

BIRD NEWS

Number 73 March 2007



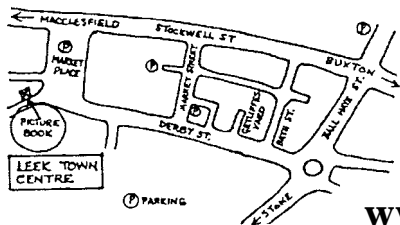
RSPB Makes Investment in Dee Wildlife
Sine Wave at West Kirby High Tide Wader Roost
Yellow-browed Warbler • The Leach's Petrel Wreck
Woolston Eyes Conservation Group Newsletter
Greenhouse Gases and our Carbon Footprint

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Front cover : Hawfinch by Ray Scally

Other illustrations : Phil Jones

Guest Editorial

When I was a boy my father always used to say that conservation was all important and, greatly influenced by such eminent figures as Peter Scott, this is a viewpoint I've shared throughout my life. We are very lucky in this country to have a network of protected sites such as Special Protection Areas and Ramsar sites, and national organisations such as the RSPB, Wetlands and Wildfowl Trust and the various Wildlife Trusts. But these protected sites and organisations are nothing without the continued support of the general birdwatching public – in other words, you and I.

In this issue of *Bird News* the topic of conservation comes up several times. We welcome the appointment of a new Conservation Coordinator, Steve Turner, whose many qualifications for the job are described on page 22. Habitat protection is a very important aspect of conservation, therefore it is a great pleasure to read Colin Wells's piece about the purchase of Burton Marsh Farm by the RSPB. The article about fluctuating numbers of waders on West Kirby shore was made possible by the Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens (DEVW) who actively engage in conservation by persuading people not to disturb the large wader roost there. Even though this area is protected by international legislation this direct action by volunteers is still required. Elsewhere, the Woolston Eyes Conservation Group perform a vital job managing the habitat of Woolston Eyes Bird Reserve, one of the best ornithological sites in Cheshire and Wirral. I would urge any birder who isn't currently involved in schemes like these to think about setting aside just a few hours a month and give something back to the birds they watch. How much better to help the birds on your local patch rather than travel several hundred miles for yet one more tick. On that subject, Clive Richards's excellent article on Greenhouse Gases, The Carbon Footprint and The Birdwatcher is certainly food for thought. Colin Jones's account of his discovery of a Yellow-browed Warbler is a very good example of how exciting local patch birding can be, surely much more satisfying than hours spent on motorways to look at someone else's find.

Another important aspect of conservation is to educate and inform. The DEVW do this by chatting to people and showing them the birds through their telescopes. One of the joys of wardening is to hear the gasp of amazement when people see the thousands of waders through a telescope which they had been completely unaware of moments before. By educating and informing the general public we obtain their support in our quest to conserve wildlife, including birds and their habitats. Indeed, I would argue that CAWOS's most important role is to educate and inform; two ways we do this is by producing *Bird News* and the *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report*. Anyone who would like to help with their production, such as helping with the compiling of the *Bird Report* or writing articles for *Bird News*, is always very welcome.

Another aspect of conservation is monitoring of birds; obviously we need to know what birds are out there and how they are doing, in order to protect them. The national body who organises the majority of bird monitoring in this country is the BTO. Surveys undertaken include the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) and Breeding Bird Survey both of which feature prominently in our *Bird Reports*; they rely wholly on volunteers to provide the data. It is only by obtaining hard data provided by these surveys that the Governmental departments such as Natural England can give the appropriate protection to our prime ornithological sites.

Many of us have been busy surveying for the forthcoming Cheshire and Wirral Bird Atlas; field work for this is now at an end after three busy years. The Atlas will, of course, be a very important conservation tool as it gives us an in-depth look at the status of our birds over the past three years, highlighting birds which are doing well, those which are struggling and the habitats they are using. I will finish by urging all Atlas surveyors to send their records in by March 27th so that this landmark publication can be published on schedule.

Richard Smith

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 2nd June - please be prompt

We cannot guarantee that material received after this date will be published in that issue. If you are aware that your material may be delayed, please let Sheila Blamire know as soon as possible.

Species Spotlight

THE LEACH'S PETREL WRECK

On December 8th 1886 a Leach's Petrel (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) was picked up near Northgate Station, Chester; another one was found in Ellesmere Port on December 16th 1907. Very interesting, you might say, but what has that got to do with the present day? Well, after trawling through Coward, Hardy, Hedley Bell and the *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Reports* these are the only December records for Cheshire and Wirral I could find prior to December 2006. This puts into perspective just how remarkable the events of that month were, which I will now relay.

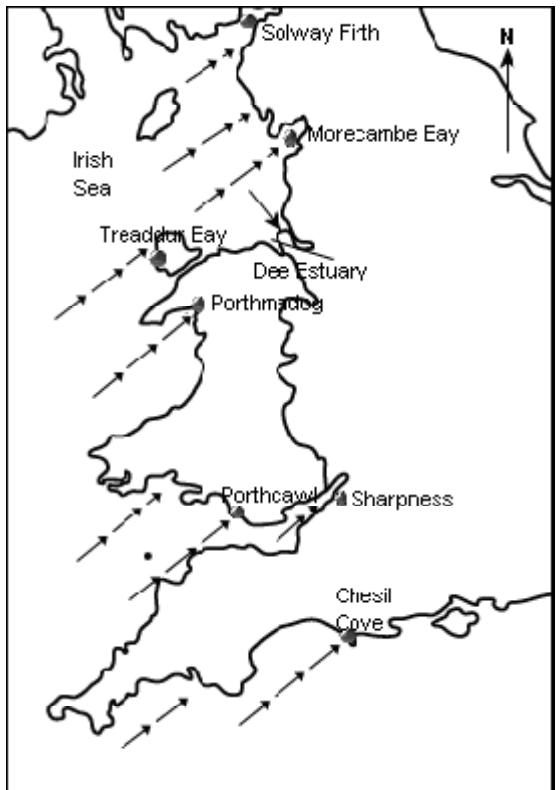
The story begins on Nov 17th when the wind started to increase from the south-west, blowing between Force 6 and 8 until about 0700hrs on Nov 21st. The only Leach's Petrel recorded in the country during this period was one inland over Westwood Pool, Worcs, on 19th. At 0700hrs on Nov 21st the wind swung from the SW quadrant to NW and within a few hours seven flew past Hilbre Island. Again these were the only ones recorded in the country on that day. It would seem that after four days of strong SW winds the birds had been blown up in to the Irish Sea through the St George's Channel from their wintering grounds way to the south. It was not until the wind swung round to NW that they were then blown in towards Hilbre Island. During the next 10 days the wind was relatively moderate but, perhaps significantly, remained mostly in the southern quadrant and this is what may have kept many Leach's Petrels further north than normal. But on Dec 2nd an intense low pressure system steamed in from the south-west, passing up the Irish Sea early on 3rd, bringing with it south-westerly Force 9 winds, a severe gale. Leach's Petrels were seen from virtually first light on 3rd from south-west facing coasts in England and Wales. 10 went past Criccieth by late morning and 12 went past Treaddur Bay on Anglesey in just one hour around midday. Further south ones and twos were being observed along the south coasts of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and south Wales. A lot of birds were being blown in to the Severn estuary and one reached right up the river beyond Slimbridge by mid-afternoon. Further north birds were being blown in to Morecambe Bay and two got as far as the Scottish coast of the Solway Firth.

Date - December	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Wind Direction	SW	SW	SW	SW	SW	NW	NW	SW	SW	SW	SW	SW	W
Wind Force	9	8	6	7	7	5	6	8	7	7	8	7	5
Criccieth to Porthmadog	21	1	100		182			2		2			
Anglesey	13	3			2								
North Wales (Bangor to POA)	1	1	1			9	11						
North Wirral/Hilbre				1		25	78	1	1				
Crosby							190						
Lancs (Formby to Rossal Point)	3	6	1	2	2	3	4		4	7			
Morecambe Bay (Heysham to Walney)	5	102	6	2	27				4	4	2		1
Cumbria (Irish Sea coast)	3	4				12				9			
Cumbria (Solway Firth coast)	8	11	6					1	4	1			

As shown in the table birds were blown in to west and south-west facing coasts on 3rd right across the north-west from Porthmadog in the south to the Solway Firth in the north, thus suggesting that a good number of birds must already have been in the Irish Sea prior to the storm system passing through on the night of Dec 2nd/3rd.

Although the wind moderated slightly to 'only' Force 6 to 8 over the next four days Leach's Petrels continued to be seen in the same south-west facing coasts as on 3rd, but in increasing numbers.

Peak counts included over 45 off Jenny Brown's Point in Morecambe Bay (4th), 36 past Sharpness in the Severn estuary (4th), over 50 past Chesil Cove, Dorset (5th), 100 at Black Rock Sands near Porthmadog (5th) with 136 at nearby Borth-y-Gest on 7th and 132 past Porthcawl, south Wales (7th). Birds reached as far north as Loch Fyne in Scotland and as far east as Canvey Island in Essex, with many also turning up over various inland reservoirs. By the end of Dec 7th we birders who do our birdwatching from north Wirral and Hilbre Island, traditionally the best sites in the country to see Leach's Petrels, were beginning to despair of seeing anything of this remarkable influx. But at 4am on 8th the wind swung round to the north-west. The wind had eased down to force 5 but it was enough to bring the birds in with about five observed passing along the north Wirral coast and 20 past Hilbre during the day. Elsewhere, there were 155 past Hartland Point, north Devon, as birds which had been trapped by the south-westerlies in the Severn estuary streamed out of the Bristol Channel. The wind increased to Force 6 overnight and remained north-westerly resulting in spectacular numbers at Crosby on 9th with at least 190 counted off the beach in the Mersey channel, the highest total from a single site during this whole period, thus restoring Merseyside's reputation as the prime spot in the country for Leach's Petrels! 74 were recorded flying west along the north Wirral coast and many were also seen off Hilbre and Point of Ayr.



On Dec 3rd birds were blown on to south-west facing coasts as shown on the map. It wasn't until Dec 8th and 9th that birds were blown in towards Wirral and the Dee estuary by north-west winds.

On Dec 10th the wind went round to the south-west again and remained strong (Force 6 to 8) for the next six days, but despite this numbers of Leach's Petrels observed dropped right off with the only double-figure count being 15 off Workington on 11th. Most records were of one or two in the northern half of the Irish Sea although the most northerly record was one off the Outer Hebrides on 11th. The last record of this remarkable influx was a single bird off Heysham harbour on 15th. It has been estimated that 2,000 birds were involved in total, making it bigger than the "wreck" of December 1989 but not yet on the same scale as the "wreck" of late Oct/early Nov 1952, which apparently involved more than 7,000 birds. The 1989 "wreck" involved relatively small numbers of birds but the one in 1952 is still remembered here when hundreds of birds were washed up dead along the Wirral coast. Elsewhere in the country winter Leach's Petrels do turn up from time to time after south-west gales but numbers are usually very small, four blown in to the coast near Porthmadog area in February 2002 being a typical example. It is believed that Leach's Petrels seen in the UK during winter are blown up from their wintering grounds in the Atlantic, in particular the Bay of Biscay which, according to Hémary and Jouanin (1988), hosts between 300,000 and two million wintering birds.

Between late August and early October the mouth of the River Mersey, north Wirral and Hilbre Island are nationally renowned as being the premier area in the country for seeing Leach's Petrels when the birds are on their way south from their breeding grounds. Numbers vary greatly

from year to year with some years producing less than 10 birds in total whereas in other years a hundred or more can be seen in a day, but always during strong north-west winds which blow the birds in off the Atlantic and through the North Channel in to the Irish Sea. What was so unusual about both the small influx in November and the much larger one in December was that birds were blown in by a south-west gale from their wintering grounds to the south.

Although called a “wreck” the number of dead birds involved in December’s influx wasn’t large compared with some previous “wrecks”. Undoubtedly some birds were under weight and many were reported as being in moult, but the wind was probably not blowing strong enough for long enough to cause wholesale deaths. Judging by the number of birds seen making their way south on 8th and 9th hopefully many will have made their way safely back to their more usual wintering areas.

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Sources of information for this article:

1. Sightings from www.birdguides.com.
2. Sightings sent to me directly from various birders.
3. *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Reports* 1964 to 2005.
4. Two very informative emails forwarded to me, originally from Brian Unwin.
5. *BTO Migration Atlas*.
6. T.A. Coward, *The Fauna of Cheshire*, 1910.
7. T. Hedley Bell, *The Birds of Cheshire*, 1962 (and 1967 supplement).
8. E. Hardy, *The Birds of the Liverpool Area*, 1941.
9. Hilbre Island Weather Station, <http://cobs.pol.ac.uk/cobs/met/hilbre/> which was used for all weather details in the article.
10. G. Hémary, C. Jouanin, 1988. ‘Statut et origine géographique des populations de pétrel culblanc (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa leucorhoa*) présentes dans le Golfe de Gascogne’. *Alauda* 56: 238–245.
11. R. Slack, Dec 2006, Storm-bringer - An unexpected wreck of Leach’s Storm-petrels, www.birdguides.com
12. *Cambrian Bird Report*, 2002.



