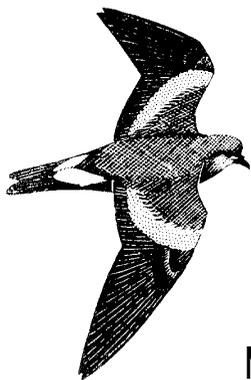


Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society

www.cawos.org



BIRD NEWS

Number 50

April 2001



**2000 House Martin Survey
Dotterel • Waxwing Invasion
Photographic Competition Results
Garden & Local Patch Birdwatching**



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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 address shown above.

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

Front cover: Whinchat by Tony Broome

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

Editorial

It would be, of course, somewhat surprising, given the current level of media coverage and public debate, if I did not centre my Editorial this issue on the matter of the ongoing foot-and-mouth disease outbreak. If you also take into account the fact that I work in the technical department of a food manufacturer whose products contain a considerable amount of dairy ingredients and now suddenly require export licences, it becomes more surprising still. However, familiarity often breeds contempt, and I must say that FMD has long since become a subject that I am utterly fed up with hearing so-called experts pontificate about to journalists searching for their next catchy sound-bite. Only my professional need to keep abreast of the disease's progress has maintained my interest over the last long three months. As such, I am loath to let it affect my beloved hobby and take over the pages of this newsletter - after all, some Ministry vet may come along and order it to be burned!

But wait; hang on a minute! What if I let my disinterest about FMD evolve into apathy? After all, it's been going on for several months now and the last case in Cheshire was over a fortnight ago. Surely all those nature reserves, country parks and areas of farmland were sealed off at the start of the outbreak as a knee-jerk reaction? What harm can it do to visit my local patch now? It is spring, and think of all the goodies that I am missing: wader passage, warbler arrivals, the first hirundines, even possible overshoot vagrants. Maybe I'll just head off to Frodsham; it'll be OK as long as I stick to the tracks. Won't it?

It all seems so reasonable, doesn't it? Perhaps, if I, an employee in an industry directly affected by FMD, can consider the thoughts above, so can others who are less intimately involved with the catastrophic events that it has brought about. And that is why it is so important that we, the birding community, must not allow ourselves to become complacent towards this appalling epidemic and continue to stay away from those areas where there is any possibility of us infecting cattle, sheep, pigs, goats or deer. (Elephants can also contract the illness but, I guess, are considerably less likely to be encountered in Cheshire & Wirral whilst out birding unless you happen to be in the near vicinity of Chester Zoo!) The losses to the agricultural industry are potentially immeasurable; the loss to birders is one year's passage and breeding season records. However, should a single birder be implicated in the contagion of FMD to a farm in a clear area such as Cheshire, all the goodwill that we have earned from farmers for our good behaviour during the crisis so far would be lost forever - together with our ability to record the birds on their land. Then we would have lost not only this year's records, but also those of the foreseeable future.

In a different vein, Chester Zoo has been particularly badly hit by the outbreak, having to close its doors to the public for a lengthy period in order to protect its hoofed animals. It has now been able to reopen but has lost thousands of pounds whilst shut, much of which would have gone towards its important conservation work. As a sponsor of the Zoo's Amur Tigers, I am a great supporter of its role in this area. Chester Zoo is vitally involved in the captive breeding and reintroduction to the wild of such endangered species as Mauritius Kestrel, one of the world's rarest birds. Please consider giving the Zoo your financial support during this difficult time, either by sponsoring an animal, becoming a member, or simply paying it a visit.

Lastly, *Bird News* reaches something of a landmark with this, our 50th, issue. The last decade or so has seen a great deal of information, discussion and controversy within the pages of this newsletter. We hope to be able to publish in the near future a comprehensive index of all of our published articles (see page 28 for more details) to commemorate this achievement. Thanks must be conveyed to every single feature writer, contributor, artist, letter writer, etc. all of whom have made *Bird News* into the nationally regarded publication that it is. Let's hope that CAWOS is still around in another decade's time when our 100th issue is published, even if I've long since vacated the Editorial chair!

Simon Edwards

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 8th June - 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.

~ Missing 'seabird' records from the 1999 C & W Bird Report - see page 28 ~

County Rarities

DOTTEREL (*Charadrius morinellus*)

One of our most enigmatic waders, Dotterel, occurs only irregularly in Cheshire. Most birdwatchers would no doubt associate this bird with trips to Scotland and walks over the boulder fields near to the Cairngorm ski lift. In fact, I've actually spent many days and nights camped on the tops near the Glenshee Valley and on Ben a Bhuid near Ben Avon, watching them sitting on nests and feeding newly hatched young, with Ptarmigans croaking all around and Golden Eagles soaring overhead. To lie in a tent at night listening to Dotterel singing their high, rolling 'pip-pip-pip-pip.....' song is sheer magic.

I digress. In Cheshire, birds have been seen in only 11 years since the *1967 Bird Report* was published, with a total of 14 records. In 1981 and 1993 there were three and two records respectively and in most years, it's usually just one, as shown below:

1972	Frodsham Marsh	Oct 23 rd & Nov 19 th	1985	Red Rocks	Sept 24 th
1973	Poulton	Sept 8 th	1992	Red Rocks	Sept 19 th
1975	Frodsham Marsh	May 3 rd - 13 th	1993	Red Rocks	May 11 th (2)
1978	Pott Shrigley	May 31 st		Ashton's Flash	May 13 th
1980	Bromborough GC	May 10 th	1996	Danebower	May 6 th (8)
1981	Dale Top	May 13 th & 15 th	1999	Frodsham Marsh	May 5 th - 6 th (2)
	Witton Flashes	Aug 8 th			
	Neston	Aug 30 th			

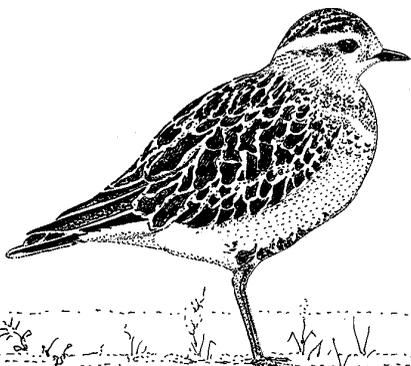
There have been eight spring records, seven of which have been in the first two weeks of May. The largest party or 'trip' was in 1996 when eight birds were found next to the road near Danebower. The sharp-eyed observer at first only saw a flock of Golden Plover-like waders in flight and could have passed them off as such, but for the fact that it was slightly too late in the year for a flock in that location. When he stopped they were nowhere to be seen, but he decided to walk up a bank for a better look. There in front of him were eight Dotterel! Sometimes persistence does pay off.....

In autumn, the six records are more spread out, spanning August to November. The 1972 Frodsham record doesn't make it clear if the birds seen on the two dates were definitely different, but Dotterel do turn up late on in the year as anyone who has been to the Isles of Scilly will know. They're regular in the fields and on the golf course and airport in late October.

May birds are simply stunning. The females are brighter than the males (and do all the singing as well!) and as a bonus are usually very tame, as Gary Bellingham's photograph in the *1999 Bird Report* proves. They're unmistakable on the ground, slightly smaller than Golden

Plover, with a grey neck and upper breast, black and white breast band, dark cap, big white supercilium meeting in a 'V' on the back of the head, orange underparts and blackish belly patch. In flight they show no wing bar but a pale leading edge to the wing and the underwings are plain buffy-greyish, looking very pale at times.

In autumn, moulting adults and juvenile/first winter birds are like a washed out version of the adults, more buff-looking with creamy supercilia and dark brown crowns. The underparts are almost totally buff, washed with a narrow, whitish breast band bordered below by the vestige of a darker band, sometimes difficult to see. There's also dark mottling across the breast and the upperparts are an intricate pattern of blackish centred



feathers bordered by white and buff notching. As the winter progresses, the upperparts become plainer. They can look most odd at times and will perhaps confuse you for a short while. However, with a good view they should be readily identifiable and only the smaller Caspian Plover bears any kind of vague resemblance.

So where do you look? In spring and autumn, any fields with short grass, any ploughed fields, golf courses, dry beds like at Witton and wetter ones like those at Frodsham and Golden Plover flocks. I once found one on the salt marshes near Southport one August in an area of sandy mud and low, sparse weedy-like vegetation. In fact anywhere flat and open with terrain that mimics the wide open spaces that they breed in and winter in. Their wintering range includes semi-desert and cultivation south of the Mediterranean. Odd birds even winter in Britain occasionally.

I've a special weakness for Dotterel and I never tire of watching them and May's just around the corner.....

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

Additional Notes:

Coward (1900 & 1910) has references to records in areas no longer in Cheshire, ie Crowden & Woodhead. He also mentions:

- 1) a few years prior to 1874 one was shot on the shore at Denhall.
- 2) 1887 one shot near Frodsham on May 2nd.
- 3) one shot on the hills near Rainow in May 1903; on May 8th of the same year a trip of 15 was on a fallow close to Sealand Road at Blacon Point (although on the Cheshire side of the River Dee these birds were almost certainly outside the current Cheshire boundary).

Other records I am aware of are:

1921 or 1922, one 'wired', Meg Lane, Sutton (near Macclesfield).

1940 two at Grappenhall on April 24th, one remaining for a week.

1953 one at Frodsham Sludge Pools on August 13th.

1964 at Walton Sludge Pool on August 24th.

1966 one at Moreton Shore on August 21st.

1985 *The Birds of Frodsham Marsh* has one on No1 Tank from October 9th to 11th. The *Merseyside Naturalists' Report* also refers to one at Frodsham in October that year.

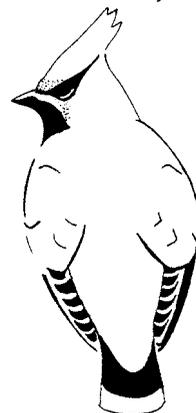
Steve Barber, 14 Thornfield Grove, Cheadle Hulme, Cheshire, SK8 6AZ

Recent Reports

Some of the records may be unauthenticated and therefore will require review by the Society Rarities Panel or the BBRC. This report covers the winter period from December to February.

December started with temperatures of up to 16°C early in the month. This was soon followed by a significant weather related movement centring on the heavy snowfalls just after Christmas and into the New Year. A band of heavy snow came across from Scandinavia on Dec 28th-29th producing up to five inches in Sandbach, nearly two inches in Poynton and on the Wirral coast. This weather system forced a large movement of pipits, thrushes and Skylarks across the county.

One of the main species involved was **Waxwings**, which were forced south and east by the severe weather. Numbers in North-East England soon filtered to Cheshire. In previous years large numbers of Waxwings arrived in south Manchester suggesting birds came from the Sheffield concentrations, but this year most birds were in north Manchester suggesting they came from Leeds. All the early sightings from this invasion came from Warrington and north Wirral. Below is the more detailed analysis.



The heavy snowfall on Dec 28th-29th produced a large thrush/pipit movement which included 200 **Fieldfares**, 100 **Redwings** and 50 **Skylarks** at Fiddler's Ferry (from 26th), 45+ Redwings, 150+ Skylarks and 24 **Lapwings** at Hoylake (28th), 2000+ Fieldfares, 2000+ Redwings and 300+ Skylarks at Moore (29th) with a mixed flock of 15,000 Fieldfares/Redwings there on Jan 1st. Also 200+ Skylarks flew over Pickering's Pasture in one hour (28th), 200+ Fieldfares, 100+ Redwings and numerous Skylarks/**Meadow Pipits** were on snow covered fields near Poynton Pool (29th) and at West Kirby (28th) there were 40 Redwings, 300 Skylarks and 100 Lapwings. Other records relating to the severe weather included four **Pintail** at Arclid SQ (28th) – the first there for three years, a **Tawny Owl** in a Culcheth garden (28th-29th), a **Woodcock** in a Great Sutton garden (28th), an influx of wildfowl at Houghton Green Pool and a large count of 53 **Reed Buntings** fed by Maw Green Tip, Crewe in late Dec.

WAXWING INVASION

December: No birds in the county but at least 16 in the North-West with up to 1000 birds arriving in Scotland and the North-East.

January: Up to 7000 birds in Britain with c900 birds in the North-West (including c100 in Cheshire). The largest flock was up to 40 at Seacombe (2nd-16th) with these birds relocating to Pensby (30 on 19th) and then Upton (present from 22nd-28th with 32 on 25th). Elsewhere, 31 flew over Moore NR (21st), up to 12 at Stockton Heath (14th-29th) and 10 at Neston (1st). Single figures came from Burtonwood (one on 10th and 20th), Clatterbridge Hospital (two on 4th, four on 6th), Crewe Business Park (one on 9th) and Risley Moss (seven on 10th).

February: As birds began to disperse, flocks were reported from new areas including 13 at Boughton (10th), up to 40 at Congleton (9th-13th), seven at Halton (23rd), up to 20 at Macclesfield (13th-24th), 18 at Thurstaston (2nd with 12 on 12th) and one reported at Wistaston near Crewe. 10 were still at Upton (18th). Three were at Woolston Eyes No1 bed (10th).

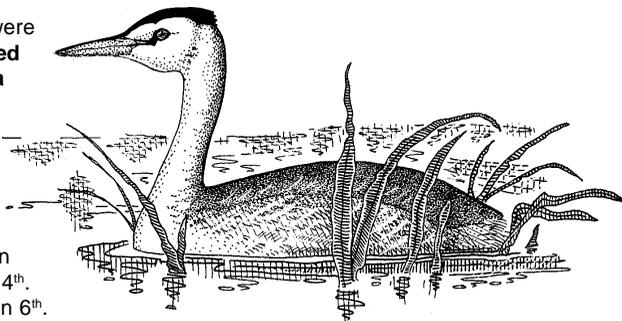
SITE REPORTS

Arpley Tip/Moore NR

350+ **Pink-footed Geese** flew over on Dec 9th and a **White-fronted Goose** (European race) seen on Jan 1st was a first for the area. Four **Jack Snipe** were at the Tip on Jan 9th. Single **Mediterranean Gulls** visited Richmond Bank on Dec 21st, 30th and Jan 19th with one at Moore on Feb 17th and 24th. The Tip held a **Ring-billed Gull** (Jan 27th), two **Yellow-legged Gulls** (Feb 10th), an **Iceland Gull** (Feb 24th) and a 1st winter **Glaucous Gull** (Jan 13th). Three **Long-eared Owls** roosted between Feb 14th-17th and four **Short-eared Owls** were seen in early Jan. A **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was seen in Jan and a **Chiffchaff** was reported on Dec 29th. Two **Bearded Tits** at Moore NR on Feb 4th will be the first county record since 1993, if accepted. Three **Ravens** flew over the Tip on Jan 9th. The same area had a **Twite** on Feb 17th with two on Jan 9th. 20+ **Yellowhammers** and 19 **Corn Buntings** were seen nearby.

