

BIRD NEWS

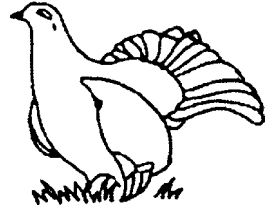
Number 65 January 2005



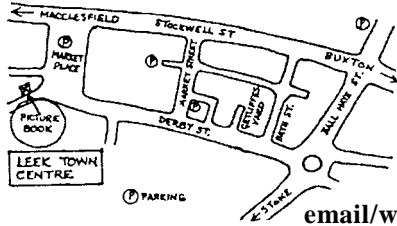
Atlas Breeding Survey: Preliminary Results
Identification of Grey Geese in Cheshire and Wirral
Franklin's Gull and Lesser Scaup at Sandbach Flashes
Firecrests on the Wirral • Ringers Conference Report

PICTURE BOOK

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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: Franklin's Gull by Ray Scally

Other illustrations: Tony Broome, Phil Jones, Ray Scally and Thelma Sykes

Guest Editorial

Another New Year comes around, daylight hours are increasing and the birds are beginning to sing once more in preparation for spring. After the dour, grey days of the last couple of months, new enthusiasm courses through the veins of birders as new lists are prepared and holidays planned for. There can't be anyone who isn't aware of the dreadful events that followed the earthquake in the Indian Ocean on Boxing Day morning. The scale of the damage and the number of people killed and made homeless are almost too great to really comprehend. With a lot of birdwatchers travelling the globe these days, there will be a lot of you reading this who will have been to one of the countries affected and even walked down the very beaches that were engulfed by the tsunami. I was at Yala National Park, the famous leopard reserve in south-east Sri Lanka a couple of years ago. I spent many happy hours walking alongside the sea, looking at the wealth of birds and enjoying the sunshine. It felt so peaceful, so idyllic. Now, it would seem, the complex including the restaurant, bedrooms and people have all gone. The local people were so friendly, so accommodating. It seems such a tragic loss. Whilst we are birding in these countries it is all too easy to take everything for granted, forgetting that it is ordinary people who make it special for us, and that their lives can be hard and unforgiving.

Back home in Cheshire, the winter Atlas work is under way. A lot simpler to understand and easier to carry out than the summer one, it is just as enjoyable and does produce the odd surprise. I opened my curtains this morning and there were two Waxwings preening at the top of the tree opposite my house. They flew off after a short while but a short walk later I re-found them in a mixed flock of Redwings and Starlings, a couple of roads away, feeding on what looked like some sort of ornamental rowan trees. There has been a large scale invasion this year and there are many big flocks around the country, including Cheshire.

But, it's not just the exotic-lookers that do surprise you. After the walk around the estate, I got out and did a big chunk of the tetrad. On coming along a footpath between two houses, I came across a 'flock' of 43 Moorhens feeding in a muddy field with sheep in it. I couldn't ever remember seeing such a large number away from established sites like Woolston Eyes, Sandbach Flashes, etc. You'd even struggle to see that many at Frodsham Marsh in a day. A look through the *Bird Report* confirmed that it was indeed a significant number. I was quite pleased actually that I'd come across them. It kind of makes you even more determined to dig out the other hidden treasures that your tetrad has to offer.

On page 28 you will see, hot off the press and of great interest, David Norman's preliminary analysis of last summer's breeding survey work for the new Atlas. Comparisons with the last Atlas, which covered the period 1978-84, show some interesting changes in status and distribution. Some are to be expected, some are more of a surprise and it should spur us all on to fill the gaps during this coming breeding season. There are quite a lot.

Early October saw an unprecedented influx of Redwings and Fieldfares into Cheshire and the rest of the north-west. I noticed unusually high numbers flying over Stockport on that day [10th October]. A request for information on this movement is to be found on page 5.

The 2003 *Bird Report* should be dropping through your door shortly, if it hasn't already done so. It is another reminder of the enormous amount of effort by a lot of people, from the birders who submit the records to the Editor and Report Team that goes into producing such a publication. As usual, it is one of the best in the country. Read it, look at the superb photographs and above all, enjoy it.... and do your tetrad!

Tony Broome

AGM + ATLAS UPDATE on FRIDAY 4th MARCH 2005 at 7:45pm

'The Cheshire and Wirral Bird Atlas: First Impressions' by Prof David Norman

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 5th March - 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 Sheila Blamire know as soon as possible.

County Rarities

THE IDENTIFICATION AND STATUS OF GREY GEESE IN CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL

Apart from escapes and releases, there are only four species of grey geese on the Cheshire and Wirral list. The most familiar is Greylag Goose, then it's Pink-footed Goose, followed by White-fronted Goose and finally there is Bean Goose.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser anser* and *Anser anser rubirostris*

Western *anser* breeds in Iceland, northern Britain, Scandinavia and central and south-east Europe and winters down as far as southern Europe and north Africa. **Eastern** *rubirostris* breeds in eastern Europe and western Russia, east to Mongolia, south-east Siberia and northern China, and winters in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and southern China.

Western *anser* has a stout orange bill and pink legs. Eastern *rubirostris* has an even larger pink bill and pink legs and is a paler, greyer bird. They are a big, short-necked, bulky goose with a big head and a very pale forewing, which is prominent in flight and even paler and more silvery than that of a Pink-footed Goose. The call is the familiar 'honking', similar to farmyard geese.

All introduced birds in England came from Scottish Western *anser*. British breeders are largely sedentary, making only relatively short movements whilst it is the Icelandic migrants that move south as winter progresses. Even so, it would appear that few regularly come further south than Cumbria.

Western *anser* Greylags were introduced into south-west Scotland in the 1930s and into England in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Presumed feral birds were published in the Bird Reports for the 1960s, but were very uncommon. In 1968 for example, there was one on Bar Mere on Jan 29th and five on Rostherne Mere on Oct 29th-31st. Ones and twos were reported each year until introduced feral populations began to flourish and these days the summer moult flocks are common, with hundreds recorded at favoured sites. They were proved to breed in Cheshire in 1979, although they had been suspected as early as 1975.

Genuine Icelandic migrants could well occur, perhaps those accompanying Pink-foot flocks. We could hope that someone reads the number on a ringed bird at some point or that a 'recovery' will prove it beyond doubt. Two that I saw drop into Frodsham Marsh a few years ago were very jittery, stretching their necks up in alarm and then leaving almost immediately, calling loudly. Does behaviour like this point to genuine 'wild' birds?

As with White-fronted Goose there are many Greylags in captivity, and these include the eastern subspecies *rubirostris* (there was a pair recorded at Billinge Green Pool in April 1983), making it impossible to be sure about what would be a rare eastern vagrant if one ever turned up. However, they do appear to be on the British List.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

There are two populations. One that breeds in Iceland and east Greenland and winters in Scotland and England, and a second that breeds in Svalbard and winters in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands.

High flying skeins are a familiar sight in the county as birds move between their Lancashire and Norfolk wintering grounds, usually in flocks of a couple of hundred, but sometimes numbering thousands. To find them on the ground is always a nice surprise and when they decide to stay in a particular locality, they attract a steady stream of birders.

A medium sized goose, they are usually quite distinctive in appearance. They have a shortish neck, round head, small pink and black bill, and pink legs and feet. The underparts are brownish, darkest on the head, neck and flanks and the upperparts are a steely grey with a blue hue, the coverts showing pale barring on the closed wing. They share a rump and tail pattern with the other grey geese and have a grey rump and tail, and white uppertail coverts. The tail is tipped broadly white. In flight, the contrasting grey coverts on the upperwing rule everything else out except Greylag Goose, which is paler still.

Identifying this species should be relatively straightforward, but invariably, there are debates each winter concerning lone birds or small parties, as observers misidentify them for Bean Geese or White-fronted Geese. The upperparts are noticeably paler than the neck and head. On Bean Goose, the upperparts and flanks are as dark as the head and neck, leaving an obviously paler breast. Size can overlap and a small percentage of Pink-feet can show orange bills, legs and feet, and even white around the bill base. Paying careful attention to structure and plumage should rule out the above and even immature White-fronted Geese. The easiest calls to decipher are a shrill 'pink-wink' or 'pink-wink-wink', but there are lots of variations on the theme.

White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons albifrons* and *Anser albifrons flavirostris*

Eurasian (Greater) White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons albifrons* breeds on the Siberian tundra from north-west Russia east to the Kolyma River and winters in western Europe, south-east Europe, Black Sea coasts and the Caspian Sea area.

Greenland (Greater) White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons flavirostris* breeds in west Greenland and winters mainly in northern and western Scotland and Ireland, with a few in Wales.

There used to be a regular winter flock of Greenland *flavirostris* in north-west England but they deserted this area during the 1950s. They wintered on western lowland peat areas which provided relatively good feeding and roosting sites in hard weather. Eurasian *albifrons* prefers coastal, estuarine or semi-wild grassland.

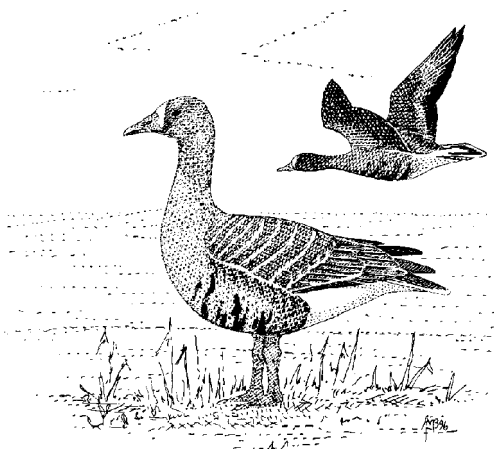
Even in the late 60s and 70s, White-fronted Geese used to be a lot commoner than they are nowadays. Flocks of tens were seen most winters and occasionally up to 200 were noted. White-fronts are seen less frequently in Cheshire these days with only 1 – 3 records annually, and most, if not all are presumably Eurasian *albifrons*. This is supported by the fact that the majority of grounded flocks since 1967 have indeed been of Eurasian *albifrons*.

All records of single Greenland *flavirostris* on waters across Cheshire at unusual times of year are, in my opinion, either escapes or releases. Genuine wild Greenland White-fronts *flavirostris* are very rare. However, submitted Cheshire records show that observers are rarely aware of which subspecies they have seen, either due to poor views or to the brevity of the sighting.

Adult White-fronted Geese of both forms are readily identifiable by their white facial blazes and dark barring on the belly. They are medium sized, stocky, orange-legged geese that are a paler brown than Pink-feet with flatter heads and longer bills. They lack the steely grey coverts of that species, which is a noticeable difference in flight. Instead, they have rather plain brown coverts, paler than those on Bean Goose. Juveniles can mislead some observers into believing that they are looking at either Pink-feet or Bean Geese, but the rather plain, extensively pink or orangey bill, with a varying small amount of black, should help avoid such a mistake. White-fronts lack the prominent white tertial edges shown by Bean Geese and Pink-feet. By mid-winter some begin to acquire white around the bill and black barring on the underparts. The call is a 'kow-kyowk', which should be easy to distinguish depending on experience, but a noisy flock can sound remarkably like a flock of Pink-feet.

The **Eurasian White-fronted Goose** *albifrons* exhibits a mainly plain pink bill and orange legs. The white blaze can be more extensive than that of Greenland *flavirostris* and the coverts are paler edged, giving a more contrasty appearance, which is paler overall. The black barring on the underparts has a tendency to be less extensive and they are slightly smaller, especially noticeable when the two are alongside each other.

The **Greenland** race *flavirostris* is slightly larger and longer necked than the Eurasian *albifrons* with darker brown plumage on the head and neck and it has an orange bill in both adult and



juvenile plumages. It can also show less white on the forehead and more black on the belly but these features are variable. The covert edgings are duller and lack the contrast shown by *albifrons*. The width of the white on the tail tip is also narrower and an important feature.

The only ones actually attributed to being Greenland *flavirostris* included an early report of 11 birds at Rostherne Mere in January 1963, but it wasn't until 1973 that they were specifically mentioned again when 10 at Frodsham Marsh on Dec 2nd were published in the *Bird Report*. Confusion over the identity of the next flock ensued in 1983 when a flock of 13-14 in the Burton Marsh/Shotwick Fields area was published as both Greenland *flavirostris* and Eurasian *albifrons*. There were then flocks of 11 noted at Hale Marsh on Dec 1st 1985 and 11 at Inner Marsh Farm on Nov 11th – 15th 1986. If the observers correctly assessed bare part colour and structure, then these records would appear to be the sum total for the county in 'modern' times, just four or five records. They are as rare as Bean Geese!

There is one more race that is on the British List. It is the pink-billed **Pacific White-fronted Goose** *Anser albifrons frontalis* which is a Siberian/Nearctic form and a long distance migrant. It closely resembles the Eurasian *albifrons* and could easily be passed off as such. It is slightly bigger and darker than *albifrons*, but would be very difficult to identify in the field without a Canadian ring on. The last two races also have pink bills and are from northern Canada (*gambelli*) and Alaska (*elgasi*) but these are less likely to occur as vagrants.

Bean Goose *Anser fabalis fabalis* and *Anser fabalis rossicus*

Taiga Bean Goose *Anser fabalis fabalis* breeds in the taiga zone from north Scandinavia east to the Urals and winters in western Europe. Two or three regular winter areas in Britain.

Tundra Bean Goose *Anser fabalis rossicus* breeds on the tundra of north-west Siberia and winters in western and south-eastern Europe. Small numbers in Britain in winter.

Bean Goose is reminiscent of Pink-footed Goose but is larger overall and they have orange and black bills and orange legs and feet. They are larger and darker headed than Pink-feet or White-fronts, and have obvious whitish edges to the coverts and tertials, which are more contrasting than those on Pink-feet. They lack the steely grey coverts of Pink-feet, especially noticeable in flight when the plain brown upperwing coverts look more like those of a White-front, but darker still. The white tail tip is narrower than that of Pink-feet. Both Bean Geese can also show a narrow white border to the bill, resembling juvenile White-front. The usual call, certainly of Taiga Bean, is a nasal 'arg, ung-ung', or 'arg-arg, ung-ung', which once heard is distinctive. The calls of Tundra have been likened to the typical calls of Pink-footed Goose.

Tundra Bean Goose *rossicus* is a dumpier bird than Taiga Bean. It has a shorter, thicker neck and although slightly larger, most resembles Pink-footed Goose. Indeed, some birds can be very difficult to tell apart if the views aren't good. The head is rounded and the relatively short bill is deep-based, with the lower mandible more prominent than Taiga Bean. Generally, Tundra Beans have a black bill with a neat orange subterminal band, but this can be much more extensive, resembling Taiga Bean at times. Their preferred habitat seems to be crop fields rather than grassland, but migrants could drop in anywhere.

Taiga Bean Goose *fabalis* is a bigger bird, approaching Greylag in size, but has a longer, slimmer neck. It looks rangier overall. The wedge-shaped head and long bill give it a distinctive look. The bill has a slightly concave upper mandible and the lower is narrower than Tundra. It is also much more extensively orange, with the black confined to the tip, cutting edges and base. A proportion does, however, show a bill pattern similar to Tundra Bean. The preferred feeding areas are grassland, but as above, they could turn up anywhere.

Assuming all the singles below were genuinely wild birds, there have been reports in only four years since 1967; one in the Wheelock Valley near Elton Hall Flash from Dec 12th – 28th 1981, eight at the Weaver Bend, Frodsham Marsh on Feb 3rd 1984, one at Doddington Mere on Jan 17th 1988 and lastly, one at Elton Hall Flash from Dec 15th – 21st 1993. Bean Geese can be seen to be real rarities in the county. Unfortunately, there are many in collections, and they do escape. One at Cholmondeley on Sep 22nd 1979 was deemed to be such.

