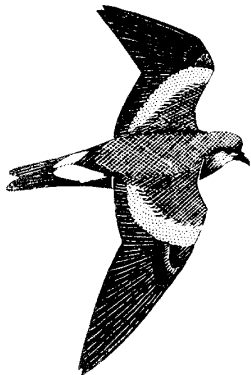


Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society

www.cawos.org



BIRD NEWS

Number 47

July 2000



**Marsh Warbler • House Martin
Frodsham Marsh Update
Ruddy Duck Control Programme
David Norman - Ringer and Physicist
Broxtton Barn Owl Group**



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*Bird News welcomes articles, letters and comments relevant to birdwatching in Cheshire & Wirral.
Please either e-mail or post (on disc) your contributions to the Editor at the addresses shown above.*

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

Front cover: Ruddy Duck by Tony Broome

Other illustrations by Tony Broome, Jeff Clarke, Tom Lowe, Bill Morton and Thelma Sykes.

Editorial

"We are concerned about the lack of individuals prepared to serve the birding community." So wrote Professor Colin Bradshaw, Chairman of the *British Birds* Rarities Committee, in the June issue of *British Birds*, following the BBRC's appeal in September last year for nominations of potential new members and its subsequent receipt of none. He was particularly worried that this apparent lack of willing volunteers would jeopardise the Committee's programme of replacing one member each year, which it operates in order to maintain its up-to-date knowledge of records and identification of rare birds in the UK. Also, he was concerned that, as long-serving members retire from the BBRC, no new blood is coming forward to replace them.

As I read this statement an odd feeling of *déjà vu* swept over me. The last issue of *Bird News* carried Brian Dyke's Chairman's and David Cogger's Secretary's reports to the March AGM. These both contained such comments as "with greater involvement from the many who are not currently involved [within the Society] we could do so much more" and "if the Society is to develop, more members must be involved". David ended his report with a stark warning of the consequences of our current low level of membership contribution to the Society's activities: "If they [the members] are not [involved], the new proposals and, more seriously, the very existence of CAWOS are threatened". It would appear that we are suffering from the same malaise as one of the most prestigious national bodies in ornithology - not that there's much consolation in that!

Over recent months, much has appeared in this newsletter regarding the ongoing so-called 'Way Forward' process commenced by Council last year. This process is endeavouring both to develop new ventures and to consolidate the activities in which the Society is already engaged, for instance recording and the production of an annual county bird report. The CAWOS web site and the recording forum held in June have already fledged, and a second brood of other exciting proposals is currently being incubated. These include, for instance, a single volume guide to birding hotspots in Cheshire & Wirral, based on the Sites to Watch articles published herein, and new species surveys to supplement our well-established one for House Martins. Council is also aiming, amongst other things, to update the *Guidelines for the Submission of Records*, extend the number of organised birdwatches and identification workshops, produce more identification cards for easily confused species (and easily confused birders, like me!), and introduce full computerisation of record handling. Some of these goals are more long-term than others are, but all require person-power to bring them to fruition, and all, by improving our birding skills and our methods of recording, will ultimately be of benefit both to the County's birding community and, more importantly, its birds. However, many of Council's plans have had to be put on the backburner simply because of a lack of people to do the work.

A recent, and by no means unique, example is the appeal made in *Bird News* 46 for volunteers to help man a CAWOS stand at the CWT's exhibition at Marbury in July. No offers of help were received and, as a result, the stand was cancelled, no doubt with some embarrassment. One of Council's current aims is to improve our links with other organisations within the County: this did not complement that aim. The possible reasons why many members apparently do not wish to be actively involved in their Society intrigue me. Perhaps the Society's committee structure is overly bureaucratic, though steps have recently been taken to address this. Perhaps the jobs that need doing within the Society are not inspiring enough, in which case I invite you to submit your own proposals. Perhaps you feel that CAWOS is little more than a birdwatching club, in which case I question the reasons for your membership. Or, perhaps the unseasonably good weather we have 'enjoyed' this summer has meant that you have devoted all your spare time to birding - yes, I am being sarcastic!

Of course, we are all increasingly busy these days with jobs, families, involvement with other groups, etc., and of course we all like to get out and see some birds every now and again. But if CAWOS is to survive and grow, we need more help from you, the members. Already overworked Council members can not be expected to bear the burden of all the work. It's your Society: use it or lose it!

Simon Edwards

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 9th September - please be prompt

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

If you are aware that your material may be delayed, please let the Editor know as soon as possible.

County Rarities

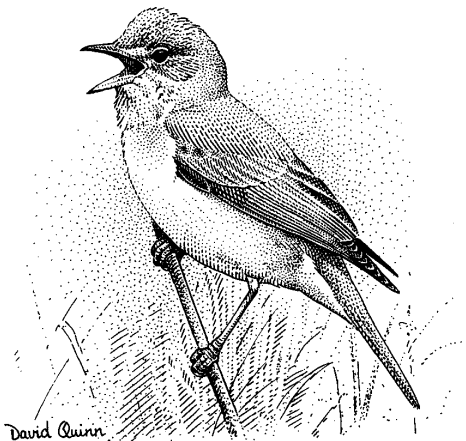
MARSH WARBLER (*Acrocephalus palustris*)

Of all the so-called, un-streaked Acros, Marsh Warblers are quite simply annoying. Why, well just when I have tuned my ear and got my eye in on the first flush of Reed Warblers in late April and May, I almost inevitably come across a silent individual Acro, usually in mid-June, giving frustratingly brief views, probably at some coastal migration area, probably near reeds, but no doubt in thick dank vegetation, and instead of constructively reviewing the key differences between these two difficult-to-separate species, I just seem to go to pieces. It's not that I don't know that spring Marsh Warblers are a softer greyish brown, sometimes greenish tinged to the upperparts, whereas Reed Warblers are routinely rusty brown in spring, becoming greyer in autumn (well, the usual races we see tend to be!), with a pointed bill, a flat head, uniform plumage on most of the upperparts or underparts, with the rump and flanks appearing a richer reddish brown.

Jizz wise, Reed Warblers also should look short winged. Marsh Warbler on the other hand, has a plain faced (even though it has a better marked eye ring and supercilium), round headed, shorter billed look, and tends to look as if it has a long primary projection. Both species show pale tipped primaries and pale edged secondaries and tertials although they are slightly more pronounced on Marsh. Also Marsh Warbler has plain creamy underparts. It's just that these features are too subtle, and subjective when the bird in question is skulking well back in dark vegetation, so it ends up being just plain annoying, and I have to confess to walking away from several such sightings just out of plain frustration!

If your problem Acro decides to burst into song, then it becomes much easier; Marsh Warblers sound like a CD of all your garden birds thrown into one, and played loudly and fast. It's a mixture of warbling, chattering, grating and identifiable mimicry which defies description, but once heard, you just know it isn't that throaty chortle of chara-chara crik-crik phrases that is so obviously Reed Warbler. Marsh Warblers also prefer the bankside vegetation rather than extensive reed-beds and prefer to sing from bushes taller than reed stems, but a migrant can turn up anywhere. Of course, Acros in autumn become your worst nightmare, and twice as awkward, so it's a combination of the spring plumage features which must be confirmed to a positive ID in Marsh Warbler's favour, but beware young birds which are rusty brown like young Reed Warblers. But the plumage features, even in well seen birds, are never that distinct, and I suspect there are a few of us who have stood in a crowd in Holy Vale on St Mary's and been asked our opinion on a problem Acro, only to find our opinion based on a rational combination of features, disputed by some who just see the colours differently. To be perfectly honest, I always concentrate on the legs and feet. Marsh Warblers tend to have paler yellowish or pinkish legs and feet with pale claws, whilst Reed are always greyer, bluish or green with dark claws and yellowish undersides to the feet. It's the only consistent and definite feature which separates these two for me at any time of year. Of course getting a good enough view to use this key feature is a different matter altogether.

Marsh Warbler is a very rare visitor to Cheshire and Wirral, there being only two accepted records up to 2000, although one is still under review for Frodsham Marsh. The breeding at Woolston in 1991 is the only confirmed breeding record, but it has happened once so why not again? There have also been unconfirmed reports of singing birds on the Wirral in other years (unconfirmed possibly due to the difficulty of identification and therefore acceptance of records). So even though the UK is at the very edge of its range, the Western Palearctic population is expanding. Whilst they may be annoying amongst the Acros, perhaps they are well worth finding all the same.



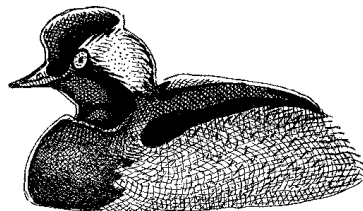
Recent Reports

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

MARCH

This March was rather quiet with very few surprises or quality birds. Highlights included both **Green-winged Teal** and **Common Crane** at Frodsham, a **Caspian Gull** reported at New Ferry Tip, a **Great Grey Shrike** at Tatton Park, a presumed escape **Pallas's Rosefinch** at Rivacre Valley and a small passage of **Stonechats** and the usual early migrants.

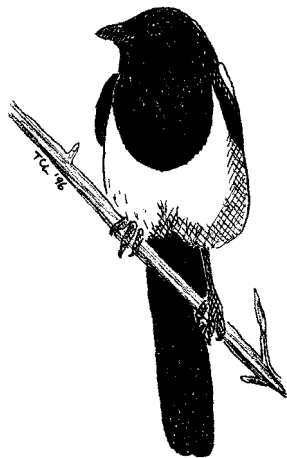
Up to 21 **Little Grebes** were at Moore NR all month and 20+ **Great Crested Grebes** were at Rostherne Mere (9th). 10 **Black-necked Grebes** had returned to Woolston Eyes by 25th. One or two **Cormorants** were regularly at Poynton Pool with three together on 31st. This species was a major rarity here until five years ago. A **Bittern** was irregularly at Inner Marsh Farm (1st-13th). Up to four **Little Egrets** were on the Dee Estuary all month with one at Fiddler's Ferry (26th). 28 **Mute Swans** were at Sankey Valley Park (7th). Two **Pink-footed Geese** visited Poynton Pool (10th) and three **Greylags** were at Gatewarth (31st). A **Barnacle Goose** was at Frodsham. The female **Ruddy Shelduck** remained at Inner Marsh Farm (14th). **Shelducks** reached 74 at Fiddler's Ferry (8th) and 41 at Sandbach Flashes. A drake **Mandarin** was at Sandbach Flashes (22nd) with three at Raby Mere (14th). Monthly maxima for **Wigeon** included 18 at Fiddler's Ferry, 350+ at Frodsham No6 tank, 43 at Houghton Green Pool and 212 at Sandbach Flashes. Up to 147 **Gadwall** were at Woolston Eyes. A drake **Green-winged Teal** was at Frodsham (to 20th). 465 **Teal** were at Sandbach Flashes with 100 at New Ferry and 160+ at Rostherne Mere. 30+ **Pintail** were at Frodsham No6 tank (9th). The only **Garganey** of the month was a drake at Sandbach Flashes on 21st. Up to 14 **Shovelers** were at both Moore NR and Sandbach Flashes with 70+ at Inner Marsh Farm (14th) and a pair at Poynton Pool (21st and a drake on 14th). The last wintering **Pochard** at Poynton Pool left on 24th and 62 **Tufted Ducks** were at Moore NR (31st). Three **Scaup** visited Frodsham where the **Smew** lingered to 9th at least. Two **Goosanders** were on the River Dane at Swettenham (18th).



An early **Marsh Harrier** was seen at Woolston Eyes (20th). A **Hen Harrier** was at Frodsham mid-month. As one now expects in Cheshire **Buzzards** were widespread. **Merlins** were at Fiddler's Ferry, Sandbach Flashes and Woolston Eyes. A **Red-legged Partridge** was an interesting find at Fiddler's Ferry with two at Frodsham. A **Grey Partridge** at Handforth Dean (11th) was an excellent record. Three **Water Rails** were at Fiddler's Ferry with one at Moulton (6th & 16th) and Poynton Pool (1st, 12th-13th, 26th & 30th). A **Common Crane** was at Frodsham (22nd) just prior to dusk before another sighting over Hoole. **Little Ringed Plovers** arrived at Fiddler's Ferry (25th), Moore NR (31st), Sandbach Flashes (5th - with up to nine by the end of the month) and Woolston Eyes (22nd). Two **Ringed Plovers** visited Sandbach Flashes (11th) and 2000+ **Golden Plovers** were at Frodsham (28th). 25 **Little Stints** were at Frodsham mid-month. Up to 15 **Ruff** were at Frodsham and Sandbach Flashes. **Jack Snipe** were at Frodsham, Sandbach Flashes and Woolston Eyes. A **Woodcock** was at Moulton (21st) and two early **Whimbrels** were at Inner Marsh Farm (27th). A **Green Sandpiper** was at Arpley Tip (9th). **Mediterranean Gulls** included two at both Frodsham and Woolston Eyes. A 2nd year **Caspian Gull** was reported at New Ferry Tip (20th) with a 1st winter **Iceland Gull** there (14th). A **Glaucous Gull** was seen at Fiddler's Ferry. A **Kittiwake** was at Frodsham (20th) and **Sandwich Terns** returned to Hilbre from 19th. Two **Long-eared Owls** remained at Woolston Eyes (to 18th). **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** were at Moulton (16th) and Poynton Pool (26th).

The first arrival dates for **Sand Martins** were Billinge Green Flash (12th), Doddington Pool (14th with 80 on 24th), Fiddler's Ferry (25th), Houghton Green Pool (19th), Moore NR (31st), Moulton (17th), Sandbach Flashes (14th), Tatton Mere (5th with c600 there on 28th) and Woolston Eyes (15th). The first **Swallows** appeared at Sandbach Flashes (19th), Tatton Mere (23rd) and Woolston Eyes (22nd). A **House Martin** reported at Tatton Mere (3rd) would be the earliest ever Cheshire arrival and as such the County Recorder would welcome more details. Up to 12 **Water Pipits** were reported at Neston all month and one visited Frodsham No4 tank (28th). Four early **White Wagtails** were at

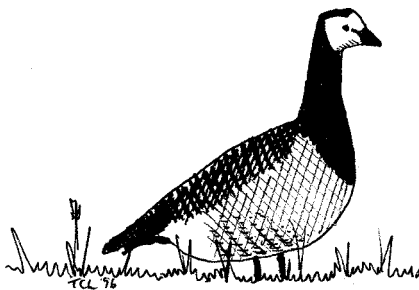
Moulton (16th). One or two passage **Stonechats** visited Fiddler's Ferry (two), Frodsham (two), Moulton (two), Sandbach Flashes (one) and Woolston Eyes (one). **Wheatears** were at Fiddler's Ferry (25th), Mow Cop (18th), Sandbach Flashes (24th) and Woolston Eyes (25th). 265 **Fieldfares** were at Tatton Park (19th) with 300 at Moulton (10th). An exceptionally early **Lesser Whitethroat** was at Sandbach Flashes (21st). **Blackcaps** were back at Moore NR (31st), Moulton (21st) and Sandbach Flashes (21st). The first **Chiffchaffs** were at Congleton (12th), Fiddler's Ferry (25th), Moore NR (4th), Moulton (14th), Poynton Pool (13th – earliest ever here), Sandbach Flashes (16th), Tatton Park (17th) and Vale Royal Locks (12th). **Willow Warblers** arrived at Neston (27th) and Fiddler's Ferry (26th – very early here). A **Willow Tit** and two **Marsh Tits** were at Moulton on 17th and 26th respectively. A **Great Grey Shrike** was at Tatton Park by the Mill Pool (18th). At least 17 **Maggies** were at Poynton Pool on 5th. **Raven** sightings included four at Fiddler's Ferry, two at Bosley Cloud and Woolston Eyes, with singles at Crewe Hall, Moore NR and Sandbach Flashes. At least 12 **Tree Sparrows** were at Whatcroft Lodge (12th) and 20+ **Bramblings** were at Timbersbrook (15th). At least 20 **Twites** were at Frodsham No4 tank (9th) with 10+ still on 28th. Up to 30 **Crossbills** were at Delamere Forest all month with five at Bosley Cloud (5th, also three on 4th & 26th, singles on 17th, 21st & 31st) and 11 at Tatton Park (19th). A presumed escape male **Pallas's Rosefinch** was found at Rivacre Valley (22nd-30th). A **Snow Bunting** was at Hale Lighthouse (8th-9th).