Chelford SQs

Up to 24 **Great Crested Grebes** were seen during Dec. Up to six **Pink-footed Geese** were seen with the **Canada Goose** flock (which peaked at 810 on Jan 18th) in Jan/Feb. Nine **White-fronted Geese** flew over on Feb 4th and **Mallard** numbers peaked at 700 in Dec. 444 **Wigeon** on Jan 14th was a new site record count. A drake **Green-winged Teal** was seen on Dec 7th, 10th, 15th, 17th and Jan 14th. 34 **Goosanders** were present on Jan 6th.



Chester area

31 **Mandarins** were at Aldford Flood on Dec 23rd with 1130 **Wigeon** and 940 **Pintail** nearby on the Eaton Estate during Dec. A **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was recorded in a Chester garden during Jan while a **Willow Tit** visited a Mouldsworth garden in Dec. A **Raven** flew over Hockenhull Platts on Dec 22nd.

Crewe/Nantwich area

120 **Mute Swans** were at Winterley Pool in Dec with 45 at Doddington Pool. 82 **Pink-footed Geese** flew over Basford Hall on Dec 7th. During Dec, 575 **Canada** and 39 **Greylag Geese** were at Barmere, a drake **Mandarin**, 377 **Mallard**, 74 **Tufted Ducks** and 18 **Goldeneyes** were at Doddington Pool while 33 **Pochard** and 43 **Tufted Ducks** (a site record) visited Winterley Pool. A **Red Kite** flew over the M6 near Sandbach services on Dec 18th and nearby seven **Buzzards** were at Arclid on Feb 8th. 15 **Red-legged Partridges** were at Doddington in Dec with 19 at Checkley. Barmere held two **Black-tailed Godwits** on Dec 30th with four **Jack Snipe** and 104 **Common Snipe** seen there. A **Woodcock** was at Stowford in Dec. A **Mediterranean Gull** roosted at Doddington Pool on Feb 9th and up to 8000 **Black-headed Gulls** roosted there in Dec. A **Yellow-legged Gull** was at Hurleston Resv on Dec 31st. A **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** visited a Wistaston garden in Dec.

Dee Estuary

A **Great Northern Diver** off Hilbre on Jan 27th was the only one reported this winter with four **Red-throated Divers** off Red Rocks in Dec. A **Bittern** at Neston Reedbed on Jan 18th appeared during freezing weather. Up to six **Little Egrets** were at Burton Marsh throughout with one off Heswall (Dec 24th). 16 **Bewick's Swans** flew over both Hoylake and Hilbre on Dec 27th. 125 **Pink-footed Geese** flew over Hoylake on Jan 11th with 200 over West Kirby next day. A further 139 were off Neston on Jan 15th, 150 at Burton on 22nd-27th and 320 over Parkgate on Feb 10th. Up to 28 **Brent Geese** (mostly pale-bellied) visited Hilbre in Dec increasing to 39 on Jan 16th, Feb 4th and 9th with 17 off Heswall (Dec 10th), six off Parkgate (Feb 10th) and 25 at West Kirby (Dec 9th). **Shelducks** peaked at 5800 off Heswall on Dec 13th with a **Scaup** off there on Feb 24th. One **Eider** and 14 **Common Scoter** flew past Hoylake on Jan 14th. A **Goosander** was off Hilbre on Jan 16th and 27th. Three **Grey Partridges** visited Hoylake fields (Jan 14th). Two **Water Rails** were at Thurston on Jan 27th and four at Hoylake fields next day. **Peregrines** and **Merlins** were regular at several sites. The peak wader counts included 10,000 **Oystercatchers** off Parkgate on Feb 9th, 30,000 **Knot** off Caldy/Thurston on Feb 16th and 12,300 **Dunlin** at West Kirby in Dec with 2150 **Bar-tailed Godwits** along the North Wirral shore on Jan 18th. Three **Purple Sandpipers** visited New Brighton on Dec 29th with up to 35 at Hilbre throughout. Two **Mediterranean Gulls** were at New Brighton on Jan 11th and 27th. Six **Kittiwakes** were off Hilbre Feb 11th. A juvenile **Pomarine Skua** off Hoylake (Dec 14th and 16th) was an excellent mid-winter record. A **Barn Owl** was at Thurston (Jan 26th). Five **Short-eared Owls** were at Parkgate in Jan with up to 11 there on Feb 10th. A late **Swallow** was at West Kirby on Dec 12th, a remarkable mid-Dec record. Up to six **Water Pipits** were at Neston Old Quay throughout. Two **Chiffchaffs** were at Neston Sewage works (Feb 25th) with one at Heswall on Dec 21st. Two **Ravens** were at Red Rocks in Dec. **Twite** records included 70 at Gayton Sands on Dec 10th, one at West Kirby on Dec 29th and two at Burton on Feb 16th. Two **Lapland Buntings** were on Burton Marsh (Feb 14th) with singles at Gayton Sands on Dec 13th and 20th. A **Snow Bunting** was at Burton Marsh on Jan 19th with another at West Kirby on Dec 18th.

Fiddler's Ferry

35 **Pink-footed Geese** flew over on Dec 16th with other large flocks heard calling after dark on Dec 14th and 26th. 234 **Canada Geese** on Dec 31st was a new Dec record count. 426 **Mallard**, 52 **Shovelers** and 33 **Pochard** were the peak counts of the winter. 20 **Tufted Ducks** on Dec 30th increased to 138 by Jan 23rd. Two/three **Buzzards** were regular along with up to four different **Peregrines** during the winter. A **Ringed Plover** on Dec 10th-11th and 31st was a rare record for that month with 17 on Feb 21st. 800 **Golden Plovers** in Dec was the peak count with up to 3000 **Lapwings**. Up to four **Jack Snipe** were regular with six on Dec 3rd. **Woodcocks** were recorded on Dec 31st and two on Jan 28th. An adult **Iceland Gull** on Dec 16th was the first in that month since 1984. A sub-adult **Glaucous Gull** was seen on Jan 30th. 14 **Grey Partridges** on Jan 14th was a good count. A **Long-eared Owl** was heard calling on Feb 3rd. One/two **Short-eared Owls** were regular throughout. A **Chiffchaff** was seen on Dec 3rd, Jan 14th (only second Jan record) and Feb 18th. Two **Jays** on Feb 4th were the first recorded in that month. Up to three **Ravens** on five dates in Dec were the first for that month with three again on Jan 6th.

Frodsham

Three **Whooper Swans** were on the Score in Feb with 600+ **Canada Geese** in Dec and 2000 **Wigeon** in Jan. A drake **American Wigeon** visited No6 tank on Feb 20th-21st. A drake **Green-**

winged Teal was seen in Jan and a **redhead Smew** was on the Weaver Bend on Jan 19th with a **Hen Harrier** here in early Dec. A **Water Rail** was at the Canal Pools in early Dec. 28 **Grey Partridges** were seen on Dec 3rd. Waders seen in Jan included an **Avocet** on the Score, 2000 **Golden Plovers**, 2000 **Lapwings**, 20 **Little Stints**, 10,000 **Dunlin** and also a **Woodcock**. A **Barn Owl** was seen in Dec and Feb with a **Long-eared Owl** on Dec 18th and six **Short-eared Owls** on Jan 5th. A **Chiffchaff** was by the old log on Dec 3rd with two reported in Jan.

Inner Marsh Farm RSPB

Four **Little Egrets** were seen on Dec 10th. Up to nine **Whooper** and 121 **Bewick's Swans** were seen during the winter. These birds occasionally visited Burton Marsh. A count of 1450 **Canada Geese** on Dec 10th was a new reserve record. One **Brent Goose** on Dec 3rd was an unusual record. The **Ruddy Shelduck** remained all winter. A drake **Green-winged Teal** remained from Nov until Dec 3rd and a drake **Garganey** seen on Dec 3rd and 7th was the first winter record for the county. The previous latest was Nov 17th in 1974. A drake **Smew** was seen irregularly from Dec 23rd to late Feb but moved to Shotwick Lake when the reserve was frozen. A **redhead** was also seen irregularly from Jan 10th into Feb. One/two **Water Rails** were regular. A **Mediterranean Gull** was reported in Feb. Six **Bramblings** and 125 **Siskins** were seen in mid-Dec. Eight **Twite** were reported on Dec 3rd.

Knutsford area

Nine **Whooper Swans** arrived from the south at Tatton Mere on Feb 16th, undoubtedly the birds seen earlier at Poynton Pool. Five other birds were at Ollerton between Dec 6th and 13th. 115 **Pink-footed Geese** flew NW over Tatton on Jan 17th and a **Shelduck** there on Jan 25th was an unusual record. 12 **Mandarins** were at Higmere, Tatton on Dec 7th. Nearby a **Barn Owl** was seen near Mere on Jan 13th. Two **Ravens** were at Tatton throughout and 60+ **Siskins** visited Dog Wood, Tatton on Dec 29th.

Macclesfield area

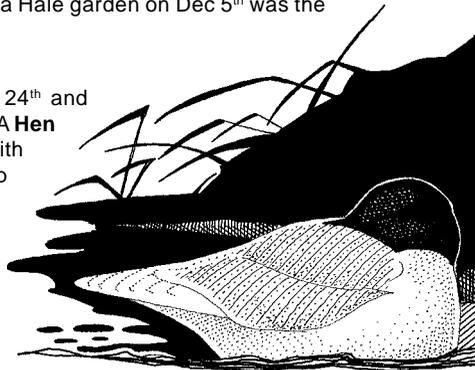
c500 **Pink-footed Geese** flew over Lyme Park on Dec 14th with 150 over Macclesfield on Dec 26th. Up to 40 **Greylags** were at Redesmere throughout, with 900 **Canada Geese** there in Jan. 25 **Mandarins** were at Alderley Park (Dec 1st). 102 **Mallard** were at Styperson Pool on Jan 21st. 21 **Red-legged Partridges** were at Alderley Park during Dec. 600 **Coots** were at Redesmere in Dec. A **Woodcock** was at Handforth Dean (Dec 3rd). c12 **Bramblings** were at Lyme Park in Dec. 150+ **Siskins** were at Macclesfield Forest on Jan 21st.

Mersey Estuary

A **Black-necked Grebe** was reported at Stanlow (Jan 19th). Two **Whooper Swans** and 1120 **Teal** were on Hale Shore in Dec. A **Goshawk** was reported at Manor Park, Runcorn on Feb 24th. The **Avocet** was seen off Stanlow on Jan 19th and on the Mersey at Oglet on Feb 3rd. Hale Shore held 4000 **Lapwings**, 140 **Knot** and 14,500 **Dunlin** in Dec - the highest counts of 2000. New Ferry Tip had single **Mediterranean Gulls** on Jan 15th, Feb 3rd and three on Feb 9th with another at Wallasey in Dec. New Ferry Tip also held different **Caspian Gulls** on Jan 23rd and 26th, Feb 3rd and Feb 9th with single **Glaucous** and **Iceland Gulls** on Jan 15th. Up to five **Rock Pipits** at Hale Shore in Dec was the highest count of the year there. A **Chiffchaff** was at Rivacre Valley LNR on Dec 29th. A **Firecrest** was at Runcorn (Feb 3rd). A **Redpoll** in a Hale garden on Dec 5th was the observer's first in five years there.

Northwich area

A drake **Scaup** was at Budworth Mere on Dec 24th and nearby a pair of **Smew** visited Pickmere mid-Jan. A **Hen Harrier** flew over Marbury No1 tank on Feb 1st with an adult **Little Gull** near Allostock on Dec 2nd. Up to four **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** were at Marbury CP in Jan. A **Marsh Tit** was at Arley Green on Feb 20th and several **Bramblings** were at Whitegate, Winsford in Jan. 80 **Siskins** visited Vale Royal Cut on Jan 1st. Two **Mealy** and nine **Lesser Redpolls** were reported in a Kingsley garden during Dec.



Poynton Pool

During the winter there was a good total of 13 **Cormorant** records (with six over nearby Hazelbadge Fields on Dec 27th). Nine **Whooper Swans** flew over on Feb 16th and were later seen at Tatton Mere. A pair of **Wigeon** arrived on Dec 5th followed by drakes on Dec 25th, Feb 1st and 25th. Six **Teal** (Dec 1st) was a good record. 191 **Mallard** on Dec 31st was a new site record. **Goosanders** were scarce with a drake on Dec 22nd, two on Dec 25th and three on Feb 4th. A **Water Rail** was seen on eight dates from Jan 12th to Feb 25th. Up to 500 **Lapwings** in early Jan was a good count and three **Snipe** were reported in early Jan. Nearby a **Woodcock** was at Lostock Hall Farm on Feb 25th (the observer's first local record). A 1st winter **Mediterranean Gull** visited on Jan 26th - the fourth record here and 51 **Common Gulls** landed briefly on Feb 28th (the largest count there for some years). **Stock Doves** were seen on several dates during the winter but this species is usually only seen in spring/summer here. A **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** on Jan 17th was a good record and 110 **Redwings** were seen in late Feb. 56 **Maggies** roosted at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton on Feb 16th with 4000 **Jackdaws** roosting at nearby Wigwam Wood in late Feb. Two different partial albino **Carrion Crows** were seen in Poynton. A **Raven** flew over on Jan 7th - a site first. Several **Bramblings** were seen (Dec 21st and 29th).