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 summer period from September to December.

SITE REPORTS

Chester area

A Honey Buzzard was noted in the Chester area on Sep 30th, Hen Harriers were at Broxton on Sep 8th and the Gowy Meadows on Nov 21st, this latter site had three Jack Snipe on Nov 5th.

Crewe and Nantwich area

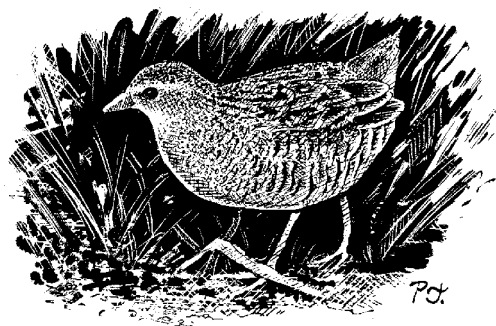
Two Whooper Swans were at Sandbach Flashes on Oct 31st with 14 over on Nov 14th. A drake American Wigeon was at Sandbach Flashes on several dates during Oct, the second record for the site, Goosanders were at Sandbach during Oct 24th to 28th, Hurleston Reservoir on Nov 4th and 23 at Sandbach on Dec 9th. A Smew was on Chapel Mere on Nov 27th. Raptors of note included: Honey Buzzard at Sandbach on Sep 3rd, Osprey at Nantwich on Sep 12th, Merlin at Burland on Sep 26th and Hobby at Bar Mere, Combermere Farm and Deer Park Mere.

It was a generally quiet period for waders, the highlight being a Red-necked Phalarope at Hurleston Reservoir on Sep 9th. A Little Gull was noted over Elton Hall Flash on Oct 30th, an Iceland Gull

was here on Dec 20th and a juvenile Kittiwake at Hurleston Reservoir on Nov 25th. A flock of 18 Black Terns was at Elton Hall Flash on Sep 14th. A very late Swallow was at Hankelow on Dec 12th and 20th, 11 Yellow Wagtails were at Baddiley on Sep 12th with two late birds at Elton Hall Flash on Oct 27th. A movement of Fieldfares during early Nov saw 300 birds at Elton Hall Flash on 3rd and 600 at Hurleston Reservoir on 6th. Good numbers of Tree Sparrows were noted at Elton Hall Flash with 60 during Nov whilst 200 were at Combermere Farm on Dec 9th.

Ellesmere Port and Neston area

Wildfowl of note included: eight Whooper Swans at Inner Marsh Farm on Oct 29th, 30+ Pink-footed Geese at Parkgate on Nov 18th, a drake Green-winged Teal was a regular visitor to Inner Marsh Farm throughout, two Garganey were present on Sep 15th. The Little Egret roost at Burton reached a record high of 169 on Sep 13th, a Spoonbill was at Parkgate on Nov 16th and 18th, a rare visitor these days. Up to four Hen Harriers frequented the Parkgate area with the occasional Marsh Harrier and one or two Merlins and up to three Hobbies at Burton Marsh on Sep 15th.



Spotted Crake by Phil Jones

A Spotted Crake was briefly at Inner Marsh Farm on Sep 26th. Up to six Little Stint were at Inner Marsh Farm; this site also had a Pectoral Sandpiper on Sep 22nd plus a juvenile Curlew Sandpiper which remained until the year end, a max of seven Greenshank on Sep 2nd and a Wood Sandpiper on Sep 23rd to 25th. Up to two Marsh Tits frequented Stanney Woods, a Brambling was at Inner Marsh Farm on Dec 23rd and a flock of 12 Twite were there on Nov 9th.

Halton area

Four Whooper Swans were at Hale on Nov 9th, a Great Northern Diver was on the Mersey off Pickering's Pasture on Dec 12th. A Merlin was at Hale on Oct 6th and a single Curlew Sandpiper and a Jack Snipe were there on Nov 9th.

Macclesfield area

A Whooper Swan was at Redesmere on Oct 20th, eight Mandarin were at Rostherne on Nov 26th with a record count of 11 on Dec 3rd; this site also recorded counts of 583 Teal and 102 Shoveler. Goosanders were noted at Chelford SQ (eight on Oct 7th) with others on the River Bollin, Capesthorpe, North Rode Lake, Redesmere and Rostherne. Four White-faced Whistling Ducks on Sep 2nd were a bizarre sight. A Black-necked Grebe was at Rostherne on Sep 27th, Oct 8th and Nov 5th, while a Slavonian Grebe was at Ridgegate Reservoir on Dec 27th. A Bittern was at Rostherne from Oct 26th. A Leach's Petrel was at Radnor Mere on Dec 10th.

Few raptors were reported; a Marsh Harrier visited Rostherne on Sep 9th with up to three Hobbies during Sep. A Woodcock at Macclesfield Forest on Oct 15th, a Greenshank at Rostherne on Oct 18th, a Common Sandpiper at Ridgegate Reservoir on Dec 8th and eight Common Terns here on Sep 10th typified a very quiet period. Other items of note included: possibly two Dippers on the River Bollin on Dec 26th, over 200 Fieldfares and 300+ Redwings over Wildboardclough on Nov 1st and Brambling at Ridgegate Reservoir on Oct 26th. Two Ravens were over Wilmslow on Sep 12th.

Vale Royal area

Four Whooper Swans flew SE over Hartford on Nov 7th, an Egyptian Goose was at Frodsham Marsh on Oct 15th, Garganey at Neumann's Flash on Oct 3rd and up to four Goosander at Marbury CP during late Nov. A Black-necked Grebe was at Frodsham Marsh on Sep 16th whilst a Bittern returned to Marbury on Nov 17th.

Raptors of note included: juvenile Honey Buzzard SW over Neumann's Flash on Oct 14th, Goshawk SE near Moulton on Sep 10th, Osprey at Comberbach on Sep 14th, Neumann's Flash on Sep 23rd and Oct 1st, Hen Harrier at Marbury CP on Dec 3rd. 10 Buzzards over Helsby Hill

on Sep 26th was the highest count received. Hobbies were reported from at least six localities. Up to 11 Little Stint were at Frodsham Marsh during Sep with 12 present towards the year end, 20 Ruff were at Frodsham Marsh on Oct 8th, 54 Snipe were counted at Neumann's Flash on Sep 27th while two Woodcock were at Carey Park on Nov 19th. Two Black Terns were noted at Frodsham Marsh on Oct 8th with single birds here and in the Marbury area during the preceding two weeks. A Water Pipit was at Frodsham Marsh on Nov 4th, Spotted Flycatcher at Higher Whitley and Marbury CP on Sep 15th and Twite at Ashton's Flash on Oct 3rd.

Warrington area

A Bewick's Swan was seen briefly at Moore NR on Dec 28th. 11 Whooper Swans were at Fiddler's Ferry during Dec. c20 probable Bean Geese flew NE over Oughtrington on Dec 8th. Six Red-breasted Merganser were over Woolston Eyes during Nov and a Goosander in Sep. A Little Egret was at Fiddler's Ferry on four dates in Sep, a Bittern returned to Moore NR on Oct 4th with two noted from Nov 4th. A Merlin was ringed at Woolston Eyes during Nov whilst Hobbies were at Lymm and Risley Moss. A Quail was noted in the Norton Marsh area during late Sep.

Eight Sanderlings were at Fiddler's Ferry during Oct; a Spotted Redshank and Wood Sandpiper were rare visitors to this site during Sep. A Woodlark was at Woolston Eyes on Sep 9th, three Whinchat at Risley Moss on the late date of Nov 2nd, at least two Cetti's Warblers were at Woolston Eyes where four Bearded Tits were present on Oct 14th and 15th and two Marsh Tits were reported at Moore NR on Oct 30th. 30 Twite were at Fiddler's Ferry during late Nov with two Hawfinches over Woolston Eyes on Dec 16th.

Wirral area

Up to 20 Whooper Swans were at Shotwick on Dec 30th and 52 Bewick's Swans on Nov 25th. 1500 Pink-footed Geese were over New Brighton on Oct 7th, 12 Barnacle Geese were at Leasowe on Oct 7th whilst the Brent Goose flock at Hilbre peaked at 94 on Dec 28th. Elsewhere, 8000 Shelducks were at Heswall on Oct 8th, 2000 Common Scoters were off Hilbre on Oct 7th, a Long-tailed Duck was off Hilbre on Oct 21st and five Goosanders S at Leasowe on Oct 1st. A good count of 378 Great Crested Grebes were off Dove Point on Nov 7th, two Red-necked Grebes were off Wallasey on Nov 3rd, seven Great Northern Divers were at Hoylake on Oct 22nd and a single was at West Kirby ML during Dec.

Seabirds of note included: Sooty Shearwater and 209 Manx Shearwaters at Hoylake on Sep 3rd, along with c50 Gannets. Gales during early Dec brought 20 Leach's Petrels to Hilbre on 8th and 74 at Leasowe the next day, the first December records for 40 years, whilst a bird was found dead at Hooton around the same time. A Honey Buzzard was reported heading W at Leasowe Lighthouse on Sep 23rd and flushed from a tree early the next day. Hen Harrier and Goshawk were in the Heswall area.

Waders of note included: a possible American/Pacific Golden Plover disturbed by a dog on West Kirby shore on Sep 25th, 21,000 Knot at Hoylake on Nov 24th, five Curlew Sandpipers at Heswall on Sep 18th, 25 Purple Sandpipers at Hilbre on Dec 19th with eight at Wallasey on Nov 22nd, 99 Turnstones at West Kirby ML on Nov 19th and a Grey Phalarope at Leasowe on Dec 9th. Two Great Skuas were at Hoylake on Dec 9th, five Arctic Skuas at Hilbre on Sep 3rd, five Pomarine Skuas were noted on the beach at Hoylake on Oct 4th, Sabine's Gull at Hilbre on Sep 9th, up to 50 Black Terns at Meols on Sep 13th, 45 Guillemot off Hoylake on Oct 22nd, Little Auk was reported at New Brighton on Sep 20th with others at Hilbre on Nov 12th, 21st and Dec 4th.

A Turtle Dove was regularly seen in the Leasowe area during early autumn. A Richard's Pipit was in the Red Rocks/West Kirby area on several dates from Sep 25th with one S over Heswall on Dec 20th. A Yellow-browed Warbler was at Meols on Sep 25th whilst another was at Hilbre on Oct 16th. A Lapland Bunting was at Red Rocks on Oct 15th, three Snow Buntings were there on Nov 1st, and a Crossbill on Oct 25th. Eight Ravens at Thurstaston on Nov 22nd was a good count.

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Thanks/acknowledgements to: Birdcall, Birdguides, *Birdwatching* Magazine, Dee Estuary website, Jack Canovan (Rostherne Mere), Moore NR website, Keith Massey (Fiddler's Ferry), Macclesfield RSPB, SECOS, NNHS and anyone else who passed records on.

County Rarities

YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER IN THE GARDEN!

The morning of 16th October 2006 was misty with a moderate south-easterly breeze that had been in that direction for the fourth day resulting in expectations being raised of interesting migration at Hilbre, my local patch.

Steve Williams and I were therefore somewhat disappointed after we had searched the island twice and only came up with a couple of Reed Buntings, a few finches, a Sparrowhawk and a small number of Teal, Pintail and Wigeon. However, we pondered whether the sudden drop in wind strength, to almost nothing, might change our fortune.

Returning to the Bird Observatory ('The Obs') I was leaning on the veranda at about 09.20hrs looking east when I was surprised to see a *Phylloscopus* warbler species feeding in the sycamores and brambles in the corner of The Obs garden.

On inspection through binoculars I was even more surprised to see the two wing bars and prominent supercilium of a Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*.

Steve was quickly alerted and as we watched the bird I managed to take some video for record purposes while we followed the very active warbler as it moved around the garden and after five minutes on to the observatory roof and then away high to the south.

Middle Eye seemed likely to be its next point of landfall but a thorough search of that island by Steve proved fruitless and all hope of seeing it again seemed to be lost, but to our surprise the bird was relocated by Chris Williams, about an hour later, in the main trapping area.

After a short period of observation the bird was duly trapped and ringed (as a first-year female) and after release stayed happily feeding in the area for the rest of the day resulting in a few of the local Obs members being able to admire this splendid little warbler from the east.

Brief Description

Size: Intermediate in size between Willow Warbler and Goldcrest from both appearance in the field and biometrics taken in the hand.

Head: Bright green with strong yellow supercilium underlined by a dark eye stripe.

Upperparts: Body bright green. Flight feathers with considerably darker centres and green edges. Two wing bars formed by pale yellow/white tips to the median and greater coverts, pale edges to the tertials and small white tips to the primaries.

Underparts: Off-white.

Bare parts: Small pointed brown bill, darker at the tip. Legs and feet were brown.

