

BIRD NEWS

Number 44 October 99



**Heswall Shore • Barred Warbler
Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens
BTO Winter Farmland Bird Survey
Migration Watch '99 Results**



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*The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Society,
the Council of the Society, or the Editor.*

Front cover: Red-backed Shrike by Tony Broome.

Other illustrations by Tony Broome, Jeff Clarke, Tom Lowe
and Cheshire Countryside Management Service.

Editorial

On most mornings at this time of year I witness a miracle. This is not a supernatural miracle, but it is a 'super-natural' event, the consequence of an achievement the accomplishment of which man barely understands. For, by good fortune, my morning drive to work east along the M58 out of Liverpool often coincides with the daily flight south of thousands of Pink-footed Geese from Martin Mere to their feeding grounds around the Alt estuary. We cross each other's paths near Rainford, their silhouettes framed by the golden rising sun ahead of me. As we all know, 'pinkfoots' migrate each winter to the North-West from their breeding territories in Greenland and Iceland. Exactly how they navigate across the featureless expanse of the north Atlantic to the same locations each year is still somewhat unclear: why they do it isn't. The still relatively unspoilt farmland of this corner of England, combined with the temperance of our Gulf Stream-warmed climate, is an essential requirement for their survival and, thus, an irresistible magnet.

Like the geese, many other species of bird use our estuaries as safe winter refuges where they can build themselves up in preparation for the short Arctic breeding season. To waders in particular, the loss or disturbance of their favoured sites poses a significant threat to their futures. A number of our articles in this issue highlights this fact, but none so graphically as Karen Leeming's report of the activities of the Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens. This group of dedicated individuals gives selflessly of time and energy to protect the wader roost at West Kirby from human disturbance; the results speak for themselves. Also, Thelma Sykes's acclaimed essay vividly portrays the vulnerability yet hardiness of the Dunlin's small frame.

In the face of increased habitat loss through the intensification of farming and the so-called 'development' of rural land for housing and industry – not to mention the increased pressures on our countryside from recreational users - I believe that it is only through the tireless efforts of such groups as the DEWV that the well-documented fall in many species' numbers will be stemmed. And so I ask myself this question: do we, as a Society and as individual birders, wish to continue to see within Cheshire the thousands of birds which rely each winter on the favourable habitat of the county? And if so, are we prepared to actively work for their conservation or are we here to purely record their demise?

However, there may be (to quote Tony Blair) a "third way". Records can be used as an essential tool to prove to both local and national governments the avifaunal importance of a site earmarked for development or to influence the broader planning proposals detailed in Local Development Plans. While the advent of Local Record Centres may help in this respect, currently the responsibility for providing this data falls both on CAWOS and our partners within the county, e.g. Cheshire Wildlife Trust. But for records to be valid they must be collected in a verifiable scientific manner; and that means, I believe, both greater cooperation between the numerous 'conservation' groups within Cheshire and greater involvement from our memberships.

A topical example, albeit outside our area, is that of Cardiff Bay, which has recently been transformed from estuarine mudflats into a freshwater lake, despite it being an SSSI and a nationally important site for Redshank and Dunlin. Records and WeBS counts were submitted in defence of the site and largely ignored, especially by the EC. And so the need of Cardiff's future office and core centre staff to have views over the water rather than biologically diverse mud was deemed more important than the feeding requirements of these waders, which will now have to find space somewhere else on Britain's already crowded estuaries.

So what would happen if, for example, part of the Dee or Mersey estuaries were similarly threatened? Would all the county's various organisations, recording groups, individual birders, WeBS counters, etc. have both the data and clout to successfully oppose such a development? Maybe, but in the face of big finance, I doubt it. So if anything emerges from the 'Way Forward' discussions that Council is holding at present I hope it is this: that CAWOS becomes both a facilitator of greater communication between all these bodies and a coordinator of organised, purposeful surveying. After all, this can only be to the benefit of the birds.

Simon Edwards

Note: copy date for the next issue is 11th December - *please be prompt*

We cannot guarantee that articles received after this date will be published in this issue.

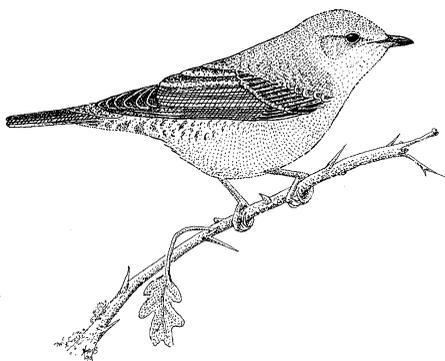
If you are aware that your article may be delayed, please let the Editor know.

County Rarities

BARRED WARBLER (*Sylvia nisoria*)

It's late September and you are working your way along the hedges by the ICI tank at Frodsham. There is a reasonable flock of Chaffinches and Tree Sparrows to distract you plus an obvious influx of Goldcrests and Chiffchaffs in the hedge, and your first four Redwings of the autumn explode out, high towards the fields. You follow another Chiffy as it flits along the cover when you are confronted by another bird, face-on, half hidden by the foliage working its way through the blackberries. Your first impression is of a bigger bird than the Chiffchaff, but featureless and oddly greyish, stocky-looking, with a big bill, before it drops, somewhat slowly, into the middle of the hedge. Was it a Garden Warbler perhaps?

As the brain engages, you are pretty sure it is just a Garden Warbler, but something about the jizz makes you wait for a second look. Sure enough the bird reappears and clammers out giving a good view, this time side-on. The head and upperparts are pale grey, whereas you might have expected warmer browner tones, and the underparts, particularly the throat and belly, are white,



with only a hint of a buff wash to the flanks; so there is more contrast than you would expect and the undertail coverts look greyish brown and faintly barred. It still looks Garden Warbler-like, with the grey legs and dark eye standing out, but it's colder looking, yet somehow is not as featureless. The plain head has a darkish line running through the eye, and the bill does look very big, pointed and dark, save for a greyish base of the lower mandible. However, as you concentrate on the upperparts, the feature which most catches your eye is the pale tips to the median and greater coverts, like washed-out double wing bars. In fact, it reminds you somewhat of a long-tailed Spotted Flycatcher. There are also pale tips to some of the feather tracts on the flight feathers,

noticeably the tertials. Surely Garden Warbler has uniform plain remiges, and this bird is a really big warbler; it dwarfs a nearby Chiffchaff and now you notice just how long the tail is. You realise that this is a Barred Warbler, and as the bird drops back into the hedge, the narrow white outer tail feathers are visible, a feature no Garden Warbler ever has.

Considering the frequency of records on the east coast, and Yorkshire in particular, it is a little surprising that Barred Warbler is such a very rare visitor to Cheshire & Wirral with only one record; the bird at Red Rocks on 11th September 1993. Other classic Scandinavian drift migrants seem to turn up more frequently, and one wonders if we are just missing these big boxy warblers.

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

COMPUTERISED SUBMISSION OF RECORDS

CAWOS Council is currently considering ways to improve the recording process. Not only to make it easier for people to submit records, but also to encourage those who at present do not submit records, for whatever reason! One suggestion is to provide interested members with a pre-formatted Excel spreadsheet to facilitate this. Unfortunately it would not be ready in time to help you with this year's records, but if there is enough interest we will make it a priority to have it available by spring of next year. You would then be able to enter your records as the year progresses, in order to negate that last minute rush at the end of the year or beginning of the next! So.....

If you are interested in submitting your records on disc please let the Editor know.

RUMOURS.... RUMOURS....

It has come to the attention of the *Bird News* team that a well-known Wirral birder may not be the best person to accompany on a twitch. We are sure that the recent long-staying Hoopoe in Hoylake has been seen by most of Cheshire's birding fraternity. However, not by a group of Swedish students who were conducted to the site on King's Gap one fine morning by this regular *Bird News* contributor. Unfortunately the bird had flown elsewhere, but it did return that afternoon to its favoured haunt (we know; the Editor saw it!). This didn't help the poor Swedes who spent most of that day on Hilbre. It is, of course, possible that this was an isolated incident and we hesitate to use the word "jinx". However, we will be closely monitoring this individual's movements and will keep you informed of any further developments. After all, this was surely no way to thank the Swedes for keeping England in Euro 2000! It should also be noted that [allegedly] the individual concerned later returned unaccompanied to successfully see the bird!

.....



As the Mute Swan flew down to the lake
Which was frozen, he tried hard to brake,
Then it looked quite surreal
As he squashed twenty Teal,
Fifteen Coot and a Mandarin Drake.

Hazel J Raw

Sites to Watch

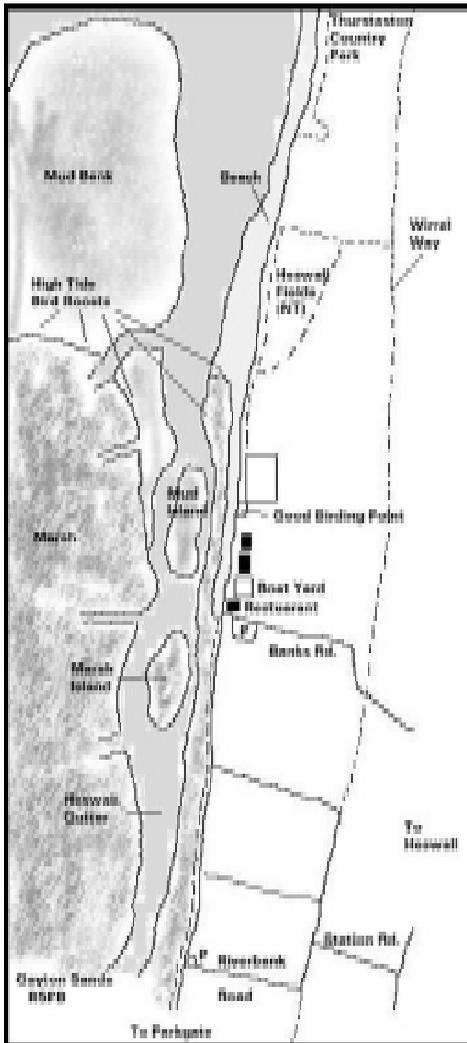
HESWALL SHORE

As you walk down the lane leading from the car park at the end of Banks Road to Heswall shore the first thing that strikes you is the boats. Not some fancy modern marina, but a good old-fashioned anchorage full of small yachts, fishing smacks, dinghies and motor boats, giving the place a distinctly East Anglian atmosphere. Even before you have time to raise your binoculars to your eyes you realise that the mud between the boats is full of birds. Small parties of Teal are everywhere, their soft whistles filling the air. Many are just a few yards away, calmly squatting on the mud undisturbed by your presence. Redshanks are present in their hundreds, feeding on the mudbanks either side of the channel, whilst the plaintive cries of Curlews can be heard as they fly from one side of the channel to the other.

Look south towards Parkgate and the marsh seems to go on for ever. From here it is a good two hours' walk to the head of the estuary at Burton. To the north, beyond the marsh, are the vast mudflats of the open estuary with Hilbre Island beyond floating serenely in the distance. Now is the time to have a first look through your telescope to reveal the thousands of Shelducks, Oystercatchers, Knots and Dunlins all busy looking for food in the mud. You may be lucky and see a massed flight flashing white and grey in the sun, the close-packed birds first splitting then reuniting as they try to escape the attentions of a Peregrine Falcon.

For me, the magic of Heswall is the sheer number of birds present whatever the state of the tide. A gutter (tidal creek) flows past the shore from Caldly to the north almost as far as Parkgate to the south; never more than one hundred yards from the beach and shore path, it comes as close as fifty yards as it passes by Heswall. This gutter acts like a magnet to the birds bringing them into close view of anyone on the beach, be they hardened twitcher, weekend birdwatcher or casual visitor.

Good as it is at any state of the tide, like anywhere else some times are better than others. My ideal day would start at dawn three hours before a spring high tide. If it is a cloudless day without any wind, so much the better! Start walking along the shore towards Thurstaston; gradually the muddy path turns into a pleasant sandy beach. Shortly you will be greeted with the glorious sight of the Curlew morning flight. Hundreds of these birds fly inland at first light to feed in the surrounding fields, calling as they pass overhead. Heswall is a major haunt of this lovely bird with up to 5000 present in winter; a good many of these feed in the coastal fields during the day.