Rostherne Mere

279 **Cormorants** on Dec 28th was the peak winter count. A **Bittern** was seen on 11 dates between Dec 2nd and Feb 25th with two on Dec 9th, Jan 19th and 21st. A single **Whooper Swan** flew over on Jan 14th and **Pink-footed Geese** flocks included 60 W on Dec 10th, 100 E on Dec 24th and 150 NW on Jan 14th. A drake **Mandarin** was seen on Feb 25th. The peak counts of **Pochard** and **Tufted Ducks** were 871 and 503 respectively (both on Jan 20th). One/two **Scaup** were seen on five dates in Dec/Jan with three on Jan 20th. An adult **Mediterranean Gull** roosted on Jan 6th. A **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was seen on Feb 10th. Two **Ravens** were seen irregularly all winter. A **Mealy Redpoll** visited on Dec 10th.

Sandbach Flashes

Five **Bewick's Swans** dropped into Elton Hall Flash on Dec 20th but soon departed next morning. 36 **Greylag Geese** feeding in the maize field by Pump House Flash on Dec 26th was a site record. The maximum counts for wildfowl during the winter were 25 **Mute Swans**, 43 **Shelduck**, 599 **Wigeon**, nine **Gadwall** on Jan 20th (a new site record), 450 **Teal**, 23 **Pintail** and 19 **Shoveler**. Regular wader counts included 51 **Golden Plovers** on Dec 18th, 1250 **Lapwings** on Feb 5th, eight **Ruff** throughout, 57 **Curlews** on Feb 16th and eight **Redshanks** in Feb. A **Jack Snipe** was at Maw Green Tip in Dec/Jan. **Woodcocks** were at Groby Flash and three at Foden's Flash. A **Yellow-legged Gull** was at Maw Green Tip on Jan 7th and 13th with a 1st winter **Glaucous Gull** there (Jan 20th-22nd and Feb 7th) and an adult on Feb 1st. A **Barn Owl** was at Maw Green Tip on Feb 10th. A **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was at Foden's Flash in Jan.

Warrington area

59 **Cormorants** over Risley Moss on Dec 26th was a large count there and 200 **Pink-footed Geese** flew over on Dec 14th. 17 **Greylags** visited Woolston Eyes in Feb with up to 2100 **Teal**. A female **Mandarin** was at Lymm (Dec 24th and Jan 28th). A **Ferruginous Duck** was reported from Woolston Eyes in mid-Dec. 423 **Tufted Ducks** were at that site with two **Scaup** in Dec and five in Feb. A redhead **Smew** visited Walton Lock on Jan 21st-22nd. A ringtail **Hen Harrier** was at Risley Moss on Dec 18th and six **Ruff** over there on Dec 17th was only the third year that this species has been recorded at the site. A **Mediterranean Gull** visited Woolston Eyes No3 bed in Jan. A **Short-eared Owl** was at Risley Moss in Dec. A **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was at Woolston Eyes in Jan with a **Water Pipit** seen on No1 bed. A female **Black Redstart** was at Widnes town centre (Jan 16th-21st). 600 **Fieldfares** and 800 **Redwings** were at Woolston Eyes in Dec. A **Chiffchaff** was at Woolston Eyes in Jan with three there in Feb. A **Firecrest** was reported at Risley Moss on Dec 1st. Two **Nuthatches** were ringed at Woolston Eyes (Feb 9th). 1000 **Reed Buntings** were reported roosting at Woolston Eyes No1 bed in Feb.

SPECIES HIGHLIGHTS

Wintering **Green Sandpipers** were at several sites including a small pond near Arley Green (Feb 20th), Chelford SQs (two on Jan 6th with singles on Jan 14th, 21st and Feb 16th), Frodsham (two in Jan), Gowy Valley (five on Dec 18th), Hockenhull Platts (Dec 3rd - the observer's first since Aug 1998),

Little Budworth (from Dec for the 10th winter), Moore NR (two on Jan 25th), Rostherne Mere (seven dates during the winter including two together on Dec 1st and Jan 14th), Stowford (three in Dec), Tatton Park (Dec 15th and Feb 6th – presumably one of the Rostherne birds) and Woolston Eyes (Dec 9th).

Stonechats were also very numerous with records during Dec from Burton Marsh (one/two all winter), Cat's Tor (pair), Chelford SQs (one/two irregularly all winter), Fiddler's Ferry (four declining to three birds in Jan and two in Feb), Frodsham (six but smaller numbers in Jan/Feb), Hale Shore (pair), Hooton Park (one), Norton Marsh, Runcorn (one), West Kirby (three) and Woolston Eyes (two into Jan). Other areas having records in Jan were Arpley/Moore area (up to six), Hilbre (one), Leasowe (pair) and Thurstaston (one) with singles at Inner Marsh Farm, Parkgate and Rookery Bridge, Sandbach during Feb.

During Dec/Jan **Blackcaps** visited gardens in Chester, Crewe (two), Great Sutton, Handforth, Kingsley, Knutsford (three), Macclesfield, Parkgate, Poynton, Prenton, Seacombe, Somerford and Upton.

Small numbers of **Tree Sparrows** were widespread (all Dec unless stated) including 20 at Bagmere, 44 at Checkley, 50 at Chester Zoo, 20 at Congleton on Feb 2nd, 88 at Crabmill Flash on Feb 20th (a high count for Sandbach Flashes), four at Hockenhull Platts, 17 at Hoylake fields on Jan 14th - a good Wirral count, up to 27 at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton in Jan (with 30 in Feb), 15 in a Mere garden, 22 at Moss Side in Jan, four at Redesmere, three at Styal, seven in a Swettenham garden, two in a Timbersbrook garden and 20 at Woolston Eyes on Jan 13th.

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Thanks/acknowledgements for Recent Reports go to:- S. & G.Barber, *Birdwatch* and *Birdwatching* magazines, J.Clarke, M.Duckham, K.Massey (Fiddler's Ferry reserve), P.Mathews, D. Morris (Tatton Park and Knutsford Moor LNR), T.Parker, B.Perkins (Sandbach Flashes), Rostherne Mere log, R.Smith (www.deeestuary.co.uk) and all the observers who submitted records for the year 2000 which I have used.

Ringers' Notebook

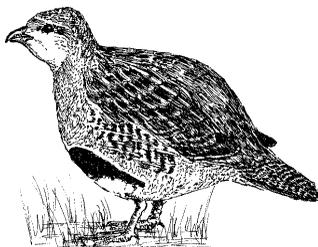
A commonly asked question at nearly every public ringing demonstration that I have attended is "how long do birds live for?". I am sure that most birders realise that small passerines, like the Robin which "has been coming into my garden for the last 20 winters", are actually more likely to survive for less than a year. However, if they can get through the first twelve months of life, then they can sometimes live for surprising lengths of time, as shown by the BTO's ringing database. The following longevity records refer to the time from first being ringed until the time of finding and so are not actual life spans. The most surprising small bird record belongs to a Blue Tit, which remarkably lasted for 21 years, one month and nine days before being re-trapped, I believe, at Spurn Head on the East Yorkshire coast. A close relative, the Long-tailed Tit, has, in contrast, a record of only eight years and 25 days – a record the ringers at Woolston Eyes nearly matched when a bird trapped there recently was found to have been originally ringed there just short of eight years before.

Although the above two examples are surprising given the lifestyles the species lead and the many predators that they have to contend with, it is the records of several of the small summer Euro-African migrants which intrigue me the most. For example, the Reed Warbler record stands at 12 years and 10 months, an amazing time span for a species weighing at most about 15 grams (prior to migration) and which has the added stress of a twice-yearly long distance migration between here and Africa as far south as Zambia to cope with. Likewise, the lighter and equally distant traveller, Willow Warbler has a record of 10 years and eight months, which is just as noteworthy. And what of that Robin mentioned rather jokingly at the start? Well, that record stands at a creditable eight years and six months; not bad for one of the most aggressive but charming of our native birds.

The longest survival rates though belong to our seabirds, which is not surprising when you consider the life that they lead often away from man, rarely ashore and with relatively few predators. Fulmar heads the list at 40 years, 11 months and 16 days. Second is Gannet at over 37 years, followed by Manx Shearwater at over 35 years and Common Tern at 33 years. So, given the right conditions and a certain amount of luck, it is possible for our wild birds to live relatively very long lives.

Swifts spend the winter in central Africa as far south and east as Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Recoveries of British and Irish-ringed birds have demonstrated the migration routes they take, with nearly all birds flying in a straight(ish) southerly direction to West Africa, before turning east and south towards their winter quarters. Not surprisingly, due to the nature of their lives and the part of the environment in which they spend most of their time, i.e. up in the sky, we get relatively few recoveries of ringed birds. It was therefore pleasing to receive news recently of a Swift ringed in May 1992 near Altrincham, aged as an adult, which was found close to the French Pyrenees in the Haute-Pyrénées département some six years later in May 1998. This was just the 125th foreign recovery out of some 170,000 birds ringed in this country over the past 90 years.

A declining species such as the Grey Partridge is, of course, an important one to study, but also a difficult one from a ringing point of view – they are so hard to catch! In 21 years ringing at Woolston Eyes only three have ever been caught, and nowadays it is a rare species on the reserve. In November 1999, I was fortunate enough to trap two birds together on No.1 bed and did not expect to ever catch up with either again. However, whilst going about my ringing duties there a few weeks ago, I came across a pile of freshly plucked feathers. Nestling in the middle of these was a ring, belonging to one of the two partridges mentioned; the feathers were just about 20 metres from the original catching spot. This was not too surprising a local recovery, as this species is sedentary, but it was odd that the ring was not still attached to the leg as when found in these circumstances they usually are. I imagined a fox sat there after a tasty dinner using a toothpick to remove the ring from around one of its fangs – what weird thoughts go through one's mind when you're out on your own!



Water Rail is another species that has recently received a lot of attention at Woolston over the past two winters as it is thought to have been under-recorded in the past. The study is again taking place on No.1 bed, or at least part of it, and is already showing some interesting results in terms of numbers and survival/site fidelity. During last winter and this, there have been over 40 captures of this species involving 22 individual birds. Only one of the adult birds caught this winter had been ringed here last year, so maybe they are not site faithful or perhaps this small population had a poor survival rate this year – these are the sort of questions that a well-targeted study of such a secretive species can help to answer. If nothing else, this study has shown there to be a larger population of Water Rails at Woolston in winter than previously recorded.

I mentioned in a previous Notebook the study of gulls and the reasons for doing so. These were their habit of travelling long daily distances allied with the scavenging nature of their lifestyle, both of which made it important for us to understand their movements because of their potential to spread disease. With the recent outbreak of foot-and-mouth, and some hard to explain incidents such as the isolated case in the middle of Dartmoor for example, I think the point has been well made. Let's all hope that there is a quick ending to this terrible outbreak as, amongst other things, ringing and the insight into birds' lives that it gives us is being severely restricted. In fact, the BTO has already informed us to refrain from some types of ringing. This is, needless to say, on most types of farmland a request that we are only too happy to comply with.

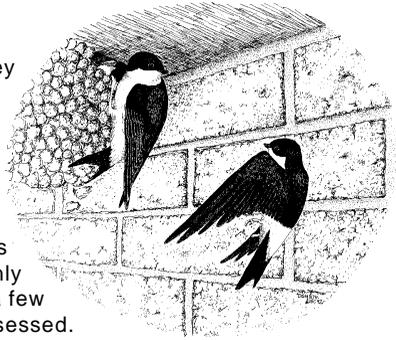
Chris Benson, 39 Redesmere Park, Urmston, Manchester M41 9ER

With regard to foot-and-mouth disease, it should be noted that the virus is apparently capable of spreading up to about 50 miles on the wind without the assistance of biological vectors. As such, wildlife, and in particular birds, may not be as responsible for the isolated cases on Dartmoor and in the Scottish Borders region as first thought. However, Chris's point regarding the potential for gulls to spread disease is still a valid one. My father-in-law, an animal feed and fertiliser salesman in Dumfries, often tells me that his client farmers believe that gulls transmit Salmonella from landfill sites to healthy livestock, in particular cattle. This may or may not be the case - I would be interested to hear from readers who have any information on this matter - but it does demonstrate the need for greater understanding of the role that gulls may play in spreading agricultural illnesses. In the same way that ignorance regarding the so-called link between tuberculosis and badgers has allowed extreme views to flourish regarding the acceptability of the badger as a British species (at least in pastoral farmed areas), many farmers are now calling for an annual "gull-cull". Perhaps, if demonstrated to be a significant vector of disease, this could be justified, but surely this can only be on the basis of scientifically valid studies such as those conducted by BTO ringers? I am no gull fanatic, but I would - in common with most birders I believe - not wish to see any bird species subject to routine population control unless it was for well-proven and justifiable reasons. Any thoughts? Ed.

Projects and Surveys

HOUSE MARTIN SURVEY 2000

This is the ninth year of the CAWOS House Martin Survey and I am pleased to report an increase in both the numbers of observers and breeding pairs. This is as a result of using both the standard survey sheets and those records sent via CAWOS recording forms at the end of the year. Given the increasing cause for concern given to this species and the fact that the RSPB has launched its own national survey, this increase is pleasing. My local colony at Poynton Pool, which has only been formed in the last three years, appeared to have a few nests but due to their location numbers couldn't be assessed.



A total of 15 observers submitted survey forms (compared to 22 in 1999) with a further nine observers submitting records direct to CAWOS. The number of breeding pairs increased from 310 in 1999 to at least 587 this year and the number of sites increased to 60 (compared to 38 colonies in 1999). Some sites are very close together and so it is easier to use the term sites rather than colonies when assessing numbers. The four main sites described in 1999 were again all detailed with a further five sites holding double figures. The figure given for the county population in the Cheshire & Wirral atlas is 5-8000 pairs and this now seems to be a gross overestimate for the current population, which I would put at 3-4000 pairs for the county.

Sites of Importance

Below is a table of the four main sites with the number of breeding pairs in each year from 1995-2000. The populations for the four sites appear to be reasonably stable with the exception of Winwick Hospital. Note: due to access restrictions, Styal Prison site is only monitored every other year, but with new management it should be monitored every year (the adjacent Bollin Cross School is included in the Prison totals).

