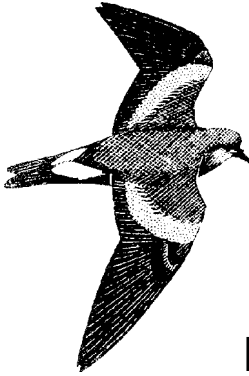


Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society

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BIRD NEWS

Number 67

July 2005



Long-tailed Skua • Waxwing Influx 2004-05

One Man's Birding - NEW Series

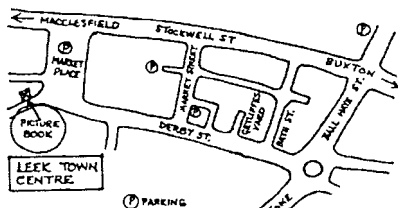
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Bird News welcomes articles, letters and comments relevant to birdwatching in Cheshire & Wirral. Please either e-mail or post (on disc) your contributions to the Editor at the address shown above.

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

Front cover: Whiskered Tern by Ray Scally

Other illustrations: Tony Broome, Phil Jones, Bill Morton and Ron Plummer

Guest Editorial

I'm sure I speak for many others who are covering their tetrads for the Breeding Bird Atlas in saying how enjoyable it is to be looking for birds with some purpose within one's 'own' defined local area. Birding is probably now more than ever a social activity, whether as a member of a local bird club on traditional coach trips to annually visited sites around the country, or in a car with other rather anxious twitchers en route to the latest rarity, or even with a friend adding to a year list for Cheshire. The thought therefore of regularly plodding alone around a tetrad or two (or more!) was at first a bit daunting. Yet I soon found that using binoculars and making notes attracted quite a lot of attention from non-birders, some I imagine based upon a suspicion as to why I was scanning their gardens! Explaining the purpose and methodology of the survey has led in a couple of instances to people taking a deeper interest, even offering to keep notes on my behalf and call me for verification. I've known one such family for many years. They live in a large and rather isolated house on the very northern edge of my Adlington tetrad. Their gardens fall into a wooded clough which has so much potential. Nothing they had noted extended my own records until I returned home this week to play back a long and somewhat hesitant message on the answerphone from the Lady of the house. She had found a nest in the climbing hydrangea close to the front door which she described in some detail including the eggs. The bird, however, had proven very elusive but the little she had seen was classically described as an L.B.J. (little brown job). Would I go up and let her know what the species was as she was going on holiday? I duly visited and immediately on getting out of the car I saw a bird fly from the hydrangea up into a large copper beech giving no proper views. Sitting back in the car I confidently awaited the return of the bird and a quick identification. After what was becoming too long a time for the bird to be off the nest I was just thinking of leaving when I caught a glimpse of it watching me from a telephone wire above the car. The L.B.J. was in fact a lovely Spotted Flycatcher. This proven breeding of a new species for the tetrad has given both myself and the house owners a thrill. Undoubtedly, it is a bird which has become less frequent over the past few years and I'm not sure why but it is probably associated with human influences in the world.

Such speculation links appropriately to several articles in this week's newspapers. On the downside was a report of the "threatened extinction of millions of petrels, shearwaters and albatrosses on Gough Island in the Tristan da Cunha group by recently turned carnivorous giant mice". The RSPB are to be granted £62,000 to fund research whilst it is deemed too expensive to fly out and spray rodent killer pellets over the island. On a slightly more positive note the Great Bustard reintroduction is to be persevered with despite only five of the original 28 birds surviving. Another 40 are being brought in from Russia. Let's hope that this wonderful species does become established again after its extinction in about 1830 and England's gain will justify Russia's loss. Today we read that "Sunny climes attract exotic invaders to Britain". Yet another pair of breeding Bee-eaters has prompted the RSPB to forecast the 10 next likely new colonists. Starting with the most likely they are Black-winged Stilt (so nearly in Cheshire), Fan-tailed Warbler (or as they name it - Zitting Cisticola), Hoopoe, Great Reed Warbler, Red-backed Shrike, Cattle Egret, Black Kite, Serin, Wryneck and Booted Eagle! Interestingly, there was no mention of other species which have become established breeders again over the past few years due more to the creation and maintenance of suitable habitat.

All of which again links with, and leads me into commending, the following articles in this edition of *Bird News*. 'Global Warming' by Richard Hargreaves which comments on change in the arrival dates of local migrants. Then 'Waxwing Influx' by Phil Oddy which covers the history of the influx of this species into Cheshire, Britain, Europe and beyond. Finally, 'One Man's Birding' by Bob Anderson which I enjoyed very much and found so relevant, particularly with Oystercatchers also recently nesting within the parish of Adlington.

Richard Gabb

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 27th Aug - 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.

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 spring period from March to May.

EARLY DATES FOR MIGRANTS

Hobby	Marbury CP	Apr 23rd	Little Ringed Plover	Frodsham Marsh	Mar 20th
Whimbrel	Hoylake	Mar 30th	Sandwich Tern	Hoylake Shore	Apr 4th
Common Tern	Hilbre	Apr 13th	Arctic Tern	Poynton Pool	Mar 20th
Little Tern	Hilbre	Apr 17th	Cuckoo	Woolston Eyes	Apr 15th
Swift	Willaston, Crewe	Apr 17th	Sand Martin	Hilbre	Mar 17th
Swallow	Combermere	Mar 23rd	House Martin	Thurstaston	Apr 2nd
Tree Pipit	Hoylake	Apr 11th	Yellow Wagtail	Church Minshull	Apr 6th
White Wagtail	Hilbre/W Kirby	Mar 17th	Redstart	Red Rocks	Apr 2nd
Whinchat	Red Rocks	Apr 23rd	Wheatear	Caldy	Mar 16th
Ring Ouzel	Hoylake	Mar 21st	Grasshopper Warbler	Runcorn	Apr 13th
Sedge Warbler	Red Rocks	Apr 2nd	Reed Warbler	Haydn Pool	Apr 16th
Lesser Whitethroat	Heswall Fields	Apr 21st	Whitethroat	Leasowe	Apr 18th
Garden Warbler	Thurstaston	Apr 17th	Wood Warbler	Tegg's Nose CP	May 1st
Willow Warbler	Moore NR	Mar 24th	Spotted Flycatcher	Hoole	May 5th
Pied Flycatcher	Tegg's Nose CP	Apr 17th			

SITE REPORTS

Adlington and Poynton area

Three Cormorants over Hazelbadge Fields (May 1st) was the first local May record and a *sinensis*-type bird visited Poynton Pool during March. Two Greylag Geese were at Adlington Driving Range on several dates with four at Poynton Pool on both Mar 29th and Apr 3rd. Drake Mandarins were at Poynton Pool (Mar 24th) and Adlington Driving Range (May 5th) the latter being a site first. A drake Wigeon at Poynton Pool (Apr 5th) was a good find. 16 Teal at Adlington Driving Range and 41 at Hazelbadge Fields both in early March were high counts. A pair at the latter site (May 2nd and 4th) were the first May records for the area. Eight Tufted Ducks at Adlington Driving Range (May 5th) was a high count. Goosanders flew over Poynton Pool (Mar 10th), Tower's Road Fields (Mar 13th) and Poynton village (Apr 14th). Poynton Pool had two Buzzards over on Mar 2nd but nine at Adlington Driving Range (Mar 13th) was a high count there. Oystercatchers were regularly at Adlington Driving Range but the peak count was nine over one observer's garden (Mar 19th). c260 Golden Plovers at Adlington Driving Range (Mar 3rd) was a poor maximum count compared to recent years. Two Jack Snipe were at Adlington Driving Range on Mar 6th with one on 10th (when 24 Snipe were counted), followed by one at Tower's Road Fields (Mar 14th). A Green Sandpiper reported at Poynton Pool on Mar 2nd was the first record for many years and the first Common Sandpiper was seen (Apr 16th). An Arctic Tern, the earliest ever in C&W by six days, was at Poynton Pool (Mar 20th – a site first) and was followed by the fifth Common Tern record for the site (Apr 24th-28th). The only Cuckoo was at Prince's Wood (May 9th) and an early Swift was at Adlington Driving Range on Apr 26th. During March, Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were at both Prince's Wood and Poynton Pool. 110 Skylarks at Adlington Driving Range (Mar 3rd) was the observer's highest ever local count and one was over Poynton Pool (Mar 13th). The first Sand Martin at Adlington Driving Range on Apr 26th was followed by 10+ on 28th. Migrant Yellow Wagtails were there on Apr 26th and May 5th. Up to three White Wagtails visited Adlington Driving Range (Apr 17th-May 1st) probably the first site records here. Waxwing sightings included at least one over Poynton Pool (Mar 27th – a site first), 19 by Poynton Station (Mar 28th-29th) and then 25+ on the Bird Estate, Poynton (Apr 3rd-5th). Adlington Driving Range hosted an excellent range of migrants including single Whinchats (Apr 26th, May 5th, 14th), up to five Stonechats (Mar 3rd and 6th - a site record), up to 12 Wheatears irregularly in late April and a singing Sedge Warbler held territory from May 5th. Other Wheatear records included the earliest ever local record - one at Tower's Road Fields (Mar 19th-20th) and the first at Hazelbadge Fields for several years (May 1st). Lesser

Whitethroats were at Hazelbadge Fields and near Prince's Wood in early May. An early Willow Warbler visited Poynton Pool on Mar 28th. Single Ravens were at Middlewood Way, Adlington (Mar 8th) and more unusually at Poynton Pool (May 8th – first May record here). c200 Linnets at Adlington Driving Range on Apr 17th completed a good spring passage for the site.

Chester and Warrington areas

Pickering's Pasture hosted a Little Egret on Apr 15th and 21st. Frodsham held eight Egyptian Geese (May 5th-30th). Single Garganey were at Hale Duck Decoy (Apr 3rd) and the Weaver Bend (May 23rd). An elusive drake Ring-necked Duck remained at Wigg Island (Apr 2nd-5th, 15th, 17th-18th and 21st). On May 20th, Richmond Bank hosted a drake Goosander - very unusual at this time of year. The highlight was the second county record of Black Kite at Moore NR (May 20th-21st) and again reported at Widnes (May 24th). The bird was apparently present in the area several weeks before. Not so rare was a Red Kite over Woolston Eyes (Apr 27th) and another at Eccleston (May 15th). On Apr 2nd, a possible Rough-legged Buzzard flew over Gatewarth. Ospreys flew over Fiddler's Ferry (Apr 27th) and Chester Zoo (May 27th). A Spotted Crake was reported at Woolston Eyes in May. One or two Quail were calling at Culcheth on May 31st and a probable Common Crane was reported circling Woolston Eyes (Apr 19th). The Weaver Bend hosted up to seven Little Stints during April and early May. A passage Wood Sandpiper was at Frodsham No6 Tank (Apr 24th and 26th). Moore NR hosted an Iceland Gull on Apr 13th. Four Whiskered Terns were present at Woolston Eyes before moving to Northwich (May 19th). A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was at Chester Zoo in mid-April. Male Blue-headed Yellow Wagtails visited Culcheth (May 28th) and Frodsham (May 30th). The Hale Lighthouse area held 16 White Wagtails and a Ring Ouzel on Apr 20th. During March, peak Waxwing counts included nine at Appleton, 40 at Chester Zoo and 16 at Lymm. Six were still at Chester (Apr 2nd). A very elusive Golden Oriole was found at Moore NR (May 21st-23rd) but proved very frustrating.