Walk on past the end of the marsh and the whole panorama of the mudflats opens up before you. Birds will already be on the move with the tide but a good proportion of the mud will still be exposed up to two and a half hours before high water. Here is a favourite haunt of Black-tailed Godwit; a flock of a thousand or so are frequently seen on the mud at this point a few yards from the beach. A look in the gutter should reveal the tide rushing in. It will soon cover the mud with almost frightening speed. Now a true wildlife spectacular unfolds as the birds are funnelled towards you by the rising water. If the sea is calm the Shelducks will form one vast swimming flock, their white plumage glinting in the sun; late on in the winter they are often joined by Scaup. Oystercatchers fly overhead on their way to join the Curlews inland, noisily piping all the way. As the mud is covered, the smaller Knots and Dunlins fly off in vast flocks to their favourite high tide roosts at Denhall near the head of the estuary, or in the other direction to West Kirby. The Redshanks, meanwhile, huddle in large groups either side of the gutter. They will only be driven off to find higher ground further up the marsh when the sea starts creeping over the marsh. As high tide approaches walk back past the boats and before heading back to the car park have one last look across Heswall gutter; this is a particularly good time to see duck driven out of the narrow inlets and channels by the rising tide.

Now for some facts and figures: Heswall has the largest Redshank roost in the country; the largest count this winter was 6600. According to WeBS counts, the Dee Estuary has the second highest number of Shelducks; the record count for the estuary was 10,400 in October 1997 with a spectacular 9400 off Heswall. Dunlin, Knot and also Oystercatchers frequent the mudflats in their thousands, whilst Wigeon and Pintail tend to stay out on the far side of the marsh, but may be observed through a decent telescope. Rareities

seen in the past year or so include Spoonbill, Little Egret, Ruddy Shelduck, Curlew Sandpiper, Greenshank and Shore Lark. Bird numbers like this are bound to attract Peregrine Falcons, and at least one appears to have taken up permanent residence on the marsh; when not hunting it can usually be seen perching on its favourite post off Sheldrakes Restaurant, waiting for its next meal! Four Hen Harriers have been present on the estuary last winter and one or two of these are regular visitors to Heswall marsh, whereas Short-eared Owls are rarer, only occasionally seen hunting rodents during high tide.

There is excellent access to the shore at Heswall with free car parks at the end of both Banks and Riverbank Roads, reached by turning off the A540 in Heswall town centre and going through lower Heswall village to the shore beyond. A bus service runs between Heswall centre and the shore at Banks Road car park. In addition, the shore can easily be reached by walking from the Wirral Country Park at Thurstaston, half a mile to the north. The best time to visit is between September and March. To keep up with the latest sightings and bird news from Heswall and throughout the Dee Estuary try the *Birdwatching Guide to the Dee Estuary* on the Internet at <http://www.deeestuary.freeserve.co.uk>.

Richard Smith, 12 Thurstaston Road, Irby, Wirral, Merseyside, L61 0HE

Recent Reports

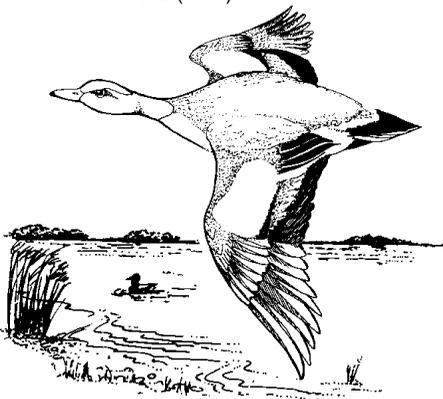
Some of these records may be unauthenticated and require review by the Society Records Panel or the BBRC. The records cover the period from June to August.

JUNE.

Bird of the month was the female **Little Crake** at Woolston Eyes No2 bed (19th-20th at least). The bird was seen briefly once on the 19th and there was much debate over the bird which was heard calling next day. If accepted it will be the first county record. A first summer male **Common Rosefinch** was apparently singing at Meols (9th-10th). The bird was seen briefly on both dates and unfortunately news of the bird's presence was not released until it had gone. If accepted this will be the long-awaited first county record.

Little Grebes bred at Dead Lake, Delamere and Marbury No1 tank with an adult at Poynton Pool on 18th (where very rare). 14 **Great Crested Grebes** at Fiddler's Ferry (6th & 12th) was a new June record there. Single **Black-necked Grebes** visited Houghton Green Pool (19th-20th & 28th) with two on the 22nd. An imm **Night Heron** at Elton Hall Flash, Sandbach (2nd) was the seventh county record. A **Little Egret** visited Frodsham briefly on 6th and 12th. The first summer **Spoonbill** remained at Inner Marsh Farm to 8th and reappeared from the 25th. Poynton Pool had its first nesting pair of **Mute Swans** for 20 years but unfortunately both attempts failed, while 54 were at Doddington Pool (23rd). A **Pink-footed Goose** visited Budworth Mere (11th).

A female **Ruddy Shelduck** was on the River Mersey at Stanlow Point (29th). Broods of **Shelducks** included eight at Fiddler's Ferry, six at Neumann's Flash and five at Sandbach Flashes. **Mandarins** bred at Rostherne Mere. Small numbers of **Wigeon** summered at Fiddler's Ferry, Frodsham, Inner Marsh Farm and Sandbach Flashes. Up to 12 **Gadwall** were in the Witton area with the occasional bird at Sandbach Flashes. The moulting male **Pintail** was at Poynton Pool (26th only) for the fourth year running. A female **Pochard** was at Elton Hall Flash, Sandbach (21st) and a pair of **Shovelers** was at Blakemere Moss (28th). A male **Long-tailed Duck** at Houghton Green Pool (10th-15th) was the first June record of this species for Cheshire & Wirral. Seven drake **Common Scoters** visited Rostherne Mere (17th) and an imm drake **Goldeneye** was there from 6th. A pair of **Ruddy Ducks** at Marbury No1 tank hatched three young (8th), only the second breeding record for that area.



A **Honey Buzzard** was reported over Woolston Eyes No4 bed and then later over Inner Marsh Farm (both 5th). Other reports came from Burton Wood (12th) and Rostherne Mere (20th) – the first reserve record. Up to 35 pairs of **Buzzards** were located in south-west Cheshire. A **Red Kite** was reported over the M6 just south of the Holmes Chapel junction on the 2nd. **Marsh Harriers** were at Frodsham (6th) and Woolston Eyes (5th) with two birds at Fiddler's Ferry. An **Osprey** circled Frodsham No5 tank (4th) before flying off south-east and was presumably the bird seen at Rostherne Mere the same day. **Hobbies** were at Crewe (3rd), Sandbach Flashes (3rd, 20th & 24th), Rostherne (9th, 11th & 20th) and Woolston Eyes (5th). Six calling **Quails** were at Farndon on 29th (birds heard regularly from 12th) with others at Decca Pools (two on 14th & one on 28th) and Parkgate (one on 12th & 25th). A **Corncrake** was heard calling late evening at Woolston Eyes (11th).

Up to four **Oystercatchers** were at Houghton Green Pool, while in south-east Cheshire, two visited Weston Cricket Pitch (21st). A **Grey Plover** visited Sandbach Flashes (13th). Two **Curlew Sandpipers** were at Inner Marsh Farm (24th-25th). A **Ruff** returned to Woolston Eyes at the end of the month and a male lingered at Inner Marsh Farm early in the month. Up to six **Black-tailed Godwits** were at Sandbach Flashes early in the month. Up to 100 **Curlews** roosted at Chelford SQs late in the month. **Spotted Redshanks** returned to Parkgate (16th) and Inner Marsh Farm (25th), where two **Greenshanks** had returned (25th). By the last week **Green Sandpipers** were at

Marbury No1 tank, Sandbach Flashes and the Weaver Bend. **Wood Sandpipers** visited Inner Marsh Farm (2nd & 14th-15th) and Sandbach Flashes (14th & 25th). A pair of **Common Sandpipers** was reported to have raised three young at a site on the Wirral for the first time in 35 years. A **Red-necked Phalarope** was on the River Mersey at Fiddler's Ferry (6th) but it flew off down river.

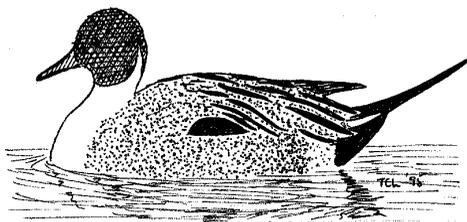
Five **Little Gulls** were at Rostherne Mere (17th) with singles on 15th and 18th, while one visited Sandbach Flashes (14th). First summer **Mediterranean Gulls** were at Frodsham No6 tank (4th-5th) and Inner Marsh Farm (4th). 500 pairs of **Black-headed Gulls** at Inner Marsh Farm deserted the colony (thought to be due to an escaped Eagle Owl!) while numerous pairs had young at Blakemere Moss (28th). Five **Common Terns** were at Fiddler's Ferry (27th) with up to four at Sandbach Flashes on six dates and 13 there on 27th. A single **Turtle Dove** was still at Rixton Clay Pits (25th). A **Short-eared Owl** was at Fiddler's Ferry on the 6th (first June record there) with 500 **Swifts** there (26th) and 60 at Poynton Pool (16th). A **Hoopoe** was reported at Timbersbrook (1st). 100 **Sand Martins** were at both Fiddler's Ferry (26th) and Houghton Green Pool (14th) with 150+ over Blakemere Moss (28th). A female **Blue-headed Wagtail** at Frodsham No4 tank (13th) was paired to a male **Yellow Wagtail**. Other breeding pairs of Yellow Wagtails were at Farndon (two) and Houghton Green Pool.

The partial albino **Blackbird** was still at Poynton Pool (5th) and a **Redstart** was still singing at Delamere in the last week. Three **Grasshopper Warblers** 'reeled' at Fiddler's Ferry (26th) with up to four each of **Sedge** and **Reed Warblers** there. The first young **Whitethroats** appeared at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton on 6th with eight singing at Fiddler's Ferry (12th & 27th). A **Wood Warbler** was still singing at Delamere (28th). A **Marsh Tit** at Rostherne Mere (6th) was the first reserve record for three years. Single pairs of **Spotted Flycatchers** bred at the Rangers' Cabin at Marbury CP, Sandbach Flashes and Tatton. At least 10 **Tree Sparrows** and five male **Yellowhammers** were at Farndon (14th) with two or three of the latter at Rixton. Two pairs of **Corn Buntings** were at both Frodsham and Houghton Green Pool.

JULY

Two **Black-necked Grebes** were at Houghton Green Pool (17th). A few **Storm Petrels** were recorded off the North Wirral shore at Leasowe and New Brighton during the third week. **Cormorants** bred at a private site on the River Mersey, constituting the first breeding record for the county. This is the first inland nesting for the North-West region. A **Little Egret** was at Inner Marsh Farm (21st) and another was reported on the Mersey. 40 moulting **Mute Swans** were at Budworth Mere and a **Whooper Swan** was at Woolston (18th). Up to 39 **Canada Geese** at Fiddler's Ferry included a pair with five young and 208 at Poynton Pool (28th) was a record July count there. Two **Ruddy Shelducks** and at least 100 young **Shelducks** were seen off Stanlow Point (26th) where numbers of moulting adults reached 12,000 birds. A Ruddy Shelduck was at Trafford Hall, near Frodsham (30th). Fiddler's Ferry had its second Shelduck brood of the year from 4th.

Teal returned to Marbury No1 tank from 4th and nearby a **Pintail** was on Neumann's Flash for several days mid-month. Post-breeding numbers of **Mallard** reached an impressive 124 at Poynton Pool on the 23rd. **Garganey** were at Frodsham (15th-16th) and Inner Marsh Farm (31st). 14 **Shovelers** returned to Fiddler's Ferry (31st) and an eclipse drake **Red-crested Pochard** was at Sandbach Flashes (7th). Two **Pochard** at Poynton Pool (12th) was the first summer record there, while up to five Pochard and 36 **Tufted Ducks** visited Fiddler's Ferry late in the month. Tufted Ducks reached 100 on Budworth Mere and a **Scaup** was seen there. A pair of Scaup was seen off Stanlow Point. The **Goldeneye** remained at Rostherne Mere all month and a drake **Goosander** visited Sandbach Flashes (14th) – an exceptional date.



