



BIRD NEWS

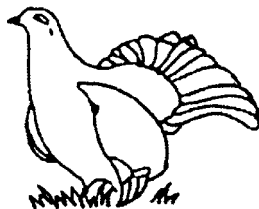
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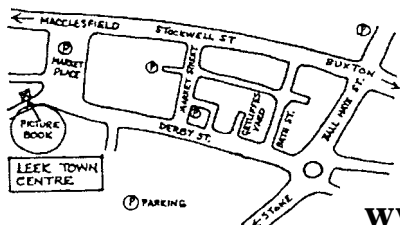
Siberian Chiffchaff: A Way Forward!
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Front cover : Lesser Redpoll by Ray Scally

Other illustrations : Tony Broome, Phil Jones, Tom Lowe
and David Quinn

Guest Editorial

It wasn't too long ago since I was bemoaning the onset of winter and now spring is around the corner. I am always pleased when the winter solstice passes and the local birds react with immediate song. It's their signal that a new breeding season has begun and they stake their claim to territory.

The early breeding specialists are the owls. David Tolliday has written an article on Barn Owls' success in 2007. It is nice to see them doing so well considering that not so many years ago, the county's total population could be counted on one hand. It used to be a real struggle to see them when attempting a year list! Trisha Thompson also pens an interesting note about a Tawny Owl on eggs in January, whilst there was snow on the ground. It may seem strange to us but even in Northern Europe owls often nest with deep snow cover present. Low temperatures are not an issue for owls.

Bob Anderson has written a couple of articles for this edition. I am quite fond of his style and enjoy his reminiscing. He seems to get better with age (meant in a positive sense, Bob). His notes on Mute Swan movements are interesting for a number of reasons. They don't *really* move, do they? Okay, perhaps a few hundred miles at best, but they're not in the champions league when it comes to long distance navigation. When they do actually make the effort, there is then the possibility of being killed by a rival. Hard life at times. On saying that, there is an intriguing record on Surfbirds North America, of an immature Mute Swan photographed in Colorado recently. The note next to the photograph says that it was unbanded and free flying, but as the escape possibility could not be ruled out, it was unlikely that the state's first record could be confirmed. It also took a couple of days to identify it, a fact that may seem bizarre to many British birders. I wonder where it came from and how many Mute Swans are in collections in the USA?

Bob also mentions Shelducks and their relatively recent colonisation of inland sites. They are an attractive bird and would no doubt be a favourite of many countryside birders if a poll were taken. They are a fixture at Frodsham Marsh, of course and on a lazy summer day, perched on the bank on No. 4 tank, overlooking the Score, they are spread out in their hundreds, accompanied by their offspring. More are remaining to moult now instead of winging their way to Heligoland. A flock high over my house a couple of years ago in June were heading east at dusk, and they would continue much of their journey through the night. I've looked since on suitable nights but never been lucky enough to see them again.

On a less palatable note, there would appear to be a rising trend, attributed to human immigration from Eastern Europe, for bird trapping to be making a comeback; mist nets and lime sticks are being used to catch passerines to eat. It seems incredible that our strict wildlife laws can be ignored at will. I would urge birders to keep their eyes peeled.

The world of genetics and its impact on birds is still set to have a massive impact on the way we perceive them at generic and species levels. Recent proposals in Asia could mean that several hundred new species emerge from the splits. I would guess that Europe will not be far behind. There are the familiar discussions going on already, one of which concerns Siberian Chiffchaff. This year, the BBRC wants all records to be submitted to them so that they can try and sort out once and for all what their status is and how much of a problem writing a description is for observers. Hugh Pulsford's note explains it all in detail.

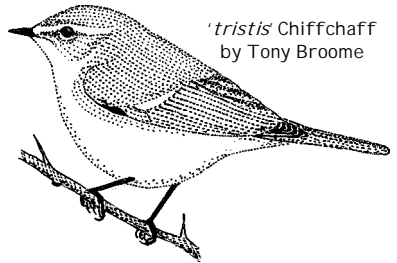
Satellite tracking is becoming more sophisticated. It's a topic that I have a real interest in and would love to become involved. Do you remember the female Osprey that overflowed Cheshire on September 13th last year and continued on to winter in Guinea-Bissau? Well, daily GPS signals show she is still on the same trees on Roxa Island, Guinea-Bissau! She should start her migration back by mid-March; it will be fascinating to watch her progress (www.roydennis.org). Smaller transmitters have meant that Sociable Plovers in Kazakhstan could be fitted with them last summer and have surprised everyone with where they've wintered in Africa. Their journey is documented on www.birdguides.com/webzine. All fascinating stuff. We think that we are so expert when compared to the Victorian ornithologists, don't we? Just give it another few decades and the birders will be looking back at us and commenting on how primitive our techniques were. I can't wait for the binoculars that analyse the molecules of the bird in front of you and confirms your identification. I don't suppose they could also write descriptions....?

Tony Broome

County Rarities

SIBERIAN CHIFFCHAFF: A WAY FORWARD!

Establishing the status in Britain of 'Siberian Chiffchaff' *Phylloscopus (collybita) tristis* has long been problematic. Key to this problem is the correct identification of the form – the difficulties of separating true Siberian *tristis* (largely from east of the Yenisey) and *fulvescens* (on the West Siberian Plain) from *abietinus* (from Scandinavia and western Russia west of the Urals) continue to plague both observers and records committees. In particular, it has become obvious that different observers (and indeed different records committees) hold different perceptions of what constitutes true *tristis* and therefore apply different



threshold criteria for acceptance into the local record. The recording of this form across Britain can therefore best be described as uneven and has never been attempted nationally. As a consequence, our knowledge of the true British status of *tristis* is incomplete and we do not yet know definitively whether *tristis* can best be described as 'scarce but regular' or 'rare but regular'.

Fortunately, three factors have now combined to help us move forward. Firstly, the work of Dean and Svensson has provided welcome clarifications over the identification of this form (*British Birds* 98: 396-410). Secondly, the rise of digital photography has greatly increased the availability of good quality images of birds in the field. Similar improvements in sound recording technology have also made recording birds increasingly feasible. Thirdly, BBRC has now moved to free up its resources to focus on the recording of subtle or rare bird forms not previously assessed. With these three developments now in place, we have the opportunity to make progress with the Siberian Chiffchaff issue.

The traditional view that any Chiffchaff lacking green in the crown and mantle and lacking yellow in the face and underparts can be labelled *tristis* has now been refined. Dean and Svensson have confirmed that true *tristis* is defined additionally by the presence of pale brown or grey-brown hues above and the presence of warm buff in the supercilium, ear coverts, breast sides and flanks. *Fulvescens* is similar in appearance though may be a little paler overall and may show very limited yellow and olive hues. This clarification has in turn highlighted the problem of 'grey and white' Chiffchaffs. Such birds are neither all consistent in appearance nor attributable to a single 'type' but some individuals, at least, match aspects of the traditional image of *tristis*. However, when they also lack the pale grey brown and buff hues now firmly linked with the form, they cannot be assigned to it. The origins of such individuals remain unclear but may include eastern *abietinus* and intergrades between *abietinus* and *tristis*. In summary, the identification of *tristis* rests on the following criteria:-

- Absence of olive in the crown and mantle.
- Absence of yellow away from the underwing.
- Presence of a grey-brown or pale brown hue in the upperparts.
- Presence of warm buff in the supercilium and ear coverts.
- Presence of buff at the breast sides/flanks.
- Very black-looking bill and legs.
- A thin, piping near-monosyllabic Bullfinch-like or Dunnock-like call.
- A song markedly different from western Chiffchaff's.

For further guidance and useful biometric characters see *British Birds* 98: 401-402.

BBRC has designated 2008 as a 'trial year' in order to try and gain a deeper understanding of the British status of *tristis*. BBRC is therefore seeking submissions of all Chiffchaffs in 2008 considered to be *tristis* according to the criteria outlined above. Submissions may take any of the following

forms but observers should try to ensure that as many categories of evidence as possible are secured. It is worth emphasising that any records committee assessing claims of *tristis* will be reliant on descriptions and photographs that accurately capture critical plumage hues. The precise analysis and description of such hues is therefore vital.

Field descriptions will be an important source of information but (particularly if unaccompanied by images or recordings) must be very detailed and focus specifically on a full and precise evaluation of plumage hues. Notes should demonstrate that views were good enough and over a long enough period to assess the bird's true appearance and that full account has been taken of the effect of light conditions on perceived hues. Any transcriptions of calls or songs should be as detailed as possible.

Observers are encouraged if at all possible to take photographs of any putative *tristis*. Furthermore, every effort should be made to obtain photographs that accurately represent the bird's plumage hues. These may best be taken in dull, flat light rather than in bright sunshine. An accompanying note setting out to what extent the photographs accurately portray the bird's appearance would be particularly useful.

Sound recordings of calling and/or singing birds should be obtained wherever possible. Modern mobile phones/MP3 players/iPods can often capture adequate recordings.

It should be emphasised that this exercise is not intended to formally 'accept' or 'reject' claims. This is very much an exploratory, learning process. The priority is to secure as much evidence as possible of the number of true *tristis* that might be reaching Britain.

In 2008 BBRC would like county rarity committees to assess all claims of *tristis* against the above criteria and then submit all those which meet them, or come close to meeting them, to BBRC. They would also like counties to provide summary details of any claims, which are assessed locally as falling clearly outside the criteria. These summary details should include location, date and reason for non-acceptance (for example, plumage not meeting criteria, call or song not meeting criteria or absence of sufficient critical detail).

Both full claims and summary data for local non-acceptances will then be examined outside the 'mainstream' flow of BBRC business by a small team made up of Colin Bradshaw, Alan Dean, John Martin, Andy Stoddart and Grahame Walbridge. Chris Kehoe will contribute to the process on behalf of BOURC. Following the review, conclusions will be presented to BBRC in 2009 with recommendations on how the occurrence of this form might best be documented now and in future.

Hugh Pulsford, County Recorder

EUROPEAN SERIN *Serinus serinus*

Serins are very uncommon migrants in the British Isles but do breed occasionally in southern counties. Cheshire and Wirral records are few and far between with most being seen in spring along the Wirral coast. They are a classic spring overshoot in April and May when southerly winds bring them northwards as far as the Shetland Isles. Although I've seen lots abroad, I still need to connect with one in Cheshire.

They are a small, short-tailed finch, about the size of a Siskin, although not as sleek, more dumpy, and frequenting the ground more. Tail and bill are short and stubby. Males are bright yellow at the front (forehead, supercilium, ear covert surround, throat, breast, wing bars and rump. Quite white below with blackish streaks on the breast sides and down the flanks. The upperparts are olive streaked blackish. Females are duller, with less yellow, duller wing bars, and plain faces with a black beady eye standing out. They look more brown-buff, streaked above, and whitish below, rather nondescript. They have quite a long primary projection, unlike other *Serinus* species such as Canary. They are a lot smaller than these species and Greenfinches. Siskins bear a vague resemblance but aren't really confusable given a good view.

So, are they easy to identify? Well.... Yes....and no. I remember my first very well. I was standing at the Narrow Neck on Spurn Point, flick-netting hirundines with Barry Spence. It would be around the early seventies. It was a beautiful May day with a breeze from the south and migrants were pouring south (as they always do at Spurn, no matter what time of year it is), when Barry suddenly shouted "Serin!". A small passerine was bounding towards us, calling as it came

closer. All I saw was a small finch go over us that showed a bright yellow rump as it disappeared south. The call was very distinctive and it was one that I remembered easily afterwards but had difficulty describing. It was a kind of high jingling "zir-ri rit" with the frequency of someone scratching glass with a sharp blade. Barry had seen them before and was confident of his ID, but I think it was the first 'flyover' submitted to BBRC (yes, it was a BBRC rarity in those days) and they wouldn't accept it on call without a full description.