Dee Estuary

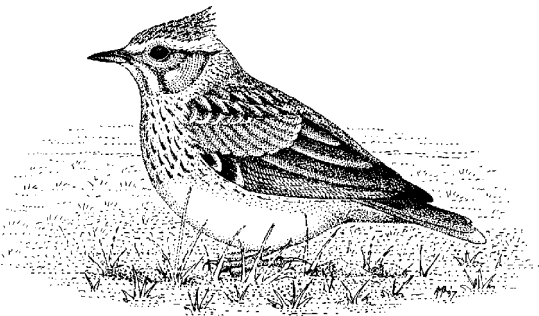
The peak count of Little Egrets was only 19 at Parkgate (Mar 12th). Up to 50 Bewick's Swans were at Burton in mid-March and the last Whooper Swan was there on Apr 9th. On Apr 21st, a Ruddy Shelduck visited Inner Marsh Farm. Four Mandarins were at Stapledon Wood with two at both Spital and Raby Mere. The regular Green-winged Teal remained at Inner Marsh Farm until Mar 22nd. The same site hosted up to three Garganey from Apr 23rd and the wintering Smew (to Mar 10th). An Osprey flew over Inner Marsh Farm on Apr 22nd and a probable Quail was at Heswall Fields on May 2nd. Avocets were much in evidence with one or two irregularly at Inner Marsh Farm (Mar 24th-May 13th with three on May 14th), singles at Burton and two at Thurstaston on May 10th. Inner Marsh Farm hosted a Little Stint (May 9th) and one or two Curlew Sandpipers (May 14th-19th). Other waders at the site included 17 Whimbrel (Apr 22nd), 10 Spotted Redshanks (Apr 3rd) and a Wood Sandpiper (May 2nd). Two Black Terns at Inner Marsh Farm (May 13th-14th) were notable. The highlight of this period was a Wryneck at Inner Marsh Farm on May 4th. The last Water Pipit was at Neston on Mar 22nd. A Wheatear at Caldý (Mar 16th) was followed by an influx on Mar 19th-20th. 11 Greenland race birds were at Gayton on May 2nd. Six Stonechats visited Burton mid-March. The two Cetti's Warblers remained at Neston until Apr 3rd at least. A possible Dartford Warbler was noted at Burton Marsh on Mar 20th. Large warbler counts included 12 Whitethroats at Thurstaston (May 8th), 12 Blackcaps and 19 Willow Warblers singing along the Wirral Way between Thurstaston and Parkgate (Apr 19th). Bearded Tits were at Neston (Mar 9th and Apr 14th). A Hooded Crow was reported near Thurstaston (Apr 19th) and a late Brambling was there on Apr 15th and 17th. Burton hosted five Twite (Mar 14th).

Hilbre and Red Rocks

Four Slavonian Grebes off Hilbre (May 4th) was an exceptional count. Hilbre also hosted 40 Brent



Geese during mid-March and a drake Eider on May 17th. The long-staying Long-tailed Duck remained at West Kirby ML (to Mar 7th). An Osprey flew past Hilbre (May 19th). 10,000 Knot were counted at West Kirby shore (Mar 1st). Single Jack Snipe visited Red Rocks and West Kirby Shore in late March. Large numbers of Little Gulls were present during mid-April with the peak of 82 on Apr 13th. Hilbre also hosted an adult Iceland Gull (Mar 25th) and a Roseate Tern (May 4th). May at Hilbre produced a summer-plumaged Black Guillemot on 21st and a Puffin on 7th. Migrant highlights at Hilbre included a Woodlark (Apr 17th), 12 Tree Pipits (May 1st) and 500 Meadow Pipits (Mar 19th with 800+ next day). Both Hilbre and Red Rocks had double-figure counts of White Wagtails on Mar 20th. A female Black Redstart lingered at Red Rocks (Mar 30th-Apr 1st). Hilbre hosted the peak Wheatear count of 20 on Mar 20th. Ring Ouzels were at Red Rocks (Apr 22nd) and Hilbre (Apr 25th). A Dartford Warbler trapped on Hilbre on Apr 22nd was the first site record and was probably present next day. Hilbre held 40-50 Willow Warblers on May 1st. A male Pied Flycatcher was at Hilbre (Apr 26th) with a Lapland Bunting reported on Apr 17th.



Macclesfield area

At least 24 pairs of Grey Herons were nesting at Trentabank Resr (Apr 3rd) with two Mandarins there (Apr 3rd). Two Mandarins were at both Styperson Pool (Mar 7th) and Rostherne (Apr 3rd and 13th). Rostherne also hosted four Common Scoters on Apr 14th. A Smew remained at Rostherne (from Mar until Apr 5th) and presumably the same bird was at Tatton Mere (Apr 19th). A Red Kite at Rostherne (May 28th) was earlier seen at Sandbach. Acre Nook SQ hosted 14 Buzzards on Mar 26th. A Rough-legged Buzzard was reported over Handforth on Apr 3rd and an Osprey flew over Disley (Apr 15th). Two Red-legged Partridges made a surprise visit to a Prestbury garden (May 3rd). A Little Gull visited Rostherne Mere on Apr 24th and three days later a Common Tern appeared followed by eight on May 19th. A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was at Gawsorth on Apr 24th and at Rostherne on many dates. Large numbers of Waxwings remained at Macclesfield with a peak of 100+ on Apr 11th and the latest ever county record on Apr 28th. Further flocks included 40 at Wilmslow in March, up to 60 at Disley in early April and 30+ at Bollington on Apr 4th. Ring Ouzels returned to Cut-thorn Hill/Danebower from Apr 2nd with five on Apr 16th. Returning Redstarts were at Lyme Park (Apr 9th) and Tegg's Nose CP (Apr 17th). A Wood Warbler at Rostherne on May 5th was a good find there. Pied Flycatchers returned to Lyme Park and Tegg's Nose CP in May. The last Bramblings were at Sutton and Tegg's Nose CP (both Apr 18th).

Nantwich area & South Cheshire

A Mandarin visited Combermere on Apr 17th. Two Gadwall were at Deer Park Mere during March and April. Ospreys were at Chapel Mere on May 4th and 14th. Quails were reported at Bar Mere from May 17th and at Combermere Farm on May 10th. Oystercatchers bred at Combermere Farm. During March, a Jack Snipe was at Bar Mere (Mar 2nd) with three at Bache House (Mar 14th). Single Common and Arctic Terns were at Bar Mere on May 7th. A good passage of Yellow Wagtails at Combermere Farm included a peak count of 11 on Apr 30th. Single Blue-headed Yellow Wagtails were found on Apr 30th and May 30th. The peak Wheatear count at Bar Mere was 12 on Apr 27th and May 7th. A Ring Ouzel at Church Minshull (Apr 26th) was an excellent find. The Starling roost at Nantwich peaked at 250-300,000 birds in mid-March. The only Crossbill report was three at Buckeley on May 23rd.

North Wirral Shore

A Great Northern Diver was off Hoylake (Mar 5th). Other notable records past here included the first Fulmars (Mar 12th) and a drake Velvet Scoter (Apr 15th). Nearby on Hoylake Langfields, a Little Egret was seen on Mar 25th. An Osprey flew over Barnston on Apr 9th with another off

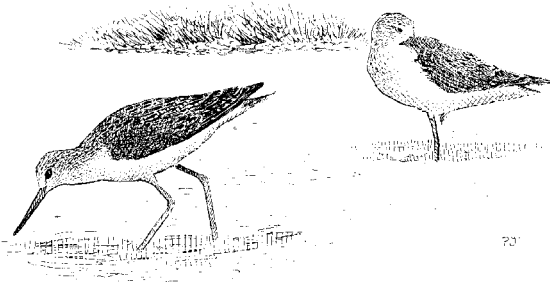
Hoylake on May 19th. A Hobby on May 30th was a first garden record for a Hoylake observer. Hoylake also had a Greenshank on Apr 22nd and six Little Gulls on Apr 15th. A 2nd sum Iceland Gull was at Leasowe (Apr 18th-21st). Tree Pipits were at Hoylake on several dates from Apr 11th with a peak of six on 22nd. Meadow Pipit passage at Hoylake included counts of 650 on Mar 19th, 300 next day and 350 on Apr 2nd. Large numbers of White Wagtails at Hoylake shore included 30 on Apr 3rd, 50 on Apr 20th, a massive 100 on Apr 22nd and 60 on May 2nd. The only Waxwing records came from Bromborough (50+ in late March) and Spital (four on Mar 4th). Redstarts visited a Hoylake garden on three dates. The peak Stonechat count was six at Leasowe on Mar 15th. Wheatears peaked at 20+ at Leasowe (Apr 19th). Ring Ouzels were at Hoylake (Mar 21st, Apr 22nd) and Leasowe (Apr 2nd). The first Willow Warbler at Hoylake (Mar 26th) was followed by a peak of c40 on Apr 22nd. Leasowe hosted four late Bramblings (Apr 19th).

Northwich area

On May 22nd, a Little Egret visited both Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes. The presumed escaped White Stork from last spring reappeared at Barnton on Apr 21st. One or two drake Garganey visited Ashton's Flash (May 3rd-10th) before one moved to Marbury No1 tank (May 15th). Budworth Mere hosted a Common Scoter on May 4th. Interesting raptors included a Red Kite over Lostock Gralam (Apr 25th) and an Osprey at Budworth Mere (Apr 13th). Three days later, two Red-legged Partridges were at Budworth Mere. A rare spring record of Pectoral Sandpiper was found at Neumann's Flash on May 31st. The same area hosted 47 Black-tailed Godwits (May 4th) and 15 Whimbrel (Apr 25th). An adult Little Gull lingered at Ashton's Flash (Apr 1st-2nd). Budworth Mere hosted a Sandwich Tern (Apr 7th) and a Common Tern (Apr 27th). An adult Black Tern was at the same site (Apr 4th), a day short of being the earliest ever in C&W. The best record of the year so far was the four adult Whiskered Terns at Ashton's Flash (May 19th-20th); this constitutes the fourth county record and equals the British record count - a record of four in West Yorkshire on May 16th last year. One or two Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were seen irregularly at Marbury CP. 20+ White Wagtails were at Budworth Mere on Apr 11th. Delamere hosted a regular flock of up to 25 Waxwings during March with other flocks at Comberbach (23 in late March), Northwich (max. 56 on Apr 6th) and Oakmere (17 on Apr 13th).

Sandbach Flashes

The max count of Shelducks during May was 38 and two broods were present. Near to the flashes a drake Mandarin was at Valley Park, Crewe from Mar 17th. Pintail numbers declined from 35 on Mar 1st to eight on Apr 1st with one present throughout May. A drake Garganey was present (Apr 24th-26th and May 5th-11th) with another nearby at Rode Pool (Apr 8th-13th). A major rarity was a Red Kite over Elton Hall



Flash (May 28th). A male Marsh Harrier on Apr 29th was also a good find. Ospreys were seen over Sandbach (Mar 28th), Doddington Pool (Apr 1st) and Elton Hall Flash (May 16th). On Apr 12th, two Red-legged Partridges were found and a Grey Plover on Apr 6th was a rare sight at the flashes. Other wader highlights included a Sanderling (May 18th), 27 Dunlin (Apr 30th), 310 Black-tailed Godwits (May 31st), up to six Greenshanks during May and finally a Wood Sandpiper (May 31st). Rare gulls were a Mediterranean Gull on Mar 11th and Little Gulls on Mar 20th and Apr 23rd. The only Waxwing records came from Wistaston, near Crewe (eight on Mar 21st). Three Stonechats were found on Mar 19th. On May 22nd, 11 Whitethroats were counted at the flashes and nearby two Corn Buntings were seen at Hough in mid-May.

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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.

“All good things

As any 'trekkie' fans will know this was the title of the last episode of Star Trek: The Next Generation (or TNG as it is affectionately known) and I would like to draw on the appropriate parallels with the series and my column. The crew of the Enterprise spent most of the time in the present, while occasionally looking into the future, as did my predictions when I first started the column. They occasionally visited the past, as did I, looking back to records from the near and not so near past.