A **Red Kite** was seen feeding on a gull corpse near Burton Manor College (18th). Three different **Marsh Harriers** visited Fiddler's Ferry during the month with a male at Rostherne Mere (21st). A **Goshawk** was over Weston (15th). **Hobbies** were at Arclid SQ (25th), Ashton's Flash (18th), Inner Marsh Farm (4th, 18th & 26th), Poynton Pool (30th) - the second ever there, Sandbach Flashes (12th, 19th & 31st) and Rostherne Mere (7th & 20th). Single **Peregrines** were at Chelford SQs, Frodsham and Sandbach Flashes. A **Red-legged Partridge** was at Sandbach Flashes (31st). **Quail** called at

Farndon, Frodsham (17th) and Parkgate (two on 16th & 18th). 300 **Coots** were at Budworth Mere.

Up to nine **Little Ringed Plovers** at Neumann's Flash was a poor total with 15 at Sandbach Flashes (10th). Two broods of **Ringed Plovers** were seen at Fiddler's Ferry with four at Neumann's Flash (31st). A **Sanderling** was at Chelford SQs (22nd). A **Curlew Sandpiper** was at Sandbach Flashes (30th-31st) and nearby four **Dunlin** visited Arclid SQ (22nd). Two **Black-tailed Godwits** were at Arclid SQ (7th) with small numbers at Fiddler's Ferry (up to 11 on three dates), Neumann's Flash (up to three on two dates) and Sandbach Flashes (up to eight on three dates & 18 on the 19th). Three returning **Whimbrels** were at Sandbach Flashes (27th). 70 **Curlews** visited Fiddler's Ferry (10th) with up to 250 roosting at Neumann's Flash during the last week and three over Poynton Pool (28th) was a rare mid-summer record there. A **Spotted Redshank** at Fiddler's Ferry (31st) was the first record there since Sept 1994 while **Greenshanks** were seen there (17th & 24th). 14 Greenshanks were at Inner Marsh Farm (10th). Up to four, 10 and six **Green Sandpipers** were at Chelford SQs, Marbury No1 tank and Sandbach Flashes respectively during the month with one at Fiddler's Ferry (24th) and two at Rixton Clay Pits (25th). Three **Common Sandpipers** were at Fiddler's Ferry (18th), with singles at Poynton Pool (12th-13th & 21st) and Witton Brook (18th).

Yellow-legged Gulls were at Inner Marsh Farm (21st), Neumann's Flash and Parkgate with up to five regularly at Sandbach Flashes. Up to three **Common Terns** were at Sandbach Flashes on four dates (with five on 6th) and up to three visited Rostherne Mere on four dates. An amazing count of 66 'Commic' Terns were at Sandbach Flashes (25th) with one at Rixton Clay Pits (25th) and six at Rostherne Mere (26th). Three **Kingfishers** indicated breeding at Moore NR and a pair bred near Poynton Pool. 30 **Meadow Pipits** at Fiddler's Ferry (18th) was a local post-breeding build-up. **Redstarts** at Forge Bed (26th), Inner Marsh Farm (18th) and Sandbach Flashes (9th) were unusual site records. **Whinchats** were at Frodsham (17th) and Inner Marsh Farm (29th). Post-breeding flocks of **Mistle Thrushes** included 30 at Fiddler's Ferry (31st) and 28 at Sandbach Flashes (17th).

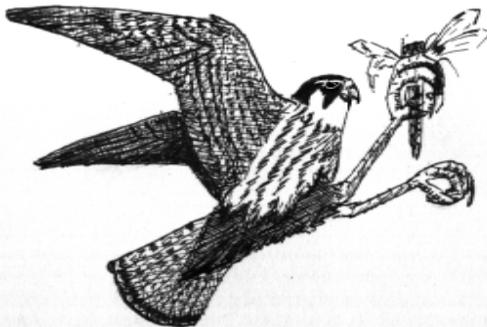
One or two **Grasshopper Warblers** were at Fiddler's Ferry (to 18th) and Marbury No1 tank (to 7th). A post-breeding flock of 34 **Long-tailed Tits** visited Fiddler's Ferry (10th). A **Raven** flew over Witton Landfill (31st) with three at Tatton (20th). Several **Tree Sparrows** were at Rixton late in the month while an impressive 70 birds were at Sandbach Flashes (21st). A **Crossbill** was at Burton (10th) before moving to Inner Marsh Farm next day. A **Bullfinch** at Fiddler's Ferry (10th & 17th) was the first July record there. **Hawfinches** may have bred in the county for the first time since 1990.

AUGUST

August is a prime month for American waders with no fewer than 17 different birds since 1968. Not surprisingly, an adult **White-rumped Sandpiper** turned up at Frodsham on the 19th (a typical date). Unfortunately the bird was only seen by the finder, much to the frustration of some of the other locals. If accepted it will be c13th county record. Another typical record was the **Pectoral Sandpiper** at Sandbach Flashes (20th) and if accepted will be the 10th for the Flashes. An adult **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** made two brief visits to Inner Marsh Farm (4th) but was not seen subsequently. From Europe, two adult **Marsh Sandpipers** briefly at Frodsham No6 tank (12th) were presumably the birds seen in the Seaforth area (Merseyside). If accepted, they will be the 3rd-4th county records.

Eight or nine pairs of **Black-necked Grebes** nesting in the Mersey Valley fledged 12 young (in addition several pairs nested on the Greater Manchester side). Another was at the Weaver Bend. An early **Bittern** flew south past Hilbre (13th) which was the first August record since 1983. Two **Little Egrets** were at Inner Marsh Farm (8th & 19th) and four **Spoonbills** were there (29th). 65 **Greylag Geese** and 350 **Canada Geese** roosted at Neumann's Flash. 600 Canadas were at Sandbach Flashes (29th). Five **Ruddy Shelducks** were at Inner Marsh Farm (7th-8th) with a single wandering bird at Trafford Hall (3rd), Sandbach Flashes (4th-6th), Inner Marsh Farm (12th-25th) and Neumann's Flash (29th). Six young **Gadwall** fledged at Marbury No1 tank, while 99 at Arpley/Moore NR (16th) was a site record. Larger than usual numbers of **Teal** returned to Chelford SQs. **Garganey** numbers peaked with up to five regularly at Inner Marsh Farm (max nine on 13th), up to four at Marbury No1 tank (10th-27th) and an elusive bird at Chelford SQs (from 26th) which was the second site record. 36 **Pochard** and 12 **Tufted Ducks** were at Melchett Mere (8th). Two **Scaup** were off Hilbre (12th) when three **Common Scoters** flew past. The **Goldeneye** remained at Rostherne Mere all month. A **Goosander** at Neumann's Flash (15th) was a rare midsummer record there. 21 **Ruddy Ducks** were at Melchett Mere (17th).

Marsh Harriers were at Frodsham, Inner Marsh Farm on five dates, Rostherne Mere (6th) and Woolston Eyes (one all month & three on 21st). Up to nine **Buzzards** were seen together at Rostherne Mere with eight at both Chelford (22nd) and Tatton (29th). Single **Ospreys** flew over Macclesfield (10th) and Frodsham (19th). Single **Merlins** and **Hobbies** visited Woolston Eyes while another Merlin was at Frodsham (12th). Other Hobbies were seen at Blacon (two), Budworth Mere (7th, attacking a Common Tern), Delamere, Inner Marsh Farm (20th), Moore NR (15th &



31st) and up to three pairs bred within the county this year. At least two, but possibly as many as four, **Spotted Crakes** were at Marbury No1 tank (9th-18th) with singles reported at Frodsham, Inner Marsh Farm (11th, 18th & 20th) and Woolston Eyes.

20 **Little Ringed Plovers** was the peak count at Chelford SQs (5th). A roost of 1000 **Ringed Plovers** at Frodsham (30th) was a good record after the poor autumn passage of 1998. By late August **Lapwing** numbers reached 500+ at Moore NR and 1500 at Neumann's Flash. 16 **Knot** were at Inner Marsh Farm (26th) with five **Little Stints** there (24th) and up to 30 of the

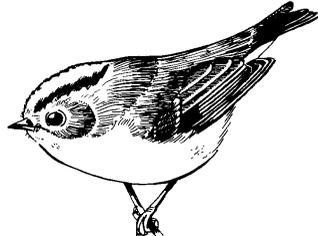
latter at Frodsham. Up to 40 **Curlew Sandpipers** were at Frodsham with up to five at Marbury No1 tank (21st-30th). 200 **Snipe** were in flooded fields by the River Mersey. At least 2370 **Black-tailed Godwits** were seen on the Mersey WeBS count (15th) with up to 800 at Frodsham and one at Rostherne Mere (16th). 274 **Curlews** roosted at Neumann's Flash (5th). 38 **Greenshank** were at Inner Marsh Farm (25th) and 20 at Frodsham with up to four at Chelford SQs, two at Moore NR (10th) and five at Witton Limebeds (28th). 10 **Green Sandpipers** were at Inner Marsh Farm (15th) with up to eight at Marbury No1 tank. **Wood Sandpipers** were at Chelford SQs (11th), Frodsham (9th), Inner Marsh Farm (2nd, 4th & 23rd-30th), Marbury No1 tank (10th & 18th) and Sandbach Flashes (29th). **Common Sandpipers** were at Poynton Pool (21st) and Tatton (6th).

Two **Mediterranean Gulls** visited Frodsham while up to seven different birds were at Neumann's Flash between 5th and 22nd. Two **Yellow-legged Gulls** were at Neumann's Flash with others at Chelford SQs (19th) and on Frodsham Score. Two **Common Terns** were at Budworth Mere (7th), Rostherne Mere (4th) and Tatton Mere (5th) with 200+ off Hilbre (12th when 30+ **Little Terns** were present). **Black Terns** were at Inner Marsh Farm (11th & 18th) and Tatton Mere (2nd, 4th-5th & 30th). A winter-plumaged **Black Guillemot** off Hilbre (28th) was the first Aug record since 1993. A day-hunting **Long-eared Owl** was at Inner Marsh Farm (2nd-7th) with a migrant bird at Hilbre (7th) - the first there since 1994. **Swifts** left at the end of the first week with stragglers at Ellesmere Port (23rd) and Elton (25th). A **Green Woodpecker** was at Moore NR (31st) - a rare sight there. Tatton had a steady passage of **Swallows** (c200 birds) on the 29th while Moore NR had a roost of 500+ each of Swallows and **Sand Martins**. A **Wheatear** was at Tatton Park (9th). A **Firecrest** was at Black Lake, Delamere (18th) during a fall of 12 **Spotted Flycatchers** and a large influx of **Willow Warblers** there. A **Raven** was at Marbury No1 tank (12th) with two there on 24th and two at Tatton (29th). Large flocks of **Goldfinches** included Elton (60), Frodsham (100+), Neumann's Flash (60) and Willaston (30+).

PREDICTIONS FOR NOVEMBER TO JANUARY

By early November large numbers of both Fieldfares and Redwings will be in evidence. A high tide on the Dee estuary should produce several Water Rails but the main attraction is sure to be the raptors including Short-eared Owl, Merlin, Peregrine and Hen Harrier. Search tit flocks for Nuthatches, Treecreepers and particularly Firecrest. Check finch flocks for Bramblings, Yellowhammers, or even the possibility of a Little Bunting is not out of the question.

Harsh weather in December could bring a selection of goodies with all three divers and the three scarce grebes possible off Hilbre. Both Red-necked and Slavonian Grebes could turn up inland. The large duck numbers at Inner Marsh Farm and Rostherne Mere may hold the odd rarity such as Green-winged Teal or American Wigeon, but Smew is much more



likely. Keep an eye on those garden feeders for wintering Blackcaps. Why not take advantage of the extra day's holiday over the New Year weekend to start your New Year in style? Up to 120 species should be possible but target your time carefully. Pick sites with a wide variety of habitats and which attract many different species.

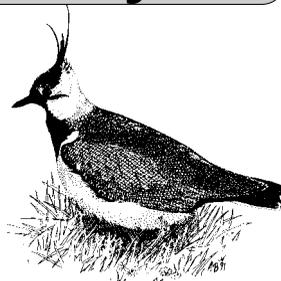
If you would like to see your Cheshire & Wirral records featured here please send them to me at the address below. I would appreciate records on a **month-by-month** basis to speed up the writing-up process, but all records for the period Sept-Nov should reach me by the beginning of December. Please remember to send your descriptions, if appropriate, to Tony Broome.