I was to see the species in Majorca and then Devon a few years later and was happy with Barry's call ID. However, two further incidents were to prove how difficult they can be to catch up with. I can't remember which came first. Some of us went up to Redcar in winter, I think to see an Arctic Redpoll. There was a Serin in a garden not too far away. The ID was okay, but it got rejected because it was winter (it felt like -20°C!) and likely to be an escape. The other 'Serin' was on Tresco in the Scillies. It was in a field of corn and remained hidden a lot of the time. Occasionally, a head would pop out from behind a stem, or a tail would be visible for a few seconds. Anyway, a steady stream of birders came and went, all happy they'd seen Serin (me included) until, I think it was one of the mega-twitchers of the time, Dave Holman (hopefully I remember correctly, if not, I'm sure that someone such as Geoff Lightfoot who usually has an excellent recall of events will put me right) announced that he had misgivings about the ID. There was plenty of discussion that night as Dave's points were banded about. Wasn't the tail too long? The underparts didn't fit.... etc etc. Next day, a crowd assembled at the field and sure enough, when the bird showed itself well enough to be thoroughly examined, it was one of the other *Serinus* species, perhaps a Green Singing Finch (Yellow-fronted Canary). It was a good lesson learnt. Never take for granted that someone else's identification is correct. It is all too easy to forget! There has actually been a possible Gold-fronted Serin recorded at Red Rocks, Sept 25th 1985.

When and where? The Wirral coast, most often at Red Rocks in late April and May. There have been seven records of nine birds, the first reportedly from Red Rocks on April 26th 1976. After a gap of 17 years, a pair was found at Red Rocks on May 23rd, with further records from the site on May 14th 1994 (f), April 11th 1995 and May 7th 2000 (f). There has also been a record of two males at Leasowe on May 11th – 13th 1998 and a male over Hilbre on April 28th 2006. Quite a rarity, unless you station yourself around the SW corner of the Wirral coast for six weeks in spring.

An inland bird would be an excellent find!

Tony Broome

Send or preferably email rarity descriptions to:

**Jane Turner, Rarities Secretary, Quaintways, Marine Road, Hoylake,
Wirral, CH47 2AS Tel: 0151 632 3308 Email: rarities@cawos.org**

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Notes & Letters

Bird News is always keen to hear from CAWOS members. Please send us any notes of unusual avian behaviour or amusing anecdotes that you think your fellow birders will be interested in. Also, we are always interested in your views on any of our articles or on the newsletter itself. Ed.

TONY BROOME, RON HARRISON, POCAHONTAS & ME

It's not surprising that the death of Ron Harrison should lead to reflections on one's own memories of him. I really enjoyed reading Tony Broome's 'Early days at Rostherne Mere' in the November issue of *Bird News*. The previous 74 issues of *Bird News* have provided much excellent reading but, to my mind, little to better Tony's reminiscences.

OK – I have to admit I might be a bit biased by the subject matter. Gill and I fell in love with Rostherne around the time we first met Ron and it was really interesting to read what Tony had to say about his early birding experiences there and his first encounters with Ron.

Our first visit to Rostherne was not until 1978 and some things had changed since Tony's earliest visit. An extension to the Observatory meant that it had doubled in size but even so you had to be there pretty early on a Sunday morning to get a seat. I don't recall a bull ever being in the Observatory field or I'm sure we would have followed Tony's route across the churchyard to avoid it. It's funny the kind of things which emerge from one's memory when the right buttons are pressed. Everything Tony wrote about Rostherne rang true to my own recollection but the one thing which really struck a chord was Tony's mention of the smell of the place. There really was a distinctive aroma about the Observatory which met you as soon as you walked through the door. Something to do with the damp I'm sure, but there were other scents mixed in there too. Strangely, I've not noticed that smell on recent visits but perhaps that's another sense that's declining with age!

On occasion we'd use the Observatory as a last place of refuge on one of those rare summer afternoons when it was simply far too hot to be outside. Its position meant that it was extremely well shaded from the sun. However, that very position, and its dampness, meant that for much of the winter months it was a perishingly cold place to spend much time in. During the very cold winters of the late 1970s and early 1980s the mere, the deepest in Cheshire, froze with some regularity – and so did the feet of those hardy souls watching from the Observatory. How we nagged successive wardens to get electricity put in. We had visions of some sort of bar heater running along the floor under the windows – perfect for warming our feet. Electricity was eventually installed but only to provide lighting and, especially, heating to stop the water and toilet systems freezing up.

For me Tony's reflections work on more than one level. Yes, they're a straightforward run through of his memories but behind that they also have something to say about the coming together of different generations of birders and, in particular, how Ron dealt with encountering young and/or inexperienced birders of any age. This comes across in Tony's telling of how he discovered a drake Smew on the mere and Ron, at that time responsible for writing the *Bird Report* for the Reserve, "asking (about) it in his casual way". Having, over the years, been questioned by Ron in a similar way on a number of occasions I think I know exactly what Tony meant. Ron, as writer of the *Rostherne Report* and later as County Recorder, felt responsible for asking observers about their sightings. I always felt that he did this in the right manner and that, quite often, I'd learned something by the end of our conversation. I get the impression from Tony's recollections that he too feels that he benefited from this aspect of his relationship with Ron.

Perhaps this has helped Tony in the various 'official' roles he has undertaken since the formation of CAWOS in 1988. Since the publication of the November 2007 *Bird News* Tony has stood down as a member of CAWOS Council due to pressures of work making it impossible to attend Council meetings as he would have liked.

Tony was among a small group of compilers of the then *Cheshire Bird Report* who approached the Cheshire Ornithological Association with a view to setting up what became the first countywide ornithological society in Cheshire and Wirral - CAWOS. Ever since that day back in 1988 Tony

had an 'official' role in CAWOS. I don't intend to list all these roles, just to say that he was an active County Recorder for many years and there can be few, if any, issues of *Bird News* which haven't benefited from a written and/or artistic contribution from him. He and I have not always agreed - but that's life. In the midst of our very occasional disagreements it was impossible to lose sight of the fact that he cares passionately about birds in general, in Cheshire and Wirral and CAWOS in particular, and I'm sure always will.

Thanks Tony for all you've done for CAWOS and for the much smaller matter of re-awakening some of my memories too!

Steve Barber, 2 Oak Lane, Marton, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK11 9HE

MINISTRY FOR BIRDS

The trend over recent years for more and more legislation, often emanating from the EEC, which impinges on so many aspects of our lives is often noted in the media. Few aspects of human behaviour, deemed to vary from some notional 'ideal', are free from new rules.

Having fed the birds in our garden for more years than we care to remember we have also noted significant changes in their behaviour of late. We wonder if this is not unrelated to similar changes in humans, which those in power are attempting to correct. In this respect we find it somewhat surprising that as yet there has been no suggestion for the appointment of a Minister for Birds.

Three such observed avian behavioural changes, namely in their AGGRESSION, OBESITY and IDLENESS, at least have some correlation with perceived human 'failings'. We cannot help but worry that the worst of our role models haven't had a deleterious effect upon our local birds.

Taking AGGRESSION, we see local mobs of what are emotively described as 'Feral Youths' aimlessly wandering about giving verbal, and occasional mild physical abuse, to any unsuspecting residents who happen to be in their way. We wonder if this has not been picked up by a growing number of Siskins visiting our feeders. Descending in ever increasing numbers, twittering loudly, they displace all other species including those older 'Teddy Boy' Greenfinches. No politeness here, just mass intimidation. Shocking to watch!! Something should be done about it.

Then there is OBESITY, which of course cannot be divorced from IDLENESS. We have observed growing numbers of all species actually just sitting around on the top of our shelter hedge smugly looking at full feeders. This even at times in the colder weather when they try to cover up their bloated condition by fluffing out their feathers. Really it is a disgrace that we are treated to such behaviour when for so long we have tried to educate them properly. 'Things' were never like this years ago.

Do we have any practical suggestions for a first course of action by any such newly appointed Minister? Well yes we do. Looking ourselves at any other reasons for such a dreadful state of affairs, we cannot help but notice that one other probable cause, attributable to humans, has been the proliferation of nearby Garden Feeders. Looking from our back-bedroom window we can now count no less than 21 feeders hanging within our adjacent neighbours' gardens and our own. (Needless to say ours are much in the minority.) We are therefore going to petition for the appointment of such a Ministry requesting the first new piece of legislation be that bird feeders are only allowed in the gardens of houses with even numbers. In one fell swoop we think much of the retrograde behaviour in our local birds would quickly be resolved.

(Name and address supplied to Editor but asked to be withheld in case of personal recriminations from all bird lovers living in odd-numbered houses.)

STOAT ATTACKING A WATER RAIL

An unusual observation made in Tatton Park, January 30th 2008:

I was watching a Water Rail on a channel that runs from Melchett Mere to the outflow stream from Tatton Mere. It was standing on a small, broken-off branch in the water, constantly turning its head from side to side, presumably looking out for food. Suddenly a stoat leapt towards it from the side of the channel. Simultaneously, the Water Rail jumped into cover on the other side and the stoat followed it. I didn't see either again but I suspect the Water Rail escaped as I heard no noise that would have suggested it had been caught. A near thing though.

Bob Groom

REFLECTIONS ON *BIRD NOTES FROM 1924 WITH A REFERENCE TO THE RAILWAYS IN CHESHIRE*

Having previously had a brief but tantalising peep at Mr (or Mrs) Lowe's annotated copy of Witherby's *Check-list of British Birds* published in 1924 I was interested to read Bob Anderson's review of, and musings on, the annotations.

One of the first things which struck me was that Lowe either had a very good memory or, more likely, his annotations (or some of them at least) were based on notes written at the time of the sightings which he'd retained. This feeling is based mainly on the mention of the single dated record of Cuckoo calling all day at Delamere on May 7th 1919.

I was intrigued by the Ruff at Ashley and the note that T A Coward "thought it could only belong to this species" followed by a date - 2nd September 1922. Is this the date of the sighting or of Coward's comment – perhaps in a letter to Lowe? I decided to look for the record in the *County Bird Reports* for the period.

You may not all be familiar with the recording system in Cheshire during the period 1917-1924 for which Lowe was making annotations. Bird records were summarised by Coward and published, usually in instalments, by the Lancashire & Cheshire Fauna Committee (L&CFC). These take the form of *Notes on the Vertebrate Fauna of Cheshire and South Lancashire – for the year 1917*, *Report on Vertebrates for 1922-23* and *Reports on Vertebrates for 1924*. I have been unable to find Reports of an annual or biannual nature for other years in this period although they may exist. However, also within this period, the L&CFC published what Coward described as his review of the distribution of the birds of Cheshire, making additions to his own *Vertebrate Fauna of Cheshire* (1910), based on information gleaned from literature not dealt with therein and notes and records which supplement what had already appeared in the *Vertebrate Fauna*. These additions include records up to 1921.

Unfortunately, there is no mention of the Ruff record in the Report for 1922-23. I searched through all the Reports for the period and could find no record credited to Lowe. Standard practice in these Reports appears to have been to publish the name of the observer behind each record rather than to list contributors all in one place. This means that we are unable to tell with certainty whether Lowe sent records for the Report. It may be the case that he did but that Coward didn't think they were of sufficient interest to publish. Frustratingly, I found that I could add nothing of a positive nature to what we know of Lowe.

I did though pick up on Bob's detailing the annotations relating to Golden Plover which, Lowe wrote, "is a winter visitor to the plains in flocks of 50-200 (invariably resort to a definite district of two or three fields which do not vary from year to year, e.g. at Ashley near CLC* and fields near Watling Street just above the Bollin Valley near Rostherne)". From personal knowledge I am aware that this habit carried on long into the 20th century. One of my first sightings of Golden Plover was of a flock of several dozen in fields near the Ashley crossroads on 17th March 1979 and watchers in the Rostherne Observatory frequently had flocks rise from fields along Lowe's 'Watling Street' (the Chester Road, aka A556) certainly into the 1980s. But are the flocks still using the same fields today? Well, the 2006 *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report* mentions a flock of 200 in flight at Rostherne on January 29th, similar to the behaviour we used to see in the 1970s and 1980s, while *Rostherne Reserve Reports* for other years in the interim period mention other flocks behaving similarly – all records suggestive that flocks still use these fields but not conclusive. However, the *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report* for 2005 has a flock of 400 at Ashley on February 17th – much more conclusive I think.

