winged Teal** at Sandbach Flashes (14th-16th) was the first there for over ten years. **Shoveler** counts included 11 at Doddington Pool (2nd), 86 at Fiddler's Ferry (3rd), 50+ at Neumann's Flash (1st) - a very high count there and 98 at Rostherne Mere (4th). A pair of **Red-crested Pochards** arrived at Astbury SQ (6th) with a Pochard influx and remained into Nov. **Pochards** returned to Poynton Pool (10th) while 56 were at Chelford SQs (25th). An interesting record of 15 **Tufted Ducks** on River Mersey near Rixton (18th) was unusual and 127 was the monthly maximum at Chelford SQs (11th). Two **Scaups** visited Frodsham and a female was at Astbury SQ from 9th. **Goldeneyes** returned to Budworth Mere (27th), Chelford SQs (18th) with the summering bird still present there and Rostherne Mere (24th). A **Red-breasted Merganser** was a good inland find at Hurlleston Resr (7th). 51 **Ruddy Ducks** were at Chelford SQs (11th) with 23 at Melchett Mere (4th).

A **Hen Harrier** was at Frodsham (3rd). Two days later a **Goshawk** was seen at Marbury CP with a male reported over Tatton (27th). **Buzzards** were seen at several sites including two at Fiddler's Ferry (1st & 10th), Marbury CP (22nd), a record five at Sandbach Flashes (3rd), five regularly at Swettenham, six at Rostherne Mere (17th) and 14 at Tatton (3rd). A **Rough-legged Buzzard** at Frodsham (18th) was part of a national influx this autumn. The **Osprey** remained in the Poynton Pool area to 4th and up to four **Kestrels** were regularly seen at Fiddler's Ferry. A **Red-legged Partridge** was at Frodsham mid-month with five near Capesthorpe (25th). **Water Rails** were at Budworth Mere (from 18th), Fiddler's Ferry (one or two from 3rd), up to three at Radnor Mere, up to eight at Sandbach Flashes and one at Woolston. A **Little Crake** was reported calling for five mins at Fiddler's Ferry (3rd). **Golden Plovers** peaked at 132 at Fiddler's Ferry and 250 at Neumann's Flash. 2000 **Lapwings** were at Fiddler's Ferry (11th) with 500 at Woodford Airfield (11th). 50 **Knots** visited Frodsham. Up to 20 **Little Stints** were at Frodsham with Burton (one on 15th), Neumann's Flash (two on 3rd, one on 7th) and Sandbach Flashes (one on 15th). A late **Temminck's Stint** was at Sandbach Flashes (7th) for 50 mins before flying off. If accepted it will

be the first there since 1994. Up to four **Curlew Sandpipers** lingered at Frodsham where 6000 **Dunlins** were seen (7th). Up to 16 **Ruff** commuted between Budworth Mere and Neumann's Flash with three at Fiddler's Ferry (1st). Two returning **Jack Snipe** at Fiddler's Ferry (from 4th) and four **Bar-tailed Godwits** visited Frodsham (7th). The juv **Spotted Redshank** remained at Sandbach Flashes (to 2nd) with small numbers at Parkgate all month. A **Greenshank** was at Marbury No1 tank (3rd) and up to eight were seen daily at Parkgate. A **Green Sandpiper** was at Fiddler's Ferry (4th) with two at both Marbury No1 tank (31st) and Rostherne Mere (31st). A late **Common Sandpiper** was at Fiddler's Ferry (18th & 24th).

A juv **Pomarine Skua** was in mouth of River Mersey (25th) followed by one briefly early morning at West Kirby Marine Lake (31st). An **Arctic Skua** flew west over Woolston Eyes (17th). Adult **Mediterranean Gulls** roosted at Hurleston Resr (7th) and Rostherne Mere (30th) with others at Birkenhead (18th) and Wallasey (25th). Single **Yellow-legged Gulls** were at Neumann's Flash (2nd-3rd) and Parkgate (all month and seen to drown a Black-headed Gull on 19th). An adult **Iceland Gull** flew west over Woolston Eyes (18th). The last dates for **Swallows** included Chelford SQs (18th), Marbury No1 tank (9th), Middlewich Lime Beds (4th), Poynton Pool (3rd), Rostherne Mere (24th), Sandbach Flashes (4th) and Tatton (9th). **House Martins** were still feeding young in nests at Haslington (1st) with others at Chelford SQs (11th) and Melchett Mere (17th). 50 **Meadow Pipits** at Fiddler's Ferry (31st) was the monthly maximum there and a late **Yellow Wagtail** was at Catchpenny Pool (3rd). 48 **Pied Wagtails** fed on a recently seeded area at Tatton (7th) with 50 at Fiddler's Ferry (31st). A female **Stonechat** was at Fiddler's Ferry (4th) and a late **Ring Ouzel** was at Woolston (17th). The first **Fieldfares** of the winter at Rostherne Mere arrived on 31st. **Redwings** returned to Forge Bed (12th), Poynton Pool (11th), Rostherne Mere (4th) and Tatton (7th). Up to 36 **Mistle Thrushes** were at Fiddler's Ferry.

The **Cetti's Warbler** was retrapped at Woolston Eyes (18th) where a late **Grasshopper Warbler** was also trapped (2nd). Single **Reed Warblers** lingered at Rostherne Mere (4th) and Watch Lane Flash, Sandbach (4th) was the latest ever for the Flashes. A female **Blackcap** was seen eating



honeysuckle berries in a Knutsford garden (31st). A **Yellow-browed Warbler** was trapped at Woolston Eyes No4 bed (3rd). **Chiffchaffs** were at Chelford SQs (3rd), Sandbach Flashes (4th), Swan Close, Poynton (singing bird on 11th) and Woolston Eyes (24th). A **Willow Warbler** at Marbury No1 tank (18th) was the latest ever for that area and another at Poynton Pool (3rd) was the latest ever there. 30+ **Long-tailed Tits** in a small, isolated wood by River Mersey near Rixton (18th) was an interesting count. A **Great Grey Shrike** at Woolston (10th) was part of a large national influx of this species. Single **Jays** were seen on three dates at Fiddler's Ferry. 350 **Jackdaws** roosted at Wigwam Wood, Poynton (3rd) and a single **Brambling** flew over Sandbach Flashes (4th), nearby 45 **Linnets** were at Maw Green Tip, Crewe (4th).

NOVEMBER

An adult female **Spoonbill** of the Mauritanian race was at Burton (7th & 21st). The bird was identified by its smaller size (than Eurasian Spoonbill), all black bill and white plastic rings! The bird originally arrived exhausted on a ship off Senegal in March this year (see page 17 for the full story).

A **Great Northern Diver** was reported at Winterley Pool (21st-c25th) by a non-birder and nearby 34 **Great Crested Grebes** at Watch Lane Flash (22nd) was a high count there. A **Slavonian Grebe** was reported at Budworth Mere (4th). Up to 40 **Cormorants** were at both Budworth Mere and Fiddler's Ferry with a Nov record of 276 at Rostherne Mere (7th). Three **Shags** visited West Kirby Marine Lake (3rd). A **Bittern** was seen irregularly at Rostherne Mere all month and up to five **Little Egrets** commuted between Burton and Parkgate. Up to 30 **Mute Swans** were at Burton, Budworth Mere, Frodsham and Woolston. Up to 30 **Bewick's Swans** were in the Burton area with nine east over Rostherne Mere (1st). A **Whooper Swan** visited Woolston while two were at both Chelford SQs (1st) and Frodsham (1st). Several large counts of **Pink-footed Geese** were seen

including 65 over Frodsham (7th), 1000 over Great Sankey, Warrington (29th), 200 over Poynton (4th) with a record c530 over on 15th, 230 over Poynton Pool (29th) and small numbers on four dates at Rostherne Mere with max of 200 on 14th. 24 **Greylags** and a feral **Snow Goose** were present at Budworth Mere (24th & 29th). A flock of c800 **Canada Geese** at Sandbach Flashes (22nd) was a new site record and up to 27 **Shelducks** were also there.

Wigeon reached 50 at Budworth Mere, 177 at Chelford SQs (15th), 60+ at Radnor Mere and 383 at Sandbach Flashes. Five **Gadwalls** were at Fiddler's Ferry (29th) with 21 at Budworth Mere (29th). **Teal** peaked at 101 at Chelford SQs, 150 at Fiddler's Ferry, c100 on Marbury No1 tank and 316 at Sandbach Flashes. A drake **Green-winged Teal** was at Inner Marsh Farm (12th-24th) then on the Mersey at Stanlow (27th) with 2000 Teal before moving to Frodsham No6 tank (29th-30th). 134 **Mallards** at Poynton Pool (16th) was a high count there. **Pintails** numbered 4000 at Burton (8th) while singles at Melchett Mere (17th) and Radnor Mere were good records there, with up to 13 at Sandbach Flashes. The pair of **Red-crested Pochards** remained at Astbury SQ all month. Single **Scaup** were at Astbury SQ all month, Radnor Mere (6th), Rostherne Mere (8th) and West Kirby Marine Lake (4th-7th). A **Long-tailed Duck** was at West Kirby Marine Lake (3rd-8th at least). A drake **Smew** was at Inner Marsh Farm (from 11th). **Goosander** sightings included 66 at Lamaload, seven at Oulton Millpool (23rd), male over Poynton Pool (22nd), 12 Radnor Mere, singles at Rostherne Mere on two dates and two at Weaver Bend late in month. 20 **Red-breasted Mergansers** at West Kirby Marine Lake (4th).

Two **Hen Harriers** were at Frodsham (1st) including a wing-tagged bird with two regularly at Parkgate. A **Rough-legged Buzzard** was reported over the M56 (26th). Several sites had **Peregrines** including Birkenhead (two), Burton (one+), Fiddler's Ferry (four), Frodsham (two), Sandbach Flashes (two), Rostherne Mere (two), Woolston (two). Released **Red-legged Partridges**

were seen several times at Frodsham and **Water Rails** were at Fiddler's Ferry (six on 8th), Inner Marsh Farm (two) and Woolston (three). An **Oystercatcher** at Chelford SQs (from 23rd) was unusual for the time of year there and 1000 **Golden Plovers** at Fiddler's Ferry (7th-8th) was a site record. 3-4000 **Lapwings** were at Burton, Fiddler's Ferry and Frodsham with 820 at Sandbach Flashes and 900 at Woodford airfield. A **Knot** was at Fiddler's Ferry (8th) while two **Little Stints** remained at Burton (8th & 12th) before one at Inner Marsh Farm (26th). A **Purple Sandpiper** was at West Kirby old swimming baths (4th) with 12 at Hilbre (14th). 10,000 **Dunlin** were at Frodsham (7th) and a bird at Fiddler's Ferry (14th)

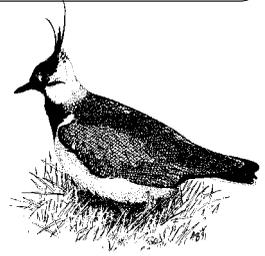


was still in full summer plumage. Single **Jack Snipe** were at Parkgate and Woolston, with two at Fiddler's Ferry. Double figure **Snipe** counts included 48 at Chelford SQs (28th), 11 at Fiddler's Ferry (1st), 15 at Marbury No1 tank, 110 at Sandbach Flashes and 49 at Tatton (28th). A colour ringed **Black-tailed Godwit** was at Sandbach Flashes (14th-29th) with 30 at Parkgate (3rd). Three **Bar-tailed Godwits** at Frodsham and **Curlew** numbers reached 266 at Fiddler's Ferry (28th). Single **Green Sandpipers** were at Anderton (17th), Birkin Brook (5th) and Rostherne Mere (4th & 8th).