APRIL

Highlights from the month included up to five scattered **Little Egrets**, two brief **Spoonbills** at Sandbach Flashes, only one **Osprey**, a twitchable **Common Crane** at Mobberley, an **Avocet** at Frodsham, a **Tawny Pipit** at Moreton and a report of a **Greenish Warbler** at Fiddler's Ferry.

A site record 46 **Little Grebes** were at Woolston Eyes. A pair of **Great Crested Grebes** had young at Sandbach Flashes (26th) and Fiddler's Ferry had a new monthly maximum of 10 on 28th-29th. Up to 25 **Black-necked Grebes** were at Woolston Eyes. One or two **Cormorants** were at Poynton Pool (to 7th) and 12 remained at Trentabank Reservoir (27th). A pair of **Little Egrets** attempted to nest in the county but they were unsuccessful. Two birds were at Woolston Eyes (28th - the first site record) with singles at Inner Marsh Farm (18th) and Richmond Bank (28th). Two **Spoonbills** stopped off at Sandbach Flashes for 10mins on the evening of 29th, before being relocated at Leighton Moss the next day. Meanwhile the female Mauritanian Spoonbill was at Inner Marsh Farm on nine dates (7th-30th). 52 **Mute Swans** were at Winterley Pool (10th). Six **Greylags** were at both Moore NR (9th) and Watch Lane Flash (16th-24th with a **Pink-footed Goose** there on 23rd-24th), and a single Greylag Goose visited Poynton Pool (26th). Two **Lesser Canada Geese** were at Inner Marsh Farm (23rd) while 48 **Canadas** at Fiddler's Ferry (8th) was a new monthly maximum. A **Barnacle Goose** was at Frodsham. The female **Ruddy Shelduck** was again at Inner Marsh Farm (19th-24th) and another was at Mobberley SQ (4th & 9th). A drake **Mandarin** was seen briefly at Sandbach Flashes and a pair was at Mobberley (6th). Seven **Gadwall** were at Fiddler's Ferry (2nd) with 32 **Teal** there on 8th. An early brood of **Mallard** appeared at Inner Marsh Farm (1st). A pair of **Garganey** was at Budworth Mere with singles at Frodsham (27th) and Inner Marsh Farm (29th). Two **Pintail** remained at Sandbach Flashes (to 29th at least) and a pair of **Shovelers** visited Poynton Pool (12th). A drake **Common Scoter** was at Astbury Mere (1st).



Three **Goldeneye** remained at Macclesfield Forest (27th) with 20+ at Tatton Mere (6th) and four at Poynton Pool (11th) mirrored a record there eight years earlier. A **Red-breasted Merganser** was at Frodsham (27th) and a **Goosander** visited Sandbach Flashes (29th). Three reports of a female **Marsh Harrier** came from Frodsham with a female at Inner Marsh Farm (28th). A male **Goshawk** was seen at Fiddler's Ferry (24th) and one flew over Timbersbrook (2nd). The migrant **Osprey** that

flew north over the M6 near Sandbach (9th) could well have been the bird seen later over Tatton Mere. A **Merlin** at Fiddler's Ferry (23rd-24th) was the first April record there.

A **Red-legged Partridge** was at Vale Royal Abbey (15th). Two **Water Rails** were at Fiddler's Ferry (15th), the latest spring record there. An adult **Common Crane** was at Mobberley (3rd-6th). A pair of **Oystercatchers** was at Mobberley SQ. A female **Avocet** was at Frodsham No6 tank (29th). Up to 10 **Little Ringed Plovers** were at Sandbach Flashes with one at Gatewarth (22nd). Up to eight **Ringed Plovers** were at Fiddler's Ferry where a female was sitting from 8th. A **Knot** visited Sandbach Flashes (11th) with **Sanderling** there on 29th. Frodsham had 10 **Little Stints**. A **Jack Snipe** was still at Fiddler's Ferry (15th), Sandbach Flashes (5th), Mow Cop (4th), Maw Green Tip (5th) with four at Tatton Park (4th). **Woodcocks** were roding at Macclesfield Forest late in the month. Two **Whimbrel** flew over Woolston Eyes with three at Sandbach Flashes (29th-30th) and one over Gatewarth (30th). A **Spotted Redshank** was at Frodsham with up to seven at Inner Marsh Farm. Three **Green Sandpipers** were at Neston (15th), with singles at Frodsham (17th), Inner Marsh Farm (8th & 10th) and Sandbach Flashes (23rd). The first arrival dates of **Common Sandpiper** were at Bottom's Reservoir (27th), Fiddler's Ferry (22nd), Inner Marsh Farm (17th), Moulton (6th), Poynton Pool (11th – second earliest record) and Sandbach Flashes (15th). Peak counts included trios at Fiddler's Ferry (22nd), Moore NR (23rd), Poynton Pool (22nd with three further singles) and up to five at Sandbach Flashes. Two **Mediterranean Gulls** were at Woolston Eyes and a **Little Gull** was at Inner Marsh Farm (from 25th with two on 28th). Two 1st summer **Iceland Gulls** were at Richmond Bank (1st) with one again on 22nd. The pair of **Great Black-backed Gulls** at Frodsham nested for the third year running. Three **Sandwich Terns** at Sandbach Flashes (21st) was a rare local record and the first there in several years, with a **Common Tern** there on 29th. The first **Cuckoos** of the year were back at Fiddler's Ferry (19th), Inner Marsh Farm (21st), Moulton (27th), Penketh (22nd) and Winterley Pool (18th).

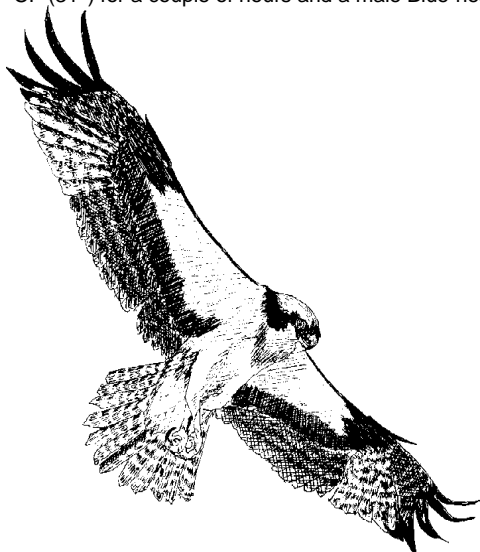
Swifts arrived back at Fiddler's Ferry (30th), Frodsham (29th) and Sandbach Flashes (23rd). **Green Woodpeckers** were seen at Bosley Cloud and Sandbach Flashes during the month. Large counts of **Sand Martins** included 300 at Fiddler's Ferry (30th), 200+ at Sandbach Flashes (23rd) and 500+ at Tatton Mere (5th), while two visited Poynton Pool (19th & 27th). **Swallows** had arrived at Fiddler's Ferry (9th), Gatewarth (7th), Inner Marsh Farm (2nd), Mobberley (6th), Moulton (6th) and Poynton Pool (19th). Slightly later than Swallows, **House Martins** arrived at Fiddler's Ferry (27th), Inner Marsh Farm (8th), Moulton (21st) and Poynton Pool (19th). A **Tawny Pipit** was at Leasowe (22nd) for a few hours. 80 **Meadow Pipits** were at Sandbach Flashes (2nd) with 45 at Mow Cop (2nd) and a peak of 11 over Poynton Pool (6th) where migration of this species has been poor. Five **Water Pipits** lingered at Neston (1st). The first dates for **Yellow Wagtails** included Frodsham No4 tank (21st), Gatewarth (29th), Inner Marsh Farm (8th), Moreton (22nd), Neston (23rd), Sandbach Flashes (9th) and Tatton Mere (29th). **White Wagtails** were at Fiddler's Ferry (9th), Frodsham (10 on 21st), Inner Marsh Farm (regular from 13th with 14 on 17th and seven next day) and Sandbach Flashes (15th). **Redstarts** were at Delamere (29th), Fiddler's Ferry (21st & 24th – second reserve record, first was in Aug 1995), Frodsham, Hilbre (four on 21st) and Tegg's Nose CP (27th). Single **Whinchats** were at Fiddler's Ferry (21st-22nd), Moulton (30th) and Sandbach Flashes (24th-25th) with two at Woolston Eyes (22nd) and an impressive 15 at Frodsham (27th). Several sites had good counts of **Wheatears** with 24 at Fiddler's Ferry (21st with double figures on four other dates including six Greenland birds on 30th), up to four at Sandbach Flashes and 15 were at Woolston Eyes. A **Stonechat** visited Sandbach Flashes (3rd) and a **Ring Ouzel** was at Tegg's Nose CP (1st). 400+ **Fieldfares** were at Sandbach Flashes (12th with 25 over on 23rd), 100 at Moulton (6th) and 140+ at Poynton Pool (5th – a very large count there for recent years). The last Fieldfares reported were at least nine at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (15th when two **Redwings** were also seen), 16 at Moulton (15th) and 25 over Sandbach Flashes (23rd).

The first **Grasshopper Warblers** were at Fiddler's Ferry (24th), Gatewarth (23rd), Inner Marsh Farm (24th), Neston Old Quay (21st) and St. Helen's Canal (22nd). The first **Sedge Warblers** were at Astmoor (20th), Hatchmere (29th), Inner Marsh Farm (21st), Neston Old Quay (23rd), Sandbach Flashes (22nd) and St. Helen's Canal (22nd with 11 there on 28th). Sandbach Flashes had its first **Reed Warbler** of the year (20th) followed by others at Fiddler's Ferry (22nd and four on 29th, a new April record), Moore (21st) and Neston Old Quay (23rd), with 28 at St. Helen's Canal (28th). The only **Lesser Whitethroats** reported were at Astmoor (20th), Inner Marsh Farm (25th) and Sandbach Flashes (23rd). **Whitethroats** arrived at Astmoor (20th), Fiddler's Ferry (21st with 40 on 30th, a new April record), Inner Marsh Farm (21st), Moore NR (21st), Neston Old Quay (23rd), Sandbach Flashes (up to five birds from 23rd) and 12 at Gatewarth (28th). The first **Garden Warblers** were at Moulton

(21st), Sandbach Flashes (29th) and Tatton Mere (30th). **Blackcaps** arrived back at Fiddler's Ferry (8th with eight there on 30th), Knutsford Moor (6th), Inner Marsh Farm (23rd) and Poynton Pool (2nd). A report of a **Greenish Warbler** came from Fiddler's Ferry (22nd). A **Wood Warbler** was at Tegg's Nose CP (27th). Up to five **Chiffchaffs** at Fiddler's Ferry was a new April record. **Willow Warblers** were at Crewe (6th), Fiddler's Ferry (8th with 20 on 23rd, a new April record), Inner Marsh Farm (20th), Moulton (6th), Poynton (9th), Styperson (1st week) and Tatton Mere (10th). Nesting **Pied Flycatchers** were back at Tegg's Nose CP (27th). Two **Jays** at Fiddler's Ferry (28th) were a rare find there and two **Ravens** were at Delamere Forest (29th). Partial albino **Carrion Crows** were seen at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (15th) and Mobberley (6th). At least 12 **Tree Sparrows** were at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (15th). Three **Bramblings** and 85 **Siskins** were at Bosley Cloud (8th) with another Brambling at Dog Wood, Tatton (1st). Two **Crossbills** flew over Woolston Eyes with four at Bosley Cloud (2nd with two on 8th) and several still at Blakemere (29th). At least 18 **Yellowhammers** were singing around Sandbach Flashes (7th).

MAY

Frodsham provided most of the highlights during May including an adult **White-winged Black Tern** at No6 tank (21st) for 20mins only, **Pectoral Sandpiper** at No5 tank (14th-16th - the fifth spring record in the county since 1969) and a pair of **Blue-headed Wagtails** nesting near No4 tank from 1st. Elsewhere another Pectoral Sandpiper visited Inner Marsh Farm (15th & 17th-20th), a male **Woodchat Shrike** was at Thurstaston CP (31st) for a couple of hours and a male Blue-headed Wagtail was at Astbury Mere (6th).



Three **Black-necked Grebes** visited Frodsham No6 tank (11th). Two adult **Little Egrets** were at Frodsham No6 tank (5th) where up to four pairs of **Grey Herons** also nested. Another Little Egret was at Inner Marsh Farm (14th). The **Mauritanian Spoonbill** was seen at Inner Marsh Farm on 13 dates up to 28th. A **Pink-footed Goose** visited Frodsham No5 tank (1st & 5th) and Poynton Pool (30th). At least five pairs of **Canada Geese** and one pair of **Greylag Geese** bred at Inner Marsh Farm with a **Lesser Canada Goose** there on 14th. Single pairs of Canadas bred at Fiddler's Ferry and Poynton Pool with two pairs at Moore NR. Six Greylag Geese were at Sandbach Flashes (22nd) with 15 at Inner Marsh Farm (5th). Single **Barnacle Geese** were at Frodsham all month and Inner Marsh Farm (5th). Two **Bar-headed Geese** were at Frodsham (14th) and the **Ruddy Shelduck** was seen at Inner Marsh Farm on 10 dates between 3rd and 24th. The monthly maximum of **Shelduck** at Fiddler's Ferry was 76 birds. A drake **Mandarin**

at Trentabank Res'r (5th) had been seen a few days earlier and was the first site record. Up to six **Wigeon** were at Frodsham and Sandbach Flashes with eight at Inner Marsh Farm and a female at Houghton Green Flash (1st). Up to 18 **Gadwall** at Frodsham was a very high count there. A **Pintail** remained at Frodsham No6 tank to 21st at least with five plus at Inner Marsh Farm (5th). Two **Garganey** were at Frodsham No5 tank (1st), Sandbach Flashes (drake on 25th), Inner Marsh Farm (drake between 3rd-13th with a female there 5th-7th). Small numbers of **Shovelers** remained at Frodsham and Inner Marsh Farm. 11 **Tufted Ducks** were at Hatton's Hey (21st) with an irregular drake **Pochard** recorded from Frodsham. A late **Goldeneye** was at Rostherne Mere (5th). Another **Marsh Harrier** was at Frodsham (6th) with one at Inner Marsh Farm (12th). Eight **Buzzards** at Fiddler's Ferry on 12th was a new site record. **Ospreys** flew over Sandbach Flashes (13th) and Tatton Mere (23rd). One/two **Hobbies** flew over Sandbach Flashes on six dates from 9th. A calling **Quail** was at Parkgate (4th). A partial albino **Pheasant** was at Rixton Clay Pits (18th). Two **Water Rails** were heard at Moore NR (5th) and another at Frodsham (1st).