Lowe's annotations may raise a number of questions but they also enable us to say that, despite worrying reductions in the size of wintering flocks, in Ashley at least, Golden Plover can still be found in fields where Lowe had known them the best part of 90 years earlier.

Steve Barber, 2 Oak Lane, Marton, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK11 9HE

*Cheshire Lines Company? There's a railway line through Ashley which has its own station.

Bob Anderson's article was sent to the person who loaned us the book - this is his response:

"What a wonderful magazine *Bird News* is. I liked the format, and stuffed full of information, a really good read. Please congratulate Bob for me, I thought the article first class. I always had the feeling that Mr Lowe might have been a school teacher, or perhaps a soldier invalided out of the Great War."

MEMORIES OF RON HARRISON

I first met Ron Harrison at Rostherne in the 1980s when I was a novice birder, and I learnt a great deal from him. I met him again by chance on a freezing winter day at Sandbach Flashes, and he remarked that he'd been watching a Water Rail at Foden's Flash. I replied that I'd never seen one, and was immediately ordered into Ron's old blue Metro and driven from Elton Hall Flash across to Foden's.

"Get out", said Ron firmly, "and stand there," indicating a scrubby damp patch of undergrowth, and then he drove off. I stood as instructed in freezing conditions, and was eventually rewarded with stunning views of my first Water Rail. Alas Ron, who clearly felt that his mission was accomplished, never reappeared, and I had to trudge all the way back to my car on foot.

Paul Freedman, Voluntary Warden, Rostherne Mere

GARDEN BIRD DISEASES – AN UPDATE

In *Bird News 75* I wrote an article about the importance of 'Feeding birds this winter', in which I mentioned the reoccurrence of *trichomoniasis* in our garden last October, affecting Greenfinches mainly, but also Goldfinches and Chaffinches. Well, hoping not to tempt fate, it appears that this disease has, at least for the moment, disappeared from the large number of finches in the garden. The recent cold spell may have helped to kill off this protozoal parasite, which is vulnerable to desiccation and cannot survive for long periods outside the host.

However, now the main problem appears to be the unsightly warty growths found on a large number of the 40 or so Chaffinches currently visiting our garden. These growths are caused by *Fringilla papillomavirus* and may vary in size from small nodules to larger warts that engulf the whole leg. The warts develop slowly over a long period and affected individuals may otherwise appear quite healthy. Some individuals though may become lame or lose affected digits – there was one particular Chaffinch I observed feeding on the lawn which 'sat down' to feed and which fluttered from one place to another, rather than the usual hopping. This Chaffinch had, unfortunately, lost its legs, presumably due to this disease. The amount of effort to take off and fly (which it managed) must have been enormous.

Fringilla papillomavirus is said to usually only affect Chaffinches and the closely related Brambling, so I was rather perturbed to see a female Bullfinch with apparently early signs of these warty growths. I did a search on the web to try and find out more, and on the BTO website I found a possible, or rather likely, alternative cause.

"A number of different agents may cause swellings on the legs and feet of wild birds. Some of these are caused by mites of the genus *Knemidocoptes* and result in scaly legs. The 'scales' themselves are dry encrustations made up of material produced by the bird in response to the irritation caused by the mites, together with skin debris thrown up by the mites as they burrow into the tissues. As well as forming on the legs, the 'scales' may also form around the beak. These mites are members of a wider family of mites that cause mange in domestic animals and scabies in humans."

Of course, wild birds are susceptible to a range of different diseases, some of which are more commonly reported than others. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some bird species may be more susceptible to disease than others. Certainly, Greenfinches, Chaffinches, Siskins, House Sparrows and Collared Doves appear to be the most commonly reported victims of diseases. This may, in part, reflect the gregarious nature of these birds and their tendency to feed in flocks, so making routine hygiene at feeding stations so important. So far (again hoping not to tempt fate), I have not noticed any sign of scales or growths on the legs of the 20+ Greenfinches feeding with the Chaffinches, nor the other four Bullfinches (three males and two females in total), nor in the Siskins, Goldfinches, House and Tree Sparrows currently gracing our garden.

To see what the warty growths caused by *Fringilla papillomavirus* look like, please visit my website: www.sheilablamire.co.uk – go to the Chaffinch gallery under 'British Birds' and the image is the last photo in the gallery. I would appreciate any comments on my identification of the scaly growths on the female Bullfinch – this image is the last photo in the Bullfinch gallery.

Thank you in anticipation!

Sheila Blamire, Woodruff Cottage, Clamhunger Lane, Mere, WA16 6QG
Tel: 01565 830168 Email: sheilablamire@cawos.org

EARLY TAWNY OWL IN NORTH STYAL 2007

I was interested to read David Tolliday's article about Barn Owl breeding being one or two months early this year. A similar situation occurred on my 'Styal North' tetrad when I was surveying for the CAWOS *Breeding and Wintering Bird Atlas*.

On 27th January this year, I discovered what seemed to be Tawny Owl feathers in a tree hole and thought that it could not be a sitting Tawny Owl that early. However, upon investigation, it turned out to be a Tawny sitting on three eggs. My friend, Neville Powell, who is a licensed BTO ringer, estimated that the eggs were probably a week old so we should return in about three weeks to see if there were any youngsters to ring. On 28th February, I returned to find one Tawny Owl chick climbing over the adult which was sitting. I thought that there was a second underneath, but, when we went to ring them on 10th March there was just one well-grown owlet – it looked very well fed. The adults were nowhere to be seen, so we ringed it and put it back in the nest hole. On March 17th it had grown considerably and was getting its brown facial disc. On March 24th it had fledged successfully, I assume.

Tawny Owls are early breeders, but to be laying eggs around 20th January, when there was still snow on the ground, must be about one month earlier than usual. It was also interesting to note that only one owlet survived from three eggs, as two or three is the norm. This may be due to the severe weather and the adults could only catch enough food for one, the siblings maybe supplementing the diet. I would be interested to know if this was a one-off, or if anyone else has had early breeding Tawny Owls.

Trisha Thompson

This note first appeared in *The Heron autumn 2007* (newsletter of the RSPB Macclesfield Local Group). Ed.

MYSTERY ACROCEPHALUS WARBLER

The report on the Frodsham *Acrocephalus* warbler in *Bird News* No 74 brought back memories of a mystery bird at Bosley Reservoir in May 2007. On 13th May I was walking along the western side of the reservoir when I heard a brief snatch of song lasting just a few seconds, coming from the hawthorn hedge. The song was unfamiliar to me so I waited until it sang again, and managed to get a brief, partly obscured view of the bird which I thought had an *Acro* look, but with such a poor view it was inconclusive to say the least.

The bird disappeared and went silent again, and after about 40 minutes I decided it must have flown. A couple more visits during the week failed to provide anything more until on the following Saturday (19th May), when I heard a brief snatch of song again. Two more brief song bursts from different locations in the hedge failed to provide a view of the bird. My thoughts were leaning towards Marsh Warbler, but my experience of Marsh Warbler in song goes back many years, and even Reed Warbler is a rarity at Bosley.

Although quite a varied song, I felt that it had some higher, musical notes, interspersed with other songs including brief 'buzzing' sounds, but the song bursts were so brief that I was unable to even get a song description down. After a wait of about an hour I moved on, and subsequent visits failed to provide any further clues. In my mind I felt that I just possibly may have had a Marsh Warbler, but the idea seemed so unlikely as to be ridiculous. The fact that the description of the Frodsham bird seemed to tally in many respects perhaps could indicate that maybe it wasn't so ridiculous at all! Isn't birdwatching fascinating?

Alan Kimber

This note was omitted from the last issue of *Bird News* – apologies. Ed.

MOORE NATURE RESERVE

This 200-acre site near Warrington, always a great place to go birdwatching, has been a magnet for both rare gulls and Bitterns this winter. However, in addition to these species, we would ask visitors to regularly report *all their sightings*, via the website preferably. Everybody reports sightings of Bitterns, but nobody reports our more common species. Please help to address this. Thank you in anticipation!

Paul Cassidy, Moore Nature Reserve Tel: 01925 444689

Email: Paul.Cassidy@wrg.co.uk Website: www.wrg.co.uk/moorenaturereserve

TREE SPARROWS 'UNUSUAL' NEST SITE

Whilst I was sitting in my hide in the garden (mid-Feb) trying to photograph Siskin, Lesser Redpoll and Bullfinch, my attention was diverted to the activities of one of our Tree Sparrows. It was investigating the artificial House Martin nests under the eaves (which haven't been used for many years, unfortunately). The sparrow was interested in one particular nest and visited it several times. It would often stay in the nest for long periods - the only sign that anything was going on was when the odd feather would drift down on the breeze. Spring cleaning a potential nest site, hopefully?

The next day I was back in my hide, and after a while I could hear a very loud tapping noise coming from the same artificial HM nest - it was the Tree Sparrow continuing with his/her (?) spring cleaning. I wasn't too sure what was going on though, because all I could see was the sparrow's tail sticking out of the entrance to the box, but whatever it was it required a lot of effort, with the tail quivering in time with the tapping. Occasionally, he/she would check out the box next door, but obviously decided that would need more attention than the current one.

Although the boxes haven't been used by House Martins for a few years, various species have used them for roosting in over winter - particularly Blue Tits and Wrens. Perhaps the resultant 'deposits' were caked hard on the inside. I hope the Tree Sparrows persist - it would be good to have them back in the garden. So fingers crossed.....

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

Stop press news: the Tree Sparrows have been evicted - by House Sparrows! Mind you, House Sparrows are actually the rarer species in our garden, so I suppose I shouldn't be too put out by this turn of events. It's actually quite amusing because every now and again the female House Sparrow breaks off from feeding (on bird seed scattered on the lawn) to fly up to and dive into the HM nest only to find the male in it - a noisy argument then follows inside the nest and the male is forcibly ejected! However, I've never seen the male carry out any debris, only the female (the Tree Sparrows obviously hadn't finished the spring clean), so perhaps she thinks he's more of a hindrance, rather than a help!



Sites to Watch

LEASOWE LIGHTHOUSE, NORTH WIRRAL

As spring has now arrived I thought it an appropriate time to write a site guide for one of Wirral's premiere birding spots and one which I have been covering for the last 20 years. My interest with this area began in the mid-eighties when, as a teenager, I spent the last week of my summer holidays at Spurn Bird Observatory, delighting in scarcities such as Wryneck, Red-backed Shrike and Barred Warblers. For me Spurn had two distinct features: a lighthouse and a broad spectrum of habitat types. In my naivety I drew certain comparisons with Leasowe Lighthouse and its associated habitats and the seed was sown for the next 20 years. Unfortunately, this is where the similarities end. As we all know, Spurn is really rather good for birds! Ever the optimist I continue to this day and, in fairness, have seen some great birds in this area over the years and I hope I can encourage many of you to enjoy the birding here for yourselves.

The area I describe extends from the long since decommissioned Leasowe Lighthouse in the east through to Dove Point, Meols in the west and south to the brick pits and sewage farm. The area has several names including Moreton Common, Meols Common and even the North Wirral Coastal Park, depending with whom one speaks. I simply call it Leasowe Lighthouse.

The lighthouse car park can be reached by exiting Junction 2 of the M53 taking the Moreton spur and head into Moreton on the A551. At the major roundabout go straight over and continue on the A551. Proceed over the railway bridge, past Burton's Foods (formerly Cadbury) on your right. As this road takes a sharp right turn, take a sharp left towards the lighthouse and the car park is located just beyond it. It should be pointed out that at this junction there is a convenient café that serves a good cup of tea, especially welcome on a cold October morning.