Two adult **Mediterranean Gulls** were at New Ferry (14th) and 1130 **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** roosted at Chelford (22nd). Adult **Glaucous Gulls** were at Chelford SQs (22nd), Maw Green Tip, Crewe (28th) with a different bird next day and New Ferry (14th). A pair of **Collared Doves** were seen copulating at Sandbach Heath (22nd). A **Short-eared Owl** at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (10th) was an excellent local record. A **Green Woodpecker** visited Crewe Green churchyard (23rd) and two **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** were at Frodsham with one at Fiddler's Ferry. A **Shorelark** was briefly at Heswall (5th) and a small passage of **Meadow Pipits** was noted over Poynton (1st). Up to seven **Water Pipits** were reported in the Burton/Neston/Parkgate area from 5th. Forty **Pied Wagtails** were at Railway Flash (29th) and 30+ over Inner Marsh Farm (8th) seen just before dusk were heading towards a roost site. The female **Stonechat** was seen again at Fiddler's Ferry (29th) and a partial albino **Blackbird** was at Poynton Pool next day. The first **Fieldfares** of the winter at Fiddler's Ferry (3rd) and Forge Bed (9th) arrived late, elsewhere 1200

The View from the Farmyard

A hole at the bottom of the bird feeder is an open invitation to most garden birds, but especially to Nuthatches, the master hit-and-run experts. Two birds worked hard for almost two hours taking one nut after another into the oaks that once were part of one of the radiating avenues on Toft Park, but now form the north boundary of my garden. Each nut is pressed into a small nook or hole in the bark of the trees. These two birds were hell bent on emptying the feeder by dusk, and my feeders hold 2kgs each. After that onslaught I botched a repair and refilled the feeder tube. Next morning when I stopped off at home for my breakfast, a squirrel was already busy undoing my repair. By



lunchtime the Nuthatch shuttle was in full swing once more and the tube was a quarter empty. Much to the annoyance of the Nuthatches, a Magpie and a Jackdaw had found that the oak bark was bristling with peanuts, and were feasting on the cache. The extreme agitation of the Nuthatches boiled over into raw aggression. After a period of flying from bough to trunk and back again, direct physical contact drove the thieves off. When the shuttle once again resumed, an attempt to find alternative sites for the hoard led to nuts being pushed into the mortar of the house, and below the berberis was good for one or two. But then one bird flipped, pulling nuts from the hole and lodging them in the mesh at the top of the feeder. This it repeated many times. Its companion stopped and watched for a while, then took them one at a time to the more traditional site on the oak. Eventually what answers for normality returned to my garden, and no repetition of the ludicrous antics of that day have been seen since.

Finch flocks this year have left little to write about, as indeed has been the case for the last 10 years or so. That was the first impression that came to mind when I was trying to decide what I could write about finches. The great days when huge flocks gleaned the stubble fields for spilled grain and weed-seeds have passed. Whether they will return is up to how the land is managed in the future. I considered avoiding writing about this, as so often I find myself dwelling upon the negative aspects of modern agriculture. When the truth is that despite the awful declines of the past 25 years, I still enjoy my life in the countryside and regularly encounter many forms of wildlife on a daily basis. All is not lost yet. When the threshing engines toured the farms reducing the thatch-topped stacks to sacks of golden grain and its by-products, the writers of the time only made passing comment on the finches, so common were they that they caught little of people's attention. Perhaps it is indicative of human stupidity that we value most that which is rare. The last Goldfinch will attract the loudest gasp of wonder at its magnificent rarity, when in reality you need to see a flock of hundreds to get the full glory. Today our responsibility is to try to increase what we have, and record what trends are obvious to us now, so that in the future people will look at a wider picture. What seems a very poor time today, may be viewed as the beginning of the end, or alternatively the turning point by the reader at the end of the next century.

Early December we felt the first real bite of winter, with sub-zero temperatures on several nights of the first week. Touring the farm it was hard to find any nuts or berries, and the bushes in my garden were also bare. When the bushes have been stripped by the resident Blackbird and visiting Redwings, birds start to turn to alternative sources of food. Their tolerance of others is also much greater, expending energy in driving off competitors is a greater risk to take than a little honest competition for food. The hedge which we planted about 12 years ago is now becoming attractive to birds. Walking down the side of it one frosty morning I encountered seven Blackbirds feeding in the leaf litter. Dunnocks closely accompanied two of the Blackbirds, for they were taking advantage of the Blackbirds' leaf moving skills, hopping about in the excavations and snapping up that which the Blackbirds had overlooked. No aggression was apparent between the birds. Dunnocks are similarly accepted by Robins. A Robin will drive off another Robin but ignore a Dunnock almost totally. The House Sparrows that nest in the farmyard returned to the easier pickings to be found around the buildings during the hard weather. Cattle are messy eaters; food that falls from the troughs is soon attracting either the Sparrows or the Collared Doves. At least none is left to attract rats and mice. On Sunday 6th December I woke early and went for a walk. It was an incredibly

beautiful world outside. The overnight temperature had been down to minus 7°C and everywhere was white with frost. As I opened the porch door I noticed movement around my car. The two offside wheels and their arches were covered in Long-tailed Tits. They hung upside-down from the wheel arches, clung to the tyre tread, examined the holes in the hubcap and disappeared up into the engine compartment. What they had found I don't know, as far as I could see there was no food to be had. An alternative answer may be that they regularly roost in the car. If they do they went for a ride the night before, or perhaps there was some residual heat from the previous night's excursion which, given the temperature, may well have been attractive to so small a bird. I have previously written about a Woodcock feeding with the cows in a trough, and about a Tawny Owl that spent a day in the passage outside the milking parlour. Both these were during hard winter weather. I am sure everyone has tales of unusual bird behaviour during such conditions, the harshness of the time drives them to try new things. This very idea is thought to be one of the driving forces behind evolution. Basically hardship can be a good thing as it provides the impetus for developing diversity. All things being variable in different places, creates different approaches to differing problems, and in the fullness of time evolves survivors.

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

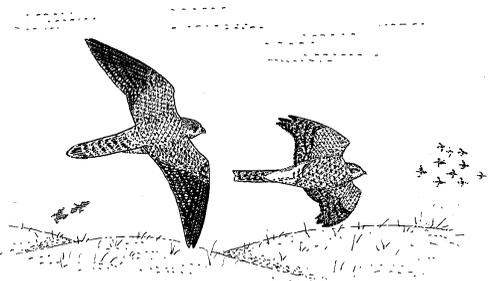
Peter's comments as ever strike a chord and his column this month prompted the idea for this issue's editorial. Thanks for the inspiration. Eds.

Jizz and all that Jazz

VELOCIRAPTORS

I have chosen four birds of prey for the last in this present series looking at aids to identification other than plumage and voice. The title is meant to suggest that we often first see these birds as they are fast flying away, which can raise doubts regarding identification. Unlike the previous articles, the four chosen species come from two families rather than one. The Accipiter family is represented by the Sparrowhawk and the Goshawk in this country. These are often contrasted with the Goshawk frequently, and most inaccurately, being described as a larger version of the Sparrowhawk. Hence the number of incorrect records submitted for Goshawk from enthusiastic new listers! The Goshawk is likely to remain a rare bird. It is also very secretive despite its size in its favoured areas outside the breeding season. We will therefore look at the Sparrowhawk together with three members of the *Falco* family. Some nine species of falcon have been recorded in the UK. Of the six we will not consider, five are rare vagrants, whilst the Hobby, though increasing in numbers, is only a summer visitor and again is still relatively rare. The three falcons we will look at are the Kestrel, Merlin and Peregrine. Because of 'loose' habitat preferences, the Sparrowhawk and the Kestrel will be dealt with as one pair and the Merlin and Peregrine as a second. All four species can remain perched on favourite lookouts for long periods, but they are often difficult to locate unless seen flying in. It is therefore in flight that we are most likely to need clues to identification.

Looking first at the profile of the Sparrowhawk and Kestrel, from below it is often said that Sparrowhawks have short, blunt wings and Kestrels by contrast have long pointed wings. This, like most superficial generalisations, can be misleading. Both species soar high and size at a distance is another notoriously deceptive factor. Male Sparrowhawks have slightly less rounded wings than females which are of course much larger. Indeed, some male Sparrowhawks can appear very similar to some Kestrels when soaring, but always look front heavy. Having identified a prey quarry Sparrowhawks sometimes close up their primary feathers in a steep downward glide which makes the wings appear more pointed. Perhaps a more useful indicator from below is that the Sparrowhawk shows a rather more prominent carpal joint on the leading edge of the wing with the head seemingly more



recessed. The Kestrel is of course best known for its ability to hover into the wind. It does this without flapping its wings or by using rapid shallow wing beats to hold its position with tail fanned, body angled and head held motionless. Often this is taken as a clincher in separating the two species. The tail profile from below is another very useful identification point. On the Sparrowhawk the undertail bars can be seen in good light at 'close' range. Also look when the tail is unfanned for it being narrower towards the body broadening slightly to end in a square tip. The Kestrel's tail when unfanned has no such tapering and is quite round ended.

The flight pattern of Sparrowhawks includes soaring on flat wings, held slightly forward, often in a circular glide interspersed with 3-4 wing beats. Frequently however our first sighting of a Sparrowhawk is as it makes a mad dash along a hedgerow, or in my garden down the stream, in an attempt to frighten and catch a small bird. Its ability to switch from side to side of a hedge very quickly is well known and I remember my father-in-law telling me how his bobble-hat was snatched from his head by a Sparrowhawk coming over from the other side of a high hedge. By contrast, in deliberate flight, the Kestrel has fast and very shallow wing beats with occasional glides and twists although it can also chase quite quickly on occasions. At rest both species can appear hunched up with no neck but often the Sparrowhawk sits in a more upright posture whilst the Kestrel sits at more of an angle. Perhaps too the head profile from the side shows a slightly flatter crown on the Sparrowhawk than the Kestrel.

The substantial size difference between our smallest falcon, the Merlin, and our largest regularly seen falcon, the Peregrine, should be sufficient to immediately separate them. Should be - but often isn't when a bird is seen at a distance and is hunting. The Merlin is Europe's smallest bird of prey and has no particularly distinctive markings. The flight silhouette is that of a typical falcon with short, pointed wings which are sharply angled back. It can however, at times be confused with the Kestrel and has even been known to hover! The tail is medium to long in comparison with the overall size of the bird and, most importantly, it has a noticeably square end. The flight nearly always appears fast, with a flicking wing beat. Usually this is low over the ground and when prey has been singled out there is an immediate increase in speed, with the victim's every twist and turn being followed, often for a long time. The wing beats are then powerful. With the males being about the same size as a Mistle Thrush there is another similarity with that species. When the chasing Merlin nears its prey the wings are often intermittently held closed to the body, possibly as camouflage. Females are again larger and can be the same size as a Kestrel. At rest, often on a favourite hunting post, Merlins appear small and upright and females appear 'big headed' with relatively large eyes. The tail tip only just extends past the wing tips, whereas in the Kestrel there is plenty of tail exposed.

Sadly there still appears to be a decline in the number of Merlins which contrasts with a welcome increase in Peregrine numbers. Few people will not now be reasonably familiar with the Peregrine's classic falcon shape. This stocky, barrel-chested bird is often likened to an anchor shape in flight from below with the wing length being equal to that of the tail. The pointed wings for high speed flight can sometimes appear more blunted at height. Viewed from the side as a Peregrine cruises by the deep chest gives rise to a cigar-shaped profile. The wing beats then are quite shallow with only the tips appearing to be working. There are often interspersed glides. Once prey, such as a feeding wader, has been selected the flight pattern changes into overdrive. The wing beats become faster and deeper. Only if you have witnessed this change of pace, say over Parkgate marsh, can the sheer rate of acceleration be appreciated. The chase is often not as long as with the Merlin and particularly so with younger, inexperienced birds. Even so Peregrines can easily be mistaken for Merlins, especially at long range when their silhouettes can look remarkably similar. Hunting from high in the air is another matter. The medium length tail can be seen to be slightly tapered to a rounded tip as the bird soars on updraughts with stiff wings held slightly above the horizontal. Most people will be familiar with the stoop on almost closed wings. Prey species undoubtedly know little of the impending death as they are struck at 100 - 125 mph! At rest the Peregrine often sits hunched and apparently motionless from some high vantage point. The moustachial stripe can often be easily seen.