Which subspecies the above records relate to is unclear. Nowadays, the different structure and bare-part colouration of the two forms are better understood and there is an opinion that they should perhaps be treated as full species. Tundra Bean Goose would be the one to expect in

Cheshire as most of the records away from the traditional Taiga Bean sites are of this subspecies, but Taiga Bean Goose could occur. There are other eastern forms which could also turn up as vagrants, but none have been identified with certainty in Britain. County flocks should be well described, photographed if possible, assigned to a subspecies. The three eastern races, *serrirostris*, *middendorffii* and *johanseni* are unlikely to occur.

Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus*

For the sake of completeness, here are a few words about the county status of this attractive little goose. Apart from escaped collection birds and an individual from the Swedish re-introduction scheme, there has never been a genuinely wild bird described in the county. It is a nationally rare bird and a BBRC description species. It could turn up though.

A word of caution:

Relative size and bare-part colouration in grey geese are both notoriously difficult to judge accurately. Lesser White-fronted Geese don't always look smaller than some White-fronts, and some Beans can look to be the same size as the Pink-feet they're with. Males average larger than females in grey geese. A lone juvenile Pink-footed Goose at Frodsham Marsh a couple of winters ago was identified as a Bean by many observers and it took many hours of scrutiny to identify it correctly, even though it gave good views. Size comparison wasn't possible and bare-part colour was intermediate. Females are smaller than males, so trying to work size difference out can be impossible.

The other pitfall is that pink can look very orange and vice versa. This surprises many birders, and it's further complicated by the fact that some Bean Geese can have pink bills and some Pink-feet, orange bills. Bills, legs and feet can merge into pinky-orange. There is a fine line between the hues on some birds, so other plumage features and structure are then very important. Lastly, intergrades between races do occur and may make subspecific identification impossible.

.....and finally.

There were lots of Thick-billed Bean Geese *serrirostris* in eastern China in autumn 2003 and the huge bulbous bills and big heads were obvious. After years of trying to get to grips with Bean Geese, I finally managed to get to spend time leisurely enjoying them and have some good close video of plumage and calls. Alongside a flock of nine birds on the ground at the Qilihi Estuary near Beidaihe were four Pacific White-fronted Geese *frontalis*, and an adult Lesser White-fronted Goose. With the calls of flocks of cranes overhead and Sakers hunting the hundreds of waders and ducks, it was a magical experience.

Tony Broome

References:

- The Migration Atlas* (BTO)
- Photographic Handbook to Wildfowl of the World* (M Ogilvie and S Young)
- The Breeding Bird Atlas of Cheshire and Wirral* (CAWOS)
- Birding World* (various papers but especially those in Volume 10 No. 11 and Vol 14 No. 3)



REDWINGS - REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

There was an unprecedented movement, in terms of both scale and direction, of Redwings through NW England on 9-10th October 2004. Information to hand indicates a minimum of 120,000 moved east through Lancashire and Cheshire on the morning of 9th.

We are presently gathering information about this event for future publication and would appreciate any records of Redwings in Britain or further afield during the period 8-12th October. All assistance will be acknowledged.

**Please post to Seaforth Nature Reserve, Port of Liverpool, L21 1JD
or e-mail JeanRbrts6@aol.com**

Conservation News

A round-up of news from the CAWOS conservation representatives, who aim to keep an eye on what is going on in their area. If you have any issues or concerns then do contact your local representative (by letter or e-mail preferably). They may be able to help or should know someone who can! The relevant contact information is listed at the end.

WARRINGTON AREA

Woolston Eyes: we have received the excellent news that a variation to the SSSI at Woolston Eyes was confirmed by English Nature Council in early September. The variation strengthens the SSSI by now including nationally important breeding populations of Black-necked Grebes, Gadwall and Pochard. The original designation was for wintering wildfowl only. Pintail which used to winter in nationally important numbers no longer does so and as a result has been removed.

I have just been approached by letter about a proposal by Peel Holdings to develop an area on the bank of the Ship Canal near Stockton Heath. The area is part of a designated SINC (Site of Importance for Nature Conservation) and has an important reed bed habitat which supports a nice population of Reed Warblers. This is at a very early stage and I will be discussing this with David Bell, the Warrington BC Ecologist, at a meeting of Warrington Nature Conservation Forum shortly.

Brian Martin, Warrington Area Representative

WIRRAL AREA

Mersey SPA and Ramsar status: both these have been amended to include New Ferry SSSI, an important area for feeding waders.

Wind Farms: quite a lot of discussion in the media and elsewhere about the proposed wind farm (Gwynt y Mor) off North Wales. This will involve at least 90 turbines and obviously poses a big threat to sea birds and birds on migration, including waders flying in to the Dee and Mersey estuaries.

Mostyn Dock/Airbus/Dee Estuary dredging: no public announcement since the Environmental Agency for Wales turned down the request for dredging of the channel from Mostyn Dock out into the Irish Sea. Wildlife charities continue to maintain that with a proposed maximum output of four wings a week of the A380 airbus (which equals two shipments a week) the proposed dredging for 24-hour access to Mostyn Dock is not only completely unnecessary but could be very damaging to wildlife. 24-hour access to Mostyn Dock might bring marginally more business to Mostyn, but would have very little impact on Airbus - who have been happily shipping wings out now for several months during high tide.

Richard Smith, Wirral Area Representative

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Recent Reports

Some of the records may be unauthenticated and therefore will require review by the Society's Rarities Panel or the BBRC. This report covers the autumn period from September to November.

SITE REPORTS

Dee Estuary

30 Little Egrets over Burton Marsh on Nov 20th was the largest count. Three early Whooper Swans were at Burton Marsh on Sep 27th. The peak count of Brent Geese was 25 at Heswall on Nov 14th and nearby up to four Hen Harriers roosted at Parkgate in late Nov. Two Little Stints on the Decca Pools (Sep 18th) were followed by four on 26th. At least two Whimbrel at Heswall shore (Sep 5th) was the only record. A Black Tern was at Sealand Road, Chester (Sep 12th) but even more extraordinary was a record of two Guillemots there on Sep 24th. Burton held 10+ Short-eared Owls on Nov 14th. The only Water Pipit record was one at Parkgate on Nov 16th. Up to 30 Waxwings were at Chester from Nov 18th. Several Redwings were heard flying over Dungeon Woods on Sep 24th. The rarest species was a Yellow-browed Warbler by the Wirral Way at Thurstaston on Oct 4th and a Firecrest was also there (Sep 18th). A Corn Bunting in fields between Frankby and Newton (Oct 19th) was a major find.

Frodsham Area

A Gannet was reported over the M56 some 3 miles north of Chester on Sep 23rd. A Shag at Frodsham No6 tank (Sep 26th) was unusual. A Little Egret visited Pickering's Pasture (Nov 3rd and 5th). On Sep 2nd, a Ruddy Shelduck and Garganey were at Frodsham. Two Hobbies were at Elton (Sep 4th) when the last Little Ringed Plovers were at Frodsham No6 tank. The peak counts of Little Stints and Curlew Sandpipers at Frodsham were 11 and 21 respectively. Three Jack Snipe were at the Gowy Water Meadows (Nov 27th) and a Greenshank flew over Elton (Sep 4th). On Nov 20th, a late Common Sandpiper visited the Weaver Bend. Six Stonechats were at the Weaver Bend (Oct 16th) with 14 at the Gowy Water Meadows on Nov 27th – an amazing number.

Hilbre

The peak count of Manx Shearwaters was 160 on Sep 14th and the only Storm Petrel report was on Sep 21st. Counts of Leach's Petrels during Sep included 10 on 14th and 19th, three next day, 47 on 21st, 57 next day, one on 23rd and five on 25th. A Little Egret over (Sep 2nd) was a rare Hilbre record. Pale-bellied Brent Geese arrived back in late Sep and the peak count was 51 on Nov 30th. Eight Eiders were present in mid-Nov and 196 Common Scoters flew past on Nov 11th. A Pomarine Skua on Sep 25th was the only report. On Sep 14th, seven Arctic and five Great Skuas were counted. Two Sabine's Gulls (Sep 21st) were followed by one next day. A 2nd win Ring-billed Gull flew past on Oct 21st. A Little Auk on Sep 22nd was an excellent find. Two late Swallows were seen (Oct 24th). Nine Whinchats on Sep 8th was a high count. On Oct 8th, a Stonechat and two Wheatears were recorded. Unusual passerine records included a Garden Warbler (Sep 2nd), two Pied Flycatchers (Sep 8th) and a Snow Bunting (Nov 19th).

Inner Marsh Farm

A county record of 54 Little Egrets roosted on Sep 5th increasing to 65 on Oct 7th. Up to four Whooper Swans were present in Nov and an escaped Cape Shelduck appeared on Sep 17th. The returning drake Green-winged Teal appeared on Oct 18th-19th, 31st, Nov 5th-7th and 12th. Three Garganey were still present on Sep 5th with one on 10th. A Spotted Crake was noted (Sep 12th). Little Stints were seen on Sep 17th, Oct 13th and 24th with two on Oct 16th-17th. A Wood Sandpiper was present most days from Sep 5th to 12th. Four Stonechats were seen on Oct 31st with two on Oct 24th and Nov 6th.

Macclesfield Borough Area/Poynton Area

A Gannet was reportedly picked up in Wilmslow (mid-Sep). 14 Mute Swans at Poynton Pool (Nov 15th) was a site record. Three Whooper Swans were at Rostherne Mere on Nov 9th and at Redesmere on 15th. Pink-footed Geese movements included c200 over Adlington on Nov 1st

and 150 feeding at Toft in mid-Nov. Canada Geese records were broken at three sites – Adlington Driving Range (363 on Sep 16th), Tatton (1,564 on Oct 17th – possibly a county record) and Poynton Pool (358 on Sep 21st was a site record). Three Mandarins visited Tower's Road Fields, Poynton on Nov 19th but were not seen again. 17 Teal at Adlington Driving Range on Oct 14th was a high count. An eclipse Pintail at Poynton Pool (Sep 28th) was only the fifth site record and another bird visited Bosley Resr on Sep 5th. A Scaup visited Rostherne (Nov 21st-24th) but a Long-tailed Duck at Catchpenny Pool from Nov 13th to 30th at least was a rarer find. Five Goosanders were at both Lyme Park (Nov 6th, 27th) and Poynton Pool (Nov 26th). An Osprey flew over Nether Alderley on Sep 8th. Adlington Driving Range had single Peregrines on Sep 9th and Oct 28th. Red-legged Partridge sightings included 14 at Lyme Park, one in a Macclesfield garden and two at Marton. Wader records from Adlington Driving Range included 250 Golden Plovers on Nov 19th, a Jack Snipe on Oct 28th, 67 Snipe on Sep 2nd and rarest of all a Greenshank over on Oct 28th.

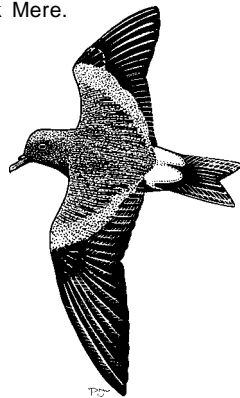
Swifts at Poynton Pool on Sep 26th were the latest ever there. During Nov, Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were at Mobberley, Poynton Pool and Rode Heath. A large movement of Meadow Pipits over Poynton was noted on Oct 7th. Two Waxwings were by the county border at Poynton on Nov 21st. Migrants at Adlington Driving Range included three Whinchats (Sep 9th), Stonechat (one on Nov 13th – a site first with two on 25th) and a Wheatear (Sep 23rd). A late Wheatear was at Sponds Hill on Oct 27th. Winter thrushes arrived during Sep including the earliest ever Redwing record at Rostherne on 18th, three Redwings over Toft on 24th and 15 Fieldfares over Rostherne on 30th. A wintering Blackcap was in a Poynton garden in mid-Nov and a wintering Chiffchaff visited Tatton on Nov 21st. A Willow Warbler at Poynton Pool on Sep 30th was probably the latest ever there. A Raven over a Poynton garden (Sep 7th) was an excellent garden tick.

Nantwich Area

On Sep 28th, a Goshawk was at Bar Mere. The last Hobby was at Chapel Mere on Oct 8th and the same site hosted two Jack Snipe on Oct 21st. Single Green Sandpipers visited Burland and Combermere Farm during Nov and nearby a late Common Sandpiper was at Chapel Mere (Oct 29th). The last Yellow Wagtail was at Bar Mere on Sep 28th. A Wryneck visited a private garden in Weston on Sep 9th. The first arrivals of winter thrushes were Fieldfares at Combermere Farm on Sep 11th and Redwings at Burland on Sep 30th. The last summer visitors included Sedge Warbler (Oct 7th) and Spotted Flycatcher (Sep 16th) both at Deer Park Mere.

North Wirral Shore

On Sep 28th, 12 Divers (possibly Great Northern) were reported off Hoylake and a Great Northern Diver was off Red Rocks on Oct 11th and 27th. A Slavonian Grebe was at Leasowe on Oct 14th. Two Great Shearwaters past Meols (Sep 21st) was a major county find. Manx Shearwaters were much in evidence during Sep including up to 15 off Dove Point, Meols and New Brighton but one off Wallasey (Sep 20th) was more unusual. The largest numbers were off Hoylake (195 on Sep 20th, 120 next day and 175 on 23rd). Single Balearic Shearwaters were off Leasowe on Sep 21st and Dove Point next day. During Sep, single Storm Petrels were at Leasowe, Meols and New Brighton (two on 21st, 3+ on 22nd). Large numbers of Leach's Petrels were present offshore during Sep (see table below for details). The only other records were 12+ off Wallasey on Sep 20th and 25 off Seacombe next day.



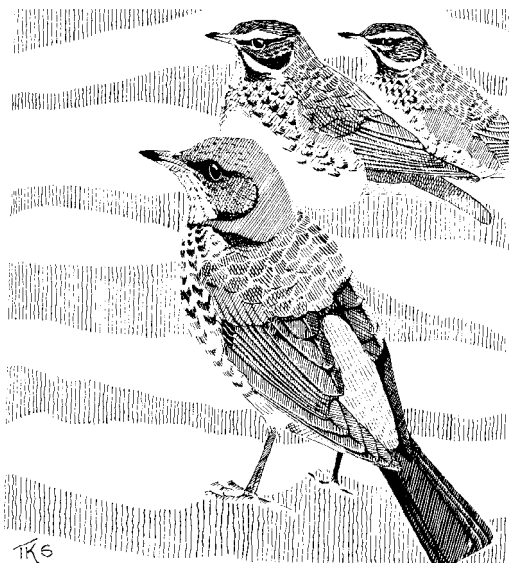
September	11th	12th	13th	14th	15th	18th	19th	20th	21st	22nd	23rd	25th	26th
Hoylake	-	-	1	35	10	-	35	46	38	107	215	-	-
Leasowe	2	1	1	10	5	4	6+	36	26+			29	15
New Brighton	-	1	1	25		1	15+	15	60+	50+	70+	89	5+
Meols	-	-	-	3+	-	1	4+	-	6	26	-	-	-

Large Gannet counts included 355 off Hoylake (Sep 20th with 250 next day) and 25+ at New Brighton (Sep 22nd). A Shag was irregularly at West Kirby Marine Lake throughout the period with two on Nov 7th, 9th, 16th and 19th. Hoylake Langfields hosted a Little Egret on Sep 19th –

this species still remains rare along this stretch of coast. Five Whooper Swans flew over West Kirby shore (Oct 9th). Three Pale-bellied Brent Geese flew past both Dove Point and New Brighton on Sep 22nd. Most unusual was a presumed escaped drake Red-crested Pochard at Birkenhead Park on Nov 11th. An Osprey flew over the M53 at Moreton on Sep 17th. A Marsh Harrier at Red Rocks (Oct 11th) was an excellent record. A well-watched Dotterel was at Leasowe shore (Sep 11th-12th) and delighted photographers with its confiding behaviour. Little Stints were at Leasowe (two on Sep 25th) and Hoylake (Oct 17th). A Curlew Sandpiper visited West Kirby shore on Sep 16th and one was at New Brighton on Sep 19th. Up to 13 Purple Sandpipers were at Wallasey in late Nov with one at Leasowe on Nov 5th. A Jack Snipe was at West Kirby shore on Nov 22nd. Single Grey Phalaropes were seen off New Brighton (Sep 21st, 26th) and Meols (Sep 21st).