As I look back over the last 35 issues and nine years of this column, there have been many changes in the birding world, some good, some not so good. The breeding population of Buzzards, for example, has increased by 1,000% across the county making it Cheshire's most common raptor. Hobby too is a clear winner with many more sightings than in 1996. Little Egrets are now a regular sight on the Dee Estuary, but back in 1996 they were rare. Pied Flycatchers and Redstarts have also shown range expansions. On the debit side Spotted Flycatchers and Corn Buntings continue to disappear at an alarming rate. Turtle Doves are all but extinct in the county. In 1996, the Internet was in its infancy but nowadays many birders use it as the primary source of information. Despite this and other technological advances, such as digiscoping, the original Birdlines started in the 1980s still continue. This link to the grass roots of birders and the determination of the many forefathers of birding will continue to endure as long as the birds continue to delight and amaze us all. As we reflect fondly on the past we must also look to the future. Thanks to all the contributors over the last nine years. It has been a pleasure. As they say on Vulcan "Live long and prosper".

Phil Oddy

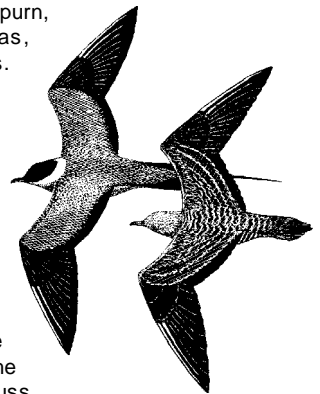
It is amazing to think that 'Recent Reports' has been going since the very first issue of *Bird News* back in January 1989, compiled then by Steve Barber under the original title of 'Then... and Now'. Phil Oddy took over the task from Steve in October 1996, and has been compiling 'Recent Reports' ever since. So what now? Is anyone else going to step forward to take over the reins? I sincerely hope so..... In the meantime our thanks go to Phil for all his hard work. Eds.

County Rarities

LONG-TAILED SKUA (*Stercorarius longicaudus*)

I remember my first Long-tailed Skua - a day in late August at Spurn, and skuas were moving north in droves, mainly Arctic Skuas, hundreds per hour, with a few Bonxies and a few Pomarine Skuas. There was a genuine excitement in the seawatching hide, everyone was predicting a Long-tailed Skua through soon, and sure enough, in a group of 10 or so birds, not 50 yards offshore, a superb adult Long-tailed Skua flapped north, twisting elegantly in the wind. It was just like it said it would be in the books - smaller than the accompanying Arctic Skuas, with a neat capped appearance and a white neck and throat contrasting with a dusky lower belly. The greyer buff upperparts and greyish wings contrasted with the dark primaries and secondaries giving the wings a dark trailing edged effect. The primaries showed only one primary shaft that flashed white and, of course, there was a pair of long black tail streamers. It was so different from the pale and dark phase Arctic Skuas that I wondered what all the fuss was about. Then I realised that others were seeing five Long-taileds in the flock, and I had missed the four in juvenile plumage completely, writing them off as juvenile Arctic Skuas.

Apart from an obvious lesson in skua identification, what had I missed? Long-tailed Skua is a much smaller bird than Arctic Skua, and tiny compared to Pomarine. But in juvenile plumage, at sea in mixed flocks, dark juvenile skuas are not easy to identify. Weather conditions, wave heights, distance from the bird, flight actions and difficult light conditions all add to the problem.



Also, skuas have a complicated moult strategy and individual variation is considerable, with light, intermediate and dark plumage morphs. When the problems of bleaching and feather wear are added on, identification is anything but straightforward. The pitfalls are many!

Adult Long-tailed Skuas, even without their tail streamers, should not present too much of a problem as noted above. Even odd winter adults or failed breeding birds will still show the same small-sized structure, plumage differences and proportions, and more flapping flight. They are, at times, reminiscent of a Common Gull, size-wise.

Juvenile Long-tailed Skuas show the same variations as Arctic Skuas and it has to be a combination of features to confirm an identification. Firstly, a silhouette of a slim body, narrow wings and longer, but blunt 'pointed', rear end to the body. Secondly, in light and medium phases, juvenile Long-tails are generally greyer, less brown than Arctic Skuas and they lack the warm brown tones of that species. They also have a less extensive wing flash (white outer edges to primary feathers). The overall grey plumage tones are broken by neat, contrasting, even barring to the underwings, tail coverts and rump. The dark breast and pale belly are features shown by all colour morphs. The wings also show a dark secondary bar, which gives a uniform dark effect across the upperwing, unlike an Arctic Skua's which ends in a white flash. Some dark phase Long-tails may not be easy to separate from Arctic Skuas, especially if seen alone, although the distinctly barred undertail feathers are diagnostic, if you can see them of course!

Comment

Hugh Pulsford

Cheshire records of Long-tailed Skuas are few and far apart. They are mainly an east coast bird, but do occur in small numbers down the west coast in August and September. They are not annual off the Wirral coast and due to the complexities of skua identification and the inability of many observers to adequately describe juveniles in flight, many records never get submitted to the county rarities panel.

You only have to be standing with a crowd of birders on New Brighton promenade in a gale force north-westerly, to understand why. Many skuas are 'called' incorrectly and two genuine Long-tails often end up as several when broadcast on the pagers and phones. They are not easy to identify at a distance, in a gale, through a shaking scope!

Birds have stayed around in some years. I saw one at Frodsham Marsh in 1990. In fact, I have never seen Arctic and Great down there. Pomarine Skua turned up one winter. Last year, 2004, there were some Long-tailed Skuas in the mouth of the River Mersey and there are some superb photos taken of them (see the next *Bird Report*). The sightings gave many people a chance to familiarise themselves with the species. This autumn should offer further chances.

The Helm book *Skuas and Jaegers* is a brilliant read and clarifies a lot of points. If you get a chance, have a look.

Tony Broome

Book Review

REED WARBLERS AT ROSTHERNE MERE by Malcom Calvert

To quote John Marchant from the BTO Census Unit: "This remarkable book is the fruit of many years' detailed note-taking during a sophisticated ringing and nest-recording study of Reed Warblers at a Cheshire mere. Over more than three decades, Malcolm has aimed to record every nest, and to use ringing to follow every bird as an individual.... Malcolm uses an easy style that encompasses many interesting anecdotes. Nest construction, one of the most fascinating aspects of Reed Warbler biology, is given a full treatment, and there is much information also on avian predation, and on nest parasitism by Cuckoos. The examples of longevity confirm this as one of the longest-lived of UK passerines...." John finishes his review, which appeared in the latest *BTONews*, by saying, "This little gem of a book is not to be missed....." A full review will appear in the 2004 *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report*. The book is available at £10 inc p&p from:

Tim Coleshaw, English Nature, Attingham Park, Shrewsbury, SY4 4TW

Species Spotlight

WAXWING INFLUX 2004-05

Introduction

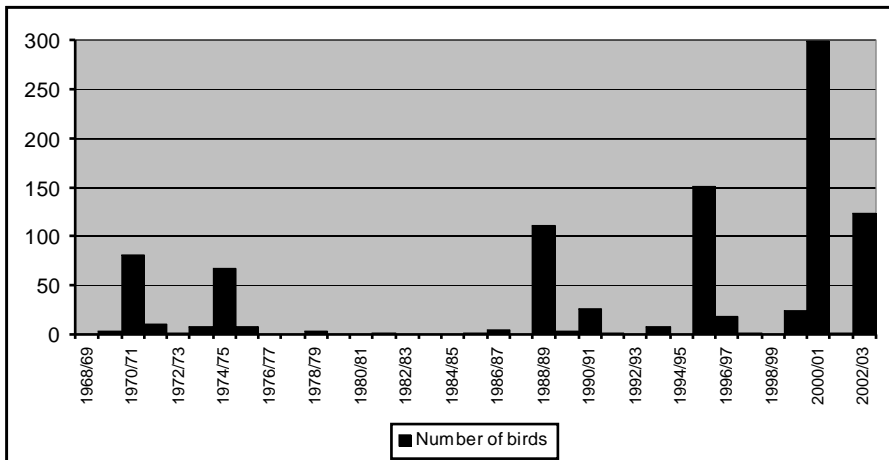
Imagine the scene, you wake up on a bright and calm spring morning in early April. The early morning sun is warming the ground already and you open the bedroom window, so you can listen to the birdsong as you lay half asleep on your bed. Suddenly, you hear a strange tinkling song; as you are half asleep it takes you a few seconds to realise what is making the noise. You then leap out of bed and grab your bins as you scramble to open the window further. The noise is coming from not one but a small flock of **WAXWINGS**. As you watch the flock for a few minutes they fly off over your garden. Is this a story of fiction? No, it is the reality for many birders this winter including myself. This article, I hope, conveys the true picture of this winter's influx of this enigmatic visitor.

This species is one of the most highly prized of the winter visitors to Britain and in some years there may only be a handful in the country but in other years there are thousands of birds. This winter saw the largest ever influx of this species on record. This species is often said to have major influxes every six or seven years but recently there have been more influxes than would normally be expected.

Previous influxes in Cheshire

The earliest known record for Cheshire was in January 1850 with invasions noted in the winters of 1849/50, 1863/64 and 1901/2. The exceptionally cold winter of 1946/47 and the winter of 1959/60 had good influxes. Most of the older records (pre-1960) related to birds arriving in December and staying perhaps until late March. The winter of 1965/66 was the first really large invasion of recent times. Birds arrived in Lyme Park on Oct 20th and then on Nov 20th, a flock of 80 at Reddish Vale (now in Gtr Manchester) was the largest flock recorded in the county.

Recent large influxes have included at least 80 birds in 1970/71, up to 67 birds in 1974/75, up to 111 birds in 1988/89, up to 151 in 1995/96. This year's influx is the third large invasion following up to 300 in 2000/01 and up to 123 in 2002/03. All these influxes have generally followed a similar pattern of small numbers arriving in November and December before much larger numbers in January and February. The largest flock was 70 at Macclesfield on March 27th 1996. There are only a handful of October records for the county. The only April records were in 1971, 1974, 1989, 1996 and the latest ever on Apr 14th 2003 at Rock Ferry. The graph below shows the approximate number of birds recorded in Cheshire during each winter.



The influx in Europe and beyond

Across Europe and beyond the massive invasion of Waxwings was noted with many countries receiving large numbers. In mid-September small numbers were noted in Iceland, probably the forerunners of the first influx. During late October large numbers were noted in Lithuania, southern Norway and Sweden. The renowned migration watchpoint at Falsterbo (Southern Sweden) had 22,500 birds pass through between Oct 17th and Nov 19th, including a peak of 8,000 in the second week of November. By late November, hundreds of birds were seen in Hungary. Spain hosted nine birds in November, constituting the second to fourth national records (if accepted).

With the impressive numbers in Scotland it was not surprising that large numbers filtered to Northern Ireland including 670+ at Ballymena (Co. Antrim) on Nov 22nd and 1,000 at Larne Lough (Co. Antrim) on Jan 24th. Ireland also had high numbers including 400 at Dublin on Jan 14th with 150 in County Cork during the winter. Hundreds were seen in NE Italy during December and remained into early February, the first records there since 1989. A count of 2,100+ birds came from Switzerland in February. Several hundred birds were recorded in the former Russian republic of Georgia in late January where previous irruptions were noted in 1966, 1976, 1982 & 1999.