This is a fairly large geographical area within which there are many agricultural fields, hedges and copses all worthy of attention. Firstly, the row of sycamores and silver poplars that runs north-west to south-east down the side of Stone Cottage, just east of the lighthouse, is excellent. As well as providing cover for the usual summer migrants, such as Grasshopper Warbler and Pied Flycatcher, there has been singing Serin in the garden of Stone Cottage and Yellow-browed Warbler in the sycamores. The car park is a favourite for Stonechat and other common migrants during a spring fall.

Lingham Lane itself is most definitely another favourite and runs south from the car park; however, birding here can be a little frustrating or maybe challenging due to the numerous high privet hedges into which birds seem to vanish, and the amount of private land in the area. Having said all that, the horse paddock opposite the car park (usually full of daisies in April) is excellent for wagtails, pipits, buntings, finches, and Ring Ouzel is always a prize find.

Further down the lane there is a bridge that crosses the Birket. Here it is good for Spotted Flycatcher, Grey Wagtail and Kingfisher, with effort. Through Lingham Farm and you will find the old brick pit now virtually completely filled, but it does look good for Black Redstart. The whole length of the lane is exciting as a bird flits from one side to the other giving perhaps only the most tantalising of views until you eventually secure the view to nail its identity. And what was the bird? Well, a chance of anything as past records have proven, with Savi's, Yellow-browed, Pallas's, Barred and Subalpine Warblers all having graced this narrow lane.

Back to the northerly entrance of the lane and there is a public footpath that runs between the inland fields on the left and coastal fields on the right. This path runs east to west (depending on your start point) and continues all the way through to Meols. Once again these fields are a magnet for Pied, White and Yellow Wagtails and Wheatears in the spring, especially when flooded. Short-eared Owls may be seen in the winter and again many waders use these fields in which to roost over high tide. The area can be watched throughout the day and will hold birds late on for some after work birding. Like most public places by the seaside the area becomes a magnet for day trippers so an earlier start avoids those, but you are rarely without dog walkers. High tide is also a good time to birdwatch here as it has the effect of forcing migrants down and appears to define the coastline that much more. Like many places a south-easterly wind will produce the best results for migrants with a little drizzle and cloud cover all serving to produce ideal fall conditions.

Of the more unusual species in these fields the following have occurred: Short-toed Lark, Lapland Bunting, Little Bunting, Stone Curlew, Red-throated Pipit, Tawny Pipit and Richard's Pipit, the latter relatively frequently. Great Grey Shrike has also been recorded near Seafeld Cottage and latterly Stone Cottage. Further west towards Meols, near the Burbo Caravan Park, we get to the area where the famous Desert Warbler resided for a month in 1979. Both Arctic Warbler and Red-breasted Flycatcher have also been ringed in the Meols area. The sewage farm is not the old-fashioned type and the majority of it is enclosed. Those parts of the plant that are exposed attract little more than a few scavenging gulls.

Seawatching from this stretch of coast is exposed and unadvisable. However, on a nice day, the bench midway along the sea defence makes an ideal place to sit and scan for divers and sea ducks during the winter, and terns and skuas during summer and autumn. It is worth looking through the gull roost that gathers on the beach at this site, as a Mediterranean Gull, whilst never guaranteed, is certainly a good bet and in line with most places now, becoming commoner. By the end of 2006 the stellar cast looked pretty good for a local patch with the highlights being Hoopoe, Great Grey Shrike, Long-eared Owl, Blue-headed Wagtail, Alpine Swift, Honey Buzzard and Yellow-browed Warbler and I can only hope 2007 will be as memorable and, you never know, may even give Spurn a run for its money!

Allan Conlin

This article first appeared in *Birding North West* Vol 4 No 3 and is reproduced with their kind permission. Ed.

Postscript: 2007 did indeed turn out to be pretty special, with better than usual numbers of Ring Ouzels and Wheatears as well as records of Hobby, Red Kite and Montagu's Harrier recorded in the spring. Bird of the year must, of course, go to the Radde's Warbler found at the south end of Lingham Lane. A Cheshire and Wirral first, this fantastic Siberian *Phylloscopus* remained all day on 16th October and delighted many local and regional birders before moving on during the clear night. What will 2008 hold in store?

Society News

WOOLSTON EYES CONSERVATION GROUP NEWSLETTER 2007

Introduction

2007 has been a year with much activity on the Eyes. The two major developments which will have been apparent to permit holders are the planting of the north meadow area on No.3 bed with a winter seed crop and the construction of a new tower hide in the north-east corner of the same bed. We have continued to monitor the progress of work on No.1 bed and further implement the Management Plan with our contractor. Many visiting groups came to the Reserve during the year and television coverage resulted in much interest in the Eyes and a significant increase in the number of permit holders.



Hides

In October a new tower hide was constructed in the north-east corner of No.3 bed. This will allow viewing of pools which cannot be seen from any of the other hides. We know that Black-necked Grebes almost certainly breed there and also take their broods into this sheltered area from other parts of the bed. Until now we have had little knowledge of what was happening there, but the new hide will hopefully change all that. Unfortunately, because the area is sensitive to disturbance and access to the hide can only be made through a gate on the bund by Woolston Weir with a padlock which the Ship Canal Company has only given a few WECG Wardens permission to use, permit holders will not, at this stage, be allowed to use this hide. This situation will, however, be kept under review.

On a more positive note, the old tower hide in the centre of No.3 bed (the one with a 'No Access' sign near it), will shortly have a staircase fitted to it - similar to the one on the Frank Linley hide - replacing the vertical ladder. This will then be fully open and available for permit holders to use; it should also be a lot safer. We have obtained quotes from a contractor to replace the centre, camouflaged hide with a large, two-tier construction. This will cost a great deal of money, for which we will need to seek grant aid. We will keep you informed of our progress.

Filming by the BBC

Many of you will have seen 'Nature's Calendar' which was screened in February. Chris Packham's enthusiasm for the Eyes came through on the programme and I know that he has plans to visit the site again in a private capacity, if time allows.

Sadly, the BBC recently informed us that the extensive footage of the Black-necked Grebes taken for the series 'Nature in Britain', which is currently being shown, will not be used. It seems that this was an editorial decision based on the large amount of quality material that had been filmed across the country. The BBC Natural History Unit has, however, kindly sent us a tape of what was filmed for the WECG archive.

Wild Bird Seed Crops

One of the major problems facing species of conservation concern such as Linnets and Reed Buntings is a lack of food during the crucial winter months. To try and help at the Eyes an area adjacent to the north meadow on No.3 bed was prepared and sown with seed in late spring. This consisted mainly of sunflower, linseed and quinoa. As many of you will have seen, the area was soon covered by a yellow mass of sunflower heads and other, less obvious, plants. These have now set seed and as we hoped the birds have moved in. As I write this in early November already flocks of up to 100 Greenfinches, 20 Reed Buntings and 40 Chaffinches have been attracted to the seed, which is very encouraging. A few Bramblings have also been seen. A second area has been prepared nearby and this will be rotavated and seeded next year. Clearly another area of interest on your visit to No.3 bed.

Predator Control

Mink have been present on the Eyes for many years and although we have no hard evidence to indicate that they predate significant numbers of waterfowl there have been regular observations of them taking both young and adult Black-headed Gulls and wildfowl, particularly in the breeding season. A major concern is the possible impact on the Black-necked Grebe colony. As a result of increased sightings of mink on the river and on No.3 bed the Group decided to introduce a programme of trapping and this commenced in March 2007. Since then 15 mink have been caught, all on the river below No. 3 bed. This is an excellent total given the low level of trapping that has taken place. Clearly, as mink move along river systems for territories and mates it is unrealistic to believe that they can be completely eradicated at the Eyes. Hopefully, however, numbers can be reduced, and the trapping programme is planned to continue in 2008.

Highlights in 2007

The Cetti's Warbler present on No.1 bed in late 2006 remained well into 2007 and it was thought that a second male could also have been present. Another male was heard calling on No.3 bed on many dates in October and was subsequently ringed. Bearded Tits have been heard intermittently and with several present in early spring special nest boxes were donated to WECG by Leighton Moss RSPB Reserve. These were duly put in position in phragmites beds on No.3 bed and with at least one bird calling nearby as a box was installed hopes were high. Unfortunately, no further reports were received during the breeding season, but at least six were heard calling on one date in October. These are encouraging signs that maybe breeding may take place in the near future. A Yellow-browed Warbler flew into a ringer's net on No.1 bed, also in October.

The appalling weather in June and July led to one of the worst breeding seasons in many years for wildfowl, with only Mallard doing reasonably well before the summer deluges. The Black-necked Grebes, however, bred surprisingly well given the conditions, although three broods were lost on the very wet 25th June. In all, about 14 or 15 pairs bred and many young were fledged. In contrast, the Great Crested Grebes reared no young on No.3 bed, and Little Grebes fared little better.

Birds of prey did not disappoint, with Buzzard proved breeding for the first time, though the nest failed. At least four, possibly five, pairs of Sparrowhawks successfully raised young, while Peregrines continue to be seen regularly on, or near, the Thelwall Viaduct, raising hopes of possible future breeding. Marsh Harriers were seen as usual on passage, and there were regular reports of Hobbies, notably in the autumn when they are attracted to the Swallow roosts on Nos.1 and 3 beds. On one occasion two flew into a ringer's net only to bounce straight back out! Excitingly, Barn Owls were reported on No.1 bed, probably from a farm not too far away where successful breeding is known to have taken place.

Two adult Mediterranean Gulls were seen intermittently amongst the breeding Black-headed Gulls, but they failed to stay and there was a good passage of Little Gulls in the spring. The annual Warbler Census was carried out in indifferent weather and with fewer fieldworkers than necessary to cover this large site. As a result the numbers of singing males recorded could well have been an underestimate. The most numerous species was Reed Warbler (126), followed closely by Whitethroat (117) and Willow Warbler (77). Sedge Warblers continue their alarming decline at the Eyes, with only 49 singing males found compared to 77 in 2006 and the peak of 256 in 1999. The importance of the Eyes for passage warblers (particularly in the autumn) is as great as ever and on one morning recently over 90 Blackcaps were caught by the ringers in the middle of No.3 bed, including 60 that were 'new', i.e. had not previously been ringed.

Access and Permits

A public footpath runs from the end of Weir Lane, along the west side of No.2 bed and the north side of the canal to Thelwall Lane. Access to other parts of the Reserve is strictly limited to permit holders. A permit entitles the holder to visit the Eyes on any number of occasions during the year and to make use of the several hides. Please contact **Brian Ankers, 9 Lynton Gardens, Appleton, Warrington, WA4 5ED** for further information, or visit www.woolstoneeyes.co.uk to print an application form.

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

Society Profile

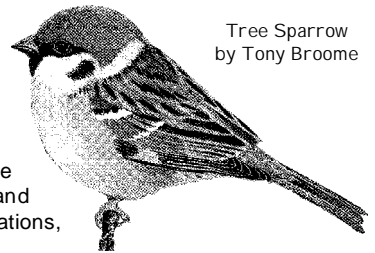
This new series of articles offers affiliated organisations an opportunity to describe who they are and what they do. We hope this will strengthen existing links between CAWOS and other societies, provide a platform for them to publicise their activities, and perhaps encourage CAWOS members to consider joining their local groups. If you would like to see your group or society featured here, send in all relevant information, preferably by email, to **Bob Anderson, 102 Crewe Road, Nantwich, Cheshire, CW5 6JD Email: robandjj@dircon.co.uk**

NANTWICH NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

The Society was founded in 1978 to promote the study of natural history. It has met continuously since that date with monthly indoor meetings held from October-April. The aim of these is to promote a friendly atmosphere and be of interest to both novice and expert in all branches of natural history; light refreshments are available at their conclusion. Monthly field meetings, normally May-September, are also held. Species observed are recorded and guidance with identification given.