Pomarine Skuas were much in evidence with one or two off New Brighton most days between Sep 16th and 28th with a peak of five on 23rd. Further sightings of one or two were at Hoylake (19th, 22nd), Leasowe (11th, 12th, 14th, 21st), Meols (21st) and Wallasey (4th). Arctic Skuas were regularly seen in single figures at the regular seawatching sites but the peak counts were at Hoylake - an incredible 54 birds on Sep 20th and 43 next day. On Sep 1st, a Long-tailed Skua was seen during the Liverpool Bay RSPB cruise. The Mersey off New Brighton hosted one or two birds daily from Sep 12th-23rd. Further singles were at Leasowe (20th, 25th), Seacombe (21st) and Wallasey (20th). Hoylake had large numbers of Great Skuas including a peak of 38 on Sep 21st and 15+ on three other dates. Up to five visited Leasowe, New Brighton and Wallasey.

Three Little Gulls from the Liverpool Bay RSPB cruise (Sep 1st) was overshadowed by the 30 at New Brighton on 20th. During Sep, Sabine's Gulls were at Hoylake (4+ on 21st and one on 23rd), Leasowe (20th, 24th and two on 21st), Meols (18th and three on 20th) and New Brighton (15th, 19th, 22nd, four on 21st and two on 23rd). Ring-billed Gulls were reported at Meols (Sep 3rd) and Hoylake (Sep 19th). An adult Glaucous Gull visited Leasowe on Sep 25th. The peak counts of Kittiwakes at Hoylake were 340 on Sep 20th and 750+ next day. The last Sandwich Tern was off Leasowe on Oct 3rd and at New Brighton, two possible Roseate Terns (Sep 28th) were seen. Single Black Terns were seen on Sep 1st from the Liverpool Bay RSPB cruise, New Brighton (three on 12th and one on 21st) and Hoylake (22nd). A migrant Long-eared Owl was found at West Kirby shore (Oct 12th) and a flock of 15 Waxwings flew south on Nov 19th. 1,400 Redwings flew over Hoylake Langfields (Oct 22nd). Six early Fieldfares flew over West Kirby on Sep 28th. Nearby at Leasowe, Yellow-browed Warblers were found on Oct 4th and 14th. Up to three Firecrests were at Spital (Nov 11th to 16th) with a possible at Birkenhead Park on Nov 9th. Wallasey shore hosted a Snow Bunting on Nov 23rd-25th.



Northwich Area

A Manx Shearwater was reportedly picked up at Lostock Gralam in mid-Sep. The long-staying White Stork was at Marbury CP on Sep 3rd and 13th. Budworth Mere hosted a Scaup (Sep 14th-15th) and a Common Scoter (Sep 25th). A Goshawk was reported at Neumann's Flash on Oct 15th. Wader records at Neumann's Flash included a Grey Plover (Sep 25th), Curlew Sandpiper (two on Oct 13th), Little Stint (Sep 16th and Nov 14th) and nine Jack Snipe (Nov 21st when 26 were at Ashton's Flash). On Nov 28th, 40+ Jack Snipe were found in that area. Budworth Mere hosted a Spotted Redshank on Sep 8th, Common Tern (Oct 12th), Arctic Tern (Sep 13th) and Blue-headed Wagtail (Sep 15th). Other interesting migrants included a very late Ring Ouzel at Ashton's Flash (Nov 7th) and nearby Broken Cross Lagoons (Nov 24th), a Yellow-browed Warbler near Marbury No1 tank (Oct 8th - a first for this area) and a Firecrest at Marbury CP (Nov 24th).

Sandbach Flashes

One or two Garganey were regularly seen during Sep and they lingered until Oct 7th. A Red-crested Pochard visited on Oct 6th. The third county record of Lesser Scaup was found at Railway Flash from Oct 3rd-6th, then at Elton Hall Flash next day and again on Nov 11th-12th. A Red-crested Pochard was seen (Oct 6th). An imm Marsh Harrier was a rare find on Sep 7th-8th. A remarkable count of 16 Buzzards was made on Sep 24th. A Hobby was present to Oct 6th. Passage waders included a Knot (Sep 17th), a Little Stint (Oct 11th-17th) and up to five Curlew Sandpipers (Sep 5th-13th and 21st). An adult Franklin's Gull roosted overnight at Elton Hall Flash (Sep 2nd-3rd) becoming only the fourth county record. A Little Gull was seen on Oct 11th and up to seven Yellow-legged Gulls were regularly seen. A Short-eared Owl at Maw Green Tip on Oct 31st was a good find. The last dates for hirundines were Sep 22nd for Sand Martins and Oct 13th for Swallows. A Yellow Wagtail at Watch Lane Flash (Oct 2nd) was the latest ever here. Two Waxwings at Watch Lane Flash (Nov 20th) was only the second ever record for the Flashes. Maw Green Tip hosted three Whinchats on Sep 12th and a peak of six Stonechats on Oct 31st. Nearby a late House Martin was seen in Congleton on Nov 1st.

Warrington Area

A Gannet at Houghton Green Flash (Sep 23rd) may have been the bird seen over the M56 the same day. Three Little Egrets at Moore NR Sep 9th was a site record and two visited Fiddler's Ferry in Sep. A Bittern returned to Moore NR from early Nov. Single Black-necked Grebes were at Appleton Resr (Sep 15th), Houghton Green Flash (Oct 15th, Nov 21st) and Woolston Eyes (two in Oct). Fiddler's Ferry hosted two Little Stints during Oct. 1,800 Woodpigeons flew over Moore NR on Oct 30th. About 25 Redwings flew over Lymm on Sep 26th. On Oct 10th, 256 Fieldfares and 900+ Redwings flew over Risley in 3.5 hours. A late Reed Warbler was at Woolston Eyes (Oct 8th). An eastern race Chiffchaff visited Moore NR (Oct 13th-14th).

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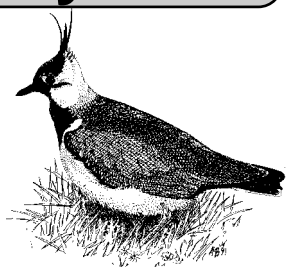
Thanks/acknowledgements to:- Birdcall, BirdGuides, *Birdwatch*, *Birdwatching*, J. Canovan (Rostherne Mere LNR), Hilbre Bird Observatory, G. Howard (Macclesfield RSPB), C. Hull (Nantwich Naturalists), B. Perkins (Sandbach Flashes), R. Smith (www.deeestuary.co.uk) and anyone else who passed records on.

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View from the Farmyard

Times have changed down on the farm; the pendulum has started its swing back towards the conditions that will hopefully suit wildlife. The conflict of interest between man and nature will be toned down somewhat, so that the culture of squeezing every last drop of productivity out of every last hectare will come to an end. For the last 35 years my life has been spent in the world of agriculture, to use an old saying "man and boy"; in 1969 the job was very different from today, but like now we were standing on the verge of great change. Then the birds were still on the land, intensification was not universal and there was a place for the small family run farm.

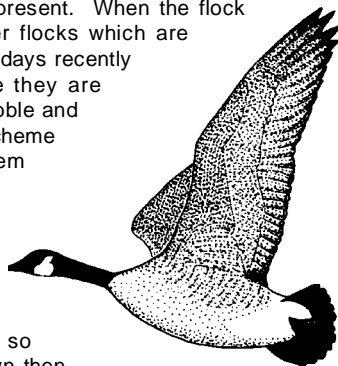
The family farm that gave me my break was in a small patch of north Manchester undeveloped and strangely rural. As chance had it I went wandering into the very same farmyard as my father had wandered into to find a job as a schoolboy in 1926; the families had changed but very little else had. Horses had been replaced by what today we would think were very small tractors, and electricity was here and being used to power machines to milk the cows; also making an impact were Friesian cattle, but the old roan Shorthorns and Ayrshire were still hanging on. Flocks of House Sparrows and Starlings filled the farmyard as they had in Dad's day, though he saw them when the threshing engine was there. For me an old Massey-Harris bagger combine was the kit.



Swallows nested in the shippon, the same shippon Dad had hand milked in, and these descendants of Dad's birds were still here and witnessing the gradual changes taking place below them. Luckily, I saw the last days of low-intensity farming; we weeded by hoe, cut hedges with saws, billhooks and galantines. Then the input of high subsidies began to change everything, not only the birds left the land, but also many of the casual workers, the Irish wandering workers who descended upon England in their thousands every year since the potato famine and the gangs who came to help with harvest. Mechanisation spoiled the contact between man and his colleagues and man and nature; nature was driven to live in the margins. Now once again change is increasing its pace; with less sprays and more land fallow than for over half a century the scene is set for a new blossoming of the wild. Birds have already begun to respond to the changes. The latest bird atlas will, I am sure, show these changes taking place and provide a benchmark against which all future changes will be judged. No longer are farmers to be paid to produce cheap food for the masses, but instead to be the park keepers for the revolution taking place in the countryside. To enable birds to expand to fill the new potential being provided by these changes, the policies being introduced will need to be long-term. Political indifference to the calls of farmers for less parliamentary and EU interference could always change as many factors of political will and financial tweaking come into play. But, as the stage is set, the drama looks to be provided by a whole new era of agricultural revolution and the rebound of wildlife to fill the new opportunities.

The short rather dull days of mid-winter, when even on the rare clear day the sun casts long shadows at midday, bring few stimuli to induce singing amongst birds. However, the Robin is a notable exception to this, with the benefit of a little artificial light he will sing all the night long. Early mornings in the last few weeks Dunnock and Wren have begun to run through their song sheets, practising their repertoires, but using muted tones as though not confident enough of their skill to belt out the songs for all to hear. As winters have become milder particularly in the pre-Christmas period, Mistle Thrush are, I feel, more likely to be heard in song and by the turn of the year many other members of the thrush family are to be found holding territories. Tawny Owl are now starting to call more, accompanying the barking of the foxes which now wander looking for a mate. Tawnys seem to be about in good numbers again after a few lean winters, when calling birds were possibly more noteworthy by their scarcity.

Tony Usher noted on his website 10x50.com that Canada Geese were present in Tatton Park in the largest flock ever recorded there, over 1,000 birds being present. When the flock leaves Tatton the birds seem to disperse into several smaller flocks which are spread amongst the neighbouring meres. Toft have on several days recently had flocks in excess of 400 birds. When near to the mere they are generally preening or bathing in the mere, then flying to the stubble and wet grassland to feed. Part of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme has been to grow areas of grain with brassicas then to leave them to the birds. It has been found of little interest to birds as yet; maybe a cold snap in the late winter will make it more attractive. I had hoped for large flocks of finches, but so far it has been of more interest to Wren and Dunnock that forage about in-between the broken stems of the straw. As yet only a few Woodpigeons strut up and down looking for grain, but the largest roosts start to accumulate in the New Year, so it could be that these reservoirs of food will come into their own then.



Since we started to create a garden for the birds in the early 80s, some of the berry-bearing bushes have now become quite large and are loaded with plump fruit. Recent reports of Waxwings in Cheshire have had me scanning the bushes for our long awaited visitors, however all we have are dozens of Blackbirds. Should the Waxwings wish to drop in for lunch they will need to get a move on before the Blackbirds strip the lot. One very welcome and rather rare visitor here was a Tree Sparrow which arrived with a small group of other finches. We continue to feed fairly large amounts of grain and seed and are rewarded by a wide variety of visitors. Only in early December did they arrive in any great numbers; the warm early winter period provided plenty of natural food as insects were still present in large numbers and a good crop of acorns and sweet chestnut kept birds away from the garden.

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

Projects and Surveys

SCARCE WOODLAND BIRD SURVEY (2005-2006)



This survey will be running over the next two breeding seasons, late March to mid-June and aims to gather information about the habitat use and variations in densities of a list of specialist woodland species throughout their ranges. The project will provide information of great value in planning future conservation work for woodland specialists, many of which are currently declining in Britain. It will also provide an opportunity for observers to learn more about woodland birds and their

habitats. Some of the species covered by the survey are very scarce and others do not occur throughout the whole of the UK, but we are also recording some of the more common woodland specialists. All types of woodland are appropriate for the survey including broadleaved, coniferous and mixed woods and recently planted and mature woods. Volunteers will need to be able to recognise target species by sight and sound, although a CD with the songs and calls of all the species will be provided to everyone taking part.

Methods: The most important part of this survey is recording birds along a transect route through woodland, known as a Woodland Walk. The woods will be chosen by observers – this is not a survey of randomly selected woods. Ideally, we would like observers to undertake a Woodland Walk in a pair of woods of similar type (i.e. both broadleaved or coniferous with a similar range of growth stages), one of which is known to be 'good', containing good numbers of commoner woodland specialists and ideally at least one of eight particularly scarce species: Firecrest, Hawfinch, Lesser Redpoll, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Redstart, Tree Pipit, Willow Tit and Wood Warbler. The other wood may either be believed to be 'poor' (containing few woodland specialists), or will be a complete 'unknown'. We will provide map outlines for observers, who will be required to mark on their transects, and to record basic habitat descriptions (mainly on woodland structure - not tree species composition), with help of diagrammatic illustrations.

The timing for getting the maps out is critical. Volunteers will need to come back to me with their choice of woods (6-figure OS grid references needed) as early as possible - **ideally before the end of January 2005**, in order for the maps to be produced and issued in time for the survey.

We will also be running a parallel programme of casual recording for records of the above eight target species, from any habitat, during the breeding season. This will be done through BirdTrack (see page 15).

Volunteers for the survey would be welcome.

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OPERATION ARTEMIS

The Hen Harrier is listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 and is afforded the highest level of legal protection in the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, this bird is under severe threat from criminal activity across the UK and is facing extinction, as a breeding bird, in England.

There is a wealth of widely acknowledged scientific evidence that persecution by a small minority of gamekeepers, other individuals involved in the grouse shooting industry and other land managers pose the greatest threat to the survival of the Hen Harrier. In recognition of this real and imminent threat the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) has declared that the Hen Harrier is the species of the highest conservation concern in the UK.

Having identified that the greatest threat is a consequence of criminal activity, society reasonably demands that:

- all sectors of the community entrusted with Hen Harrier habitat management fulfil their legal obligations to end persecution
- the statutory conservation authorities meet their responsibilities to enforce current legislation
- the Police reduce numbers of persecution incidents by preventative techniques, and investigate those involved in criminal activity
- the Prosecuting Authorities prosecute offenders in line with their statutory guidelines.

In England in 2003 eight pairs produced young. During 2004 only five breeding pairs successfully fledged young, all from the same geographical area. In Scotland the 2004 survey indicates that the numbers are also falling and the birds are being driven north and westwards.

Operation Artemis is the Police response to Hen Harrier persecution. The aim of the Operation is to reduce the number of incidents of persecution and to detect and prosecute offenders. The national Co-ordinators, Steve Downing and Paul Henery are working with the National Criminal Intelligence Service - National Wildlife Crime Intelligence Unit to that end.

If we are to be successful in preventing the Hen Harrier from being driven to extinction it is essential that we protect the birds at both winter and breeding sites. However, before this can be undertaken we need to identify these sites more accurately and plot the flyways between the winter roosts and the summer breeding areas and we urgently need your help to achieve this.

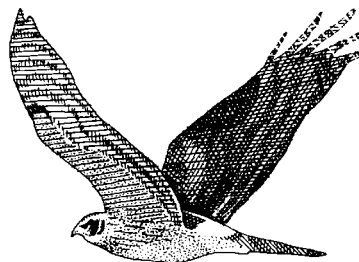
We recognise that in the past some raptor workers have been reluctant to share information with the Police whilst others have been unwilling to risk compromising their access to land to study other species. If this is the case then it should be remembered firstly that Open Access is on the horizon and secondly, and more importantly, the Hen Harrier is on the brink of extinction, as a breeding bird, in England. We all need to work together to ensure that this does not occur.