Site	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Alderley Park	45	58	59	37	30	33
Styal Prison	73	n/a	151	n/a	124	126+
Toft Hall Farm	34	43	74	55	62	59
Winwick Hospital	n/a	111	101	75	38	22

AstraZeneca's Alderley Park site had its first returning birds on Apr 5th with c10 birds nest building on May 12th. Of the 51 nests counted only 33 were occupied with first broods and 17 nests had second broods. A post-breeding peak was 150+ on Aug 9th with some nests holding young into early Sept. The last birds at the site were seen on Oct 4th.

The number of nests at **Styal Prison** fell slightly to 105-109 pairs with 21 at Bollin Cross School, but this can possibly be attributed to movement to the adjacent sites. At least 44 additional pairs were located at three sites close to the Prison, which have not previously been counted, including 37 at The Ship Inn.

Toft Hall Farm had birds arrive on the early date of Apr 1st. By Jun 10th, 59 nests were occupied with most birds gone by Aug 14th. Only one second brood was noted on Aug 10th (40 in 1999), but the reasons for this lack of second broods are unclear. The last sighting here was on Oct 9th.

2000 has been another disastrous year at **Winwick Hospital**. Following the erection of 80 nests on the water tower in spring 1999, the Borough Council decided to allow the developers to demolish the tower in early 2000 just before the House Martins returned. The reasons for this change of heart by the Council are unclear and this spells the demise of this Site of Biological Importance. The 22 pairs that nested were on adjacent houses outside the development area. One can only hope that birds will continue to use this area.

Another area that has not previously been surveyed thoroughly was the Antrobus parish, which totals c16 sq km. B.Martin, who gave the total population for the parish as 141-144 pairs, visited a total of 23 sites in late July. Most sites held only a few pairs but double figures were at Crowley Hall Farm (10 pairs), Laurel Bank (18-19 pairs), Antrobus House Farm (13 pairs), Old Pole Farm (19 pairs) and Hammerton (16 pairs).

Several other colonies held double figures including Arclid SQ (c24pairs), Cock of Budworth Pub, Great Budworth (24 pairs), Hale, near Runcorn (11+ pairs), Mortimer Drive, Sandbach (13+ pairs), Prenton (10+ pairs) and 22+ pairs at Lyme Park (30 pairs in 1999 but 16 in years 1996-98).

Was it a successful breeding season?

A late Apr/early May arrival seemed to be typical for most colonies with the earliest arrival at Church Lane, Sandbach on Apr 14th. Most observers felt their birds had a good year including D.L.Colley-Davies's colony at Norley with its "Best (summer) for many years". S.Crabtree had a "very, very successful season and every year returning birds bring many, many more birds with them". Most small colonies had equal numbers of first and second broods. A colony at Chelford appeared to have some third broods.

The only negative comments came from A.Colebrook who stated that House Martins were "constantly battling for nest occupation with a large increase in the House Sparrow population". Untimely house maintenance resulted in disturbance to one pair of T.Broome's birds and the other pair deserted for no apparent reason. S.Blamire's birds didn't return for the second year running and P.Johnson had no nesting pairs for the first time in 25 years. A pair using a traditional site in Handforth will find their building demolished when they return this coming summer. Several sites had young still in the nest during late Sept/early Oct including a pair at Stockton Heath on Sept 30th and Parkgate on Oct 3rd. Most birds departed in the first few days of October.

Colony Age and Site

Only two sites had artificial nests occupied (Sandbach and Wilmslow) probably reflecting the lack of them, rather than the fact birds don't like using them. Many of the colonies are less than 10 years old and only two sites gave colony ages of over 20 years (Croft and Norley). House Martins have a distinct preference for the older buildings i.e. over 25 years, with a colony being used for at least 64 years just over the border in Greater Manchester. Two sites seem to be at odds with this trend. Firstly a site at Croft which has had pairs nesting for 25 years on a building only 30 years old and a Warrington site has a nine year old colony on a 15 year old building.

Maintenance on buildings seems to be a major factor in some sites' declining breeding population. A typical example is Padgate College where 15 pairs nested in 1990 but when painting/maintenance work was undertaken the population dropped to only four pairs this season. It's clear that any exterior work by the colony, particularly painting of fascias will result in a reduction of the number of breeding pairs. However the following tale from W.Allen should inspire all observers to take positive action in keeping House Martins on their buildings. In c1994 a pair nested for the first time but unfortunately a man working on the roof knocked the nest down. However, W.Allen continues "To my delight House Martins chose my house in 1999 and built a nest from scratch. It is wonderful that they have returned" and also adding "I have fitted a small shelf on the side of my house – very useful, no mess on the ground this year". I would certainly add my sentiments to those of W.Allen, who cares greatly for the House Martins but is also mindful of the slight inconvenience they can cause.

What will 2001 bring?

Because of my new role as Records Secretary I am having to give up organising the CAWOS House Martin Survey after only one year, but I am pleased to announce that Brian Martin has volunteered to take over. Brian has been a key observer over the years for a number of important sites within the Warrington area and again I am sure he will continue to place importance on the monitoring of Cheshire's significant colonies, whilst encouraging more people to take an interest in the fortunes of their local birds. Please feel free to photocopy the House Martin form enclosed with this edition of *Bird News* (or ring Brian for extra copies) and pass them on to your friends and neighbours within the county and so increase the interest in and take-up of the survey. Remember that *any* information is useful, even if just one visit is made to count the number of occupied nests (July is probably the best month). We would be grateful if you would check that your local library is

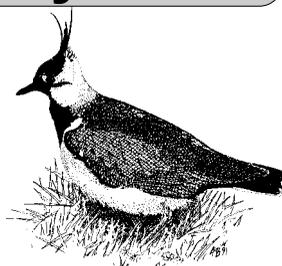
displaying the CAWOS House Martin poster and also look out for any notices in your area papers (please let Brian know). If you would like any further information or are able to offer advice or help, please contact **Brian Martin, 45 Albert Road, Grappenhall, Warrington, WA4 2PF. Tel: 01925 264251.**

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Contributors: C.Adams (Warrington), *Alderley Park Bird Report*, W.Allen (Great Sutton), D.Bissitt (Lyme Park), S.Blamire (Mere), A.M.Brooke (Wilmslow), R.P.Cockbain (Hale, nr Runcorn), A.Colebrook (Frodsham), D.L.Colley-Davies (Norley), S.Crabtree (Sandbach), A.Ford (Arclid), J.C.Gibson (Warrington), A.Grimes (Sandbach), P.Hall (Toft Hall Farm), G.Hodgson (Wirral), M.Hood (Mobberley), P.Johnson (Croft), A.W.Martin (Handforth), B.Martin (Styal, Antrobus, Great Budworth, Winwick), P.Oddy (Poynton), SECOS (Swettenham), A.Sparkes (Chelford), G.H.Rhodes (Parkgate), C.Wells (Burton) and from outside Cheshire & Wirral's recording area: J.B.Cooper (Stretford), J.Golding (Altrincham), D.Grellier (Bowden), S.Lievesly (Flixton) and J.Wilkinson (Altrincham) - these records have been passed on to the Greater Manchester County Recorder.

View from the Farmyard

Recent declines in the number of farms active in the British countryside are only a continuation of decreases that began two centuries or more ago. The enclosure of the commons began by depriving the commoners of their right to graze stock on common land; this was followed by hard times in corn growing. Mechanisation, depression and intensification caused later losses. Many farm buildings became surplus to requirements, of these some that became derelict during the depression of the 1920s and 1930s remained so, many until the 1960s or later. Only with the era of the car and commuting did the potential for redevelopment become an option. Further amalgamations of land have meant that farmhouses and their accompanying buildings have been released to feed an ever-growing demand for country homes (to justify their 4x4s) from the upwardly mobile. However demand is now outstripping supply and faced with the ability to claim much needed revenue, farmers are turning to redundant buildings for their salvation. Only when you look closely do you discover the problems this creates for the farmyard birds. I decided to look at the birds that frequent the farmyard and stable-yard here at Toft and assess the effect that such development would have upon our birds. Conversion from farm use to domestic can be dramatic and rapid. Plans seldom include any provision for wildlife, the once open and inviting stable doors and loft windows become sealed, double-glazed and impenetrable to the old residents.



Toft Hall's farm and stable-yard are now quite different from their heyday, when they were the bustling heart of the domain lands. The stables lie idle, the coach houses are already converted to a domestic dwelling, the potato store houses all kinds of bric-a-brac. Haylofts, grain lofts and shippens perform various insignificant functions, but still enable all kinds of wildlife to flourish under their Cheshire brick and slate protection. Cracked walls provide roosting sites for pipistrelle bats, small holes are used as nesting places for tits and House Sparrows, slightly larger holes are used by Starlings. Within the stables and old shippens Swallow nests cling to the loft beams, though typically House Martins, as their name would imply, reject the eaves of all the farm buildings choosing instead the eaves of Toft Hall and the farm dwellings.

On farms where no traditional buildings remain, but livestock is kept, Swallows do nest, though they seem to do so reluctantly and at a lesser density than in more traditional steads. Take away the farm animals, you lose the insects and the muddy gateways, which provide food and building materials, and so the Swallows soon drop in number. In yards where conversion to domestic dwellings is taking place walls are straightened and cracks filled, pitch-holes glazed and ventilation holes blocked. These ventilation holes were left open to allow the stored crops within to finish drying without developing mould. Since these stores have been superseded by more modern equivalents the ventilation holes have been neglected. The reduction of maintenance has permitted the vents to become the nests of Pied Wagtails, and are used to rear two broods annually. Also

Wrens have taken to nesting here though they reduce the opening to conceal the nest. Rotting window frames provide nest cracks, which are the choice of Blue and Great Tits; Treecreeper and Nuthatch also have used these sites.

Toft Hall Farm has no nesting Swift though I am sure many farmyards do entertain breeding birds. The roofs and walls provide the crevices and ledges required for nesting. Though development of our yard would not pose a problem, many other such enterprises must deprive Swifts of suitable nesting opportunities. Barn Owl has in the past used the farm buildings but this was many years ago. Odd birds however have visited; if ever two were to attempt breeding it is critical that these buildings should be available, but once converted to a dwelling they are lost forever. Blackbirds, Collared Doves and Mistle Thrushes nest on beams, treating them as the tree boughs they once were. Spotted Flycatcher uses almost any available ledge, window sills, gate hinges and holes left by missing half bricks. In fact almost every nook and cranny of these buildings must at some time have given shelter to one of these visiting species. The continuing sanitisation of the rustic dwelling and accompanying buildings is, and I'm sure always will be, a major loss to mankind as well as birdlife, as this sharing had enabled myself and many others to enjoy close observation and an almost symbiotic existence with some of our commonest species.

Our excellent partridge-friendly set-aside has fallen victim to the bad weather of the last six months. Due to the flooding of several acres of corn land, the set-aside land has been called back into production and sown on February 22nd with wheat seed, which should have been sown last October. The flooded land has now been entered into set-aside, this is allowed due to a special dispensation given for 2001 only. The drains in this land are working at full capacity and will by next autumn have removed the surface water. Approximately three acres are under water and are now used by various gulls and ducks for bathing and daytime roosts. With a little luck the exposed mud in spring may attract wading birds, but with so many similar floods the competition for their patronage is great.

Foot-and-mouth is a disease that sends shivers down the spines of livestock, men and farmers. The consequences of an outbreak on this farm will be that we shall cease to trade, and my colleagues and I will be out of work. It is possible that this could be the last 'View from the Farmyard', before I join you on the other side of the yard gate. Could birds spread the virus? In the 1967 outbreak people started to look at statistics relating to the methods of transfer. These pointed to many different methods mainly human related, but of 540 looked at, 88 pointed to birds. Gulls and Starlings were the main culprits identified, in fact Starlings were believed to have been the primary source. The virus was found to survive for 91 hours on the feet of birds and for more than 26 hours in their stomachs. This was considered ample time for migrating birds to spread the disease across the continent of Europe. Will birds be culled to prevent the spread? The answer to this is most likely 'no' as others moving in to the empty territories quickly replace birds removed by culling. And should this be adopted and completed, attention would turn next to man. Would culling be so acceptable in that species? Pass me the gun!!

My thoughts recently were taken back several years to an incident, which took place close to my house. My attention was drawn to the unusual drumming of a Great Spotted Woodpecker. Instead of the hollow woody sound one would expect, this 'pecker was making a most metallic sound. The pace of the strikes was at the normal rate but beaten out upon a metal stanchion at the top of an electricity pole. Possibly the bird was of West Indian extraction, but more likely it was the novelty of the sound which the drummer was hoping would gain an edge over its rivals. The reason for this train of thought is the proposed erection of a mobile phone aerial upon the farm. Some months ago I was fortunate to be travelling along the A556 as an aerial disguised as a tree was being lifted into place. Whenever I have a passenger in the car I challenge them to spot the odd-tree-out, perhaps 50% get it right. What I wonder do birds make of these trees, excellent for roosting Buzzards, challenging for woodpeckers. Placed by water they could be perfect for Osprey nesting, in the edge of a wood they would prove a barren waste of space with no rot, no insects, and no available nesting holes. A good songpost though for those Starlings that have mastered the song of the mobile phone.

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

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"Is the wind that carries the foot-and-mouth virus five, 10 or 15 miles, the same wind that carries pollen from GM crops 300 metres?"

Letter from the *Guardian*

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.

LOCAL PATCH

Perhaps like me you are rather suspicious when you pick up a birdwatching magazine and read an article by someone describing his or her local patch. These suspicions are heightened when you read the author's name and realise he or she is an expert birdwatcher and describes the patch as really quite normal. Read further on and you find that it is on the coast of East Anglia or some other hot spot and is full of rarities. Casual give-away sentences such as "Watching the Hawfinches at the bottom of my garden my attention was distracted by an over-flying Rough-legged Buzzard, followed by several Temminck's Stints" only confirm the impression that this patch is in no way typical. My local patch is not like this. It is ordinary; it has a fair range of reasonably common birds - and rarities are what they should be - rare. Where is it? It is a stretch of land alongside the River Dane and the Trent and Mersey Canal to the north-west of Middlewich (SJ696672) - from the A530 up most of the way to Whatcroft Hall. I walk along, usually with my two dogs, several times a week every week of the year except when we are on holiday.