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

Thanks/Acknowledgements for Recent Reports go to:- S.&G.Barber, I.Blagden, *Birdwatch & Birdwatching* magazines, J.Clarke, A.Hearn, Inner Marsh Farm Log, M.Jones, K.Kirk, K.Massey (Fiddler's Ferry), D.Morris (Tatton & Knutsford Moor LNR), Rostherne Log, Sandbach Flashes Log, D.Walters (Marbury CP & Witton Limebeds), C.Williams and anyone else who passed records on.

The View from the Farmyard

It is I'm sure impossible to ever know everything about things avian, as habitats, habits and even bird species are forever evolving and attempting different strategies for survival. Trees feature heavily in the lives of many bird species, be it teasing insects from the bark, eating caterpillars from the leaves, nesting on branches, in holes inside the tree or amongst the roots in old rabbit burrows. So it shouldn't be surprising to find that less obvious species of bird also utilise these structures that reach into the bird's element. Mallards regularly nest in the chestnut trees by Toft pool, my first encounter with them being as many as fifteen years ago. I saw what I thought was a small brown bird bobbing up and down in the huge cleft where the trunk splits into three great boughs. Upon closer inspection the brown bird was found to actually be the head of the female Mallard as it sat on the nest tending its eggs. Some days later I was fortunate to be present when eleven tiny ducklings took one small step into nothingness, their tiny wings acting as parachutes as they plummeted pond-ward. Once in the marginal vegetation they were marshalled into one body to face the perils of the next stage of life.



Another unexpected visitor to the trees was a magnificent male Wheatear; he sat bolt upright at the pinnacle of another parkland chestnut tree. The tree had once been in the fence line of the old moss boundary but now stands almost alone in the field. Victorian drainage extended the cultivatable land into the moss, and the fields were extended to fit. The now more open nature of the landscape is attractive to migrating Wheatears in most years, but this bird was using the treetop out of necessity. The reason for this became apparent when a female Sparrowhawk broke cover from the lower branches of the same tree. Skimming the grass it flushed fifty Meadow Pipits, took one and perched on the edge of the wood opposite to enjoy its unfortunate meal. However my prize for originality goes to a Black-headed Gull, which with its friends visits our garden on most days throughout the winter to eat the batter waste gleaned from a local fish and chip shop by my wife. On any normal day, having consumed their meal the gulls sit and preen in the middle of the old cricket field adjacent to the garden. One bird with evidently a plastic-lined stomach perched in the top branches of the yew tree at the end of our drive. For fifteen minutes it clambered around the branches eating the buds from the branch ends, the poison from which could down a small herd of cows. As to whether it survived its meal I cannot answer, but it would seem to prove that eccentric adventurers are not confined to the human race.

Cutting the set-aside grass is a job that I don't take lightly, as part of the purpose in the siting of the set-aside is to encourage birds to use the land. It would be rather counter-productive to get the birds in, only to destroy their nests at some crucial time in the season. So before the cutting is due to be done I spend some time watching the progress of the nesting species. This year two pairs of Skylark raised broods and once fledging was confirmed I was set to mowing the grass off. The mower used is not the one so much to blame for bird destruction, but one specially designed for

topping pastureland; running much slower than the drum mower in the silage field and cutting much higher, so as to remove the seeding heads of grass and weeds to promote new grass growth, without leaving the field bare of grass. Adopting the Corncrake-sensitive mowing strategies, so as to drive any foraging Pheasants or partridges towards the permanent grass strip which borders the field, I was able to avoid killing a female Pheasant and her seven chicks. The movement of the grass as they pushed their way through giving their presence away, over the following weeks this small family were encountered time and time again. The development of the chicks is a direct consequence of just a little care. What a shame it would be if they are to end up on the wrong end of a shotgun, but then maybe I have a little plot in hand.

Spring passage usually sees a few extra species passing through that don't breed here. Sand Martins fall into this category, and are sometimes to be found flying over Toft pool possibly on their way to Tatton Mere, where at various times hundreds accumulate before flying on to the breeding colonies. One rare encounter was had with two such passage birds. It occurred in the old orchards behind the farmyard. The orchards were part of the walled garden that once kept Toft Hall almost self-sufficient in fruit and vegetables in the 19th century, and are now used as paddocks for our calving cows, which are sheltered from the sharp winds by 12ft high Cheshire brick walls. The glow of the red brick when the sun strikes them must from the air take on the appearance of a sandbank, so it was that the birds were attracted down to take a look. Once the birds had dropped below the height of the walls they found themselves in a microclimate. Here the air was warmer, and flies were abundant and the pickings easy. They flew in circles snapping up flies and possibly enjoying some of the warmest conditions since having left Africa. After the feast their attentions were turned to the walls; clinging on to the bricks' rough surface they tested first the brick and then the mortar. Chipping away with their beaks looking for I presume a nest site, they moved from wall to wall but most interest was shown in the south-facing facet. The probing continued until the passing of a Little Owl put them to flight, and they were gone. Had these walls been sand, would they have stayed? We shall never know, but when on migration they are clearly alert to new nesting opportunities as shown by their colonisation of new sand quarries.

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

Projects and Surveys

BTO WOODLAND BIRDS APPEAL (with the help of a CAWOS donation!)

We are very grateful to the members of the Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society for the donation of £350 that was made to the BTO's Nightingale Appeal on your behalf. As always, the BTO is dependent upon two vital resources - time and money. Anyone who has contributed records to one of the BTO's surveys or responded positively to an appeal has played his or her part in British bird conservation. We could not do it without you!

Woodland looks like being the 'new farmland'. The declines of breeding birds in fields and hedgerows have been well documented and the ground-breaking work by the BTO, based on 30 years of effort by volunteer birdwatchers, is indicating the choices which must be made if we are to combine agriculture with a rich diversity of plants, insects, birds and mammals. The losses in woodland started more slowly and it is only in the past few years that concerns have been expressed about species such as Willow Tit (down 50% between 1972 and 1996) and Marsh Tit (down 37%). Every birdwatcher must be aware there were six times as many Spotted Flycatchers 30 years ago as there are now. These are some depressing stories.

The Nightingale Appeal, launched by Dame Vera Lynn in Berkeley Square in the spring of 1998, should provide us with funds to look at some of the problems in woodland. The focus has been the Nightingale - because of its high profile and the losses that are occurring in many counties - but significant sums of money are going into the continuance of the Trust's vital monitoring work for other woodland species. Next year we hope to diversify further; targeting nest record analyses for declining species, for instance, so that we can find out whether the problems for these birds are occurring in the breeding season or during the winter.



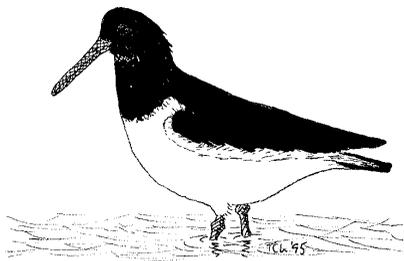
British Trust for Ornithology

When our concerns were for farmland birds, the BTO was successful in securing the support of parties interested in this financially important environment. Unfortunately, woodland is often viewed as valueless. Woods have been removed and, with fewer people working in the countryside, management systems that used to produce timber products and create diverse habitats have died out. If we are to try to work out the reasons for the changes in woodland populations (in the woods which do still exist) and suggest ways to look after these habitats, then we must rely even more heavily than normal on the financial help of individuals who love birds. I should like to thank the Society once more for its support.

Graham Appleton, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU

WARDENING WADERS (with the help of a CAWOS donation!)

For me, as a Wirral birder one of the most spectacular sights of the season is standing on West Kirby beach when there is a huge roost of wintering waders from Iceland, Greenland, Scandinavia, northern Russia and Canada. These roosts are even more breathtaking when they are aerial, with thousands upon thousands of Dunlins, Knots, Bar-tailed Godwits, Grey Plovers, Oystercatchers and Curlews wheeling, dipping and tumbling in an avian ballet against a (usually) grey winter sky. The only problem is that this latter sight is one that the Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens (DEVW) try to prevent from happening too often as the repercussions for the birds can be serious. If subjected to continuous disturbance the birds find it difficult to restore the energy that they are using up when flying, which can have a number of consequences. In the short term, if there is a cold spell they can die or they are weakened, making them easy prey. In the long term, if they fail to reach the optimum weight for breeding they can die on the journey north to their breeding grounds or fail to breed. The DEVW tries to minimise disturbances so that waders will continue to return to the Dee.



These large flocks of waders have been a feature of the Dee Estuary for many years and have contributed to the estuary's recognition both nationally and internationally as an outstanding habitat. In 1971 the estuary was designated a Ramsar site in accordance with the terms laid down by the international convention held in Ramsar, Iran, as it was "a wetland of international importance for waterfowl" (Kirby, Clee and Seager, 1993). In the same year it was also designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest and in 1979 a Special Protection Area under the European Commission Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds. However, this impressive array of protective measures did not automatically guarantee the protection of the wader flocks and from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s the numbers began to fall dramatically. For example, the numbers of Bar-tailed Godwits fell by 99% from a peak count of 11,149 in 1976/77 to 25 birds in 1984/85; Knots by 79% from a peak of 48,000 in 1979/80 to 10,050 in 1985/86 (both of these species were found to have switched their roost sites to the Alt); and Dunlins by 81% from a peak of 46,826 in 1975/76 to 8800 in 1985/86, which mirrored a decline nationally (Mitchell, Moser and Kirby, 1988).

Mitchell et al. (1988) attributed the behavioural changes of Bar-tailed Godwits and Knots to increased levels of disturbance on the Dee roost sites, especially in the West Kirby/Red Rocks area. This disturbance was caused mainly by dogs, horse-riders and walkers; the obvious conclusion that was drawn was that disturbance levels needed to be reduced in order to encourage these species back to the Dee (Kirby et al., 1993). In October 1986, as a response to this need, local birdwatchers established a voluntary wardening scheme with the support of Wirral Borough Council, the Nature Conservancy Council (now English Nature) and the RSPB.

Essentially, the wardens patrol the beach during the winter months of September to March during high tides of 8.4m and above, as the birds are confined to a relatively small strip of beach very close to public footpaths. Wardens try to stop people disturbing the roosting birds and one of the best ways to do this is by telling people about the birds: where they have come from; what they eat; why it's important that they are not disturbed; and by identifying the different species for them.

In the early days of the DEVW the scheme met with some resistance from the other users of the beach, and although some of the tales told by founder members may be considered by some to be

slightly embellished, there is no doubt that it took a lot of perseverance, tenacity and good humour to continue wardening in the face of what could often be less than congenial circumstances. Thankfully this approach has paid dividends and the wader numbers have risen. For example, in the wardening season 1997/98 the numbers of Knots rose to a peak count of 20,000, Dunlins a peak of 22,000 and Bar-tailed Godwits a peak count of 800. This is despite a massive rise in the numbers of beach users as shown in the table below.

Season	Walkers	Dogs	Windsurfers	Cyclists
1986/87	1936	1373	3	0
1987/88	1280	948	30	0
1988/89	2072	1484	28	0
1989/90	2545	1262	395	5
1990/91	5307	2440	573	23
1991/92	4677	2600	482	18
1992/93	5474	2393	499	26
1993/94	5036	2367	618	13
1994/95	5934	3089	468	25
1995/96	6260	2968	390	25
1996/97	5921	2708	591	28
1997/98	7514	2801	352	47

The work done on the Dee Estuary by the various groups interested in bird protection in the Merseyside region (including the DEVW) has meant that it is now an internationally important site for Oystercatcher, Grey Plover, Knot, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Redshank, Turnstone, Shelduck, Teal and Pintail and nationally important for Sanderling, Wigeon, Cormorant and Great Crested Grebe (Waters, Cranswick, Musgrove and Pollitt, 1998).

Over the years the nature of the work of the DEVW has evolved from a purely protective role into protection, education and data collection. This latter function has provided material for several scientific papers and also forms part of an interactive project being undertaken by Liverpool Museum. Additionally, the commitment shown by the volunteers has meant that the DEVW is the longest-running voluntary wardening scheme in Britain. It has also proved to be a fertile recruitment ground for the Wetland Bird Survey - a national scientific survey on wader migration and movement - with a number of the Wirral 'counters' coming from the DEVW. Two years ago, in order to further its work, the DEVW became a constituted group, although it is still fully supported by Wirral (Metropolitan) Borough Council. Since then we have put structures into place that ensure that all new volunteers receive training, codes of conduct and identification badges. We also make sure that there are more social occasions!