Richard Gabb, 72 Chester Road, Poynton, Cheshire, SK12 1HA Tel: 01625 262946

Note: As ever, supplementary comment, whether kind or critical, would be most welcome. I would also like to receive species suggestions for future 'Jizz and All That Jazz' features.

Notes & Letters

FRODSHAM MARSH...OF COURSE

The 'race' goes on. Some race! The old fable of the Hare and the Tortoise keeps coming to mind as that veteran of the marsh, Bill Morton creeps ahead as the year draws to an end. All credit to him. His unrelenting enthusiasm has often spurred Richard Gabb and myself on when a wet and windy day has threatened to see us off. Other stalwarts including Paul Miller and Chris Done have also worked hard to make sure our year list had its best chance. So, what have we seen, if anything? I don't want to just reel off a list of birds, what's the point? Perhaps a few of the memorable moments would be more interesting reading.

The first, an early year speciality, Whooper Swan, fell on 11th January when a flock of five, one with a yellow neck collar, from Iceland, fed in the fields by the Bend. As Richard and I watched them, they took off, disappearing out over the Mersey. Would the other 'contestants' see them? No chance, they'd gone forever...or so we thought! Who'd have thought that on one balmy June evening, three



Tree Creeper
- a local patch first?

Whoopers would be mingling with the Mutes on the Bend! Those trailing in the swan department had the biggest grins ever seen on the Marsh..... Then there was a heated debate over the exact boundary of the recording area. A copse at the western end of the marsh produced the first Tree Creeper ever recorded. It remained for a few weeks in January/February and was actually twitched by visiting birders. The copse was quite rightly admitted officially to 'Frodsham Marsh' and the Tree Creeper gave us an excellent start to the year. An ace rarity but very common elsewhere. Listing's all relative isn't it?

Difficult species continued to fall throughout January; Redpoll, Siskin, Bullfinch, Twite and Jack Snipe, leaving us on 83 by the end of the month. February dawned very coldly; overcast, murky and in the south-easterly airflow, a few flakes of snow. The weather was like water off five ducks' backs. There were birds to see! The Smew and Goosanders on the Bend remained, Raven and Buzzard sightings were regular and Twite numbers on No4 continued to rise, at least five mixed with the Linnet flocks. A likely patch of phragmites and some minor gardening attracted a Water Rail, a species which must be a lot commoner than its written status would have us believe.

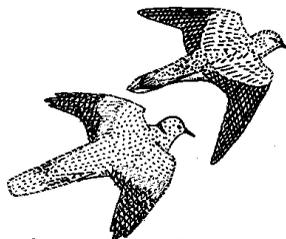
It's amazing really when you concentrate so hard on one particular patch, just exactly what you notice in the local populations of birds. Despite their apparent residency in winter, an exchange is constantly being made between different sites. Our regular walk over No4 found a roost of six Short-eared Owls on 7th February. They hadn't been there a few days before and were not seen again. Minor duck and wader movements begin at this time of year and after mild air dumped Saharan sand on the country on 14th/15th February, the first Oystercatchers appeared on the Marsh, a couple of pairs and a flock of 30 on the score. Even better were the three Pink-feet that Richard noticed on the mud banks. Billy and Chris had already sneaked them on to their lists, so these were grip-backs! There was no competitive element at this stage, just friendly birding....honest! What would it be like in the last month of the year?!

Now then, it hadn't been decided between us whether lone visits by any one of us, when the others couldn't be there, was cricket. You get the picture, true English chivalry, shaking hands and playing football across the lines on Christmas Day etc. So when I spent 1st March on the marsh.... on my own, bottom lips quivered and teddies were taken home.... especially when the tally went up by three, Black-tailed Godwit, Little Stint and Mediterranean Gull. To be fair, I did walk all day and saw relatively nothing until the last ten minutes, as I was leaving, when the Mediterranean Gull flew over the Little Stints. Some reward was only fair...wasn't it? They'd be common late in the year anyway. What was all the fuss about?

Boundaries continued to be challenged but 18 Bewick's Swans on Hale Marsh, visible from No4 were definitely out, Billy was adamant. "Let's see what happens by 31st December" was his advice.... This brought another rule into question. If you were doing a year list on a patch, did you count birds seen outside the boundaries but seen from within them, or could you count birds seen inside the boundaries, from outside. The latter seemed to be agreed on although some flexibility was adopted with the midway point of the Mersey. Red and white marker posts straight up the middle would help.

The logbook next to No5 was of enormous importance. It was an up to the day record of what was about and it often determined which direction we headed off in. On 28th March the first Wheatears, White Wagtails and Little Ringed Plovers arrived from the south. Not surprising really as my pocket thermometer showed 22°C in the sun! Were we in for a hot summer? We hoped so. (No sniggers at this point, please!)

Northerly winds dropped temperatures once more in April and snow on the Welsh mountains gave Frodsham an eerie gloom as a leaden sky threatened the intrepids. More migrants struggled against the odds and a small summer plumage adult Mediterranean Gull took up residence in the Black-headed Gull colony. The others were delighted. (See I told you earlier didn't I?) The topsyturvy weather continued through the month with heavy snow on the 13th and 14th and then warm sunshine over the next two days. On the 20th, the first Corn Bunting returned and three more new birds brought me to the first milestone, 100 species for the year. A totally albino Common Gull on No6 caused some excitement initially as it looked as if it should be rare. Rumours of an Ivory Gull actually made it on to the Birdlines! After a bright sunny start on the 23rd it rained all afternoon. I arrived at lunchtime to find the air over No6 alive with all three species of hirundines and over 40 Swifts, a sight I'll remember for a long time. The event highlighted the unpredictability of birding and underlined the importance of slogging away, no matter how unpromising the weather conditions. April ended with a high tide watch on the 26th. As I walked around the back of No4 tank, a Cuckoo slipped past me and a flock of Whimbrels, uttering their hauntingly beautiful calls, came off the score. As Billy and Richard arrived shortly afterwards, I could only grin broadly saying, "You should have been here five minutes ago". They both feigned mock outrage (I think it was mock anyway!) and we carried on birding. Billy's shout of "Jay!" livened things up even more as a lone bird floated east past us down the bank. It was to be unusually common later in the year however. Normally this member of the Corvid family is a rarity here.



Collared or Turtle -
both were as rare!

One of Richard's birds he struggled with was Collared Dove. Billy had scored early on and I managed a lone bird at Spring Farm shortly after dawn on 2nd May. "Don't worry Rick, the fields will be full of them in August when the young are about and the cereal crops cut", I promised him. They were to be as common as flying pigs! It became a pilgrimage. We had to arrive by way of Spring Farm and we had to leave by way of Spring Farm. I even suspect he asked if they did 'Bed and Breakfast!' He even got his car covered in mud in his attempts to see one. (A very rare event at Frodsham as Rick only drove on dry days!) Finally, on 6th September, a lone Collared Dove obliged us. The excitement was so great that I had to check that it wasn't a Passenger Pigeon....

Good birds continued to be found. A male Ring Ouzel on No5, a Redstart by the log, Spotted Flycatchers on a hot sunny afternoon (23°C) in mid-May and the bird of the spring, a Temminck's Stint on No6. This last mentioned was expertly found by Dave Tilsley and stayed for a few days. I'd forgotten just how tiny stints can appear! On the day we saw it, a Little Gull appeared on No5, quite a bonus really as this species would be very rare during the year. It was lovely idling away the time sitting in the sun on the bank, watching Ruff and Black-tailed Godwits. Next day the weather was freezing! A calling Quail arrived and defied any attempt to see it, departing as quickly as it had arrived, but an early morning dash on 29th May for a Spoonbill proved successful. Rumours have it that it was a ship-assisted bird from off Senegal, of the race *P.I. balsaci*. It was nice anyway.

Sometimes, it is an event that passes by almost unnoticed that is actually the most important in terms of county birding. A pair of Great Black-backed Gulls had been hanging around the Black-headed Gull colony on No6, all spring, much to the consternation of the smaller species. They mobbed noisily whenever they got the chance. On the day the Temminck's arrived, it appeared that the female Greater was sitting on a nest. Very nice....but it was an inland nest. "How unusual", I thought. Then the penny dropped, "Unusual my....., they didn't breed anywhere in Cheshire, never mind inland!" A quick flick through past records and a discussion with Steve Barber confirmed that this was indeed the first breeding attempt for the county. A rare event indeed. In late June, the adults were watched feeding at least two chicks but very sadly all had disappeared when we called on 5th July. A mystery with no obvious explanation.



GT Bk-b Gulls - 1st County breeding attempt.

June was the wettest on record and the stalwarts kept dodging the rain. A Turtle Dove, the first for many years, was found feeding on the track at the top end of No6 whilst Billy was on holiday in the Canaries. Richard and I muttered something like "That'll teach him to leave the patch", but couldn't help smiling with childish enthusiasm. Our glee was short-lived, however, as it flew across in front of my car a few days later when Billy was sitting next to me. Talk about jam!

Now, at this point in time, late summer, early autumn, late August to be exact, we'd been at it for eight months. We'd not been as often in the last six weeks

and I must admit we'd run out of a little steam. My workload was horrendous, in my defence, and I worked a lot of weekends. "Birding doesn't pay bills", I remember saying. How true, but perhaps a weak excuse for a local patcher. Paul Miller and Chris Done continued to operate furtively, producing the surprises when necessary and raising expectations of a national rarity being found in autumn. Between the five of us, we continued to cover the area.

Fired up by a week on the Scillies in September, my enthusiasm somewhat increased to normal levels, I called in on the morning of 20th September. Thick mist blanketed the area and birding was frustrating. It did begin to clear mid-morning and as I peered across No5, it was obvious that a lot of waders were feeding on the flooded pan. 17 Ruff, 200+ Lapwings, over 20 Snipe...and the first (and only) Wood Sandpiper of the year. Not many birders caught up with it before it left later that day...except Bill of course! Would nothing evade him? His timing was immaculate. Out of bed at 10 o'clock, a saunter down to Frodsham, sees the bird, home in time to take his girlfriend out, brownie points intact!

By the end of September we were all around the 130 species mark. We'd all missed things but were surprisingly close. Our communication had improved and we talked most weekends or mid-week, planning our next visit. Frodsham Marsh as a patch is really much bigger than you might suppose and to get the best you have to do two things, target specific areas and walk, not drive. It's impossible to cover the whole area adequately in a single day. The Little and Tawny Owls we chanced upon on 26th September would not have been found without legwork. Chris Done, Billy and myself were walking the footpaths near No4 and as I left them I confidently told Chris there'd be a Little Owl sitting in the tree I was heading for (what a load of!). Imagine our surprise when one very irritable small owl jumped off the lower branches as we stood around the trunk. Sometimes it happens!

Much of October came and went with Richard, Chris and myself on the Scillies. Sheila Blamire (an occasional guest to the patch) possesses a Birdnet pager and each day we waited for the big news to break from Frodsham. It never did. The month was, countrywide to some extent, a disappointment. East coast sites had the "usual" migrants but the west struggled. Into November and the list had really slowed down. Even so, the birding was usually very good. Mid-month saw an influx of thrushes to the hedges around the ICI tank, odd new birds included Tree Sparrows and Bramblings and both Merlins and Peregrines gave cracking views. Atlantic fronts rolled in and the rain only seemed to get heavier. Much of the patch was waterlogged.