How to send in your sightings

There are a number of ways to report sightings of Hen Harriers to Operation Artemis and a 'sightings form' has been produced to assist us to collate the information we require.

Please provide the following information:

- Date and Time
- Location and 6-fig map ref.
- Sex: male / female
- Age: adult / juvenile
- Wing tag(s): colour and number (or none)
- Ringed: yes / no / not known
- Other Information (hunting, roosting, etc)
- Name, tel. no. and e-mail address



The information can be passed in any of the following ways:

- telephone / text to Steve Downing on 07917 267022
- by post to Paul Henery, Wildlife Crime Officer, Northumbria Police, Ponteland, Northumbria
- by e-mail to Paul Henery at paul.henery.3957@northumbria.pnn.police.uk
- by e-mail to Steve Downing at operationartemis@hotmail.com
- via the Operation Artemis website at www.savethehenharrier.com

If you have information about a specific persecution incident you can pass the information to us by any of the above methods or anonymously via Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

If the Hen Harrier is to survive as a breeding bird in England and to prosper across the rest of the UK they urgently need your help. **Please support Operation Artemis.**

Steve Downing and Paul Henery, Operation Artemis Co-ordinators

WINTER GULL ROOST SURVEY

Many thanks to those who contributed to the Winter Gull Roost Survey (WinGS), during last winter. Counters massed at various locations to record the number of roosting gulls as dusk approached and recorded over 100,000 gulls in the Cheshire/Wirral area around the middle of January 2004. The table below summarises the results.



Location	BH	CG	US	LB	HG	GB	UL
Astbury Mere	0	0		0	0	0	
Bar Mere	0	0		0	0	0	
Budworth Mere	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chapel Mere	0	0		0	0	0	
Combermere	3,700	100		250	0	0	
Dee Estuary - Connah's Quay	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dee Estuary - Ffynnongroyw	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dee Estuary - Greenfield	5,350	3,200	0	150	140	200	0
Dee Estuary - Heswall	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dee Estuary - Hilbre	259	320	0	79	3,730	47	0
Dee Estuary - Neston Old Quay	190	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dee Estuary - Oakenholt Marsh	1,000	600	0	400	100	250	0
Dee Estuary - Salisbury Middle	40	520	0	4	20	14	0
Dee Estuary - West Kirby	96	38	198	15	62	18	226
Deer Park Mere	0	0		0	0		
Doddington Pool	8,500	350		2	0	0	
Elton Flash	3,362	0		40	18	2	
Elton Hall Sand Quarry	4,600	0		122	26	37	
Farmwood Pool	4,800	22	0	14	262	15	0
Frodsham Marsh	200	2	0	4	0	0	0
Frodsham No6 Tank	110	10	0	0	7	2	0
Hurleston Reservoir	14,500	850		83	10	2	
Marbury Big Mere	0	0		0	0	0	
Mersey Estuary			845		590		44
Mersey Estuary	3,260	128	68	118	36	15	142
Mersey Estuary - Frodsham Score	0	0	12,100	0	0	80	5,500
Mersey Estuary - Ince Bank	756	286	3,724	85	164	44	2,398
Mersey Estuary - New Ferry	850	50		1	180	25	
Mersey Estuary - Rock Ferry	1,000						
Moore NR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Oakmere	3,173	1	0	0	0	4	0
Oss Mere	0	0		0	0	0	
Redes Mere	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rostherne Mere	4,300	200	0	27	4	0	0
Tabley Mere	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tatton Mere	750	0	0	1	1	0	0
Westlow Mere	0	0		0	0	0	
Totals	60,796	6,677	16,935	1,395	5,350	755	8,310

Key: BH = Black-headed Gull CG = Common Gull
 US = Unidentified Small Gull LB = Lesser Black-backed Gull
 HG = Herring Gull GB = Great Black-backed Gull
 UL = Unidentified Large Gull

During this exercise, the most important key sites were surveyed and 81% of the 475 identified sites throughout the UK were covered. The results are being used to look at changes in the number of gulls at individual sites over the last 50 years and will be summarised in a paper and a BTO article next year.

As in previous surveys, the sum of the counts from key sites will only provide a 'minimum population estimate', as many more gulls winter away from these sites. To be able to estimate the total numbers wintering in the whole country, it is necessary to add to this minimum estimate from the key sites an estimate of the numbers of gulls wintering elsewhere. This we hope to achieve in the second part of the survey by sampling randomly selected inland tetrads and coastal stretches away from the key sites.

The survey of inland tetrads and random coastal stretches began last year and we hope that most of the remaining sites will be covered this January. The areas we require to cover this coming January and require volunteers for are on the north Wirral shore at the following grid references: SJ296942, SJ281932 and SJ212895. If anyone can help, please get in touch.

We would also welcome any repeat surveys of sites already surveyed in 2004. Although these counts will not contribute to the population estimate, receiving counts from the same sites in different winters will allow some estimates about the consistency of gull numbers from year to year.

Paul Miller, BTO Regional Representative Mid-Cheshire/Wirral
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WINTERING WARBLER SURVEY 2004/05

Over recent decades the number and diversity of wintering warblers has greatly increased. The aim of this survey is to find out how many individuals currently spend the winter in Britain and Ireland and collect information on where they occur. Records are required for all wintering warblers (Goldcrest is optional), between 1st November and 31st March. The three target species are Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Firecrest, but records of other scarce and rare wintering species, such as Willow Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Yellow-browed, Hume's and Pallas's, are also requested.

For further details about the survey and how to contribute contact:

- Paul Miller (contact details above), or
- visit the BTO website: http://www.bto.org/survey/special/wintering_warblers.htm, or
- contact Greg Conway, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU. Tel: 01842 750050
E-mail: greg.conway@bto.org



BIRDTRACK

Members may have heard of the new online bird recording scheme BirdTrack developed between BTO, RSPB and BirdWatch Ireland. It is described as "a year-round recording scheme that will use data from birdwatchers' records to support species and site conservation at local, national and international scales. It follows on from the Migration Watch project that looked at spring migration in 2002-2004 and aims to map the migration and movements of birds and monitoring of scarce birds in Britain and Ireland".

In the publicity for BirdTrack they say "We intend to provide a comprehensive bird recording scheme that birdwatchers can use to store all of their birdwatching records". Concern has been raised by the Association of County Recorders and Editors (ACRE) about "the lack of consultation with counties/clubs/recorders prior to its launch" and especially about "the further fragmentation of data collection".

BirdTrack was considered at the recent CAWOS Council meeting and certain concerns were raised by several Council members present. We will be following closely the discussions between ACRE and the BTO/RSPB and will keep CAWOS members informed.

For the time being, in order to ensure that all records are included in the relevant *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report*, **may we urge all contributors to submit their yearly records for direct import into the CAWOS database**, whether or not they have already been submitted to other schemes/surveys. Please do not assume that any records submitted elsewhere will reach us (or if they do in sufficient time for inclusion in the *Bird Report*). In order to highlight possible duplication of records, please add another column to your spreadsheet and enter the name of the survey e.g. 'BirdTrack' (or simply put the name of the survey under comments).

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CAWOS Database

2004 BIRD RECORDS

Please submit your 2004 bird sightings as soon as possible!

We prefer to receive records in an **electronic format** via e-mail if at all possible. This reduces our workload and also the possibility of errors with manual input. The preferred format is a simple spreadsheet (or table) with the minimum column headings of: Date, Species, Site, Number, plus Comments for extra detail or to put the record in context. See *Bird News* No. 57, page 12-13, for general hints and advice (or e-mail me for a copy). Up-to-date 'site' and 'species' lists are available in electronic format, simply e-mail me for the latest versions.

If you are at all unsure how to send in your records please get in touch - a few minutes on the phone could save both you and us a great deal of time!

E-mail electronic records to: submissions@cawos.org

Send paper records to: Phil Oddy, 4 Swan Close, Poynton, Cheshire, SK12 1HX

For further information or advice contact: Sheila Blamire, Woodruff Cottage, Clamhunger Lane, Mere, WA16 6QG Tel: 01565 830168 E-mail: sheilablamire@cawos.org



ATLAS RECORDS

We have received several queries as to whether atlas records should also be submitted as 'ordinary' year records. All atlas records are being imported into the CAWOS database so there is no need to resubmit these **EXCEPT** where you can supply significant extra information to that already submitted, e.g. numbers, dates, precise grid ref and/or site, additional comments, etc.

Also, winter atlas records may be submitted too late in 2005 to be inputted in time for inclusion in the 2004 *Bird Report*, so please either send these in **asap after Feb 2005** to: atlassubmissions@cawos.org or send in 2004 winter records straight away to: submissions@cawos.org (though these will still have to be sent in as atlas submissions after Feb 2005 in the usual way).

Please put 'Atlas Breeding Survey' or 'Atlas Winter Survey' either in a separate column or under 'comments', so that the *Bird Report* compilers are alerted to the fact that it is a duplicate record. You may find it easier when submitting atlas records in the future to add in extra columns for 'number', 'grid ref', etc, so that you only have to submit the record once.

For further information or advice contact Sheila Blamire (contact details above).

Remember: we really would like any extra information gathered during your atlas surveys.



RARITY DESCRIPTIONS

Full descriptions, whether national or county, should be written out on a Rarity Form (available by downloading from www.cawos.org or from the Membership Secretary). They may also be sent in electronically, but the information given must be the same as on the form.

County Rarities: A complete list of county rarities is published in the *Bird Report*. E-mail or post county rarity descriptions **as soon as possible after the sighting** to:

The Rarities Secretary, Howard Fearn, 37 Ollershaw Lane, Marston, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 6ES. Tel: 01606 330358 E-mail: howardfearn@cawos.org

National Rarities: A list of national rarities is published in *British Birds* periodically. To allow time for circulation and approval of the record by the BBRC, descriptions should be sent in **as soon as possible after the sighting** to:

The County Recorder, Tony Broome, 4 Larchwood Drive, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 2NU. Tel: 01625 540434 E-mail: tonybroome@cawos.org

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.

LONGEVITY IN SOME CHESHIRE WARBLERS

Some Reed Warblers are known to outlive practically all other small passerines within the UK and research into ages of the warbler's adult population at Rostherne Mere has highlighted this.

Birds ringed as nestlings or juveniles, caught in later seasons as adults, provide a likely insight into the age composition of the breeding birds. Whilst 38% of the adults may be recruits from the previous season's young and 78% are no more than three years old, it would appear that about 2% are aged seven years or older. The annual adult survival rate is approximately 60%.

On 27 June 2004 I was pleased to catch an adult male, which I had also trapped in 1997, 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002. I ringed this bird as an adult on 22 July 1995, so it must have at least been approaching its tenth birthday. I thought this bird was likely to be the patriarch of the Reed Warbler colony but I was in for a surprise. On 6 July 2004, I netted an adult male, which I had trapped in 1997 and 2000, and was amazed to find that I had marked it as an eight-day-old chick on 4 July 1993.

In thirty-two seasons at the Rostherne reserve, I have caught nine Reed Warblers which have survived more than six years after ringing, including the eleven-year-old bird. The others have appeared after nine years (3), eight years (2) and seven years (3). A sibling of one of the nine-year-old birds was netted six years after its nestling ringing date. Of the nine 'old' birds, seven were males and two females. Also at Rostherne, a Sedge Warbler first encountered as adult male on 23 May 1997 has been trapped on site for eight consecutive seasons, being last netted on 15 May 2004.

I reported longevity in Reed Warblers at Tabley Park involving a male and a female which had survived for more than eight years, and a female last known nine years and ten months after being banded as a juvenile. In the same note, I referred to a Blackcap, ringed as a juvenile on Knutsford Moor, caught seven years later in Tabley Park (Calvert & Brannan 1983). The Blackcap was the oldest known of that species but subsequently longer-lived individuals have been found with the most extreme surviving ten years and eight months after ringing (Clark *et al.* 2002).

A most remarkable Reed Warbler, ringed in Cambridgeshire, was recaptured there some nine days short of thirteen years later. It was marked as adult male in July 1988 and upon recapture must have been around fourteen years old (Clark *et al.* 2002).

References:

Calvert, M. & Brannan, J.V. (1983) Longevity in Warblers at Tabley Park. *Cheshire Bird Report* 1983: 77-78

Clark, J.A., Balmer, D.E., Adams, S.Y., Grantham, M.J., Blackburn, J.R., Robinson, R.A., Wernham, C.V., Griffin, B.M. & Milne, L.J. (2002)

Bird Ringing in Britain & Ireland in 2001. *Ringing & Migration* 21: 80-143

Malcolm Calvert, Hilbre, 12 Hill Drive, Handforth, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 3AR

CAWOS LOGO

I would be very sorry to see CAWOS change their logo from Leach's Petrel. I feel it is a bird very much associated with Wirral across the country and indeed in most people's view the best place to see them. Living as I do very close to the north Wirral shore I can say that all birdwatchers look forward to seeing the Leach's Petrel, not just twitchers. I am certainly not a twitcher but I get so much pleasure in watching these dainty little birds battling with the elements.

It has been suggested that the Grey Heron would make a more appropriate logo. I would agree that it is a bird which is very much associated with Cheshire and Wirral but I feel, to put it bluntly, the Grey Heron is dull and boring compared to the charismatic little Leach's.

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FIRECRESTS ON THE WIRRAL

'County Rarities' on the Firecrest by Hugh Pulsford and Tony Broome in the last issue of *Bird News* Number 64 October 2004 was well-timed. November 2004 turned out to be a very good month for this little bird on the Wirral. This short article, which was first published in *Birding North West* Volume 1:11 (November 2004 edition), discusses the small influx which occurred on the peninsula during November and compares it to previous years. It should be noted that this comparison is based solely on Wirral records, and not Cheshire and Wirral as a whole. Therefore comments regarding status, both as a migrant and wintering, should be read in this context:

The Firecrest is quite simply a stunning bird. It is a member of the crest family – latin name *Regulus ignicapilla* and it is the scarcer of the two species of crest that occur in Britain; the other commoner species being the Goldcrest *R. regulus*, with which it regularly associates, particularly in winter. Aptly named, the Firecrest takes its name from having a central crown stripe which is flame coloured (reddish-orange) surrounded by a varying amount of yellow. It then has two black lateral crown stripes and pure white supercilia which meet above the base of the bill at a diffuse orange-buff spot. It has a thin black eye stripe and a black moustachial stripe. It often has pure white underparts and green upperparts, with a bronze shoulder patch, blue-grey nape and two pale wing bars! This goes to show that words can not adequately describe such a bird.

The Firecrest breeds across southern and western Europe north to Britain, Denmark and the Baltic and east to Belarus. It is, however, a localised breeding bird in England and Wales, mainly in southern England. The breeding population is prone to marked fluctuations from year to year. The southern European population is mainly resident. However, the eastern and more northern populations tend to be migratory and it is thought that they winter in the Mediterranean and the extreme west of Europe from Portugal to Britain.

There is very little information available on the movements of Firecrests from ringing recoveries. There have only been four British-ringed Firecrests recovered abroad: two in Holland and singles in Belgium and Spain and only nine foreign-ringed Firecrests have been recovered in Britain: seven from Belgium and singles from Holland and the Channel Islands. These all indicate movements to and from the near Continent; however, there is no data on ringed breeding birds or pulli.