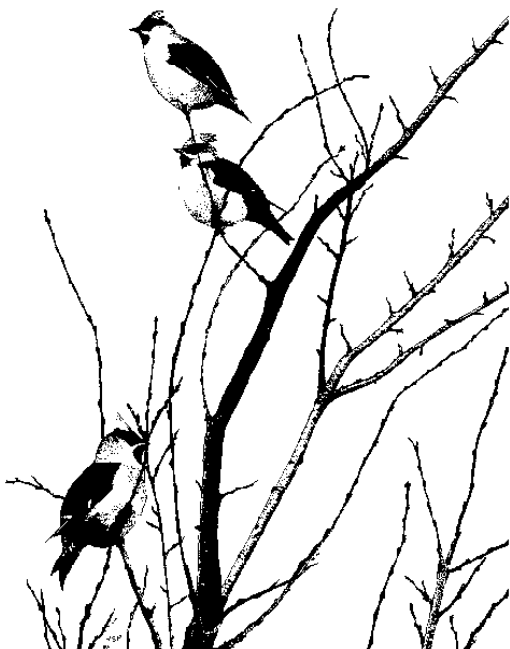
Across the Atlantic this species occasionally has influxes from the breeding areas in western Canada to the Great Lakes. This year large numbers reached the NE United States of Vermont and New Hampshire where numerous birds were seen in February. Large numbers also occurred at Ottawa in eastern Canada at the same time. It is interesting to speculate whether or not some of these birds may have come from this side of the pond.

The influx in Britain

Scotland – Scotland received the bulk of the record influx particularly the earlier arrivals. During October, Birdline Scotland reported 6,000+ birds including record numbers on Shetland, Fair Isle and the Outer Hebrides. The first birds were, not surprisingly, seen on Fair Isle on Oct 7th. An unprecedented count of 1,300 at Forres (Grampian) on Oct 30th-31st coincided with a large winter thrush influx to the east coast of Scotland. The largest numbers by the end of the month were 150 on Fair Isle on Oct 24th, 300 at Kyle of Lochalsh (Highland) on Oct 28th and 1,000 on Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on Oct 30th.

By early November large counts were widespread with 1,200 still in Forres on 1st, 1,020 at Inverness (Highland) early in the month, 500 in Perth (Tayside) on 9th, 450 in Dunblane (Central) on 11th, 400 at Irvine (Strathclyde) on 11th, 600+ in Dumfries (Dumfries & Galloway) on 21st, 1,879 at Aberdeen on 21st (a British record flock) with 1,200 still on 28th, c1,000 in Glasgow on 22nd-26th, c500 near Bellshill (Strathclyde) on 23rd, 885 in Edinburgh on 28th, c780 were in Musselburgh (Lothian) on 29th, with 650 at Renfrew (Strathclyde).

By December numbers were reducing with 750+ at Edinburgh on 6th, 680 at Glasgow on 9th, 430 at Grangemouth (Central) on 14th and 1,100 still at Aberdeen on 15th. These were the only sites with flocks in excess of 400 birds. Numbers then reduced significantly as birds exhausted the berry supplies. Numbers included up to 700 in Edinburgh in early January and up to 400 at Aberdeen throughout January to March. Birdline Scotland still received reports totalling at least 2,000 birds during February. Smaller numbers remained into April with the latest migrant on Fair Isle (May 28th).



NE England – An early arrival was at Spurn on Oct 16th. During November, 600 were at Corbridge (Northumberland) on 14th, 250 were at Sheffield (S. Yorks) late in the month. The first two weeks in December saw 300 at Blaydon (Tyne & Wear), 600 at Jarrow (Tyne & Wear) and 500 at both Halifax (W. Yorks) and Morpeth (Northumberland). Three-figure counts were widespread during December to February.

Midlands and Southern England – The early signs of the influx in late November included 150 in Norwich, the largest flock of the winter in East Anglia. Other three-figure counts became increasingly common through December. This showed the influx was mainly confined to Scotland with birds then quickly moving south, rather than the large east coast arrival of previous influxes. In January, Birdline South-East noted the relative lack of records from Kent and Essex, which in normal invasion years would expect to receive the bulk of the birds. During January, large flocks included 300 in Bracknell (Berks) on 18th, 300+ at Beeston (Notts) on 21st, 600 in Bristol on 22nd, c70 at Exeter (Devon) on 23rd – a county record, 460+ at Poole (Dorset) on 24th, 207 at Melksham (Wilts) on 30th and 1,200 at both Newcastle-under-Lyme (Staffs) and Bilston (West Midlands) late in the month. 700+ birds were counted in Shropshire during the third week. Numbers for SW England were 2,000+ birds with nearly 14,000 in the Midlands region during January. February saw counts of 300+ at Maidenhead (Berks), Milton Keynes (Bucks), Southampton (Hampshire) and Southwater (W. Sussex). 310 were still at Southampton during the first week of March.

Wales and NW England – During December, the large numbers from Scotland had filtered down preceded by a flock of 70 on the Isle of Man on Nov 11th. The largest counts away from Cheshire were 600 at Dalston (Cumbria) early in the month, 520 at Carlisle (Cumbria) on 5th, 325 at Ruthin (Clwyd) on 24th and 350 at Atherton (Manchester) next day. During January, over 4,600 birds were in NW England and 650 in Cardiff on Jan 20th was a new Welsh record. The previous Welsh record, before this winter, was only 52 birds set in the 1965/66 winter.

Ringed birds in Cheshire

During winter at least 1,000 birds were ringed in Scotland allowing a unique opportunity to track these birds as they spread across the country. Up to the end of 2003, only 2,900 had been ringed in Britain according to the BTO. In early January up to 40 birds were in the centre of Warrington and by 15th January the flock had suddenly increased to around 200 individuals. A warden in the block of sheltered accommodation was happy to allow mist netting by the Merseyside Ringing Group in their grounds and very quickly 14 birds were caught. It was nice to see that one of these birds was already wearing a BTO ring. In the Merseyside Ringing Group's 50-year history, only four Waxwings had been ringed. Another three sessions resulted in a further 11 birds in the hand, with another control, this time a colour-ringed bird, taking the total to 23 new and two controls. A further two ringed birds were subsequently seen. All the ringed birds came from Scotland. The first control had been ringed on Oct 31st 2004 in Forres (Grampian). The second control and the colour-ringed birds were all ringed the previous day at Inverurie (Grampian). One of these had previously been in Burnley (Lancs) on Dec 10th. By late January over 200 ringed birds had been retrapped or resighted.

The influx in Cheshire

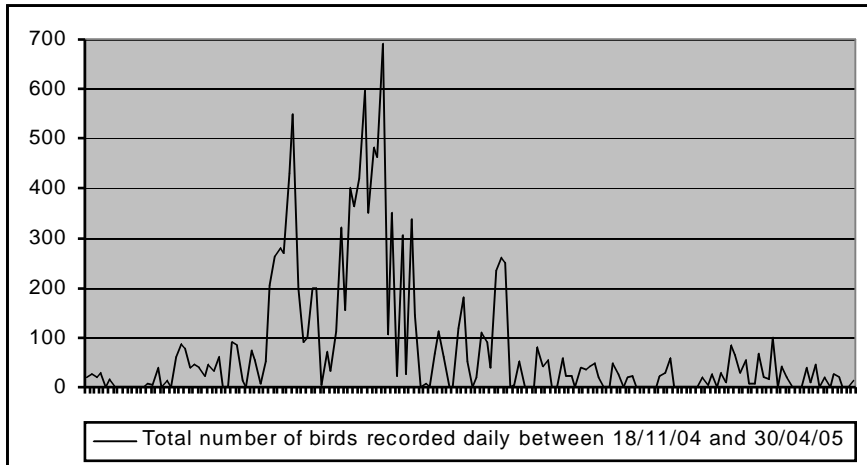
The first arrivals were in late November with a flock of up to 30 at Chester from Nov 18th followed by 15 over West Kirby on 19th and two at Watch Lane Flash on 20th (the second flashes record). In early December birds began to appear at Macclesfield with 90 on 19th setting a new county record. Numbers then declined to a handful just prior to Christmas then on Dec 27th a new county record was set – 200 at Macclesfield on 27th, only to be increased to 260+ on 29th. A flock of 200 appeared in Chester on the last day of the year.

The New Year started with yet another county record – 307 birds at Chester while 200 were at Macclesfield. The large flocks at Chester (peak of c300 on 25th) and Macclesfield lingered for most of the month although numbers fluctuated day-by-day. Elsewhere in the county during January, notable counts included 90 at Weaverham (14th), 100 at Lymm (14th), 138 at Crewe (15th), 150 at Caldby (15th), 87 at Great Sutton (16th), 93 at Greasby (17th) and 50 at Woolston Eyes (21st). Numbers at Warrington increased from 40 on 14th to 150+ on 16th then to 320 on 17th (a county record) and then finally an astonishing 450 on 19th. Numbers rapidly dropped off

then to 75 on 23rd. Runcorn undoubtedly had some of the Warrington birds as numbers rose from 60 on 17th to 180 on 19th, to 270 on 21st. On Jan 19th, flocks were 180 at Runcorn, 450 at Warrington and 60 at Crewe giving a total of 690 birds.

February was somewhat quieter with 100 at Northwich (4th), 100 at Cuddington (5th), 50+ at Macclesfield Forest (6th), 250+ at Macclesfield (13th-14th), 59+ at Moore NR (26th) and 80+ at Poynton (21st) being the peak counts. The highest counts during March were Chester Zoo (2nd) and 40 at both Wilmslow (9th) with 50+ at Bromborough (21st). Lingering flocks and migrants in April included 60 at Northwich (3rd), 60 at Disley (8th), 100+ at Macclesfield (11th) with the latest ever county record of six on Apr 28th.

See graph below for total number of birds day-by-day. The largest peak corresponded to a similar peak received by records to Birdtrack, the BTO's migration network.



Let's hope that next winter some of the birds return to their favoured spots so we can again enjoy their beautiful and enigmatic charm.

Phil Oddy, 4 Swan Close, Poynton, Stockport, Cheshire, SK12 1HX

Thanks to Merseyside Ringing Group and Prof David Norman for details of the ringed Cheshire birds.

Other sources:

Various county ornithological websites (too numerous to mention).

Waxwing Irruption 2004 by Jim Pewtress

The Birds of Cheshire (and supplement) T.H.Bell

Cheshire and Wirral Bird Reports 1968-2003.



HOUSE MARTIN SURVEY

Please return this year's House Martin survey forms by the end of October if possible to:

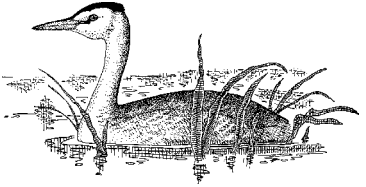
Brian Martin, 45 Albert Road, Grappenhall, Warrington, WA4 2PF

Tel: 01925 264251 E-mail: brianmartin1940@hotmail.com

Any information is welcome, e.g. numbers, breeding success (or not!), anecdotes, etc.

One Man's Birding

We give a warm welcome to Bob Anderson and his new regular 'slot' giving his unique slant on birding in South Cheshire and beyond. Eds.



There is much to be said for living in south Cheshire, but a major disadvantage (especially for one who did much of his early birding on the Dee) is the lack of good wader sites. West of Sandbach Flashes, in the four 10km squares constituting the Nantwich NHS recording area, only Hurlleston Reservoir, on the few occasions when the water level drops, offers much chance of seeing passage birds. So finding a new wetland site which produced 17 wader species in a year was, to put it mildly, quite an event.

Martin Pennell (to whom credit for most of the records is due) first discovered it early in 2004 and he, Andy Green and myself have watched it ever since. At first I thought we were just looking at a winter flood, holding a decent flock of Wigeon, a few hundred Lapwing, and occasional Golden Plover. Only later did we realise that this was permanent water. The collapse of a land drain immediately to the rear of a working dairy farm has produced a fairly extensive, open flash in a damp pasture. A smaller pool is separated from the main water body by a farm track, and immediately beyond this lies an area of very rough and boggy ground. It amounts to several acres of wetland, and a locally important site. We have been made welcome by the owners, but in return have agreed not to publicise the exact location.