In complete contrast, 29th November was dead calm and sunny. A northerly breeze in the afternoon took temperatures down to 4°C. The coffee and the cheese butties tasted especially nice. It was to be one of the most memorable days of the year. At the north end of No4, Richard, Paul Lewis (a vagrant to the patch) and I walked slowly through the bushes and trees. Within minutes of arriving, two Great Spotted Woodpeckers had given excellent views. Singles were rare, pairs unheard of. The tit and finch flock mobbed a Little Owl in a dense hawthorn and we began to head back to the car. Richard's call of "*phyllosc*" and then "Chiffchaff" had me turning around and I hurriedly joined them. My first views through binoculars stunned me. "...hell, it's pale, isn't it Rick?" was my first utterance and then "...hell, it's got wing bars!". I whistled *phyllosc* type "weet" calls and the bird came and sat within feet of us for many long minutes, giving excellent views in the bright sunshine. "It's got to be *tristis*" was all I could say. And that was the conclusion we all reached, a vagrant from Siberia to Western Europe, at the present time a subspecies of Chiffchaff but mooted as a full

species by some authorities. Fortunately, both Billy and Paul later obtained good views and between us we put together a full description, the first BBRC rarity of the year!

At this point in this rather lengthy account, there are just ten days to go to Christmas Day. A celebratory night out is booked in a few days' time and then the hard work begins again....planning for next year's record attempt. This is only my interpretation of events and I daresay that the others would have as much to say (if I'd let them). One thing is certain though, their friendship, enthusiasm and unselfish sharing of information made the year list attempt one of the best year's birding I've ever had. A thoroughly enjoyable experience! I'm looking forward to 1999 more than ever. Competitive you say? No, not at all...well, maybe just a little!

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

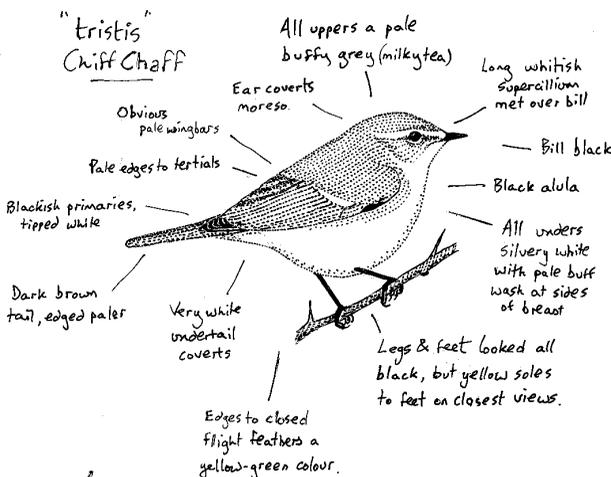
Postscript: Even into December new species were being added. Chris Done found only the third ever recorded Woodcock for the Marsh. Nice guy Chris, he told the rest of us and we all managed an eleventh hour twitch. It was even a patch tick for Billy! The five main contenders (and other 1999 new runners) met on 29th December to plan next year's campaign. All had finished around 140, within three or four of each other. Not bad for a 'poor year', totalling around 154 in all!

"TRISTIS" CHIFFCHAFF AT FRODSHAM

On Sunday, 29th November 1998, Richard Gabb, Paul Lewis and myself were birding near the north end of No4 tank at Frodsham Marsh. At about 10:45am, Richard and Paul located a *phyllosc*, loosely associating with tits, crests and finches. My first views, moments later, showed the bird to be unusually pale overall and it possessed strikingly obvious wing bars on the greater coverts. My first thoughts were a *tristis* type Chiffchaff, previously thought to be a regular autumn vagrant from Siberia, but now known to be exceedingly rare. Most of these types are actually *abietinus* from northern Scandinavia or possibly *fulvescens* from central/western Siberia. The bird was, however, exceptionally pale and the wing bars were almost as obvious as some Greenish Warblers. Good, close views through a 20x scope, down to 10 metres or so, showed all the plumage detail.

All the uppers were a pale, milky-tea colour with the only yellow-green being the edges to the closed wing and tail feathers and the yellowy patch at the bend of the wing. The greater coverts were tipped pale grey, forming the wing bars, wider towards the outer features and forming a wedge as it went across the coverts inwards. The primaries were dark grey, very fresh and with noticeable whitish tips, especially so on a rear view. Possibly longer winged than *collybita* but difficult to be certain. The alula were blackish and contrasted greatly with the pale, cold-greyish of the wings. The tertials had broadish, grey fringes.

The head pattern was very different from *collybita*, the whitish supercilium meeting over the bill and slightly upturned at the end of the ear coverts, which were milky tea-ish. Dark eyestripe and pale, broken eye rings. Throat – very pale, almost white, merging into silvery grey unders, tinted with the same milky-tea of the uppers, but only really obvious at the sides of the breast next to the



bend of the wing, fading further down the flanks. Undertail coverts were pale, off-white. Rump and uppertail looked grey brown, no olive noted. Bill and legs jet black, the soles of the feet yellow on the closest of views (PM). Call – a loud repeated 'WEEP' or 'WEET' call, similar in tone, but noticeably different from *collybita* (WSM). Fresh plumage and wing bar indicated a 1st winter bird.

Bill Morton had good views and got the calls a couple of days later and, on the following Saturday, Paul Miller had it as close as 3 metres for almost two hours, alongside a nominate *collybita* Chiffchaff. The comparison confirmed the points noted above.

The timing of this observation does fit the pattern of vagrancy for *tristis*, a very late autumn vagrant. Around the same time, other “eastern-type” Chiffchaffs were reported in the country and also *blythi* Lesser Whitethroats, another Siberian subspecies. If accepted by BBRC, it would constitute the first confirmed record for the county. However, the taxonomy of the Chiffchaff complex is under review at the present time and *tristis* may well form a distinct species. Ruling out *fulvescens* Chiffchaffs, which reputedly originate from an area in Siberia where Scandinavian *abietinus* and Siberian *tristis* meet, is not a simple task and field descriptions are sketchy to say the least. Time will tell.

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

MORE BIRDS IN THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY

Well OK, you might think that it's pretty sad if all I can find to do is look through a dictionary. But, 'The World's Greatest Football Team'™ is on the box again and I've been banished to another room. This CD-Rom Dictionary thingy is pretty clever. All I have to do is key in a word, press the 'return' key and up on the screen pops the definition with a list, sometimes short, sometimes very long, of references and quotations relating to the different usages of the word I originally keyed in. Also, by keying in the name of a writer, I can bring up a list of the quotations from his or her work which appear in the Dictionary.

I tried this with a couple of well-known names from the ornithological past of Cheshire but drew blanks with both Bell T Hedley and Boyd AW. However, when I keyed in Coward TA, I was pleased to see, on screen, a list of six references. To put things into perspective I checked for references under the name of a rather more widely known Coward, Noel of that ilk, and found 178 references.

Going back to Coward TA I found that two of the references were under 'jizz' and covered by my note in the last issue of *Bird News*. The next reference referred to 'leaf-warblers' and I called this up onto the screen. I found that the first reference quoted by the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* to the use of the term 'leaf-warbler' was by Coward in his *The Birds of the British Isles* (1926 edition) where it appears in Series III of that much-respected work as the title of a chapter dealing with that group of *phylloscopii* warblers including the familiar Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler and the not so familiar, at least in these parts, Yellow-browed and Dusky Warblers.

Moving on, I found that the next reference was to 'quartering' and looking this up found that once again the *OED* was quoting Coward's *The Birds of the British Isles* (1919 edition) as a first reference, this time, for the use of 'quartering' to describe a form of hunting by a species of bird. Coward wrote "Sharing with other Harriers the habit of closely and diligently quartering the ground with buoyant easy flight, the Hen Harrier more frequently interrupts its progress by hovering".

Going in search of the fifth and sixth references I found that they were both among seven quotations used by the *OED* to illustrate the use of the word 'raptorial' when applied to species of birds "given to seizing prey". The quotations from Coward came from *The Birds of the British Isles* (1919 edition) where he wrote "Most raptorial birds are variable in plumage." and his *Life of Birds* (1931) where the quote was "The flesh-eating or raptorial birds kill birds which we call useful as well as those which are troublesome".

I was surprised but pleased to find another, albeit small, way that Coward's work lives on. I do wonder however whether he really was the first to use, in print, 'leaf warbler' and 'quartering' (to describe a hunting strategy by a bird of prey) and would be very interested to hear if a CAWOS member can provide earlier references to the usage in print of either.

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

THE FEATHERED TRIBES OF THE BRITISH ISLANDS

In the last *Bird News*, there was an article called "Armchair Birding" by David Atkinson, in which he was pondering the references in *Mrs. Beeton's Cookery Book*, (ca. 1885) to "bastard plover" and her distinction between Lapwing and Green Plover. I have a copy of *The Feathered Tribes of the British Islands* by Robert Mudie, "Volume the Second" (1854), otherwise entitled *Mudie's British Birds, Vol. 2*, which throws some light on these questions.

Under the heading "Plovers (Charadrius)" Mudie says there are only three resident species of this genus and one summer visitor. These are the Golden Plover, Dotterel, Ring-dotterel and Kentish Plover. (Ring-dotterel = Ringed Plover, and Kentish Plover he notes as "local and rare".) He goes

on to say that “the thick-knee, the long-shanks, and even the lapwings, have also been popularly styled plovers”. Hence the Lapwing was a false or ‘bastard’ plover.

Under “The Golden Plover (*Charadrius pluvialis*)” he writes “In the popular vocabulary, and even in that of authors, the plover is a bird of many names. It has been called ‘green’, and also ‘yellow’, from its colours, and ‘whistling’ from its voice; all of which names are applicable at some stage or other, and yet it remains all the while the same bird..... After the young have become able to fly, their plumage differs so much from that of the old birds, that they have been described as different species; and as the plumage differs both in the males and the females, the finding of both sexes in each of the two states, gave a semblance of truth to the mistake. The young have the plumage on the upper part grey, with yellowish brown spots, and have thence been called grey plovers; the winter plumage of the old birds is often brown and yellow on the upper part, in which state they are golden plovers; and when they are in the prime of their summer plumage, which they do not recover till they are on the breeding grounds, they are black (or dusky) and green on the upper part, with black on the breast, in which state they are green plovers, although that name has been sometimes given to the lapwing”.

The Lapwing he knew as the “Crested Lapwing (*Vanillus cristatus*)”. Referring to “The Grey Plover, or Grey Lapwing (*Squatarola cinerea*)”, he says “This bird, which is not very common as a British species, holds a sort of intermediate place between the plovers and the lapwing, partaking a little of the characters of each, and yet not strictly admitting of classification with either”.

I also have a copy of *A Dictionary of British Birds*, being a reprint of *Montagu's Ornithological Dictionary*, together with *The Additional Species* described by Selby; Yarrel, in all three editions; and in *Natural History Journals*, compiled and edited by Edward Newman, F.L.S., F.Z.S., etc. This was probably compiled about 1866. In it, Lapwing is *Tringa vanellus*, with a reference to British Zoology ii no.190 which gives the name as Lapwing, or Bastard Plover. It was also now known as the Green Plover. Golden Plover is *Charadrius pluvialis* (Linn); or *Pluvialis viridis*. (*Raii Syn* p. 111) - whatever publication that was. Provincial names were also still Grey and Whistling Plover. The Grey Plover, Grey Sandpiper or Swiss Sandpiper, was variously *Tringa squatarola*, *Pluvialis cinerea*, *Vanellus griseus*, *Tringa helvetica* or *Vanellus helveticus*.

Eric Burrows, 16 Arden Drive, Little Neston, South Wirral, Cheshire, L64 0SJ

JUST ANY OLD SPOONBILL?

28th May 1998 and the year list gets a boost from the finding of a Spoonbill on No6 tank at Frodsham. A quick twitch at dawn on the 29th and the bird's in the bag...or is it? It flew off later that day and joined the five Spoonbills, which summered on the Dee off Parkgate and it stayed until 4th June. “So what?”, you might say, but read on...