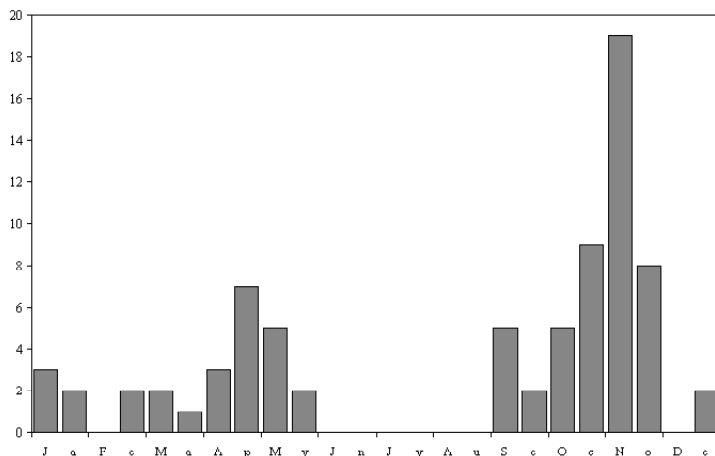
Westward movements from Europe to England tend to occur late in the autumn (October onwards) and are thought to be a result of an exodus from central Europe following the onset of cold weather. This is in line with those arriving in the north-west of Britain, some of which stay to winter. November 2004 turned out to be an excellent month for Firecrests on the Wirral with at least seven birds seen on the peninsula throughout the month and no doubt many more went unobserved.

The first bird was trapped and ringed on 2nd at a private ringing site in north Wirral, a site which has caught five previous birds over the years. Remarkably, the same site caught a second bird on 8th. The third individual was a bird seen with a mixed Goldcrest and Long-tailed Tit flock in Birkenhead Park on 8th and 9th; possibly representing the first record of Firecrest for the Birkenhead Park area? The fourth to sixth records all came from SR's garden in Spital, near Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve. The first of these birds was seen on 11th and this was followed by it or another on 14th. On this second date there were at least two birds and possibly as many as three present in SR's garden during the morning.

The seventh bird was another which was trapped and ringed, this time in a garden on Bidston Hill also on 14th, just going to show how many of these birds must pass through the region unnoticed, despite their attractive appearance. This is emphasised by the fact that many of the records of Firecrest from the Wirral come from ringers. In fact, the ringer in this particular garden on Bidston Hill had caught 20 Firecrests prior to this November! Similarly, Hilbre Island has had 17 records, and another ringer from north Wirral has had at least nine. These three ringers/groups represent more than half of the Wirral records.

Late October and particularly early November is the peak period for Firecrests on the Wirral. Figure 1 below details the majority of the records of Firecrest on the Wirral in the period 1968 (the first Wirral record) to date. These have been extracted from those reported to Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society (CAWOS) for 1968–2002. However, many wintering records are not date-specific and these have therefore been excluded from the histogram. The figures have been updated for 2003 and 2004 from our own information.

Figure 1: Number of Firecrests on the Wirral 1968 to 2004 (in half monthly periods)



This year's influx is certainly not unprecedented; for example, an influx in late 1974 involved numerous individuals, possibly a dozen, reported all over Wirral. Indeed the *Cheshire Bird Report* for that year recorded that "This unprecedented influx was apparently only part of a more general one in the NW for birds were recorded from Formby and Silverdale in Lancashire and several points along the North Wales coast". It is interesting that during the 1970s there were a number of wintering records, although by 1981 the *Cheshire Bird Report* noted that "The wintering records of a few years ago seem to have subsided to be replaced by a tiny double passage".

Another similar influx to this year occurred in 1998 when there were apparently eight recorded on the Wirral during November, six of which were caught by ringers.

The majority of spring birds are from the Wirral's coastline, with Hilbre, Red Rocks, Hoylake and Meols/Moreton producing the vast majority of records. However, late autumn and winter records are more scattered with various woodlands across the Wirral attracting this stunning little sprite. It is interesting to note that the winter distribution of Firecrests in England and Wales is mainly coastal and they apparently show a preference for woodlands adjacent to rivers or other water, although there is currently no information available on winter site fidelity.

It seems that the Wirral, being a peninsula and surrounded on three sides by water, is the ideal wintering area for these little beauties. There must be more out there in mixed tit and crest flocks, probably in Eastham CP, Royden or Arroe Parks on the Wirral, than are currently being reported. Perhaps, following this November's influx, we can look forward to at least a couple of birds wintering on the Wirral this year as in the past. Or perhaps the ringers will be rewarded for their constant effort with a foreign recovery which will indicate the origins of these birds.

Steve Round and Steve Williams

References:

CAWOS, *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Reports 1964-2002* (Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society) Wernham *et al.* (Eds) 2002, *The Migration Atlas*, T. & A.D. Poyser, London

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to Birdcallonline for information regarding the Birkenhead Park sightings and to Dave Cross, Kenny McNiffe and Tony Ormond for additional information.

Postscript:

Amazingly, yet another bird was trapped and ringed on Bidston Hill on 3rd December 2004, constituting the eighth on the Wirral since the start of November. It was the 22nd to be trapped in the same Wirral garden.

Note: A paper entitled 'The Regular Occurrence of Wintering Firecrests in North Cheshire and Wirral' by David Norman and Tony Ormond appears in the *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report 2003*. Ed.

GROUSE MOORS IN CHESHIRE – FURTHER INFORMATION

Bob Anderson's reply to my treatise on High Moor was stimulating as the management process is dynamic. Twelve years ago my target was to regenerate heather from barren grassland with a few Meadow Pipits and while there are more opportunities now the questions outnumber the answers.

A couple of comments:

1. Anderson's need for information not emotion is well taken. But perhaps passion backed with proprietorial ownership and financial commitment is different from emotional comment without scientific foundation.
2. Debate about private ownership of moorland is relevant because all the evidence is that public ownership results in a backward step for biodiversity. It need not be so, but what government will want to invest the necessary funds faced with competing claims to spend money on education, crime, health or pensions? Is there much difference, except in degree, between a moor and a private garden? Moorland owners provide a continual public benefit, akin to gardens occasionally open to the public. In both cases it is the passion of individuals which counts.

Let me try to fill the information gaps.

Red Grouse Stock

On prime kept grouse moor it would be reasonable to assume 1 breeding pair per 3 acres in a good year. High Moor is a 600-acre island with an adjacent 700 acres of forestry so the stocking rate is probably a maximum of 1 pair per 10 acres. A good breeding season should produce an average of 5 young to provide an August stock of 420 birds. Clearly, if the moor can only support 60 April pairs, 300 birds will die



over the winter, even if no shooting takes place, from predation or the endemic Strongylosis disease. The rule of thumb theory is that predation / disease will take the same as the April stock – allowing a harvestable surplus of 90 brace. In a poor breeding season the harvestable surplus (which is the 'top slice') would reduce (and might be 'nil'), because one cannot cut into the base April stock of 60 pairs and predators will have their cull whatever happens.

Not an exact science but the only other Cheshire moor, two miles away, of 6,000 acres shot 1,000 brace in 2003 – 1 brace for 6 acres. The smallest driven moor (175 acres) in Yorkshire has an average annual bag of over 50 brace - better than 1 brace per 4 acres. This April we counted 13 pairs on High Moor and an August stock of 55 birds. With only half the potential heather cover we are nearly halfway there - a long way to go, but grounds for optimism.

Black Grouse Stock

The area between Goyt Valley through High Moor, the Roaches to Warslow used to be a Black Grouse stronghold. Habitat has improved under the ESA Scheme with a good mix of scrub, heather and rushy in-bye land. Releasing Black Grouse was a conservation experiment, discussed with the UK Black Grouse Biodiversity Action Plan Team in the hope that adjacent owners (United Utilities, Lord Derby and the Peak Park with another 25,000 acres) would be inspired to participate in any future release - absolutely not with ever the idea of shooting. The release did encourage Severn Trent Water to release 30 birds last autumn in the North Peak, though 20 have been predated, mostly by Goshawks and 10 cannot be found. High Moor did prove big enough for the four blackcock which stayed around for six months and formed one lek but naturally the greyhens dispersed. The key point is that none starved so we have proved that 'habitat' and 'food' are not limiting factors.

Buffer Feeding

At Langholm the Joint Raptor Study found that Hen Harriers reduced Red Grouse stocks and proposed buffer feeding with white rats. In Wales Black Grouse are in a desperate situation particularly at RSPB's Vyrnwy Reserve, being decimated by Goshawks. To the surprise perhaps of everyone, RSPB and Game Conservancy included, on the nearby Ruabon Moor, where Red Grouse shooting has ceased because predation has eliminated the harvestable surplus, Black Grouse numbers have increased. Last year numbers increased from 90 to 120 with one new lek. Substantial numbers of Red-legged Partridges released for shooting have given Goshawks an alternative food source so the management system has significantly improved Black Grouse prospects – and raptor prospects

too! A logical experiment would be to do the same and release partridges on High Moor – but would there be a risk of disease transfer, less important in Wales as there are so few Red Grouse?

Species Reintroduction

Black Grouse and Red Grouse are different, but there are commonalities, especially the need for a 'secure base'. That base implies management control and funds to invest in gamekeeping and experiments like buffer feeding. My idea was to demonstrate that Black Grouse would survive sufficiently long to convince my neighbouring landowners to participate in a release over thousands rather than hundreds of acres. The example of Great Bustards being lost to foxes on Salisbury Plain shows it would not be feasible to release Black Grouse in the South-West Peak without increased gamekeeping input and funding that effort implies a reasonably viable grouse moor because no public funds are available.

Capital Cost

Hill land changes hands for around £600 per acre making High Moor worth about £400,000 so the notional interest cost is £27,000 per annum. Payment under the Scheme and the new Single Farm Payment will produce about £17,000 annually. So the net carrying cost is £10,000 every year, equivalent to £16 per acre. Not a very appealing prospect, so one has to be pretty besotted, albeit with one particular bird species.

Income – Sheep

The only production units on moorland are grouse and sheep. Everyone else enjoys the vista, flora, fauna and birdlife but no money changes hands. At the recommended stocking rate 225 ewes with one lamb to sell will net £25 per lamb or £5,600 per annum. But sheep can only be kept on moorland from May through August so there is a winter feeding cost (£1 per week per ewe) of £3,600. That means a potential net return without making any charge for labour of about £2,000.

Income – Shooting

Let's start from the premise that grouse shooting has a 'personal value' akin to membership of a golf club, remembering that the 365-day annual pleasure from managing moorland and its bird species is unquantifiable, even if a couple of days are spent with a gun in hand. So I am not seeking purely financial gain, just a revenue stream which makes all the time and effort more palatable. We can assume that grouse shooting on offer at £120 per brace would generate £10,800 if the maximum 90 brace target harvest was commercially available. There is the cost of operating each shoot day, of equipment and the labour cost of gamekeeping.

Comparative Moors

At Langholm, once one of Scotland's best grouse moors over 1,000 brace of grouse were shot annually, waders of all types were abundant and three gamekeepers were employed - and two pairs of Hen Harriers nested each year. The Game Conservancy / RSPB project showed that when gamekeepers were laid off grouse numbers crashed, wader numbers fell and Hen Harrier numbers increased to a peak in the middle of the project of 22 pairs. At the end of the project there are now precious few grouse and waders, no gamekeepers and harrier numbers have reduced back to two pairs because their food source has largely disappeared.

At RSPB's 25,000-acre Vyrnwy Reserve where there is no gamekeeping Red Grouse have virtually disappeared and Goshawks have reduced Black Grouse numbers from 33 to 8 in 3 years and soon no doubt to extinction.

Predation

The predation issue is at the heart of the matter since the adjacent Macclesfield Forest provides Goshawk habitat and Hen Harriers have hunted the open moorland. The 55 Red Grouse on High Moor (and the Golden Plover, Lapwings and Curlew) are already an island 'honey pot' surrounded by barren unmanaged land. As numbers increase so will the honey pot, and inevitably the predators. We radio tagged all 14 Black Grouse and 20 Red Grouse hens, checking them every three days. All previous radio tracking by the Game Conservancy has checked birds over longer periods. With a three-day check it is possible to evaluate a freshly killed bird and to make a reasonable stab at the cause – a fox will bite off wings, a Peregrine will decapitate the body, a badger will spread debris far and wide, a Carrion Crow will lift eggs and a Goshawk will pluck its prey. Simplistic but it was pretty clear that seven Black Grouse were fox kills and seven raptor kills – to answer Pulsford's point – well within the capacity of one Goshawk over a twelve-month period.

The Red Grouse were less susceptible (though the chicks suffered) probably because they remained in territories on kept land rather than dispersing like the grey hens over unkept land. Perhaps being netted wild stock rather than reared birds, they were rather wiser!

My tentative conclusion is that foxes and raptors cause equal damage but foxes can be strictly controlled if the boundary is 'secure', which (if foxes are eliminated) may lead to the conclusion that there are more apparent raptor kills.

I do not condone illegal killing but it is worth reflecting that when we had 25,000 gamekeepers in Victorian times there were Grey Partridges everywhere and a range of birds at population levels far greater than today. Raptors did survive until pesticides wreaked havoc and in this modern age we have foxes, grey squirrels, mink, Carrion Crows all out of control (and millions of cats!) with many bird species under serious pressure. One does wonder whether Tunnicliffe would have preferred to live at a time when there were 25,000 gamekeepers rather than today.

So the omens are not good. But the vital difference is that on High Moor intensive management and gamekeeping can be contrasted with the lack of management or mismanagement at Langholm and Vyrnwy. We have a test bed here in Cheshire because the recreated moorland already providing habitat for Golden Plover and the first brood of wild Grey Partridges for decades does seem to provide sufficient critical mass to have a small sustainable surplus of Red Grouse. Enlightened moor owners have no problem with investing to boost the Red Grouse harvest - and to feed Peregrines, Kestrels and Short-eared Owls so long as there is also a shootable surplus.

The management task in the Uplands is immense, especially in the Peak District with pressure from tourism, wild fires, pollution, let alone global warming or over-grazing and unplanned management of 'open access' may already be eliminating Hen Harriers' 'undisturbed landscapes'. Attempts are made to manage Crows, Cormorants and Ruddy Duck so it is frustrating for moor owners like me who can only manage half of the equation, to face emotion and intransigence when all the evidence from the lack of management at Vyrnwy demonstrates that Goshawk predation is eliminating a Red Data List species. High Moor is miniscule compared to Vyrnwy but it is ironic to think that we have more Red Grouse, probably more waders and certainly more grey hen nesting success than RSPB management has achieved.

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FRANKLIN'S GULL AT SANDBACH FLASHES

I arrived at Elton Hall Flash, Sandbach after work on Thursday 2nd September to continue the rather thorough coverage the site had been given lately by the locals, and to hopefully inflate an already impressive personal Sandbach Flashes ('flashes') 2004 year list (130 at that point). After an hour of scanning the Flash the best bird to be found was a juvenile Goosander (a site scarcity). I duly telephoned Dennis Swaby, a flashes regular who also keeps a year list, as I knew he 'needed' Goosander. Robert Jones another regular arrived and walked up the road to view the 'Salt Pan' from a different angle from myself. I started scanning through the burgeoning gull flock and after a minute or so came to a small obviously dark-mantled gull. Realising this was something different I shouted to Rob, his reply being "*are you looking at that gull?*". We joined forces and discussed the bird in detail with me resorting to my field guide (I'm not proud). We were convinced it was a Franklin's but making that first call to the locals and pager services was delayed until we had looked through the recently arrived Dennis Swaby's zoom lens. Small size, dark mantle, hooded appearance, white eye crescent - what else could it be?

The telephone calls commenced and within an hour about twenty-five birders were enjoying a Sandbach Flashes first. By dark approximately fifty had connected. The bird roosted and was seen early the following morning, but flew off south with Black-headed Gulls at 6.30am. It sounds sad (not to local patch workers though) but I didn't sleep well that night, the excitement of part finding a Flashes first and Cheshire rarity running through my mind. The next morning, on relating my euphoria to my wife she replied, "*it's only a bird*". Is she beyond conversion?

The Franklin's Gull was a surprise but not a totally unexpected find. Local birder Dave Norbury had selected this species on the '*Next for the Flashes*' sweepstake. The Sandbach Flashes bird list now stands at 233, of which I have seen 164 since my first visit in May 1998.

Andy Firth, Crewe

DRAKE LESSER SCAUP AT SANDBACH FLASHES

On 3rd October 2004 Andrew Goodwin (AG) and I had arranged to meet up on Maw Green Tip and take in the surrounding flashes in the hope of finding a rare passerine or wader. After an hour or so on the tip itself we decided to take a look at Railway Flash.