If you are interested in the DEVW and becoming a warden, just remember that you don't have to give up great wadges of time; just three hours a month will do. You don't have to be an expert 'birder' or 'counter'; you just need to like meeting people, be willing to allow them to use your optics and be enthusiastic - even in the teeth of a howling gale with thunder, lightning and hail, as happened to me and my fellow duty wardens one day last winter. If you are interested please phone Christine Smyth, Coastal Ranger on 0151 678 5488 for further details. If you don't want to become a warden, why not come and visit us on the beach at West Kirby? Almost every high tide in winter over 8.4m has at least one warden present and at the weekends there are usually three or four. Any of us would be delighted to show you the wader roosts and hopefully answer any questions you may have. Who knows, you might just get hooked?

Karen Leeming, 1 Sealy Close, Spital, Wirral, L63 9LP
(on behalf of the Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens)

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Other Sources

Figures for 1997/1998 wardening season and the numbers of potential disturbances data collated by Roy Palmer.

HALE HEAD FARMLAND CBC - 1999 UPDATE

During 1999, 24 species held breeding territories by BTO criteria in the Hale Head plot. In descending order of territory numbers, these were as follows: (1998 figures in brackets).

Skylark	17 (15)	Wren	15 (11)	Linnet	12 (10)
Whitethroat	9 (9)	Shelduck	8 (8)	Chaffinch	8 (8)
Corn Bunting	8 (5)	Blackbird	7 (9)	Blue Tit	7 (4)
Robin	4 (4)	Pheasant	4 (4)	Reed Bunting	4 (3)
Great Tit	3 (3)	Grey Partridge	3 (3)	Lapwing	2 (3)
Wood Pigeon	2 (3)	Yellow Wagtail	2 (3)	Sedge Warbler	2 (3)
Reed Warbler	2 (2)	Dunnock	2 (1)	Mallard	1 (2)
Meadow Pipit	1 (1)	G S Woodpecker	1 (0)	Blackcap	1 (0)

There were no dramatic changes compared with 1998, but four species – Wren, Blue Tit, Linnet and Reed Bunting – did attain their greatest recorded number since the census began in 1989. The success of the first two species probably relates to the recent series of mild winters allowing the survival of these smaller birds. The increase in Linnets and Reed Buntings may also be attributable to oilseed rape occupying more than one third of the plot in 1999. Oilseed is a favourite food of the Linnet, while Reed Buntings (like Sedge Warblers) now use rape as a nesting site. In 1999 there were, for the first time, more Reed Bunting sightings in the rape fields (9) than in the reed-beds (7).

Spring-sown barley was grown in two fields at Hale Head in 1999 for the first time in eight years. These fields lay fallow through the winter, and on the first CBC visit in early March a mixed flock of 'finches' feeding on one of these fields included four Tree Sparrows – the first recorded by the census since 1990. The barley fields, though occupying less than one fifth of the plot, were also the site of three of the eight Corn Bunting territories and, during June and July, nine of the 16 Corn Bunting sightings. The planting of spring-sown barley may thus have stemmed the steep fall in the number of Corn Bunting territories (to five recorded in 1998 from a previous annual average of 14).

The possible influence of habitat on the abundance of different species during the decade through which the Hale Head farmland census has been carried out may be of some interest. The increase in Skylark territories from an average of 13 during the first five years to 17 in the last five is (as noted in *Bird News* 40, October 1998) in keeping with the national CBC findings for coastal farmland. The extensive tidal marsh at Hale Head presumably provides a valuable feeding ground.

A second asset of the Hale Head site is the fairly complete system of hedgerows that links three small copses, each with dense undergrowth. This favours the small hedge and wood-nesting passerines – such as Wren, Robin, Blue Tit, Blackbird, Chaffinch and Whitethroat - which have either maintained or increased their numbers during the decade of the census.

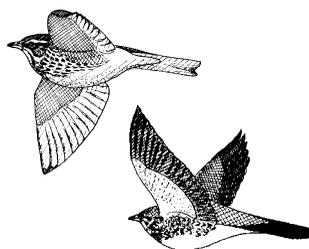
On the debit side at Hale Head, in common with arable farmland throughout the country, there are both the adverse effects of autumn-sown crops on food supply and the extensive use of herbicides and pesticides. (At Hale Head, the latter are even used on stubble fields prior to the spring planting of root crops.) These may be important factors, nationally and at Hale Head, in the disappearance of Tree Sparrows – which bred at Hale Head only during the first two years of the census – and the marked reduction in the number of breeding Grey Partridges and Corn Buntings. The possible benefits to Corn Buntings of spring-sown barley and of oilseed rape to Linnets and Reed Buntings have already been noted above.

Finally, some comment should be made about one notable absentee from the Hale Head plot: the Greenfinch. Despite its close relationship and similar feeding and nesting requirements to Linnets and Chaffinches, which have actually increased their numbers at Hale Head, Greenfinches have bred on only three occasions in the last decade and not at all in the last six years. One possible explanation is that Hale Head is a suburban farm surrounded by a great number of houses and gardens. In my own garden, only a few miles from Hale Head, my Garden Birdwatch figures reveal Greenfinches as the most frequent visitors to the garden feeders during the breeding season. Based on a regular daily count, the total number of Greenfinches recorded between March and July was 192 compared with only 63 Chaffinch sightings and, of course, no Linnets. Whether this apparent preference for garden feeding accounts for the absence of Greenfinches from the Hale Head farmland is a matter for speculation; I would welcome any alternative theories.

Colin Ogilvie, The Riffel, Woolton Park, Liverpool, L25 6DR

MIGRATION WATCH '99 RESULTS

As any student of migration will know the chance of hitting the right day for observing visible migration is an imperfect science. This year was no exception. Movement on the first two selected dates of 2nd and 3rd October was negligible. Past experience suggested that we would struggle when the watches began in west and north-west winds force 5-7 and so it proved. However the date of 17th October dawned more auspicious. The $\frac{2}{8}$ cloud cover was less than ideal but the prayed for south-easterlies force 2-3 duly arrived and heralded an excellent morning's migration watching. The returns from the two public watchpoints are analysed below.



Date = 17th October 1999

Time = each column represents a quarter hour period. Start 0730. Finish 1130.

Redwing																	
Thurstaston	22	0	31	13	2	86	23	11	4	2	2	11	45	45	43	43	383
Denhall Lane	17	29	77	180	100	58	0	23	7	1	11	4	18	8	2	5	540
Fieldfare																	
Thurstaston	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	12	3	0	14	0	0	2	0	0	43
Denhall Lane	27	36	11	80	18	10	0	1	26	0	75	5	19	28	0	2	338
Starling																	
Thurstaston	52	369	114	200	191	155	139	134	202	213	209	168	146	25	118	93	2528
Denhall Lane	56	123	107	58	176	232	4	0	10	0	0	0	7	0	90	22	885
Chaffinch																	
Thurstaston	0	1	0	0	10	19	5	5	15	0	7	32	3	10	0	3	110
Denhall Lane	24	16	55	79	44	59	78	67	75	54	66	20	28	34	32	25	756
Greenfinch																	
Thurstaston	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	15
Denhall Lane	6	5	0	37	10	34	13	12	1	10	2	3	3	1	10	3	150
Skylark																	
Thurstaston	0	0	0	0	0	5	6	4	30	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	47
Denhall Lane	0	0	1	8	3	8	1	31	19	8	2	1	0	0	1	0	83
Meadow Pipit																	
Thurstaston	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
Denhall Lane	2	12	8	0	1	2	2	6	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	1	38
Brambling																	
Thurstaston	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Denhall Lane	0	0	2	0	3	1	0	1	18	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	26
Song Thrush																	
Thurstaston	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Denhall Lane	1	0	2	11	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	3	0	1	25
Jackdaw																	
Thurstaston	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Denhall Lane	0	0	0	0	26	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	62	0	0	0	103
Linnet																	
Thurstaston	0	0	0	0	0	0	30	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	60
Denhall Lane	1	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	5	0	0	13
Siskin																	
Thurstaston	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Denhall Lane	0	0	3	0	0	0	7	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	13
Woodpigeon																	
Thurstaston	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Denhall Lane	0	0	0	14	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18

Shown above are all species which achieved double figures at one of the watchpoints. Various other species were also recorded. See additional notes for comments.

Results largely followed the expected trends with the bulk of movement beginning about 15 minutes after sunrise, peaking at the end of the first hour and declining sharply at the start of the third hour after sunrise.

Allowing for observer bias, most of the returns show a high degree of correlation between the two recording stations with a few notable exceptions. The variety of species involved in the movement was impressive. In total 25 different species were observed undertaking migratory movement. Many of these species are undoubtedly of Scandinavian origin. Without confirmatory ringing or radar evidence

the likely origin of locally abundant species caught up in the passage is open to conjecture. The fact that the sudden appearance of large numbers of Starlings, Chaffinches and Jackdaws etc were flying strongly on the same heading as marker species such as Brambling provides strong circumstantial evidence to support the proposition that these birds were also of Scandinavian origin.

As can be seen from the tables some species begin their diurnal movements later in the morning than other species. The Skylark is one species in which this is most readily demonstrated and the same though less marked trend, also occurs with Greenfinch and to some extent Chaffinch. This habit has been a consistent feature over several years of timed, fixed point, migration watching.

One of the most anomalous results is found with Starling where movement at Denhall virtually ceased after 9am, whereas Thurstaston continued to observe strong passage throughout. Two possible explanations have come to light. During a High Tide Birdwatch at Heswall on 23rd October a strong SE passage of Starlings was again taking place. It was noticed that the Starlings were cutting the corner and heading out across the saltmarsh on a line for Burton Point. It is possible that the Denhall Lane observers failed to pick out the Starling flocks flying low across the marsh as the majority of other migrants at this watchpoint pass directly overhead or slightly inland. The most likely explanation however is that these migrant Starlings were dropping down to feed with local birds on the saltmarsh adjacent to the Decca Pools, as it was noticed that large numbers of birds were gathering in this area towards the end of the morning on the 17th. This is probably because it represented a good refuelling stop for the Starlings whereas the Thurstaston area presented less suitable feeding opportunities and therefore the birds pressed on with their movement.

Of course the common migrants provide main course and excellent it is too, but it's always good to have a little spice and both watchpoints had their own little treats. Firstly Thurstaston provided the watchers with the unexpected sight of six Crossbills, three male, three female which perched briefly in a small stand of pines, before continuing SE. At Denhall Lane the observers were surprised to note a small lark with big rounded wings and a very short tail fly straight overhead trailing a small party of Skylark which provided a direct comparison. It could only have been a Woodlark. A Cheshire first for most of the group gathered here. These two observations highlight the true joy of visible migration watching; you never quite know what is going to turn up and every series I have taken part in since 1992 has provided its own surprises.

Several thousand birds passed both watchpoints during the morning and those people who turned up were treated to a tremendous spectacle. Just as a matter of interest the group gathered at Denhall Lane had a truly international flavour with a Canadian and two Germans present to witness a migration in Cheshire. At Thurstaston one individual had travelled all the way from Plymouth to attend the event. It makes you wonder about the power of the Internet; after all that's how these people found out about the event. In addition the Society gained a Cheshire-based member as a bonus. If you didn't attend this year, there are always the Millennium Migration Watches to look forward to. Migration Watch will again take place next year and the proposed format and dates will be announced shortly.

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

.....

A Wheatear said "Let's get it right,
I'm the one with the *rump* that is white.
It's a bit of a farce
To call it an arse,
I'm sure it was done out of spite."

Hazel J Raw



RUMOURS... RUMOURS...

One member of the *Bird News* team pleaded temporary insanity due to the stress and pressure of deadlines after a particular 'faux pas' recently. On extolling the virtues of Great Yarmouth cemetery as a prime birdwatching site, this said individual made particular reference to the small stands of trees to be found scattered amongst the gravestones, which provide an irresistible attraction for migrating warblers. These trees were described as small "corpses". Unfortunately no pun had been intended!

BTO WINTER FARMLAND BIRD SURVEY

It is no secret that the population of some wild birds in the UK is declining at an alarming rate. As birdwatchers, I hope everyone has a genuine concern for the welfare of all birds, but how can you help?



British Trust for Ornithology

Organisations such as the BTO and RSPB can provide underlying wild bird population statistics to enable action plans to be devised to safeguard birds and their habitats. A large portion of the data is supplied by birdwatching volunteers collecting data through the BTO national survey schemes such as the Breeding Bird Survey, Common Birds Census etc.