The Society collates records for four 10km Ordnance Survey squares, SJ54, 55, 64 and 65, with Nantwich near their centre. Records in general natural history are kept with a particular emphasis on flowers, birds, macromoths, butterflies, dragonflies and recently, fungi. An *Annual Report* is published which includes all records, officers' reports and any articles received from the membership. This has undergone continuous development from the original slim effort to the current 70 A4 pages with numerous colour photographs, provided by members and recorders. It is sold at a price that covers the production costs, the latest issue being £4. Several copies are distributed free to landowners who have granted access to their property and to relevant recording groups.

The Society has installed, and maintains, two observation hides. The Stuart Gibson Memorial Hide at Hurlleston Reservoir was erected in memory of Stuart, a founding member and popular local birder, who was tragically killed in a road traffic accident near the site, after visiting the reservoir. [Just before his death in November 1986 Stuart had agreed to take up the position of County Recorder for the old Cheshire Ornithological Association; sadly, he did not live to undertake the work - Ed] A second hide was built at Bar Mere in the 1990s. The Society was also involved in the design of two further hides at Cholmondeley Castle (there is a good relationship with the estate, and the Marchioness of Cholmondeley is the Society's patron) and maintains the bird feeders here and at its own hides. CAWOS has generously provided financial help with the feeders at Hurlleston in an effort to maintain the population of local Tree Sparrows. Members have access to all of these hides and logbooks for sightings are provided. Any records, or observations, are all included in the Annual Report.



Tree Sparrow
by Tony Broome

Members and officers contribute to regional and national surveys including the Cheshire breeding and wintering bird survey, BTO surveys, monthly wildfowl counts and county invertebrate surveys.

In 1997 Society stalwart and former Secretary, Mike Holmes wrote and published *Rare and Scarce Birds in the Nantwich Area, 1850-1996*, a comprehensive review of the records during this period. Many members contributed records and information for this. In 2006 current Secretary, Dr. Paul Griffiths, compiled a review of *The Macromoths of the Nantwich Area*, which covers all macromoth records in the Society's area between 1980 and 2005. Virtually all the records included were the result of the efforts of members, several of whom run moth traps. Hopefully, both these texts will be updated in the future and similar publications for other groups will be produced.

Indoor meetings are currently held at the RSPCA, Stapeley Grange, Nantwich; these commence at 7.30pm. Field meetings commence at 6.30pm and usually visit local sites. All meetings, indoor and field, take place on the third Thursday of the month. Current membership is approximately 40, with subscriptions set at £15 for family and £10 for individuals.

Dr Paul Griffiths, Secretary, 'Vailima', Heatley Lane, Broomhall, Nantwich, Cheshire, CW5 8BA Tel: 01270 722979

CHESHIRE SWAN STUDY GROUP

The Group was started in August 1988 by Dennis Elphick as only fifteen breeding pairs of Mute Swans *Cygnus olor* had been found in the whole of the county of Cheshire. The problem of low numbers of swans was put down mainly to the use of lead in fishing. A subsequent ban on the use of lead, and the good-natured change in habits by fishermen, has enabled the swan population to recover to good levels in all areas. This increase led the Group to study the breeding success, record moulting and wintering flocks, and follow the movement of swans in Cheshire and nearby areas.

David Cookson took over leadership of the Group in 1992, and since then the number of breeding pairs in Cheshire has increased to the level that has made it impossible for the Group to monitor and ring all the cygnets. Since 1999 they have concentrated on ringing cygnets in the Borough of Crewe and Nantwich, and in the Chester District, including the Shropshire Union Canal system and the River Dee.

Now the Group has a brand new website:

<http://www.record-lrc.co.uk/Group.aspx?Mod=Article&ArticleID=G0012001>

The site is a mine of information – check out the ‘Memorable Selected Swan Movements’ page listing some mammoth journeys undertaken by some of Cheshire’s Mute Swans!

WIRRAL BARN OWL TRUST

The email address for the Wirral Barn Owl Trust has changed to: wirralbarnowltrust@sky.com. Alternatively, you can reach them via their website www.wirralbarnowltrust.org.

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Conservation News

CONSERVATION AND CURRENT TRENDS IN WILDLIFE CRIME

As spring approaches and hopefully this spell of wet weather decides enough is enough, we will all be preparing for the mass exodus of our winter visiting feathered friends, and preparing ourselves for the influx of the fresh batch of summer migrants. It has come to light that with the influx of many people from Eastern Europe many of our protected species of songbird and finches feature very high on their menu, not to spot as we would, but to EAT. Please keep an eye open when you are out and about for seed scattered in locations where you would not expect to find it and also for areas that have been cultivated, i.e. gaps cut in scrub and overhanging branches of trees cut back to create a ‘feed ride’ across which a mist net could be hung. It would appear that ‘Bird Lime’ is freely available in Europe. Normally marketed to control mice and rats, instances of ‘lime sticks’ have been reported on a more frequent basis over the last twelve to eighteen months. The time-honoured catch alive traps also seem to be making a comeback. These are the traps that contain a decoy bird in the middle cage and have a trap cage either side to contain any wild birds that are attracted by the decoy. These traps are normally used by the person trapping to sell on as caged birds rather than to eat. As well as birds we are receiving reports of persons catching and taking coarse fish for the table. Please remember that people taking birds and fish for the table do not think they are committing any crime.

As the nesting season approaches please be aware of any suspicious persons in the vicinity of any nesting sites. There are still egg collectors out there, and also people who come under the mantle, and I use the term very loosely, of falconers. They are prepared to take eggs or young birds to rear on for their ‘sport’. Do remember that 99.9% of all falconers are true to the course and would not keep a wild-caught bird or have anything to do with eggs taken from the wild.

One last item of crime prevention - “Please keep your eyes and ears open”. Quad bikes, Ifor Williams Trailers and power tools are high on the list of collectables at the moment, especially if

they belong to someone else. You are the eyes and ears of the Police Force. If you are not happy with something you see let us know. If you have a problem reporting a suspicious incident please let me have the details and I will sort it out.

On the conservation front there seems to be a trend towards wind farms. As you will all be aware this subject is a political hot potato at present; as information is received I will pass it on. There are obviously good points and bad points over this matter; if you have a problem in your own area let me know and also your own MP.

Steve Turner, Conservation Officer
Tel: 01606 781435 Email: conservation@cawos.org

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Wirral Area

Barn Owls: An agreement has been made with a tenant farmer at Royden Park to create rough margins to the left of the main drive for Barn Owl feeding. A record 132 Barn Owl chicks were hatched in Wirral in 2007; this is very welcome after the very poor 2006 season.

Wind farms: Burbo Bank wind farm has now been completed; this has 25 turbines. npower have recently brought out an Environmental Information Pack for the proposed massive Gwynt-Y-Mor wind farm in Liverpool Bay. The Dee Estuary Conservation Group (DECG; CAWOS is a member) wrote to the regulators with some concerns, in particular there appears to have been no monitoring of the spring migration of terns and gulls, nor the hundreds of Little Gulls which pass by Hilbre and north Wirral. These may well fly straight through the proposed site. There is also concern that no radar studies have been carried out to establish the location and height of wader movements across Liverpool Bay. Gwynt-y-Mor appears to be on a direct line between the Dee estuary and sites in Ireland.

Low flying aircraft over the Dee estuary: These have caused much disturbance over the years but the Civil Aviation Authority have recently brought out a document advising pilots not to fly below 1000 feet over wetlands and to try and avoid flying over estuaries. The CAA point out that pilots causing disturbance could be prosecuted under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. This should be a great help in our efforts to try and combat this problem.

Port of Mostyn (PoM) dredging: PoM have applied for a deep dredge (4m) in the Dee estuary. Over the past two years they have been allowed to dredge to 2m which has appeared not to have damaged the estuary or its wildlife. The RSPB and DECG have written to object to this deeper dredge. Airbus have built a shallower draft ship which does not need this deeper dredge.

The **RSPB** have brought more land at Burton near to Inner Marsh Farm. Further details will be announced shortly.

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: not available |
| Crewe & Nantwich | Colin Lythgoe, 11 Waterloo Road, Haslington, Crewe, CW1 5TF. Tel: 01270 582642.
Email: colin.lythgoe@uwclub.net |
| 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, WA6 7RE. Tel: 01928 734679
Email: mosullivan@ic24.net |
| 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@cawos.org |

County Round-Up

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 period from September to December.

SITE REPORTS

Chester area

A Marsh Harrier was over the M56 at Stoak on 7th Sep, and a Mealy Redpoll was at Backford on 18th Nov.

Congleton area

104 Fieldfares noted at Holmes Chapel on 3rd Nov.

Crewe and Nantwich area

A Bittern was at Elton Hall Flash on 21st Oct with another at Chapel Mere on 1st Nov, a Cattle Egret was at Stapeley on 13th Dec and a Little Egret at Doddington on 21st Sep. A Scaup was at Bar Mere on 24th Dec, 23 Goosanders were at Deer Park Mere on 14th Dec and 11 were at Sandbach Flashes on 27th Dec. Two Ospreys were noted at Doddington on 5th Sep, followed by one at Nantwich on 9th Sep, four Hobbies were at Nantwich on 1st Sep. An American Golden Plover was reported at Elton Hall Flash on 26th Dec, two Pectoral Sandpipers were at Elton Hall Flash on 18th Sep with a max of 31 Black-tailed Godwits at Sandbach Flashes on 1st Sep.

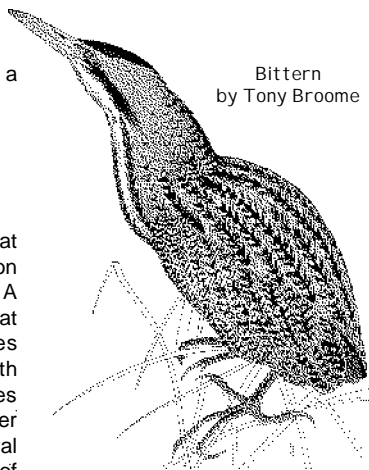
A Ring-billed Gull was at Pumphouse Flash on several dates in Oct and Dec, with another at Hurleston Reservoir on 22nd Dec. A Caspian Gull was noted at Elton Hall Flash on 22nd Nov. A first winter Desert Wheatear was at a private site in the Crewe area from 12th to 14th Dec. 2000 Fieldfares were at Sandbach on 18th Nov, and a Black Redstart was at Cholmondeley on 29th Dec. The Starling roost at Crewe railway station peaked at c30,000 during Dec, whilst that at Combermere Farm ranged from 500,000 to two million. 25 Bramblings were at Doddington during Dec with 40 Reed Buntings roosting at Park Farm, north of Nantwich on 19th Dec.

Ellesmere Port and Neston area

Wildfowl of note included five Bewick's Swans at Inner Marsh Farm on 24th Oct, 18 at Shotwick on 26th Dec along with up to 30 Whooper Swans, and over 130 Pink-footed Geese at Burton Marsh on 25th Dec. A Green-winged Teal was at Inner Marsh Farm from Oct to Dec, 500 Pintails were here on 29th Nov, and a female Ferruginous Duck was here on 4th Oct with a Smew on 18th Nov and Goosander on 3rd Nov. A Great White Egret was in the Burton area from 4th to 6th Oct, and up to 100 Little Egrets were at Burton Marsh on 25th Dec. One or two Marsh Harriers were in the Inner Marsh Farm and Parkgate area for most of the period, and two Merlins were in the Decca Pools area on 22nd Sep. 500 Golden Plovers were at Burton Marsh on 15th Dec, 13 Greenshanks were at Parkgate on 15th Sep. A Little Gull was at Inner Marsh Farm on 24th Oct. Four Short-eared Owls were at Neston on 26th Nov, 465 Fieldfares at Burton Marsh on 24th Oct, a Firecrest at Stanney Woods on 28th Oct, four Ravens at Neston on 14th Dec and 14 Bramblings at Inner Marsh Farm on 24th Dec.