On first glance all we could see were a variety of wildfowl including Teal, Wigeon, a group of three Ruddy Ducks and a female Tufted Duck. Convinced that there was nothing else we walked further on and with a second look, I picked up what I thought to be a drake Tufted Duck but realised it had a 'scaup-like' back. I commented to AG who replied it was a Scaup and we retreated so as not to flush the bird as any species of Scaup would be an excellent find locally.

Over the next few minutes whilst looking at the bird we realised it was around the same size as the female Tufted Duck it was with; its head seemed to rise to a peak at the crown and did not appear smooth and rounded. The next thing that struck us both was how vermiculated the grey upperparts were. We then concentrated on the bill which was blue/grey in colour with a tiny nail. The stern of the bird appeared very dark. It was then we suspected Lesser Scaup and informed the locals.

Andy Firth telephoned me to say he was on his way and I asked him to bring a good field guide so as to eliminate hybrids as we were aware these were not that uncommon and a potential pitfall. Within the next hour or so we had eliminated hybrids but still needed to see the wing bar to identify the colour in the secondaries and inner primaries.

The bird was flushed by Canada Geese and good views were obtained by the gathering locals. However, the wing beats were very fast and none of us could be 100% sure of the colour. It was, however, fully-winged and no leg rings were visible. It then landed and the study continued. The bird now facing away from us flapped its wings and the wing bar was seen well. White in the secondaries and pale grey on the inner primaries - relief! News of the bird was telephoned to the pager services as a definite drake Lesser Scaup.

The bird stayed in the area until 7th October. Its arrival coincided with several North American species in Britain, although it could well have been the Lancashire bird seen earlier in the year. This bird, if accepted, is a first for The Flashes and the third for Cheshire and Wirral.

Mark Stubbs, Crewe

As Mark states this was the third record of Lesser Scaup for Cheshire and Wirral with the first being a first summer male at Frodsham between 16th May and 9th September 1996 at least and the second an adult male at Redesmere between 13th and 24th April 2001. However, it was the second sighting of Lesser Scaup in the north-west this year following the returning male found at Pennington Flash, Greater Manchester in July (see BNW Vol 1:7). **Birding North West Eds.**

Footnote: The Lesser Scaup found by Mark Stubbs and Andy Goodwin was the third North American species to be recorded at Sandbach Flashes this year and was somewhat unexpected as The Flashes are not renowned for diving ducks; Greater Scaup is a 'mega', Goldeneye is very irregular and Goosander is only just annual. The find was just reward for Mark Stubbs who covers the Maw Green Tip area at least once a week in all weathers and at all times of year. For Andy Goodwin it was yet another find to his impressive list of rarities at The Flashes. **Andy Firth**

VISIBLE MIGRATION

On 10th October I witnessed a quite phenomenal movement of Redwings and Fieldfares over the Whitley Reed bed (Arley). Whilst it was almost impossible to formulate an accurate count, I estimate that between 7:15am and 10:30am, approximately (very) 40/50,000 flew over, roughly 60/70% Redwings and 30+% Fieldfares. The birds appeared to be moving on a front of approximately 1.5 to 2 miles wide, but, of course, that really was the limit of my vision. Rather more perplexingly was the fact that they were virtually all heading due north-east (i.e. into the wind)! Interestingly, no birds had been seen going south in the days preceding.

I would be most interested to hear from anyone who either witnessed the event or maybe was taking part in a migration watch on that date.

Christopher Hancock, Brow Side, Brow Lane, Antrobus

EXCERPTS FROM THE KNUTSFORD ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY WEBSITE (www.10x50.com)

HOBBIES INCREASING IN CHESHIRE?

The remarkable turnaround in the fortunes of the Buzzard over the past decade has been well documented. It would now be unusual, at any time of the year, not to see at least one bird during a morning's birding, just about anywhere on the Cheshire plain. Other species are also currently increasing, perhaps though in a more subtle manner due in part to them being a little less obvious than a Buzzard. Chief amongst these must be the Hobby. Coward had no nesting records after 1898 and it was exactly 100 years later, in the spring of 1998 that a pair nested locally (I'm not saying these were actually the first pair since 1898, just the first that I knew of).

In the few short years since then they have flourished and over the past couple of weeks there have been a glut of records as adults and youngsters relax a little before beginning their perilous journey south for the winter. I've seen one regularly on Pavement Lane, Mobberley; Bob Groom has watched two on a number of occasions after Swallows at the roost along Green Lane in Knutsford and up to three have been recorded in front of the hide at Rostherne - possibly the birds seen in Tatton hawking insects over the main mere last week and yesterday watched by Darren Morris doing the same over at the Mill Pond at the north end of the park. **1/10/04**

WINTER INVASION OF THRUSHES

The arrival dates of some of our winter thrushes and the period of heaviest passage through the area is relatively straightforward to pinpoint. This is especially true for the two commonest species, Redwings and Fieldfares - Fieldfares are readily identified by their chattering calls as they pass over in loose flocks, normally during the hours of daylight. Redwings too have a characteristic call, a long, high pitched "seeep" that can be heard not only in the day but also at night as they migrate during the hours of darkness, especially on cold, clear nights during October and November. Give it a try on a favourable night, they don't fly too high, only around 100 or so feet up and it's not difficult to pick them out - a glass of red wine will make the job even more of a pleasure!

Blackbirds are more of a problem; you don't (as far as I know) see or hear large flocks passing through, it's more a sudden realisation, on a particular morning, that the species is everywhere! This was the case on Sunday 31st October on a trip round the local patch in Mobberley - there they were, feeding almost exclusively on an abundant crop of hawthorn berries, 100s of Blackbirds where yesterday there were only one or two locals. This technique also applies to Song Thrushes, they arrive early with the first Redwings, but because there are so few, it requires a remarkable sensitivity to subtle changes in numbers and behaviour to identify them. **5/11/04**

DRAMA IN THE SKIES

Drama today high in the sky over Mobberley when I noticed a flock of around 200 Lapwings flying in a tight group over in the general direction of Tatton Park. They were really high and still climbing, much higher than I've ever seen this species before. As I watched the birds the reason for their behaviour was revealed, just below them and equally intent on gaining height was a marauding Peregrine Falcon! Eventually the raptor drew level with the Lapwings, which must have realised the game was up, and they dropped from the sky scattering in all directions. The Peregrine selected its target, folded its wings and plummeted downwards.

On this occasion though it seemed to have met its match, the Lapwing waited until the last possible moment before skilfully slipping a few inches to one side, leaving the attacker grasping at fresh air as it dropped towards the ground. (It took me back to the 60s playing for Knutsford Boys Club in the Cheshire and Border Counties Sunday League when the same technique was successfully employed against the hugely aggressive fullbacks you used to meet up with in places like Sandbach and Cholmondeley - something to do with in-breeding we were told at the time!) Not to be outdone, the birds were still 100s of feet in the air, the Peregrine used its momentum to good effect and within seconds was able to stoop once again - six times it tried, but the Lapwing used the same trick each time, the final attack coming close to the ground below the tree line after which the two protagonists were seen heading off in different directions. **3/12/04**

PROOFREADING – A SERIOUS BIZNUSS

It may be of interest to see a copy of a letter I wrote to the Oxford University Press in October and their reply.

“As proofreader of the newsletter and annual report of a county ornithological society I am finding difficulty in differentiating between ‘epithet’ and ‘prefix’ in relation to birds’ names. In your 2003 dictionary an epithet is defined as ‘an adjective or phrase expressing a quality or attribute regarded as characteristic of the person or thing mentioned’ and a prefix, when a noun, can be ‘a word, letter, or number placed before another’.

Some of the types of words used in birds’ names are as follows:

Northern or European – description of location geographically	epithet?
Great or Lesser – size	epithet?
Common – how often occurring	epithet?
Barn or House – where they might be found	prefix?
Temminck’s or Baird’s – named after the person who discovered them	prefix?
Pied or Black-necked – description of appearance	epithet?
Carrion or Honey – what they eat	prefix?
Laughing or Trumpeter – what they sound like	epithet?
Solitary – how they like to live	epithet?
Brown Fish Owl – a mixture of colour and prey	epithet/prefix?

Also, I am uncertain as to why the ‘Royal’ in ‘Royal Institute’ is a prefix. Royal is given as an adjective in the ODE [Oxford Dictionary of English]. Would a Royal Tern begin with a prefix? Your help would be appreciated. The annual report is due to be published within the next month, so an early reply would be valuable.”

Reply: “The problem here is that *epithet* is not a part of speech, and neither is *prefix* when used in this way, so that their use is less precisely defined. In the example of *Royal Institute*, the word *Royal* can be called a prefix to describe its position relative to the noun, but this makes no comment on its function as an adjective. It would be unusual to call any of your examples prefixes.

(As a part of speech, a prefix is an element such as *non-* at the beginning of a single or hyphenated word that modifies its meaning. The *honey* in *honeyeater* is sometimes considered a prefix, though this is not strictly correct.)

The word *epithet* has been used for a variety of purposes in different disciplines. It has become the practice in natural history to use *epithet* for the distinguishing words in the names of animals and plants, such as those in your list. (Again, this makes no comment on the part of speech concerned: *northern* and *brown* are adjectives, *barn* and *fish* are nouns used attributively, and *Temminck’s* is the genitive form of a noun.)

So, the short answer to your question is that you can describe all of your examples as epithets.”

Hazel J Raw

I’m glad that’s cleared up then! Proofreading is a serious business..... Ed.

PERFECT EXAMPLE OF THE FOOD CHAIN

Of interest was the note ‘Feeding Frenzy’ about flying ants (*Bird News* 64). A similar incident happened to a neighbour of mine who was watching a swarm of flying ants outside her back door when a number of dragonflies descended on the ants, and then down from a willow tree flew her Swallows onto the dragonflies (she breeds Shetland ponies so their stables are ideal for nesting Swallows and there are a number of ponds around the area for dragonflies). A perfect example of the food chain.

Dot Bramhall, Falcon House, Burwardsley Road, Burwardsley, Chester, CH3 9PH

A.W. BOYD OBSERVATORY, ROSTHERNE

The management committee of the A.W. Boyd Observatory at Rostherne would like to thank all those helpers who contributed to the external painting of the Observatory and for the paint donation. The job was very efficiently done and the essential maintenance will hopefully last a good few years. Thanks again.

Conference Report

NORTH-WEST ENGLAND AND NORTH WALES RINGERS CONFERENCE HOSTED BY MERSEYSIDE RINGING GROUP

Merseyside Ringing Group celebrated its 50th anniversary by hosting a one-day conference on 27 November 2004, jointly with the British Trust for Ornithology. Over 100 people, including a number of invited guests, sat enthralled through a day of high-quality presentations.

The conference started in a very auspicious manner with a ministerial letter of support: Elliot Morley MP, Minister for the Environment, is a former member of Merseyside Ringing Group and had hoped to be able to be present, but in the end had official duties in China. Elliot wrote that he had never realised - when he was a teenager crashing through Burton Woods or holding the end on mist-net poles on the Dee, or being beaten up by Swans in Chester or thrown-up on by young Herons - that the data being collected would influence government policy and international treaties; but that is what it did. Data from ringing have led to protection of our estuaries, laws protecting wildlife, and now a Public Service Agreement setting the Government a target (with Mr Morley as the Minister responsible) to reverse the decline of farmland birds by 2020. The Minister concluded that "... we are fortunate in the UK to have the network of amateurs that we have and the fantastic database they provide. It does help conservation. It does influence policy both here and abroad and it is essential to our understanding."



The conference presentations opened with a talk by Dave Okill, another former MRG member who has lived on Shetland since 1976, and has made major contributions to the study of seabirds. He talked about Storm Petrels, especially their breeding and long-distance prospecting movements around the northern colonies. The Scottish birds must be passing through the Irish Sea, although little is known about them, and Dave issued a challenge to local ringers to get out there and catch Storm Petrels.

Professor David Norman, Chairman of MRG, used the corny title of 'One good tern deserves another' to describe the important populations of terns - significant nationally and internationally - breeding around the coasts and adjacent waters of north-west England and North Wales. The colony of Common Terns nesting on concrete islands, provided by Merseyside Ringing Group, in the Corus steelworks at Shotton, Clwyd is one of the largest in the UK, having grown from small beginnings on a wooden raft 35 years ago. Such a scheme could easily be copied in Cheshire on some of the county's inland waters. Conservation of Little Terns is more difficult: David's annual study of the growth rate of chicks at Gronant gives a good indicator of the success of adults in finding food.

The highlight of the conference was the keynote lecture from Professor Franz Bairlein, Director of the Institute of Avian Research 'Vogelwarte Helgoland' in Wilhelmshaven, Germany. Franz led the Network on European-African Songbird Migration, funded by the European Science Foundation, coordinating work across more than 50 ringing sites in 18 countries in Europe and Africa, one of which was Woolston. He is now Patron of MRG.

His talk 'Bird Migration: Where now, after the Migration Atlas? The next 100 years of bird ringing' covered the ancient, the modern and the future aspects of migration study. Conventional ringing still has a major part to play alongside new technologies such as satellite tracking or the use of chemical and molecular markers that help to reveal connectivity between breeding and non-breeding grounds. The daily cycles of birds wearing individual microchips can be checked as they return to nest sites equipped with antennae, automatic weighing machines and video recorders, needing an army of students to analyse the results.

In keeping with a speaker who had travelled from Continental Europe to the conference, Professor Bairlein urged that we work collaboratively with groups in other countries. But also, we need to

plug the gaps in our local knowledge. Until his talk, we had not realised that we are studying 'meta-populations', but he showed how our data on retraps and local movements provide vital information on dispersal and recruitment. Franz also pointed out that comparatively little is known about birds in winter, and pressed us to study more of the species that make use of our mild British climate.

Under the title 'Why don't Pennine Twite go to Blackpool?', David Sowter from the North Lancashire Ringing Group described how integrated colour-ringing programmes are showing that Twite chicks from the central Pennines migrate to the east coast as far south as Kent, but show no movement to the nearer west coast. The study has identified that birds wintering on the Lancashire and Cumbria coast are from a population breeding in the Western Isles of Scotland. Detailed studies of the species' breeding pattern and wintering habits are helping to shed light on its status on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern.

Dr Dave Leech, Head of the Nest Record Scheme at the BTO, gave a most entertaining and informative talk. In the 65 years of its existence, the Nest Record Scheme dataset has been used to produce more than 270 scientific papers, with some of the more significant recent findings including the impacts of changing farming practices and the continuing influence of global warming. Every birdwatcher can contribute to this knowledge by completing Nest Record Cards for all nests found - in garden hedges, nest boxes or wherever.

The final talk was given by Malcolm Bennett, Professor and Head of the Department of Veterinary Pathology at the University of Liverpool. His presentation entitled 'Biodiversity and Disease - is infection a conservation issue?' showed that infection (whether or not accompanied by obvious clinical disease) can have significant effects on the population dynamics of wild animals, and introduced us all to the idea that infection may even have benefits to hosts in some circumstances. The relevance to birds, and to ringing, lies in their possible role in carrying infections, especially enteric zoonoses (infections transmissible to human beings), and a new collaborative project with MRG investigating infections in wild British birds.

It may not be to everyone's liking to spend a day sitting indoors discussing meta-populations and enteric zoonoses, but the audience went home enthused and vowing to do more to put our study of birds in a wider context: we all realised how we can contribute to knowledge that will benefit bird conservation. In between the formal presentations, those present took the opportunity to meet or renew acquaintances with fellow-ringers and to peruse the latest publications and equipment from a variety of exhibitors. As well as the BTO, sponsorship was received from Corus Colors, CJ Wildbird Foods, Biota, Focalpoint and Wheatear.biz. The use of the conference venue was generously given by CLRC Daresbury Laboratory.