In early March 1998, a very tired Spoonbill landed on a passing ship off the coast of Senegal. When the ship docked near Bristol, it was taken to a local vet and then onto Slimbridge, where it recuperated. On 19th April it was released, carrying a shiny new ring and white darvic rings bearing the letters “RH”. It left the area on the 20th, being seen in Norfolk on the 21st, remaining at Titchwell until 15th May. On 28th May it arrived at Frodsham and then Parkgate on the 29th. On 20th/21st June it was back at Slimbridge.

Why the fuss? Well it was reputed to be obviously smaller than the Dee Spoonbills, the bill lacked any yellow, it had practically no crest and there was no yellow on the neck or upper breast. The wing tips also lacked black. These features, if applied to a breeding adult bird, which this was meant to be, made it a bird of the Mauritanian subspecies *Platalea leucorodia balsaci* and some would say it is a strong contender for being split as a distinct species. They only breed on the offshore islands called Banc d'Arguin and there are approximately 1,430 breeding pairs out of a total population of 6,000 birds or so.

Interesting eh? Countable? – You may wonder. Was it fed on the ship off Senegal? No one seems 100% certain but if not, the current criteria for ship-assisted passage would then make it an addition to the British list. If it was fed, then it's doomed to Snowy Sheathbill ignominy.

As I write this, in November '98, the same bird has once again been reported on the Dee with the Spoonbills. Surely if it's the bird its persistence at trying to get noticed should help its cause... Now then, just how flexible is the county list...?

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

DEATH ON THE ROADS

Most of you are familiar with the sight of road casualties, the automobile being one of the most effective predators of small mammals and birds. In fact so many birds are killed as they cross from one roadside hedge to another that Chris Mead, formerly with the BTO, is advocating the removal of hedgerows from one side of the road, thereby reducing the incentive for finches, thrushes and buntings to cross the killing zone. Very radical considering the mileage of hedgerow already lost in the past thirty years.

Just when you think things can't get much worse for our beleaguered wildlife a new carnage awaits the unwary. Many roadsides are now being drained using Gully Pots. These are a series of holes placed within the kerbstone. These holes slope from the road surface and then drop several inches into a drainage channel. Any small mammal or fledgling bird that blunders into these holes risks becoming entombed in a clinging mire of ooze. All of the gully pot channels I have so far checked fail to incorporate any escape route. Some are like a 'hedgehogs' graveyard'.

Ground-nesting bird species are particularly vulnerable. I spent a large part of one spring morning last year attempting to retrieve a distressed Lapwing chick, which in its panic to escape the attentions of some children cycling past, promptly shot down one of the gully pot holes. Several hours later I finally located the mud-caked chick and attempted to rehabilitate it with its frantically calling parents. The chick was so weakened by the ordeal that I doubt it survived. I suggest if you work within a highways division or know somebody that does that you alert them to this problem. British wildlife has enough perils to face without needlessly foisting another one on them.

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

PEREGRINE, PLOVERS AND A PILOT

Uncle Cyril! On the Connah's Quay Reserve at the end of January I had a sudden and clear recollection of this figure from my childhood. He wasn't a relative, you understand, just a family friend adopted as "uncle". A RAF pilot, we saw him rarely, but I remember his reputation as a formidable aircraft spotter. He had that uncanny ability for almost instantaneous recognition of any 'plane given the minimal view. It was a skill developed by many servicemen during the war years, and was based not upon marks of identification, but on a "General Impression of Shape and Size", a mastery of GISS. This term has been handed on to birdwatching. Field naturalists who can name wild creatures from the most fleeting view, however distant and however bad the light are said to understand the Jizz of the animal. We all know birdwatchers with that sixth sense, who see, let alone identify, a bird long before others are aware of its presence. This is an enviable skill indeed and one which we all hope to develop: it is the culmination of knowledge and of days, even years spent in the field. It is a sobering thought then to learn that not even the best Jizz-master can match the identification skills of a Dunlin.

Scientists researching the reactions of birds to raptors have found that waders are not only alert for the presence of an aerial predator, but that they identify each raptor specifically to enable them to make the safest appropriate response. The Peregrine, for instance, with the pointed wing of high speed, lacks manoeuvrability. He takes his prey from the air, so staying grounded may be a wader's best option. But this could prove a fatal choice against the agile flight of the Sparrowhawk whose rounded and "fingered" wings allow of low level sorties and whose long legs extend to pluck even the smallest bird from the ground.

So waders not only have greater acuity of vision than we, but are also masters of identification. Direct experience of this made a great impact on me, and brought my pilot uncle to mind. We were



overlooking the bunded pool from the East hide on a cold bright morning. The previous night had been clear with a full moon, so the Lapwings had been feeding overnight and there were now some 700 roosting in the vegetation. The other waders, twenty five Redshank, three Spotted Redshank and three Dunlin,

were all foraging and were scattered along the muddy margins of the pools, some Redshank on the near bank, some on the far bank.

As often happens, it was the response of the waders which alerted me to the presence of the Peregrine. They saw it first! They usually do. Way over on the English side, it was a mere dot flying fast and high. The Lapwings scrambled. Their lolling flapping flight and the alternating flash of black and white creates visual confusion. Such flight is the Lapwings' own distraction tactic, and works a bit like the aluminium strip dropped by aircraft to baffle radar. It dazzles the predator so that it cannot focus on just a single bird and since mid-air crashes at Peregrine speeds would be fatal to the falcon as well as its prey, an attack is forestalled. The Lapwings continued to fly round bunched together not leaving the area and the Peregrine, the element of surprise lost, simply came overhead and continued on his way.

The Dunlins, too, made the appropriate response — safest among the Lapwing flock, they flew round with them enjoying the protection of the Lapwings' flickering-wing distraction. I was too enthralled by the Lapwings and Peregrine to notice the response of the larger waders, but when I looked back at the pools all the Redshank, save one, were huddled in a tight group on the far bank. They were safer on the ground. The last bird was still making its way toward them and rather than risk being in the air it was swimming to join them — swimming the full width of the banded pool. I regret keeping my binoculars steadily on the Peregrine. I would have liked to see how those Redshank mustered — whether they all made the shortest journey, by running or swimming, without taking to wing. Next time the waders tell me there is a raptor about, I'll concentrate on their behaviour, marvelling at their identification skills.

Thelma K Sykes - Blue Neb Studios

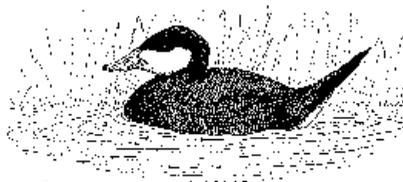
Before Bob Anderson sends me yet another 'rocket' on the subject of the origins of the term 'Jizz', I feel that this article lends strong weight to the theory of 'convergent-evolution'. Both TA Coward and the military being jointly responsible for its general usage. Perhaps in twitching parlance it's the equivalent of the 'two bird theory' proven. Eds

Isn't it funny what comes into your head!

A Ruddy Duck flew off to Spain
For his hols in the sun once again,
Where a White-headed Duck
Said, "I think I'm in luck,
He's sure to have sex on the brain".

Hazel J Raw

(Are there other limerick writers out there?)



TICKED OFF

I am sure many of you have managed to see the Dartford Warbler that recently took up residence at Heswall Dales. Unfortunately I have received several reports of poor behaviour from visiting birders, with instances of the bird being completely surrounded and people trampling through the gorse and heather in order to flush the bird and get it on their list. The birdwatchers' code clearly states that 'the welfare of the bird comes first'. In this case several people clearly failed to observe this simple rule.

I rarely attend twitches these days, but when I do, I all too often encounter this lack of regard for the bird and other observers. As the finder of many county rarities and the occasional national rarity I am beginning to have second thoughts about broadcasting my finds to a wider audience. Suppressors are frequently denounced in the birding press but when you see repeated examples of rank poor behaviour their reaction is understandable. Unless the standard of birding etiquette improves this is likely to be a growing phenomenon. Then same members of the twitching fraternity may actually be forced to try the novel experience of finding their own rarities. (This is not a denunciation of all twitchers, many of whom do turn up their own rarities and diligently work a patch.)

So if you are an habitual harasser of rarities, you'd better look to your laurels or the genie of the pager may declare that all your wishes have been used up.

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

(Oh, by the way I don't want you to think I'm anti-twitcher. After all I just happened to be visiting a friend and fellow birder in Notts who fortunately lives within 10 minutes of Oxtun. As anybody with a pager will know, the area is currently hosting a Rough-legged Buzzard and yes I did see it. Who said twitching was a negative form of birding?)

CHESHIRE & WIRRAL RARITIES - WORTH THE TROUBLE?

Every year a considerable amount of time and effort is dedicated to trying to ensure that the records of those species deemed to be Cheshire & Wirral Rarities satisfy certain standards of proof of identification before they are published in the *Bird Report*.

At the end of each year, birders are invited to send in records of the birds they have seen during that year. In addition they are asked to support records of Cheshire & Wirral Rarities they have seen with additional documentation in the form of details of background to the observation and a description of the bird or birds involved. While many birders may not have been fortunate enough to have seen a species for which a description is required, a substantial proportion of people mentioned in the 'List of Contributors' at the back of each report will have submitted one or more records of such a species. Some, but by no means all, observers will send in the required description with their records.

Number of individual records of Cheshire & Wirral Rarities submitted 1994-97:

1994	728
1995	508
1996	654
1997	572

It can be seen from the above table that while the number of Cheshire & Wirral Rarities can vary considerably from year to year there are a substantial number annually.

On receipt of records, both from individuals and in the form of Reports from Reserves such as Inner Marsh Farm and Woolston, it is part of Joe O'Hanlon's job as Records Secretary to list all the records of Cheshire & Wirral Rarities, together with details of site, date, observer's name and whether or not a description has been received - a time-consuming task. At a later stage Joe, in liaison with our County Recorder Tony Broome, ensures that any records and descriptions sent directly to Tony are included on a master list of Cheshire & Wirral Rarities.

Cheshire & Wirral Rarities 1997

	<i>No. of C&W Rarity records</i>	<i>No. of descriptions received with the records</i>
1997	572	296

(The proportion of descriptions received with the records varies from year to year but the figure for 1997 is a not unreasonable example of a typical year.)

Tony takes over the Cheshire & Wirral Rarity master list from Joe and has to decide on which records he needs to chase up for a description. If we have good descriptions for the first and last date of a long-staying rarity then it is likely that no further action will be required (although occasionally this will mean that the finder, assuming he/she has not sent in a description, will not get credit in the *Report*). Quite often however we will be lacking a first or last date description and Tony will write off to first and/or last date observers to try and obtain one. If there are several observers involved it is usually necessary, to avoid delay, to contact them all in an attempt to ensure that at least one description is received. In many cases of 'no description', single observers are involved and it is necessary to write to that observer asking for a description. In quite a large number of cases each year it isn't possible to identify either the original observer or indeed any observer at all. The majority of such cases come from the *North West Region Bird Report* published by Birdline Northwest plus others from Reserves such as Inner Marsh Farm or Rostherne where sightings entered in a logbook on site later appear unaccredited in the Reserve's own Report. Tony allows a suitable time to elapse before calling a meeting of those members of the Editorial and Records Sub-committee who adjudicate Cheshire & Wirral Rarities.

Comparison of total number of individual records of Cheshire & Wirral Rarities submitted 1994-97 with the number for which no description was ever received:

	<i>No. of records</i>	<i>No. of records without descriptions</i>
1994	728	111
1995	508	115
1996	654	92
1997	572	123

In the vast majority of cases the adjudicators find the records supported by a description acceptable for publication.