Status in Hilbre

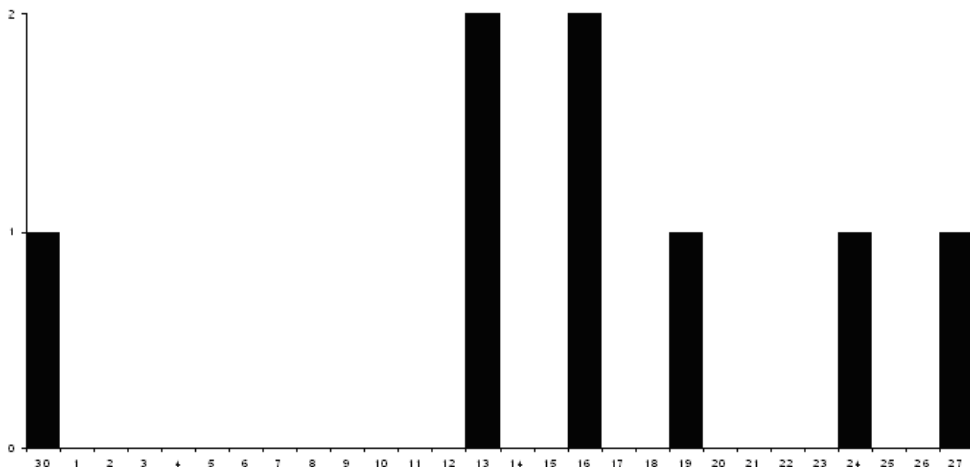
This is the eighth Hilbre record, the fourth in the last six years (2001-2006 inclusive). All but one, 30th September 1975, have been in October.

The following histogram shows the arrival dates of all eight Yellow-browed Warblers on Hilbre (none have stayed longer than a single day):



Yellow-browed Warbler by Phil Jones

Arrival dates of Yellow-browed Warblers at Hilbre between 30th September and 27th October



Obviously, the best time to come and see Yellow-browed Warblers on Hilbre is in the two weeks between 13th and 27th October. However, five of the eight records, and including the last four birds, have occurred in the week 13th to 19th October inclusive.

Colin Jones (Hilbre Bird Observatory)

THE STATUS OF YELLOW-BROWED WARBLERS IN CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL

Introduction

The status of Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* in the UK has previously been described as 'a vagrant from Asia'. However, following an increase in annual occurrence over the last 30 years it is perhaps best described as 'a regular passage migrant that occasionally arrives in very large numbers'. Indeed, the last couple of autumns (2005 and 2006) have produced two of the largest ever arrivals of this stunning little leaf warbler in Britain and Ireland including in excess of 1,000 birds in the autumn of 2005 alone (Williams, 2005).

Cheshire and Wirral receives only a tiny percentage of records of Yellow-browed Warbler that reach the UK and so it remains a much sought-after county rarity for many Cheshire and Wirral birders.

Habitat and Distribution

In its breeding range Yellow-browed Warbler prefers open, light woodlands especially with willow, birch and mixed species of trees. On passage in the UK it is often found in sycamores. Its behaviour is extremely active, constantly on the move and picking insects off leaves or even fly-catching – thus making it extremely difficult to photograph in the field.

Yellow-browed Warbler breeds in Siberia from the northern Urals to the sea of Okhotsk, south to the northern Sayan Mountains. In Siberia it is one of the commonest birds. On its autumn migration it passes through China in large numbers to its wintering grounds from central Nepal and Bangladesh east to south-east China and south-east Asia, the Malay Peninsula and southern China.

It is the most regular Siberian migrant occurring in the UK. However, in the ten-year period between 1958 and 1967, only 275 individuals were recorded in Britain and Ireland (Sharrock, 1972) and this included 128 birds seen in 1967 alone. During 1968-1998 over 7,000 are said to have occurred in Britain; clearly there has been a remarkable rise in the occurrence of the species in Britain since 1958 and more than can be explained by increase in observer coverage alone.

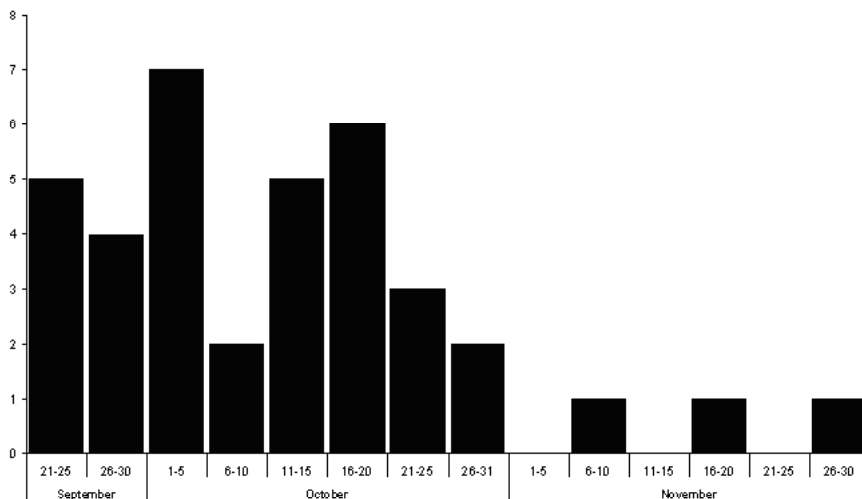
Autumn migration begins in August and September from the breeding grounds with birds initially heading eastwards via north-east China. They then drift south or south-west through China to their wintering grounds, where they arrive from mid-October, remaining to mid-April.

Yellow-browed Warbler arrivals in the UK are to an extent weather dependent with easterly winds drifting birds particularly across the North Sea, but the fact these birds have already travelled vast distances from the east can only be explained (on current understanding) by the theory of reverse migration. In basic terms this means that a small percentage of the population migrates in completely the opposite (or reverse) direction to that followed by the majority of the population. The great circle route theory then predicts that birds will turn south once hitting Western Europe. The increase in numbers following this westward migration route and therefore occurring in the UK has been tentatively explained (Wernham *et al.*, 2002) by the fact that they may be contributing genetically significantly to the population and might be pioneering new wintering areas, possibly in Africa, for the species. If this was the case then some of the birds which arrive in the UK must be making it back to their breeding grounds the following year. Definitive answers to some of these questions may only be obtained by ringing recoveries. However, for now the specific origins and final destinations of these birds arriving in the UK remain unknown.

Status in Cheshire and Wirral

Following the first record of Yellow-browed Warbler in Cheshire and Wirral on Hilbre on 13th October 1973 there have now been a total of 37 records up to and including two during autumn 2006 (which, of course, remain to be ratified by the CAWOS Rarities Committee). The histogram below indicates the arrival dates of these individuals in Cheshire and Wirral in five-day periods (except for one six-day period 25th to 31st October) from 21st September (earliest date) to 30th November (latest date occurred).

Yellow-browed Warbler arrival dates in Cheshire and Wirral 1973-2006

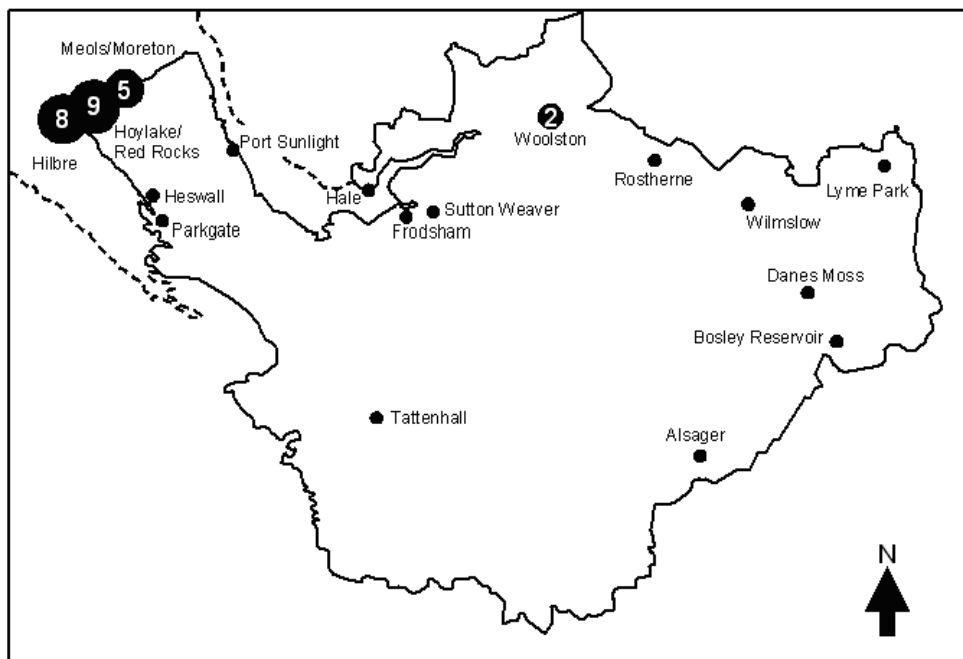


October is clearly the favoured month for this species in Cheshire and Wirral with the middle ten days of that month producing eleven records. As with the rest of the country late September is also productive with nine records.

It is also noteworthy that there were three November records. One seen at Port Sunlight on 19th November 1991 apparently showed characteristics of Hume's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*, so perhaps would be better removed from the histogram and map below as that is now considered a separate species which is known to arrive later in the country than Yellow-browed Warbler. Another bird was seen in a garden at Parkgate on 26th (and 30th) November 1994 and finally one was caught at Sutton Weaver on 9th November 2002.

Of the 37 records from Cheshire and Wirral the map below details the occurrences by location (and numbers are provided when a location has had multiple records).

Cheshire and Wirral 1973-2006



This map is only indicative of locations, not a true representation

As expected north Wirral from Hilbre to Moreton takes the lion's share with 22 records. I am also aware of at least two more records from the Meols/Moreton area which have not been submitted to CAWOS, including at least one bird trapped and ringed. Hopefully, these will be submitted retrospectively to help provide a slightly more accurate status of this species in Cheshire and Wirral.

Despite the high percentage of birds occurring on the north Wirral coast, birders from across the county can take heart from the numbers which have occurred in south Wirral and the rest of Cheshire including two records from Woolston.

However, it is clear that if you want to see Yellow-browed Warbler in Cheshire and Wirral your best bet is to head up to north Wirral - probably Hilbre, Red Rocks, Lingham Lane (Moreton) or Park Lane (Meols) are the best sites - a couple of days after a large arrival on the east coast (Williams, 2005) in late September to the middle of October.

The Past

I read with interest a piece of correspondence from Mr Tucker of *British Birds* to a Mr Walter Griffiths of West Kirby, Wirral, dated 27th February 1947. In the letter the editor of *British Birds* states, regarding a bird seen by Mr Griffiths in his West Kirby garden, as follows:

'In reply to your letter your bird sounds strangely like a Yellow-browed Warbler and had it been in the autumn or indeed almost any time of year but mid-winter, I should have been disposed to think you had in fact seen one of these birds, but in January it really does seem almost incredible it could have been this species, which has never been recorded in that month or anywhere near it. All the same the agreement is surprisingly close...'

Researching Mr Griffiths' notebooks, which I have had the privilege of reading, I found the following entry for 25th December 1946 (I imagine he wrote to Mr Tucker in January 1947 hence the reference to that month in the letter above):

'An unidentified bird in the garden today, getting food in the shrubs like a warbler. I heard it about a week ago but was unable to find it. Got good views today.

The call given almost continuously was a single sharp note "clip" or "ziv" repeated a number of times. The size was that of a small warbler & seemed slightly too big for a Goldcrest, although this effect may have been produced by my nearness (about 6 feet) to the bird. The general colour of the upper parts was olive green & the under parts greenish white; just off the white. Legs brown (light). Crown dark green with no suggestion of stripe. The most noticeable features were (a) very conspicuous pale yellowish white superciliary stripe, again just off the white. (b) a double yellow wing bar, one bar small the other long, this latter with a dark edge immediately below it. On either the extreme edge of the wing, or on the flank, the former I think, was another very thin yellow line. There did not appear to be any black about the sides of the face near the eyes.'

From reading some of Mr Griffiths' notebooks it is clear to me that he was very familiar with the commoner species of *Phylloscopus* warbler and Goldcrests, also his description does not fit Firecrest. I appreciate the call note does not sound quite right, but, in light of more recent occurrences of Yellow-browed Warbler wintering in Britain and indeed occurring in the county as late as the end of November, plus the recent occurrence of the wintering Pallas's Warbler in Cheshire in February 2005, perhaps this was the first record of Yellow-browed Warbler for Cheshire and Wirral – wintering in West Kirby almost 30 years before the first Hilbre record?

Or, even rarer, perhaps the single repeated call note and the lack of description of tertial edgings indicate it was the first Hume's Leaf Warbler for Cheshire and Wirral!

The Future

Since 1991 there have only been three blank years for Yellow-browed Warbler in Cheshire and Wirral (1992, 1995 and 1999) and it has been annual since 2000. It is apparent that birders can look forward to more records of Yellow-browed Warbler in the county in future autumns and possibly even the odd winter record, as well as the first ratified Hume's Leaf Warbler...keep looking this winter and ring me when you find one!