Merseyside Ringing Group was founded in 1954, originally as a partnership by Rob Cockbain and Graham Thomason, both still active members of MRG, who were presented with engraved commemorative plates. In those fifty years, the Group has ringed over 580,000 birds and had nearly 1,500 overseas recoveries. MRG has produced a 50th anniversary report, 88 pages of A4 size, summarising hundreds of spectacular ringing recoveries in maps, tables and text, and some of the papers published by MRG members. Copies are available from Peter Coffey, 19 Heath Lane, Little Sutton, South Wirral, CH66 5NN at a price of £5 including postage. Cheques should be made payable to Merseyside Ringing Group.

REPORTING RINGED BIRDS AND COLOUR RING SIGHTINGS

The BTO have now developed (in collaboration with EURING - the European Union for Bird Ringing) a much improved web form for reporting ringed birds found dead, or sightings of colour-ringed birds. The form is designed to work throughout Europe, but is currently being trialled in English only, though it is hoped that other languages will be available in the not too distant future. Your sighting/report will then be forwarded to the most appropriate person/scheme automatically. You can get to the form from the BTO website (www.bto.org) by clicking on the "Report a Bird" link on the right-hand side, or go to the form directly at <http://blx1.bto.org/euring/main/rings.jsp>

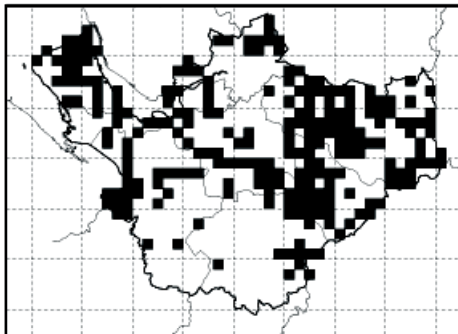
Cheshire and Wirral Atlas

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

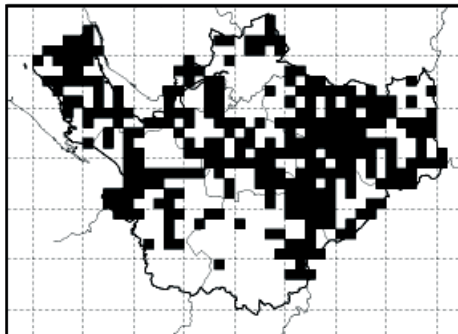
After the first season of this, the biggest project ever involving the Society, we can now present some preliminary results. All of this report should be treated with some caution, as the data come from a quick analysis of the records successfully imported into the database up to the end of 2004, rather than for the whole of Cheshire and Wirral, but the first map shows that observers covered a reasonable spread of the county. Some of the large gaps are where fieldwork has been done but records have not yet been submitted, but there are substantial areas needing more effort in the remaining two years of the project, and volunteers are welcome. Those not taking part will perhaps need reminding that birds are recorded in 2x2km squares, defined by the even-numbered gridlines of the Ordnance Survey – the squares known as ‘tetrads’, 670 of which make up the breeding Atlas recording area. Every project develops a jargon of its own, and 2004 was the year that ‘tetrading’ entered the vocabulary of many Cheshire and Wirral birdwatchers.

Prepare to be blitzed with numbers! From submissions received to the end of 2004, there are 16,332 records in the database, from 211 observers covering 161 species and 428 tetrads. There are “main” submissions for 339 tetrads (of these 98 also have supplementary submissions), and 187 have supplementary records: these are reports of birds found in the breeding season anywhere whilst observers were going about their normal travels, rather than as part of their dedicated survey work in their ‘own’ tetrad. A further 41 files have been returned to observers and are awaiting corrections, and it is known that as many as 80 more tetrads have been visited but the data not yet sent in. The 339 tetrads with dedicated visits that have been included in the database so far make up almost exactly half of Cheshire and Wirral. Including the supplementary records, the coverage map turns blacker.

Coverage for the 2004 breeding season



Coverage including supplementary records



From those who gave full details, an average of 7 visits per tetrad and an average of 24 hours were spent on the survey. Some of these figures are distorted by those who lived in the tetrad, or who recorded whilst they walked the dog every day. Nevertheless, they add up to about 10,000 hours of recording and represent very impressive figures from a veritable army of bird surveyors, many of the volunteers new to systematic bird recording. Almost without exception, participants have enjoyed the fieldwork and have learned new things about their local birds and their behaviour.

There are 15,613 unique records, where only one record of a species (the highest level of breeding evidence) per tetrad is included: 6,587 of 15,613 are ‘two-letter’ codes indicating confirmed breeding. This figure of 42% of confirmed breeding records is a good start; the next two years of survey work should allow it to be pushed up, ideally to the 60-70% range achieved in most county atlases. The figure for the first *Cheshire and Wirral Breeding Bird Atlas* was 62%. Similarly, the number of species found should go up. The present figure of 44 species per tetrad, for those surveyed as ‘main’ tetrads, is somewhat below the value of 52 species per tetrad for the whole county found in the first *Cheshire and Wirral Breeding Bird Atlas*, although it must be remembered that some of the areas had seven years of concentrated fieldwork (1978-84).

The most diverse tetrads so far reported for 2004, including all records of species seen or heard, are SJ75J (Sandbach Flashes, 87 species), SJ58M (Fiddler's Ferry, 81), SJ75E (Coppenhall Moss, 79), SJ78M (Rostherne Mere, 77) and SJ75K (Englesea Brook/Balterley Mere, 76). If only species with 'confirmed breeding' records are included, the picture changes somewhat, with SJ75K (59 species), SJ28I (West Kirby East, 54), SJ77N (Toft, 53), SJ75E (52) and SJ58M (50) the top five. Most observers will have realised the importance of a range of habitats, including especially some standing water, for an area to hold substantial diversity of species.

After this barrage of figures, what do the data tell us about the county's birds? Because of the uneven spread of effort across the county, I have not yet prepared any maps of species' distribution, but the uneven coverage has to be borne in mind as a 'health warning' on any of the following snippets of information. Note also that all of the discussion is about *distribution*; we plan to do detailed work on the *abundance* of the county's birds through surveys in randomly selected areas in the breeding season of 2005.

The order of the 'top ten' most widely-distributed species, with any level of breeding status, is Blackbird, Blue Tit, Robin, Wren, Great Tit, Woodpigeon, Chaffinch, Song Thrush, Magpie, Dunnock, House Sparrow and Swallow (three species tie for tenth place). Considering only confirmed breeding, the order changes to Blue Tit, Great Tit, Blackbird, Starling, House Sparrow, Robin, Swallow, Mallard, Moorhen and Carrion Crow. It can be seen that the latter list reflects the ease of finding nests (such as the tits, Swallow and Carrion Crow), adults carrying food (such as Starling, Blackbird and Robin), adults with dependent young (House Sparrow) or downy chicks (Mallard and Moorhen).

Some comparisons with the results from the 1978-84 *Breeding Bird Atlas* are illuminating. In the first *Atlas*, the rank order of the 'top ten' summer migrants (in terms of the number of tetrads in which they were recorded) was Swallow, Willow Warbler, House Martin, Cuckoo, Blackcap, Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Spotted Flycatcher, Yellow Wagtail and Swift. There have been some major changes in just twenty years. For the data submitted so far, in 2004 the order is Swallow, Chiffchaff, House Martin, Blackcap, Willow Warbler, Whitethroat, Swift, Garden Warbler, Cuckoo and Sedge Warbler. It is no surprise that Spotted Flycatcher and Yellow Wagtail have dropped out of the top ten, but who would have guessed that Chiffchaff would become our most widely recorded warbler? We shall have to see if the next two years of the survey change these results.

The decline in distribution of the Willow Warbler is striking. In the 1978-84 survey, Willow Warblers were found in almost every tetrad – 96% of the county – and the species was proven to breed in more than three-quarters of them. In 2004 it was located in just 72% of those tetrads from which data have so far been received. Its near relative, Wood Warbler, was found in only 9 tetrads in 2004, and proven to breed at only one site, just one-tenth of the distribution found only twenty years ago. On the other hand, Chiffchaffs have greatly extended their presence to become the top *Phylloscopus* warbler, now being found in 299 tetrads, nearly 90% of those reporting so far, well up on the two-thirds (67%) of the county where its presence was recorded in 1978-84.

Wherever one looks, the results contain intriguing gems. Who would have thought that we would receive more breeding records of Red-legged than Grey Partridge? And there are now more records of Great Crested Grebe than Little Grebe – twenty years ago it was the other way round. There are already more tetrads recorded with Greylag Geese than in the whole of the county in 1978-84. So far, our third most common duck for confirmed breeding records in 2004 (behind Mallard and Tufted Duck as the two most widespread) is – Mandarin! The authors of the first *Breeding Bird Atlas* wrote that '... it seems unwise to regard the Mandarin as a permanent addition to the Cheshire avifauna', neatly illustrating the folly of making predictions.

The rise of some birds of prey has been one of the exciting stories of the last two decades, and I suspect that many people could have guessed that Buzzard is now the most widespread, with 67 tetrads with proven breeding in 2004 (up from just two in 1978-84). The rank order is now Buzzard, Kestrel, and Sparrowhawk, with Hobby the next most widely distributed diurnal raptor. The effects of climate change are complex. Despite our warmer summers, most of the species with a south-easterly distribution are much reduced from twenty years ago, although Red-legged Partridge has bucked this trend: in 2004 observers found Tree Pipit in only six tetrads (82 in the 1978-84 *Atlas*) and there were no Turtle Dove records – who could remember that they were detected in 144 tetrads in 1978-84?

The decline of our seedeaters has often been discussed, so it is good to have found Yellowhammer in almost half of all tetrads surveyed, and Linnet in rather more than half, although they are way below the 85% and 88% of all tetrads in which they were located during 1978-84. But the decline of the Lesser Redpoll has been much less commented upon. Twenty years ago it had been recorded in 295 tetrads, 44% of the county, mostly in the northern half of Cheshire and Wirral; in 2004, records came from just 29 tetrads, with no proof of breeding from anywhere. And there were no records at all of Twite: no wonder that it is on the Red List of Species of Conservation Concern.

The paucity of records of 'brown tits' justifies our concern, as well. Only four tetrads had records of Marsh Tit showing breeding behaviour – one with recently fledged young, one pair, and two singing birds. Rather more tetrads recorded Willow Tit, but still only 14 at any level of breeding status. Twenty-two sites recorded Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, a precipitous drop from 239 in 1978-84, and proof of breeding came from only three of them. We need to spend more time in damp areas with rotting wood to check that these records truly reflect these species' status.

As readers of *Bird News* can tell, this survey is already producing some very exciting results which will prove to be really important for bird conservation in our area. Every record is linked with the habitat information for the bird, and detailed analysis will need much more time than this early snapshot. More results will be given soon in a newsletter for all participants in the Atlas project. So, there is already fantastic progress, a great tribute to the thousands of hours contributed so far by hundreds of fieldworkers. On behalf of the birds, thank you all!

Despite this progress, much remains to be done in raising the level of proof of breeding for many species and ensuring complete coverage of the whole of Cheshire and Wirral. More help from CAWOS members would easily enable those targets to be hit. It is surprising to see that fewer than one in three of you – the members of the county's Society – is recording for the Atlas. Just think what more we could discover about the county's birds if more CAWOS members joined in. And don't forget the winter survey, now well under way.

To volunteer to help, please contact David Cogger (see below). For more information, see the Atlas website <http://www.cheshireandwirralbirdatlas.org/>.

David Norman (Atlas Coordinator), Rowswood Cottage, Ridding Lane, Sutton Weaver, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 6PF. Tel: 01928 711064 E-mail: atlascoordinator@cawos.org

UPDATE ON TETRAD ALLOCATION

With most of the returns for the breeding season now in the database it is clear that nearly 400 of the 670 tetrads have already been surveyed, with a promise of another 50 to be done in 2005. The project has caused considerable interest, with many of those taking part saying how much taking part in a survey such as this has enhanced their birdwatching.

However, we still have between 150 and 200 tetrads to be covered. Many fieldworkers have expressed a desire to survey their own tetrads again to get maximum coverage, which is excellent, but we do need to cover those additional tetrads either in 2005 or 2006. **I would like those already participating to think seriously about taking on an extra tetrad and those who have not joined yet to consider taking part.** Some of the tetrads which need coverage may be some distance from your home or your regular birdwatching 'patch'; however, please think about adopting one of these - it may be in an unfamiliar part of the county but it may also offer new challenges and different birds!

For those of you new to this project, details were published in the July and October 2003 editions of *Bird News*. A tetrad is an area 2km square (thus occupying 4 squares on the OS map) and the grid reference given is that for the bottom left-hand square of the tetrad. Tetrads are grouped in 10km squares and an Area Coordinator is responsible for each 10km square, so you will have someone to call upon if you need help.

If you would like to volunteer to take on a tetrad please choose your tetrad from the list enclosed with this issue of *Bird News* and then contact me to check if it is still available; if it is, I will send you a map of the area and all the necessary paperwork (instructions, record cards, etc). You can also download these from the Atlas website.

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

ATLAS SPONSORSHIP OF INDIVIDUAL SPECIES

Thanks to the following people who have, to date, sponsored an additional 34 individual species:

Sue and Christian Heintzen	Swift, Raven
Charles Hull	Moorhen
www.deeestuary.co.uk	Shelduck, Redshank, Pintail, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit
RSPB Chester Group	Skylark
Peter Day	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
Joe O'Hanlon	Barn Owl
Mrs K Parry	Dipper
Dr R G Thorp	Goldfinch
Dr P Griffiths	Starling
Alan Straw	Tree Sparrow
Mr and Mrs A J Hayter	Pochard
Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens	Oystercatcher
Macclesfield RSPB Group	Grey Heron
David Simmons	Siskin
Clive Richards	Pied Flycatcher
Irene Blagden	Stonechat
Michael Miles	Lesser Redpoll
Nantwich Natural History Society	Willow Tit
Paul Brewster and Cerys Jones	Green Woodpecker
Focalpoint	Spotted Flycatcher
Tony Usher	Lesser Whitethroat
Tony Coatsworth and Gina Jones	Treecreeper
Woolston Eyes Conservation Group	Black-necked Grebe
Dr Bill Bellamy	Wigeon
Marc Granville	Water Rail

AstraZeneca Sports Club are sponsoring Grey Wagtail, Little Owl, Nuthatch and Goldcrest.

If you are interested in sponsoring a species there are still about 100 left (cost £25 per species). The species which have already been sponsored are either printed above or on page 25 of the October 2004 issue of *Bird News*. Sponsors will have their names printed at the foot of the species' description and, of course, will have the satisfaction of supporting the work of the Atlas. Simply send a choice of four species you would be interested in sponsoring in order of preference (in case your main choice has already been taken), along with a cheque for £25 per species (payable to CAWOS). Please enclose a stamped addressed envelope or give an e-mail address so that you can be informed which species you have sponsored. You could also phone or e-mail me for up-to-date availability.

The Lancashire and North Merseyside Breeding Bird Atlas was able to obtain sponsorship for every species - surely Cheshire and Wirral can do as well!

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

WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO BECOME A COUNCIL MEMBER?

There are two vacancies on Council which need to be filled at the AGM on 4th March 2005. Council meets five times a year (currently in Knutsford), plus each Council member is expected to play a role on one of the Sub-committees within CAWOS. **If you are interested please come forward.** If you're unsure what it entails please contact Sheila Blamire, David Cogger, or any other Council member to discuss it further.

THE SOCIETY NEEDS YOU!

Membership News

Welcome to the following new members: N and J Crossley, Anne Fowler and Hugo Charlton-Jones. Our membership for 2004 reached 370, equalling the previous highest total of 2002.

Gift Aid: Thanks to all those who continue to support this scheme - last year you brought in over £800 to CAWOS funds. May I remind you that once you have signed up for the scheme I will keep you on it unless you let me know otherwise; if you cease to be a UK taxpayer you should let me know.