Cheshire & Wirral Rarities 1997

No. of C&W Rarity Records	Total no. of descriptions received	No. not accepted
572	449	15

If we take 1997 as a fairly typical year it can be seen that a substantial amount of effort was expended on Cheshire & Wirral Rarities by individual birders, by Joe O'Hanlon as Records Secretary and by Tony Broome as County Recorder. The result of all the effort is that of 572 Cheshire & Wirral Rarity Records, 434 were published, 123 were not considered (and therefore not published) as they lacked supporting descriptions while just 15 were not published because the supporting descriptions were not considered acceptable.

I have written this article with three main objectives in mind:

1. to give some credit to those individual birders who have co-operated so well with the Cheshire & Wirral Rarity system and to Joe O'Hanlon and Tony Broome who have made the system work at the CAWOS end and,
2. to call into question a system which creates so much work to deny just 15 records a place in the 1997 systematic list while leaving in limbo the 123 records for which no details were received and,
3. to promote a debate among Cheshire & Wirral birders regarding the way to deal with Cheshire & Wirral Rarities in the future.

Over the last few years the issue of Cheshire & Wirral Rarities has, in one guise or another, featured in many editions of *Bird News* and is a regular conversation topic among birders in the field. I have heard and read many different views ranging from publish everything, via suggested tinkering with the C&W Rarity List to imposing stricter rules regarding the acceptance of rarities.

To set the debate in motion I would like to finish by adding that, judging by appearances, the CAWOS method of dealing with local rarities differs little from that of our neighbours in Derbyshire and Greater Manchester. It is very important that the credibility of the data in the *Cheshire & Wirral Report* is maintained and yet isn't that very credibility threatened by a system that in 1997 ignored 123 records, many of which will be perfectly 'good', while working so hard to weed out just 15 doubtful ones.

What do you think?

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

ONE REASON.....

I read the above article by Steve Barber with sympathy for his sentiments. On the face of it, a thankless task but one I feel is important. It is perhaps becoming less onerous for both the birders who send their records in and for the panel – not forgetting Jane Turner, Hugh Pulsford, David Steventon and Steve Barber himself, who have spent many hours at rarities meetings. The status of certain species becomes clearer as patterns occur. By this I mean that species such as Hobby, Marsh Harrier, Glaucous and Iceland Gulls etc. that used to frustrate everybody, can now be accepted as occurring both widely and frequently, at the correct times of year. The odd 'wrongly' identified individual won't detract from the overall status of a species, which will remain pretty accurate from knowledge gained over the previous years, when we doggedly poured through the records. Of course, if a Hobby is reported in December, a full description asked from the observer would not be unreasonable.

However, for me personally, a report that contains unsubstantiated records is worse than useless. It may just as well be written before the end of the year it's due to reflect. It could be made up.... couldn't it? So, how do we tackle the problem assuming that, like me, you deem it important?

Most birders are lazy note takers/senders. Not just in Cheshire, but countrywide. It's human nature. You've always got something better to do. I have anyway. It is, however, your responsibility. It is a discipline. You wouldn't read the report if you didn't enjoy reading it, would you? Surely, if you've taken the trouble to support your records with descriptions, you do feel a certain amount of pride when you notice your record (which you should be able to these days!) has been included. Why not send them in each month?

Getting around to the '15' records that Steve mentions as 'denied'. Doesn't this depend on what species they are? Perhaps not. Any inadequately described species shouldn't be included. The

others without descriptions at all, some 123 of them, may have included a higher proportion of the above category. Who knows, they weren't submitted. I'd rather lose them than accept any unauthenticated record. All I can say is that the list of county rarities demanding descriptions has been reviewed recently and should be more relevant.

One final point. If you do an area that you visit regularly in the county, i.e. Sandbach, Chelford, Rostherne, IMF, Frodsham, Woolston Eyes etc, especially if it annually attracts county rarities, you will rely on the county committee to verify other observers' records, in order that your 'patch list' includes only 'good' records. You wouldn't be sent descriptions by people even if you asked for them and if I know local patchers, they're fiercely proud of their patch lists. The list has got to be right!

So, yes, I agree with Steve on most points, but for me personally, an unauthenticated county list is uninteresting and of no value.

Tony Broome (County Recorder)

Note: Any birder wishing to be considered for the Rarities Panel should drop me a line. New blood would be welcomed.

Membership News

Welcome to the following new members: P Turner, HJ Raw, V Brown, D and P Hatfield, A and J Walker, DC Highet, A Leigh, JM Pott, G Hogan, PS Hill, P Rhodes, RG Thorp, R and A Hounslow, M Ansell.

The final tally of members for 1998 was 347; hopefully we will pass the 350 mark this year if everyone renews. Thanks to all who have renewed membership so promptly: as I write this on 13th December the 1999 membership list already numbers 234.

At the November Council meeting thanks were expressed to all who were involved, in any way, in our recent exhibition at the Grosvenor Museum, and to all those concerned with the production of the *1997 Bird Report*.

David Cogger, Membership Secretary, 113 Nantwich Rd, Middlewich, CW10 9HD - 01606 832517

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Recently CAWOS gave a grant to the Cheshire Forest Guides for the construction and erection of bird boxes at the Pettypool Guide Activity Centre, which lies in woodland, predominantly birch, on the outskirts of Sandiway. Summer is a busy time there; scores of Brownies and Guides are busy on the ground, while flycatchers, tits, Nuthatches and warblers fly around the trees and the dense undergrowth surrounding the various sites.

A few nestboxes have already been put up over the last two years and have already attracted both Pied and Spotted Flycatchers. On the first Saturday in November Brownies from Elton were shown how to make bird boxes by Jeff Clarke, with help from Derek Kelly, David and Fran Cogger and the Brownie leaders. We hope that the Brownies will be able to return in the summer to see the boxes being used, and that the flycatcher population, in particular, will increase.

'CHESHIRE - A WEALTH OF BIRDS' EXHIBITION REPORT

Well, it's over. It feels that we have eaten, slept and breathed the CAWOS Exhibition for the past eight months now, though it seems longer. It was a great deal of hard work, our most ambitious project to date, and of course 'best-laid plans' and all that - nothing seemed to be straightforward and some valuable lessons were learnt. With mixed feelings we survey the empty room, the bare walls and the carefully packed boxes. Was it worthwhile? Well, after some visitors from Cardiff wrote to us saying "*Congratulations to all involved, it was clear and informative and hopefully stimulating for visitors of all ages*", our spirits were raised, maybe we should crack open a bottle of bubbly after all! But wait, let's not get carried away, perhaps our viewpoint is ever so slightly biased? Let's review our original aims and objectives, look through comments made in the visitors' book to see if we succeeded, and make sure we give credit where credit is due (our humblest apologies to anyone we have not mentioned). So.....

AIMS OF THE EXHIBITION:-

To be attractive and enjoyable - many visitors would not know the exhibition was on until they walked in through the museum door, so it needed to be visually eye-catching and also to appeal to birders and non-birders alike. Comments included:-

"We were delighted to come across the excellent exhibition"

"What a wonderful exhibition, beautifully displayed - tremendous!"

"Excellent display, very informative, well worthwhile!"

We would particularly like to thank Richard Gabb, Steve Young, Tony Bond and many other photographers for rallying to our appeal and providing us with such a high standard of photographs and also to Thelma Sykes for her contribution of beautiful artwork. The museum and its staff, especially Steve Woolfall, provided us with invaluable advice, practical help and last, but not least, financial support.

To be educational - to illustrate the seven major habitats to be found in Cheshire, the birds associated with them and their conservation status. We needed to convey a serious message in an interesting way - thanks go to everybody on the Publicity Committee for contributing to the texts. Did we achieve this?

"Very attractive for teaching"

"Very interesting and worrying!"

"Enlightening" "Very meaningful"

"Educational and very interesting"

To include an interactive element - to vary the type of display so bringing all the senses into play, including 'feely boards', a Swallow migration game and a blindfolded 'touch and sound experience'. Special thanks to Jeff Clarke for masterminding this section. Comments included:-

"Interesting and variable"

"So much to see, read and feel!"

"I love Tickle Wood"

Unfortunately the planned audio-visual display, with background bird song, never materialised due to equipment problems on the part of the museum. Best laid plans...

To involve other societies and schools - and for them to contribute displays of their specific activities and projects. Special thanks here to David Cogger who, as co-ordinator, had the job of liaising with the numerous people involved with the exhibition and the unenviable task of trying to get everyone to stick to tight deadlines. Because of the need to encourage visitors, especially children, to look at each and every display, a comprehensive quiz was compiled by Phil Oddy which included many testing questions, so thanks also to the numerous people who argued over exactly how many owls there were pictured in the exhibition! Besides the varied society displays, these were the highlights for many visitors:-

"Very impressed with the school's artwork" - special thanks to Verdin High School, Winsford for the beautiful friezes, which now adorn their library and also to High Street Primary School, Winsford for their paintings and verses.

"Especially enjoyed the paper birds" - Chestnut Lodge Special School, Widnes must have had a wonderful, if messy, time preparing those!

One of the major disappointments of the exhibition was the lack of attendance by schools. It appears that the publicity material handed to the Education Authority for distribution never arrived at its intended destinations. Thus the Education Authority successfully shot itself in the foot and denied many children the chance to become inspired by the natural world around them.

Must appeal to all ages - especially children, in whose hands lies the future of Cheshire's habitats and its birds! Ignoring the one comment of "*boring*" (!!), visitors had this to say:-

"Excellent for all age groups" "Children love it!"

"I love it! Brill! Smashing!"

To look to the future - and to use the complete exhibition, or parts of it, for future displays in other parts of the county. To build on the work already undertaken and to update where necessary, to keep it alive and kicking!

"Very good - one of many I hope.....!"

Any offers out there.....???

Sheila Blamire, on behalf of the CAWOS Publicity Committee

RUMOURS... RUMOURS...

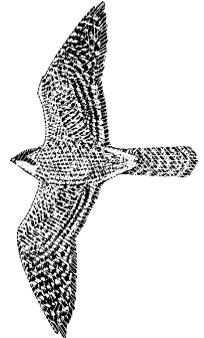
- Fears that the 'new, exciting survey', rumoured in the last edition of *Bird News*, would not get off the ground due to the cessation of the 'out-of-season breeding behaviour' have proved unfounded. In fact, this 'out-of-season breeding behaviour' has apparently been displaced slightly and now involves lower numbers than previously witnessed, possibly due to negative interaction with birdwatchers. Of course it is still too early to jump to any firm conclusions, but a close watch will be kept up, conditions permitting. We would like to reassure everybody that the utmost care will be taken not to affect, in any perceivable way, the true behaviour of the target species.
- UMIST are developing some whizzo electronic technology which could be the answer to what must be our County Recorder's greatest frustration (well as far as I am aware anyway!) and hopefully fulfill his heart's desire. You will have to wait for the next edition of *Bird News* to find out more!

Sites to Watch

FRODSHAM SCORE - An untold secret!

Imagine the scene, it's the first week of September and the skies are blue, with a brisk wind bringing with it the threat of a deepening depression from the south-west. Before you lies acres of closely cropped grassy saltmarsh stretching out 180° ahead. In the distance the Mersey mudflats are slowly covered by an advancing ten metre tide and in the air the song of a Skylark hangs. Then select the best position to sit to view from the raised embankment of No4 tank. With the sunlight to your back and the breeze to your side, the conditions are near perfect to watch the spectacle unfold on the score ahead.

The murky, grey-brown waters of the river move ever closer inshore and in the distance the alternating flashes of a large flock of Dunlin catch your eye, followed by a long line of black and white Oystercatchers and the bubbling cries of Curlew. Suddenly an explosion of roosting Lapwings takes to the wing and, there overhead, a majestic Peregrine falcon folds its wings as it hurtles down towards a flock of panic stricken Teal and becomes lost in a confusion of birds. Inexperienced sheep grazing by the tideline now find themselves cut off by the encroaching surge and bleat cries of concern as they begin to wade to safety. Relentlessly the water moves forward, filling the channels and forking out on to the marsh, forcing the reluctant roosting birds from their slumber to find security in tighter assembled groups, closer to the banks of the Ship Canal and within scoping distance to you.