An **Avocet** again visited Frodsham Marsh (5th). 14 **Ringed Plovers** were at Sandbach Flashes (27th) with 11 there on 6th. A pair of birds flew around Handforth Dean (1st) and were probably

nesting on a gravel area (but now an airport car park) in previous years and up to four sitting birds were at Fiddler's Ferry. Two **Knot** were at Fiddler's Ferry (6th-7th) – the first May record there. A **Sanderling** was at Sandbach Flashes (19th) with three at Inner Marsh Farm the same day. Up to 18 **Little Stints** were at Frodsham mid-month with one at Inner Marsh Farm (20th-21st). Three **Curlew Sandpipers** were at both Frodsham No5 tank (16th) and Inner Marsh Farm (12th). Up to 13 **Dunlin** visited Sandbach Flashes. A **Snipe** was still at Frodsham (10th) with up to six **Woodcocks** roding at Macclesfield Forest (5th). Several large flocks of **Black-tailed Godwits** were recorded at Sandbach Flashes including up to 250 over on 13th and 87 on 22nd (with 68 still present on 24th). Frodsham No6 tank held 250+ on 11th. A **Bar-tailed Godwit** at Fiddler's Ferry (9th) was the first record there since Dec 1995. **Whimbrels** were at Fiddler's Ferry (8th), Gatewarth (14th), Inner Marsh Farm (8th) and Frodsham No5 tank (22 on 1st). Up to three **Greenshanks** visited Fiddler's Ferry, Frodsham and Sandbach Flashes. **Wood Sandpipers** were at Frodsham No5 tank (6th) and Inner Marsh Farm (1st). Single **Common Sandpipers** were at Fiddler's Ferry (9th), Moore NR (5th), Poynton Pool (8th & 14th) and Tegg's Nose Res'r (5th). Two **Turnstones** were at Frodsham No5 tank (14th) with good numbers at New Brighton (5th) and three at Sandbach Flashes (21st). Two adult **Mediterranean Gulls** visited Inner Marsh Farm (8th with a 1st summer there on 28th). Two 1st summer **Little Gulls** were at Frodsham (14th) with singles at Inner Marsh Farm (to 13th with two on 8th & 11th) and off New Brighton (5th). A **Yellow-legged Gull** visited Maw Green Tip (24th). For the third successive year, Frodsham hosted Cheshire's only breeding pair of **Great Black-backed Gulls**, which hatched three eggs. At least 26 **Kittiwakes** were off New Brighton (5th) and an adult went through Inner Marsh Farm (10th). 14 **Arctic Terns** passed through Frodsham (7th). Three **Black Terns** were at Fiddler's Ferry (12th) with others at Frodsham No6 tank (two on 5th) and Inner Marsh Farm (two on 7th, one on 12th). A **Turtle Dove** was reported at Sandbach Flashes (3rd). **Cuckoos** were at Frodsham (10th) and Knutsford Moor (1st). A pair of **Tawny Owls** (with young) was at Tegg's Nose CP (5th) and at least three birds called from Macclesfield Forest. **Short-eared Owls** were at Fiddler's Ferry (8th) and Frodsham (2nd). **Swifts** arrived at Inner Marsh Farm (3rd), Moore NR (6th), Poynton (6th), with 500 at Fiddler's Ferry (21st). A **Green Woodpecker** at Fiddler's Ferry (14th) was unusual and a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was at Barthomley (1st).

Up to five **Sand Martins** were at Poynton Pool on seven dates from 3rd while colonies at Fiddler's Ferry totalled 320 nests, more than double the previous record of 150 pairs set in 1999. A pair of **Grey Wagtails** bred at Fiddler's Ferry. A **Redstart** was at Frodsham No5 tank (2nd) and several were at Macclesfield Forest/Tegg's Nose CP early in the month. **Whinchats** were at Fiddler's Ferry (6th), Gatewarth (1st & 12th) and Sandbach Flashes (5th). Two Greenland **Wheatears** were at Fiddler's Ferry (1st) with one at Frodsham No6 tank (11th). A male **Ring Ouzel** at Danebower Quarry (5th) was a good bird-race tick. On May 7th counts of warblers at Fiddler's Ferry included three **Grasshopper**, 20 **Sedge**, four **Reed**, two **Willow**, 60 **Whitethroats**, six **Blackcaps** and one **Chiffchaff**. A comparative survey of Moore NR/Moss Side/Gatewarth on 14th produced totals of:- one **Garden**, 10 **Grasshopper**, 112 **Sedge**, 69 **Reed** and 67 **Willow Warblers**, 144 **Whitethroats**, 27 **Blackcaps** and eight **Chiffchaffs**. Nine/ten **Reed Warblers** sang at Sandbach Flashes (8th). The earliest dates for **Garden Warblers** included Fiddler's Ferry (1st with two on 12th), Frodsham No5 tank (7th), Macclesfield Forest (5th) and Moore NR (6th). 18 **Willow Warblers** were at Astmoor (20th). Five **Wood Warblers** were at Macclesfield Forest/Tegg's Nose CP (5th). **Spotted Flycatchers** were at Frodsham (9th – earliest ever there), Hough (13th) and Macclesfield Forest (11th). Two **Pied Flycatchers** were at Timbersbrook (24th) with four plus males at Macclesfield Forest/Tegg's Nose CP (1st). A pair of **Marsh Tits** was found feeding young by the River Weaver near Kingsley (21st) - a rare find in the county. Regular sightings of **Jays** at Fiddler's Ferry raised hopes of breeding there and two **Ravens** were at Macclesfield Forest (1st). The first fledged juvenile **Starlings** were at Handforth (25th) and Poynton next day. 16+ **Tree Sparrows** were at Sandbach Flashes (5th) with a box nesting pair at Inner Marsh Farm. Both **Siskins** and **Redpolls** held territory at Macclesfield Forest early in the month. At least 53 **Reed Buntings** were singing in the Moore NR/Moss Side/Gatewarth area (14th). **Corn Buntings** were singing at Basford (10th), Frodsham and Houghton Green Pool.

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

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

Thanks/Acknowledgements for Recent Reports go to: - Birdwatch and Birdwatching Magazines, P. & C. Brewster, B. Perkins, (Sandbach Flashes Log), Keith Massey (Fiddler's Ferry Reserve), D. Morris (Tatton Park & Knutsford Moor LNR), A. Parker and anyone else who passed records on.

Personality Profile

DAVID NORMAN - RINGER AND PHYSICIST

The name of David Norman is well-known to CAWOS members through the Ringers' Notebook which he compiled for *Bird News* for many years, as well as the Report on Bird Ringing that he continues to write for the annual *Bird Report*. It is probable, however, that apart from ringers and officers of CAWOS, David is not a familiar figure to many of the county's birdwatchers. Much of his ornithological time is taken up by ringing, which is usually carried out at sites that may be private or which few birdwatchers visit. Thus, the chances of bumping into David in the field are probably not very high. If, however, this suggests a narrow interest, nothing could be further from the truth. David Norman's often behind-the-scenes contribution to Cheshire's ornithology has been considerable, and his national profile is no less impressive.

Born in Leicester in 1949, David studied Physics at Cambridge University, obtaining his BA in 1970. Other qualifications followed, including a Ph.D. from Leicester in 1977. He has been a scientist throughout his working life, most of which has been spent at Daresbury Laboratory. He is a respected physicist and has delivered papers in many countries of the world; at such times he has taken every opportunity to become familiar with the local avifauna. His professional career has been very successful: since June 1997 David has been Director of Synchrotron Radiation at Daresbury and a few years ago he was appointed Visiting Professor of Physics at Liverpool University.

I have known David Norman since 1980 and from our first meeting it was clear that his scientific training was applied in full measure to his ornithological interests. He became an 'A' ringer in 1981 and at about this time he began the ringing programme at Woolston Eyes, which has continued and expanded to the present day. Much of what we now know about passerines at Woolston derives from David's pioneering work, and his training and subsequent encouragement of others has ensured the continuing development of ringing activities at this exciting site. Away from Woolston, which he has now largely left in the capable hands of others, David has over many years carried out long-term studies of a number of species, in particular Fieldfare, Sand Martin, Grey Heron and Little Tern (in North Wales). I can recall many freezing cold winter mornings, when one's hands almost literally froze to the ringing poles, at Daresbury Fruit Farm catching Fieldfares or standing on precariously steep banks at mid-Cheshire's sand quarries whilst David pursued his long-term study of his beloved Sand Martins. Many scientific papers have resulted from the vast amount of data that David has amassed, while his book on the Fieldfare is highly regarded. He wrote the texts for Chaffinch and Brambling in the 1986 *Winter Atlas* and he has been commissioned to write the species' accounts for Common Tern, Wood Warbler and Chaffinch for the forthcoming BTO Migration Atlas.

Recognition of David's knowledge and experience has led to many national appointments. From 1986 to 1990 he was a member of the BTO's Ringing Committee and since 1996 he has been a council member of English Nature. From 1991 to 1996 David took part in four ringing expeditions to Senegal, during one of which he re-trapped one of his Cheshire-ringed Sand Martins - only to re-trap it back in Cheshire the following spring!

What then of David's wider contribution to Cheshire's ornithology that I alluded to earlier? From 1987 to 1998 David was a very active and stimulating chairman of the Mersey Estuary Conservation Group and helped, through a number of successful conferences and publications, to bring to the attention of planners, developers and the general public the high nature conservation value of the Mersey. As far as CAWOS is concerned, David has for many years read and commented on drafts of the *Cheshire & Wirral Bird Report*. For someone who has been at the receiving end of his written



comments, these can appear daunting, especially when they cover almost every square inch of a page! However, and I know Steve Barber agrees, almost all of David's comments are pertinent and an antidote to lazy thinking and factual errors. He also helped to steer through to publication the *Cheshire Breeding Bird Atlas*, of which he was a co-author, at a time when it had become bogged down. He has been the Ringing Recorder of Cheshire since 1988, and I know from my role as the County Coordinator of the Heronries Census that David and his team's visits to about a third of the county's heronries have vastly increased our knowledge of the Grey Heron population in Cheshire.

It is likely that I have omitted something important about David, so wide is his range of activities and interests. His thoughtful and important contributions to the Woolston Eyes Conservation Group during his vice-chairmanship were invaluable, and I have little doubt that the Merseyside Ringing Group, of which he has been such an active member for over 20 years, has similarly benefited. Although ringing can be a solitary pursuit, David is always prepared to share his knowledge with others and I have frequently seen him take the time to explain to a member of the public the finer points of identification of a bird in the hand. Without his encouragement and many helpful suggestions my paper on Swifts in the 1997 *Bird Report* would have been much the poorer. One example probably encapsulates all that I have attempted to say about David. In July 1991, a Marsh Warbler was found at Woolston and heard singing. This soon ceased and it was assumed by those involved that it had probably moved on. When he first learned of this a few weeks later, David immediately suggested another possibility, namely that the male had a mate and had settled down to breed. He was proven right and the most northerly breeding record of Marsh Warbler - and of course the first for Cheshire - was subsequently confirmed. This was the scientist considering all the possibilities. David wrote a full account of what occurred in the 1993 *Bird Report* that makes fascinating reading.

Finally, one is unlikely to find David Norman amongst a crowd of twitchers - he regards rare birds as an irrelevance, preferring to study and expand our knowledge of more common species. He has made a considerable contribution to both Cheshire's and national ornithology which I am sure will continue, whilst I have little doubt that his dedication and sharp intelligence will benefit national conservation issues, through his role with English Nature, for many years to come.

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



A ringer from Chad was distraught,
And to cut quite a long story short,
His mist net was wrecked,
His arms badly pecked
By the Lappet-faced Vulture he'd caught.

Hazel J Raw

Ringers' Notebook

The ringing of wild birds usually involves the placing on one of the legs of a lightweight band of aluminium, with its own unique sequence of letters and/or numbers. Increasingly though, in the case of larger bird species such as geese and swans, brightly coloured neck collars with easy to read digits are being used. These apparently cause the host no discomfort or problems with their own group of birds, and, being easily seen, allow us to track the movements of these individuals around the globe. One such bird is neck collar 3J65, a female Whooper Swan ringed as a second-year bird in August 1994 at Anavat in eastern Iceland. From there it moved to spend the following winter in the north of Ireland and the next autumn on the Somerset Levels (after a brief visit to Finistère in north-west France), before arriving in our region at Hale Gate Marsh in February 1997. Staying there until the end of March, it returned again in November of the same year and stayed that and the following winter, with the last reported sighting on 8th March 1999. No information for this bird is available for last winter, so if anyone has any sightings tucked away in their notebooks, please let the County Recorder know.

It is now well established that many summer migrants return to the same site - and even the same small bush or patch of ground - to breed. Less well known perhaps is that some wintering birds return to the same areas also. A Blackbird ringed in the Netherlands in November 1998 spent the winter of that year on the Wirral, roosting in a ringer's garden in Bidston Hill, where it was caught several times. The bird was then recaptured at the same place in November 1999.

Another thrush which gave us cause for excitement after being caught entering a roost was a Redwing ringed as a second-year bird at Norton Priory, Runcorn in January 1996. It was subsequently reported in July last year from Arkhangel'sk (Archangel) in the north-west of Russia, some 2750 kilometres distant. This is not rare, as there have been 57 confirmed recoveries of BTO-ringed Redwings in the ex-Soviet states in previous years, but very pleasing nonetheless. Another Norton Priory bird caught at roost, a Chaffinch trapped at the end of December 1996, has just been reported as being originally ringed in western Belgium in November 1994. I'm afraid some Continental ringing schemes seem very slow compared to ours in releasing original data, hence the delay in the processing of this recovery.

Finally, we have two Reed Warblers of interest. A French-ringed bird trapped at Rostherne Mere in August 1998 had first been caught in Finistère the previous year. Also, a Woolston bird, first ringed in July last year, was recaptured on its way south in the Algarve, southern Portugal one month to the day on 24th August.

Chris Benson, 39 Redesmere Park, Urmston, Manchester, M41 9ER

Sites to Watch

FRODSHAM MARSH UPDATE

The year's been doing quite nicely with about 145 species being recorded so far, about usual for the first six months. Earliest surprise was a dark juvenile Pomarine Skua which came in after high tide on the score on January 8th, the second year in a row for this species. A Common Crane in April, another second for the Marsh was missed by most of the regulars who were watching thousands of them in Israel. Not the same though for a local patcher, is it!?

