

BIRD NEWS

Number 79

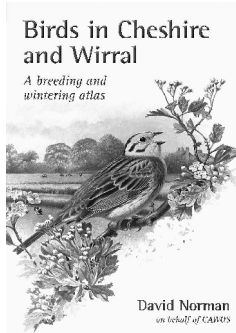
March 2009



Review - 'Birds in Cheshire and Wirral'
Rookery Survey 2009 • Red-rumped Swallow
Guidelines for Assessing Scarce County Bird Records

BIRDS IN CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL

by David Norman on behalf of CAWOS



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Bird News welcomes articles, letters and comments relevant to birdwatching in Cheshire and Wirral. Please either email or post your contributions to the Editor at the address shown above.

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Front cover : Linnet by David Quinn

Other illustrations : Tom Lowe, Phil Jones and Thelma Sykes

Guest Editorial

At the recent AGM a presentation was made to David Cogger by the Chairman to mark his retirement from the posts of Membership Secretary (16 years) and Secretary (13 years) of the Society. In his years in post David has been closely involved in all the activities of the Society. In fact, during the *Atlas* years, as a member of the *Atlas* Steering Group and acting as the point of receipt for all *Atlas* records in addition to his normal duties, he must have been working full time and without the benefit of school holidays! David has worked tirelessly for the Society and will be a very hard act to follow. I am sure that members will join me in wishing David and Fran a well-deserved long and active retirement. David will, however, continue to be active as a member of Council and his experience will be invaluable to the Society.

The talk after the AGM was on the great Cheshire naturalist A W Boyd and it was gratifying to hear the speaker acknowledging the work of the Society as a continuation of Boyd's work. Boyd prepared the annual reports on birds in Cheshire which appeared in the *Lancashire and Cheshire Fauna Committee Reports* from 1934 until 1956 and was well known to the small band of local birders at that time. He would inform his contacts of local sightings by postcard, invariably delivered the next day, and he would gently interrogate birders about their sightings of rarer birds, either in person or by post. He single-handedly took on the role of the County Recorder, *Bird Report* compilers and Rarities Panel, albeit at a time when a lot less people were birding.

Many more people will have heard of him as a result of his long-running weekly column in the *Manchester Guardian*, 'A Country Diary'. A selection of these essays was published as *A Country Diary of a Cheshire Man*. He was also a national figure, regularly contributing to *British Birds* and acting as Assistant Editor from 1944 to 1958. Boyd was very active locally in all branches of natural history and was also a pioneer of ringing. I know that some local birders met him in their youth and it would be interesting to publish their reminiscences.

This issue of *Bird News* reprints the review of the recently published *Birds in Cheshire and Wirral: A breeding and wintering atlas* from *British Birds*. Although the *Atlas* obviously concentrates on the results of the fieldwork carried out by local birders during the period 2004-2007, the writings of Boyd and others are used to provide the historical context. With the mention of the current Rook survey under 'Projects and Surveys' in this issue, it is timely to note that Boyd organised the county-wide Rook survey in 1945 and a map of local rookeries appeared in his New Naturalist volume, the classic *A Country Parish*.

Pete Hall's article on his discovery of one of the first pairs of Hobby to be proved breeding in the county gives a flavour of the enjoyment to be gained from close study of birds breeding locally. The recent spread of this schedule 1 species in Cheshire was recorded in the *Atlas* – Boyd would have been amazed to know that this bird would be breeding in typical Cheshire farmland 40 years after his death.

The article by Richard Gabb on patch birding '106 Not Out' also demonstrates that birders can obtain considerable enjoyment from concentrating on the birds in their local area. However, on a negative note, Richard Smith's article on disturbance by birders and photographers, reprinted from the Dee Estuary Birding website, is a plea to all of us to remain at a sensible distance from birds to avoid any possibility of disturbing them.

Although the 79th *Bird News* is not a landmark number in terms of anniversaries, the contents do give a snapshot of the activities of the Society at a moment in time. As an ordinary member of the Society I have enjoyed previous issues tremendously and would like to thank those who have prepared and contributed to *Bird News* over the years and hope it continues for many years to come.

Gill Barber

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 13th 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.

County Round-Up

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

SITE REPORTS

Chester

Three Waxwings were at Huntingdon on Dec 4th.

Congleton

A Red Kite was noted between Holmes Chapel and Middlewich on Nov 24th, three Waxwings were in Congleton on Nov 22nd, a Brambling flew over New Platt Wood SQ on Oct 26th with three at Swettenham on Nov 15th, and 33 Lesser Redpolls were in Dane Valley on Nov 1st.

Crewe and Nantwich

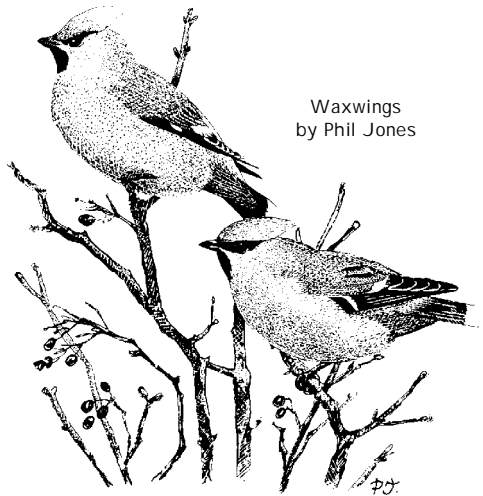
Wildfowl included: three Whooper Swans at Sandbach Flashes on Oct 8th and four at Bar Mere on Nov 25th, two White-fronted Geese at Sandbach on Sep 30th, a pair of Ruddy Shelduck on Winterley Pool throughout Sep, two Common Scoters at Astbury Water Park on Sep 6th, Red-breasted Merganser on Bar Mere on Nov 25th and 20 Goosanders at Sandbach on Dec 19th. A Little Egret was at Elton Hall Flash on Oct 15th. A Honey Buzzard was over Elworth on Sep 28th and Reaseheath on Oct 6th, Goshawk at Bar Mere on Dec 23rd, a male Hen Harrier was a notable record at Fodens Flash on Oct 21st, whilst a Merlin was at Burland on Nov 7th and Pump House Flash on Nov 21st. A Spotted Redshank was at Sandbach on Sep 12th.