Steve Williams

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Griffiths, W, 1941-1957, Notebooks. Unpublished
Sharrock J T R, 1972, *Scarce Migrant Birds in Britain and Ireland*, T & AD Poyser
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Williams S, 2005, 'Yellow-browed Warblers in the North West – Autumn 2005', *Birding North West Vol 2:10* pp258-264

Acknowledgements:

Many thanks to Pete Williams for access to Mr Griffiths' notebooks and for reviewing a draft of this article.

RARITY DESCRIPTIONS

County Rarities: A complete list of county rarities is published in the *Bird Report*. Email (preferable) or post county rarity descriptions **as soon as possible after the sighting** to:

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

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

The County Recorder, Hugh Pulsford, 6 Buttermere Drive, Great Warford, Alderley Edge, Cheshire, SK9 7WA. Tel: 01565 880171 Email: countyrec@cawos.org

Projects and Surveys

CONCERN FOR STATUS OF KESTRELS

In the Database Statistics article published in the *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report 2005*, I made the following comment: "This year it is another bird of prey which requires a special mention - the Kestrel, which leapt into third place with 1811 records, 1203 sightings having been recorded in 2004 (1031 in 2003, 731 in 2002, 577 in 2001). It will be interesting to watch the progress of this Amber-listed species in future years." So it was with particular interest that I read the following press release from the BTO:



"Birdwatchers were already worried about the disappearance of Britain's Kestrels, but a long-term decline in breeding success, recently identified by BTO scientists, highlights the need for further research. The Kestrel has been added to the BTO Nest Record Scheme (NRS) Concern List, published in the November *BTO News*. The Kestrel joins other species such as Spotted Flycatcher and Skylark.

Each year the BTO Nest Record Scheme produces a Concern List, incorporating those birds that currently show a significant decline in both breeding success and abundance. The NRS list is intended to act as an early warning system, focussing attention on those birds that may be in greatest need of conservation action in the future. It is sent to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), the Government's advisor on nature conservation, to help frame policy. There are currently 21 species on the list, of which Kestrel is one of the most recent additions.

While Kestrels used to be a common sight hovering over our motorway verges, numbers declined steeply between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s, possibly due to a reduction in suitable hunting habitat related to agricultural intensification. Numbers appear to have stabilised subsequently but results of the most recent analysis of Nest Record Scheme data suggest that the species' troubles may not yet be over. Dr David Leech, Research Ecologist at the BTO said, "The latest NRS trends indicate that Kestrel brood sizes have declined, with more pairs now rearing three chicks instead of four or even five. This reduction in breeding success is particularly worrying in light of the recent population trends."

I eagerly await the analysis of the breeding and wintering Atlas data, which should be very revealing, but in the meantime, do any CAWOS members have any comments they wish to make on this familiar and popular species? Have you witnessed varying fortunes in your local area?

Sheila Blamire

CRUMBS OF COMFORT FOR FARMLAND BIRDS

Research on the food preferences of declining farmland birds proves that food variety is the key to helping these birds in winter. The RSPB study says that cereal grains such as wheat and oats are the preferred winter food for House Sparrows, Corn Buntings and Yellowhammers on farmland while Tree Sparrows also eat sunflower hearts and rape seeds, and Reed Buntings consume maize.

The research underlines the importance of green farming schemes through which farmers are paid to help wildlife. Amongst options farmers can choose are the provision of winter seed and the retention of overwinter stubbles, which means spilt grain and weeds seeds are not cleared as autumn crops are sown. The paper, published this month in the journal *Bird Study*, found that House and Tree Sparrows ate the most varied diets because they crushed grain in their bills rather than trying to remove the husks. Other species struggled with the husks of barley and ryegrass, which are difficult to strip from the kernel.



Allan Perkins, lead author and a researcher at the RSPB, said: "Few studies have looked at the food choices of individual farmland birds and this research shows just how crucial it is to provide a mixture of food to help different species survive. This mixture would have been automatically available before farming became so efficient because more weeds would have survived and plenty of grain spilt from the autumn harvest. Farmers now trying to help birds should provide a

variety of food but also cater for the preferences of birds in their area. And they should also consider which plants produce most seeds in their local soil and climate.”

All five birds studied have suffered severe declines across Western Europe in the last 35 years and all are on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern because of the extent of their declines. In the UK, Tree Sparrows have declined most with numbers down by 94 per cent, followed by Corn Buntings which have suffered an 89 per cent decline. House Sparrows have declined in both rural and urban areas, by 50 and 58 per cent respectively.

TAKE UP THE NEST BOX CHALLENGE

As part of National Nest Box Week the BTO launched the Nest Box Challenge in collaboration with the BBC's Breathing Places campaign. This exciting new survey is open to everyone with access to a nest box. The aim of the survey is to collect information about breeding birds in gardens and green spaces across the UK by inviting you to register your box on-line on the BTO website, www.bto.org. So far, 4523 nest boxes have been registered. Hampshire leads the way with 197, with Norfolk close behind on 195. The Nest Box Challenge isn't only for new nest boxes, we want to hear about your old boxes too. If you have a nest box in your garden, join in the fun and register it for the Nest Box Challenge, but please note that if you are already a contributor to the BTO's Nest Record Scheme, we would prefer you to continue to submit your records in the usual way, as Nest Box Challenge is aimed at introducing first-time observers to the fascinating world of nesting birds.

Paul Stancliffe, on behalf of the BTO Nest Box Challenge Team

FARM SURVEYS

On several occasions recently I have been approached by farmers, or environmental consultants, asking for bird surveys to be carried out on particular farms. The motive behind this has been an application for a grant under the Environmental Stewardship scheme, under which farmers are paid for farming in a more wildlife-friendly manner. This can include planting of hedgerows, shelter corridors, etc which is of obvious benefit to birds.

Since these requests are coming on a fairly regular basis it would seem sensible to have a pool of members who might be prepared to help out with this. If you are interested - no obligation - please contact me.

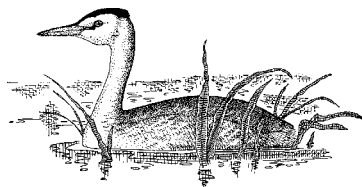
David Cogger, 113 Nantwich Road, Middlewich, Cheshire, CW10 9HD
Tel: 01606 832517 Email: memsec@cawos.org



One Man's Birding

REFLECTIONS ON A SMEW THAT WASN'T

It was some time in the 1950s that, as a schoolboy, I saw my first female Smew. Keith Huxley and I were holidaying one cold winter with Miss van Oostveen, a well-known landlady and respected birdwatcher at Westleton in Suffolk. We returned after a trip to the old public hide at Minsmere, baffled by two birds we had seen which seemed to us rather like grebes, but had conspicuous red heads. Laughing, Van identified them for us and pointed out the reference in the *Handbook* - "often confused by inexperienced observers with the smaller grebes..." That was us in a nutshell.



I thought of this last November, the day after Charles Hull found a female Smew at Cholmondeley. David Cookson and I both went to see the bird. Among a good array of waterfowl on the mere there was only one candidate: a small, hunched-up, unhelpful ball of feathers drifting along with its

head tucked into its back. A white cheek-patch was pretty obvious; in the low, bright, early-morning light I persuaded myself that at certain angles I could see a reddish crown; it had to be the Smew. I was so sure that I convinced David. After about quarter of an hour it at last raised its head - and I swore loudly and admitted that we had been watching a female Ruddy Duck.

So it is just one example (there are many of them, and this is by no means the most spectacular...I'll come to that later) of my general incompetence. However, it set me thinking about some of the reasons for misidentification. The Suffolk Smew, of course, is an example of one which is common (and wholly forgivable) if you aren't very experienced - just not knowing enough about what birds look like in the field. The Cholmondeley Ruddy Duck illustrates something different: going to a place expecting to find a bird, and (usually unconsciously) twisting what one sees to suit expectations (Water Pipits at Neston, maybe?). It has happened to me more than once, and I have seen it happen to other people.

A variation of this form of wishful thinking is of course the habit, not unusual I think at a certain stage of one's birding career, of having a choice and going for the rarer option: Firecrest rather than Goldcrest, Ring-billed Gull rather than Common and so on. We know other people find the rarer species, we desperately want to prove our abilities by joining them - and we forget the odds and convince ourselves we have a winner.

Then there is the danger of over-confidence - something which I suspect happens to the best of birders (maybe even, especially to the best of birders?). I recall the tale told by Dick Wolfendale, sometime warden at Minsmere, about the Very Famous Ornithologist, one of the giants of his day, explaining to his long-suffering children exactly why the bird they were looking at was a Willow Warbler - before it began going "chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff." And that's not the only instance of good birders ending up with egg on their faces; I have seen four expert observers immediately and confidently identify as a Peregrine an approaching raptor which was an obvious Kestrel when it eventually hovered overhead.

And if the experts have given their verdict, who are we to question it? In the case of the dodgy Peregrine, I thought from the start that the experts were wrong and the bird was a Kestrel - but didn't dare say so. So that's another problem in identification: going along with the crowd, admiring the emperor's new clothes. Back in the Fifties there was a story that half the staff of the Edward Grey Institute turned out to see the first pair of Crossbills ever to nest in the Oxford Parks - until someone said, "They're Bullfinches." It may be apocryphal, but I think it is entirely possible: group psychology is a funny business.

So, I think that for much of the time the roots of misidentification lie in our mindset. It is often a matter of self-deception: we expect to see a particular bird, or we want to see it, and we convince ourselves we have seen it. Or we accept what we are told, don't take enough care to check it out for ourselves, rely on other people's eyes and identifications rather than our own.

Maybe the greatest difficulty, though, is in simply saying "I don't know". Sometimes positive identification of a bird is just plain impossible: the old shooter-collectors' maxim "What's hit is history, what's missed is mystery" still has a certain validity. Not knowing what the wretched bird was is something which we all have to be prepared to admit from time to time (some of us more often than others!). I was lucky to have been trained by 'Daddy' Rankin at Birkenhead School - a hard, indeed puritanical, taskmaster of complete integrity, who drummed into us that we should not claim a bird unless we were quite sure of it. I've now been around long enough to have learned that he was right: the view may have been insufficient, I may not have known just what to look for, or I wasn't careful enough in my recording. And, let's face it, the eyes and the mind can play tricks on all of us.

Which brings me to my personal best-ever clanger. Many years ago, Tony Land and I were coming off Hilbre at the end of a dull, autumn day. Approaching the Marine Lake, we saw it, conspicuous in the fading light: a small bird, buoyant on the water, gull-like, grey above and white below, spinning in circles on the surface of the lake. We looked at each other: this was a classic Grey Phalarope, right conditions, right time of year. Some minutes later, and several hundred yards closer, Tony lowered his glasses, turned to me and said, "You do know what we are looking at, don't you?". "Yes," I replied sadly, "it's a paper bag!"

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

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 would be interested in. Also, we are always interested in your views on any of our articles or on the newsletter itself. Ed.

GREENHOUSE GASES, THE CARBON FOOTPRINT AND THE BIRDWATCHER

For most of us global warming has become a regular news item and it seems that almost everywhere in the world is affected by increasingly severe or unusual weather or shifts in climate, of one form or another. We like to blame 'greenhouse gases' and indeed it is now proven (to all except the US government), that we have high anthropologically generated increases in CO₂ and other gases which are even more potent, e.g. methane from cows/landfill. There is a whole cocktail of gases that limits the earth's heat loss to balance the eternal solar gain. Climate change forecasts now range from 'disruptive' to 'catastrophic'.

Average temperatures at the surface and in the air are rising and scientists express universal concern now. The worry is that some parts of the earth's natural systems (ocean currents, glacial accumulation/ablation, etc) will become irreversibly altered so that freshwater distribution and temperatures will make whole regions have quite different capacities. By this I mean capacity to support certain plants and animals including food sources, and capacity to hold nutrients and not blow away to dust. It is a very dynamic picture.

Global warming with its attendant storm events and sea level rise does bring uncertainty. Can we expect more murrelets and frigatebirds? Damaged woodland, shifted shores, droughts and other changes certainly do offer a conundrum. This is not to mention the real effects on populations elsewhere in the world and shifts in disease distributions. Everything we do in the modern world, one way or another, generates demand for energy and one main by-product after combustion/generation processes is good old CO₂. The developing world too impacts but to a much lesser extent per capita. Their population has a much smaller per capita 'footprint'. Carbon footprinting is a way of interpreting the effect of human activity on climate and is becoming widely used as a benchmark.