With the spring came recognition that we had found somewhere special. As yet, there is no marginal vegetation around the flash; if this limits the potential for some breeding species, a shoreline consisting of just a rim of mud makes it easy to see waders, and from April to September we were recording them on a regular basis - usually in ones and twos, but in a remarkable variety by local standards. Ruff, Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers, Little Stint, Greenshank, Green, Wood and Common Sandpipers all fed along the margins (some staying for several days), while Curlew and Whimbrel were seen flying over. There were several records of Black-tailed Godwits, including a count of 24 by Andy in June, and a Redshank was seen briefly displaying; later in the summer, Martin identified a young, recently-fledged bird, which raised speculation that they may have bred at some nearby location. Snipe are hard to come by in our neck of the woods in summer; a count of 21 in August, coming in a run of single-figure records, was a very rare local record of return passage.

I am particularly fond of Oystercatchers, so seeing four at the flash in the spring of 2004 was pretty satisfying, and hopes they might breed were raised when two stayed around throughout the summer. Unfortunately, they did just that: stood and thought of whatever Oystercatchers think about. This year, however, they reappeared, were seen vigorously defending territory, and soon one was incubating on a nearby tilled field. Martin (carefully calculating duration of incubation) hoped the eggs would hatch on his birthday. He just missed out - but a couple of days later an adult was standing, wings drooping in brooding posture, near the nest site. Now there are two young birds, half-size brown and white replicas of their parents, feeding at the water's edge, standing tall among the Lapwing chicks.

For the Lapwings are another feature of the farm. There are few more delightful sights than young Lapwings running around with their parents, and we reckoned that six to eight pairs bred in the first year, probably rather more in 2005. The trampled, muddy pasture and boggy ground have proved ideal for them, and also suited Yellow Wagtails. Both of these are, of course, traditional species of Cheshire farmlands, which have become increasingly scarce with the passing of time. When I first came here, in 1970, I more or less took Yellow Wagtails for granted; things have changed, and eleven feeding at the flash at the end of April was more than I had seen locally for many years - and that was only half of the peak count. We know that at least a couple of pairs stayed to breed (we saw adults carrying food, and then young birds feeding on the mud), and although this year's spring passage was less spectacular we believe they are nesting again this year.

Then there were the Shelduck. OK, we know they are spreading inland - but even so, finding them on your home turf where they have not been before is something different. Last year, there were several around in the spring; one pair became pretty aggressive and territorial, and then the female simply vanished. One evening, I saw her creeping down, hunched low and unobtrusive, to the small pool. The suspicion of breeding was confirmed when a brood of six young appeared on June 11th, and so far as we could tell all survived. We always felt that others would follow, and sure enough there are two families on the water this year: flotillas of fluffy, striped chicks weaving and bobbing and diving after their parents.

The Shelduck shared the water with broods of Mallard, Canada Geese and Coot. A pair of Little Grebes has been about in both years, though the well-grown young which appeared in late summer were probably hatched elsewhere: there is a shortage of suitable sites, and this year they seem to be contemplating seriously the potential of a submerged fence post, to which they are very attached. Mute Swans come and go, and several Herons can sometimes be found fishing early in the morning, before anyone disturbs them. Other visitors have included a splendid adult Little Gull which spent more than a week on the flash in late June last year, and a Little Egret present for a few days at the beginning of August.

Hobby and Peregrine have been recorded fairly frequently, and a pair of Buzzards raised two noisy and demanding young in a hedgerow tree; given that the hedge bank is riddled with rabbit burrows, it must have been like growing up in an avian McDonald's. Grey Partridges are sometimes heard calling, and this year I saw in a nearby field an adult with what must have been the last survivor of her brood. In all, from the flash, bog, farm buildings and fields, and a small bit of nearby woodland, over 100 species have been recorded since January 2004.

If much of this seems small beer to those watching the county's hot spots, you have to put it in the south Cheshire context. In thirty-five years' birding in the area, I have known nothing quite like it. Some species I have never seen locally before, others are distinctly rare. Shelduck and Oystercatchers may breed not far away, but I never expected to watch them doing so just behind a south Cheshire farm.

This is high-quality, efficient farming country - improved grassland, early silage cuts, and fields of maize for fodder. And in a small corner of it a new wetland has appeared and the old Hereford bull and his heifers, stumping their way through a waterside pasture, are quietly re-creating a habitat in which Lapwings and Yellow Wagtails can flourish. It gives me hope that other places may still be there to be discovered.

One freezing morning in December, long after the excitement of migrants and breeding birds was past, the low sun was glinting off the ice which covered most of the flash. A spring which feeds into it had preserved a small patch of open water and a soft, unfrozen area in the grass on the bank. Upwards of a hundred Wigeon and forty Teal packed in together on the bank to feed, and among them half-a-dozen Black-tailed Godwits, a Redshank and a Dunlin hurried about, probing the soft ground. Suddenly, presumably spooked by an unseen raptor, the ducks and godwits took to the water; the resident Lapwing flock rose from the bog to join another which simultaneously appeared overhead: five or six hundred of them circling against the winter sky. Some good records there, by local standards - but then, in my book, there was also some good birding by any standards, at a site I didn't even know about a year before.



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

This account is derived in part from a contribution submitted to the NNHS Annual Report for 2004. Thanks are due to Andy Green and, especially, Martin Pennell for their records and for finding the site, and to the site owners for their co-operation and support.

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.

GROUSE COUNTS ON PIGGFORD AND HIGH MOOR

An essential management task in managing any stock, whether wild or domestic is to make an accurate assessment of its health, quality and quantity. The pot luck approach leaving everything to chance or to find its own level in today's increasingly managed world seems careless and unfair to sedentary species, even negligent to those at risk.

So a key task on every grouse moor is to carry out a count in early April to ascertain the number of breeding pairs and a further count in late July to ascertain breeding success, particularly noting covey size and maturity. Each count is usually undertaken by about four dog handlers each working two or three pointers or setters lined out 75 yards apart walking up the chosen section of moorland. Dogs work in tandem quartering the ground with radio contact between each handler helping to identify birds seen, their location and flight line. In April birds are naturally wilder whereas in July, particularly on a warm day, a dog can 'point' a covey within feet ensuring an accurate count. Not an exact science but, taking the same route annually, the year-on-year stock quantity and quality can usually be gauged with considerable accuracy.

Last October Bob Anderson posed a key question - is it possible to have a grouse population which can withstand predation and still provide a shootable surplus on Piggford's mere 600 acres, an island moor at the very edge of the birds' range. My tentative and hopeful reply was that an April stock of 60 pairs ought to be feasible and that at the target stocking rate all the time and investment would be worthwhile, though not financially profitable!

In April 2004, with only half the potential heather cover, we counted 13 pairs. The August count produced 55 birds, theoretically two birds fledging per brood, which gave grounds for optimism particularly when the number of birds seen during December appeared to be at a similar level. Did that mean a disease-free stock, recruitment from other moors or minimal predation as a result of intensive fox control?

This April's count was on Saturday 9th when the same four dog handlers and dogs covered both moors on a cold and damp day - similar weather annually helps make the count consistent - to record one Merlin, one Peregrine, 18 Golden Plover and 25 pairs of Red Grouse and 35 single birds. Perhaps the assessment was generous, some double counting may have occurred, a few outer parts of the moors were not covered and the dogs may have missed the odd bird, but a realistic minimum must be at least 30 pairs, significantly more than double last year's April count. At the risk of being on cloud nine, if not cloud 29, very encouraging indeed on the basis that the current heather cover and burning regime is only half way to the 2010 target, five years hence. But if this April stock level is measurably more than last August's stock some recruitment must have occurred from other moors, probably the Goyt, because some predation losses will inevitably have been incurred. Because all grouse carry the endemic strongylosis worm, and older birds carry a heavier worm burden, the unknown is the quality and condition of incoming stock, particularly if predation losses have been high resulting in a correspondingly higher number of infilling recruits. The not unreasonable hope is that the new recruits, probably hens, are young birds seeking new territories pushed out by old birds. So on the habitat front the picture appears rosy. Ramblers and their dogs are an unknown in the first year of Open Access and we can but pray for favourable weather. Zero tolerance of foxes is necessary but I would be surprised if raptor predation is a cause for serious concern at this stage, although a number of Lapwings on the newly seeded open moorland have succumbed, probably to a Peregrine.

So far so good but there are still more questions than answers - probably always will be.

Richard May, Long Ridge, Sutton, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK11 0LU

ROBIN NURSERY

Finally, the day came for leaving the farm. Despite having said my goodbyes to the departing Swallows last autumn I was still there to greet the new arrivals this spring. For months many different thoughts had circulated in my mind about the changes that were to take place in my life. When eventually the day for leaving came, April 1st (possibly of some symbolic significance), Barry, my work colleague and I packed our wellies and paused for an hour to drink a bottle of our homemade vintage wine, 1993, especially laid down for the occasion. We drank and reminisced as the Swallows put on a flypast followed by communal singing; we toasted their efforts and agreed that 1993 had been a very good year indeed.

After being in the same job for 26 years it was with a great deal of trepidation that I embarked on my new career in the nursery. One of my fears was soon laid to rest, as for some reason I had feared that fewer birds would be around at my new job. To my great pleasure by the end of the first day I had discovered five Robin nests.

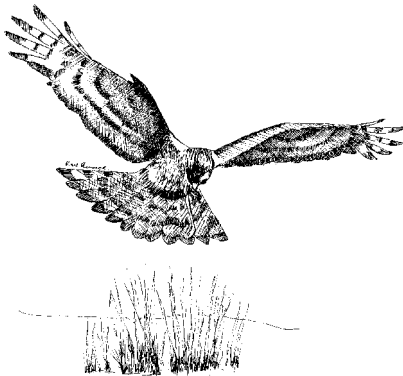
Over the coming weeks I discovered that the nursery had an incredible density of Robin territories, probably in excess of 20 pairs in 8 acres. Everywhere I work within the nursery a Robin is only feet away. As plants are moved or pots lifted the Robin is in there, grabbing the grubs for their young. After only 9 weeks in my new job the Robins are on their second broods and the young from the first broods are dispersed throughout the area.

In the potting shed Swallows nest over my head, Song Thrushes and Blackbirds nest in the poly-tunnels, Goldcrests and Coal Tits have reared broods in the conifers and a pair of Kestrels noisily make food passes on a dead oak branch by the office. For therapeutic purposes I look over dairy cattle in the field to one side and horses on the other, a wood and a stream form the opposite boundary to the Macclesfield to Knutsford road. Almost business as before!!

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

THE MAGIC OF PARKGATE

In winter, whenever possible, I visit the Old Baths car park just before dusk because of my enthusiasm for Hen Harriers. For me, 2004-2005 was a very special winter season. I can find 15 records that I have made over the period from 7th November to 26th February.



These are the highlights:

The most exciting highlight was my last recorded visit to the Old Baths car park - 26th February 2005. As an adult male approached the northerly roost site (i.e. in line with Point of Ayr) a second adult male came up from the site, then the two of them dropped down again. Some minutes later, when I was the sole observer I was treated to 10 minutes of the two males together - they briefly grappled talons and then flew around together and landed at exactly the same time on the far side of the small flash opposite the car park and were both visible on the ground. Shortly afterwards, one of them flew south and to the best of my knowledge only one male was seen by any observers on the estuary after that time.

On both 27th and 30th December, together with a number of other observers, I saw five Hen Harriers at the roost site at dusk - an adult male and four ringtails. (NB From mid-December, one of the ringtail Hen Harriers could be clearly identified by having one leg which trailed at about 45 degrees. This bird was still in the estuary in March, I saw it near Neston reed bed on 13th March.) Final note, on 20th November 2004, three Merlins were observed in the air at the same time.

I hope you find this narrative note interesting - for me it reflects on some very exciting observations during the winter when I was not tetrading on my own patch.

David Esther, 13 Loretto Drive, Upton, Wirral, CH49 6LH

DEAD CORMORANT USED AS LURE

The Government's recent decision to sanction the killing of Cormorants seems to have brought out the ugly side of a minority in the angling community. A dead Cormorant mounted on wire was found by a member of the public at a fish pond in Cheshire. The RSPB asked the finder to retrieve the corpse, but on returning to the site it had vanished.