The importance of wild bird populations has now been recognised by the British government. In 1998, the government published a list of 13 indicators that, taken together, provide a guide to the sustainability of development in Britain. These indicators have since been termed the 'quality of life barometer'. Three of the indicators relate to economic growth, three to social progress, six to the protection of the environment and one to the prudent use of natural resources. The population of wild birds is one of the indicators and is largely based on BTO data.

Further to this, in 1999, the government issued a separate set of 'indicators of climate change in the UK'. Of the 34 indicators, BTO data is represented by three of them, these being 'the arrival date of the swallow', 'the egg laying dates of birds' and 'small bird population changes'. BTO data is therefore at the forefront in the conservation of UK birds and habitats. Bird surveying has never been more important.

Everyone can help by contributing to bird surveys. They come in various guises from formal structured surveys to casual recordings. This winter sees the start of a new BTO survey designed to plug gaps in our knowledge about birds using farmland in winter. The survey is called the 'Winter Farmland Bird Survey'. It involves monitoring 10 species of conservation concern, plus several common species where there is insufficient knowledge of wintering habits to prevent their decline in future years.

The survey is set to run over the next three winters and is recorded using three different methods:

1. The formal structured surveying of 1km ordnance survey squares.
2. Casual regular winter walks recording.
3. Casual recording.

The first method of survey is organised by the regional BTO representatives and contributed to by volunteers up and down the country. The second and third methods are reliant on the casual records of birdwatchers, which means that anyone who birdwatches in the winter will be able to contribute data. On behalf of the BTO I would like to urge everyone to participate where possible in either or both of the casual surveys. The main requirements are:

Winter Walks

If you regularly do a particular walk, say to walk a dog, or to get to work, or even a regular weekend walk and this walk takes you past Cheshire farmland, then this survey is for you. All you need to do on each occasion is record the numbers you see of each of the species listed. Just like a normal day out birdwatching!

Casual Records

When out birdwatching, walking or for general recreation on or around Cheshire farmland on a one-off or irregular basis, this survey is for you. All you need to do on each occasion is make a record of flocks of 'significant' size of any of the birds listed. Again this can easily be taken in as part of a normal day's birding.

The recording forms for these casual surveys have already been sent to CAWOS members. How many of you reading this have just discarded them without a second thought? If so, then please ask for another one, or photocopy a friend's. For the sake of a few moments to record your results at the end of the day, it is only a small effort required, for the future of our birds.

Anyone wanting further information can contact me below and dependent on when this goes to press, there may still be time to become involved in the formal structured survey if anyone is interested.

Paul Miller, BTO Survey Representative, 6 Hunters Hill, Kingsley, Warrington, WA6 8DE

Notes & Letters

Bird News is always keen to hear from CAWOS members. Please send us any notes of unusual avian behaviour or amusing anecdotes that you think your fellow birders will be interested in. Also, we are always interested in your views on any of our articles or on the newsletter itself. Eds.

DIFFICULT TO SWALLOW?

Can anyone provide an explanation for the odd bird behaviour I witnessed recently?

I was standing by the River Weaver when I heard a Kingfisher. I saw it, a juvenile, flying close to water level accompanied by a Swallow. As they passed, the Swallow dived onto the Kingfisher, forcing it into the water. The Kingfisher recovered and flew on only for the same thing to happen again, the Swallow evidently having waited. The pair flew off, leaving the river and I lost sight of them across a field. I was surprised to see a Swallow act so aggressively towards another bird.

F A Coppenhall, 1 Dutton Locks, Northwich, Cheshire, CW8 3QQ

This behaviour is hard to explain unless it was just a case of the Kingfisher taking evasive action rather than actual physical contact being made. Any other comments from members? Eds.

A SINGULARLY EXCELLENT ADVENTURE

A recent trip to Florida provided many indelible memories but few stick in my mind so vividly as the day we visited Lake Trafford, ostensibly to take an airboat ride. The airboat company 'Airboat Adventure' advertises Lake Trafford as the northern extremity of the Everglades and guarantees your money back if you fail to see a 'gator'. The friendliness of the welcome overcame any reservations one may have had about the hygiene within the airboat office. After all, the cricket collection in the corner was most musical and the lethargic fan in the roof guaranteed that the food on the counter never exceeded 80°C. Naturally we stuck to cans of Diet Coke. The middle-aged lady who ran the show was a real star and had a strong rapport with and love of, the local wildlife. Just to demonstrate she called in a wild Red-shouldered Hawk which snatched thrown fish titbits a few feet above our heads. Mind you it had to be quick as any morsels going astray were readily grabbed by hand-tame Little Blue and Green-backed Herons.

After a few minutes we clambered into the airboat piloted by Hank, a US Navy veteran, who bore a startling resemblance to US golfer Tom Lehman. This guy was so laid-back he was almost horizontal. In fact when we'd entered the office that's exactly the position he was in as he slumbered in his easy chair. Hank was a most congenial and accommodating host. He went out of his way to help us see as much of the wildlife as possible and in some cases actually run over it! He was able to identify a few of the individual gators, presumably by their skidmarks, as he had run over some of them dozens of times. Either they enjoy it or they are very slow learners. In contrast the Moorhens skittered hither and thither at the approach of our vessel. Despite the airboat's intrusive roar most creatures were fairly approachable and Hank gave a laconic and knowledgeable commentary. He had a good eye for the local herons and quickly picked out the Great White Heron (a rare form of the Great Blue Heron) from the look-alike and plentiful American (Great White) Egrets.

Sadly Hank's knowledge did not extend to waders, or as Americans prefer to call them, shorebirds. Not that there is any shame in this; after all, the majority of American birders seem to quail at the very prospect of identifying this potentially problematic group. However we British tend to be less backward in coming forward with a stab at wader ID so when a small bobbing shape appeared on an adjacent mud patch I gesticulated to Hank and indicated I wanted a closer look. By the time the propeller had stopped the bird had flown but not before I was able to confirm its identity. I triumphantly turned to the eager audience and pointing at the departing bird exclaimed "Solitary Sandpiper". To which Hank uttered the immortal and perfect response "Nope, I think there was two of 'em!". The four non-birding Brummies who shared our boat gave me a 'dumb schmuck' look and I wilted back into my seat crestfallen.

I guess I got what I deserved. Hank continued with his commentary totally oblivious to the ironic turn of events or the wit of his reply. I couldn't think of a way to point out that it really was a Solitary Sandpiper without making Hank look daft; after all he didn't deserve that; he really had given

everyone an enjoyable time. What's more the things he could identify he would talk about at length with the grace of a natural storyteller. So I did what I should have done in the first place. Kept my mouth shut. What's more I'd recommend the whole experience to anyone visiting Florida, even if like me your conscience is a little perturbed at the thought of so many alligators getting bumped. What's more the tour at Lake Trafford was cheaper, lasted longer and the relaxed, yet concerned, leading was superior to those on the better-known tours further into the Everglades. So if you go to Lake Trafford expect a thoroughly enjoyable time. Just remember, don't eat the food unless you've had all your injections and don't forget to take an American shorebird field guide.

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

Following Jeff's departure as Editor, fans of his unique literary style will be pleased to know that he has agreed to provide this regular feature for *Bird News*. If you have any ideas on a fitting section heading please let me know. Eds.

EBBSLEEPER

It was finger-white cold. Winds whipped themselves to howling. The beach became wilderness. Ice crunched underfoot where sand should have given, and shifted easily to the tread. Snow clad, the dunes were tundra hummocks, and those bordering the sea had met the full ferocity of the storm's blast. Wind-sculpted, they were crescented and domed, with arctic white surfaces curling over blue shadows. Out in the estuary the sea creamed. I had come for the tide. Here on this north of England estuary, high spring tides bring a spectacle of birds. Waders, forced from their feeding grounds on remote mudflats, come to find safe roost on the upper beach.

From the horizon, a cloud moving swiftly into near focus becomes a thrumming of wings. Smoke wisps turn silver-sided, as flocks wheel and divide, regroup, approach, hesitate. A few birds hover and drop, then whiffle the wind from their wings to alight at the water's edge. Others follow, tumbling from the sky. They are numberless. Godwit and Oystercatcher, Knot and Sanderling, Grey Plover, Ringed Plover and Dunlin come – all seeking rest. And of this throng, it is the Dunlin, always anxious to stay out feeding, the tiny Dunlin which are last to arrive.

But the tide is fickle, and bends to the wind. Today the wind was merciless. The sea, scourged until wave crests burst into spume, mingled its spray with the driving snow. Further it pushed, and still further, beyond its wildest reach. Today there was nowhere for the birds to roost. They had to move on. The snow beach had been engulfed.

It was late when I noticed the Dunlin. As the water had thrust up the beach, it gathered snow and swept it before, crushing and impacting the crystals and dowsing them in spray, finally releasing them to the wind to be blast frozen into slates of ice. Now, in that lull which precedes the ebb, this pack-ice was waterborne, grating and fusing into miniature bergs and floes. And there, incredibly, were the Dunlin. They huddled, jostling to retain their footing, some six or eight birds to each raft of ice: island after floating island offering respite to the small waders. Each movement of the Dunlin was economic of energy. Feathers fluffed, they stood one-legged, the other drawn into the heat of the body. The bill thrust deep into the plumage, so that the bird breathed warmed air. It was vital to rest.

High tides cover feeding grounds for extensive periods. Winter days are short. Nights are long and cold. When mudbanks are uncovered, day or night, Dunlin must forage. Stitching the ooze, one hundred probes a minute, they need to feed unceasingly, whenever tides permit, in order to survive. Flight is expensive of energy. In harsh conditions the Dunlin risks death if he must spend the full tide on the wing. The ice floes offered a life-giving roost. The birds bobbed in safety, becoming distanced from me as the sea withdrew. But I had shared the tide with them more closely than they could know.

Over the years I have come to learn something of their lives, the comings and goings of these small migrants who populate our estuary from July through winter into spring. The names of their breeding grounds ring cold as the day I have described: Spitsbergen, Bear Island, Arctic Canada, western Alaska and Russia, east to the Kolyma River. Here in the brief summer, and the long hours of daylight, they raise their young. Then begins the journey south. The Dunlin stage on the estuaries of Europe, to refuel and to rest, gathering in groups, all driven by one purpose. Just such a party of tired migrants I recall with affection, as I watch the ice-raft Dunlin drift away. It was another time, another place.

We were walking, a friend and I, the steeply shelving shingle of a wide bay, heading into north-east Scotland's September winds, and the going was hard. The Dunlin flew over the

dune slacks, to alight at the water's edge. My mind ticked off 23 birds, noted the mix of adult and young, marked the moult from the black bellies of summer plumage. Here was an excuse to stop and recover breath.

We found shelter in a deep hollow gouged from the shingle, unloosing our packs for a moment. But the brief rest became prolonged as we became involved in the dance of the Dunlin.

The tide was coming in fast. Those birds belly-deep in water, leap-frogged their companions to huddle on the shoreward side. Exposed birds to seaward followed suit, and in this way the tired group progressed up the shore. It was when they reached the shingle, open to the discomforting wind, that a small miracle happened. Driven by the need to rest, the Dunlin chose the lee of the hollow, as we had.

One by one they dropped over the ridge, alighting ever closer to us. We had been there so long as to become an acceptable part of the terrain. With brisk decision, one bird thrust bill into scapulars, and settled to roost. The others did likewise. We shared the Dunlin's repose with stilled breath. For that moment we became Dunlin, felt the warmth of lifted feathers around the bill, tension of the foot curled over rock. Together we roosted out the tide.

And since the day with the Dunlin I am changed. For I took on responsibility for their safety as they slept and knew fear for their kind. The rigours of arctic weather, the toll of long migration, vagaries of the sea – it is not of these that I am afraid. It is concern for their world, the stopover estuary, chosen upland, a trusted roost: a barrage, land drainage, commercial afforestation, the marina. Will they find a place? They are so slight, the Dunlin, but they weigh heavily now in the balance of my mind.

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

Originally published in *BBC Wildlife* in February 1988, this essay by Thelma was a runner-up in their 1987 essay writing competition. Eds.

An Ode to a Birder

When all about you are stampeding after the bird, do not.

Patience will have its reward,

But not necessarily in terms of your list!

Observe the country code at all times;

Do not trespass on private land.

You may see nothing from the path

But farmers often carry shotguns.