How could I assess what the birdwatcher enthusiast does? How do we as a group behave? Well, to begin with we are no more eccentric than the next hobby/amateur skill base. Or are we? What about the specific birdwatcher contribution to the 'problem'? I suspect we individuals are no different from the football supporter or the hillwalker or indeed any ordinary person, in lots of ways. We all have our hobbies and nowadays we use the car to get where we want to go. The away match at Middlesbrough, the rambles meet on the Dove or the mega twitch on Anglesey; all use litres of fuel. All comparisons are tricky. What about those who twitch from the Isles of Scilly to Fair Isle, via Norfolk – now that is power birding with knobs on. The holiday abroad – is it really necessary to see those endemics - really? Well, all hobbies can take one abroad. The expansion of Manchester Airport can testify to all of this but it seems some passenger numbers are now falling. (The second runway was justified off the back of holiday traffic although I guess the chiefs might now argue differently.) Those cheap flights are all too tempting.

Where do we go from here before we all get too depressed, close the hatches and live in a tent? I think that we are the same as most other members of British society. There are very few of us who shun the benefits of our modern world, even though we do know the long-term damage being done or risked. Ignoring all our other areas of consumption at home or work, shopping or commuting, birdwatching is an additional form of consumption. One could assume that our 370 members split into three broad camps – a third are passive garden-home types; a third are twitchers and a third are local-patchers. We could also guess that roughly half take holidays for their birding delights, so one is left with the worrying potential for this group of people to add to the world's problems!

We are all environmentalists though, aren't we? At least we must have one foot in that camp. We support (after CAWOS of course!) the RSPB, Woodland Trust maybe, WWT and so on; we know they benefit the environment in general. So the twitchers are schizophrenic or merely agonising over the conflict at least? Somehow we are all being extolled to mitigate our consumption or at the very least think about how to adapt nowadays. Are we really to consider not going to Extremadura

or Florida? Short of us all living on the coast or within walking distance of an RSPB reserve which would allow us to shun travel etc, we do need to recognise that the 'hobby' (not an adequate term of course) has a cost to the environment. It will probably continue to do so for some while.

The future is here, obviously. Should we change our habits? Could we all go virtual birdwatching, apart from the garden and local area? Imagine webcams at each RSPB hide, instantaneous ticks on 'Surfbird'; this would take something of a culture change but I for one cannot imagine not enjoying the excitement of seeing birds in the flesh. (We could all have Titchwell in our 'favourites!') This would be an *adaptation* of our habits though, wouldn't it? Do we all wait for those rarer species to come within a reasonably acceptable distance; value them for that all the more?

What to do? Well, I for one advise adopting all the measures commonly hailed by our leaders and newspapers, etc. Mantras such as Recycle, Re-use, Reduce and Share, all apply. Like companies becoming more Corporately Socially Responsible, maybe societies should adopt similar measures. However, CAWOS cannot and I'm sure has no wish to, control what individual members do. It is very easy to take the moral high ground when writing something like this; far harder to adapt and mitigate one's own consumption, lifestyle and expectations, let alone others'. This is so even when one has the strong beliefs. This is not a lecture but I hope a thought-provoking piece.

Want to reduce your footprint? How do you make your trip to Spain 'carbon-neutral'? There is help on the educational front and getting to know one's footprint. One can establish how much CO₂ is generated by a particular activity.

Did you know....

- Car drivers do an average 722,000 miles in a lifetime (more than a few twitchers must have outstripped this, I guess). The 12,000 miles a year travelled by many drivers needs 21 good-sized trees to absorb the CO₂ emissions – before you ask - no, there wouldn't be enough space in the UK alone for the trees required to 'balance' our vehicle use!
- 25kg of carbon is saved for every journey walked or cycled under 3 miles?
- The average household has 12 items on standby?
- One cup of tea produces 25 cups of CO₂? (Message = Only boil enough water...)
- If one moves £10,000 from the worst investment fund to the best, in terms of performance on an environmental basis, then the impact is 14 tonnes of CO₂? (www.trucost.com/carbon_news.html)
- Annually the average household uses 6 tonnes of CO₂?

Carbon Footprint tools are available:-

<http://www.bestfootforward.com/carbonlife.html>
www.carbonfootprint.com/calculator.html

www.carboncalculator.org.uk
www.safeclimate.net/calculator

I thought a publication called *I Count* was amusing; it is by Penguin Books (R. Alcraft 2006). This has a website too, but one is in danger of being over-run with information here!

If one wishes to put one's life more in balance – carbon-wise – then the World Land Trust provides a thoughtful approach to the costs and savings that can be made. Try www.carbonbalanced.org They have a means of off-setting and put a value on our consumption – item by item. And there was I thinking I'd fly for a holiday at Easter....

Of course, there is an irony here: in fact a kind of double irony. Many of us recording the habits of birds and wildlife in general, create CO₂ in the process; we then damage, indirectly, the very same wildlife. This compounds when one considers too, that what we have recorded is one of the very measures used by the Government to detect global warming, indeed a valuable contribution.

Clive Richards



As the Starling flock wheeled, climbed and glided,
Two dysfunctional youngsters collided,
This provoked a mass brawl,
A complete free-for-all,
As down through the reed bed they slid.

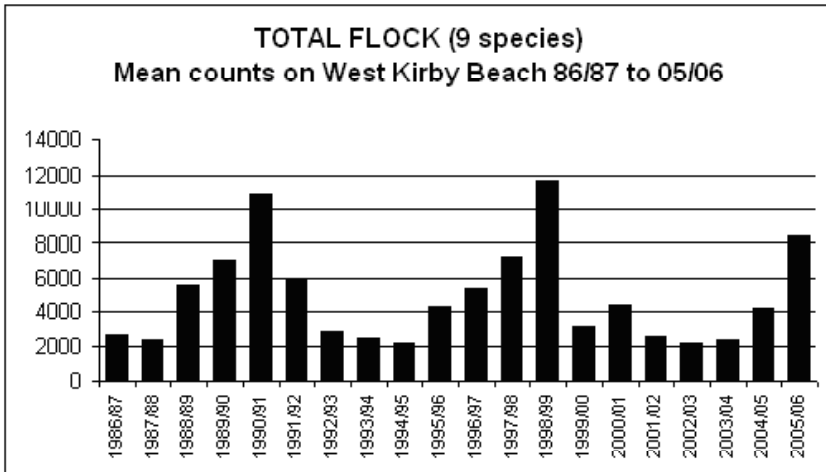
Hazel J Raw



A SINE WAVE AT WEST KIRBY HIGH TIDE WADER ROOST

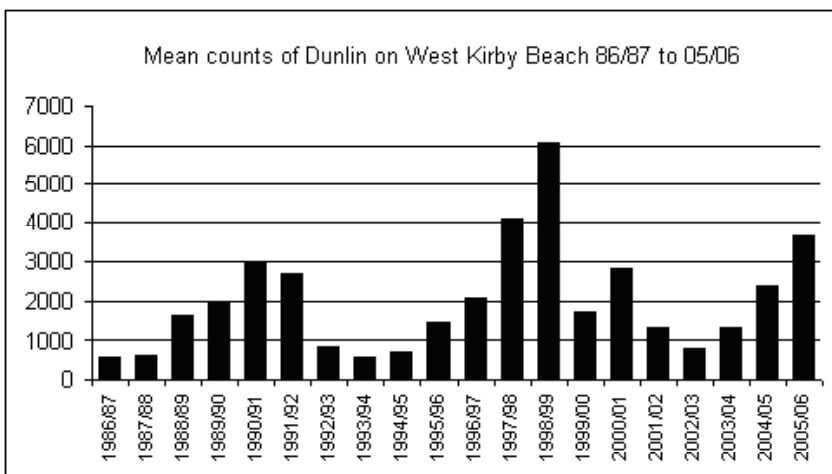
West Kirby shore high tide roost is monitored on a daily basis between mid-September and mid-March by the Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens (DEVW) when the tide height is over 8.8 metres, in effect about 50% of the days available. The winter of 2005/06 was the wardens' twentieth anniversary and it turned out to be a very good one, both in terms of bird numbers and lack of disturbances to the wader flocks. Wader counts on West Kirby shore were the highest for seven years and disturbances caused by human agents were the second lowest recorded.

West Kirby is an important roost for nine species of wader, in particular Knot and Dunlin. Over the past twenty years counts of each species have been noted every wardening day, and we have discovered something very interesting - the numbers fluctuate in a predictable sine wave-like pattern.



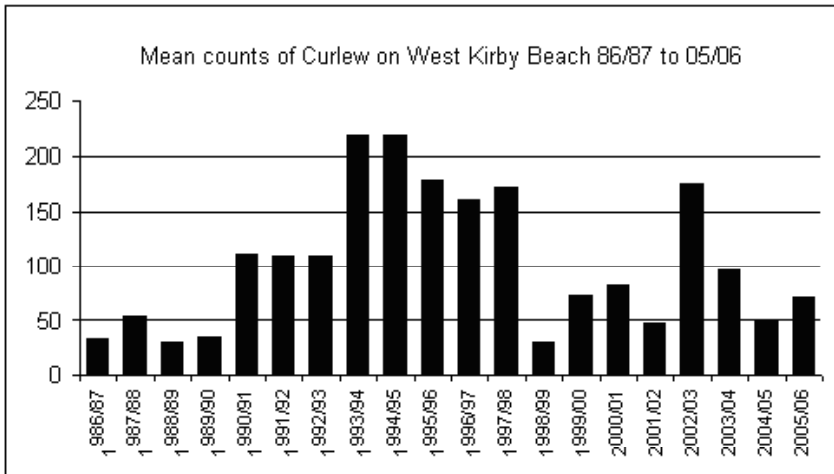
Counts at the West Kirby high tide wader roost which appear to show an eight-year cycle

It is important here to stress that the data represent average counts, rather than peak counts which are more often used to illustrate trends. We feel that average counts give a more accurate picture of population changes as they are not so prone to one-off events such as disturbance or short-term hard weather movements.

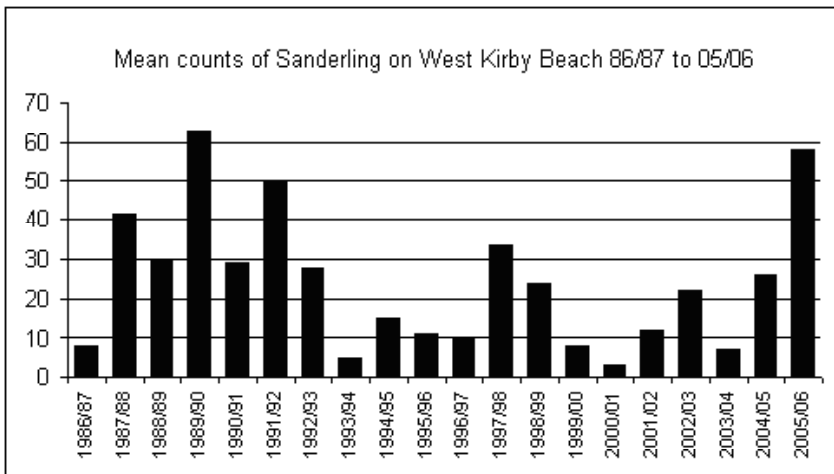


Dunlin follow the sine wave pattern closely and, with Knot, are the most numerous species

How closely they follow the pattern varies with each species. Dunlin, Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit and Grey Plover follow the pattern closely, but Oystercatcher, Redshank and Curlew do not. Sanderling and Ringed Plover might well be following the same pattern but as numbers are so small it is rather hidden in the 'noise' of various other factors such as disturbance, weather, etc. The three species graphs illustrate these points.

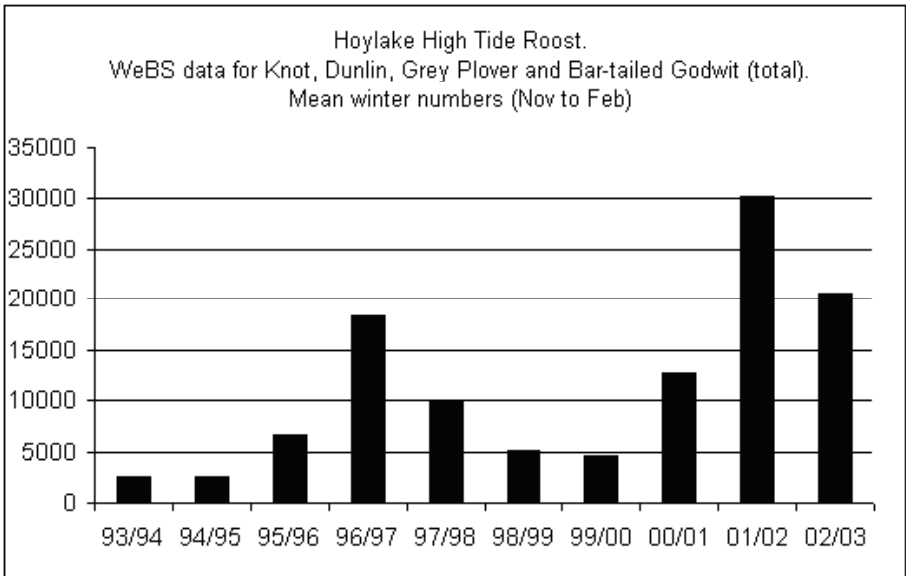


Mean counts for Curlew show no indication of a pattern



Mean counts for the small numbers of Sanderling show an indication of a pattern, but far less obviously than for Dunlin

It is not surprising that Oystercatcher, Redshank and Curlew do not show this cyclic pattern as, apart from anything else, their main roosts lie elsewhere on the estuary and West Kirby just gets a small and irregular proportion. It would be interesting to look at data from other roosting sites both on the Dee and elsewhere to see whether they too show a cyclic pattern. Unfortunately there is not a great deal of data available, but I do have Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) counts for Hoylake, a major roosting site for Dunlin, Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit and Grey Plover, just a short distance from West Kirby. The next graph shows the average November to February count from Hoylake, for the years 1993/94 to 2002/03.