The RSPB Investigations Unit believes the bird was probably a decoy to lure other Cormorants. The society's Mark Thomas said that the wire sticking out of the bird's body enabled it to be positioned with open wings near water, but there is no obvious reason why the bill was wired up. Surprisingly, as long as the bird was legally killed, such mutilation is not in itself an offence.

The above report appeared in *Birdwatch* May 2005; we are trying to find out further details about the incident. If a CAWOS member sees anything suspicious, please contact the RSPB Investigations Unit, and also inform Tony Broome, County Recorder. Tel: 01625 540434. E-mail: tonybroome@cawos.org Eds.

SWIFT NEST BY SPYCAM

Having begun nest recording for the BTO scheme a few years ago, I have often been frustrated in my local patch, Tatton Park, by the inaccessibility of the nests of many hole nesters - Nuthatch nests, for example, easily found but often impossible to inspect. The recommended mirror on a stick technology is of limited use in small dark holes and it seemed something better was required. A friend suggested a mini-security camera that plugs into a normal TV and one was quickly located at Maplins for only £24.99 by an Internet search. They are tiny and could easily be slipped into the opening of a Blue Tit nest hole. Prototyping experiments proved that an infrared diode priced at 49p could provide effective and unobtrusive lighting. A bit of soldering soon had the whole system wired up for connection to a battery and plugging in to the TV for less than £30 (technical details available on request).



Before investing in a portable TV monitor for use in the field, a trial close to home seemed the best option and a Swifts' nest under the eaves of the house was the obvious choice. Located just inches from the nest, the camera provided sharp, life-sized pictures of the adults incubating eggs and then feeding young. Without any disturbance, the progress of the young could be followed on a daily basis, so providing good nest record data.

Apart from that it was a joy just to be able to see the birds so close - an adult, filling the whole TV screen, preparing to launch itself off the edge of the nest. The views as the young pointed their backsides out over the edge of the nest, almost directly at the camera, before firing away a small white capsule, caused amusement. The downside was seeing their bloodsucking parasites running about the nest site, slipping in and out of the birds' feathers, and then watching the birds for ever scratching with the irritation caused.

You don't need Bill Oddy - if you've got birds nesting at home somewhere then why not get a mini-security camera and make your own TV viewing? After that the system could be redeployed for winter bird table viewing.

A Swift summary:

1 st May	Adults returned and feeding in the area
14 th May	Camera installed - adults roosting at nest site but no eggs yet
23 rd May	3 eggs - adult incubating
14 th June	2 blind and naked young being fed
30 th June	Still 2 young, now with well-developed feathers
1 st July	Only 1 young remaining - other presumed lost overboard
20 th July	Remaining juvenile still being fed in the nest and almost ready to fledge
21 st July	Nest empty during the day, birds (adults?) returning to roost

Mark Eddowes, 3 St Peters Avenue, Knutsford, WA16 0DN. Tel: 01565 750208.

E-mail: mark.eddowes@aeat.co.uk

STARLINGS - A DIFFERENT ROOST

In earlier editions of *Bird News* (April 2003, April 2004) I described a large Starling roost at a farm near Hurlleston Reservoir in the winters of 2002/3 and 2003/04. This roost was concentrated in *Leylandii* windbreaks around a farm, and dispersed early in 2004 when most of the trees were felled.

In the winter of 2004/5, another and rather different one developed in Nantwich. This was in a suburban area and unlike that at the farm (and indeed unlike others I have known) it appears to have been more dispersed, with birds using at least three different centres, spanning about half a kilometre (and possibly rather more).

I think the roost began to build in late December, when several thousand Starlings were wheeling over Nantwich Lake in pre-roosting manoeuvres. By January, however, the numbers present towards the southern fringe of the town were sufficient to attract quite extensive coverage in the local press: unlike the relatively isolated farm roost, this was in the middle of suburban housing and many residents were affected. (My first thought, on visiting the area, was that if I had known in advance I could have cornered the market in plastic car covers.....) As usual, various attempts to scare the birds away had proved unsuccessful.

Most reports simply referred to the Starlings roosting in the area of housing (around Rookery Drive, for those who know the town). However, it became clear during a couple of evenings spent watching them that the situation was not quite so simple. So far as I could see, the bulk of the birds were indeed around the housing, probably concentrated on one or two groups of larger trees. A second site was around Brine Leas School, about 250 metres away from the main centre, and a third in Brookfield Park, maybe 500 metres from it. The entire roost was therefore located at the points of a triangle with (roughly speaking) two sides of 250 metres and one of 500. Although the first impression was of one mass of birds, it began to divide until there were three distinct sections, each settling into its own trees for the night.

I said earlier that they used "at least three centres", because there were reports of Starlings roosting a kilometre away across the river (Queen's Drive) and also near the railway station, again about 500 metres from the main body (though I suspect this could be simply the Brookfield birds seen wheeling about). However, it is difficult to be precise. For example, in March a couple of dozen roosted in my garden, well over a kilometre away) for one or two nights - but by then the roost was probably dispersing anyway.

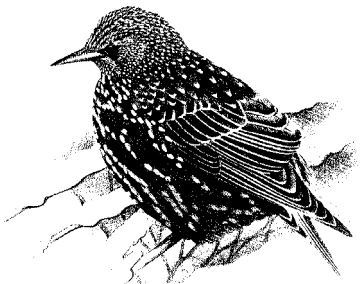
What is certain is that, on the evenings that I watched them, the three centres were in use. It is curious that one at least (Brookfield) seemed to offer just as much cover as the single-centre farm roost of the previous winter, yet was used only by a subsidiary group. I suspect that the roost may have begun in the housing area, but that numbers became too great for the available roosting space (not enough big trees) and the birds overflowed to the other sites.

Once again, we local birders have proved inadequate at producing figures; I did try photographing sections of the flock as a basis for estimating numbers, but results weren't good enough. The consensus appears to be that the roost was probably a bit smaller than that at Hurlleston a year before, though still numbering several hundred thousand birds.

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

As the thousands of Starlings took part
In their great murmuration of art,
All were swooping and wheeling
Expanding, congealing,
Mass movement with one beating heart.

Hazel J Raw



THE 'COMMON' LESSER WHITETHROAT?

When discussing Atlas survey work with many birdwatchers, the species which seems to cause many people great difficulty in finding is Lesser Whitethroat. I am coordinating the 10km square SJ66, covering the area around Winsford and Middlewich, and this spring I have been in and out of nine tetrads in that area. In all nine I have heard Lesser Whitethroat, which leads me to suggest that this bird is much commoner than is often supposed - certainly, I have come across it more frequently than the Common Whitethroat and often more than once in the same tetrad. It will be interesting to see how it fares over the whole county when the Atlas is published.

It is certainly a difficult bird to track down; it keeps to hedgerows, liking in particular tall, uncut hedgerows (E8 in the Atlas habitat code); its song, whose most significant feature has been described by one book as "a tuneless little rattle", could easily be missed and I have heard it far more often than I have seen it. By the time this note appears it will be too late to look for it this year but if you are 'tetrading' next year and don't know this bird, familiarise yourself with its call - you may be pleasantly surprised!

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

Some people refer to the song as a 'funny Chaffinch'. I think of it as the rattle of the Yellowhammer, but missing the 'no cheese' bit! You usually don't hear the first part of the Lesser Whitethroat song, a 'soft warble'. Eds.

RUMOURS... RUMOURS...

Shock! Outrage! It's not just Cormorants that need to watch their backs (termed the black plague by fisherman fearing for their 'sport') - a prominent Council Member has called for an extensive cull to be carried out with immediate effect on Mute Swans (white plague?) and Canada Geese (black and white plague?). Perhaps understandable when you consider that this particular stalwart is currently wading through 1,277 Mute Swan records and 1,303 Canada Geese records whilst compiling for the 2004 *Bird Report*. Enough to give him snow blindness!!!

Stop Press news - he's just added Mallard to his hit list - a mere 1,858 records sent in for 2004! Now that really is beyond the call of duty.....

Members' Noticeboard

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

Free to a good home:

British Birds magazine: 1978 (bound) and 1979-1981 loose. These are available free to a good home if any member would like them. They are in quite good condition despite having been in the loft!

Contact David Simmons on 01477 532588 or e-mail edsimmons62@hotmail.com

Would YOU be willing to help organise speakers for the CAWOS Indoor Meetings? Or even take over as Programme Secretary! Please contact Sheila Blamire on 01565 830168 or e-mail progsec@cawos.org

Membership News

Welcome to the following new members: Derek Berry, Helen Baker, Andrew Duncalf, Stephen Morris, Stephen Turner. Total membership for 2005 now stands at 367, just five below our 2004 record of 372. Can you help us find at least six new members?

At a Council meeting on April 14th:

- Marc Granville and Mark Eddowes were welcomed as new elected members of Council; Richard Smith (Bird Report Systematic List Editor) and Charles Hull (BTO) were coopted for the year.
- agreed to give £250.00 to the Mersey Estuary Conservation Group towards the publication of their revised book on the Mersey estuary.
- the purchase of a laptop computer, digital projector and camera, under the 'Awards for All' scheme, was to be investigated.
- Tony Parker volunteered to take over as Conservation rep for Halton; the Macclesfield position is still vacant.
- for the 2004 *Bird Report* Richard Smith would take over as Systematic List Editor, Sheila Blamire would look after the technical side, Richard Gabb would control advertising and liaise with compilers, while Steve Barber would oversee commissioned articles.

PLANNING MATTERS!

Concerned about a local development proposal that may affect a site or species of ornithological interest in your area? Fiona Mahon, Planning Conservation Officer at Cheshire Wildlife Trust explains what you can do to have your say.

Under the current planning system the community are encouraged to take an active role in land use decisions. Involvement in the planning process requires access to information and the submission of written representations, either as an individual or as an interest group, such as CAWOS. There are four areas where the public can get involved in local planning matters: planning applications, planning appeals, local and regional development plans and breaches of planning control. The main area where CAWOS can have a direct input is via representations on planning applications.

In order to stay abreast of present planning applications it is necessary to inspect the weekly planning list held by your local planning department. These days most councils display these lists on their website. If you require the list in paper form there is often a charge, alternatively you can visit the council offices in person. After a planning application has been made, the local planning authority is required to post notices near the site and write to neighbouring landowners. Large developments will be advertised in the local newspaper, so looking for public notices in local newspapers is a good way of finding out about prospective planning applications.

Most planning departments are happy to keep local interest groups notified of relevant applications, so it might be worth writing a standard letter to all the councils in your area asking for CAWOS to be kept informed of any applications that may have an ornithological interest. However, you will have to spell out to the planners the type of applications and sites that you are interested in, as several districts in Cheshire do not employ an ecologist to advise the planners about which applications might be of interest to you.

If you do find out that a particular application may have an impact on the ornithological interest of a site and/or its surroundings, then you will need to request a copy of the application. Individuals will be asked to visit the planning department of the council in question to inspect the plans, but if you register your concern as an organisation then a representative of CAWOS may be able to



request a copy of the application to be posted to them. When requesting a copy of a planning application always ask whether an ecological survey has been conducted, and if so ask to see a copy of the survey report to enable you to submit a more informed representation. It is the duty of the local planning authority to ask the applicant to provide a survey or assessment of the potential impact of the proposal on the ecological value of the application site if this is deemed necessary.

When you receive a copy of a planning application it will come with a covering letter giving the timescale for receipt of letters of representation. If you are not able to meet this deadline then the council will not take your views into account. Remember that local planning authorities are statute-bound to consider planning applications within 8 weeks of receipt.