On a good tide and from a single position one can expect to see over 80 species including 23 species of wader. In recent years Little Egret, Brent Goose, Ruddy Shelduck, Velvet Scoter, Osprey, Glaucous Gull, Common and Black Tern and the ever-present Lesser Flamingo have been found.

Access to the site is situated via Marsh Lane in Frodsham village. Follow the road over the motorway and bear left along the tarmac road (the right fork takes you towards the logbook area). Continue along this road to where it joins a dirt track. Take this lower left-hand track, keeping the raised embankments of No6 and No4 to your right, for about three miles or until you reach a small concrete bridge which crosses a channel (Hoole Pool Gutter). Park just before this bridge, then with the No4 bank still on your right, walk along the grassy track for 1/4 mile to low, iron barrier-gates. From here, walk towards the river, still keeping the raised bank to your right. Select the best position to view from and enjoy the experience!

Bill Morton, 53 Percival Lane, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 4UY

Note: Did you see the Purple Heron at Frodsham Marsh in the seventies, or are you the mystery Bluethroat observer? The Frodsham Marsh list is being revised. Any records that you know haven't been submitted with descriptions, either at county level or at national level, please drop Tony Broome, the County Recorder, a line. They'll make all the difference!

BIRDERS ROUGH GUIDE TO FRODSHAM MARSH

F.P. = FOOTPATH.

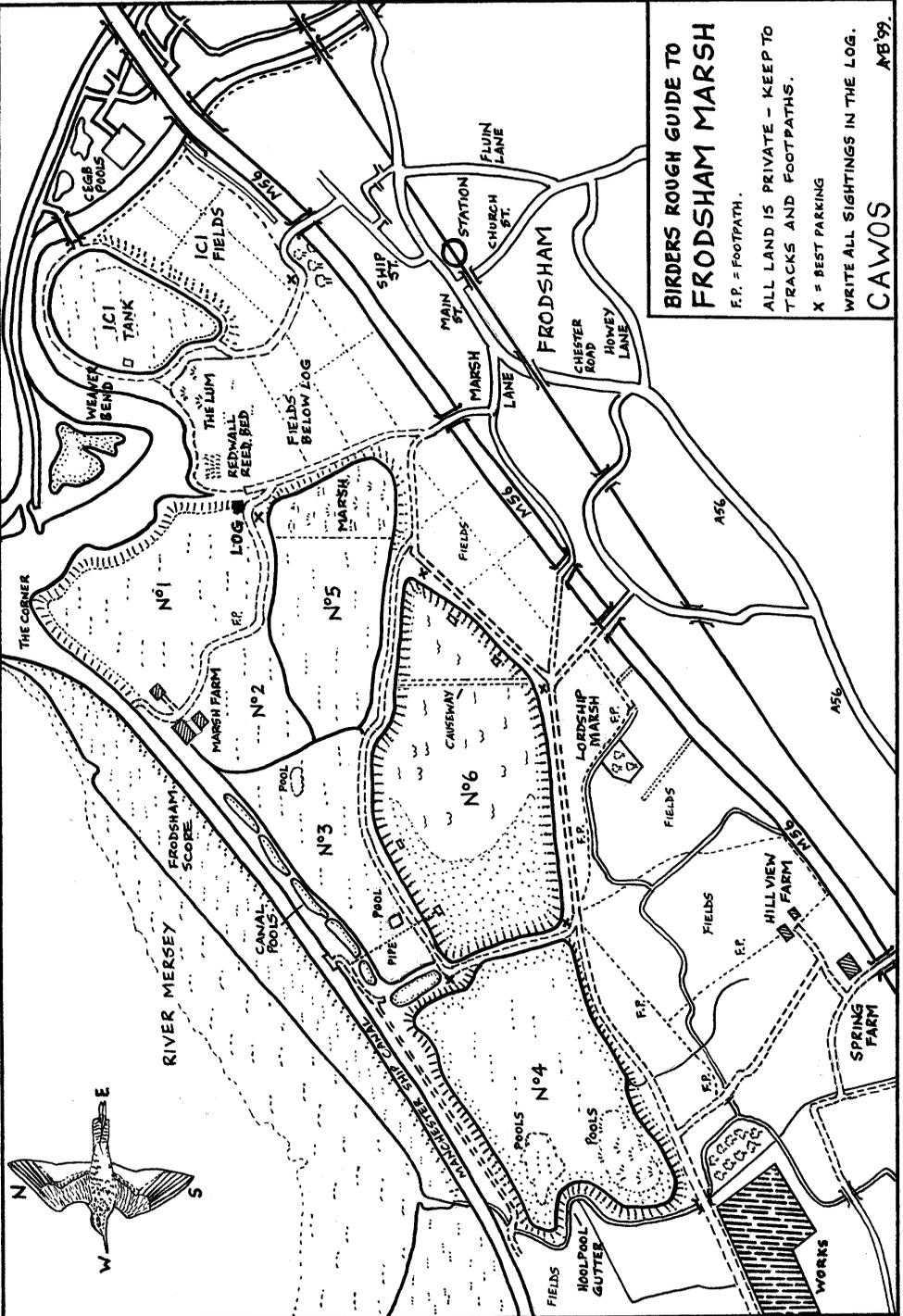
ALL LAND IS PRIVATE - KEEP TO TRACKS AND FOOTPATHS.

X = BEST PARKING

WRITE ALL SIGHTINGS IN THE LOG.

CAWOS

AB'99.



Projects and Surveys

GREY PARTRIDGE RECOVERY PROJECT

In the last issue of *Bird News* we looked at the rationale behind and the objectives of The Grey Partridge Recovery Project, which has been developed by the Cheshire Grey Partridge Species Action Plan Group. Briefly, the main objective of this group is to facilitate the delivery of targets for the recovery of Grey Partridge populations, as set out in *Countdown 1997: A Local Biodiversity Action Plan for the Cheshire Region*. In this issue we will look at the Project Remit in more detail and also see the Resource Inputs (financial costs) of the Project.

PROJECT REMIT

The Steering Group will undertake the overall running and administration of Project funds; however the partner organisations, attached to the Project, will be responsible for delivering four tiers of advice on the management for Grey Partridge. These can be defined as advisory, habitat creation funding, agri-environment schemes and legal predator control.

1. Advisory

- A number of the partner organisations affiliated to the Project have the ability to deliver on-farm conservation advice regarding the habitat requirements and ecology of Grey Partridge. Furthermore, certain partners eg Farming & Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA) are qualified to give legal advice on the most appropriate spraying regimes and pesticides.
- Each year partner organisations will divide between them the responsibility of visiting targeted farms within the Project area, which have requested involvement within the Recovery Project. On occasions, more than one partner may visit the farm simultaneously, in order to combine the best available ecological and agronomic advice. Partner organisations affiliated to the Project are providing their time and advice free of charge, as a “contribution in kind” to meet the “spirit” of the Biodiversity Action Plan process.
- All farms visited will receive an advisory pack on best practice management for Grey Partridge and a typed summary of the recommendations made by the Project partner during the site visit.
- Advice could include promoting the retention of over-wintered stubbles, sowing of spring cereals, undersowing, the value of fodder crops and diverse rotations, hedge and field margin management and appropriate cutting dates. Certain partners will also be able to advise on the use (or non-use) of suitable pesticides and spraying regimes. Other mechanisms for providing suitable habitat, such as the “Wild Bird Cover Option” under the set-aside regulations will also be promoted.
- The provision of advice aimed at improving the suitability of current farming practices for Grey Partridge will play a major role in the implementation of the Project’s targets.

2. Habitat creation funding

- A principal aim of the Project is to create an area of farmland specifically managed for Grey Partridge on each of the 90 priority farms identified within the Project area. A target has been set of one acre per farm, giving a total of 90 acres of specially managed Grey Partridge habitat. In reality, if fund-raising exceeds the Project target, then a greater area of habitat may be created on each participating farm.
- Based on the site visit, the partner responsible will recommend the most appropriate form of habitat creation and/or enhancement that is acceptable to the landowner.
- The habitat created should provide one of, or a combination of, winter seed sources, insect rich chick feeding areas or nesting habitat. The types of habitat which could be created to provide such conditions include: beetle banks, conservation headlands, wildlife seed crops, fenced grass margins along hedgerows or around arable fields, new hedgerows, rough unimproved grassland and field corners.
- The habitat creation payments are designed to cover profits foregone by the farmer, plus an additional financial incentive for habitat creation. Payments will be available for an initial period of three years. Future payment will be dependent on the success of the Project in maintaining funding income.

3. Agri-environment schemes

- Accepting that the Project will only be able to deliver small-scale habitat creation, during site visits partners will provide advice on how to apply for grant aid under existing agri-environment schemes such as Countryside Stewardship. Entry into schemes such as Countryside Stewardship will enable farmers to implement partner recommendations for Grey Partridge management over a larger area of the farm than could be funded by the Project itself.
- Partners will direct farmers to the existing deliverers of Stewardship schemes such as Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and FRCA. Thus the Project will play an important promotional role in raising awareness and interest in agri-environment schemes uptake.

4. Legal predator control

- In addition to sympathetic management of existing land and the creation of new habitat, the Project aims to increase the Grey Partridge population by reducing predation pressure through legal predator control.
- Project partners aim to establish and part fund a network of local, voluntary gamekeepers who will be available (at the landowner's request) to advise on or undertake legal means of predator control on farms participating in the Project.
- Predation of Grey Partridge is thought to operate mostly through removal of incubating females on nests by foxes, and the loss of eggs and young to Crows and Magpies. As such, the voluntary keepers will advise on or implement legal means of predator control (eg shooting and the use of Larsen and cage traps), to reduce the effects of predation by the species.
- The voluntary gamekeepers will receive appropriate training in legal means of predator control from the Cheshire Constabulary Wildlife and Environment Officer and BASC. Close liaison will be maintained with these two partner organisations to ensure that no poaching or illegal means of predator control are in operation within the Project area.
- The Project will fund "petty cash" expenses of the voluntary gamekeeper network, such as materials for the construction of Larsen traps and the cost of petrol when visiting farms participating in the Project.

RESOURCE INPUTS

The financial costs of the Project are calculated as follows:-

1. Habitat Creation Budget

To create one acre of habitat specifically managed for Grey Partridge on each of the 90 priority farms visited over the three year period.

£300/acre/annum - to cover 'profits foregone'
(predominantly dairy and arable land with high capital returns)

£100/acre/annum - to cover cost of optimum game seed mix or other capital costs of habitat creation

£400/acre/annum x 90 farms = £36,000/annum

Sum = £36,000 x 3 years = £108,000

2. Part-time Gamekeeper Network

£50 for construction of one Larsen trap

£50/Larsen trap x 90 farms = £4,500

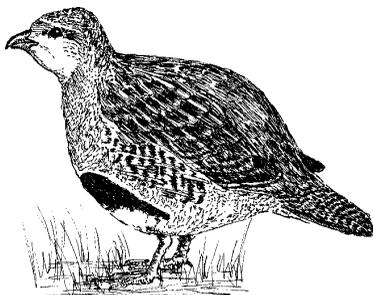
£4,000/annum to cover out-of-pocket expenses
for a network of voluntary gamekeepers

£4,000 x 3 years = £12,000

Sum = £16,500

3. Total Costs

£108,000 habitat creation + £16,500 gamekeeper
network = £124,500



If you have any recent Grey Partridge records, please contact John Roberts at Cheshire Wildlife Trust (01270 610180). If you would like to know how you could do more to help the Grey Partridge, please contact Roy Taylor of RSPB (01785 603395) for some free advice.