Halton area

Five Whooper Swans were on the marshes at Hale on 24th Nov, a Ruddy Shelduck was at Pickering's Pasture on 14th Oct. A Marsh Harrier was at Hale on 22nd Dec, and two Curlew Sandpipers were here on 16th Sep. A Richard's Pipit was noted at Hale on Oct 14th along with 669 Fieldfares and 176 Redwings. A Yellow-browed Warbler was in the Runcorn area on 11th Oct, with a Firecrest here on 26th Oct. 26 Bramblings were noted over Hale on 14th Oct, with a Lapland Bunting at Hale on 21st Oct.



Bittern
by Tony Broome

Macclesfield area

Six Whooper Swans were at Rostherne on 11th Nov, 700 Pink-footed Geese were over Rostherne on 27th Sep, with c230 at Gawsorth the same day. Seven Mandarins were at Rostherne on 5th Sep with six at Trentabank on 23rd Nov. A Scaup was at Rostherne on four dates during Dec, a Common Scoter was here on 12th Sep and 7th Oct, with a Smew on two dates in Dec. 25 Goosanders were on South Park Lake, Macclesfield on 26th Nov with the same number on Tegg's Nose Reservoir on 25th Dec. A Black-necked Grebe was at Redesmere on 29th Sep with another at Rostherne on 24th Nov. A Bittern was at Rostherne on 25th Nov and again on five dates during Dec. A Goshawk was at Rostherne on 7th Oct. An Osprey was over Rostherne on 1st Sep, and four Hobbies were here for most of the month. A Black-tailed Godwit was an unusual visitor to Rostherne on 11th Sep. The first Fieldfare and Redwing were noted at Rostherne on 29th Sep with up to 300 Fieldfares at Lamaload Reservoir on 16th Oct and c400 Redwings at Bosley on 27th Sep. A good flock of 70 Bramblings were in the Macclesfield Forest area on 11th Nov. A Twite at Rostherne on 8th Dec was the first for the site. 57 Reed Buntings roosted at Rostherne on 27th Oct.

Vale Royal area

Up to 37 Pink-footed Geese were in the Neumann's Flash area on several dates in late Sep, a Ruddy Shelduck was in the Marbury CP/Neumann's Flash area for most of Sep, a Green-winged Teal was at Neumann's Flash on 30th Nov, and 66 Ruddy Ducks were at Frodsham Marsh on 21st Oct. A Black-necked Grebe was at Frodsham Marsh on 9th and 12th Sep. A Bittern was present at Budworth Mere on several dates from 17th Nov. A Marsh Harrier was noted in the Frodsham Marsh area during Nov and Dec.

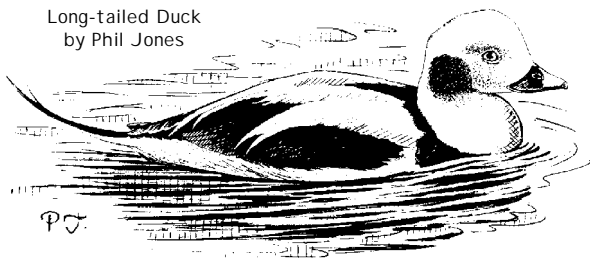
Waders included 28 Curlew Sandpipers at Frodsham Marsh on 6th Oct, 16 Little Stints on 30th Sep, 12 Ruff on 6th Oct and 40 Black-tailed Godwits at Frodsham Marsh on 9th Sep. Two Bar-tailed Godwits were at Neumann's Flash on 7th Nov, five Green Sandpipers at Marbury No. 1 tank on 25th Sep and a Wood Sandpiper at Frodsham Marsh on 9th Sep. A Little Gull was at Neumann's Flash on 1st Nov. A Kittiwake was at Marbury CP on 10th Nov. Two Ring Ouzels were at Frodsham Marsh on 22nd Oct, and a Great Grey Shrike was here on 14th Oct.

Warrington area

Three Whooper Swans were at Woolston Eyes on 3rd Nov, 2500 Pink-footed Geese noted NE over Winwick on 29th Dec, the first Ruddy Shelduck at Moore NR appeared on 30th Sep with the first Scaup during late Oct, six Goldeneyes were at Woolston Eyes on 21st Dec with a Goosander on several dates during Nov and Dec. A Bittern returned to Moore NR on 25th Oct with up to three seen on subsequent dates, and Little Egret in the Fiddler's Ferry area during Sep. A Marsh Harrier was noted in the Fiddler's Ferry area during Oct, with another here from early Nov into the New Year, a Hen Harrier was at Risley Moss on 27th Nov, and 12 Buzzards were noted at Woolston Eyes during Sep.

1120 Golden Plovers were at Fiddler's Ferry during Nov, five Ruff, Black-tailed Godwit and Green Sandpiper were here during Oct, and a Common Sandpiper at Woolston Eyes on 10th Oct. A Kittiwake was an unusual visitor to Lymm on 5th Nov with an Arctic Tern at Woolston Eyes on 29th Sep. 500 Sand Martins were noted on passage at Fiddler's Ferry during early Sep. At least one Cetti's Warbler was noted at Woolston Eyes for most of the period with a Yellow-browed Warbler on 5th Oct.

Long-tailed Duck
by Phil Jones



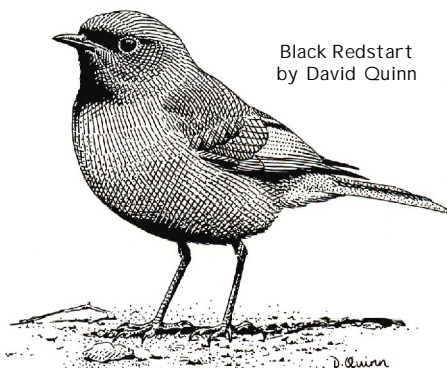
Wirral area

Three Whooper Swans were at Heswall on 3rd Oct, the Brent Goose flock at Hilbre peaked at 100 on 29th Dec, 4900 Shelducks were at Heswall on 14th Oct, 480 Pintails at Thurstaston on 27th Dec, 300 Common Scoters at East Hoyle Bank on 14th Nov, two Velvet Scoters at Red Rocks on 29th Sep and seven Long-tailed Ducks at Hilbre on 12th

Sep. 30 Red-throated Divers were off Hilbre on 27th Sep, 192 Great Crested Grebes off Meols on 14th Oct, two Slavonian Grebes were at Hilbre on 26th Oct with a Red-necked Grebe reported off Red Rocks on 25th Oct. Seabirds of note included 22 Manx Shearwaters off Hilbre on 25th Sep, small numbers of Leach's Petrels noted from several sites into mid-Nov, with a max of 16 at Hilbre on 25th Sep. 195 Gannets were at Hilbre on 24th Sep. 21 Shags at Hilbre on 29th Sep was a record for this site. A Spoonbill was noted in flight at Heswall on 17th Nov.

An immature Marsh Harrier was at Heswall on 9th Sep with another on 27th Oct, with Hen Harrier noted from several sites. 26 Buzzards noted over Hoylake Langfields on 6th Sep may have been a county record. An Osprey was over Heswall on 5th Oct with two the next day, and a Honey Buzzard was at West Kirby on 26th Sep. Max wader counts included 14,500 Oystercatchers at Thurstaston on 19th Oct, 400 Grey Plovers at West Kirby on 13th Nov, 12,300 Knots at Hoylake and Heswall during Nov, 400 Sanderlings at Hoylake on 25th Nov, 30 Purple Sandpipers at Hilbre on 18th Dec, 1011 Black-tailed Godwits at Heswall on 23rd Dec, 2000 Bar-tailed Godwits at New Brighton on 20th Nov, and 362 Turnstones at West Kirby on 24th Nov. A Grey Phalarope was at Hilbre on several dates with two at Red Rocks on 29th Sep. Two Great Skuas were off Red Rocks on 27th Sep, 10 Arctic Skuas were off Meols on 1st Sep, with Pomarine Skuas at several sites during the period. Three Mediterranean Gulls were at Leasowe on 10th Nov, Little Gull at Hilbre on 25th Sep, Sabine's Gull off Meols and Hoylake on 1st Sep, and Hilbre on 25th, 115 Kittiwakes at Hoylake on 24th Sep. 25 Little Terns were at Hilbre on 9th Sep, 40 Common Terns were at Hoylake on 25th Sep with 30 Arctic Terns at Hilbre on 25th Sep. 475 Guillemots were at Hilbre on 24th Sep, 150 Razorbills were off Hilbre on 26th Oct along with two Puffins, a Little Auk was at New Brighton on 12th Nov. An Eagle Owl was reported at Pensby on 31st Oct and three Short-eared Owls at West Kirby on 2nd Nov.

A possible Pacific Swift was over West Kirby on 16th Sep, two late Swifts at Bebington on 2nd Oct, with a Hoopoe at Meols on 6th Oct. Seven Rock Pipits were at Hilbre on 29th Sep, seven Wheatears were at Red Rocks on 22nd Sep with the latest at Red Rocks on 26th Oct, and a Whinchat was at Hoylake Langfields on 7th Oct. The last Ring Ouzel was noted at Red Rocks on 19th Oct, 500 Fieldfares were at Hoylake Langfields on 19th Oct, with 100 Song Thrushes and 122 Redwings at Thurstaston on 20th Oct. A Black Redstart was at Red Rocks on 25th Oct, a Blyth's Reed Warbler was at Red Rocks from 6th to 10th Oct, with a possible Siberian Chiffchaff on 10th Oct. A Yellow-browed Warbler was present at Hoylake Langfields,



Black Redstart
by David Quinn

North Wirral Coastal Park and Red Rocks on 10th Oct. Over 20 Goldcrests were noted on passage at Hilbre on 27th Sep with three Firecrests on 30th Sep, a Red-breasted Flycatcher was at Hilbre on 8th Oct. Three Bearded Tits were at Red Rocks on 12th Oct. A Great Grey Shrike was at Hoylake Langfields from 21st to 23rd Oct. Passage migration at Red Rocks included 7360 Chaffinches, 87 Bramblings and 524 Siskins on 15th Oct, and a Common Rosefinch was here on 18th Oct. Two Crossbills were at West Kirby on 12th Sep with another at Caldly on 31st Dec. Three Snow Buntings were at Thurstaston on 26th Nov.

**Tony Parker, 41 The Park, Penketh, Warrington, Cheshire, WA5 2SG.
Tel: 01925 726986 Email: tonyparker@cawos.org**

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 everyone else who passed records on.

If YOU see anything of interest in your local paper, or even in the national press, relevant to Cheshire and Wirral please bring it to our attention. Either scan in the article and email it, or cut it out and put it in the post. Please make sure the source and date is clear. Contact details are on the inside front cover of *Bird News*. Ed.

Species Spotlight

MUTE SWANS: SOME RECENT MOVEMENTS

Mute Swans are prominent birds which people notice, and are big enough to carry large Darvic rings with easily-read numbers. These two factors make for a high rate of return in terms of tracing the history and movements of individual birds, and as usual, the 2007 *Annual Report* of the Cheshire Swan Study Group contains some interesting examples of movements into and out of the county.

One cluster of records confirms the familiar pattern of movement between Cheshire and North Wales. Two birds ringed as cygnets from different broods, near Chester in August 2006, were at Llandudno Boating Lake (a distance of over 60km) in April and July 2007 respectively; by November the second of these was back on the Dee at Chester. Another Chester swan, ringed in July 2005, was at Cholmondeley early the following year but at Aber Ogwen, Bangor (80km from the ringing site) in August 2007, while one ringed at Rhyl in 1991 was recorded at Winsford in November 2007 (having paid a visit to Nantwich in 2001 in between).

Of the Welsh group, however, CH15 showed the most intriguing pattern of movements. Ringed as a young bird at Doddington in 2003, he was on the Clywd at Rhuddlan in April 2004, travelled over to New Brighton in February 2006 but then back to Wales (Aber Ogwen) by August, and returned to New Brighton again in September 2007.