Starting from the road and walking along the towpath the first point of note is the Middlewich tip - or Household Recycling Centre, as these places are now generally known. The men who work there are bird-friendly and have put up bird feeders and a bird table, which are probably used far more after closing hours. Beyond the skips is an area of rough grass, grown over the old tip. A few years ago there was a plan to "improve" this by removing all the dense vegetation which attracts Whitethroat and Sedge Warbler in summer, but happily this seems to have been shelved.

Then the canal goes over the Dane on an aqueduct and through fields on either side until after a quarter of a mile we come to a stretch where the canal broadens into a subsidence flash. Croxton Flash, to give it its official name - Swan Pit or the Boats' Graveyard are local ones - is very deceptive. It is deep enough in parts for grebes to dive in it, yet in other sections it is so shallow that Coots and gulls can stand up in it. This causes great amusement when unwary boaters try to enter and end up by getting stuck. It is fringed by reeds that spread along the canal, though they are from time to time cut back to allow boats through. At present there are several stretches along the canal with good habitat for Reed Warblers but they will soon lose it for a while until the reeds grow back again. Opposite the flash is a lagoon. In case you think that Middlewich is in some sort of tropical island paradise let me explain that this is a mud lagoon, a sort of mini Frodsham Marsh, where dredgings from the canal are dumped. The rich silt produced gives rise to an equally dense cover of vegetation beloved by various warblers and other small birds.

After the flash, river and canal run very roughly parallel for several miles, despite the meanders of the former. The Dane is said to be one of the fastest flowing rivers in England, and certainly rises very quickly in times of heavy rain - it was as much as a quarter mile wide at the end of October last year when it flooded the surrounding fields. The strong currents continually nibble away at the banks and are gradually taking away the willows which are not being replaced - thus making matters worse. It is significant that there are no settlements actually on the banks of the Dane from its source until Northwich is reached - presumably the first settlers soon found themselves swept away and retreated to higher ground.

The canal at this point is fringed by ancient hawthorn and elder trees, much beloved of many species of bird in the autumn. After about a mile it enters a narrow strip of woodland, probably planted at the time it was built. On one bank are several places which were the sites of old quarries where sand and clay were dug out; one of them has been transformed by a local boat club into a picnic site. It looks attractive but I do regret the loss of much dense scrub which must have been a good foraging and breeding point for many species of animal. Once it has left the woodland my patch ends and the canal, not now always parallel to the river, runs through the hamlet of Whatcroft and round to Billinge Flashes.

From many places along the canal I am conscious that although it is a very quiet and unspoilt area, it is only a narrow stretch between two busy roads taking traffic from Middlewich to Northwich. Indeed, depending on the direction of the wind, traffic up the M6 can clearly be heard as can machinery on the industrial estate at Winsford. However, it is a peaceful place, frequented mainly by dog walkers, a few fishermen and boaters. The vast majority of the fields are under permanent pasture and because of this there is little change throughout the year. Cuttings for silage are frequent and are inevitably followed by the slurry spreader. I am sure that there is an excellent logical reason for it but it does seem to a non-farmer very odd that nowadays we keep the cattle indoors most of the year and spend much time spreading muck which in past times the cattle deposited themselves - the cow-pat is an endangered species in this part of the world!

Apart from the slurry machine the only distraction is in late autumn when brave men on the Bostock estate defend Middlewich against what must be an enormous attack by Pheasants on the town's north-western flank, dispersing the local corvids and Woodpigeons far and wide as they shoot.

Enough of the area - what of the birds? As I said before, we don't here have many rarities but a good cross-section of many common species. At least one pair, or sometimes two pairs of Great Crested Grebe nest most years on Croxton Flash, and when the birds swim into the canal they can be seen at really close quarters as they bob up beside you. Cormorants fly up the river and roost in the trees, though not in great enough numbers to concern the fishermen; Grey Heron are frequent visitors while the pair of Mute Swans which usually breeds largely ignores the invitation of my dogs to have a barking match! Canada Geese occasionally appear; Mallard are resident, but other ducks make rare appearances.

Sparrowhawks can be seen dashing across the canal, while Kestrels give a greater opportunity for a more prolonged look whilst they hover in search of prey. However, the most interesting raptor to have appeared on the scene recently is Buzzard, in line with its spread across the county. At least one pair breeds nearby; soaring birds appear now in every month and last August I watched four young try out their wings from the branches of a dead tree. Pheasants, some genuinely wild and others bred for shooting, inhabit the woodland and very occasionally Grey Partridge are flushed from the grassland. On the flash Coot frequent the open water while Moorhen scurry through the reed-beds. Lapwing used to be more frequent than they are now; Snipe lurk on the banks in autumn while Common Sandpiper are regular on spring and autumn passage. Occasionally a flock of Curlew, presumably from the roost towards Northwich, lands in the fields, while in recent years a pair of Oystercatchers has spent a brief time at the flash in spring.

Gull-watchers would not find the area rich, though there is much passage over with small flocks moving between wetlands in the south and middle of the county. Black-headed Gulls often roost on the flash while Common Gulls are regular in the fields in autumn. Woodpigeons are one of the most commonly seen birds here and a few Stock Doves are often in the wooded parkland on the Bostock estate to the west of the river. Cuckoos are rarer than they used to be while Tawny Owl and Little Owl can be heard if not seen.

All three types of woodpecker are present, Lesser Spotted appearing almost anywhere in winter - the other day one was on a telegraph pole near the main road. Skylark is another bird much less common than formerly, while on a good day when the midges are out all three hirundines plus Swift can be seen hunting over the flash. Sand Martin have in the past prospected for nests and certainly nest higher up the Dane, while Kingfisher are frequent and must nest in the area, though I have never actually found a nest - possibly because I haven't looked too closely for fear of disturbing the birds.

Pied Wagtail used to nest in an old boat on the flashes until it crumbled into the water, and Grey Wagtail have fed young down by the Dane. Dunnock, Wren and Robin are plentiful, as is Blackbird. Our two resident thrushes exist in small numbers, while in autumn and winter the area is enlivened by large flocks of Redwing and Fieldfare, mostly the latter, which feed on the haws and elderberries along the canal.

And what of warblers? Blackcap and Chiffchaff, together with Willow Warbler, are present along the stretch while the Waterways Breeding Bird Count usually gives me a maximum of seven singing Whitethroat. Along the reed-beds and the fringes of the flash are many Reed Warblers with smaller numbers of Sedge Warbler and Reed Bunting. Blue, Long-tailed and Great Tits are common, with a few Goldcrest, Treecreeper, Nuthatch and Coal Tit in the more wooded area. Willow Tit seem to be no longer present.

Numerous Jackdaws, Magpies and Carrion Crows can be seen feeding in the fields, often with Rooks from the rookery in the woods on the Bostock estate across the river; Jays inhabit the wooded margins of the canal. As for finches - Greenfinch, Goldfinch and Chaffinch are frequent, Bullfinches are scarce but their squeaky call often indicates their presence, while Tree Sparrows are still present near the flash in the summer and must breed there.

So what do we have - an attractive, peaceful area with a good number of common birds. Ideal for the birdwatcher not in a hurry who wants to learn the basics. And as for rarities - well, over the last 20 years I have had Raven, Goosander, Hobby, Water Rail, Grasshopper Warbler, Mandarin and Green and Wood Sandpiper. Not exactly Norfolk - but not bad either!

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

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

With the help of BTO/CJ Christmas Bird Count sponsors, we raised £99 for the British Trust for Ornithology research project into the decline of the Blackbird, and this is how the total grew.

Our garden bird count began very well with sixteen species attracted to the garden on the first day. We usually put out a variety of foods, nuts, seeds and fruits, but we targeted the morning gull flight which goes overhead to the estuary by adding large, and therefore very visible, slices of soaked bread. We expected to attract a few Black-headed Gulls, but the Common Gull that came with them was an unlooked for bonus. Despite the name, they are not generally common, especially in gardens.

The treat on this day was the flock of six Long-tailed Tits; not a bird we see often and therefore a welcome addition to our list. Long-tailed Tits are so attractive that for me any sighting makes a red-letter day. The other species we counted were our garden regulars, though there are some surprises here too in that now we see more Goldfinches in our garden than we do House Sparrows.

We count the birds coming to the garden daily, to record weekly totals for a long running BTO Garden BirdWatch survey, and we average 17 or 18 species a week in the winter months. We hoped to reach 20 over this two week count, but knew that we would need cold weather to bring in the less usual visitors. When the weather turned chill on Christmas morning and Boxing Day we saw the Crow tempted down to food as well as Song Thrush and Wren.

But it was the snow of December 28th which made a real difference, with Pied Wagtail on that day. I often hear Pied Wagtails around the village, and I see them trotting over the rooftops, but they come to our garden only in bad weather to take seed, especially sunflower hearts. Over the next couple of days we saw flocks of Scandinavian thrushes over the field, and were particularly lucky to have a Redwing come into the garden on the 29th, attracted by the last few berries remaining on the cotoneaster.

These were right at the branch tips and had been left by the Blackbirds as out of reach - the branches wouldn't bear their weight, but the smaller and lighter Redwing benefited. However, we found the only way we could supplement the food of the Song Thrush was to provide fruit. When we ran out of apple cores and bruised apples we put out some dried fruit, soaked first in warm water to plump it up. The Song Thrush came specially for this, but on the 31st a Fieldfare came to take some too, our twenty second species.

Later that day we spotted our twenty third species, a male Blackcap, which came to the peanut feeder, and which



has been a daily visitor ever since. If you check your bird books, you will see that the Blackcap is a warbler; and a summer visitor to Britain, unless your book is a very recent one. Only over the past few years have Blackcaps been recorded here regularly in winter and research has shown that these are not our British breeding Blackcaps, but birds from the Continent, especially from Germany. Whilst 'our' Blackcaps still migrate south to overwinter in the western Mediterranean, or even as far as tropical West Africa, the Continental Blackcaps have migrated north-west rather than south, to take advantage of Britain's winters made more equable by the warming of the Gulf Stream. The benefits to the Blackcaps which winter here are, a shorter less energy sapping and less dangerous migration, plus the opportunity to return to the breeding area earlier in the spring. By doing so they are able to select the most favourable breeding sites and to start breeding earlier, thus giving their young a better chance of survival. We are watching evolution in progress.

One aspect of the cold weather was the increase in the numbers of birds we saw at any one time. On the three snowbound mornings at first light there were thirteen Blackbirds on the lawn at the same time as three Robins and a Song Thrush. Our finch flock grew to 24 birds, with a dozen Greenfinches and six Goldfinches. On one of the days we saw two Song Thrushes. Over the field we saw Heron, Buzzard and Snipe, with both the fox and the Sparrowhawk hunting in and around the snow covered vegetation. So the changing weather made it an interesting time and boosted our total of species seen.

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

VALENTINE'S DAY

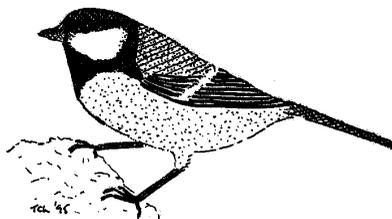
February 14th is traditionally the day for expressions of love but I was surprised to see 'my' regular pair of Nuthatches inspecting the garden nest box. Both entered a couple of times which is very encouraging. That they were able to do this when the box had been built for Blue Tits is due to their activities in 2000. Last year I was gardening when I heard faint tapping. I immediately got excited thinking of a possible Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Even allowing for dimming eyesight I was unable to locate the source which sounded distant and hollow. Eventually I realised it was coming from the inside of the nest box and I saw that the standard Blue Tit hole had been enlarged. After a while a Nuthatch emerged and from then on I watched as over the next few days both birds moulded the entrance with mud to an oval just matching their body shape. I resisted the urge to look inside the box whilst nest building and nesting took place and in retrospect I'm very glad that I did.

As soon as the young had fledged I opened the box and was thrilled at what I saw. I hadn't known what to expect as I'd not read any literature but I suppose I imagined something similar to a tit family nest. At first the hinged lid didn't swing up easily but when it did I saw that not only was the inside of the entrance hole moulded with mud like the outside but that the lid had also been sealed to the box top with mud. The most surprising sight however was the nest itself. It was perfectly clean with no droppings at all and consisted of layer upon layer of the finest slivers of silver birch bark laid upon each other to a depth of several inches. My dilemma now is should I remove last year's nest in the interest of hygiene or leave it as a good base in anticipation of a repeat performance this year. Anyway, it is good to feel that spring is just around the corner.

Richard Gabb, 72 Chester Road, Poynton, Cheshire

GARDEN BIRDWATCHING

This winter I have spent much more time watching the birds in the garden and it has proved to be a wonderful season. In addition to sunflower hearts, peanuts, bread, cheese, sultanas, shredded suet, table seed, etc I put up two Nuttery cake feeders, one with peanut cake in and the other with seed or insect cake and a third cake hanging from a branch away from the feeders. To my delight there have been three Blackcaps overwintering, one male and two females and they have spent hours in the feeders. Starlings and Blue, Great,



Coal and Long-tailed Tits have all enjoyed the cakes, the long tails of the latter not being a deterrent when they go inside the feeders. The plumage of Starlings is stunning and I love having them in the garden (only six or seven). Greenfinches, Siskins, Goldfinches and Nuthatches go for the sunflower hearts and a Robin was on the feeder a few times. Siskins as well as Goldfinches eat niger seed.

When the weather was cold I put out some apples and two Redwings came down. Starlings and Blackbirds liked the apples, but once the weather warmed up they left them alone. A Reed Bunting appeared on the coldest days. Chaffinches seem to feed on the ground most of the time, whereas Greenfinches eat from the feeders, off the ground, on the bird table and on the ground feeder. Dunnocks often dash back into cover after feeding. A Wren was preening on top of a plant pot holder while a Song Thrush nervously searched for food. Song Thrushes always seem to be chased off by Blackbirds when the two meet. Jackdaws are occasional visitors. A Treecreeper unexpectedly landed on the trunk of the apple tree, made three circuits of the trunk and then flew off.

There is a sort of hierarchy on the ground feeder. Some of the birds manage to share their space, but the Woodpigeon is not amongst them. It takes over the feeder and usually chases off other birds, including Magpies. Collared Doves can also be aggressive to others, but do sometimes share. Three House Sparrows, two males and a female spent the winter in a berberis bush near to the bird table. One of the males landed in a rowan tree and I watched while the other male threat-displayed on a branch below, with his tail cocked up and his wings partially spread out.