Roy Taylor, on behalf of the Cheshire Grey Partridge Species Action Plan Group

BIRD NEWS INDEX - Would you find it useful?

We are considering compiling a reasonably comprehensive index to *Bird News* and would value the opinions of CAWOS members on whether it would be worth the effort involved. Steve Barber originally started this task with the proposed Avifauna in mind, as he realised there was a wealth of information about Cheshire and Wirral's birds between the pages of *Bird News*. He has compiled the index up to and including *Bird News No. 32*, so we are already three-quarters of the way there! The Editorial team would obviously find an index invaluable for checking which county rarities and sites have already been covered and what illustrations and poems have been used; but what about the average CAWOS member?

Would you use an index? Please let us know:-

1. If an index would be useful and briefly why.
2. What would be the 'must-haves' in an index? (in order of priority)
3. What would be the 'nice-to-haves'? (time and effort permitting)
4. Would you be willing to pay for an index? (purely to cover printing costs)
5. Would you prefer a copy on disc and if so in what format?
6. Is there anybody out there who would volunteer to continue the task already started by Steve Barber? Even a *guarded* reply, (eg. dependent on the final workload), would be welcome!

Please send your written responses to:-

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



JANUARY

- 22 KOS 'SEYCHELLES' by Val McFarland
- 22 NCRSPB MEMBERS' EVENING - quizzes and slides
- 26 ADNHS 'PERU' by Margaret Ledger
- 29 WGOS 'A CELEBRATION OF BIRDS' by Gordon Yates
- 31 ADNHS Mere Sands Wood, meet Cecil Road public car park, Hale at 9:30am

FEBRUARY

- 4 CADOS 'LIFE OVER 1000 FEET' by Keith Offord
- 5 CAWOS 'CORMORANTS & INLAND FISHERIES – will the conflict continue?' by Chris Wernham
- 7 CADOS Tregaron, contact Don Pawlett 01244 677477
- 7 CRSPB Sandwell Valley/Brandon Marsh by coach, contact Brian Roberts 01352 714758
- 8 SRSPB 'TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO' by Val McFarland
- 9 ADNHS 'CHESHIRE DRAGONFLIES' by Richard Gabb
- 9 MRSPB 'HOCKENHALL PLATTS NATURE RESERVE' by David Cummings
- 10 HO 'BIRD LIFE IN NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE' by Dr Colin Davies
- 12 MCOS 'WILDLIFE OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS OF SCOTLAND' by Steve Knell
- 12 SECOS 'BIRDS OF VENEZUELA AND CHILE' by Brian Dyke
- 13 KOS Frodsham, meet Knutsford Sessions House 9:00am
- 13 HO Martin Mere and Marshside, meet Cecil Road public car park, Hale at 8:30am
- 17 CRSPB 'THE COMPLETE OWL' by Michael Leach
- 18 NNHS 'THE SEASHORE' by Hugh Jones
- 19 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - 11:45am (HT 13:24, 9.8m)
- 19 NCRSPB 'BIRD MIGRATION' by Jeff Clarke
- 19-21 MCOS Norfolk, ring Paul Kenyon for details on 01606 77960
- 20 CAWOS Gull Identification Workshop, details from Jeff Clarke, 0151 423 4275

- 21 SRSPB Tophill Low by coach, departing at 8:00am – ring for details
 21 MRSPB Rutland Water by coach, meet Duke St. car park 7:30am, contact Ian Taylor 01260 275248
 21 SECOS Tregaron, ring for details
 21 NCRSPB Conway & Nth Wales coast, meet at Frodsham Station Car Park at 9:00am
 23 ADNHS 'WILD PLANTS AND PLACES' by Jack Smith
 26 KOS 'BIRDS OF THE DEE' by Colin Wells
 26 WGOS 'PORTRAIT OF A RIVER' by Charles Owen
 26-28 HO Solway Weekend by coach, ring for details
 27-28 CADOS Northumberland Weekend, contact Don Pawlett 01244 677477
 TBC WGOS Wirral (High Tide Weekend), depart Wilmslow Guild at 8:00am

MARCH

- 4 CADOS 'AGM + MEMBERS EVENING'
 5 **CAWOS AGM, FOLLOWED BY MEMBERS' SLIDES**
 5-7 SECOS East Fife weekend, ring for details
 6 CADOS Pennington/Richmond Bank, contact Chris Done 01928 724994
 7 CRSPB Fleetwood and Rossall, meet 8:30am, ring Brian Prince 01978 353427 for details
 8 SRSPB 'WILDFOWL – THEIR HISTORY AND NATURAL HISTORY' by Roy Croucher
 9 ADNHS 'RAPTORPHILIA' by Keith Offord
 9 MRSPB 'SEABIRD CITY' by Allan and Susan Parker
 10 **CAWOS 'Behind the scenes at the Bird Room', Liverpool Museum, details from Jeff Clarke, 0151 423 4275**
 10 HO 'HARRIERS - SKY DANCERS' - RSPB film
 12 MCOS 'LESBOS EXPERIENCE' by Susan and Allan Parker
 12 SECOS 'WORK OF THE WILDLIFE HOSPITAL' by Andrew Routh RSPCA
 14 KOS Derwent Valley or Pennington Flash depending on weather, meet Sessions House 8:00am
 14 MCOS Worlds End/Clocaenog Forest, meet 7:00am at Worlds End, 11:00am Clocaenog
 14 MRSPB Marshside/Southport, meet Duke St. car park 8:00am, contact Ralph Cole 01625 829119
 17 CRSPB 'WILDFOWL IN TRUST' by Patrick Wisniewski
 18 NNHS 'WILD PLANTS' by Jack Smith
 19 **High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - 10:30am (HT 12:23, 10.1m)**
 19 NCRSPB Quiz and Hot Pot Supper, ring for details
 20 **High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - 11:00am (HT 13:04, 10.1m)**
 20 NCRSPB Parkgate & Wirral, meet at Frodsham Station Car Park 9:00am or at Parkgate 9:30am
 21 **High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - 11:45am (HT 13:46, 9.9m)**
 21 **CAWOS 'In search of the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker', meet 7:00am, Rivacre Valley LNR, details from Jeff Clarke, 0151 423 4275**
 21 HO Great Orme & North Wales coast, meet Cecil Road public car park, Hale at 8:00am
 23 ADNHS AGM followed by short talk
 26 KOS 'BRITISH BIRDS' by Colin Twist
 26 WGOS 'UP THE OKAVANGO' by Charles Brown
 28 SECOS Frodsham, ring for details
 TBC WGOS Leighton Moss, by coach, depart Wilmslow Guild at 8:00am

APRIL

- 9 SECOS AGM & MEMBERS' EVENING
 9 MCOS AGM & MEMBERS' SLIDES EVENING, starting at 7:45pm.
 11 KOS Llandudno/Conway Reserve meet Knutsford Sessions House 9:00am
 11 MCOS Dunsop Valley, meet Dunsop Bridge at 9:30am, ring 01829 265578 for details
 12 SRSPB AGM, followed by a talk by John Headon
 13 MRSPB 'FAIR ISLE' by Tim Melling
 14 HO 'SETTING UP A WILDLIFE SANCTUARY' by Mrs Lalasievriez
 15 NNHS AGM, followed by 'WEEDS IN THE GARDEN' by Dr Brian Barnes
 16 NCRSPB 'THE BIRDS OF FIRE AND ICE' by Gordon Yates
 17 **High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - 11:00am (HT 13:01, 10.3m!)**
 18 **High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - 11:45am (HT 13:44, 10.2m)**
 17 SRSPB Strines, meet in car park (Grid Ref SK 221908) at 10:30am – ring for directions

- 18 CRSPB Leighton Moss by coach, meet 8:30am, ring Graham Dixon 01244 324268 for details
- 18 MRSPB Hope Carr/Pennington Flash, meet Duke St. car park at 8:00am, contact Geoff Yarwood
- 21 CRSPB AGM, followed by 'PYRENEES' by Barrie Cooper
- 23 KOS AGM followed by 'LESBOS' by Peter Perkins
- 23 WGOS AGM, followed by a talk by Brian Dyke
- 24 HO Fairburn Ings by coach, meet Cecil Road public car park, Hale at 8:00am
- 25 SRSPB Attenborough Gravel Pits by coach departing 8:00am – ring for details
- 25 SECOS Coombes Valley & Swallow Moss, ring for details
- 25 NCRSPB Leighton Moss, meet at Sainsbury's Car Park, Warrington, at 9:00am
- 26 SRSPB Etherow Country Park, meet in car park (off B5104) at 7:30pm
- 27 ADNHS 'WATERWAYS' by Jim Hulley
- TBC WGOS Blacktoft Sands and Fairburn Ings, by coach, depart Wilmslow Guild at 7:30am

MAY

- 6-13 KOS Lesbos Anniversary Trip
- 9 CRSPB Pendle Hill meet 8:30am, ring Brian Webster 01244 851026 for details
- 9 NCRSPB Ynys Hir RSPB Reserve, meet at Frodsham Station Car Park at 8:00am
- 10 SRSPB Taxal, meet at layby on Buxton side of A5004 at Whaley Bridge at 7:30pm
- 11 ADNHS 'LIMESTONE FLOWERS OF NORTHERN ENGLAND' by Vincent Pedley
- 11 MRSPB AGM, followed by members' slides
- 12 SECOS Local evening walk, ring for details
- 12 HO 'PHOTOGRAPHING BIRDS IN BRITAIN' by Nick Williams
- 13-16NCRSPB Norfolk long weekend, contact Cliff Gibson on 01925 817874
- 14-16MRSPB Aberystwyth, contact Ian Taylor 01260 275248 for full details
- 15 ADNHS Limestone Trail, Wrexham area, meet Public Car Park, Cecil Road, Hale at 9:15am
- 15 HO Hartington, meet Cecil Road public car park, Hale at 8:00am
- 16 WGOS Bempton Cliffs and Flamborough Head, by coach, depart Wilmslow Guild at 7:30am
- 16 MCOS Conway Valley, meet at Conway RSPB reserve at 9:00am
- 16 SECOS Anglesey, ring for details
- 17 SRSPB Prince's Wood, Higher Poynton, meet in car park in South Park Drive at 7:15pm
- 19 CRSPB Duke's Drive, meet 6:00pm, contact Malcolm Leigh 01244 348238 for details
- 25 MRSPB Sandbach Flashes, meet Elton Hall Flash at 6:45pm, leader John Poolford

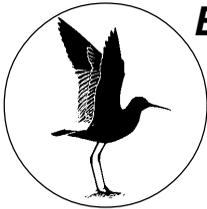
JUNE

- 6 CRSPB Lake Vyrnwy by car, meet 8:30am, ring Rob Adams 01829 270654 for details
- 9 MRSPB Goyt Valley, meet at 7:00pm at Derbyshire Bridge car park, leader Branwyn Kilburn
- 9 HO '60 degrees NORTH' by Stan Craig
- 8 ADNHS Members' evening. Contributions welcomed.
- 12 NCRSPB Bempton Cliffs RSPB Reserve, meet at Sainsbury's Car Park at 8:00am
- 11-13MCOS Dorset, ring Ray Evans for further details on 01829 752494
- 13 SECOS Bempton Cliffs, ring for details

Will **affiliated societies**, who wish to advertise 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, Prog. 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 John's 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 8:00pm, 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 Peter's 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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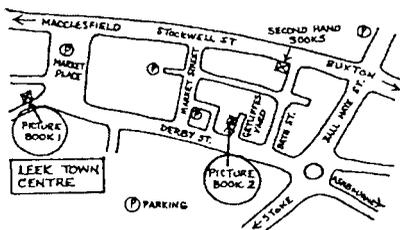
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Imminent date for your diary:-

Sat. 20th February Gull Identification Workshop - see page 28 for details

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