Mute Swans generally avoid high ground and follow river valleys and canals when moving, and the Severn/Trent systems are significant for Cheshire records. Oddly, all the 2007 records from these areas are of birds moving into our area. Three can be classified as associated with the Trent system: one ringed at Kenilworth in 2005 was seen at Doddington in 2007; another from Branston Water Park, Burton-on-Trent (2006) was at Holmes Chapel in 2007; the third came from Chasewater, Staffs, where it was ringed in 2006, turned up at Doddington later that year and at Coole Pilate in 2007.

A swan ringed at Welshpool in 1992 and found at Congleton early in 2007 was presumably associated with the Severn system; two others definitely were. The first was ringed on the Avon in Worcestershire in 2003, hung around on the Severn at Worcester and Bewdley for a couple of years, but by 2007 had moved to the Dee at Chester (134km from the ringing site). The second Severn bird, ringed at Worcester in 2004, made a fatal mistake in choosing to visit Stoke-on-Trent, where it was killed by another swan in April 2007.

Finally, two remarkable long-distance movements stand out. A swan ringed at Marlow in Buckinghamshire in October 2006 was found dead at Coole Pilate (200km away) in February 2007. Unlike all the others it was carrying only a metal BTO ring, and the record illustrates the value of using the big Darvics: a BTO ring alone cannot be read unless the bird is caught again or, as in this case, picked up dead. Perhaps the most remarkable of all, though, is the bird ringed at Aber Ogwen in 1995, reported from near Stoke-on-Trent (129km away) in 2000, and found breeding at Millbay Dock, Plymouth (318km from the ringing site) in June 2007.

The *Migration Atlas* (Wenham *et al.*, 2002) rightly points out that the growth of swan rescue centres produces problems in estimating both Mute Swan mortality (life prolonged due to human intervention) and long-distance movements (assisted passage, if a bird is taken to a rescue centre and released far from where it was picked up). There are very close links between the Swan Study Group and the RSPCA Wildlife Hospital at Stapeley Grange near Nantwich, which means that we at least know if birds moving into the county have been brought to Stapeley. In the case of the last two birds, which don't fit into the familiar pattern of the other records, we have no way of knowing whether they were helped on their way by some other rescue centre - though it would be nice to think they were just adventurous individuals who travelled under their own steam.

Copies of the 2007 Report can be obtained by phoning David Cookson on 01270 567526, or emailing him at cheshireswans@aol.com; he is always keen to hear of sightings of ringed swans, and can provide data on their known histories.

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

2007 - A SUCCESSFUL BARN OWL YEAR?

2006 proved to be a great disappointment for the breeding success of Barn Owls, both regionally and nationally. A wet spring and a low vole/shrew breeding cycle resulted in very few Barn Owls laying eggs, let alone producing healthy youngsters.

However, 2007 initially seems to have completely reversed the situation. A warm, dry spring, with voles/shrews definitely back on the menu, helped produce a very early and apparently abundant breeding season for Barn Owls.

Normally, ringing of chicks would begin in early June, but this year chicks were mature enough for ringing as early as 27 April. In fact, by ageing the chicks that have been ringed, it has been possible to determine that in many instances Barn Owls started egg laying around early March, with one estimate as early as 18 February. Therefore, egg laying this year was between one and two months earlier than normal. Interestingly, this local early breeding appears to not be a national trend as, elsewhere, Barn Owls were breeding in line with normal trends; it seems that the Cheshire birds were ahead of the game. In addition, brood sizes have been larger than normal. This year broods of five and six have been the norm, with one box containing eight; when in the past, broods of two to four were more usual.

This year 156 successful breeding sites have been located in Cheshire and Wirral producing an estimated 670 young (651 confirmed). Interestingly, 24 of these sites were found late on in the year, with some Wirral chicks too young to ring even at the end of November.

There are obviously concerns about the effect of the continuing wet weather but, as most broods were early this year, the chicks were of a good age/size before the wet weather arrived. Fortunately, the wet weather in our area has not been continuous thus allowing birds to hunt for food during the breaks in the rain. However, it is not yet known how the wet weather has affected the newly fledged youngsters, which may be finding it difficult to find sufficient food.

Unfortunately, over the last few weeks there have been some Barn Owl casualties, mainly through road accidents, one of the major causes of Barn Owl deaths in adult birds. On a more positive note, these birds appeared well fed suggesting that food was still plentiful.

To confuse the situation, there are indications that late broods have been less successful, especially in the west of Cheshire, where, in some instances, only one or two chicks have been hatching from clutches of five or six eggs. The cause of this is not yet known, but may well be as a result of the poor weather.

David Tolliday

This article first appeared in *The Heron autumn 2007* (newsletter of the RSPB Macclesfield Local Group). Ed.

ROSTHERNE OBSERVATORY

As announced in the last issue of *Bird News* visitors to the A W Boyd Observatory at Rostherne will be pleased to learn that the voluntary wardens are now able to 'man' the observatory on Wednesdays as well as Sundays. Casual visitors are welcome, but it is always best to phone either Peter Day (0161 973 0067) or Dave Clarke (0161 973 7122) beforehand to ensure access is available. Day permits (£1 per person) and annual permits (£7 per person) are available from Dave Clarke.

The Observatory has commanding views across the Mere and offers really good facilities. The place is a perfect setting, and is so peaceful yet still needs to be appreciated by more of us. Parking is available in the village car park next to the Post Office.

PLEASE NOTE: Just in case any non-renewing/late renewal permit holders, or other visitors from the past don't realise, there is a **keypad access** on the door now, rather than by key. This does mean that casual visitors do need to ring first, but you are most welcome, so please do not be put off!

One Man's Birding

SHELDUCKS - AND DAPPLED THINGS

Early in the New Year the Shelducks were back at two local nesting sites. Both are decent-sized but unexceptional pools in pasture land, the fortunate result of inadequate drainage systems; I have also seen single birds at two other, smaller ponds not far away and would not be surprised to find young birds there in future, given their recent increase.

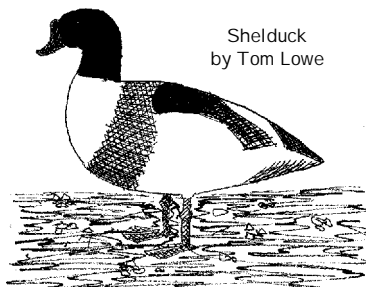
There's nothing very new about inland Shelduck. I encountered my first on a Flintshire farm, three miles or more from salt water, back in the early fifties (and very exciting, and a bit puzzling, it was too to a schoolboy who knew them only on the estuary). The original *Cheshire and Wirral Atlas* included an increasing number of records throughout the twentieth century, especially from the nineteen seventies onwards, and this trend has apparently continued. David Norman noted, in one of his Atlas newsletters, that this is likely to be one of the big changes since the original publication of twenty-five years ago.

So far as the southern end of the county goes, the birds seem to have been established at some of the larger and more obvious waters (Sandbach, Doddington, Comber Mere) for many years. I suspect that recent records from smaller and obscure sites reflect a spread of population from those original centres rather than just chance discovery - the two pools I am talking about didn't exist until fairly recently. There is also an interesting question about the possible origin of these inland birds: the first Atlas noted that "a suggestion that the present inland breeding population originated from a wildfowl collection near Crewe remains unsubstantiated".

There does appear to have been a change in status of captive birds over the years. The Victorian classic *British Birds in their Haunts* by C.A.Johns (published in 1862) stated that "If easy of domestication [it] would no doubt be a common adornment of our lakes and rivers. It is, however, a marine bird. Numerous attempts have been made to familiarise it with inland fresh-water haunts to which some other species readily take, but they have rarely succeeded, while to induce it to breed at a distance from its seaside home has proved yet more difficult". But by 1979 Johnson and Payn (*Ornamental Waterfowl*) could write that "Shelducks do extremely well in captivity" and that the Common Shelduck "is to be found in most public and private collections". Presumably, skills in aviculture improved over the course of a century; possibly our local population does indeed derive from escaped stock.

Whatever their origins, I'm glad we have our inland birds. At the end of May last year I watched a brood of nine ducklings at one of the pools - little spotted balls of down, bouncing across the water and diving frequently and with complete aplomb. The adults rarely dive; for a few weeks the ducklings do so with such skill that Coward could write "I have seen a brood tire out an energetic retriever and never be in any danger". A month later, and there were three survivors - by now, manifestly half-grown Shelduck, diving no more but dabbling like their parents and trying out their wings as they scurried away from a second pair, which was vigorously defending a rather younger brood of seven. Seeing these big, boldy-patterned birds standing on the bank again on a bleak January day seemed a reminder that winter was passing and in a few months more I would be amused by the antics of the youngsters.

I'm sure that the main attraction of Shelducks lies in that striking black-and-white plumage, offset by the rich chestnut breast band: the name itself derives from "sheld" meaning variegated, and there does seem to be an enduring appreciation of contrasting patterns. Perhaps the best-known expression of this came from Gerard Manley Hopkins, opening his poem "Pied Beauty" (in which he celebrated, among other things, "finches' wings") with the line "Glory be to God for dappled things". And, if I recall correctly, there is evidence for this appreciation in a less literary source.....



Shelduck
by Tom Lowe

Many years ago, Chester and District Ornithological Society conducted a poll of its members to establish their favourite birds. As I remember it (and if I am wrong perhaps some CADOS member with a copy of the relevant Newsletter can correct me) the respondents showed a commendable loyalty to the Society's logo by voting the Great Spotted Woodpecker into first place. However, the top-ten list of members' favourites included a very high proportion of other species which were characterised by their black-and-white plumage - birds like Pied Flycatcher, Oystercatcher and (probably) Shelduck.

It would be interesting to see the outcome of a similar poll among CAWOS members - and I'd be prepared to bet that the Shelduck came somewhere up among the leaders.

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

BIRD REPORTS - BACK COPIES AVAILABLE

The following *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Reports* are still available at a cost of £1.25 + p&p (negotiable for several copies).

1969	1972	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982
1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
1991	1992	1993	1995	1997	1999	2000	

Do you have any spare copies of any of the years missing from the above table (excluding 1994 and 1998)? **We are particularly looking for 1996.**

2001 onwards are also available - please contact me for prices.

Ray Scally tel: 01663 765377 between 8pm and 9pm

or email: scallyray@hotmail.com

BOOKS AND REPORTS FOR SALE

		£	Copies
A Birdwatcher's Guide to Lancashire (1994)	Lawson K.	5.00	18
Checklist of the Birds of Cheshire & Wirral (1987)	Harrison R. & Barber S.	1.00	6
Checklist of the Birds of the NW Region (2000)	Abraham T. & Williams S.	1.00	6
Cheshire & Wirral Bird Report 1994	CAWOS	4.50	3
Cheshire & Wirral Bird Report 1998	CAWOS	5.00	1
Hilbre Island Bird Report 1993	Hilbre Bird Observatory	2.00	2
Hilbre Island Bird Report 1994	Hilbre Bird Observatory	2.00	1
Lancashire Bird Report 1974	Lancs. & Cheshire Fauna Soc.	1.00	1
Lancashire Bird Report 1976	Lancs. & Cheshire Fauna Soc.	1.00	1
Manchester Ornithological Society	Manchester Orn Soc.	10.00	1
North West Region Bird Report 1990	Abraham T.	2.00	2
North West Region Bird Report 1992	Abraham T.	2.00	2
North West Region Bird Report 1993	Abraham T.	2.00	1
North West Region Bird Report 1994	Abraham T.	2.00	2
North West Region Bird Report 1996	Walters D.M.	2.00	2
Supplement to the Birds of Cheshire (1967)	Hedley Bell T.	5.00	4
The Birds of Marbury Country Park & the Witton Limebeds (1993)	Walters D.M.	4.50	9
The Birds of Rostherne Mere (1977)	Harrison R. & Rogers D.A.	3.00	1
The Birds of Sandbach Flashes 1935 - 1999	Goodwin A. & Talbot G.	4.50	4

(all the above plus postage & packing)

Dave Pearce, Waxwings Natural History Books. Tel: 01377 254775

Email: dmp.waxwings@btinternet.com Website: www.waxwings.co.uk

CAWOS News

Welcome to the following new members:

TS Lightfoot, Andrew Judd, Angela Needham and John Tromans.