There will be standard paragraphs that you can use in your letter of representation, such as asking for a full ecological survey of the application site, including breeding birds survey, if this has not already been carried out. If a survey report has been submitted as part of the application, check that the methodology employs current good practice. Do you agree with the findings based on your local knowledge and do you feel that any mitigation proposed in the recommendations section of the report is acceptable? Could you argue for greater mitigation than that proposed? Planners often fail to understand the importance of collecting survey data early in the planning process, preferring instead to attach a condition to any permissions granted requiring a survey to be conducted prior to commencement of construction works. How then can the presence of Protected Species on a site be used as a material planning consideration, as required by the Government's Planning Policy Guidance note on Nature Conservation, known as PPG 9, to which local planning authorities must have regard in the consideration of a planning application?

This Planning Policy Guidance note is soon to be replaced by a Planning Policy Statement on Biodiversity and Geological Conservation. The first draft of PPS 9 was available for consultation earlier in the year and we are currently awaiting the final draft. For the latest information on this and other relevant Government Planning Policy Statements, refer to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) website at www.odpm.gov.uk.

As conservationists we should always argue for surveys to be carried out using appropriate methodologies and by suitably licensed individuals, before any wildlife mitigation is planned. It is helpful to the planners if you provide detailed advice on the type of mitigation required for a particular species or habitat (if this has not already been covered in any ecological surveys carried out by the applicant), particularly in areas where there is no council ecologist employed to advise the planners on nature conservation matters.

When writing a letter of representation on a planning application you can use the following bullet points as a template:-

- Include any planning application references together with a description of the proposal and location.
- State clearly and concisely in your opening paragraph whether you object to the proposal and on what grounds, for example, 'CAWOS objects to the above-mentioned proposed development on nature conservation grounds, in particular, we feel that the proposal will have a detrimental impact on the ornithological interest of the application site'.
- Keep your letter brief and to the point. The planning case officer may have many letters of representation to peruse for a single application. The views that you make in your letter are more likely to be included in his/her report to the council's planning committee if they are quick and easy for the planner to understand.
- Be factual wherever possible and only offer an opinion if suitably expert to do so. If the application is refused by the council and later goes to appeal your original letter of representation will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate as evidence and you will be asked if you wish to give further evidence at the Appeal Inquiry.
- Wherever possible cite relevant pieces of legislation, particularly when referring to species protected under national and international legislation. Also refer to their current conservation status internationally, nationally and locally and mention the threats to the conservation of that species locally.

- Focus on valid ecological or environmental considerations, such as potential damage to rare and endangered species and habitats arising from the proposed development. If appropriate offer advice on suitable mitigation, should the council be mindful to grant planning permission or suggest additional information that is required before the council can make a decision on the application, such as a breeding birds survey.
- Refer to the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) for the Cheshire region, known as Countdown, to check whether any BAP species or habitats occur on the application site. The LBAP can be viewed at www.cheshire-biodiversity.org.uk All local authorities in Cheshire and Wirral are members of the local BAP process and therefore have a commitment to helping conserve locally rare and endangered species and habitats.
- If you would like to be notified of the outcome of a planning application include this in your letter. Local planning authorities will not automatically notify interested parties of planning decisions unless specifically asked to do so.

It is possible to attend planning committee meetings and in some cases members of the public can speak briefly to make sure that the committee is aware of their views or concerns. Check first with the planning case officer whether this is appropriate before attending a meeting.

It is currently not possible for third parties to appeal against a local planning authority's decision. However, you can ask for a copy of the decision notice, which should detail the grounds for refusal, or approval of the application. If you have complaints about how a local planning authority handled a planning application these can be referred to the Local Government Ombudsman.

For more information on the planning system in England look on the Planning Portal website on www.planningportal.gov.uk. This site includes links to other websites including the Royal Town Planning Institute, the professional organisation for planners.

Another useful website is that of the Association of Local Government Ecologists which contains a handbook for incorporating the natural environment into developments: *Developing Naturally*; for more details go to www.alge.org.uk.

If you require any further advice on planning matters contact: Fiona on 01270 610180 or e-mail fmahon@cheshirewt.cix.co.uk



SPONSORSHIP OF INDIVIDUAL SPECIES FOR THE ATLAS:

Thanks to the following who have sponsored the following species:

Denise Bebbington	Coal Tit	Paul Bebbington	Willow Warbler
Steve Binney	Long-eared Owl	Tony Broome	Cormorant
Andy Coxon	Whinchat	Philip French	Red Kite, Blackbird
Paul Lewis	Tree Pipit, Great Tit	Peter Mathews	Curlew
Dave Murray	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Phil Oddy	Goosander
Norman Scott	Pied Wagtail		

118 species have now been sponsored, leaving a further 65 still to be taken. Lists of those birds already sponsored have been published in previous editions of *Bird News*; a quick way of finding out if a species has not yet been taken would be to phone me on 01606 832517 or e-mail memsec@cawos.org.

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

~ THE CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL ATLAS ~

Please submit your 2005 breeding season records asap!

~ e-mail: atlassubmissions@cawos.org ~

Cheshire and Wirral Atlas

David Norman has written about his experiences whilst out tetradting in a number of areas in the centre of the county, from Runcorn/Warrington to Chester/Nantwich, during the 2005 breeding season. I'm sure his suggestions for proving breeding will be of help for the 2006 (and last!) breeding season recording. Please send in your anecdotes to share with (and enthuse!) others, and any questions/queries you may have as well, of course. Eds.

Mid-May progress

Most waterfowl have nests, and the early ones already have young on the water: remember that these should be coded as NY until they can fly. Some birds on nests can be ridiculously easy to see - Mute Swans, Canada Geese, Moorhens and Coots - but others can be well hidden and only the presence of males, but no females, out on the water makes you suspect that there's a female on a nest in the vegetation somewhere. A few minutes spent looking at any of the waterbodies in your tetrad should let you clock up some easy species, although return visits in June will be needed for some of the later-nesting birds like Tufted Duck.

Some young Tawny Owls are now quite vocal, calling for food. On the other hand, most woodpeckers are quite quiet as the females are incubating: in a couple of weeks' time the woods will be full of noise.

In the last week or more, urban roofs and farm buildings have become busy with Starlings. Many of the young Starlings are now out of the nest and pestering their parents for food. Whilst in the nest they are extremely noisy and are very easy to record: I have found Starling nests in every tetrad that I have been through in May (over 35 of them) just by listening for the noise of the chicks or watching adults carrying food back to the nest.

A useful side-product of watching for Starlings is getting lots of records of House Sparrows, Jackdaws, Feral Pigeons, Collared Doves and other commensal species such as Pied Wagtail. Many Swallows have eggs now, and House Martins are renovating nests, or building new ones. Many Dunnocks and Robins are feeding young now, but they can be sneaky birds and difficult to observe. Most Mistle Thrush chicks have left the nest, along with the early Blackbird and Song Thrush chicks, but many of them are trying for second broods, or replacement clutches if they have lost a nest, and there is still plenty of thrush song. Most warblers have built nests, and some of the early-arriving ones are on eggs. During this time, the males of many species do not sing much. Some flycatchers are still arriving.

Most of the common hole-nesters have hatched recently, as the woodland caterpillars emerge. There were far more records of Marsh Tit and Willow Tit in winter than in last year's breeding season: these species are very sedentary so, if you found them in winter, please try to check the same area for breeding activity.

Rooks are so noisy that I hope we are recording most of the county's rookeries. Many of the other crows are feeding young now, although Ravens fledged a while ago.

Many Chaffinch chicks have recently hatched and the adults are much more obvious with their alarm calls. Most of the other finches and buntings are a bit later, waiting for more plants to set seed, but increasingly some of them get in an early brood and I know of flying young Greenfinches, and Goldfinches and Linnets on eggs. Lesser Redpolls can be conspicuous with their song-flights over the tops of trees, but are much more difficult to track down for higher levels of breeding evidence.

Early June expectations

The breeding season moves on, and we now have opportunities for finding the late-arriving migrants, and for proving breeding with two-letter codes of many species. Recording two-letter codes for most species becomes easier when the eggs have hatched and adults are feeding young. Although some people find it more difficult to prove breeding than to find a singing bird, there is an advantage when birds have chicks to feed: the adults are usually active all day long, so you don't have to get out so early in the morning to spot them!

Most of the young Grey Herons from our heronries have now fledged, but there are usually late nesting attempts, and especially first-time breeders might try to set up in different sites. Little

Egrets could turn up anywhere. Cormorants are known to have nested in trees at four Cheshire sites in 2004, and the species might be on the verge of widespread colonisation, so please keep an eye out on any suitable spots. Most swans and geese have their young and are especially visible when they are afloat: remember that these should be coded as NY until they can fly. Similarly, stripy-plumaged young grebes can be seen on many waters. The first year of Atlas work has alerted us to the apparently low numbers of Little Grebes in Cheshire, so all records will be valuable.

By early June, even the late-nesting species of waterfowl mostly have nests - such as Tufted Duck, Pochard, Ruddy Duck - and we are less likely to see females out on the water. If you see only males of these species, it is probably a good sign that a female is on a nest somewhere in the waterside vegetation; she is likely to be well-concealed, but a visit late in June should be repaid with sightings of a brood of ducklings.

The early-breeding raptors like Peregrine and Goshawk are busy feeding their young. Possible nest sites should not be approached - these are Schedule 1 species - but please let me know if you think you have these birds breeding. Many Kestrels have hatched, a week or two earlier than normal, and probably indicative of high populations of their rodent prey. Some Buzzard chicks have hatched, and most will do so in the next week or two. Sparrowhawks can be more difficult to find during June as the females stay on the nest most of the time and the males bring them food; the females start to hunt for themselves when the chicks are 10-14 days old, late in the month for most of them. Hobbies are the latest of our diurnal raptors and are only now occupying their nests.

Most waders have chicks, as we can tell from the adults' alarm calls. If you get too close, some adults perform a distraction display (DD) by pretending to have a broken wing to lure you away from their nest or young.

Perhaps the best opportunity of proving breeding for Tawny Owls is by hearing the chicks calling, now that most of them have left the nest but are still depending on their parents. The same will apply to Long-eared Owls if anyone is lucky enough to have them in their tetrad. Little Owls have chicks in the nest and the adults can be more obvious during the day.

Most woodpeckers have now hatched and all three species can be found by hearing the young calling in their nests, often audible from a long way away. Swifts are now incubating eggs, usually in buildings. They can be found feeding almost anywhere, but the late-evening screaming parties, often below rooftop-level, are a good sign of nesting nearby.

Skylarks are carrying food for their young, amazingly able to sing with a beakful of grubs. It is well worth watching any Skylark for proof of breeding. They do not give much of an alarm call - a 'chirrup' if they are anxious - and usually go to the nest even if there are people quite close. Wagtails and pipsits are much more wary but all can be seen carrying food in early June. Swallows and House Martins usually give away their nest sites very easily.



Early June is probably the peak time for getting two-letter codes for warblers. Many of the later-arriving warblers - especially Reed Warblers and Lesser Whitethroats - are still singing, and should be noted for a return visit later in the month, but all of the other warblers have young in the nest about now. The alarm calls of all four Sylvia warblers sound harsh and grating, and it is worth spending a few minutes watching to see a Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Garden Warbler or Blackcap with food for its young. Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers both have similar 'hweet' alarm calls, usually given very frequently when taking food to their nestlings. Both parents feed Willow Warbler broods, but male Chiffchaffs do nothing but sing and give the alarm if need be, so watch the female!

Family parties of early-nesting birds are starting to fill the hedges and woods, giving plenty of opportunity for 'RF' records when you see young Long-tailed Tits, Nuthatches and Treecreepers that are being fed by their parents. Remember that juvenile birds on their own do not count for 'RF': many young birds wander several kilometres from their natal area, so sightings of independent juveniles do not prove breeding in that tetrad.

Many of the *Parus* tits are still feeding young in the nest and can be very obvious at this time. Redstarts and Pied Flycatchers can also be found with nestlings in some of our woods. On the

other hand, some Spotted Flycatchers are still arriving and building nests, often in creeping vegetation on the side of a building.