Two nest boxes have been taken over by Blue Tits, although a Nuthatch surveyed one of the boxes. I watched one of the Blue Tits displaying in front of the box, but I'm not sure whether he was trying to attract a female or trying to discourage other males. A male Blackbird displayed on the lawn a few feet from the back door to a female in a conifer nearby. A male Great Spotted Woodpecker has been down to the ground feeder a few times, eating the shredded suet. A Sparrowhawk has been around occasionally but I've not seen it catch anything this winter.

Now it's spring, the garden is alive with bird song and a new season has begun.

Hazel Raw, 35 Beggarmans Lane, Knutsford, Cheshire, WA16 9BA

BIRDS OF THE WIDER COUNTRYSIDE REPORT - ON THE 'NET'

The BTO/JNCC partnership produce a report that brings all of the known facts from BTO surveys together in one report. This summarises the current status of the UK's common birds and reports population changes and findings on breeding success. The first report was produced in 1996 and 1997, but now the latest version is on the Internet; it will be continually updated as the survey results are produced. It is the most comprehensive documentation of our knowledge of the health of the UK's birds and is readily available to all on the web. Check it out at: www.bto.org/birdtrends.



British Trust for Ornithology

EXCERPTS FROM THE KOS WEB SITE

24th JANUARY The cold snap lasted for more than two weeks with sub-zero temperatures at night followed by mainly sunny days with the temperature rising to just a few degrees above zero. The fields in Mobberley quickly dried out giving our nearest farmer chance to plough 30 acres and sow his winter barley at long last, but at the other side of the village, whilst they were also able to get their tractor onto the beet field, the crop had frozen into the ground, so it still had to be lifted by hand! In a pasture next to the beet we noticed a small flock of 10 Lapwings accompanied by no less than 44 Golden Plovers. These birds used to roost a couple of miles away at Ringway but the traditional site has been covered by the new runway and I've not seen a flock this big for a number of years. Tatton Mere all but froze over completely, only a few square yards on the west side remained free of ice and attracted a large concentration of wildfowl, mainly Mallard, Tufted Ducks and Mute Swans. A Kingfisher flew low over Knutsford Moor but was unable to find any open water and made off towards the Birkin; whilst in the alders surrounding the Moor the more usual Siskins were joined by a flock of c.40 Lesser Redpolls, a high count for a species that seems to have declined considerably of late. A spring surfacing on the Moor close to the Pumping Station never freezes no matter how cold it gets. It runs for only about 150 yards before running into the main Mere and is the most reliable site in the area for Water Rails, forced out of the reeds in their search for food during periods of very cold weather; we counted five birds on one particularly frigid morning.

7th MARCH A dramatic change in the weather has taken place over the past 24 hours. After a settled period of 10 days or so with high barometric pressure and easterly winds, we now have a current outside temperature of 14°C, in contrast to recent daytime highs of only three or four degrees. As the wind changed direction we had a few hours of very strong gusts, this always scatters a sprinkling of seeds beneath the alder trees on Knutsford Moor and invariably encourages any finches present to feed on the ground rather than from the trees themselves. This proved to be the case today and a mixed flock of some 40 birds, Goldfinches, Chaffinches, Siskins and Lesser Redpolls gave us excellent views, against a dark background, rather than the usual treetop silhouettes.

Tony Usher, 113 Town Lane, Mobberley, Cheshire, WA18 7EU. www.10x50.net

EXCERPTS FROM CAWOS DISCUSSION FORUM (www.cawos.org)

NEW HOBBY? When I find the time I must scan through BWP to see if I have witnessed some important behaviour never recorded before! Our regular male Sparrowhawk, obviously bored with his more usual occupation of terrorising our garden birds (he'd just made a meal of one of the six Robins in the garden at the moment) has decided to take up ice-skating. His first attempt on our frozen pond was done without his usual panache, as he desperately tried to regain his balance after skidding halfway across the pond. He ended up standing at the back of the pond trying to look nonchalant, whilst balancing on one foot (the other warmly tucked up). I had fully expected to see him crash on to his rump with wings outstretched trying to save himself.

Sheila Blamire

RAPTOR THEORY I have a raptor theory.... one that makes me feel better for missing a higher % of raptors on the Red Rocks list than anything else. I've missed Honey Buzzard (4), Montagu's Harrier (2), Gyr Falcon (1), Red Kite (2) and Rough-legged Buzzard (1). I do better with Ospreys and Marsh Harriers. Anyway - here is the theory: I do most of my birding looking for passerines.... that means looking at my feet and the bottom of bushes a lot, usually in the early hours of the morning. Big BOPs (birds of prey) usually go through in the afternoon in bright sunny weather. I think the reason I do pick up Ospreys is that they scare the hell out of the gulls and waders when I'm sea-watching, so I look up! (Ospreys put the gulls up in just the same way as Bonxies!) Also I was once called by Steve Williams from Hilbre who said "Look out of your attic window - there's an Osprey going past". He was right!

Jane Turner

WINTERING TWITE IN THE NORTH-WEST

Often described as "drab and featureless", the Twite wouldn't seem to have much going for it. However, Britain's Twite are of international importance as they represent a large part of the European population of this largely Asiatic species: those which breed in the south Pennines and in North Wales are the most south-westerly Twite in the world! Twite formerly bred on many of the Lancashire and Cheshire mosses; breeding information for Cheshire and North Wales has often been very thin, but does this mean a genuine absence of birds or under recording of an often elusive bird? Even less is known of the origins and distribution of wintering Twite in the north-west: a flock was first found on the Dee estuary in the 1950s, but what is the origin of these birds and how have their numbers changed with time? I am trying to gather together wintering information for Cheshire and North Wales to try to get a better understanding of these problems. I would greatly appreciate any unpublished observations, especially with regard to habitat usage, counts or changes in status; old observations are also extremely useful. Any help would of course be fully acknowledged. I hope you can help!

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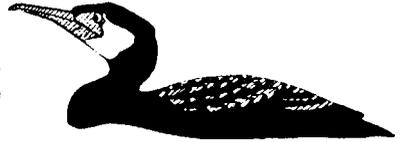
Said a very indignant young Twite,
"I'm not drab and my features are bright,
I've a rump that is pink,
Which is cool, don't you think,
And my streaks are a wonderful sight".

Hazel J Raw



THE POWER OF THE BIRD LOBBY!

I was intrigued to read in the magazine *Hooked 2000*, published by Anglian Water, an advertisement from the Salmon & Trout Association headed 'Fish-eating birds - the way ahead'. "Following the long-awaited publication of the three-year Government research programme on fish-eating birds in September 1999, the Association welcomed the Minister's statement that fish-eating birds can cause 'serious damage to fisheries'." They went on to say that "Fish-eating birds impact on all species of fish, not just salmon and trout, and we decided that we would probably achieve more by a unified approach with the 12 other angling and fisheries organisations represented by the Moran Committee. That Committee decided that it would be sensible to first meet with the RSPB to try and agree a joint programme of action to put to the Government. This approach recognises practical politics - that given the power of the bird lobby, any changes to legislation or licensing are unlikely to succeed if opposed by the RSPB." A small delegation from the Moran Committee did meet with the RSPB and it was agreed that an action plan was necessary with the following objectives: protection of sustainable fish populations and maintenance of sustainable populations of piscivorous birds. It was also agreed that we should urge MAFF to undertake a review of the conditions for granting licences by June 2000.



What really struck me was, and I repeat, "**given the power of the bird lobby**" - I don't know about you but I had never realised what power we have before! I suppose I have always thought more about the power of fisheries to influence Government, rather than birders. It is certainly a gratifying thought that these same anglers view us as 'having clout'.

But the other thing to leave me feeling more optimistic was the positive approach being taken by Anglian Water to minimise the impact of Cormorants as reported in the News Update section in *Hooked 2000*: 'Cormorants: what next?':

"The long-awaited results from the Government's £1 million three year research programme were released last autumn and reinforced our view that our strategy to minimise the impact of these birds on our fisheries was the correct approach. The national decline in the number of Cormorants has continued and has coincided with a continuous fall at Rutland Water.... The fifth year of collecting data from our angling returns shows continued success in increasing the proportion of stocked trout caught by anglers and reducing the proportion of fish damaged, but not eaten, by Cormorants.

We have changed the size distribution of the trout we stock to minimise their chances of being caught by Cormorants while avoiding increasing the cost to anglers any more than necessary. We have learned a great deal about this and will be making further changes again this year, trying to maintain catches close to the current levels, which are better than in any previous season. Catch rates average over three per return and the proportion of 2lbs fish at Grafham, Rutland and Ravensthorpe last season was over 40% - more than twice the proportion of bigger fish than ten years ago!"

Congratulations to Anglian Water for what seems such a simple, but effective step to take, which is obviously keeping anglers happy, whilst not engaging the wrath of 'the powerful bird lobby'!!

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

CORMORANTS MADE INTO SCAPEGOATS

Conservationists Call for Scientific Studies to Determine True Causes of Fish Declines, New York, July 2000

Cormorants are also coming under fire across the other side of the Atlantic - I found this hard-hitting report about the National Audubon Society announcing its opposition to a national control programme for U.S. Double-crested Cormorant populations in light of the lack of evidence to support such action. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has announced plans to carry out an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and management plan for cormorants. Audubon's 550,000 members call on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to deny requests to remove legal protection for the cormorant, while conducting the proper environmental reviews to determine the true causes of fish declines. Audubon's announcement follows the criminal shooting of about 500 protected Double-crested Cormorants, several dozen Ring-billed Gulls and their chicks by trespassers on a National Wildlife

Refuge in Saginaw Bay, Michigan this June. If apprehended, the killers face fines of up to \$5,000 each and up to six months in prison. Last fall ten men, who killed 1,000 nesting cormorants on Lake Ontario's Little Galloo Island, were sentenced to up to six months probation and \$2,500 fines. "Where fish stocks have dropped, the cormorant makes a convenient scapegoat," said Dr. Frank Gill, National Audubon's Senior Vice President of Science. "To allow a hunt based on emotional reaction rather than facts would be a return to the bad old days when herons, egrets and other fish-eating birds were regularly persecuted. This would open the door to the killing of other non-game birds like the Common Loon and other species of special concern."

It is Audubon Society policy that all wildlife management decisions must be based on credible scientific evidence. When supported by strong scientific data, Audubon does not oppose control of wildlife populations that negatively impact ecosystems and threaten the health and survival of other native wildlife species. "We recognise that concerns have been expressed by some regarding the potential impacts of the increase in numbers of Double-crested Cormorants on sports fisheries", said National Audubon Director of Bird Conservation Dr. Jeff Wells. "However, available scientific evidence has shown little or no impact of cormorant depredation on populations of sports fish in virtually every case. If, after scientific review, management of Double-crested Cormorants is warranted to support overall health of the ecosystem and other bird species, then techniques designed to target only those populations in need of management should be implemented." Wells continued "Based on current evidence, we expect that such cases will be uncommon and will occur in very limited areas. We would - as we have in New York State - support effective techniques like harassment, egg oiling, egg addling, and nest removal that can be targeted at a particular site or colony as the best control options in these few cases." While anecdotal observations have suggested that cormorants may have an impact on fish in certain limited areas, no studies have been carried out which use the proper scientific techniques to measure the causes of fish mortality.

Audubon calls on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to fill the knowledge gap and urge federal and state wildlife agencies to design and implement studies that make use of fish tagging techniques to assess the level of mortality to fish populations attributable to various factors. The Audubon Society further suggests that, within the EIS, determination of appropriate population levels of Double-crested Cormorants should be based not only on potential impacts on fisheries but should also consider positive and negative impacts on other wildlife species and overall ecosystem health. Audubon contends that, considering the growing, well-documented increase in ecotourism and recreational wildlife watching, there are opportunities in many areas to generate millions of dollars for local economies based on wildlife viewing opportunities at colonial waterbird colonies. These benefits must be assessed in an EIS to fairly consider the issue of cormorant impact. In addition, Audubon urges that the EIS strongly encourage fish-stocking practices known to minimise short-term localised predation by cormorants on recently released fish such as deep-water releases and night-time releases.

It is imperative that management actions follow an adaptive approach with careful, well-designed monitoring of the cormorant population, the impacted fish, wildlife, or ecosystem and other species within the area. Audubon supports the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in their development of an EIS that reviews not only cormorants, but also the following impacts: changes in the dynamics of sports fisheries, stocking programs, non-native fish introduction, zebra mussels, and changes in water quality. These issues must be considered as parts of the management picture before control of Double-crested Cormorants takes place. National Audubon Society hopes to develop education and outreach programmes designed to raise awareness of the issue in local communities.

I wonder if there are lessons to be learnt between UK and USA? Both from the fisheries side as well as the powerful bird lobby (which probably doesn't come any bigger than the National Audubon Society!).

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

A Cormorant knocked on the door
Of a farm where he'd been once before.
"Can I stand by your fire
To get myself drier?
Outstretched in the cold makes me sore.

Hazel J Raw



Membership News

Welcome to the following new members: Mr and Mrs Mayers, Wendy Allen, Brian Payne, Mr and Mrs JG Dawson, Graham Jones, Brian Baird, Dr CV Howard, George Higham, Andy Harmer, WJ Kavanagh and Janet McSwiney. Miss AM Shore, Mrs Bartlett, Dr Lok and Peter Swallow have resigned, the two latter on moving to East Yorkshire.

Frodsham Marsh - In January I had a request from a farmer on Frodsham Marsh. He asked us to remind birdwatchers to keep to public footpaths or roads while birdwatching on the Marsh. He contacted me after an incident in which some birdwatchers (whom he fully accepts might not have been CAWOS members) accidentally or otherwise disturbed shooting by wandering off the footpaths. He understands that many birdwatchers are unsympathetic to shooters but points out that shooting represents a valuable source of revenue to farmers on the Marsh and were it not for that income some farmers might have to resort to a more intensive style of farming which would be detrimental to birds. Please respect other users of the Marsh and if you are in any doubt of public rights of way find them on the Landranger or Explorer OS maps.