Abide by the bird protection laws at all times,

Especially concerning Schedule 1 Breeding Birds,

Unless you need it,

Or are a Rare Bird Photographer.

Be slow to brag about what you have seen,

Unless you know what you are talking about,

Otherwise you may make a complete prat of yourself.

Remember - careless talk costs reputations.

Always go for a tick as soon as possible.

Those who wait for a hearty breakfast,

Will often dip;

Birders would rather go hungry.

Resist the temptation to look in the field guide,

Before going for the bird.

It is thought to be unlucky,

But this is probably just superstitious crap.

Do not pretend to have seen

The bird before, and be bored by it.

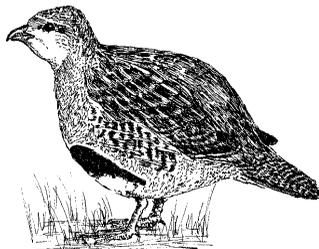
You may think it looks good to do this,

But it doesn't.

Mike Crawley, 17 Leaside, Heaton Mersey, Stockport, SK4 2DN

GREY PARTRIDGE RECOVERY PROJECT

Though I was interested in the correspondence in *Bird News* No 43 about the Grey Partridge recovery project and the brief mention of the changes that will be made in the project, I was very surprised that there was no mention of the results of this year's survey. Some of us put considerable time and effort into the survey and so far we have received no feedback at all: no acknowledgement of receipt of the recording forms, no thank you, no information about the habitat recorded, whether any partridges were found, the number of finch flocks etc. I can do without the first two but it would be nice to have some information.



This seems to be another example of people being enlisted to help with surveys and then not being kept in touch. Though the organisers might be remiss, the results of the survey are surely of interest to CAWOS and its members, so perhaps you would consider, please, commissioning someone to produce an article or item for the next *Bird News*.

J V Oxenham, Birchwood, 178 Holmes Chapel Road, Somerford, Congleton, CW12 4QB

See Derek Kelly's explanation of the complicated politics involved with this survey on page 22. Eds.

PUZZLES

Two 'puzzles' became apparent as I was reading through the text for the forthcoming 1998 *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report*. Both drew my attention and I thought that the extracts might interest you...

1. Fulmar

"An intriguing series of records of birds at Beeston Castle where one was seen on April 25th and 26th and two on May 3rd. This mirrors a series of records of a single bird at this location on nine dates between April 20th and June 2nd in 1993."

Now then, why should two Fulmars fly miles inland to fly around Beeston Castle? The Castle is some 12 miles from the River Dee on the west side of Chester and around 25 miles from the Wirral coast. It sticks up nearly 400 feet and is probably visible even from the coast, but why does it attract Fulmars? *BWP* states that Fulmars "rarely fly above 100m above the sea" and also "rarely alight on land other than at actual or prospective breeding sites, normally within 2km of sea and mostly immediately facing it". We know that they do occasionally cross land without being wind-blown and that adults start prospecting from March. Young birds or failed breeders can occasionally begin to prospect in July or August. Off the coast, Fulmars are usually summer visitors and inland are very rare.

I haven't any real answer except for the fact that even at 50m above the sea, Beeston would be visible to a Fulmar, and 25 miles wouldn't be much of an obstacle for such a strong flier. Maybe, just maybe, they're about to prove the norm isn't always the acceptable and begin to breed alongside the Peregrines on Beeston. Perhaps the Peregrines fly out to the coast and attract the attention of the Fulmars? Any other ideas?

2. Black-tailed Godwit

The *CAWOS '98 report* states "Record numbers were present on the Dee WeBS in May and June, but the max winter count was the lowest on the estuary since 1994". We are talking about 838 birds on the Dee and 2086 on the Mersey in January with counts of 2000 at Hale and Stanlow.

When I first began to visit Frodsham Marsh in the early seventies, I was delighted to find my very first Black-tailed Godwit in full summer plumage on No3 tank. They were uncommon in those days, even rare. The graph in the report confirms the fact that numbers were indeed low. In 1981, the National Index was about 35, now it's a 100. The rise in the numbers on the Dee and Mersey are reflected likewise, none on the Mersey in 1981 and about 400 on the Dee.

Climate cycles do affect birds, especially waders, in dramatic ways. But in 1912, Coward gave only six records up to 1912; in 1928 G B Farmer stated that the maximum number in August was 30 to 40. At Ince in 1961, there was a flock of 45. Has the climate changed that much, or have the birds been ousted from elsewhere? Whatever the solution, they're a welcome sight in such huge numbers on our estuaries. Perhaps one of you '*Breeding Bird Atlas*' buffs out there will let me know what the actual reason is.

Fascinating, puzzles... aren't they?

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

Membership News

Welcome to P Brewster who joined in the summer, bringing the total number of members to 353, the highest ever. We hope we can maintain and improve on this in the years to come.

Enclosed with this issue of *Bird News* is a subscription renewal form. Please note that all rates, except the Junior rate, were increased by £1 at the last AGM. When you consider the cost of producing a quality *Bird Report* and a quarterly newsletter which is the envy of many other societies, we think this is still good value for money, and is the first increase for three years. With your renewal form you can also obtain a year's entrance to Rostherne Mere NR. You can renew personally at an indoor meeting; by sending a cheque or postal order made payable to CAWOS to the address at the foot of this article; or by standing order. We introduced this last method of payment a few years ago in response to members' requests, but relatively few of you use it. So please consider doing so if you do not already; it saves you postage and the bother of writing a cheque, and assures us of a regular income early in the year - but please do not send me your standing order form - send it to your bank.

Earlier this year CAWOS Council agreed to give donations of £350 to the BTO's Nightingale Appeal, which has now expanded to cover woodland birds, and £750 to the Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens. We have received letters of thanks from both these organisations, together with articles in which they explain their work and which appear elsewhere in this issue (pages 10-11). We are always willing to consider making grants for matters relevant to birds in Cheshire.

Reluctantly we had to turn down a request from BirdLife International to sponsor one of the thousand or so species to be featured in their forthcoming book *Threatened Birds of the World*, as none of the birds concerned were found in Cheshire and our constitution limits us to work within the county. If any individual member is interested and has £95 to spare, please contact BirdLife International at Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge, CB3 0NA. We have also had a request from the Mersey Basin Trust, who are looking for volunteers to act as Schools Liaison Officers to help teachers plan and carry out river field work with their students. Anyone interested should contact the Education Officers, Mersey Basin Trust, Sunley Tower, Piccadilly Plaza, Manchester, M1 4AG (tel 0161 228 6924). Volunteers are reminded that it is normal these days for security checks to be made on anyone who wishes to work with young people.

Finally, I now have an e-mail address: d.cogger@talk21.com.

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

CAWOS - THE WAY FORWARD

In the Editorial of the July *Bird News*, Jeff Clarke made reference to 'The Way Forward' - the attempt by CAWOS Council to map out the path which the Society should take over the next few years.

The process began with a brainstorming session at the end of June, at which ideas were exchanged. At that meeting it was decided to set up sub-groups representing the five main areas which needed attention - Conservation, Publications, Recording, Liaison and Activities. Each sub-group held one or two meetings during July and August to thrash out these ideas in more detail. A deliberate decision was taken to ask non-members of Council with special interests and interested outsiders to join a sub-group and contribute; Council would like to thank all of those who helped us in this way.

Council met again on 23rd September to hear reports from each sub-group, which were as follows: **Conservation:** accepting that CAWOS could not realistically become a conservation organisation without massive financial injection, its best way forward would be to support existing local organisations or set up conservation groups in bird-rich areas to gather information which would enable us to respond to development pressures.

Publications: *Bird News* and *Bird Report* would continue with some modifications; a decision would be taken quickly about whether to proceed with the *Avifauna*; serious consideration would be given to create a Website for the Society; new *Guidelines for the Submission of Records* to be produced as soon as possible; additional subscription-only publications were also proposed, eg *Sites to Watch Guide* and a technical research-oriented journal, though these were viewed as lower priority.

Recording: if the Society's recording function is to continue, which it was agreed it should, we need to work with recorders and local organisations to create a wider range of information which could be better presented and have increased conservation value.

Liaison: there was need for closer liaison with members, with other organisations and with the large number of other recording groups which have sprung up recently, so that records can be better exchanged. CAWOS should take the lead in organising a forum, on a regular basis, of all bodies involved with birds in the county, in order to increase the level of knowledge of what activities were taking place, and to exchange ideas and information.

Activities: more should be done to increase membership and improve the existing links and services to members. Many existing developments should continue, the programme should be re-examined and there should be greater involvement with other organisations and youth groups.

The common theme of increased liaison between all levels of the birdwatching community in Cheshire was apparent in the reports of all five sub-groups. The Council meeting on 11th November will, after reflection on the points listed above, start the process of drawing up plans and determining priorities for actions, so that implementation can begin in 2000.

David Cogger, CAWOS Secretary

GREY PARTRIDGE BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

(Apology for inaccurate information in *Bird News* 43)

The information relating to the CLA (Country Landowners' Association) questionnaire was not correct. Funding was not found but unfortunately this information was not passed on to all the members of the BAP group (including CAWOS). Further changes have occurred within the BAP group: its Chairman Roy Taylor, RSPB has been promoted and his replacement is not likely to be in post until January next year.

Roy's last letter states:

"I feel that of late the group has lost its momentum and we have achieved little real progress to achieving action on the ground for Grey Partridge. Most recently we have failed to find the money needed for the questionnaire to be mailed out to the CLA. Perhaps this enforced break will give us all time to review the situation and in the New Year develop a positive way forward for the group. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the hard work and time you have committed to the group."

I did express my concern as to the poor liaison within the group and Council has approved the publication of parts of my reply to Roy:

"At the moment CAWOS is reviewing its role. Uppermost in that has been liaison within the society, as well as other organisations. Could I request that when your replacement is in post, that liaison be made a priority in dealing with organisations like ours whose members wish to make a contribution to the success of such projects."

Derek Kelly, CAWOS Conservation Officer

PS Some members of CAWOS have expressed a wish that the February survey results be the subject of an article in a later *Bird News*. This request is being considered and the survey forms have been requested from the Cheshire Wildlife Trust, as to date CWT have not published the survey results as initially agreed when the group was first set up.

CAWOS EXHIBITION AT WIRRAL COUNTRY PARK

Last year CAWOS launched its exhibition at the Grosvenor Museum. One of the functions of the exhibition was to be re-usable and therefore provide an economic return on the financial investment made by both CAWOS and the Museum. This October the exhibition was repeated at Wirral Country Park. The park is well known to wildlife enthusiasts and as such provided an excellent venue. The launch day coincided with World Birdwatch Weekend and visitors were entertained by bird ringing demonstrations courtesy of BTO ringer Dave Cross and patrons to the hide were given expert help and instruction by members of CAWOS and Wirral RSPB.

Though the bulk of the exhibition was the same, including a variety of interactive games, many of the elements were altered to reflect the local situation. The partnership links this time were the newly-formed Wirral Barn Owl Group, Wirral RSPB and Hilbre Island Bird Observatory, all of these produced excellent displays though it must be said my favourite was Hilbre's, as it concentrated on my pet subject, migration. As before the artwork section was supported superbly by Thelma Sykes.

If you haven't seen Thelma's new piece entitled 'Overtures and Undercurrents' you've missed a real treat. This piece is selling fast so if you want to see it you'll have to visit WWT's reserve at Welney, Norfolk. A new section featured the photographic talents of Wirral rarity photographer Gary Bellingham, sponsored by Here and Now Photographic. The idea behind this section was to feature rarities found in and around Cheshire and Wirral. So up to date were these fabulous photographs that they featured Burton's Red-backed Shrike, still present throughout the first two weeks of the exhibition.

Thousands of people passed through the exhibition during the four week period and no negative comments were noted in the visitors book excepting those of three lady visitors who thought that the Swallow Game was very unfair on the Swallows. They pleaded for "fewer perils". One of the most colourful features of the exhibition was the hanging banners created by local artists and schoolchildren. They really helped to lift the exhibition and give it a real three-dimensional quality.

Thanks must go to all those who helped with the exhibition in any way, but a special thank-you must go to Steve Woolfall, of the Grosvenor Museum, who once again provided substantial time, effort and some financial contribution to make the exhibition a great success. If you still have not caught up with the exhibition you'll get yet another chance next year when it transfers to Ellesmere Port, with finalised dates and venue to be announced shortly.