At Council meetings held on 15th November 2007 and 17th January 2008:

- Tony Broome's resignation from Council was accepted and he was thanked for all his work on Council and as County Recorder for many years.
- discussions were taking place with the Cheshire Wildlife Trust about SBI (Site of Biological Importance) recording and it was hoped that those interested would hear details in time to start in the spring.
- all those involved with the successful production of the 2006 *Bird Report* were thanked.
- reports were received indicating that the work on the Atlas was progressing well and the target date of autumn 2008 should be met.
- the budget for 2008 was approved.
- an action group was to meet to discuss how best to organise the monitoring and recording role of CAWOS in the county.

ATLAS SPECIES SPONSORSHIP

All species which will receive a 2 or 4-page spread in the forthcoming Atlas have now been sponsored, raising a sum of £4802 towards the cost of the Atlas.

CONTACT WITH MEMBERS - IMPORTANT

There are some occasions, such as the recent AGM notice sent to all members, when it would be just as convenient (and cheaper) to send material to those members who have email by this medium (about 2/3 of the membership) rather than by post. David Cogger is in the process of compiling a list of all email addresses held by members and in future such mailings will be sent by email.

However, if you have given David your email address but would prefer still to receive material by post, please let him know. It is also **important** under this scheme that you inform David if your email address changes. Please email:

David Cogger: memsec@cawos.org

CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL GAZETTEER

Finally, a new printed edition of the *Gazetteer* is now available.

Of course, as with many publications, it will be instantly out of date! This is why I strongly recommend that CAWOS members, and other contributors of records, request the latest electronic version supplied in spreadsheet format. Simply email Sheila Blamire with your request: sheilablamire@cawos.org

However, if you would like a printed copy of this new edition of the *Gazetteer* please send a SAE (A5) to:

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

BARN OWL EXTRAVAGANZA

The Mid Cheshire Barn Owl Conservation Group are hosting a Barn Owl Celebration event at the Memorial Hall, Northwich on the evening of **29 April 2008**, commencing at 7.00pm (sponsored by Environmental Crop Management Ltd).

The Group has now been in existence for some eight years and during this time has seen the number of Barn Owls in Cheshire grow significantly. In fact, in 2000 there were only some 19 recorded breeding pairs of Barn Owls in the whole of Cheshire; but by 2007 this had grown to over 150 recorded pairs. The significant increase is not just a reflection of the work of the various Barn Owl groups throughout Cheshire, but is also due in no small measure to the support of local farmers and landowners allowing the erection of breeding/roosting boxes on their land.

Such has been the success of 2007 (over 150 breeding pairs with an estimated 650 chicks) that we thought we should do something to celebrate this fact and to give something back to those who have supported our work, hence this Celebration event.

It is hoped to have displays there, not only from our Group covering all aspects of our work (e.g. box making, pellet analysis, membership, services, recording, ringing, monitoring, plus, of course, details of the bird itself and the factors affecting its survival), but also with displays from related groups and organisations (e.g. Broxton Barn Owl Group, Wirral Barn Owl Trust, Macclesfield Borough Council, Vale Royal Borough Council, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, Lower Moss Wood Wildlife Hospital, CAWOS, and consultants/clients related to current pipeline projects in Cheshire).

The intention of the evening is to celebrate the Barn Owl and to enable all those who attend to be able to find out all they want about this beautiful bird. It is not intended to have formal talks/presentations during the evening, but to let those attending walk around the displays at their own pace, and to talk to representatives of the various groups about their activities, and have their individual questions and queries answered direct, thereby getting as much out of the event as possible.

The event will be open to everyone and anyone interested in the conservation of the Barn Owl in Cheshire. We do hope this event is of interest to you and would welcome your attendance. Please feel free to pass on this message to all your friends, neighbours and relatives.

If you require any further information regarding the event, please do not hesitate to contact:

John Mycock 07970 235473.



MARCH

- 20 NNHS 'WILDLIFE IN THE GARDEN' by Gillian Pierce
- 23 RSPB Parkgate Raptor Watch, meet Old Baths car park at 4:30pm
- 25 ADNHS AGM + short slide show
- 28 KOS 'A TASTE OF YORKSHIRE WILDLIFE' by Steve Knell
- 28 LOG 'THE SAPPHIRE OF THE KAKAMEGA' by Mike McKavett
- 28 NCRSPB QUIZ & HOTPOT SUPPER – ring for details (by ticket)
- 30 SECOS Wirral Circular – ring for details

APRIL

- 7 RSPB Parkgate High Tide, meet Old Baths car park at 11:30am (HW 12:55, 10.1m)
- 8 RSPB Parkgate High Tide, meet Old Baths car park at 12noon (HW 13:36, 10.0m)
- 8 ADNHS 'ALL ABOUT BATS' by Martin James
- 8 MRSPB 'A NIGHT ON THE TILES' by Jeff Clarke

- 9 HO 'WILDLIFE OF THE CZECH & SLOVAKIAN REPUBLICS' by Terry Pickford
- 11 SECOS AGM and MEMBERS' EVENING
- 14 SRSPB 'COSTA RICA – GEM OF CENTRAL AMERICA' by John Mather
- 16 CRSPB AGM followed by 'BIRD CONSERVATION ACROSS THE GLOBE' by Alistair Gammell
- 17 NNHS AGM followed by 'LIVING WITH SPIDERS' by Dr Paul Griffiths
- 18 NCRSPB 'BIRDS OF THE PENNINES & THE HEBRIDES' by Gordon Yates
- 19 KOS Llandudno and Conwy, meet at the Sessions at 8:30am
- 20 MRSPB Anglesey - depart Duke Street car park at 8:00am
- 20 SECOS Forest of Bowland – ring for details
- 20 NCRSPB Goyt Valley, meet Derbyshire Bridge car park at 9:30am
- 21 HPRSPB 'WHAT'S THAT RAPTOR?' by Keith Offord
- 22 ADNHS 'HISTORY OF THE GREEN MAN' by Mark Olly
- 23 NCRSPB Coombes Valley/Churnett Valley, meet Coombes Valley car park at 10:00am
- 25 KOS AGM followed by 'NAMIBIA – THE LAND OF CONTRASTS' by Sheila Blamire
- 25 WGBG 'BIRDS OF WETLANDS' by Geoff Trinder
- 25 LOG 'PLANT HUNTING IN PERSIA' by Dr Brian Barnes
- 26 RSPB Morning Walk to Burton Point, contact 0151 336 7681. Booking Essential!
- 27 MRSPB Brandon Marsh, nr Coventry, by coach - ring Trisha Thompson 01625 526546
- 27 WGBG Brandon Marsh, nr Coventry, by coach, ring for details
- 27 SRSPB Penmaenpool/Bird Rock, Tywyn by coach - ring Jayne Skelhorn 0161 282 8758
- 27 HPRSPB Eccup Reservoir - ring Jim Jeffery 0161 494 5367 for details
- 27 HO Penmaenpool, Towyn/Bird Rock – ring for details
- 28 SRSPB Pennington Flash (evening) - ring Jayne Skelhorn 0161 282 8758 for details

MAY

- 2-5 MRSPB Weymouth, Dorset weekend – ring Graham Palmer 01625 420179 for details
- 3-10 HPRSPB Speyside holiday – ring Joyce Wilson 0161 427 1932 for details
- 4 CRSPB Melin-y-Wig – ring Roger Nutter 01829 782237 for details
- 7 NCRSPB Woolston Eyes, meet Thelwall Lane entrance at 7:00pm
- 11 WGBG Hodbarrow by coach, ring for details
- 11 MRSPB Hodbarrow by coach - ring Trisha Thompson 01625 526546 for details
- 12 SRSPB Reddish Vale Country Park (evening) - ring Jayne Skelhorn 0161 282 8758
- 13 ADNHS 'JACKSON'S BRICKWORKS – BEFORE AND AFTER' by Pat Hilton
- 13 MRSPB AGM followed by MEMBERS' SLIDES
- 14 HO 'BIRD HAUNTS OF WILDEST IRELAND' by Jo Moran
- 15 MRSPB Coombes Valley (evening) – ring Ray Evans 01625 432635 for details
- 15-18NCRSPB Norfolk long weekend – ring Dave Hughes 01925 726242 for details
- 16-18KOS Ynys-hir / Barmouth – long weekend, ring for details
- 18 SECOS Lake Yyrnwy – ring for details
- 18 HPRSPB Tanat Valley – ring Eric Walker 0161 427 5127 for details
- 19 HPRSPB 'MY LOCAL WILDLIFE' by David Tolliday
- 23 KOS Manchester Airport evening walk, meet at the Sessions at 6:30pm
- 24 MRSPB Woolston Eyes - ring Trisha Thompson 01625 526546 for details
- 30 LOG 'DOWN ON THE FARM' by Charles Owen

JUNE

- 8 HPRSPB Anglesey – ring Richard Stephenson 0161 427 4187 for details
- 11 NCRSPB Sutton Manoe Woodlands, nr St Helens, meet Jubits Lane entrance at 7:00pm
- 11 HO 'WARBLERS OF THE OLD WORLD AND NEW' by Stuart Meredith
- 14 KOS Leighton Moss RSPB Reserve, meet at the Sessions at 8:30am
- 15 SECOS Woolston Eyes – ring for details
- 21 NCRSPB Llangynog, Powys, meet village car park at 9:30am
- 27 KOS Goyt Valley evening walk, meet at the Sessions at 6:30pm
- 28 ADNHS Hutton Roof Crag, Burton-in-Kendal, at 9:30am, contact 0161 865 0118

JULY

- 6 KOS Anglesey, meet at the Sessions at 8:00am
- 9 HO 40th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

TOM GIBBONS

Independent Bird Trip Organiser

37 Strawberry Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 6AQ

Tel: +44(0)1625 520317 Email: Tomgibbons2@AOL.com

Website: www.gobirding.co.uk

OVERSEAS BIRDWATCHING HOLIDAYS

Whilst this year's holidays have now been fully booked, I am pleased to advise the new destinations for 2009. If these seem a long way forward, 2008 vacancies filled shortly after release and I am sure the new holidays will prove equally as popular.

The key feature is that you do NOT need to forward any money to make a reservation - all forms of contact will ensure a place is reserved for you on your chosen trip.



MOROCCO 16 - 27 Feb 2009 £1220 based on two sharing

COSTA RICA 20 Mar - 3 Apr 2009 £2490 based on two sharing

HUNGARY 9 - 17 May 2009 £1090 based on two sharing



- PLEASE NOTE:**
- 1) All destinations are from Manchester
 - 2) All use professional local guides
 - 3) All are several £00s less than other operators
 - 4) All are fully inclusive

Full handout details of each holiday are now available and will be sent on request via phone, post, or email.

ATOL PROTECTION:

Please note that I do not book or take payment for flights myself: however, by ensuring that you are booking with an ATOL holder, you can be assured that your flights are financially protected. This is accomplished by your cheque for the flight being payable to my travel agent who is ATOL accredited and you are therefore covered under that licence.

Ground arrangements, which are arranged by myself, are subject to my own separate Terms and Conditions.



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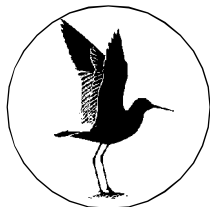
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Monday 7 April - Parkgate High Tide, meet Old Baths car park at 11:30am
 Tuesday 8 April - Parkgate High Tide, meet Old Baths car park at 12noon

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 1st 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.

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