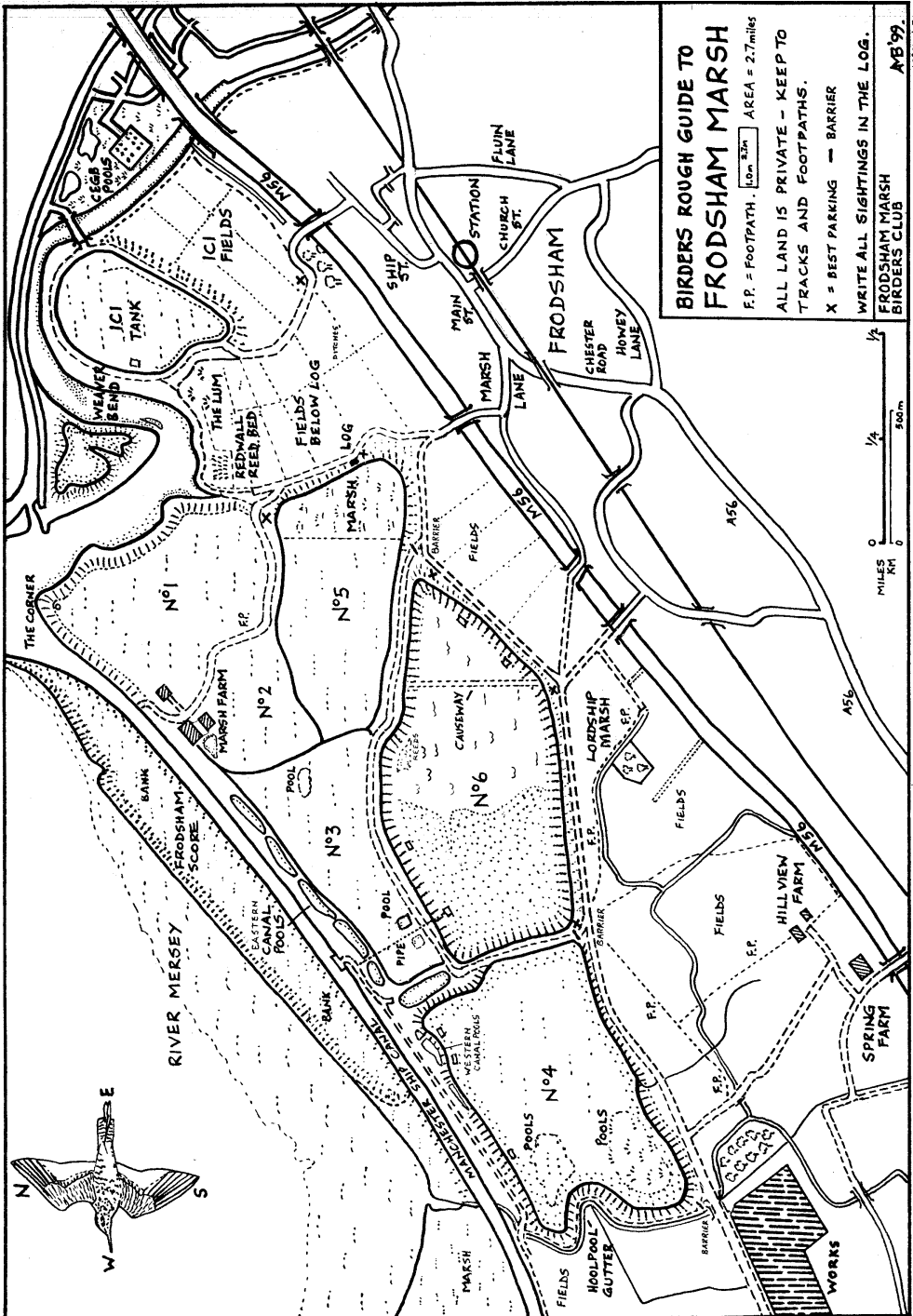
Spring migrants were on time with at least three Redstarts, but only one Lesser Whitethroat. House Martins didn't appear until late and even at the beginning of July only ones and twos were being recorded. In the last week of April, an Avocet and a Red-breasted Merganser were excellent finds although the mega appeared on April 30th in the form of a Green Woodpecker, only the third ever. It was found on No6 and disappeared after an hour or so on the south side of No5. Only four or five people saw it - a bad miss for those that arrived just too late....

A singing Garden Warbler on No5 on May 7th was the first twitchable one for three years and a Pectoral Sandpiper stayed for several days on the No5 flood from May 14th. This would surely be a brilliant site if properly managed. 14 Arctic Terns passed east up the Mersey also on May 7th. A Marsh Harrier, the sixth or seventh of the spring, took up residence, still being present in July. Breeding birds have included a pair of Blue-headed Wagtails, the Great Black-headed Gulls again on No6, with three young and the usual good numbers of Lapwings and Ringed Plovers on No4. At least two Redshank juveniles were on No5 in June, and there were two broods of Ruddy Ducks on the canal pools at the end of the month.

Perhaps the most controversial event has been the barriers erected by the Ship Canal Company at either end of the track around No6, the reason being the amount of fly-tipping that had to be cleared each month. It does now make it very difficult to cover the area without leaving your car out of sight, perhaps at the mercy of the vandals or worse. Do any members know of the legal situation with regard to this track? Was the road that went through No6 a public right of way for cars and if so, can the track be closed off? Presumably the Ship Canal Company have got it right..... let me know if you have any ideas. Don't let this put you off anyway, the Marsh has got a lot to offer even so and you do see a lot more walking about - honest! The map opposite includes some amendments to that featured in *Bird News* 41, plus the new location of the log.

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

Footnote: There are moves afoot to form a Frodsham Marsh Birders' Club - anybody interested?



**BIRDERS ROUGH GUIDE TO
FRODSHAM MARSH**

F.P. = FOOTPATH. 1.0m 32m AREA = 2.7miles

ALL LAND IS PRIVATE - KEEP TO
TRACKS AND FOOTPATHS.

X = BEST PARKING - BARRIER

WRITE ALL SIGHTINGS IN THE LOG.

FRODSHAM MARSH
BIRDERS CLUB

AB99

VERSION 3

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.

BARDSEY BIRD & FIELD OBSERVATORY

The bird observatory on Bardsey Island off the Lleyn Peninsula in North Wales is appealing for volunteers to help with its day-to-day running and census work. This is the only accredited bird observatory in Wales, on an island known for its Choughs, Manx Shearwater colony and enviable list of migrants and rarities, including Britain's fifth Common Yellowthroat. However, with increasing competition from foreign birding destinations, the observatory is suffering from a serious shortfall in its funding, much of which comes from visitors and volunteers. So, if you fancy giving up a week to spice up your birding by counting shearwaters or seals, helping with netting and ringing, or searching for migrants, please contact the observatory's Honorary Booking Secretary, Alicia Normand, for more information, a brochure and a booking form. Her address is 46 Maudlin Drive, Teignmouth, TQ14 8SB (tel: 01626 773908 or e-mail bob&lis@solfach.freeserve.co.uk).

BTO PEREGRINE APPEAL & 2001 PEREGRINE SURVEY

Did you know that, in 1991, there were estimated to be 1265 pairs of Peregrines in the UK – 20% of the European population? In 2001, the BTO's Scottish Office will be conducting a new survey of the UK's population of Peregrines, in conjunction with local raptor study groups and national organisations such as the RSPB and English Nature. Building upon the results of previous surveys in 1971, 1981 and 1991, this survey hopes to determine long-term national and regional trends. Having been promised a £32,000 grant by the Esmee Fairbairn Charitable Trust, the BTO is appealing for a further £32,000 in order to enable it to carry out the survey. If you wish to contribute, please contact the BTO Scottish Office at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh, EH7 5BT (tel: 0131 558 8009). Remember, if you are a taxpayer, your donation can now be made under Gift Aid, thus considerably increasing its value to the BTO.

THE NANTWICH NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY WEB SITE

The Nantwich Natural History Society has just launched a new web site. The Society, which was formed in 1979, exists to promote interest in all aspects of the local flora and fauna of the south Cheshire area centred mainly on Nantwich. The new web site gives full details of all the group's activities from indoor meetings and talks to field trips plus survey work, birdwatching hides, nest box schemes and the publication of various reports. It also includes contact details for the Society's committee members and the various people who collate bird, insect, mammal and flower records. Details are also available about how to attend meetings, and even how to join the Society. There are links to other sites of local interest too - like BirdLine North West and the Cheshire & Wirral Ornithological Society.

The site has been set up by the Society's Secretary, Mike Holmes, who got the idea whilst working in Australia. Says Mike, "I searched the Internet to try to find a good site dealing with the wildlife around Melbourne where I was working. I found one, and got in touch by e-mail with Tania Ireton who had set up the site. She was very helpful, and I ended up being taken birdwatching by some very friendly and helpful Australian birdwatchers. It was great to learn from their vast local knowledge of the birds and habitats. So I thought why not set up a similar site here; you never know who around the world might want to get in touch with us and learn more about the wildlife of our area. Now they can do just that. In fact, some members of our Society are interested in running exchange visits with other groups".

Aimed at giving its own members and the increasing number of 'web-wise' wildlife watchers a focal point for local information, the site is sure to be a hit. The address of the site is www.crewe25.freeserve.co.uk and further information is available from:

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

Don't forget to check out the CAWOS web site at www.cawos.org. Ed.

Ruddy Duck Control Programme

Due to the number of letters I have received on this highly controversial subject, we have included them together in this single section. I must again reiterate that the views expressed are not mine, nor those of the Society's Council. However, two of these letters have been written by Council members who express diametrically opposed points of view, thus demonstrating how divisive this issue has become. With such strongly held feelings, the debate on this issue is sure to run and run. Ed.

DETR RUDDY DUCK MEETING

Wincham Hall - Thursday 4th May 7:00pm

Attending: CAWOS Derek Kelly, Tony Broome, Paul Brewster, Jeff Clarke; SECOS Colin Lythgoe, Brian Perkins; DETR John Clorley, Andrew Griffiths; WWT Dr. Baz Hughes; CSL Iain Henderson.



The purpose of the meeting was to provide the CAWOS membership with the most up to date information available within the public domain with regard to the Ruddy Duck control - trial programme - and its potential future outcomes. The representatives from CAWOS and SECOS represented a broad range of views from those who are implacably opposed to the cull to those who are adamantly in its favour. The rationale behind the current trial stems from the perceived threat from the Ruddy Duck to the continued existence in Europe of the White-headed Duck.

The first part of the meeting outlined the situation with regard to the current status of the White-headed Duck. Overall the population is still declining globally with marked falls in the Russian and Caspian populations. This primarily relates to habitat loss and degradation and hunting. In Spain the situation has brightened considerably. Big efforts to restore crucial habitats have reaped rich rewards with the population recovering from a low point of 22 individuals in 1977 to the latest figure of 2003 birds. The most serious threat to the Spanish population now appears to be hybridisation with invading Ruddy Ducks, most of which are attributed to the very large UK population. Fertile hybrids have been noted to at least the second generation.

Among the various facts which came to light was that current estimates put the UK Ruddy Duck population at 4000 birds, with increases running at an estimated 15% annually. As a figure in the region of 6000 birds was suggested as the cut-off point beyond which proposed levels of control would not succeed within reasonable budget, there may be some doubt that this figure will not be exceeded before the trial and its analysis is complete. There may also be some doubt over the existing figure of 4000 birds as the control team acknowledge that it was difficult to account for the discrepancy of 1209 breeding birds surveyed as opposed to a winter peak count figure of 3300 birds during earlier pre-trial studies. The 1996 Department of the Environment Feasibility Study on Control Measures states "...the total number of breeding sites may be as high as 750 rather than the 311 identified during the survey".

The purpose of the current trial is to establish the most effective and efficient method to bring about the eradication of the Ruddy Duck within the UK. Shooting with shotguns or silenced rifles, during the breeding season, already stands out as the most effective control method and it is predicted that if this method is employed the Ruddy Duck will reach 'quasi-extinction' in the UK within 3 - 10 years. (For the purposes of this study quasi-extinction means less than 50 remaining individuals).

Within Cheshire control trials have been in the east of the county and south of the M56 starting in 1999. All sites trialled to date have been south of the M56. To date within Cheshire 24 landowners have been approached with requests for access. Ten sites accepted, six refused and eight gave no decision. Future extensions of the trial locally will focus on sites in the west of the county and south of the M56, excluding the Wirral. On average throughout the UK 40 - 60% of owners approached give permission for access. One of the outcomes of the trial will be to assess whether it will be essential to impose compulsory access to enable eradication to succeed. Within Cheshire CSL operatives killed 53 birds in 1999. Up to the time of the meeting in 2000 a further 70 birds had been killed, mostly through rifle shot. £800,000 has been awarded to complete the trial. One year and eight months of the trial remain, though this may foreshorten if funding is insufficient.

If the result of the trial concluded that eradication is practicable then a European-wide eradication strategy will come into play. One of the biggest hurdles to date is that most countries are unwilling

to carry out costly control programmes without all the countries with Ruddy Duck populations carrying out simultaneous eradication programmes. Governmental inertia is one of the biggest threats to the success of any eradication programme. To date countries with control plans for the Ruddy Duck include France, Spain and Portugal. Countries likely to follow the UK, if a UK control plan is agreed, are Switzerland, Belgium and Holland.

Both CAWOS and SECOS representatives raised a number of concerns that the governmental representatives were keen to answer.

- Control measures take place throughout the year and the disturbance to other wildlife, particularly in the breeding season, was raised as a problem. The effect was described as minimal. On small sites, most of the non-target wildfowl species left but returned within a few hours to two or three days in winter and most remained on site in summer. Grebes did not leave. Shooting on larger sites provoked less disturbance and minimal evacuation. Nest searching and destruction caused more disturbance. CSL were careful to minimise the frequency and duration of visits to minimise disturbance.
- Where Schedule 1 species were concerned, i.e. Black-necked Grebes, detailed research and assessment would be carried out before any culling. It could be carried out in winter when the grebes are not around.
- Every effort was made to avoid involving members of the public by culling on private sites or before people were out and about. Should the situation arise, then CSL operatives would retire from the site. In urban settings, trapping and egg destruction methods would most likely be used instead of shooting.
- At Washington WWT, a trial had taken place which involved placing two pairs each of White-headed and Ruddy Ducks in pens to study the likely effect of interbreeding. The limitations of using such a small number of birds were realised and a further study using larger numbers was now under way. It would most likely take the rest of the trial period to produce results.
- The involvement of other EC countries was vital if the trial and future full eradication programme was to succeed. The UK Government may have to rethink funding the programme if it had to foot the entire bill. The trial would clarify this point.

Birdwatchers were also asked to send any sightings of Ruddy Ducks in any countries to the respective recording contacts. It was important to not pass them off as 'just escapes'.

Copies of a leaflet containing facts and background information are available from John Clorley, Bird Conservation Policy Advisor, European Wildlife Division, Room 902A, Dept. of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, Tollgate House, Houlton Street, Bristol, BS2 9DJ.

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE MEETING

Throughout the meeting was conducted in a frank and courteous manner. The CAWOS and SECOS representatives agreed that the DETR, WWT and CSL representatives had answered our questions, queries and concerns in an open and honest manner. They also took on board many of the comments that we placed before them. It is safe to say that none of the CAWOS or SECOS representatives substantially altered their own individual standpoints on this contentious issue.

At this stage, with one year and eight months of the trial remaining, CAWOS, as a body, is unable to take any active lobbying position. No matter what the outcome of the trial CAWOS reserves the right not to take a public stance on the eradication programme. The reason for this stance is that the membership is already deeply divided on the issue and appears likely to remain so. If CAWOS Council take a view one way or the other it is likely to be highly damaging to the Society. CAWOS Council will of course keep the membership fully informed about any future developments. It will therefore be left to the consciences of the individual members to take up their own positions on the validity of the 'Eradication Programme', should one be initiated. No doubt the CAWOS Council will be criticised in some quarters for taking this stance. To put things in context, WWT has not yet committed itself to supporting the cull and will not make a final decision until the trial is complete.

Final thanks must go to Derek Kelly of CAWOS for his determination and effort in bringing this meeting to the table. Thanks also to all the representatives from the DETR, WWT and CSL for giving their valuable time to the membership of CAWOS and SECOS. Finally thanks go to the various representatives of CAWOS and SECOS who gave up their individual time to put forward their views and to listen to the information presented by the DETR in a civilised and professional manner.

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

RUDDY DUCK CULL

I am writing in response to Simon Edwards's Editorial in *Bird News* 46. In the first place, I agree wholeheartedly with his own personal view: I too remain unconvinced that a cull of Ruddy Ducks in the UK will have any direct effect on the problem of the decline of the White-headed Duck.