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

WADER IDENTIFICATION WORKSHOP REVIEW

It was overcast, but dry and surprisingly mild, on the Saturday morning of September 25th when a group of six birders, led by Jeff Clarke, met in the public car park near Sheldrakes Restaurant on the Heswall shore front. A light onshore breeze blew in from the Dee estuary as we made our way along the shingle beach towards Thurstaston, eager to both witness a wader spectacle and glean precious gems of Jeff's wisdom (well, I was!).

Having cut my birding teeth in the inland county of Buckinghamshire, which is about as far from a decent mudflat or estuary as it's possible to be in England, waders have always been somewhat of a mystery to me. Sure, I could identify Lapwings and Redshanks, but other members of this diverse family were usually recorded in my notebook accompanied by a question mark. Help was needed; hence my presence on this workshop.

At 9am, the inflowing tide was already beginning to rush along the dyke on our left, pushing a variety of waders and wildfowl towards us. Indeed, as we passed the miscellany of skiffs, yachts and rowing boats that comprises Heswall marina, we were immediately greeted by a collection of small birds gently probing the mud.

Bold white supercilia, dark lores, buff underparts, grey tones to the upperparts all suggested Knot to me. "Curlew Sandpiper", said Jeff: I'd missed the slightly decurved bill that gives this species its name. Well, it was in the mud most of the time!

This is the style of Jeff's workshops: informal, witty, uncritical of your mistakes. Yet, you really do learn, largely because Jeff concentrates on explaining each bird's jizz rather than the standard field guide plumage marks. By lunchtime we had seen, and learned the basic identification points of Knot, Dunlin and Curlew Sandpiper, separated a couple of Spotted Redshanks from the horde of commons (which included an unusual leucistic bird), and found a few Greenshanks and Bar-tailed Godwits, all in addition to the ubiquitous Lapwings, Oystercatchers and Curlews. Rounded off with five sightings of Peregrine Falcon, an excellent morning was had by all.

If you have never been on one of Jeff's workshops, I would really encourage you to do so. They are an important function of the Society towards improving the accurate recording of the county's birds: and even the most learned birder can always hone their identification skills.

Simon Edwards, 24 Badby Wood, Kirkby, Liverpool, L33 8YQ

PS For those of you who are wondering, yes, I did go on to twitch the Red-necked Phalarope at Inner Marsh Farm in the afternoon!



MEMBERS' NOTICEBOARD

Do you have any helpful tips; requests for information; small items for sale (ornithological of course!) etc etc? Well, this is the place for you! Write in with your thoughts or requests.

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You will have already received a leaflet offering members a 25% reduction in the price of a subscription to *British Birds*. If you wish to take up this offer but have mislaid the leaflet, please contact David Cogger, CAWOS membership secretary.

PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

Enter the CAWOS Photographic Competition. It is open to members only and **restricted to those photos taken in 1999**. **Closing date Saturday 5th February 2000**.

There will be three categories which can be either slides or prints:-

1. **Foreign**
2. **Great Britain**
3. **Humorous** - this section will be decided by a panel of judges on the night and all entries should be accompanied by an appropriate caption. There will be equal weighting regarding the originality and humour of the caption and the quality of the photograph.

Make sure each entry is clearly marked with the following:-

1. your name (and address if space permits)
2. where the photo was taken and approximate date
3. the species depicted

There will be an entry fee of 25p per entry with a prize of £5 awarded to the winner of each section. Winners and runners-up will be shown at the March AGM / meeting and reported in *Bird News*.

If you want your entries to be returned by post please enclose an appropriate S.A.E. We will take the utmost care of your photos but wish to point out that we cannot be held responsible for any loss or damage. You should have already received an entry form, but if you require further details please contact John Headon on 0161 439 8557.

Please hand or send your entries, along with the entry form, to:-

John Headon, 6 Holland Road, Bramhall, Stockport, Cheshire, SK7 2PQ

Diary

NOVEMBER

- 17 CRSPB 'BIRDS & MIGRATION' by Jeff Clarke
 19 NCRSPB 'MILLENNIUM BUGS & BIRDS' by Andy Harmer
 20 BTO/RSPB 'BIRD TRENDS INTO THE NEXT CENTURY' Conference, Horwich, ring 01942 712615
 21 LOG Blithfield Reservoir, coaches depart 8:00am, contact Peter Tonge 01606 891274
 21 SECOS Ogston Reservoir/Carsington, ring for details
 24 **High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - 9:45am (HT 11:38, 10.0m)**
 25 **High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - 10:30am (HT 12:23, 10.0m)**
 26 KOS 'BIRDING IN INDIA & NEPAL' by Adam Davison
 26 LOG 'IN SEARCH OF HIMBRINI' by Gordon Yates
 26 WGOS 'SEARCH FOR THE ROADRUNNER - a Look at Texas Birds' by Sue & Alan Parker

DECEMBER

- 2 CADOS 'HEBRIDEAN SPLENDOUR' by Gordon Yates
 3 **CAWOS 'SPRING IN SPAIN' by Mike Wilkes**
 4 KOS Martin Mere/Marshside, meet Sessions House at 9:00am
 4 NCRSPB Rostherne Mere/Marbury CP, meet Sainsbury's car park, Warrington at 9:00am
 5 WGOS Carsington Water, meet there at 9:30am, or depart from Guild at 8:00am
 5 CRSPB Marshside/Seaforth, contact Malcolm Leigh 01244 348238
 8 HO 'A CELEBRATION OF BIRDS' by Gordon Yates
 8 MCOS Parkgate, contact Bob or Sheila Greenwood 01928 788475
 10 KOS CHRISTMAS PARTY
 10 LOG CHRISTMAS PARTY
 10 WGOS 'CANADIAN ROCKIES' by Valerie McFarland
 10 SECOS 'NATURE AROUND BRITAIN' by David Tolliday
 10 MCOS 'TUNNICLIFFE'S ANGLESEY' by Paul Rogers
 11 CADOS Marshside, contact Don Pawlett 01244 677477
 12 LOG Moore, contact Peter Tonge 01606 891274 for details
 12 SECOS Pennington Flash/Hope Carr, ring for details
 12 MCOS Point of Air/Gronant, contact Harold Fielding 01606 882529
 15 CRSPB MEMBERS' EVENING
 24 **High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - 10:15am (HT 12:12, 10.0m)**

JANUARY 2000

- 6 CADOS 'MOUNTAIN RAINFORESTS OF ECUADOR' by Mark Woodhead
 9 KOS Tatton Park, meet Dog Wood entrance at 9:00am
 12 HO 'THE WILD LIFE OF NORTHERN FRANCE' by Roy Croucher
 11 MCOS Sandbach Flashes, contact Bob or Sheila Greenwood 01928 788475
 14 **CAWOS 'CAMELS AND CRAB PLOVERS' by Tom Lawson**
 14 SECOS 'THE COMPLETE OWL' by Michael Leach
 14 MCOS 'CANADIAN ROCKIES' by Valerie McFarland
 15 CADOS North Wales Coast, contact Ron Shewring 0151 339 0696
 16 MCOS Pennington/Wigan Flashes, contact Les Goulding 01925 265578
 21 NCRSPB MEMBERS' EVENING
 22 NCRSPB Parkgate & Wirral, meet Frodsham Station Car Park at 9:00am
 22 **High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - time tbc (HT 12:01, 10.0m)**
 23 **High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - time tbc (HT 12:47, 10.0m)**
 23 WGOS Sandbach & Frodsham, meet there at 9:30am, or depart from Guild at 8:45am
 24 HO Lower Derwent Valley/Wheldrake Resr by coach, contact Marion Haigh 0161 903 9163
 28 KOS 'WILD WINGS & WANDERINGS' by Clifford Heyes
 28 WGOS 'THE ARCTIC SUMMER OF GREENLAND AND SPITSBERGEN' by Gordon Yates
 tbc SECOS Rossall Point/Marton Mere/ Pilling, ring for details

FEBRUARY

- 3 CADOS 'ALASKA' by Don Coan
4 **CAWOS** '(NORTH) RONA: ISLAND VENTURE' by John Lawton Roberts
8 MCOS Ellesmere, contact Bob or Sheila Greenwood 01928 788475
9 HO 'WILD AND FAR PLACES' by Charlie Brown
11 CADOS Marshside, contact Don Pawlett 01244 677477
11 SECOS 'BIRDLIFE IN NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE' by Dr Cliff Davies
11 MCOS 'BIRDS OF THE COAST' by David Webb
12 KOS North Wales, meet Sessions House at 8:30am
12 CADOS Pennington/Richmond Bank, contact Chris Done 01928 724994
13 MCOS Slimbridge, contact Mike Allsopp 0151 348 4500
13 NCRSPB North Wales Coast, meet Frodsham Station Car Park at 9:00am
18 NCRSPB 'THE DEE ESTUARY' by Colin Wells
20 **High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - time tbc (HT 11:47, 10.0m)**
20 SECOS Derwent Ings, ring for details
21 **High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - time tbc (HT 12:29, 10.0m)**
24-27 NCRSPB Caerlaverock Weekend, contact Cliff Gibson 01925 817874
25 KOS SPEAKER tbc
25 WGOS 'BIRD HAUNTS IN WILDEST IRELAND' by Jo Moran
25-28 CADOS Millennium Special, contact Nick French 01978 856522
tbc WGOS Lancashire coast, by coach, departing at 8:00am – ring for details

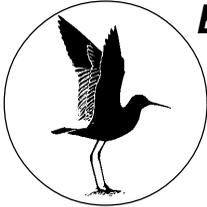
MARCH

- 2 CADOS AGM + MEMBERS' EVENING
3 **CAWOS** AGM + MEMBERS' SLIDES
3-5 SECOS Norfolk Weekend, ring for details
7 MCOS Frodsham Marsh, contact Bob or Sheila Greenwood 01928 788475
8 HO 'SWANS FLY IN' by David Cummings
10 SECOS 'BIRDS AND ANIMALS OF INDIA' by Mike McKavett
11 NCRSPB Shropshire Meres, meet Frodsham Station Car Park at 8:30am
12 KOS Parkgate/Inner Marsh Farm, meet Sessions House at 9:00am
13 CADOS Tregaron, contact Don Coan 01244 660621
13-20 MCOS Eilat, Israel, fully booked!
17 NCRSPB HOT POT SUPPER & GENERAL KNOWLEDGE QUIZ
21 **High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - time tbc (HT 12:08, 9.9m)**
24 KOS 'BIRD HAUNTS IN WILDEST IRELAND' by Jo Moran
24 MCOS 'IN SEARCH OF DOTTEREL' by John Linton Smith
31 WGOS '35 YEARS OF LEIGHTON MOSS' by John Wilson
tbc **CAWOS** Gull ID Workshop, contact Jeff Clarke for details 0151 648 4371/3884
tbc WGOS Seaforth & Southport, by coach, departing at 8:00am – ring for details
tbc SECOS Connah's Quay, ring for details
tbc HO Weekend trip to Fort Belan, Caernarfon, contact Ann Ramsey 0161 980 4459

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, 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



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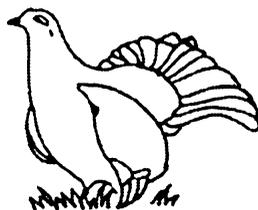
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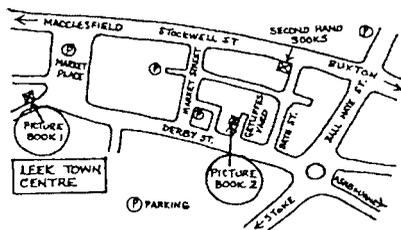
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Imminent dates for your diary:-

Wed/Thur 24/25th November High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - see Diary page 25 for details
Friday 3rd December 'Spring in Spain' by Mike Wilkes - see Diary page 25 for details

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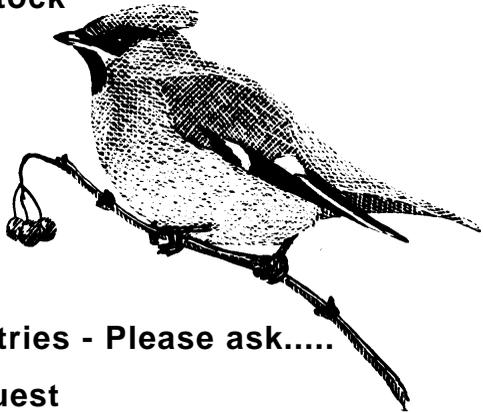
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