WeBS data from Hoylake shore showing a possible five-year cycle

Here we have what appears to be another sine wave pattern but different from that at West Kirby. Some caution is in order here as the data available are for a shorter time period than that for West Kirby, and WeBS counts are only carried out once a month, far less frequently than DEVW counts at West Kirby. But despite the limited amount of data there does appear to be a sine wave with a five-year cycle, in contrast with West Kirby which has an eight-year cycle.

Before I go on, and for those that don't know the area, let me explain what the differences are between West Kirby and Hoylake and why that may possibly lead to different patterns. The two roost sites are little more than a mile apart and by and large they attract the same species; both are major roosts for Knot and Dunlin but also attract the other six species mentioned in this article. One difference is that the sandbank at Hoylake is slightly higher than at West Kirby and therefore remains dry at higher tides, but both get covered during the highest spring tides. But the major difference between the roosts is where the birds come from, i.e. where they are feeding at low tide. There is a major feeding area east of Hoylake off north Wirral at Mockbeggar Wharf/Leasowe shore. Most of the birds feeding here usually roost either at Hoylake or across the River Mersey at the Alt estuary. Another major feeding area is well inside the Dee estuary at Dawpool Bank off Thurstaston and most of the birds using this area usually roost at West Kirby. The two feeding areas are therefore quite different, one being well within the Dee estuary and sheltered from the Irish Sea, and the other on the north Wirral coast exposed to the winds of the Irish Sea and close to the mouth of the River Mersey with its strong tidal currents. In reality there is likely to be interchange between the West Kirby and Hoylake roosts, and some birds can be observed flying from one to another during a single high tide, but the general trend would seem to be as I have described above. Exactly what impact these different feeding areas have on numbers of waders at the roost sites remains unclear, but any changes to these areas, either short-term or long-term, must surely affect the numbers of waders at the nearby high tide roosts.

As far as I'm aware there hasn't been any scientific study, or even statistical analysis, of wader population dynamics at single roosts, such as we see at West Kirby, over a period of more than a year or two. I'm also not aware of any study which shows a clear sine wave-like pattern at any other roost. Consequently, I'm left with a few ideas of my own and those of my fellow wardens to try and explain the possible causes of this pattern, as described below:-

1. **Food availability.** Probably the most likely cause for the cyclic pattern. If the amount of food available is fluctuating then the numbers of birds will fluctuate with it. Populations of animals do often follow a sine wave, particularly short-lived species such as those waders feed on. One

would think that with waders ranging in size (or more importantly a range of bill size) from Dunlin to Bar-tailed Godwit, a large range of food species are involved. But Dunlin, Knot, Grey Plover and Bar-tailed Godwit are all surface feeders at least some of the time, and a look at *Birds of the Western Palearctic* reveals that many of the same surface-dwelling prey are taken by all four waders. Indeed, we do not know precisely what the birds on the Dee estuary are fed on; it could be that one prey species, such as the tiny snail *Hydrobia*, constitutes the main diet for all four wader species. In other words, the sine wave might well reflect the population dynamics of just one food item (e.g. *Hydrobia*). One interpretation of the pattern is that it is not actually a 'classical' sine wave but shows a smooth increase in numbers followed by a sharp fall. This would be consistent with predators (birds) periodically exceeding the amount of prey able to sustain such numbers, which would then dramatically fall. However, we should be careful not to read too much into too limited amount of data!

2. **Population.** By which I mean all the birds in a particular subspecies or large geographical area (such as Western Europe). Populations of animals often follow a sine wave pattern, especially short-lived and fast-breeding species such as small rodents. In contrast waders are relatively long-lived and have only one or two young a year; this means that any change in numbers of the population is slow (barring a catastrophe). This is borne out by looking at WeBS data which show only small changes to the national population of each species from one year to the next. For example, Dunlin increased by just 1% between 1995/96 and 1998/99 nationally* but by 420% at West Kirby over the same period! It is also difficult to believe that the populations of four different wader species breeding over a large area of the northern hemisphere would all move in unison.

* based on an average winter count (Nov to Feb). Peak counts, on the other hand, showed a slight drop in numbers over the same period.

3. **Overflow effect.** It is known that waders find the muddy North Sea estuaries more attractive than our relatively sandy estuaries on the west coast of Britain. But these estuaries presumably can only hold a certain number of birds. When these estuaries reach capacity it may well be that the excess birds make their way west. Now this excess, which might be only a few per cent of the total population, might well vary year by year in the form of a sine wave. This would result in us seeing a pronounced sine wave here, even though the total population is varying only by a small amount. I have to admit, however, that I think this is unlikely to be the origin of our cyclic pattern as there are so many other variables, not least cold weather which drives birds westwards in a much more random way - or at least that is what one would think.

4. **Disturbance.** Disturbance can certainly have a big effect on wader numbers at roosts, and to a smaller extent on feeding areas. However, it is difficult to see how any pattern of disturbance would be in the form of a sine wave.

5. **Tides.** The tide height has a big effect on the wader roosts at both West Kirby and Hoylake. Too low a high tide and birds tend to be spread out and stay on sandbanks nearer the feeding areas. Too high a tide and the roosting sites are completely covered by the sea. However, I am not aware of any year-on-year pattern which would result in a pronounced sine wave.

6. **Weather.** Numbers of waders on the estuary are certainly affected by the weather. For example, in cold weather there is usually a noticeable increase in numbers with birds flying west escaping the freezing North Sea coasts. Another, possibly less obvious, effect is autumn gales. It was certainly noticeable in the winter of 2004/05 that Mockbeggar Wharf was sandier than in the previous few years after prolonged September gales washed sand over the mudbanks. The food species preferred by waders occur in greatest number in mud, rather than sand, and the smaller numbers of waders than usual on Mockbeggar Wharf these past two winters presumably reflects this. Consequently, there were smaller numbers at the Hoylake high tide roost. In contrast there appeared to be more birds than usual in the estuary on the mud at Dawpool Bank, resulting in more birds at West Kirby at high tide, perhaps displaced from north Wirral. Having said all this I'm not sure how it could produce the sine wave pattern.

7. **Follow-my-leader.** It may well be that just one species is affected by one of the above, Dunlin being the most obvious candidate, and the rest are following their lead. It is common behaviour by waders for mixed flocks to both feed and roost together - Godwits, for example, are rarely seen without their accompanying flock of Knot. So it is feasible that if Dunlin are present in large

numbers on Dawpool Bank (or wherever) this attracts other waders in. Whether this would result in such a clear sine wave-like pattern is another matter!

I have given you the benefit of my own very amateurish ideas. If there are any ornithologists out there who think they might know the answer the DEVW would be delighted to hear from them. I have shown the graphs to the BTO who run the WeBS counts, they have shown great interest but are none the wiser for the cause of the cyclic pattern. It would certainly make an interesting PhD project, if someone had several years and unlimited time to spend!

The Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens are always on the lookout for new volunteers. It's a chance to do something useful whilst doing a bit of birdwatching! Feel free to come down to West Kirby to say hello; for details contact Lynne Greenstreet, the Coastal Ranger, on 0151 678 5488, or email Richard Smith on richard@deeestuary.co.uk

References:

Cramp, S (Editor) *Handbook of the Birds of the Western Palearctic* - Vol 3, 1992 (OUP).
Wetland Bird Survey Reports 1996/97 to 2000/01.
Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens' data collected between 1986 and 2006.
Wetland Bird Survey Data (Core Counts) 1970 to 2003, kindly provided by Andy Musgrove of the BTO.

Many thanks to:

1. Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens for allowing me to use their data for this article, and more importantly for performing all those counts over the years.
2. Roy Palmer for collating the DEVW data on to spreadsheets and for drawing my attention to the sine wave in the first place.
3. Chris Butterworth for his own thoughts on the sine wave.
4. Andy Musgrove (BTO) for his help and advice with the article.

Wetland Bird Survey Data in this article should not be used in any way without permission of the WeBS Office. To access official WeBS data please contact the WeBS Office - BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU. <http://www.bto.org>

This article is based on one published on the Dee Estuary Birding Website, www.deeestuary.co.uk

Richard Smith

Note: Thought it might be worthwhile for those members unfamiliar with sine waves to add a note of explanation. Well, according to the dictionary it's "a curve representing periodic oscillations of constant amplitude as given by a sine function". Hope that helps! Ed.



WEBSITE OF THE MONTH – WWW.DEEESTUARY.CO.UK

Congratulations go to Richard Smith (Bird Report Systematic List Editor), whose website www.deeestuary.co.uk has been awarded 'Website of the Month' by Birdwatch magazine (February 2007). This is what they had to say about the site:

"This website, produced by Dee Estuary Birding, is an excellent example of a local website that caters fully for birders. Up-to-date information on sightings, a site guide and a map of the estuary are the most useful and quickly accessible pages. For background information, details of wader and wildfowl counts going back to 1997 are provided.

Monthly newsletters include a 'Species Spotlight', which in December featured Black-tailed Godwit. Detailing the status of the species on the Dee, the article included ringing recoveries from Iceland and maps (courtesy of Google Earth) which showed the movements of Icelandic birds around British estuaries. Latest news and events for the coming month complete the newsletter. An archive contains more than 100 past newsletters.

Being at the right place at the right time is important and the website includes not only a useful list of rewarding birding localities, but also the best tidal conditions for each site as well as a link to tidal information. A detailed calendar tells you what to expect in each month of the year and incorporates links to any site mentioned. These take you to a page in the site guide. There is also a gallery of photographs of birds, the estuary and the surrounding area.

This amazing depository of information is very accessible and well laid out. An index enables you to find topics that have been covered in the past and, as if this weren't enough, there are a generous number of links to incorporated websites as well as many others that are also relevant."

Conservation News

CONSERVATION COORDINATOR

We're delighted to introduce you to Steve Turner, the new Conservation Coordinator for CAWOS. This is a brief outline about him – he is well qualified for the role!

I first became interested in birds and wildlife in my home county of Norfolk. I was born and raised in the heart of the Norfolk Broads, and my mentor was Edwin Vincent, the son of the great Jim Vincent of Hickling Broad fame. I have continued a love of all things wild throughout my life and I am fortunate to have a wife who is just as passionate about birds and wildlife as I am.

I have been a Police Officer with the Cheshire Police for the last 26 years and throughout my service I have been a front-line officer. I have made a point throughout my service of concentrating on Rural Police Duties. During the 1980s, along with one of my colleagues, I instigated a local Rural Crime Prevention Scheme 'COUNTRYWATCH'. The main aim of this scheme was to bring together all groups that use the countryside and instead of working against one another, communicate, by means of a quarterly Newsletter, the current crime trends and also collate information passed on to the Police, and ensure this information reached the correct destination.

The scheme went from strength to strength and continued to bring in useful information for a period of ten years. Due to the formulation of a specific post within the force of Wildlife and Environmental Officer, the scheme was enveloped into other Crime Prevention Initiatives.

The post of Rural Affairs Officer within the force has been civilianised in an effort to maintain a full contingent of uniformed officers on the front line where they are most effective. This has been an advantage to myself and other like-minded officers. Each of the three divisions has a uniformed Wildlife Crime Officer to investigate and prepare court files for Wildlife and Environmental cases. This is not a full-time post however; I have to manage these matters alongside my role as Community Officer for 12 rural villages in the Vale Royal area.

I have attended a National Course for Wildlife Crime Officers and I have made it a priority to amass a vast reference library of legislation, stated case notes and any current trends information in Rural Crime. For many years I have made a point of becoming involved in any wildlife Crimes in the County, covering many offences from Poaching to Exotic Animals Licensing.

My colleagues throughout the force are all aware that if they become involved in a Wildlife Crime advice on what to do is on the end of a phone or email. Whilst people who report crimes of this nature become frustrated with the initial response they get, I hope from my input to the officer dealing with the matter, the informant feels that the Police are taking the information seriously when they receive further contacts from the officer dealing. We are also very fortunate in Cheshire that we have a solicitor who works with the Crown Prosecution Service, who is of a like mind.

My main aim throughout my service has been to bring together all groups who use the countryside, to enable them to pass on information to the Police, to enable that information to be collated and disseminated to the correct unit to allow the matter to be dealt with.

If anyone in the Society needs information or advice, if I do not have the answer, I will know someone who does.