Council met on 11th January. Much of the matter discussed is referred to elsewhere in this issue, but other points were:

- CAWOS members would do pilot monitoring of bird species in 2001 on three LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) farms at Chelford, Weston and Sound.
- a meeting would be held to discuss the computerisation of records.
- CAWOS would have a stand at the February High Tide Birdwatch at Parkgate (note: it produced at least two new members).
- the financial plan for 2001 was accepted. A slight decline in income from members would, it was hoped, be more than offset by money from the Gift Aid scheme (note: so far £325.71 has already been received from the Inland Revenue).

The **Annual General Meeting** was held on 2nd March. The Chairman's and Secretary's reports appear below. The officials of the Society were re-elected, as were five of the six ordinary Council members. Paul Brewster withdrew because of work commitments and Richard Gabb was elected in his place. During the meeting we had a short talk by Roy Leigh, on behalf of the Cheshire and Wirral Raptor Study Group, explaining the Buzzard Tagging Project, and a talk with slides by David Cummings about the work of the Swan Study Group and David Cookson demonstrated their computerised ringing data system. Both these groups had received grants from CAWOS towards their work.

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

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2nd MARCH 2001

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

CAWOS Council has continued to seek ways to make this an attractive, worthwhile and viable society. Discussions and resulting actions from the 'Way Forward' project initiated last year have continued and thanks go to Bob Anderson for his analysis of the recent Membership Survey [report in *Bird News* 47]. Although overall there seems to be a fairly high level of satisfaction with the Society's service to its members, there is still much to be done, particularly regarding the involvement of such a dispersed membership, and with only limited scope for face-to-face contact.

It was particularly relevant to read a letter from another county society in the *Birding Press* recently, which stated that the main challenge for bird societies is to ensure they can attract an active membership. For it is the members on the ground assisting national organisations with survey work, providing data for the bird report, managing reserves and tackling a myriad of other activities who remain the backbone of birding in this country. This sounds rather obvious, but with so many other societies and groups, both on a local and national level, competing for members' time,

commitment and, of course, money, it is essential for CAWOS to raise its profile and to make both members and non-members aware of the work being carried out.

We have particularly looked at how CAWOS can help to forge links between the local bird societies and the various study and conservation groups within the county, and also the new Local Record Centre, to help co-ordinate the recording of our avifauna and to continue to produce a worthwhile *Bird Report*. With this aim in mind, Tony Parker has taken on the role of Recording Liaison Officer within the Society.

Two Recording Forums were held during the year, each attracting approximately 30 people representing many different societies and groups within the county. The first was held in June 2000 and looked specifically at 'Record confidentiality and a demonstration of the database system Recorder 2000'. The second in February 2001 aimed to 'Generate ideas about co-ordinating recording in the county'. Organising these two meetings was probably one of the most important things undertaken this year. Both were well received and we plan to make these regular events.

There has been a re-structuring of CAWOS sub-committees to clarify roles and to reduce duplication of effort. This is now largely complete with the exception of the Editorial and Records sub-committee, a review of which is still ongoing. Comments and suggestions have been sought from all those involved with the *Bird Report*, particularly compilers, on how the *Report* is produced and what can be done to make the whole process less time-consuming and more enjoyable!

Regarding the recording and storage of bird records within the county, priority will be given to agreeing upon the computerisation of data; sorting out data licensing, copyright and sensitivity issues; and an effective means of archiving past and future records. Recorder 2000 is currently being evaluated by the Society and we are due to make a decision on software within the next couple of months.

The *Bird Report* team was sorry to lose some long-serving compilers, but was pleased to welcome a few new faces into this valuable role. The *Bird Report* also had a new Systematic List Editor, Colin Schofield, who has done a brilliant job with the *1999 Cheshire & Wirral Bird Report*. Though again published later than we would have wished, we hope you think that it was worth waiting for. It is definitely a credit to all those involved with its production. We are pleased that Phil Oddy has now taken on the role of Records Secretary, and Dave Walters has agreed to take on the new role of Rarities Secretary to handle all the county rarity descriptions prior to adjudication by the committee.

Bird News continues to receive high acclaim from both within and outside the Society, with a tremendous input from many CAWOS members. There are now plans underway to catalogue the wealth of information contained within its pages onto a database for future reference. Also a *Bird News* index will be published for CAWOS members.

The CAWOS web site has continued to develop and grow. The Discussion Forum has been improved to encourage the exchange of information and ideas; Record and Rarity forms are now available for downloading, as are some old copies of *Bird News*. A Mystery Bird Photograph competition has been added for extra interest and discussion. A map and further 'sites to watch' will be added soon.

A varied programme of indoor meetings was held, with talks ranging from 'Owls of the World', to the attractions of Florida, Alaska and Israel, whilst nearer to home we heard about the richness and diversity of the birdlife to be found in our neighbouring county of Derbyshire.

A growing number of workshops and guided walks were well supported throughout the year. Included were such topics as 'Wildfowl and Waders', 'Bird Song', 'Searching for Skuas on Hilbre', and the always popular 'High Tide Birdwatches'. Particular thanks go to Jeff Clarke for co-ordinating these events.

Both the annual Migration Watch and the CAWOS Yule Log attracted many birders. The House Martin Survey entered its 9th consecutive year and the CAWOS Photographic Competition, now in its 7th year, attracted a record number of entries, resulting in a fiercely fought competition, particularly in the 'Foreign Category'.

Conservation is still seen as a priority and local area representatives are being sought to act as a point of contact for conservation issues in that area, and to be in a position to take a more proactive approach with local authorities etc.

CAWOS arranged a meeting with the Ruddy Duck Advisory Committee in May 2000 to seek the most up to date information available with regard to the Ruddy Duck Control Programme [report in *Bird News* 47]. It is obvious that the membership is deeply divided on this issue, which means that Council is unlikely to take a particular stance on the proposals; however it will keep the membership fully informed about any future developments.

Three representatives from CAWOS attended the launch of a LEAF Demonstration Farm on the Wirral in June 2000. LEAF stands for 'Linking Environment and Farming' and the purpose of the open day was to demonstrate the principal of Integrated Farm Management [report in *Bird News* 47]. There is to be a second demonstration farm at Higher Whitley, and finally three CAWOS members have volunteered to undertake pilot monitoring during 2001 on another three farms, which are generally not open to the public.

Input from the Society was provided where habitat was threatened by development or other activities, for example: an application by 3C Waste for an extension to the Arpley Tip site; proposed weed control on Frodsham No4 tank; proposed industrial development by Halton, which would result in the destruction of Halton Moss.

Several CAWOS grants have been made to support local projects and groups, including: Rostherne Observatory towards production of its annual report; SECOS to help maintain its feeding station at Elton Hall Flash, Sandbach; Cheshire Swan Study Group towards ringing costs; Cheshire & Wirral Raptor Study Group towards the Buzzard Wing Tagging Project.

Finally thanks are due to the many people who give their time to the Society to make all these things happen, their efforts are greatly appreciated. The continuing challenge is to prioritise what is important, to draw up realistic action plans and to gain the support of all birdwatchers within the county to enable CAWOS to grow as a respected, viable society.

Sheila Blamire, CAWOS Chairman

SECRETARY'S REPORT

For the first time since I took over as Membership Secretary about eight years ago, membership has fallen, from 353 in 1999 to 339 in 2000. I have no ready explanation for this except that more members than usual decided not to renew their subscriptions. New members are still joining - we have had 10 since the beginning of the year - so we hope that numbers will rise again this year.

I am still concerned about the involvement of members in the work of the Society, and you will doubtless have read comments and correspondence on this topic in *Bird News*. I think we all appreciate that many of our members are also members of, and maybe leading lights in, other natural history societies and we accept that probably a majority will pay their subscriptions and do little else. I expect that many of you, like me, are in other societies where we do just that. However the point I would like to make is that the number involved in running a society like CAWOS is getting dangerously low; I read somewhere that for a society to be effective it should have about 10% of its members involved in its daily running. We are well below this and unless more people participate then we are not going to be able to do all that we want to.

There has been correspondence in the birdwatching press recently on these topics of declining membership and lack of involvement, which some of you will have read. One of our major initiatives this year will be to establish greater contacts with other ornithological societies with a view to sharing experiences and learning. For example, we are involved in computerising our record procedures and have begun to make contact with a neighbouring society which has already gone through this process; the difficulty we find in staffing CAWOS stands at wildlife and environmental events may be overcome by joining forces with other groups who are attending the same event.

Sheila has reviewed last year; what will the next year bring? Next year's indoor programme will include talks on the 'Baltics' by Algirdas Knystautas, on the 'Conservation of Common Scoters' by Baz Hughes, Head of Threatened Species at WWT and talks by Mike Wellman, Tim Loseby and Keith Offord. The first meeting will take place in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester and we hope that as well as the regulars from the Knutsford area many of our members in west Cheshire and the Wirral will be able to attend. Many of you will have seen our full programme of outdoor events, whether I.D. Workshops, High Tide Birdwatches or Guided Walks; please join in, help if you can and make suggestions for future activities.

We are looking at the possibility of organising a Cheshire Young Ornithologist of the Year award and also of holding a joint conference with BTO on Surveying Techniques, which have been held successfully in other counties. Follow-up work on the Swift survey will be undertaken and a new *Guidelines for the Submission of Records* will be produced.

In next year's budget financial provision has been made for grants for conservation purposes, which will include extra monies received via the Gift Aid scheme. Members who have schemes which they think might qualify are invited to apply in writing to me, giving full details, as soon as possible.

Sheila has mentioned that perhaps our major task over the next couple of years will be the computerisation of records. For this we will need extra pairs of hands - a number of people is required to input record data and help compile the various sections of the *Bird Report* (I got drafted in last year and found it interesting and not too difficult!). Someone is also needed to seek advertisers for both the *Bird Report* and *Bird News*, and volunteers to organise guided walks and/or workshops are always welcome, as of course are articles for *Bird News*.

My report last year ended on a gloomy note; this year I have put the gloom, such as it is, at the beginning of the report and tried to concentrate on what we hope to achieve in the coming year. Please help us to achieve it.

David Cogger, CAWOS Membership Secretary

RECORDING FORUM

CAWOS's second forum to discuss recording took place on 8th February at Wincham Hall. Over 30 people representing many different groups attended or expressed interest.

Sheila Blamire opened the meeting by explaining that its main purpose was "to generate ideas about co-ordinating recording in the county".

Tony Broome, County Recorder, reviewed the existing situation. The present *Bird Report* was in general good, giving a sound picture of birdlife in the county, but pressure from planners and others demanding records meant that we needed to look at our systems again. Computerisation was necessary but problems of inputting data, late entries and deadlines need resolving.

Tony Parker, Recording Liaison Officer, outlined the relations between CAWOS and the Local Record Centre. The County Recorder would be the main point of contact and CAWOS the main source of bird data. Agreement needs to be reached with the Record Centre to allow the passage and use of data. The issue of existing archives needed addressing. Two CAWOS members were on a committee acting as a link between the Record Centre and local groups and recorders.

The meeting then broke into three discussion groups, each of which reported back as follows:

Records

- regular submission of reports throughout the year should be encouraged.
- forms should be compatible with Local Record Centre requirements for ease of transfer.
- computerisation would make the recording of 'common' species easier to handle.
- regular annual records for particular sites were of more value than random counts.

Ownership of Records

- copyright of records would remain with the producer of the record, who would have to sign a data licensing form which would allow use and transfer of records.
- sensitive records should only be released after permission from the County Recorder or the individual and a common list should name organisations approved to receive data.

Collection and Storage of Records

- software was available and should be issued to all those wishing to use it.
- data should be copied regularly and the copy stored in a secure but different place.
- a printed copy of all records should be kept for cases when reference back to the original was desirable.

Outcomes of the meeting were that e-mail addresses were exchanged for ease of communication and a small group should hold a further meeting to discuss which type of software to use and plan for its introduction in time for the production of the *Bird Report* for 2001.

ANNUAL CAWOS PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

There were six entrants in total this year, with only two in the GREAT BRITAIN category, three in HUMOROUS and five in FOREIGN. 52 slides were submitted, well down on the previous year. A misunderstanding on my part meant that Colin Smith FRPS, from Chorley was unable to judge the competition on the date I had anticipated due to his leaving for a holiday in Florida. I shall always be indebted to Tony Bond FRPS, from Leigh, for stepping in as judge at the last moment. Some of his comments are shown below.

CATEGORY 1 - FOREIGN 32 Slides

Slides in this category were submitted by Sheila Blamire, Richard Gabb, Andy Harmer, James Quinn and Nigel Stones.



1st WILLET, LOVER'S KEY, FLORIDA BY NIGEL STONES

"Size and exposure perfect for a difficult bird in difficult lighting. The waves in the background set off the bird well in the context of the shoreline."

2nd Red-shouldered Hawk, Eco Pond, Florida by Nigel Stones

"Superbly lit and full of anticipation."

3rd Cape Gannets, Lambert's Bay, South Africa by Sheila Blamire

"High impact of tightly packed birds in breeding colony."

Highly Commended Brahminy Starling, Bharatpur, India by Sheila Blamire

"A good perky pose."

Highly Commended Cape Robin, Western Cape, South Africa by Sheila Blamire

"White rocky background shows bird well in true habitat."

Commended Roadrunner, Orange County, California by James Quinn

"Flat light with some merging of the subject into the background but a typical pose."

Commended White-chinned Petrel, Western Cape, South Africa by Sheila Blamire

"Truly in context against the ocean."

CATEGORY 2 - GREAT BRITAIN 8 Slides and 3 Prints

Three prints from Phil Barnett and eight slides from a new member, Andy Harmer, were all that were received. Surely the weather in the UK doesn't put everyone else off? - but we say the same thing every year!

1st BARN OWL, NORTHWICH, CHESHIRE BY ANDY HARMER

"A stunning in-flight flash photograph as the bird lands on a fence post. Simply faultless and presumably a competition winner in the past."

2nd Kingfisher, Frodsham, Cheshire by Andy Harmer

"A sad indictment of our age with such a beautiful bird hanging dead from snagged fishing line. Of great conservation value."

3rd Kestrel, Frodsham, Cheshire by Andy Harmer

"A wary species in typical watchful mode."