I find his initial scenario only too likely, and personally if I happened to be at a mere or lake and came across 'officials' with air rifles aiming at Ruddy Ducks, I would do all that I could to scare the birds off. I have written to the RSPB expressing the hope that they are equally against the proposed cull. However, to my disappointment, I received a long diatribe of which the bottom line was that they supported it. Incidentally, they either could not or would not tell me how the cull was going to be done: Simon's mention of air rifles is the first I have known as to the likely method to be used. I have also written to the Cheshire Wildlife Trust and they have said that they are against it.

I can understand the concern about the White-headed Duck, and the argument has been used that Ruddy Ducks were introduced to the UK and are not a native species. So what? There are species throughout the world that have been introduced into various countries and they are not persecuted (perhaps Common Pheasants in the UK are an exception!). I look forward in due course to reading the outcome of the meeting between CAWOS and the DETR. Long live the Ruddy Duck!

John Hillmer, 31 Priory Road, Wilmslow, SK9 5PR

Thanks for your letter, John, though it should be noted that I have since discovered that 'proper' rifles and not air rifles are being used in the cull. Whilst not advising taking direct action against the cull, it should be noted that the marksmen contracted by the DETR have instructions to cease shooting upon objection by members of the public. Also, you are to some extent right when you say that other introduced species around the world are not persecuted. However, I would argue that in many cases they should be, e.g. rats introduced to seabird islands. This is the problem with debates concerning conservation: it is all too easy, but often inaccurate, to present black and white arguments - each case must be considered upon its own merits. Ed.

IS IT TOO LATE TO SAVE THE RUDDY DUCK?

This is a frankly partisan article, a sort of party political broadcast on behalf of the Ruddy Duck, following the Editorial and note from Tony Usher in *Bird News* 46. I attended the meeting on 4th May with the DETR to which the Editorial referred, and write in the light of what I heard there. However, I must make two things clear: one, I write as an individual and not as a member of Council, and, two, I am not writing an objective account of the meeting. Jeff Clarke has taken on that task, and will do it far better than I could.

I went into the meeting fairly well opposed to killing Ruddy Ducks and came away strongly opposed. It appeared to me that the scientific and conservation cases for the present programme were weaker than I had supposed - e.g. the limited knowledge of hybridisation and its impact and the fact that White-headed Duck numbers are increasing rapidly with habitat improvement - and the political case stronger - the UK Government is keen to demonstrate its support for Spanish efforts on habitat improvement by doing whatever it can. What struck me most, though, was how far decisions have been taken, with minimal public debate, by the DETR in response to the powerful White-headed Duck lobby.

Let us consider just what the situation is:

1. There is no point in discussing whether or not Ruddy Ducks should be killed, because the decision to exterminate them, if feasible, has already been taken at ministerial level, we were told on a number of occasions.
2. Therefore, meetings such as that on 4th May have nothing to do with debating the issue; they are to tell the public what has been decided, and why, and if possible to get its support (though that isn't really important as the DETR can go ahead without it).
3. The current programme of shooting (in three areas, one of which includes most of Cheshire) is a three-year trial to see if extermination is feasible. If it is, then all 'ruddies' in all parts of the country will be killed. If extermination proves to be impossible or, as is more likely, unacceptably expensive, the UK Government can hold its hands up to Spain and say "We tried, but....".
4. The locations of actual shooting sites will be kept secret; "landowner confidentiality" being given as the reason; secrecy and/or fear of protest may underlie this. In another field, I know that "commercial confidentiality" is often invoked by public bodies to prevent the public examining contracts for public services.

5. During the trial period, the marksmen have no right of access to land, but must negotiate it with the landowners. If, at the end of the trial, the DETR decides to go ahead with extermination, it may take action to compel access if necessary.
6. The shooting programme will be evaluated to see if extermination is feasible; this evaluation will be undertaken by those who are already convinced that extermination is desirable and who have initiated it, authorised it and carried it out. This hardly gives confidence in an objective assessment.

Is it too late to save the Ruddy Duck? Probably, but there are glimmers of hope. Just possibly, if enough people kicked up a stink, politicians might back down on their decision. (Contrary to the Editor's view in the April issue, that it is "a public relations disaster for all concerned", I see the business as having been brilliantly handled by the White-headed Duck lobby: they have secured ministerial agreement to a potentially controversial programme without any real controversy.) Frankly, though, this seems like a long shot.

The only real hope is that the three-year trial fails, and that the Government concludes that extermination is either impossible or unacceptably expensive. (The DETR would regard something just short of total extermination as acceptable; the WWT representative at the meeting felt that this would not be enough.) There appear to be three major barriers to its success:

1. Finding the birds - they can be elusive, and during the breeding season at least are established on some small and obscure waters.
2. Gaining access to these waters - this has been refused in many cases, though not necessarily because the landowners want to protect Ruddy Ducks, but for a number of other reasons such as the need to negotiate with several different interests.
3. Hitting the birds - probably the least important factor as a rifle at close range has been proven to be very effective.

The shooting programme may fail anyway. However, I think that there are some steps which those of us who oppose it can take to increase the difficulties, and therefore the chance of its failure:

1. Tell nobody (and I mean NOBODY) where you find Ruddy Ducks; many within birding favour extermination and, to adapt a phrase from the war, careless talk costs Ruddy Ducks' lives. Above all, do not submit records, as county records are an acknowledged and invaluable source of information for the marksmen.
2. If you have any influence with landowners, or those controlling access to waters, try to persuade them to withhold permission. Explain that the case against the Ruddy Duck is weak, and that, if the White-headed Duck lobby has its way, compulsion is probable; that may get their backs up and encourage resistance to the DETR.
3. Try to build up public awareness of what is happening and the weakness of the case for extermination. Incidentally, never use the word "cull", which means reducing a population to control it; speak of extermination, which is the purpose of the killing. It is always difficult for unorganised individuals to compete with a powerful, well-organised and well-funded lobby - but then, Ken Livingstone beat a party organisation even more powerful than the White-headed Duck lobby!

I've ended, as I began, on a political note because I now see this as having more to do with politics between the UK and Spain and a sort of ecological political correctness and its relationship with the public than with conservation.

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

RUDDY DUCKS AND CHESHIRE

Never, it seems, has there been such a controversial and emotive debate surrounding a single issue like the Ruddy Duck issue. It has divided birders countrywide and has even split CAWOS Council. My own personal opinion and I must stress 'personal', is that there is no issue to discuss. The very existence of a bird species is at stake through no fault of its own. Human beings created the problem, human beings must now be responsible enough to solve the problem in as humanely a way as they can. Ruddy Duck as an alien in Europe must be eradicated.

Before you send a deluge of letters asking for my resignation as County Recorder, let me expand on the above paragraph. It is an opinion that has been formed after a lot of thought and after years of watching species vanish on a global basis over the last thirty years.

The victim in all this is the White-headed Duck, *Oxyura leucocephala*, the only representative of the genus in Europe and Asia. It has declined over the last century from a total population of around 100,000 birds to somewhere in the region of 10,000 – 15,000. There are only about 1500 birds left in western Europe, all of them in Spain. It is a population that has grown from only 22 individuals in 1977 thanks to the brilliant efforts of Spanish conservationists.

Their hard work saved this western population from extinction. Remember, this is still a very small number that could decline again. You can see a single flock of Lapwings on Frodsham Marsh totalling four times that number, practically in one scope's width. Also, 1500 ducks would fit onto Poynton Pool, a very small area of water in east Cheshire. It is a tiny population.

DNA analysis shows that White-headed Ducks and Ruddy Ducks are separate species that have been geographically isolated for 2-5 million years. According to precedents that exist elsewhere, interbreeding and hybridisation with Ruddy Ducks, *Oxyura jamaicensis*, will cause the extinction of the White-headed Duck in the future.

Concerns of the Spanish over the sub-specific identity of Asian White-headed Ducks have led to a reluctance to increase their population with birds from elsewhere, risking a degeneration of the gene pool. In any case, the Turkish population itself is under serious threat from hunting, land usage and habitat destruction. Numbers there may have fallen from 11,000 birds to only 3000. The east Asian population in Pakistan has also crashed from somewhere in the region of 1000 birds to less than 50. In all other areas, numbers are decreasing.

White-headed Ducks are in dire straits and need urgent protection. There is no room for inaction, for underfunding, for hesitation or for do-gooders. Time is not on their side.

Ruddy Ducks on the other hand are on the increase with over half a million birds in North America. It is not under threat. Ruddy Ducks are aggressive and produce fertile hybrid young when paired with White-headed. They were introduced into Britain in the 1940s and now total upwards of 4000 birds, a figure which is increasing each year. Birds have been recorded in most European countries and as far as Israel in the Middle East. Clearly, it is not only the western population that is at risk. Breeding has been reported in at least six of the European countries and wintering populations continue to build. All are attributable to British birds in origin.

Spain, Portugal, Morocco and France all have eradication programmes. Other European countries are waiting for Britain to take the lead before they too act. It is not the whim of various individuals that a cull is carried out, but is required under EC legislation. These include the EC Birds Directive, the EC Habitats Directive, the Bern and Bonn Conventions, and the Convention on Biological Diversity. The latter is perhaps the most forceful in its recommendation that "*each Contracting Party shall, as far as possible and appropriate, prevent the introduction of, control or eradicate those alien species which threaten ecosystems, habitats or species.*"

So far, in Britain, Sika Deer threaten Reds, Turkish and North American Signal Crayfish threaten Atlantic Stream Crayfish and domestic cats threaten Scottish Wildcats. Another alien, the New Zealand flatworm, poses a severe threat to our own earthworms on which it feeds. Earthworms play an important role in the food web and without them, many native birds and mammals could be in real difficulties. It could even be the end for some species.

Would anybody object if the Government announced a major cull of New Zealand flatworms? Or what about the rhododendron eradication programme, or any of the many other programmes that are being carried out. Yes, there is already a huge amount of money spent on alien eradication. It's just that they are not high profile like Ruddy Ducks and not as endearing. Nobody gives a damn what happens to New Zealand flatworms, including the objectors amongst you that are reading this. Coypus have already been successfully eradicated from Britain. *Did you object – no you didn't!*

I also don't hear too much in the way of criticism from conservationists when there is a call for Magpies to be shot for decimating songbird populations – and Magpies aren't aliens. They're 'only' crows and the songbird nestlings are in your own backyard. What is it with White-headed Ducks? Is it that they're in another country and somebody else's problem? *Out of sight and out of mind, eh? You can't be a selective conservationist. You either are one or you're not.*

I therefore charge you with hypocrisy and say that you haven't got a moral leg to stand on. None of your excuses about disturbance to habitat and other wildlife is valid. There isn't a Cheshire water besides Rostherne Mere, that isn't badly disturbed throughout the year by anti-wildlife activities. I don't just mean the obvious either, the various watersports etc. I've yet to hear a public

word against fishermen who cause more disturbance in various guises than any other country activity I know. My old favourite I know, but nobody has to date shown me that I'm wrong on this issue. By comparison, the disturbance caused by the eradication programme would be relatively minor.

Whether you like it or not, whether you think that it's proved beyond doubt or not, Ruddy Ducks pose a very serious threat to an endangered European species of bird, the White-headed Duck. Birds don't belong to only one country. The RSPB spends a lot of money in various African countries educating populations of humans so that OUR breeding species make it back to us each summer. Would you accept the extinction of the Sandwich Tern in Britain? Of course you wouldn't - unless you didn't care.

We have a responsibility and moral obligation to save the White-headed Duck, by any means at our disposal. If this means short-term minor disturbance at some sites, then the end justifies the means. I would hang up my binoculars in shame and quit birding if any moves failed to save a species because I objected to them. Human beings cause most of the problems in the natural world and it's up to them to solve them.

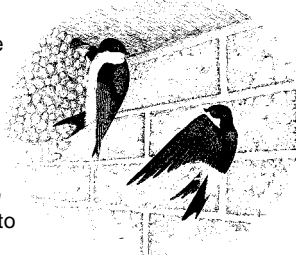
Come on all you pseudo-conservationists, get a grip! Ruddy Ducks are a menace.....

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

Species Spotlight

HOUSE MARTINS

Sitting here on one of those rare hot June evenings after a day where temperatures in Cheshire topped 30°C, I sip a cold Bud and gaze into a clear blue sky. Yesterday an Oystercatcher flew over, high to the west, piping noisily. Tonight, only the House Martins glide about, occasionally jinking upwards to seize a prey item from below, before gliding off out of sight. I only recently discovered the fact that they do catch prey from below as I delved into *Birds of the Western Palearctic* in a bid to learn more about the two pairs that returned to my house this spring.



The first pair arrived on April 27th and immediately began to ready the natural nest built there years ago. The second pair appeared on May 15th and moved into one of the two artificial nests. The third nest, also artificial, was to remain empty. I tried in vain to understand their antics last year, when each pair had at least two broods, possibly three. Some evenings, as many as a dozen birds would roost in the nests and later on in the summer there would be none about in the day, but a whole batch would suddenly dive under the eaves just before dark. What was happening?

House Martins winter in Africa, in the area of the Afrotropics including the humid zone north of the equator. Sightings are however relatively few in relation to the huge numbers that must be present and it's thought that they live a highly aerial lifestyle similar to Swifts, remaining at high altitude to forage and even sleep on the wing. In areas where the commonest hirundines are the low-flying Swallows, periods of bad weather often kill hundreds of birds. Amazingly, there are more House Martins found than Swallows, indicating that the above is true - the martins are indeed present but remain out of sight, very high up. After a long journey northward, our birds arrive back in the second half of April, into May. They've probably come from West Africa as there's some evidence that a longitudinal split of wintering birds occurs, with a Kenyan-ringed bird being found in the Caucasus, part of the former Soviet Republic, on the eastern edge of Europe.

Some pairing occurs on migration, especially amongst older birds and they arrive at the nest site already bonded, although further bonding carries on in the colony. Most colonies consist of five pairs or less and 500 pairs at a single colony is very exceptional. Colony sites do however vary in size from year to year. Both the male and female choose the nest, the male often making the first move but the female having the final say. (Sounds familiar!) The male can be very aggressive towards other birds in defence of the nest site in spring and the females join in as the season progresses. Disputes can take weeks to settle. Unpaired males often sit in partly built nests and defend them and birds engaged in aerial combat fall to the ground, only breaking off before they hit it.

Established breeders, particularly older males, show a marked year to year fidelity to a nest site, but the females are generally less faithful and change nest, colony or even village more frequently than they do. Even young males are more faithful to the nest site where they were hatched. Once paired House Martins usually roost together, unless one is excluded by a particularly aggressive partner. The same nest will be used for the second brood unless the first brood fails and then they may move on. 85% of young birds build new nests.

Faithfulness does vary from pair to pair and pair bonds are monogamous typically for a season but sometimes shorter! Of 152 marked pairs, only five pairs were controlled at the same colony the following year and all the birds had new partners. Birds even change their mates during the breeding season, usually after serious disturbance but sometimes between broods. Out of 32 pairs controlled during first and second broods, five changed their mates for the second brood. One male was even thought to have paired with his daughter for the second brood! Exceptionally, pair bonds are renewed in subsequent years, so not all are quite so incestuous!

Mating occurs either up to two hours after wake up, or about two hours before roosting and successful copulation is usually in the period three to ten days before laying and is last seen on the day that the second egg is laid. The female House Martin is unresponsive during nest choosing and bonding and then again after the eggs are laid. The average number of eggs laid is four, but up to nine can be laid. Older birds lay larger first clutches but 1st year birds lay larger second ones. Clutch size is smaller towards the end of the season.