Due to my passion for all things rural I have become known throughout the Cheshire Police Force, and a number of other forces as 'THE POACHER'. I respect this title and feel that it is an honour to be given it.

I can be contacted by:

Email at home: steve.poacher@tiscali.co.uk

Email at work: stephen.turner@cheshire.pnn.police.uk

Phone at home: 01606 781435

Steve Turner, 'THE POACHER'

WIRRAL AREA

Liverpool Bay SPA: Natural England and CCW (Countryside Council for Wales) are proposing to designate parts of Liverpool Bay as a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the Habitats Regulations and Birds Directive. Data shows the pSPA regularly supports Red-throated Divers and Common Scoters in numbers of European Importance. The case is being made strongly that Cormorant (non-breeding), Sandwich Tern (passage), Common Tern (breeding and post-breeding), Little Tern (breeding and post-breeding) and Little Gull (spring passage) are also present in European Important numbers.

Planning application: CAWOS are opposing a planning application to erect a marquee next to Thornton Manor Lake, Thornton Hough, as we understand this will be used for social events involving loud music and fireworks. The lake is part of Thornton Manor Woods which is of great ornithological interest, in particular as it has the only Heronry in north Wirral.

Richard Smith, Wirral Area Representative

LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA REPRESENTATIVES

Chester	Neil Friswell, 8 Oaklands Crescent, Tattenhall, Cheshire, CH3 9QT. Tel: 01829 770463. Email: neil.friswell@btinternet.com
Congleton	Richard Blindell, 5 Bath Vale, Congleton, Cheshire, CW12 2HF. Tel: 01260 275084. Email: richardblindell@hotmail.com
Crewe & Nantwich	Colin Lythgoe, 11 Waterloo Road, Haslington, Crewe, CW1 5TF. Tel: 01270 582642. Email: colinlythgoe@haslington9.freemove.co.uk
Halton	Tony Parker, 41 The Park, Penketh, Warrington, WA5 2SG. Tel: 01925 726986. Email: tonymarker@cawos.org
Macclesfield	Vacant - please let Steve Turner know if you are willing to take on this role
Vale Royal	Mark O'Sullivan, 13 Bickerton Avenue, Frodsham, Cheshire. Tel: 01928 734679 Email: zen16185@zen.co.uk
Warrington	Brian Martin, 45 Albert Road, Grappenhall, Warrington, WA4 2PF. Tel: 01925 264251. Email: brianmartin1940@hotmail.com
Wirral	Richard Smith, March Wall, King's Drive North, Caldy, Wirral, CH48 1LL. Tel: 0151 625 2320. Email: richard@deeestuary.co.uk

VOUCHER FOR A ROUND OF GOLF FOR 4 PERSONS

Your chance to enjoy a day's golf and support the Rostherne Mere Bird Observatory

The golf driving range at Mere Golf and Country Club (MGCC) faces into The Mere so 'floater' balls are used. The club endeavours to collect the golf balls with the use of a trap but inevitably some balls escape into the outflow stream. After passing through Cicely Mill Pool many enter Rostherne Brook and ultimately appear in the reed beds surrounding the lake.

Using my access rights to Rostherne Mere as a Voluntary Warden with Natural England, I collect the golf balls and return them to MGCC. As a thank you, the golf club has provided a voucher for a round of golf for 4 persons. The rules stipulate availability only on Monday, Tuesday or Thursday; no denims; all golfers must have official handicaps.

In the summer MGCC charge £75 per person for a round of golf. We propose to raise funds towards the cost of the Rostherne Mere Bird Observatory and therefore invite offers for the voucher (minimum bid £80) to be sent in a sealed envelope (marked 'Golf Bid') to Clive Richards at 88 Manchester Road, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 2JY **to arrive by 30 April 2007**. The winner will then be notified and his/her cheque requested. The offer is available to any qualifying golfers; they do not have to be CAWOS members, so spread the word amongst your golfing friends.

Malcolm Calvert

Membership News

Welcome to the following new members:

Ted Lock, Stuart Taylor, John Bird, Karim Labib, June Wright, David Lewis, Nicole Buckley, Mr and Mrs J Drewitt. Membership for 2006 peaked at 382, a new record.

Job changes:

Peter Mathews has now taken over all aspects concerning the distribution and sale of the *Bird Report* from David Cogger. He can be contacted on 01625 614501 or at prmm@hordernpottery.wanadoo.co.uk

Stephen Turner has taken over as Conservation Coordinator, a job which has been vacant for several years. He can be contacted on 01606 781435 or at steve.poacher@tiscali.co.uk

Thanks also go to the following offers of help: Mike Hems (easier submission of Gift Aid claims), Bob Anderson (*Bird News*), Ray Anslow, Graham Palmer and Andrew Duncalf (records/database), and Frank Duff and Mike Hems (website).

Help required:

The Society is hoping to have a stand at the Trentabank Wildlife Open Day, which runs from 11am to 3pm on 22nd April 2007. **Would anyone be able to spare some time to help man the stand?** Please contact David Cogger for further details.

At a Council meeting held on January 11th:

- Excellent progress was reported from the Atlas Steering Group. The final winter season's fieldwork was in hand and, together with our partners, Cheshire Wildlife Trust and Halton Borough Council, we had received a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to cover the cost of publishing the Atlas. This would be undertaken by Liverpool University Press and it was hoped to publish by autumn 2008. Thanks were expressed to Peter Twist for successfully guiding us through the Lottery grant procedure.
- Concern was expressed about the attendance at indoor meetings, which had diminished. It was agreed to raise this matter with the membership, but to carry on for the 2007-08 season and review later in the year.
- The response to the letter requesting additional help had been encouraging; however, *Bird News* would now be published only three times a year.

ATLAS SPONSORSHIP

Thanks to all those who have sponsored species since the last Newsletter. Your name will appear at the foot of the page on which the species you have sponsored has been described.

Now only Greylag Goose and Barnacle Goose remain. If you wish to sponsor either of these remaining two species (it is quite acceptable for two or more people to join together for this), please contact David Cogger on 01606 832517 or at memsec@caвос.org to check if the species is still available and then send a cheque for £25 made payable to CAWOS to **David Cogger, 113 Nantwich Road, Middlewich, Cheshire, CW10 9HD**. Your cheque will be acknowledged.

~ THE CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL ATLAS ~
REMINDER TO ALL ATLAS FIELDWORKERS
ALL RECORDS, INCLUDING THE LAST WINTER SEASON,
SHOULD BE IN BY 31ST MARCH 2007

Sites to Watch

WOOLSTON EYES CONSERVATION GROUP NEWSLETTER 2006

Reserve Management

During 2006 our contractor has worked hard carrying out agreed action in the Reserve Management Plan. Further reed spraying on No.3 bed aims to produce a more broken reed edge, while a number of bays have been created to provide loafing areas for the wildfowl. Visitors will have enjoyed the improved viewing that reed clearance has created in front of the centre hide on No.3 bed, and this has been extended to the Sybil Hogg hide on the south bank of that bed. This is a long-term task and it will be several years before we see the full benefits of it. Already, however, some spraying and subsequent clearance of the dead reeds has created an excellent shallow feeding area at the north-west pool of No.3 bed, which wildfowl have found attractive. Waders, too, have been seen in larger numbers than for some years in the cleared areas. A sluice has been fitted to one of the water towers and this should allow for much greater control of water levels, a crucial matter on wetland reserves. Spraying has also continued on the Loop of No.4 bed, not only of reeds but also of giant hogweed, which had invaded one of the islands. This, too, is an on-going task. In the coming months our contractor will be fitting depth markers on No.3 bed and the Loop, so that regular monitoring of water levels can be achieved. That the spraying of the islands on the Loop was effective was evidenced by the successful breeding by a pair of Lapwings and the presence of a pair of Little Ringed Plovers during the breeding season.



As always Roger Benbow continues with his management working parties, for which volunteers are always welcome. Some willows were coppiced recently near the ringers' net rides and further work parties are planned for hide maintenance and in particular replacing the screen at the north-west pool. If you have some time to spare (you do not need to be an expert!) and would like to help please ring Roger on 01925 601247 or email him at Rogerbenbow@btopenworld.com

Grant Application

WECG was successful in obtaining a grant from Biffaward of over £40,000, which will enable the Group to carry out major habitat improvements on the Reserve. This will ensure the services of our contractor until at least the end of 2008. In addition to habitat improvements the money will also be used to purchase a secure storage unit for our equipment. This should ensure that incidents of vandalism, as outlined in the January 2006 Newsletter, are much less likely. Another purpose of the grant is to encourage more visitors to the Eyes to enjoy its very special wildlife. This is the largest grant that WECG has ever obtained and David Bowman in particular deserves special thanks for his hard work in guiding the application to a successful conclusion.

Developments on No.1 Bed

Over the past two years WECG and English Nature (now Natural England) have been in discussion with Peel Holdings, who own No.1 bed, about their plans to construct a small recycling plant for non-toxic materials (mainly bricks) on the north side of the bed. This will involve some inert waste being left on site and landscaped, with Peel and their contractors creating new habitats, including wetlands, to a design approved by Natural England and WECG. Hides will also be constructed across the newly created areas. The whole project, which has now received planning permission, will take over ten years to complete, but new habitats will be created and released as the work progresses.

It has been known for some time that No.1 bed held important numbers of amphibians with, for example, over a thousand toads found there in March 2006 and over a thousand clumps of frogspawn. Clearly mitigation was needed for populations of that size. During the autumn of 2006 the developers set up a programme of trapping amphibians by means of pitfall traps. As expected large numbers of frogs and toads were caught, but the greatest surprise was the amazing numbers of Great Crested Newts. By the time catching ceased several thousand Great Crested

Newts had been caught and released in parts of No.1 bed outside the proposed development area. It is clear that this is a population of major national importance and further discussions are taking place between Natural England and the developers to ensure that the needs of this population are met. This includes habitat enhancement and the release of more good quality land for feeding and hibernation. This situation will be monitored closely. The discovery of this large population of Great Crested Newts only occurred after the applicants had received planning permission. Previous surveys by consultants, and those carried out separately by WECG, had only found very small numbers of Great Cresteds and a population of this size was therefore totally unexpected. What is clear is that No.1 bed must now be managed principally for the benefit of amphibians.

Filming by the BBC

Two separate film crews from the BBC visited Woolston in the spring, and spent many days filming on No.3 bed. One of the programmes is part of the series called 'Nature's Calendar', introduced by Chris Packham, due to be transmitted on Thursday 1st March on BBC2 at 6pm. The March 2007 issue of the BBC *Homes and Antiques* magazine (out in February 2007) is scheduled to include an article on the series with information and photographs of Woolston. The second programme, which we believe is to be fronted by Alan Titchmarsh, is part of the series called 'Nature in Britain' not due to be shown until the autumn of 2007.

Website

During the year Chris Wooff, a permit holder and Deputy Director of Computer Studies at Liverpool University, took over responsibility for our website, www.woolstoneyes.co.uk, which had become embarrassingly out of date. Chris has already brought about significant improvements, though clearly it will take time for him to completely revamp the site and if you have any suggestions for further improvements please contact Chris at c.wooff@liverpool.ac.uk. Chris has also set up a link to Amazon from our website. If you purchase books via this link WECG receives a small donation from Amazon on each sale, so please don't forget this when you are buying books!

Plastic Boardwalks and Seats

Those of you who visit Woolston regularly will have seen the sections of plastic boardwalk placed near the approach to the Frank Linley hide and the north-west screen. It was felt necessary to provide safe access for our visitors as those areas become particularly muddy during the winter, and as money allows these will be extended. Two seats, also made from recycled plastic, have been placed along the footpath in the centre of No.3 bed, one on the way to the centre hide, the other by the north meadow. These should be long-lasting and will hopefully provide comfortable resting places.

Wildlife Highlights in 2006

Birds: It is pleasing to report that the Whiskered Terns, Common Crane and Chimney Swift have all been accepted by the *British Birds* Rarities Committee (BBRC). Other highlights in 2006 were a Great White Egret, Little Egret and Red Kite. A male Cetti's Warbler was ringed on No.1 bed in August and was still present in December. In November a second Cetti's Warbler, this time a female, was netted on No.3 bed. If they both stay what are the possibilities of them finding one another in the spring? Another fascinating record was a group of at least four Bearded Tits found in front of the Frank Linley hide on 9th October by permit holder John Williams. They were still present on 14th October when the ringers caught one, an adult male. This was photographed and its picture is on our website. These birds appear to have been part of an influx into the country at that time and at least one remained until 19th October.

A Merlin, which flew into a net on No.1 bed in the autumn was the first ever ringed at Woolston. The Black-necked Grebes had probably the second-best breeding season ever, with a total of 16 broods, all on No.3 bed. Many young fledged. Wildfowl had a quiet year with wintering numbers well below average, as was the case at many other sites. It is believed that mild weather in Eastern Europe kept most of the ducks there. A few Marsh Harriers appeared as usual in the spring, and several Hobbies were also seen. Sightings of 18 Black-tailed Godwits and 10 Greenshanks were also good. In the last two weeks of April two adult Little Gulls became resident on No.3 bed, but just as hopes began to rise that they might stay they departed. A few days later two Sandwich Terns made a brief visit, the first record for almost exactly twenty years.