CATEGORY 3 - HUMOROUS 12 Slides

These were submitted by Sheila Blamire, Richard Gabb and Andy Harmer.

1st “THE CAWOS AGM GETS THE USUAL RESPONSE WHEN VOLUNTEERS ARE ASKED FOR.” BY ANDY HARMER

The caption was changed at the last minute from the ‘DUCK AGM’ to ‘CAWOS AGM’ as it was thought to be much more appropriate - the resounding laughter proved this a wise decision.



2nd “The World’s Mud-wrestling Champion(ship) was coming to a climax.” by Sheila Blamire

A pair of Cape Gannets mating in a muddy site. Much debate preceded the choice of caption for this ‘candid camera’ shot, all of it concerned about the sensitivities of the CAWOS membership!

3rd “Have you got these in size 2?” by Andy Harmer

A Robin perched on the ankle of a walking boot looking at the camera. The bird’s questioning look automatically suggests this caption but, was the nest inside the boot?

Thanks to everyone who entered and congratulations to the winners. I wonder what next year will bring?

Richard Gabb, 72 Chester Road, Poynton, Cheshire

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CONSERVATION NEWS

Arpley Update

Following a recent meeting with David Bell, Conservation Officer for Warrington, I am more confident that we can defeat the proposal from 3C Waste/WRG to extend the Arpley Tip over the remaining floodplain at Moss Side. A report countering the various misleading comments contained within the extension bid was presented at the meeting and this will form the basis of CAWOS’s official objection to the extension should it go to public enquiry. Suffice it to say there was more than enough ammunition with the bid proposal to hopefully scupper any chance that it will be accepted – at least in its current form.

Clarification of previous Conservation Report comment:

Jonathan Guest has asked *Bird News* to clarify a statement made in the previous issue relating to his involvement with the application for an extension to the Arpley Super Tip near Warrington. The statement did not make clear that Blandford Associates were the organisation responsible for the Environmental Impact Assessment and that Jonathan Guest was merely acting as a surveyor, gathering information pertinent to the biological aspects of the report.

Local Area Representative - Any Volunteers?

We still need a conservation rep for the Wirral area. The task is relatively straightforward, simply keep abreast of any new planning proposals and alert CAWOS and the local Council should any biologically important sites (not necessarily for birds) be threatened, either directly or indirectly, by the development. It is easier to stop inappropriate development at the initial stage than it is later on. It is essential that CAWOS has a ‘rep on the spot’ as local knowledge is vital in our fight to prevent the destruction of our biologically important areas. It is also crucial that records from significant bird areas are passed on to CAWOS for collation so that hard evidence of an area’s importance to our region’s birdlife can be presented to the planning authorities. The task is not particularly onerous but it is vital as is evidenced by the battle to save Moss Side in which CAWOS is currently joined.

Jeff Clarke, Conservation Officer, e-mail: conservation@kawos.org

BIRD NEWS

Work has begun to catalogue the wealth of information contained within the pages of *Bird News* using an Access database, which will be so useful for historical and research purposes. Steve Barber originally started a comprehensive index up to *Bird News* 32 (in word format), and I had added to this but only in certain categories. David Simmons has now begun to enter the more recent issues into the database he is developing. Ultimately the 'old' index will be imported as well, enabling searches to be easily carried out over the whole newsletter run (currently 50 issues worth!).

Eventually we will print a *Bird News* index for CAWOS members as well - no longer will you have to search through old copies to find which issue has the latest update on Moore Nature Reserve, or which looked at the i.d. of Great Grey Shrike etc. **Let us know what categories you would find useful**, and how often you would want the index updated (in the form of supplements).

We are also considering archiving *Bird News* on CDs, so we could make copies available to members, in pdf format, perhaps in 'lots' of 2-3 years. We would have to work out a reasonable cost. **Would anybody be interested?** Also I do have a quantity of some back issues of *Bird News* available. Let me know what numbers you need (there would be a small charge to cover postage).

**Sheila Blamire, Woodruff Cottage, Clamhunger Lane, Mere, WA16 6QG. Tel: 01565 830168
E-mail: info@cawos.org**

CHESHIRE BIRD REPORT - 34 YEARS AGO

Extract from the Editorial by G. A. Williams:

"1967 was tragically notable throughout Cheshire as the year in which foot and mouth disease spread to many of the farms of the county. The rapid progress of the virus from October onwards meant that most country areas became inaccessible; bird watching was therefore impossible except in a few particular, notably coastal, areas and this is reflected in the sparsity of records from October onwards."

What will the Editorial in the 2001 *Cheshire & Wirral Bird Report* have to say?

CHESHIRE & WIRRAL LIST

Work is in progress to update the 'Species Status' statements in the *Cheshire & Wirral Systematic List*, ready for the submission of 2001 records. We would welcome comments and suggestions, so if anybody would like to see a draft copy please send a floppy disc and/or SAE to:

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

1999 'SEABIRD' RECORDS

Due to the unfortunate loss of some of the above records prior to publication in the 1999 *Cheshire & Wirral Bird Report*, it is intended to include them in the 2000 report. Anyone who can provide copies of the relevant records for 1999 should send them to: Phil Oddy, 4 Swan Close, Poynton, Stockport, Cheshire, SK12 1HX (tel: 01625 877855) **by May 18th**.

Likewise, it is regrettable that some observers' initials were omitted in error from their records. Sincere apologies are offered to those people affected. If anyone feels strongly about this, then please let Phil know and a footnote will be included under the relevant species in the 2000 report.

Tony Broome, County Recorder

CAWOS WORKSHOPS 2001

There was a full review of the workshops being run by CAWOS in *Bird News 49*, and brief details are repeated below. **At the time of going to press, it is not anticipated that any of the workshops will need to be postponed due to foot-and-mouth - but please ring to check nearer the time.**

Thursday 24th May 2001 8:30pm - 10:30pm

In search of the Long-eared Owl (CAWOS)

Meet: Ferry Tavern Car Park, Station Road, Penketh, Warrington. Places are strictly limited and booking is essential. Tel: Jeff Clarke 0151 423 4275 or 0151 648 4371.

Saturday 7th July 2001 10:00am

Of Hobbies and Skimmers (CAWOS & Moore Nature Reserve)

Meet: Lapwing Lane entrance, Moore, near Warrington. Tel: 01925 444689 or 0151 423 4275.

Saturday 4th August 2001 8:30am

A Gathering of Terns (CAWOS & Wirral Ranger Service)

Booking is essential. Cost £1 per person. Tel: Wirral Country Park, Thurstaston 0151 648 4371/3884.

Saturday 22nd September 2001 6:00am - 10:00am

Swallows Go South (Migration Watch 2001) CAWOS & Wirral Ranger Service

You can turn up at any time during the watch. Meet: Denhall Lane, Burton, South Wirral. Further details: tel: 0151 648 4371/3884.

Sunday 23rd September 2001 9:30am - 2:30pm

Raptors on High (CAWOS & Moore Nature Reserve)

Meet: Lapwing Lane, Moore, nr. Warrington. Tel: 01925 444689 or 0151 423 4275.

Sunday 21st October 2001 7:30am - 11:30am

Migration Watch 2001 (CAWOS & Wirral Ranger Service)

Further details will appear in future issues of *Bird News*.

Note: Several of the above events require prior booking to secure your place. Places on events are also open to non-members of CAWOS and so may book up well in advance.

If you would like to run a workshop or have good ideas for future sessions please contact Jeff Clarke on 0151 423 4275 or e-mail him at conservation@cawos.org.

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GULL WORKSHOP REVIEW

17th March dawned bright and breezy and, free from foot-and-mouth restrictions, prospects for the Gull Watch at Gatewarth looked promising. Earlier in the week two 1st summer Glaucous Gulls had favoured the Richmond Bank and Iceland Gulls had also been reported recently. 20 desperate looking birders turned up to the famed gull venue eager for the rich vein of 'white-wings' we were bound to strike.

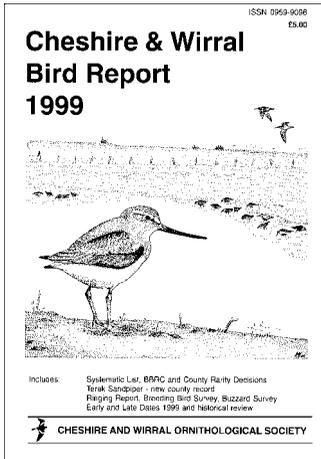
Murphy's Law intervened to guarantee that not a single white-winged gull would grace us with its presence. The near demented leader, 'yours truly', desperately clung to the subtle nuances of 1st winter Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls. A handful of *argentatus* 'Scandinavian' Herring Gulls, were pulled kicking and screaming from the swirling mass and the ever dainty looking Common Gulls were examined more closely than would appear seemly. Hardly any wonder it started to 'mew'. Nevertheless people hid their disappointment with typically British stoicism. Some of them even stayed awake.

Despite the lack of 'white-wingers' a varied selection of birds was observed and many people were pleased to have finally located the Richmond Bank and Gatewarth phase III area. I even hear tell that several people have already returned to try their luck again. Just as I did a few days later when, as you can guess, Glaucous and Mediterranean Gulls literally flaunted themselves in front of me in a gratuitously mocking manner. Only two of the twenty people who were booked on the workshop were CAWOS members. Am I barking up the wrong tree, perhaps field days are not what the CAWOS membership actually wants? Any responses are greatly welcomed. I haven't yet decided if there will be a 2002 Gull Workshop, I might just try and not see a different group of birds somewhere else.

Jeff Clarke, 90 Simonside, Hough Green, Widnes, Cheshire, WA8 4YN
E-mail: conservation@cawos.org

Book Review

1999 CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL BIRD REPORT



The Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society has once again produced an excellent report. There is the usual comprehensive yearly review and systematic list. The list alone is 85 pages long and includes a lot of detail on each species. WeBS counts for the whole of the Dee and Mersey estuaries (not just those bits falling within Cheshire) are shown for wetland birds. The species list is greatly enhanced by eight very good colour photographs.

In addition there is Tony Broome's entertaining article on the discovery of a Terek Sandpiper at Frodsham, a new county record. The report on bird ringing is fascinating with the longest recovery being a Turnstone ringed at New Brighton found 3770km away at Baffin Island, Canada. The Raptor Study Group demonstrates the remarkable increase of the Common Buzzard in Cheshire and Wirral, from seven pairs in 1992 to 184 pairs in 1999/2000 (not all pairs have been confirmed to breed). An article on the Breeding Bird Survey in Cheshire (1995 to 1999) shows the varying fortunes of different species but demonstrates a most welcome increase in Lapwings and Skylarks.

A must for anyone with an interest in Cheshire and Wirral birds.

The report can be obtained from: P Brewster, 23 Verdin Close, Moulton, Northwich, Cheshire CW9 8RL. Price is £5.70 including p&p, please make cheques payable to 'CAWOS'.

Richard Smith, A Birdwatching Guide to the Dee Estuary, www.deeestuary.co.uk

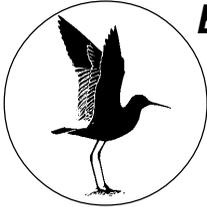


MAY

- 8 ADNHS 'LOCAL BOTANY' - The Philip Newton Memorial Lecture, by Elizabeth Blackman
- 8 MRSPB AGM, followed by MEMBERS' SLIDES
- 9 HO 'WADING ABOUT - A WORLD TOUR OF WADERS' by Brayton Holt
- 9 NCRSPB Inner Marsh Farm, meet in car park at 7:00pm
- 12 ADNHS Spring Wood/walk to Sabden, Lancs, meet public car park, Cecil Road, Hale at 9:30am
- 12 KOS Day trip, meet at Sessions House at 8:30am (venue tbc - ring for details)
- 13 WGOS Ynys-hir by coach departing at 7:30am - ring for details
- 13 HO Coed Garth Gell, by coach, contact Mavis/David Caldwell, 0161 962 3626
- 13 MCOS Ynys-hir, meet at RSPB reserve at 9:30am
- 13 SECOS Anglesey, ring for details
- 17-20NCRSPB Norfolk weekend, for further details ring Cliff Gibson on 01925 817874
- 20-20MRSPB Dorset weekend, for details ring Ian Taylor on 01260 275248
- 20 LOG Aber Valley by coach, contact Peter Tonge 01606 891274
- 21 SRSPB Pennington Flash, meet at Golf Club, off A572 Golbourne, Wigan at 7:15pm
- 24 **CAWOS In Search of Long-eared Owls, 8:30-10:30pm, contact Jeff Clarke 0151 423 4275**
- 24-27 KOS Mawddach Estuary & Ynys-hir Weekend - ring for details
- 25 LOG 'WILDLIFE OF INDIA' by Tony Baker

JUNE

- 2 ADNHS Great Orme Head, Gwynedd, meet public car park, Cecil Road, Hale at 9:30am
- 3 MCOS Dane Bridge/Dane Bower, contact Paul Grimmett 01925 268770



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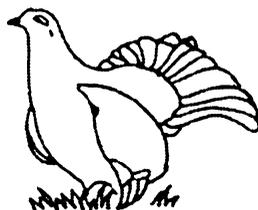
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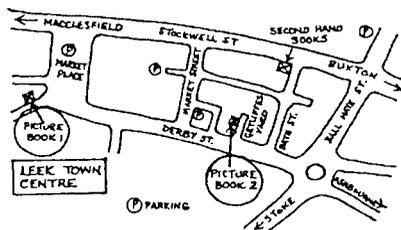
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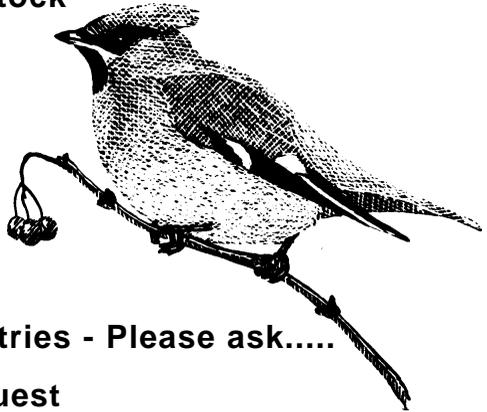
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