Two broods are the norm, with three broods being very occasional, more often in the south of the area in Europe. Incubation lasts 14-16 days and the female does most of the brooding. Smaller broods (1-3 eggs) are brooded less, perhaps for 11 days, whilst larger broods are brooded for only five days or so. One thing I've noticed about my birds is that the young 'chirrup' constantly throughout the night. Even the next door neighbour has mentioned it, but *BWP* doesn't. Interesting!

The young poke their heads out of the nest from nine days onwards and the parents try to lure them out of it from between 19 and 24 days. On leaving the nest, the young often drop to the ground, being escorted back to the nest by the adults. One adult even dragged a young bird out of the nest by clinging to it, only separating before hitting the ground and flying around the young in circles as it gained height. Even the first brood helps to lure the second brood out of the nest. Real family stuff eh? Fledging takes about 27 days in Britain, but on average is between 22-32 days.

The period between laying the first and second clutches is about 56 days. Both sets of young receive food from the parents for a few days after leaving the nest and roost in the nest for up to 48 days after fledging. The adults often roost outside the nest unless the weather is particularly harsh, using the nest little or not at all after the young have fledged. One nest in Switzerland had 13 birds roosting in it in autumn, the two adults and 11 of their offspring. Fledged young also roost in neighbouring nests when their parents are feeding the second brood. Aerial roosting at night is probable but not proven. One incident tells of 200-250 birds dropping into their nests shortly after 04.45 hours from perhaps 1000 metres. Those that were intercepted trying to get into their nests were either males or young and all were freezing cold to the touch, indicating a night on the wing whilst the adult females were snug and warm in the nest.

In late summer, juveniles congregate in traditional areas travelling 5-6 km from the colony in groups of one or more broods. Birds engage in flying around and engage in comfort activities such as sunbathing and preening before dispersing. They form groups again in the evening before suddenly leaving to return to the nests for the night. Autumn migration begins with pre-migration flocks gathering in September and October, birds loafing in suitable areas. Before departure they engage in several mock climbs to great heights before returning to the same area. Eventually they do leave, climbing once more for a considerable height and flying off on a journey that will take them across Europe, the Mediterranean, the Sahara and eventually tropical Africa. With a relatively low mortality rate of 57%, the chances of your birds (at least the males!) returning are good. As a matter of interest, single-brooded females survive better than double-brooded ones and the oldest ringed bird recorded was 14.5 years old.

Not such simple birds after all are they? If you would like to read more, try wading through *BWP*, but I thought the above may explain some of the bizarre antics of such an endearing bird.

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

Footnote 1st July - The first birds that returned to the natural nest have fledged their brood. The second pair in the artificial nest has got full-grown young ready to fly. Maybe next year all three nests will be occupied.

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. Ed.

POND LIFE

Based on current life expectancy in the UK, I am approximately halfway through my allocation. I'm getting worried - how on earth am I going to fit it all in? So much to do and so little time. To make matters worse I am currently in a holding pattern. In other words the child-rearing years have me firmly in their thrall. What's more the final, and sometimes fatally terminal phase appears to be upon me. The 'ground force' phenomenon has struck. Valuable birding time is being eroded by an irrational urge to throw gravel on various areas of the Clarke estate. How can a man who has successfully avoided any serious form of gardening for over two years suddenly be struck down with this wretched affliction?

Unfortunately my wife called my bluff. Ever since we met she has been implacably opposed to having a pond in the garden as they can present a risk to children. So I cunningly promised to take an interest in the garden if Adele agreed to have a pond. Perfect get-out, so I thought. That way I could refuse to do any serious gardening other than throwing a derisory mower across it occasionally, thus maximising recreational time. So for two blissful years most of the gardening tools have been left to gather dust in the shed. Then, horror of horrors, Adele suddenly announces that now our daughter has developed the swimming capacity of a Bottlenose Dolphin I can have a pond, but only so long as I created something akin to Dungeness in the grounds. Pointing out that a dirty great big nuclear power station in the back garden might raise a planning objection from some of the neighbours sadly fell on deaf ears. Though I must say I was quite keen on the prospect of attracting Black Redstarts to nest in the back garden.

Like most men I'm cheaply bought with alluring promises, so the temptation of a wildlife pond in the back garden was just too much. So it is that the year 2000, a year in which I was going to make a big effort to see so many fantastic birds, has become the year of visiting garden centres. Things must be bad as our local nursery has even offered me a loyalty card. Adele, in a sneaky ploy to keep my nose on the grindstone, announced that she had entered our garden in Halton's Garden Competition, in the 'Garden under Development' section. The woman has no mercy.

So here I sit. May fizzed by like an Exocet with birding compressed to a couple of days at the start of the month to enable me to compete in the bird race (time off for good behaviour). June in contrast has been that traditional annual wet blanket with almost perpetually lowering leaden skies, at least on my days off that is. Anxious glances at the text messages on my mobile phone announced a plethora of scarce and rare migrants just outside striking range. Cheshire appears only to have a single male Blue-headed Wagtail on the No4 tank at Frodsham and I still haven't seen that. Though working at Thurstaston on the Wirral has its compensations, as it is well known for turning up good birds. This year proved no exception with a Woodchat Shrike appearing, for one day just 500 yards from my office, on my day off!

I shouldn't complain of course; after all, the garden looks splendid. Only one major item now needs to be put in place - 'the pond'. Having spent 50 squillion pounds on the initial phase of Mrs 'Capability' Clarke's master plan the bank balance was looking redder than the feathers on a Hobby's bottom. If I was going to achieve my lifetime's ambition, of managing one of the world's great wetlands, I'd have to do some pretty nifty financial footwork. Sadly my appeals to the 'fascist capitalist oligarchy', otherwise known as 'the bank', that my 750 litre spit of water was of international importance and the final cog in Cheshire's Biodiversity Action Plan for the Great-crested Newt, fell on deaf ears.

Apparently they were using their money that week to make Gurney's Pitta extinct. They muttered something about having to provide urgently needed funds to some multinational corporation that felt unable to liquidate its own vast resources, as the Chief Executive's daughter needed some extra pocket money during her final term at finishing school in Switzerland. Sadly the 'Nazi Gold' she had stored in her locker was a tad politically sensitive to use just now and it was after all a Wednesday. Furthermore the multinational demanded the funds as part of its globalisation strategy

which required payment to corrupt governments in South-East Asia. They would in turn give some peasants 15 Baht each to burn down vast swathes of the continent's hardwood tropical forests. Whereupon the said peasants would attempt to eke out a living on the impoverished soils. Then when they were close to starvation the middlemen (normally the very same government officials) would buy their land off them with a chicken and two tickets to the latest Disney movie. The man from Del Monte then brokers a contract with the middlemen to take all the pineapple and coconut juice they can produce on their newly acquired plantations. Meanwhile the multinational calls in its favour from the plantation owners (aka the government officials), who allow them to use their plantation roads to get the men and machinery in so they can continue illegally logging what remains of the pristine tropical forest. I left the bank comforted by the thought that at least in this new millennium they were taking ethical investment seriously.

Still, here I sit, lovely garden, no pond, birding down to a bare minimum and now it looks like my ambition of seeing Gurney's Pitta is literally going up in smoke. Next week I thought I'd visit the bank and ask them to lend me some money, so I could catch up with what remains of Asia's rhino and tiger populations. No doubt they'll tell me that because China's economy is now booming they're about to invest in its pharmaceutical industry, so I might as well not bother. So it looks like the pond's going to have to wait a little longer. Never mind, at least a chap's still got Charlie Dimmock's bosom to look forward to on a weekly basis.

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

QUAKETAIL

They hurry by - Lowry-people, eyes downcast, unseeing. Collar upturned against the cold, I am jostled and shoved, elbowed and elbowing, thrusting along with the crowd, making for the underground, bus stop, rail terminus. It is dusk. The struggle to leave the city is on. This is rush hour.

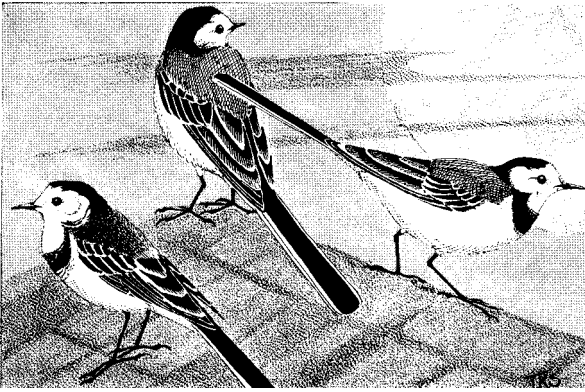
"Chis-ick". The call of a wagtail high above halts my step. I look up. Storeyed buildings tower over me. In the darkening patch of sky between them I glimpse the bounding flight of a Pied Wagtail. It disappears beyond an overhanging cornice. "Chis-ick". Another swings overhead. My heart changes mood; I am with them, and of them. For they are flying into their city roost, to spend the cold of night in company, and I have been with them there, and shared their warmth.

The city is Liverpool. These wagtails, however, are not Merseysiders. Have they summered in north-eastern Britain? Are they come, perhaps, from upland Wales, from the Pennine dales? Winter's threat now brings them together to milder lowlands, a coast warmed by the Gulf Stream, to Lancashire and Cheshire. At day's end, they cross the Mersey to enter the city which we, commuters of another kind, are labouring to leave.

I know just where they are heading. They spend the night amid office blocks, roosting, not in twos and threes, as they fly over now, but in hundreds: eight hundred together, this chill November night. They will sleep, as wagtails have for nineteen years past, in one of Liverpool's most prestigious landmarks, India Buildings. No ordinary building, this! Impressive in mass and line, no expense spared in realising the architect's vision. Portland stone, laid with care on its natural quarry bed; Ruabon brick of burnt clay faced with silver sand; for the interior, marble quarried in Italy. It could be said that its architectural qualities make India Buildings favoured of the wagtails, for it encloses two courtyards, the architect's answer to the problem of bringing daylight to inside rooms. Eight storeys soar over and around each light-well, window upon window contemplating mirror-images of itself.

Here, in the light-court, warmth emanates from the building; there is shelter from the wind, whatever its direction, and safety from predators. The walls of the court plunge steep and enclosed, where falcon or hawk fear to stoop. And it is here, from a deserted and darkened office six floors up, that I have overlooked the court, privileged to share a roost with wagtails. Dapper birds, sleek and slim in contrasting livery: the sobriety of black crown and bib edging white forehead and face is belied by the pert expression of the dark eye. The long tail is in incessant motion, bobbing gently when the bird trots over the pantiled roof, or trimming and balancing its flight across the court. What surprise it holds, the tail, when suddenly flared as the bird changes direction, or brakes from fast flight. Then is the border-flash of white outer feathers unleashed from the encasing black. This flirt of white serves, too, as a signal. Should a companion at the roost approach too closely, the blazed tail indicates in stark black and white that a small territory is held here, and that its owner brooks no disturbance.

For every individual has his personal space. There is no huddle together in the roost. Each requires a turning distance, a tail length each way. Come nightfall, the light-court will be parcelled



out in regularly-spaced mini-territories. Some niches are hotly contested. The roost fills, therefore, with fratching and disorder, but yet in regular sequence each evening. It is the fifth-floor windows, uniquely arched, which afford prime sites. First-comers take position topmost of an arch, others alight to cling to the curve below, one on each side, then two, finally five to a side, symmetrically and regularly spaced, all facing inward to the window, all head to tail, all the required distance apart. They are as sculpted finials to a springing gothic arch, or Grinling

Gibbons's carvings decorating a vault. With the arches filled, window ledges come under contention. First the two corners are taken, a third bird alights centre-ledge, space is made for another and yet another. Finally that limit of individual distance is reached. Roost holders become capricious and crotchety. No further intrusion is allowed. Another window ledge is 'full'.

Dusk sets in, numbers rise, five hundred are here, seven hundred, eight hundred. All is confusion, early sleepers reawaken. It is bustle and twitter, comradeship and possessive bitterness. Gradually the birds take sites on lower floors, fighting further and further into the light-court, until, as very darkness falls even the glass roof which spans the ground floor will be dotted with wagtails - dotted in that remarkable pattern which gives each its privacy and turning space. And then there will be peace.

It is spectacle on a grand scale, but yet with the detail and delicacy of a Pre-Raphaelite pen-and-ink drawing. All is in black and white, the black plumage of the birds inked over the white reflective surface on the bricks of the light-court, white feathering etched against the dark of night. The wagtails sleep. Each individual bill thrust deep into the mantle, quietly breathes air warmed by its feathers. I too breathe quietly, seeing the rise and fall of the breast of each bird on my window ledge I am but inches away. An eye opens. All is well. The bill plunges deeper into the plumage. There is a sigh.

"Chis-ick" jolts me to the present. Another group of five birds swings overhead, flight-line India Buildings. And the jostle and throng of human bodies carries me along once more. The birds seek the city. The commuters seek to leave "Chis-ick". My heart leaps acknowledgement: suddenly I have my own space. But faces set, hands thrust deep in pockets, shoulders hunched against the cold, they hurry, bumping by - the people, eyes downcast, unseeing.

Thelma K Sykes - Blue Neb Studios

WOOLSTON ON THE TELLY AND THE RADIO!

During the second week of May 2000, a team from the BBC Natural History Unit in Bristol visited a number of sites in the Mersey valley to film a new series of *Bill Oddie Goes Wild*. The overall theme of the programmes is wildlife in urban areas, and among the sites visited were the reserves at Seaforth, Fiddler's Ferry, Woolston Eyes and Rixton Claypits. The feedback from the film-makers was one of surprise at the richness of the wildlife that they found. When the series is transmitted on BBC2 later this year a much wider audience will be able to appreciate how good many of the sites in north Cheshire, Wirral and Merseyside are. I don't know what was filmed at the other sites, but I do know that some excellent footage was obtained of Woolston's Black-necked Grebes.

On 13th May a separate programme was recorded at Woolston for Radio 4's *Living World*, which was transmitted on 11th June. It went out at the ridiculously early hour of 6:35am, so it is hard to know how many people (apart from Derek Kelly!) actually heard it. Both the producer and the presenter, Lionel Kellaway, were impressed with Woolston, and I understand that the BBC received some positive comments from listeners. The hour or so recording which was made was edited down to less than half an hour, but I believe it conveys quite well the essence of Woolston.

Overall, this was some excellent publicity for our area and its wildlife.

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

EXCERPTS FROM CAWOS WEB SITE FORUM CHIFFCHAFF SONG

A few months ago I heard an odd Chiffchaff song in the Marbury Country Park area of Cheshire. My attention was drawn by an unusual warbled 'zinc, zinc' type song; I was initially reminded of the intonation of Iberian Chiffchaff but the semblance was only basic. I located the bird, which appeared to be just an ordinary Chiffchaff; if anything it was perhaps colder in tone and with a more distinct eye stripe (although this description leans ever so slightly to *tristis* (Siberian) Chiffchaff I'm sure it wasn't). I watched it for a while as it continued with this bizarre song and then out of the blue it completed an almost perfect Willow Warbler song impression. I have heard Chiffchaff take a stab at this before but never anything so complete or perfect! After that it continued with the odd 'zincing' type song, occasionally interspersed with brief garbled Willow Warbler sections and towards the end an increasing number of normal 'chiff chaffs'.

I do not doubt that this was just your 'bog standard' Chiffchaff. The completion of a mimicked Willow Warbler song phrase leads me to the assumption that the bird was repeating song that it has heard during its recent migration and perhaps the odd 'zincing' was its attempt at Iberian Chiffchaff?