The annual Warbler Census in May produced record numbers of singing male Reed Warblers (150), Whitethroats (185) and Blackcaps (97), but Sedge Warblers continue to decline at an alarming rate – just 77 singing males, 48 of which were on the favoured No.4 bed. Willow Warblers showed a pleasing increase to 93 compared with 81 in 2005.

Butterflies: 2006 was an excellent year for many species, and I am indebted to Dave Hackett for providing the information for this summary. No doubt the hot and dry weather in June and July provided ideal conditions, but at times the numbers observed were staggering. Record counts of Gatekeeper (1600), Peacock (200), Painted Lady (22), and Comma (over 60) were the highlights, with other large counts of Small White (150) and Meadow Brown (238). The single most exciting event, however, was the return of the Clouded Yellow after an absence of ten years, with four seen on 22nd August and sightings continuing until 1st November when two were found mating on No.1 bed! There were also good numbers of Red Admirals, and Holly Blues were recorded on at least five occasions. The year also saw the establishment of a Butterfly Transect in conjunction with Butterfly Conservation. This is a set route which is walked on a weekly basis from April to September, and the data used to establish trends over a number of years.

Odonata (Dragonflies and Damselflies): This was an excellent year, with Trish Thompson and Les Jones continuing their studies on the Eyes. In late July two new species for Woolston were discovered on No.1 bed, a Yellow-winged Darter and a Black-tailed Skimmer. The former is a first-class rarity and was part of a small influx into the country at the time. Emperor Dragonflies are now well established, while Common Darters were present in large numbers, with two pairs seen mating and ovipositing as late as 29th October.

Finally: Some of you will have observed a notice that has been placed in the hides advising of dates for the WeBS count. This is a wetland bird survey, which means that on the listed dates we count ducks and other wildfowl. Anybody is welcome to help or learn; please contact Brian Martin if you would like to take part. Each session will last no more than three hours.

**Brian Martin, 45 Albert Road, Grappenhall, Warrington, WA4 2PF. Tel: 01925 264251
Email: brianmartin1940@hotmail.com**

Note: Access to the main part of the Reserve is strictly limited to permit holders. Permits (and keys) can be obtained from Brian Ankers, 9 Lynton Gardens, Appleton, Warrington, WA4 5ED. For further details and an application form visit the Woolston website at www.woolstoneyes.co.uk

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RSPB MAKES INVESTMENT IN DEE WILDLIFE



On 1st September 2006, the RSPB purchased 194 hectares of salt marsh and adjacent farmland at Burton Marsh Farm, which will in addition allow access to manage around 1,000 hectares of grazable salt marsh on the English side of the estuary. This strategic purchase now connects the existing land holdings of Gayton Sands and Inner Marsh Farm together. The salt marsh and adjacent Burton Marsh Farm are now protected for posterity.

Before Inner Marsh Farm Reserve was created, the inner Dee marshes off Denhall Lane and the Decca Station (Decca Pools) were already well-known birding hotspots. The grazed salt marsh attracts huge flocks of wintering Lapwing and lesser numbers of Golden Plover. When it floods during the autumn tides, good numbers of migrant waders can be seen, especially Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Spotted Redshank, Ruff, etc. Large numbers of wildfowl occur with Bewick's Swan, Wigeon and Teal being the main species.

Over the years, the flooded marsh has attracted a number of rarities which includes: Glossy Ibis, American Wigeon, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, Wilson's Phalarope (3), one of which I can vividly remember watching from the bedroom window when I lived at Marsh Cottage! The inner salt marsh with its rush and reed beds hold significant numbers of breeding Water Rail, Grasshopper and Sedge Warbler and Reed Bunting, whilst further out Redshank and Skylark breed in substantial numbers. In recent years, Denhall Lane has become one of the best places to watch Barn Owl and Short-eared Owl on the estuary, with birds just gliding by the attendant crowds. This August/September, Hobbies became a feature and they delighted the local birders as they hunted dragonflies over the marsh.

It is not just birds that will benefit from the purchase. Brown hares occur and noctule bats feed over the marsh, whilst harvest mice have recently been recorded.

The RSPB will continue to manage the grazing of the salt marsh in partnership with a local farmer. Agreements have been negotiated with neighbouring landowners of the salt marsh, so Burton Marsh as before, will be grazed as one unit. Stock numbers will be maintained at levels that will benefit the breeding birds as well as the Dee's internationally important concentrations of wintering wildfowl and waders.

The best place to view the new reserve extension is from the bottom of Denhall Lane; park on the front and take a walk along the public footpath towards Little Neston.

The Dee is a wonderful place for both people and wildlife and the RSPB has recognised its importance by investing in Burton Marsh Farm. This move will ensure stunning wildlife such as Redshank, Lapwing and wildfowl have a safe place to live - and people can continue to witness the spectacle of thousands of birds feeding and roosting along the shore of the estuary.

Colin E Wells, RSPB Site Manager Dee and Mersey Estuaries

This article was first published in *BIRDING NORTH WEST* Volume 3:11 pp 294-297



MARCH

- 12 SRSPB 'A LANE THROUGH BHARATPUR' by Mike Lane
- 13 ADNHS 'NORWEGIAN FJORDS & THE LAND OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN' by David Cummings
- 13 MRSPB 'A LANE IN A POLISH MARSH' by Mike Lane
- 14 HO 'HIGHLIGHTS OF LOCAL WILDLIFE' by John Lawton Roberts
- 16 NCRSPB QUIZ & HOTPOT SUPPER, ring for details
- 17 HPRSPB Attenborough NR/Foremark Resr, contact Dave Hughes on 01925 726242
- 18 KOS Old Moor RSPB Reserve, nr Barnsley, meet Sessions House, Knutsford at 8:30am
- 19 RSPB High Tide Birdwatch, Old Baths car park, Parkgate - 10:00am (HW 11:21, 10.1m)
- 19 HPRSPB 'IN PURSUIT OF PENGUINS' by Tom Lawson
- 20 RSPB High Tide Birdwatch, Old Baths car park, Parkgate - 10:30am (HW 12:00, 10.4m)
- 20 MCOS Shropshire Meres, meet at Hanmer Mere at 10:00am
- 21 RSPB High Tide Birdwatch, Old Baths car park, Parkgate - 11:00am (HW 12:44, 10.4m)
- 21 CWT Delamere Forest birdsong walk led by David Norman, 5-7pm, contact Kay George 01606 882183
- 23 KOS 'GALAPAGOS ISLANDS' by David and Sigrun Tollerton
- 24 HPRSPB Cannock Chase, meet in Memorial Park car park, Marple at 8:00am
- 25 MRSPB World's End, nr Llangollen, North Wales, depart Duke Street car park at 8:00am
- 25 SECOS Martin Mere, ring for details
- 27 ADNHS AGM followed by a short slide show
- 30 WGBG 'SOUTH AMERICAN NATURE' by Trevor Davenport

APRIL

- 10 MRSPB 'THE GAMBIA' by Mike Wilkes
- 11 HO 'A BIRDING TOUR OF NEW ZEALAND' by Brayton Holt
- 13 MCOS AGM and MEMBERS' SLIDES
- 13 SECOS AGM & MEMBERS' EVENING
- 14-15KOS North Wales Weekend, ring for details
- 15 MRSPB Forest of Bowland, depart Duke Street car park at 8:00am
- 15 SECOS Nottingham Gravel Pits, ring for details
- 16 SRSPB 'YORKSHIRE'S WILD BEAUTY' by John Gardener
- 16 HPRSPB 'BIRD MIGRATION: THE GREAT EASTERN FLYWAY' by Mike McKavett

- 17 ADNHS 'IN SEARCH OF THE DOTTEREL' by John Linton Smith
- 17 MCOS Dane Valley, meet at Danebridge at 10:00am
- 18 RSPB High Tide Birdwatch, Old Baths car park, Parkgate - 11:00am (HW 12:38, 10.3m)
- 19 RSPB High Tide Birdwatch, Old Baths car park, Parkgate - 11:30am (HW 13:22, 10.2m)
- 20 NCRSPB 'NATURAL HISTORY THROUGH THE SEASONS' by David Webb
- 22 NCRSPB World's End/Ceiriog Valley, for details contact Dave Hughes on 01925 726242
- 25 CWT Delamere Forest birdsong walk led by David Norman, 5-7pm, contact Kay George 01606 882183
- 27 KOS AGM followed by 'THE DELIGHTS OF SCOTLAND' by Sheila Blamire
- 27 WGBG 'A WALK ON THE DARK SIDE – Investigating Wildlife Crime' by Andy McWilliam
- 29 SRSPB Attenborough Gravel Pits by coach, ring for details
- 29 WGBG Rutland Water by coach, contact Marjorie Mason 01625 525781
- 29 MRSPB Rutland Water by coach, ring for details
- 29 HO Attenborough Gravel Pits, ring for details
- 29 HPRSPB North Cave Wetlands, meet in Memorial Park car park, Marple at 8:00am
- 29 MCOS Ynys-hir RSPB, meet at the reserve at 9:30am
- 30 SRSPB Goyt Valley by car, meet at Errwood Resr car park at 7:30pm

MAY

- 8 ADNHS 'PRESERVING OUR FOOTPATH HERITAGE' by Peter Rhodes
- 8 MRSPB AGM followed by MEMBERS' SLIDES
- 9 HO 'OUR FRIENDLY GARDEN ROBIN' by David Tidswell
- 9 NCRSPB Inner Marsh Farm, for details contact Dave Hughes on 01925 726242
- 12 KOS Lake Vyrnwy, meet Sessions House, Knutsford at 8:30am
- 13 WGBG Bempton and Flamborough Head by coach, contact Marjorie Mason 01625 525781
- 13 MRSPB Bempton and Flamborough Head by coach, ring for details
- 13 HPRSPB Tanat Valley/Lake Vyrnwy, meet in Memorial Park car park, Marple at 8:00am
- 13 SECOS Ynys-hir, ring for details
- 14 SRSPB Danebridge by car, meet by the fish farm at Wincle at 7:30pm
- 15 MCOS Loggerheads, meet at car park at 10:00am
- 16 NCRSPB Porthmadog, for details contact Dave Hughes on 01925 726242
- 17-20MCOS Dorset Weekend, contact R Evans 01829 752494
- 18-20MRSPB South-West Cumbria Weekend, ring for details
- 19 ADNHS Gaitbarrow and Silverdale, contact Mike Pettipher 0161 865 0118
- 19 NCRSPB Bolton Abbey, for details contact Dave Hughes on 01925 726242
- 20 CWT Delamere Forest birdsong walk led by David Norman, 5.30-10.30am, contact Kay George 01606 882183
- 21 HPRSPB 'WIGAN FLASHES: FROM COAL TO COOTS' by Mark Champion
- 31-3 NCRSPB Anglesey weekend, for details contact Dave Hughes on 01925 726242

JUNE

- 6 NCRSPB Pant, Shropshire, for details contact Dave Hughes on 01925 726242
- 9-16 KOS Week in Scotland – FULLY BOOKED
- 10 SECOS Anglesey, ring for details
- 13 HO 'BIRDQUEST TO THE USSR' by Tim Loseby
- 13 NCRSPB Oxmoor, for details contact Dave Hughes on 01925 726242
- 13 CWT Delamere Forest birdsong walk led by David Norman, 5-7pm, contact Kay George 01606 882183
- 17 HPRSPB Bempton Cliffs, meet in Memorial Park car park, Marple at 8:00am
- 17 MCOS Llangynog (Montgomeryshire), meet at village car park at 9:00am

JULY

- 6 NCRSPB Bat & Moth Night at Oxmoor, for details contact Dave Hughes on 01925 726242
- 8 HPRSPB Glaslyn (Ospreys), Porthmadog, meet in Memorial Park car park, Marple at 8:00am
- 11 HO SOCIAL EVENING
- 11 NCRSPB Kingsley/Dutton, for details contact Dave Hughes on 01925 726242
- 15 SRSPB Middlewood Way Open Day – guided walks, sales goods, nest box building, etc
- 24 ADNHS Annual Barbecue, ring for details

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 and 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. John and Tracy Langley 01244 678781
HO Hale Ornithologists, mtgs St Peter's Assembly Rooms 7.45pm, contact Prog. Sec. Beryl Peel 0161 980 8606
HPRSPB High Peak RSPB Members' Group contact Peter Griffiths 0161 427 5325
KOS Knutsford Ornithological Soc, mtgs Jubilee Hall, Stanley Road 8.00pm, contact Tony Usher 01565 873508
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 email: sheilablamire@cawos.org

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



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IMMINENT DATE FOR YOUR DIARY: Wednesday 21st March 2007

Delamere Forest birdsong walk led by David Norman, 5-7pm - see page 28

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