Many finches and buntings have chicks now and should be watched carefully. Some of them take beaks full of grubs for their young, but some feed them on seeds or a mashed-up mixture of seeds, so do not obviously carry food in their bills. Corn Buntings are late breeders, and many sing through much of June.

Late June and July

By now the breeding season for many species is over for this year, which is why the 'core' breeding Atlas period is defined as April to June. Many juvenile birds are now independent of their parents and roaming far away from where they hatched, so they must not be counted in your Atlas recording: 'RF' refers to young birds that are clearly still dependent on their parents, and so are likely to have come from a nest nearby.

However, some species are only now coming to the peak of their breeding activity, and late June and July are the key periods for recording their breeding status, so further visits to your tetrad can be very valuable. Some of these species are scarce in Cheshire and Wirral, and others might just be under-recorded. Your efforts can help determine their true status.

Some of our raptors are easiest to prove breeding when the adults are carrying food back to the nest for their young. For most species, the male alone hunts whilst the chicks are small, the female staying on the nest and brooding the young; both parents leave the nest to hunt for food after the chicks are about ten days old, giving observers twice the opportunities to see an adult carrying food. Most Sparrowhawks have recently hatched, and Buzzard chicks are quite well-grown. Hobbies are one of the latest of all our breeding species, and are worth watching throughout July. Also, Barn Owls are having a bumper season in Cheshire and Wirral and could be breeding in new places. They are often found hunting in daylight when they have hungry chicks to feed. The spread of the Barn Owl is one of the major conservation success stories of recent years in our county, a good sign of a healthier countryside.

Out on the water, the chicks of our late-nesting diving ducks - Tufted Duck, Pochard, Ruddy Duck - are now accompanying their parents, the chicks able to dive well at an early age. Some other aquatic species also have young. The large gulls are spreading, often nesting on rooftops. Black-headed Gulls are usually in big, unmissable colonies, but odd pairs can turn up and breed almost anywhere. Common Terns might be found somewhere in Cheshire.

Swift chicks are starting to hatch, and July can be the best month for seeing adults returning to likely nest sites. Spotted Flycatchers should be easier to find, and Quail, if there are any around.

The seed-eating finches start breeding later than most other passerines and species such as Linnet and Bullfinch can still be incubating now. Corn Bunting is amongst the latest of all breeders, and males are often polygamous, so they continue to sing whilst one or more females are on eggs.

Many species never, or only very rarely, have second broods - tits, woodpeckers, etc. But other species will have second broods or repeat layings after a failed attempt. Unusually, many Starlings in 2005 are having second broods. If you have so far not been able to prove Starlings breeding in your tetrad, there is a good chance in the next week or two as the squawking chicks call incessantly from their nest holes. Similarly, if you have not yet managed to pin down some of the other common species such as the thrushes, doves and some of the warblers, watch - and listen - for evidence of late broods.

And finally.....

E-mail your completed files as csv attachments to atlassubmissions@cawos.org **as soon as possible please**. Do remember to copy in your Area Coordinator, who will be keen to look at them as well. If you happen to find a late-breeding species after you have sent in your records, don't worry: just send an extra submission, the breeding component of our bird atlas is defined by biological events, not by the calendar! Also, in general, birds will nest later at higher altitudes, and earlier in urban and suburban areas.

Professor David Norman, Rowswood Cottage, Ridding Lane, Sutton Weaver, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 6PF. Tel: 01928 711064. E-mail: davidnorman@cawos.org

~ <http://www.cheshireandwirralbirdatlas.org> ~

Diary

AUGUST

- 7 **Birdwatch, Banks Road car park, Lower Heswall, 10:30am (HW 13:36, 8.8m)**
 21 NCRSPB Hilbre - contact Tony Parker 01925 726986

SEPTEMBER

- 4 KOS Hilbre, meet 8:00am at the Sessions House, Knutsford, or 9:00am at West Kirby
 5 HPRSPB AGM AND MEMBERS' SLIDES
 9 SECOS 'VENEZUELA: THE BIRDS OF THE LLANOS' by Dave and Sigrun Tollerton
 11 HPRSPB Pennington Flash/Horrocks' Flash, meet at Memorial Car Park, Marple at 8:00am
 12 SRSPB AGM and 'NOT THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR YOU DON'T' by Brian Hallworth
 13 MRSPB 'AUTUMN TO SPRING' by Mike Wilkes
 14 HO AGM and 'BEYOND THE GARDEN HEDGE' by Margaret McCormick
 16 NCRSPB 'UP THE INSIDE PASSAGE' by Jeff Clarke
 17 **Wader Watch, King's Gap, Hoylake, 10:00am - 12:00noon, tel: 0151 678 5488**
 17 NCRSPB Tittesworth Reservoir, Leek - contact Paul Grimmert 01925 268770
 18 SECOS Seaforth, ring for details
 19 **Birdwatch, Riverbank Rd car park, Lower Heswall, 11:45am (HW 12:56, 10.0m)**
 19 HPRSPB 'NESTING BIRDS' by John Lintin Smith
 23 KOS 'BIRD HABITATS OF THE PENNINES AND SHETLAND' by Gordon Yates
 25 Hawk Walk at Wigg Island, 9:00am - 12:00noon, tel: 01928 583905
 27 ADNHS 'PLANT HUNTING IN THE YORKSHIRE DALES' by Dr Brian Barnes
 30 WGBG 'FLORIDA BIRDING HIGHLIGHTS' by Paul Hobson

OCTOBER

- 7 **CAWOS 'BIRDQUEST TO THE USSR' BY TIM LOSEBY**
 9 KOS Conwy/Llandudno, meet 8:30am at the Sessions House, Knutsford
 9 HPRSPB Old Moor RSPB Reserve by car, meet 8:15am at the Memorial Car Park, Marple
 9 WGBG Spurn by coach, contact Alan Bradshaw 01625 527169
 10 SRSPB 'GATEWAY TO THE SAHARA' by Keith Offord
 11 MRSPB 'CHASING THE DAY' by Keith Offord
 11 ADNHS 'JODRELL BANK AND ITS NATURAL HISTORY' by Jack Swan
 13-16NCRSPB Lincolnshire long weekend contact Dave Hughes 01925 726242
 14 SECOS 'WHITE WINGS OVER ARCTIC AND INDIAN OCEANS' by Gordon Yates
 16 SECOS Old Moor RSPB Reserve, Barnsley, ring for details
 17 HPRSPB 'LAND OF CONTRASTS' by Keith Offord
 19 NCRSPB Marbury CP/Anderton Nature Res - contact Dave McMaster 01928 772403
 21 NCRSPB 'AGM & 'MISIDENTIFICATION OF BIRDS' by Tim Melling
 21 WGBG 'WETLAND WILDLIFE' by Steve Knell
 21-23HPRSPB East Anglia weekend - ring for details
 23 SRSPB Rutland Water by coach - ring for details
 25 ADNHS 'AFRICAN GAME PARKS' by Peter Kirk
 28 KOS 'BIRD HAUNTS OF BRITAIN' by Tony Duckles

NOVEMBER

- 4 **CAWOS 'THE ART OF MISIDENTIFICATION' BY TIM MELLING**
 5 KOS IMF/Parkgate, meet 8:30am at the Sessions House, or 9:30am at IMF
 6 WGBG Fylde coast by coach, contact Alan Bradshaw 01625 527169
 8 MRSPB 'BIRDING IN TURKEY - ANKARA TO BIRECIK' by Nick Williams
 8 ADNHS 'RARE PLANTS - NW ENGLAND AND N WALES' by Colin Twist
 11 SECOS 'BIRDS OF THE WEST MIDLANDS' by Mike Wilkes
 13 HPRSPB Wyre Estuary and Pilling Flats, meet at the Memorial Car Park, Marple at 8:15am
 18 NCRSPB 'BENEATH THE DARK CANOPY' by Michael Leach

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 Caldý 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

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

Indoor Meetings 2005

Meetings are held in the Cranford Suite, Knutsford Civic Centre, at 7:45pm, on the first Friday of the month, **unless otherwise stated**. There is an entrance fee of £1.50 for members and £3 for non-members for all meetings except the AGM when admission is free.

7th October 2005 **'BIRDQUEST TO THE USSR'** **by Tim Loseby**

We're very pleased to begin the new season of indoor meetings with Tim Loseby, whose presentation tonight starts with the sights of Moscow, before setting off through mountains and valleys of the Caucasus, the spectacular Tien Shan mountains, the steppes of Central Asia and finally, the meadows and taiga of Siberia. This is a journey across the real former Soviet Union. Many of the birds known to us in Britain only as rare vagrants occur here in large numbers; but there are species familiar to us in Europe. Tim's stunning photography will bring the familiar, and the not so familiar, to life.

4th November 2005 **'THE ART OF MISIDENTIFICATION'** **by Tim Melling**

Tonight we welcome Tim Melling, Conservation Officer with the RSPB, who describes his talk as "A compilation of funny stories from many years of experience of answering bird enquiries at the RSPB and elsewhere". Tim goes on to explain that "Most of the stories are first-hand, although several stories from elsewhere within the RSPB were too good to miss out. There are also a few stories of high-profile misidentifications from birders who hoped their bloomers were dead and buried". Could be some red faces after tonight's meeting?

2nd December 2005 **'NAMIBIA: LAND OF CONTRASTS'** **by Keith Offord**

Namibia is one of the most remote and undiscovered countries in Africa and has within it an extraordinary range of habitats including thornveld, mountains, desert and coastline. It is not surprising that there exists an enormous variety of birdlife from ubiquitous Lilac-breasted Rollers to endemic White-tailed Shrikes and Monteiro's Hornbills. Mammal life is equally rich with massed gatherings of various antelope species with their attendant predators plus one of the world's most important populations of the threatened Black Rhino. This talk explores the fabulous wildlife of these areas and blends some of the most exciting aspects of natural history with stunning backdrops of Namibian scenery.

BIRDING IN ANDALUCIA

Self-catering holiday accommodation for rental in Jimena de la Frontera, a beautiful whitewashed village in a stunning setting on a hillside, overlooked by an old Moorish castle.

Easy access from Gibraltar (Jimena is approx 35 miles north on the road to Ronda) and Malaga (approx 1½ hour drive).

Fully air-conditioned new townhouse sleeps 4 in two twin rooms, with additional accommodation for 2 in self-contained double bed studio. Small private patio/garden and shared swimming pool with sun terrace.

Fabulous views towards mountains, with 'balcony ticks' including 33 Griffon Vultures, Short-toed and Booted Eagles, Bee-eater, Golden Oriole and Hobby.

Jimena is on the main migration route north of Gibraltar so birding is particularly productive in spring and autumn. It is situated on the edge of Los Alcornocales National Park (cork oak woodland) and a walk along the Hozgarganta River (10 mins walk from the accommodation) has produced Western Bonelli's and Orphean Warblers, Wryneck, Rock Martin and White-rumped Swift, as well as the commoner Mediterranean species.

Jimena is well placed for a drive up to the mountains of Sierra de Grazalema (Bonelli's Eagle, Rock Thrush, Rock Bunting and Rock Sparrow) or along the Costa de la Luz, past the beaches near Tarifa (Audouin's Gull and Lesser Crested Tern) to the former wetland at La Janda (Collared Pratincole, Common Crane, Black Stork and Spanish Imperial Eagle).

For those with interests other than birding, there are plenty of other places to visit including a drive along the route of the whitewashed villages to Ronda, a trip to Gibraltar and, of course, the many local tapas bars where the rioja is excellent!

For more details please contact Nigel and Ruth Stones on 01625 520989 or e-mail nigeldoc44@aol.com



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New season of indoor meetings starts on Friday 7th October at Knutsford:
 'BIRDQUEST TO THE USSR' BY TIM LOSEBY

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