Meetings at the Grosvenor Museum: Since 2001 we have held one indoor meeting per year at the Grosvenor Museum in response to justified comments from some members living in west Cheshire and Wirral that we did not do enough for them. However, attendance at these meetings has been disappointing; at the recent December meeting only 45 people were present, 3 of those were CAWOS members (out of a membership of about 100 who live in the area) who would find it easier to reach Chester than Knutsford, a further 10 were non-members from the Chester area and the remainder were members who normally come to the Knutsford meeting. We have therefore regretfully decided not to hold meetings in the Chester area for the foreseeable future.

Meeting of Council held 11 November:

- It was agreed to buy a new printer for *Bird News* as the existing one was giving considerable problems.
- Members were asked to think if there was a project sufficiently large to warrant a bid under the "Awards for All" application.
- The Secretary was writing to all local authorities within our recording area requesting that CAWOS be placed on any mailing list for matters concerning wildlife conservation.
- Steve Barber was trying to find out the number of Cormorants culled in the county.
- Those fieldworkers for the Atlas who were not members were being sent a pack to include a *Bird News* and an old *Bird Report* to encourage them to join CAWOS.
- Mark Feltham had resigned from the post of *Bird Report* Editor owing to pressure of work; he was warmly thanked for his efforts.
- Training days for Atlas fieldworkers and members of CAWOS would be organised in the first part of April 2005.
- CAWOS would have a stand at the Woolston Eyes Conservation Group Open Day on June 26.

TRAINING FOR FIELDWORKERS AND CAWOS MEMBERS

Several Atlas fieldworkers have expressed a desire for more training in fieldcraft, with identification and correct description of habitat being two of the topics mentioned. When this was discussed by the Area Coordinators at a recent meeting it was generally agreed that the best type of training was that which is done in the field. Several people have consequently expressed a willingness to lead a small group in the field at various locations in the county in the first two or three weeks of April 2005, i.e. at the beginning of the breeding season. **This is not confined to fieldworkers and any member of CAWOS is welcome to join.**

The time and places of these training sessions would be decided by mutual agreement among the trainer and the fieldworkers. If you are interested please contact whichever of the following people it would be most convenient for you to meet with:

David Bowman in the Warrington area, tel: 01925 754734 or e-mail: DSBowman123@aol.com

David Cogger in the Winsford area, tel: 01606 832517 or e-mail: memsec@kawos.org

Neil Friswell in South-West Cheshire, tel: 01829 770463 or e-mail: neil.friswell@btinternet.com

Charles Hull in the Nantwich/Audlem area, tel: 01270 628194 or e-mail: edleston@yahoo.co.uk

David Norman in the Runcorn, Delamere Forest or Nantwich areas, tel: 01928 711064 or e-mail: davidnorman@kawos.org

Tony Usher in the Knutsford area, tel: 01565 873508 or e-mail: tony@10x50.com

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

Tel: 01606 832517 E-mail: memsec@kawos.org

Diary

JANUARY

- 23 **Raptor Watch, Old Baths car park, Parkgate, 3:00pm, tel: 0151 336 7681**
 23 HO Pilling and Glasson Dock by coach departing at 8:00am - ring for details
 25 ADNHS 'NATURAL HISTORY OF THE SEFTON COAST' by Tony Duckels
 28 KOS 'POLAND' by Val McFarland
 28 WGBG 'BIRD HABITATS OF THE PENNINES AND SHETLAND' by Gordon Yates
 30 **Birdwatch, Banks Road car park, Lower Heswall, 11:00am (HW 14:09, 8.9m)**

FEBRUARY

- 3 CADOS 'BIRD RINGING' by Ian Spence
 3-6 MCOS Weekend to Solway, contact Les Goulding 01925 265578
 4 **CAWOS 'IT'S A FUNNY WAY TO MAKE A LIVING' by Michael Leach**
 5-6 CADOS Norfolk weekend - contact Alan Harley 01925 269430
 6 WGBG Fair Ings and Blacktoft, by coach - contact Derek Bradbury 01625 525950
 6 CRSPB North Wales coast, contact Peter Stevenson 01352 716886
 8 MRSPB 'BACK DOWN A COUNTRY LANE' by Mike Lane
 8 ADNHS 'NAMIBIAN ADVENTURE' by Mike Pettipher
 9 HO 'BIRDS OF THE BULGARIAN BLACK SEA COASTS' by John Roberts
 10 **Hightide Birdwatch, Old Baths car park, Parkgate, 11:00am (HW 12:18, 10.1m)**
 11 **Hightide Birdwatch, Old Baths car park, Parkgate, 11:30am (HW 13:01, 10.1m)**
 11 SECOS 'ALGARVE – SUN, STILTS AND STORKS' by Rev. Hugh Linn ARPS
 11 MCOS 'ALL ABOUT ROBINS' by David Tidswell
 12 **Hightide Birdwatch, Old Baths car pk, Parkgate, 12:00noon (HW 13:42, 10.0m)**
 12 NCRSPB Leighton Moss - contact Paul Grimmett 01925 268770
 13 KOS Wirral CP/Inner Marsh Farm, meet 9:00am at the Sessions House (changed venue)
 13 SECOS Hest Bank & Heysham, by mini-bus - contact Derek Owen
 13 HPRSPB Conwy/North Wales, by car, meet at the Memorial Car Park, Marple at 8:30am
 14 SRSPB 'A NIGHT ON THE TILES – Ramblings of a Nocturnal Naturalist' by Jeff Clarke
 15 MCOS Shropshire Meres - contact Harold Fielding on 01606 882529
 16 CRSPB 'THE FASCINATION OF BIRDS' by Rev. Hugh Linn
 18 NCRSPB 'THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF IMAGES FROM LESBOS' by Ken Lewis
 19 ADNHS Old Moor Reserve, nr Barnsley – contact Anne Mason 0161 980 8645
 20 **Raptor Watch, Old Baths car park, Parkgate, 4:00pm, tel: 0151 336 7681**
 21 HPRSPB 'SEARCHING FOR ROSS'S GULL' by Brayton Holt
 22 ADNHS 'LLANGOLLEN TO CHESTER' by David Cummings
 25 KOS 'JEWEL IN THE CROWN - The Wildlife of Northern India' by Mike McKavett
 25 WGBG 'CLOSE UP AND PERSONAL WITH BIRDS OF PREY' by Steve and Carol Davidson
 25-27 HPRSPB Severn Estuary Weekend – ring for details
 26 **Wader Watch, King's Gap, Hoylake, 11:00am - 1:00pm, tel: 0151 678 5488**
 27 SRSPB Mere Sands Wood/Southport Marshes by coach – ring for details
 27 MRSPB Caer Hun and RSPB Conwy, depart Duke Street car park at 8:00am

MARCH

- 1 ADNHS SUPPER & SOCIAL – contact Anne Mason 0161 980 8645
 3 CADOS AGM & MEMBERS' EVENING
 4 **CAWOS AGM + 'Cheshire and Wirral Bird Atlas: First Impressions' by David Norman**
 4-6 SECOS Dorset Weekend - contact Derek Owen
 6 CADOS Forest of Dean - contact Dave King 0151 327 7212
 6 CRSPB Leek moorlands, contact Brian Webster 01244 851026
 6 HPRSPB Marbury/Neumann's Flash, meet at the Memorial Car Park, Marple at 8:30am
 8 MRSPB 'OWLS OF THE WORLD' by Michael Leach
 8 ADNHS 'CHINA, ITS LAND AND FLOWERS' by Marion Bray

- 9 HO 'THE FASCINATION OF BIRDS' by Rev. Hugh Linn
- 11 **Hightide Birdwatch, Old Baths car park, Parkgate, 10:30am (HW 11:58, 10.2m)**
- 11 SECOS 'BIRDS OF NEEDWOOD FOREST' by Charles Brown ARPS
- 11 MCOS 'NESTING BIRDS' by John Lintin Smith
- 12 **Hightide Birdwatch, Old Baths car park, Parkgate, 11:00am (HW 12:37, 10.2m)**
- 13 KOS Gigrin Farm trip - ring for details
- 13 HO Llanfairfechan and Conwy by coach departing at 8:00am - ring for details
- 13 NCRSPB Foryd Bay - contact Les Goulding 01925 265578
- 14 SRSPB 'RSPB VISION FOR THE NORTH-WEST' by Keith Clarkson
- 15 MCOS Fiddler's Ferry - contact Harold Fielding on 01606 882529
- 16 CRSPB 'BACK DOWN A COUNTRY LANE' by Mike Lane
- 18 KOS 'BIRDS THRO' ONTARIO' by Phil Holland (3rd Friday!)
- 18 NCRSPB QUIZ AND HOT-POT SUPPER – contact John Drake 01928 561133
- 20 **Raptor Watch, Old Baths car park, Parkgate, 5:00pm, tel: 0151 336 7681**
- 20 SECOS Pennington Flash, by mini-bus - contact Derek Owen
- 20 MRSPB Marton Mere, Blackpool, depart Duke Street car park at 8:00am
- 20 MCOS Black Grouse, Denbighshire - contact Harold Fielding on 01606 882529
- 21 HPRSPB 'THE RAINFOREST' by Michael Leach
- 28 WGBG 'BIRDS OF PREY AND MIGRATION' by Paul Doherty

APRIL

- 2 ADNHS PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH – contact Anne Mason 0161 980 8645
- 3 CRSPB Lake Vyrnwy, contact Norman Sadler 01244 335670
- 8 SECOS AGM and MEMBERS' EVENING
- 8 MCOS AGM AND MEMBERS' SLIDES
- 9 **Hightide Birdwatch, Old Baths car park, Parkgate, 11:00am (HW 12:33, 10.0m)**
- 10 KOS Conwy and Llandudno, meet 8:30am at the Sessions House
- 10 HPRSPB Derbyshire Bridge/Goyt Valley, meet at the Memorial Car Park, Marple at 9:00am
- 11 SRSPB 'THE BIRDS OF THE WHITE PEAK' by John Power
- 11 HPRSPB 'A LIFETIME OF BIRDS' by Laurence Rose
- 12 MRSPB 'HOMELIFE OF THE GOLDEN EAGLE IN SCOTLAND' by Terry Pickford
- 12 ADNHS AGM + SLIDE SHOW
- 12 MCOS Brereton Heath CP/Dane Valley - contact Harold Fielding on 01606 882529
- 13 HO 'SIBERIAN DREAM' by Graham Bell
- 15 NCRSPB 'ISLAY MAGIC' by Gordon Yates
- 16 MRSPB Loggerheads Country Park, depart Duke Street car park at 8:00am
- 16 MCOS Dunsop Valley - contact Graham Haspey on 01829 751949
- 16-30 HPRSPB Holiday in Majorca – ring for details
- 17 SRSPB Marbury Park, Great Budworth, meet in Marbury Park car park at 9:30am
- 17 SECOS Rutland, by mini-bus - contact Derek Owen
- 20 CRSPB AGM followed by 'LAND OF CONTRASTS (NAMIBIA)' by Keith Offord
- 22 KOS AGM & MEMBERS' SLIDES
- 22 WGBG 'RIBBLE ESTUARY – A WORLD CLASS WETLAND' by Stuart Meredith
- 24 **Birdwatch, Banks Road car park, Lower Heswall, 9:00am (HW 12:11, 9.4m)**
- 24 WGBG West Midlands Reservoirs, by coach - contact Derek Bradbury 01625 525950
- 24 NCRSPB Ceiriog Valley - contact Tony Parker 01925 726986
- 25 SRSPB Redesmere, meet in the lay-by by the mere off A34 at 7:15pm
- 26 ADNHS 'DRAGONFLIES OF THE WORLD' by Prof. Mike Parr
- 30 MRSPB Coombes Valley RSPB Reserve, meet at the Visitor Centre at 8:30am

MAY

- 4 NCRSPB Aber Valley - contact Paul Grimmer 01925 268770
- 7 ADNHS Leighton Moss – contact George Allan 0161 973 8088
- 7 WGBG Ynys-hir, by coach - contact Derek Bradbury 01625 525950
- 8 CRSPB Botanical Gardens, Morfa Nefyn by coach, organiser to be confirmed
- 8 HPRSPB Coombes Valley, by car, meet at Marple at 8:00am or Chapel at 8:30am
- 10 MRSPB AGM followed by MEMBERS' SLIDES

- 10 ADNHS 'HEDGEROWS' by Chris Hudson
- 11 HO 'A BIRD AND ITS BUSH' by David Elcome
- 11 NCRSPB Pennington Flash - contact Paul Grimmer 01925 268770
- 12-15KOS St. Bees Head, Cumbria Weekend – ring for details
- 13-15MRSPB Suffolk Weekend, contact Ray Evans for details on 01625 432635

**For further information on Outdoor Events within the county see the
2005 Birdwatcher's Diary at: www.deeestuary.co.uk**

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AFFILIATED SOCIETIES

- ADNHS Altrincham & Dist. Natural History Soc, mtgs Hale Methodist Church Hall 7.30pm, contact Sec. Anne Mason 0161 980 8645
- CADOS Chester & Dist. Ornithological Soc, mtgs Caldy Valley Community Centre 7.30pm, contact Prog. Sec. Nick French 01978 856522
- CAWOS Cheshire & Wirral Ornithological Soc, mtgs Knutsford Civic Centre 7.45pm, contact Sheila Blamire 01565 830168
- CRSPB Chester RSPB Group, mtgs St Mary's Centre, Chester 7.30pm, contact Prog. Sec. Rob Adams 01829 270654
- HO Hale Ornithologists, mtgs St Peter's Assembly Rooms 7.45pm, contact Prog. Sec. Barbara Vercambre 0161 980 8362
- HPRSPB High Peak RSPB Members' Group contact Peter Griffiths 0161 427 5325 or Pat O'Mara 0161 449 8299 (Outings Sec.)
- KOS Knutsford Ornithological Soc, mtgs Jubilee Hall, Stanley Road 8.00pm, contact Roy Bircumshaw 01565 634193
- LOG Lymm Ornithological Group, mtgs Lymm Village Hall 8.00pm, contact Prog. Sec. Hilary Unsworth 01925 860155
- MCOS Mid-Cheshire Ornithological Soc, mtgs Hartford Village Hall 7.45pm, contact Paul Kenyon 01606 77960
- MRSPB Macclesfield RSPB Members' Group, mtgs Senior Citizens' Hall 7.45pm, contact Ray Evans 01625 432635
- NCRSPB North Cheshire RSPB Members' Group, mtgs St Matthew's CoE Primary Sch, Stretton 7.45pm, contact Olive Giles 01928 733405
- NNHS Nantwich Natural History Soc, mtgs The Gables at 7.30pm, contact Sec. Mike Holmes 01270 611577, mike@uimprove.com
- SECOS South-East Cheshire Ornithological Soc, mtgs St Peter's Church Hall, Elworth 7.30pm, contact Sec. Colin Lythgoe 01270 582642
- SRSPB Stockport RSPB Members' Group, mtgs Stockport College of Technology, Lect Theatre B, 7.30pm, contact Peter Hugo 0161 485 4024
- WGBG Wilmslow Guild Birdwatching Group, mtgs Wilmslow Guild HQ 7.45pm, contact Indoor Prog. Sec. Judith Rees 0161 980 5034

Will **affiliated societies**, who wish to advertise meetings of relevance to CAWOS, please send their programme to:- **Sheila Blamire, Woodruff Cottage, Clamhunger Lane, Mere, Cheshire, WA16 6QG** or, *preferably please*, by e-mail: sheilablamire@cawos.org

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(£20 less for 20-40x zoom with 660 series)

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8x42 DBA £549 8x42 BGA Imagic £299

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Imminent dates for your diary: - see page 33 for details

- Sun 30th Jan Birdwatch, Banks Road, Lower Heswall, meet at 11am
- Fri 4th Feb CAWOS indoor meeting with Michael Leach, at Knutsford
- Thu 10th Feb Hightide Birdwatch, Old Baths car park, Parkgate, meet at 11am
- Fri 11th Feb Hightide Birdwatch, Old Baths car park, Parkgate, meet at 11:30am

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