Whilst watching it I was recording using a hand-held Sanyo that I have never had cause to use before. I was quite smug with the fact that I had it with me until I noticed that the battery was dead. I then tried to ring my home number on my mobile in the vain hope that my answerphone would pick up the song but the bloody mobile battery had gone as well. Luckily my car started!

Dave Walters

BAR-HEADED GEESE

Birdnet reported four Bar-headed Geese on Fair Isle this afternoon (12th May). On Tuesday 9th May four Bar-heads were on Budworth Mere in Cheshire. Over the past 20 years around seven of these escapes have been recorded in this area, all singles. Throughout the north-west this is still an unusual escape with normally only singles or rarely pairs reported and absolutely no hint of any expanding feral population as may be the case in other parts of the country. Therefore the Budworth record was noteworthy and one might assume that the whereabouts of these birds may have been reported if they were still in the region. What is the likelihood of these groups being the same?

Dave Walters

Interestingly, the last time we were at Frodsham there were two Bar-headed Geese on No5 tank, acting as though they were a pair. Also whilst there, we were assured that earlier there had been two pairs present. More evidence for these being the Scottish birds??

Paul Brewster

DAVID QUINN - WILDLIFE ARTIST

I read with interest the profile on Dave in *Bird News* 46. It brought back memories of a holiday in Spain in 1996. We spent a couple of weeks in the Spanish Pyrenees, together with Geoff and Heather Lightfoot. It was quite a relaxed type of break looking at butterflies as well as birds. We stayed in a ski village on the French border, Candanchu, which was deserted for the summer and so we had the place to ourselves. Red-backed Shrikes, Rock Sparrows and Black Redstarts all nested outside the hotel and climbs higher up gave good views of Citril Finches and Lammergeiers. The photo of Dave used in the 'Personality Profile' was actually taken in that area just before the mist closed in.

We had a lot of rain, it being the wettest spring for years and just prior to the mud slide that year in an adjacent valley that killed locals and tourists alike. We were sitting in the hotel bedrooms for two days watching the rain come down like stair rods. We even had a blizzard one day! Dave sketched some of the time away while the rest of us turned to drink. On the third day we decided to go further down the valley and brave the deluge. Imagine our surprise when only a couple of miles down the road the rain stopped, the cloud vanished a little bit further on still and after ten miles or so we were in brilliant sunshine and it was hot enough to crack the flags! We'd been sitting in the hotel for nothing....

We did however, find a staked-out Wallcreeper's nest in the Hecho Valley and had superb views as it came in with food. Dave later painted a Wallcreeper and used photos of the actual rock face for the background. The actual Wallcreeper didn't do the painting justice!

Pete's comments about Dave's skill with the paintbrush are wholly justified and on the odd time I've visited him in Moulton, he's made painting birds look so easy. Mine never seem to have that certain look of life about them. He notices detail where we mere mortals see only feathers and it's reflected in the way that he paints immature gulls, a difficult group at the best of times.

Dave also has a really good sense of humour and luckily for him, one that is similar to my own. He showed me some plates from his warbler book one day and in amongst them was one that was unfinished. I remarked on how good it was but was told it was a reject, to be condemned to the waste bin. After a few more moments of me looking at it, he commented with a smile, "You never know, if you keep practising, you could reach that standard one day!" My mock outrage turned to a smile..... I knew he was right.

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

A variety of Dave Quinn's work will be on show in the Art Marquee at this year's British Birdwatching Fair at Rutland Water, 18-21 August, including illustrations, field guide plates, sketches and watercolours. Ed.

SBI RECORDING

At the Recording Forum organised by CAWOS on 22nd June, the importance of biological recording was emphasised by both Colin Wells (RSPB) and Steve McWilliam (Lancashire & Cheshire Entomological Society). The SBI (Sites of Biological Importance) Register is just one form of recording, but, as well as a record of sites of value in Cheshire, it is important for planning purposes, particularly with regard to the protection of special sites. The Register was originally largely based on botanical recording, but it is obvious that this only represents a part of any site's biological interest. For some years, members of local ornithology groups have been recording birds on the basis of SBI sites, and these data have been added to the records held at Grebe House. Where possible we also collect records of other taxa, e.g. mammals, insects, etc., in order to make our records as complete as possible. I would just like to say thank you to all the bird recorders who have been providing this information, and to let you know how important it is and how much the Cheshire Wildlife Trust values your input. I look forward to a continuing association with all of you.

Margaret Curtis, SBI Coordinator, CWT, Grebe House, Reaseheath, Nantwich, CW5 6DG

WHAT'S IN A 'BIRD-DAY'?

This is definitely one for the armchair birders, as opposed to the field men. My Oxfam diary for 1999 included three entries that intrigued me. Did you know that 14th April was Cuckoo Day, 15th April was Swallow Day and 14th May was Mallard Day? The first two I could just about see fitting in with some past tradition of the arrival of common migrants, but Mallard? I mean, they're not even in season. A different and more business-like diary for this year doesn't include anything so entertaining. Nor, so far as I could see, was there a Leach's Storm-petrel Day tucked away in October. Can anyone explain?

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

Did the diary state where these days were commemorated? After all, Mallards are summer visitors to most of North America as well as eastern Europe and Asia. Perhaps the Chinese celebrate the first returning Mallard with some sort of festival, no doubt involving pancakes and hoisin sauce! Or perhaps 14th May is an important 'anas-versary'! Ed.

BIRD SONG

Would anyone like to comment on two observations of mine which may be glaringly obvious - or have I discovered a hidden ornithological fact - very unlikely? On holiday recently in Central Europe (Vienna, Prague and Budapest to be exact) I had little scope for birdwatching as we were staying in large cities but I did notice that the local Blackbirds and Chaffinches, when singing, seemed to have a slightly different song from those at home. Has anyone else noticed this? Again, when out walking in this country in spring, when the weather is in one of its colder spells, I notice that whereas the resident birds carry on singing the summer migrants fall quiet and are much less easy to detect. This seems fairly logical but is it an established fact?

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

MOBBERLEY'S HOUR OF FAME

Our visitor stayed with us until Thursday (6th April) - a beautiful spring morning with cloudless skies and little wind, ideal conditions for migration which the Common Crane appears to have taken full advantage of to continue on its journey to the north. With it have gone the 'pager people' on their own journeys zig-zagging in a loose flock across the north-west of England and beyond, in search of the next tick in a seemingly vain attempt to satisfy that insatiable primeval urge so peculiar to some birders. Mobberley enjoyed its 15 minutes of fame and the bird was the main topic of conversation amongst many villagers; not since the Luftwaffe dropped three bombs on Ted Leech's potato fields in 1943 had there been such excitement!

Tony Usher, Knutsford Ornithological Society Web Site, www.10x50.com

Society Spotlight

If you would like to see your group or society under the spotlight, send in all relevant information, including how you started, specific aims and any other interesting snippets! Ed.

BROXTON BARN OWL GROUP

The CAWOS *Breeding Bird Atlas for Cheshire & Wirral*, published in 1991, gives a depressing picture of the status of the Barn Owl in Cheshire between 1978 and 1984. Statements such as “of 102 south-west Cheshire farms visited in 1967, only two held breeding Barn Owls”, “19 which had held birds at some time during the previous five years were deserted” and “the seven years of field work for this survey furnished a cumulative total of only 18 tetrads with confirmed breeding” indicate the plight of the species within the county. Statements of this nature, together with the fact that the final estimate was that the area monitored by CAWOS held a maximum of four pairs and there was some doubt as to whether birds still bred on a regular basis in the county, all make depressing reading. It was against this background that the Broxton Barn Owl Group was established in 1995 in an attempt to pursue in west Cheshire a positive and active approach to monitoring Barn Owl population trends and to carry out conservation work.



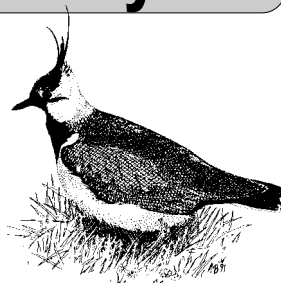
We have been monitoring the Barn Owl population of west Cheshire over the last five years and have established a conservation programme in areas of both feeding and breeding habitat. Local RSPB and Hawk & Owl Trust members work actively within the Group. A network of people who report sightings has been established throughout the villages of the district, and the numbers of Barn Owls that are reported to us on a regular basis is surprising. The Group is slowly achieving success in the establishment of a comprehensive database for west Cheshire. Nesting boxes (of a type approved by the BTO and the Hawk & Owl Trust) have been positioned along the valley of the River Gowy in trees and on poles and linking potential breeding sites with feeding habitat. In other areas of suitable feeding habitat, where nest sites are lacking but where Barn Owl sightings are frequently reported, further nest boxes have also been erected. In time these acceptable habitats will be linked into other stream and river networks in order to provide a continuous sustainable corridor, an essential feature for the dispersal of the young Barn Owl population throughout the county.

The last two years have indicated success in the methodology adopted, with confirmed breeding in several boxes and early reports from this year are confirming that new boxes are being taken up and the population, although still small compared with pre-war studies, is beginning to be more dispersed.

George Bramhall, Sandhollow Farm, Harthill Road, Burwardsley, Chester, CH3 9NU

The View from the Farmyard

The declining frequency of migrant arrivals in late springs can at times lead to a sense of anti-climax. Distant memories now, the rush of excitement given by the first Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff songs of the year, which were followed by a constant stream of warblers, hirundines, Wheatear and terns. But by the time the Swift and Spotted Flycatcher turn up the calls of the early arrivals have faded into the background clamour of spring song. They no longer catch the ear as they did in February and March, when our senses were tuned in waiting for the very first snippet of song to brighten the gloomy days before the equinox.



April 9th was one such nondescript spring day. My regular Sunday morning walk around the farm started with an air of anticipation. I walked slowly, stopping at intervals to scan bushes and sky for new arrivals. Each familiar stop brought forth nothing new; even earlier arrivals were muted and elusive. As my route reached its farthest point from home my pace had already quickened and the pauses were shorter and less frequent. By the time I had reached Toft pool my thoughts had turned more to home and coffee and biscuits. Toft pool is one stretch of water but as it is crossed by a bridge, which divides it unequally in two, I tend to think of it as the small and large pools. The larger part is about five sixths of the total area, and on that day held only a couple of Canadas and half a dozen Mallard. My walking pace quickened still further. After crossing the stile onto the hall drive, I paused, scanning the water from the bridge; three pairs of Tufted Duck and a few other duck of North American origin were nice to see.

As I started for home through the fisherman's car park my attention was drawn to a huge pair of wings being lifted for flight; the first great wing-beat lifted the bird from its perch on a dead branch, the second and subsequent beats hauling the bird 10 feet at a time. Lulled by the walk that had produced little of interest so far, I hadn't even bothered to scan the trees lining the pool. As the bird climbed its head turned in the direction of my house. I took to my heels. The timber operations of last winter had left the plantation floor strewn with discarded branches. Not as fleet footed as I once was I stumbled forward crunching twigs and leaping fallen boughs, finally jumping the perimeter fence. There over the field still climbing, it displayed the enormous strength necessary to lift a bird of these proportions from the surface of water whilst clutching its prey. Trying to keep it in view, as it was partially obscured by an avenue of trees, my walk broke into a jog. Its flight was changed to a glide as it lined up for Tatton Park. Sunday morning I thought, "Tony Usher will be in Tatton". I crossed the last 200 yards to my house, keys at the ready. I rang Tony's wife who promptly rang Tony on his mobile, "Pete Hall just rang; if you look up now you will see an Osprey". He looked skyward and there amongst the wheeling gulls, right on cue was indeed an Osprey (marvellous thing technology). I on the other hand practised my Cheshire cat grin and settled down with my coffee and biscuits, and considered how close I had been to missing my first Osprey for Toft.

It was a great pleasure to be asked by the committee of CAWOS to represent the Society, along with Derek Kelly, at the inaugural demonstration by the north-west's first LEAF farm. LEAF is an organisation set up to **Link the Environment And Farming**. This it aims to do by offering farmers a farm audit, which will highlight areas of their cropping and animal husbandry where a more environmentally friendly approach would be as beneficial to profits as wildlife. The other side of their remit is to demonstrate to the consumer the strides being made by farmers, and their beneficial effect on the environment and the products being marketed. In the future it is intended to use the leaf logo to identify food produced within their guidelines.

Leverhulme farms on the Wirral are a large agricultural business: 450 dairy cows, and 80 head of beef, 600 acres of grass and 800 acres of arable. A more recent addition has been a 21-acre plantation of poplar; this is one of the modern attempts to produce timber as a managed crop, with regular returns from thinning. On the bird front wouldn't it be marvellous to have the Golden Oriole on the Wirral living in poplar as they do in East Anglia. 94 acres are involved in various forms of set-aside, all of which are managed with wildlife in mind. Sensitive mowing regimes and hedge trimming on a rotation that allows fruit to be present on at least some of the hedges in winter. Other hedgerows are being repaired by dropping the overgrowth to ground level, the re-growth then being laid to form a solid stock-proof hedge.

The farm is run for profit, and stands on its own merit with no financial assistance from other Leverhulme interests. As a show farm for LEAF, they will be used to demonstrate LEAF's ideals. The 10 members of farm staff will carry out their daily tasks within certain principles laid down by LEAF. Many of the livestock goals I must admit to being familiar with, as they are included in our contract with the dairy company. The dairies in their turn can assure the purchasers of the welfare-friendly credentials of our produce. Purchasers for the supermarkets demand trace-ability, and that animals involved in food production are given rights; these are: - clean living areas, plenty of food and water, freedom from fear, freedom from suffering and medical attention when necessary.

What will LEAF do for birds? It will encourage farmers to apply forgotten techniques to their modern practices, such as using manure and clover to replace some of the chemical fertilisers. It will encourage the use of set-aside to create wildlife habitats, and to change the shape and cycle of hedge trimming to create hedges that birds will use. My main concerns however involve the ability

of farmers to adopt environmentally responsible methods, particularly in the present farming climate. The vast majority of farms now have few if any hired staff. Even if times improve a return to staffing levels of the past are unlikely. This means that most jobs in the field are done by a dwindling number of ever larger machines and tractors; labour-intensive tasks such as hedge laying tend now to be done by contractors expert in such things and the cost of this is far beyond many small farms. Leverhulme farms are in the privileged position of already having smaller than average fields with hedgerows containing mature trees. This is mainly due to the enlightened approach to the estate by previous Lord Leverhulmes; many commercial farms however would require a sustained programme of hedge planting and field dissection to create anything resembling the show farm, and this would clearly be outside their labour or financial abilities. However if farmers come, see and take home only 1% of the ideas it would be a move in the right direction. There is however a hard core of farmers who look upon all this as a waste of time and resources, and they will probably never be convinced. The way of the future in farming is accountability and reliability, and those farmers resistant to this do the industry harm. Members of the general public who will also visit this farm will leave with a feeling that with will and finance, improvement can be made to our depleted wild species. They will see hedgerows with Yellowhammers and open set-aside teeming with Skylarks, tracks of foxes pushed through hedge bottoms and hares boxing in open corn and grass. Verdict, good principles, but I wouldn't fancy the task of convincing farmers; the aware consumer however should I think be impressed.

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

RUMOURS... RUMOURS...

Rumour has it that a certain member of the Society's Council has a starring role in Christmas panto later this year as Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*. Perhaps this has been based on the somewhat piratical-looking earring that he has recently been observed sporting in public.

Membership News

Welcome to the following new members: Barrie Marshall, C.Herbstritt, L Brown and Paul Bell. We were sorry to hear of the death of one of our members, Dr DH Smith of Meols.

Amid some of the glorious birdwatching weather we have been having it would be nice to write a glowing article about membership, but unfortunately this is not the case. For the first time since I took over as Membership Secretary seven years ago, membership is down; as I write this on 21st June it stands at 337, 16 below last year's record total. If you know anyone who has not yet rejoined for this year it is not too late for them to do so, and if you know anyone who has not and can tell you why, then Council would like to know.

In several aspects, too, the reaction of members has been disappointing. Despite extensive publicity only 41 members took the opportunity of acquiring permits for Rostherne, and doubtless some of those who did were already permit holders. Some members have stressed the need for CAWOS to be more widely seen at events in the county, but when I appealed for volunteers to man an exhibition on Cheshire's Wildlife on Show at Marbury on July 9th, not a single member came forward. As several members of Council who normally help at such events had prior commitments consequently I had to write and cancel our stand. This only highlights points I have made before about the need for more members to be involved actively in CAWOS matters.

At the Council meeting on 13th April Tony Parker and Paul Brewster were welcomed as new members, while Simon Edwards, Derek Kelly and David Steventon were co-opted until March 2001. It was agreed that members who had not increased their standing order payments in line with the rise in subscriptions should be asked to do so and that at the next meeting Council should look at its own committee structure.

**David Cogger, 113 Nantwich Road, Middlewich, Cheshire, CW10 9HD. Tel: 01606 832517
E-mail memsec@cawos.org**

LEAF DEMONSTRATION FARM

On Wednesday 7th June three representatives from CAWOS - Derek Kelly, Peter Hall and Jeff Clarke attended the launch of a LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) Demonstration Farm at Leverhulme Farms, Thornton Hough on the Wirral.

The purpose of the open day and walk was to demonstrate the principle of Integrated Farm Management. This attempts to show how some farmers are trying to balance environmental responsibility with running a profitable business. At the heart of this philosophy is the adoption of Integrated Crop Management. This is intended to balance the economic production of crops with positive environmental management, including:

- **crop rotation** which provides both a diverse agriculture and helps to maintain soil structure. (The Norfolk four course rotation established a couple of hundred years ago understood the need for this; it's amazing what essentials modern agriculture has forgotten.)
- **variety selection** - growing crops with a natural resistance to pests and diseases.
- **cultivation techniques** to preserve soil structure and retain the beneficial creatures that live in it.
- **plant nutrition** - applying the correct levels of fertiliser at the appropriate times.
- **crop protection** - balancing the biological, chemical and cultivation techniques for the control of pests and diseases.
- **wildlife and landscape management** to encourage biodiversity and rich flora and fauna.

Although all LEAF farms will be different, what struck me most forcefully on the visit was the extent of the set-aside (38 hectares) and hedgerows. Several sizeable fields had been devoted to set-aside and a feature of these fields was the abundance of Skylarks. The hedgerows were plentiful and not all were heavily manicured, providing abundant cover for Yellowhammers, Common Whitethroats, Grey Partridges and Pheasants. The latter two were shot during the game season so there was a profit incentive to retain the habitat which best suited them.

This is by no means an organic farm but it did adopt a more sensible and sensitive approach to land utilisation. Steve Binney, the only regular birder allowed on the farm, has recorded over 100 species on the site in recent years and testifies to the increase in birds since the farm adopted the integrated crop management approach.

What's in it for CAWOS? LEAF farms hold regular farm walks for organised groups and so the opportunity exists for inviting members to attend future demonstrations and see some of the associated wildlife. Perhaps more importantly it gives CAWOS a vehicle to persuade farmers throughout the recording area to adopt a more environmentally sympathetic approach to farm management.

One interesting additional comment that I heard concerned the likely vast increase in permanent set-aside next year. This is being economically driven by the changing EU subsidies and the 'greening' of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Perhaps the CAP has a silver lining after all.

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

FORUM - BIRD RECORDING

On 22nd June the Society organised a forum of all those concerned with birdwatching and recording in Cheshire and Wirral. About 30 people attended, representing many different groups and organisations within the county.

Jeff Clarke introduced the meeting by explaining its purpose. At a time when many more organisations were recording birds, and when both the reasons for and methods of recording were changing rapidly, CAWOS sought common ground with other organisations so that knowledge and experience, and most important of all records, could be shared.

Colin Wells then talked about confidentiality in record keeping. There were two very different views; some believed that everyone had the right to know, for example, the whereabouts of rare breeding species, while others believed that the threat from illegal collecting and unintentional disturbance from birdwatchers was such that the sites of rare species should be kept secret. These views were difficult to reconcile and individuals must make up their own minds. Both views had pitfalls; rare eggs could be taken by collectors, but the disadvantages of secrecy were shown by the example of the nest tree of a pair of Honey Buzzards being cut down because the landowner had not been informed. Ultimately trust on the part of the record holder and the record seeker was essential.

Steve McWilliam then introduced Recorder 2000, a new version of a database for recording biological material produced by the Joint Nature Conservancy Council and which would be available in August.

Among its features were:

- the ability to enter by species, by location or by observer, and to give access to reference material.
- species dictionaries which would be reissued and expanded to take changing taxonomy into account, and which would give photographs, text and distribution maps. Additional dictionaries would give information about habitat types and administrative areas; more recording was now being classified under local authority areas owing to conservation and development with its attendant financial interest.
- reporting would allow users to look at individual species and design their own reports and send out material.
- a wide variety of tools which would give secure access if needed and which could allow users to use the database on only one type - eg birds.

Steve pointed out that when Recorder 2000 does appear, consumer pressure will be important in enabling modifications to be made. The inputting of records was a slow process but many people could be trained to do it. There was a possibility that societies could buy a copy under franchise and then make further copies for distribution among members.

Because of the interest aroused by Recorder 2000 we did not have time to discuss how societies could come together on recording matters. However all those who attended and those who sent apologies will be sent a summary of each organisation's recording position at the present time.

Sheila Blamire closed the meeting by thanking the speakers and all involved.

David Cogger, Membership Secretary

MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

Firstly, thanks to all those who took the trouble to complete the survey form. A 76% response rate was good for this sort of survey and represented 15% of the membership. Many respondents added suggestions or wrote supplementary notes; I will not include these here as there is no room for all of them and selection could be invidious, but all have been passed on to Council for its consideration.

Secondly, it is obvious that, as expected, members have a range of different interests and preferences and we can't please everyone. If we satisfied the member who wanted half the contents of *Bird News* scrapped, we would upset several more who asked for it to be kept just as it is. We'll have to do the best we can.

If there is such a thing as a typical CAWOS member he (88% of the sample were male) is an RSPB member (90%), has been a CAWOS member for over five years (51%), is over 50 (60%), lives in or around the north and east of the county (51% in Macclesfield, Warrington, Stockport & Trafford) and goes out birding between two and six days per month (51%). His main birding interests, in order of preference, are likely to be watching his local patch, garden birds, and casual birding/country walking. If he is into year or life lists, or twitching, he keeps very quiet about it. Although he probably uses a field notebook (52%) and keeps written records (58%), he is unlikely to submit records to CAWOS (only 32%). He's not heavily into new technology in terms of keeping records on computer (25%) or currently using the Internet (38%). Obviously, that's a simplification, and there are many variations (I particularly liked the reply which gave "World list" as the main birding interest); it does summarise the main points of the profile though.

This hypothetical member is generally satisfied with what the Society offers. He thinks CAWOS's performance as a county society is good or fairly good (90% combined), and that he gets good or fairly good (93% combined) value for money. He values *Bird News* very highly or fairly highly (88% combined), and rates the performance in producing it as very high or fairly high (91% combined). His favourite features are 'Sites to Watch' and 'Recent Reports', with 'Membership News' the least valued. Similarly, he values the annual report very highly or fairly highly (88% combined), and rates the performance in producing it as high or fairly high (92% combined); by a long way, he rates the systematic list as its most important feature.

If he attends indoor meetings or outdoor events, he is fairly satisfied - but he is not very likely to attend as 70% had not attended an indoor meeting in the past year and 75% had not attended an outdoor event. In both cases, the probability of him attending is likely to be mostly influenced by the location and the speaker or leader. He believes strongly that CAWOS should run more surveys (80% of the sample), but is reluctant to commit himself to helping as only 38% said they were very

likely or fairly likely to do so; the time involved is likely to be the major factor in this decision. He thinks that the most important function for CAWOS in the future is recording, though he is also inclined to rate conservation fairly highly. He doesn't give much of a rating to research or public education, and isn't greatly moved by the idea of cooperation with other societies.

Although he thinks, despite his low rating of 'Membership News', that CAWOS is quite good at keeping him informed (90% rated performance on this as high or fairly high), he isn't so happy about the extent to which he is involved in the Society as 40% rated performance on this as low or fairly low. On the other hand, he may have himself partly to blame as less than a third of those commenting adversely on involvement made suggestions for improving it, and only a minority of members (16% of the sample) had ever responded to requests for help!

That's the bones of it; if anyone wants fuller information on any part of the survey, they are welcome to get in touch with me. As to its value, it does offer reassurance on some points, and yet raises a number of issues. *Bird News* and the *Cheshire & Wirral Bird Report* are obviously running on the right lines, though it seems unlikely that the editorial team of either will become complacent, and Council appears to be doing a reasonable job in keeping members informed, though again with no room for complacency. On the other hand, how can we best recruit younger members to the Society? How can we increase the level of satisfaction over the involvement of members? How far does this relate to the low attendance at indoor and outdoor meetings, and is it possible to improve the position by finding alternative locations for both? If more surveys were to be mounted, how far would members actually support them?

I believe the survey has been very useful in enabling Council to sample the views of a dispersed membership where there is only limited scope for face-to-face contact (though there is always 'Notes and Letters' and the new web site). All the questions raised, including many suggestions not reproduced here, provide Council with plenty of food for thought - but they are not just matters for Council. Suggestions (or even better, action) from members on recruitment, or participation in surveys, or in arranging new meetings or activities, are needed; that is all part of being involved in the Society's work.

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



AUGUST

- 30 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - 11:00am (HT 12:48, 9.9m)
- 31 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - 12noon (HT 13:32, 9.9m)

SEPTEMBER

- 1 **'In Search of Skuas', Hilbre Island, at 10:30am, to book ring 0151 648 4371/3884**
- 2 CADOS Flamborough, contact Chris Done 01928 724994
- 10 HPRSPB Spurn Point by coach, meet at Marple Hollins at 8:00am or Hazel Grove at 8:15am
- 11 HPRSPB AGM, at Marple, & 'OUR LOCAL BIRDS - WINNERS & LOSERS' by Judith Smith
- 11 SRSPB 'A WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER ABROAD' by Michael Leach
- 13 HO AGM AND SPEAKER
- 15 NCRSPB 'ISLAY' by Les Goulding
- 16 KOS Hilbre Island meet Sessions House at 9:00am or West Kirby at 10:00am
- 16 NCRSPB Blacktoft Sands/Spurn Point, meet at Sainsbury's Car Park at 8:30am
- 22 KOS 'THE ARCTIC SUMMER OF GREENLAND & SPITSBERGEN' by Gordon Yates
- 24 **Migration Watch 2000, 7:00am start, contact 0151 648 4371/3884**
- 27 HPRSPB 'HIGH FLYERS OVER THE BOSPHORUS' by John Raines, at High Lane
- 28 **High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - 11:00am (HT 12:28, 9.9m)**
- 29 LOG 'BIRD HAUNTS IN WILDEST IRELAND' by Jo Moran
- 29 WGOS 'BARN OWLS IN CHESHIRE' by George Bramhall
- 30 CADOS East Coast, contact Ron Shewring 0151 339 0696
- tbc LOG Weekend to Rye/Dungeness, contact Peter Hale 01244 341074

OCTOBER

- 1 **Migration Watch 2000, 7:00am start, contact 0151 648 4371/3884**
3 SRSPB World Birdwatch Event at Reddish Vale CP, South Reddish, 10:00am - 4:00pm
5 CADOS 'NORTHERN INDIA' by Brayton Holt
5-8 KOS Holy Island Weekend - ring for details
6 **CAWOS 'A FLORIDA SPRING' by Steve Knell**
9 SRSPB 'FROM THE DUNES TO THE FALLS' by Keith Offord
14 **Migration Watch 2000, 7:30am start, contact 0151 648 4371/3884**
15 **Migration Watch 2000, 7:30am start, contact 0151 648 4371/3884**
15 LOG North Wales coast, contact Peter Hale 01244 341074
15 WGOS Leighton Moss by coach departing at 8:00am - ring for details
19-23 NCRSPB Islay Weekend, contact Cliff Gibson 01925 817874
22 CADOS East Coast, contact Dave King 0151 327 7212
23 HPRSPB 'WILD WINGS AND WANDERINGS' by Clifford Heyes, at Marple
27 KOS 'A FLORIDA SPRING' by Steve Knell
27 NCRSPB AGM & FILM SHOW
27 LOG 'AROUND THE WHIXALL MOSS AREA' by Dr Daniels
27 WGOS 'MIGRATION TO THE MASAI COUNTRY' by Keith Offord
29 HPRSPB Wigan Flashes, meet at the Memorial Park car park, Marple at 8:30am
29 SRSPB Seaforth Docks & Southport by coach, contact Jayne Skelhorn 0161 282 8758

NOVEMBER

- 2 CADOS 'EILAT' by John Raines
3 **CAWOS 'OWLS OF THE WORLD' by Michael Leach**
4 **'From Wildfowl to Waders', meet Moore NR at 9:00am or 1:00pm, 01925 444689**
11 NCRSPB Autumn Fair, Frodsham Church Hall, 10:00am
10-11 HPRSPB Solway Weekend, contact Pat & Anne O'Mara 0161 449 8299
12 KOS Mere Sands Wood & Marshside meet Sessions House at 9:00am
12 LOG Shropshire Meres, contact Peter Hale 01244 341074
12 WGOS North Wales by coach departing at 8:00am - ring for details
13 SRSPB 'SEABIRDS OF SUMMER' & 'BIRDS OF THE PENNINE FORESTS' by Gordon Yates
17 NCRSPB 'BIRDING IN CENTRAL SPAIN' by Allan & Sue Parker
19 NCRSPB Foryd Bay, meet Frodsham Station Car Park at 8:30am
19 HPRSPB Blithfield Reservoir, meet at Marple at 8:30am or Chapel at 8:45am
24 KOS LECTURE (title to be confirmed) by Clifford Heyes
24 LOG 'ISLAY - JEWEL OF THE HEBRIDES' by Gordon Yates
24 WGOS 'UK - SCILLY WEEK' by John Raines
25 CADOS Leighton Moss, contact Dave Goff 01244 345043
27 HPRSPB 'A CELEBRATION OF BIRDS' by Gordon Yates at Marple

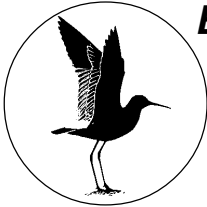
DECEMBER

- 1 **CAWOS 'A BIRD PAINTER IN ISRAEL' by Philip Snow**

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. Nick French 01928 856522
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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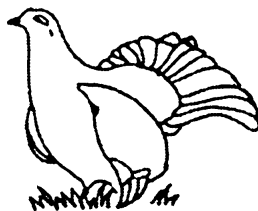


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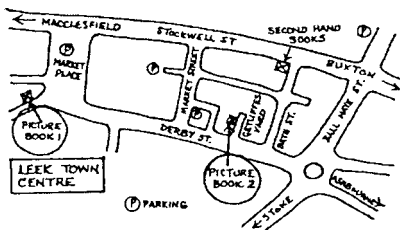


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High Tide Birdwatch - see Diary page 30 for further details

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