A Caspian Gull was at Pump House Flash on Oct 8th with possibly two more on Nov 15th, a Glaucous Gull was at Elton Hall/Pump House Flash on Dec 22nd and an Iceland Gull was there the previous day. A Little Tern was at Bar Mere on Oct 8th, six Black Terns at Combermere Farm on Sep 11th and Elton Hall Flash on Sep 15th, and a late Common Tern was at Bar Mere on Nov 7th. Late migrants included a Swift at Elton Hall Flash on Sep 17th, a Wheatear at Basford on Oct 2nd, and a late Swallow was at Elton Hall Flash on Nov 15th. 500 Fieldfares and 500 Redwings were over Elton Hall Flash on Oct 18th, five Waxwings were along the Wheelock Trail on Nov 18th, four at Haslington on 23rd and six at Crewe on Dec 3rd. A Marsh Tit was noted in a Sandbach garden during Nov with another at Rode Pool in Dec. 300 Tree Sparrows were at Combermere Farm on Nov 16th, eight Bramblings were at Doddington on Dec 8th. A Hawfinch was at Barthomley Fishing Pools on Nov 2nd, 12 Crossbills at Fodens Flash on Sep 3rd, and a Little Bunting was reported at Smugbury Farm on Nov 16th.

Ellesmere Port and Neston

40 Whooper Swans were at Burton on Dec 7th, five Bewick's Swans at IMF on Nov 27th, 700 Pink-footed Geese at Parkgate on Nov 28th, and a drake Green-winged Teal was a regular visitor to IMF for much of the period plus a Goosander on several dates during Dec. A Black-necked Grebe was reported from Shotwick on Sep 6th, and a Spoonbill at IMF on Sep 12th. A Marsh Harrier was present at Burton for much of the period along with at least six Hen Harriers, an Osprey was over Shotwick on Sep 6th, and three Merlins were at Burton on Dec 28th.

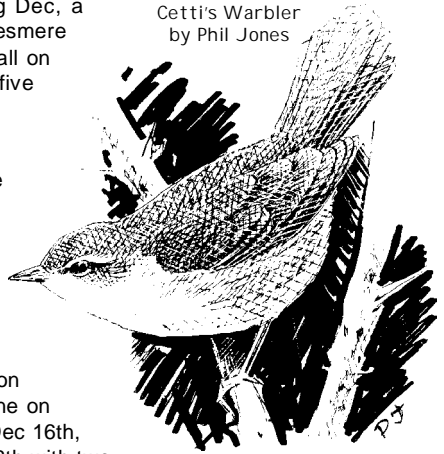
Waders included: Avocet at IMF on Sep 26th, three Curlew Sandpipers at IMF on Sep 15th and a Wood Sandpiper at Shotwick on Sep 18th. A juvenile White-winged Black Tern was at Shotwick on Sep 3rd to 11th and at IMF on Sep 10th and 12th, two Black Terns were at Shotwick on Sep 7th. 25 Short-eared Owls at Burton on Nov 16th was the highest count for many years. A late Cuckoo remained at Parkgate to at least Sep 22nd. A late Swallow was at Burton on Nov 3rd, a Richard's



Waxwings
by Phil Jones

Pipit was noted at Parkgate on several dates during Dec, a Waxwing was at Neston on Dec 5th with three at Ellesmere Port on Dec 9th; elsewhere, a Firecrest was at Denhall on Nov 29th, Brambling at Burton Marsh on Nov 1st and five Twite at Burton on Nov 22nd.

Cetti's Warbler
by Phil Jones



Halton

10 Little Egrets at Wigg Island on Sep 21st was the highest count for the area, a Marsh Harrier was at the same site on Dec 11th with Merlin at Hale on Oct 30th and Hobby at Wigg Island on Sep 21st. A Cetti's Warbler was at Wigg Island on Sep 21st with two Lapland Buntings at Hale on Nov 12th.

Macclesfield

Wildfowl included: 23 Whooper Swans E over Adlington on Nov 12th, c3000 Pink-footed Geese over Rostherne on Nov 3rd, a drake Green-winged Teal at Adlington on Dec 16th, Common Scoter at Rostherne on Sep 13th and Nov 18th with two Scaup on Dec 14th, and 24 Goosanders at Styperson Pool on Dec 14th. A Black-necked Grebe was near Acre Nook SQ on Sep 25th, whilst a Bittern was noted at Rostherne on several dates.

Four Honey Buzzards were reported circling over Macclesfield on Oct 13th, a Hen Harrier was an unusual visitor to Rostherne on Nov 4th, Ospreys were observed on Sep 3rd and 12th, and a Merlin was seen at Higher Poynton on Oct 30th. Little Tern was at Rostherne on Sep 6th.

Elsewhere, there was a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker at Redesmere on Dec 1st with two at Rostherne on Dec 21st, 200+ Pied Wagtails were noted roosting in Macclesfield on Nov 30th, 130 Fieldfares at Cat & Fiddle on Nov 7th, 12 Waxwings were at Macclesfield on Nov 17th, 30+ on Dec 13th, 22 on Dec 31st, 50 near Bredbury on Dec 30th. Three Bramblings were seen in Macclesfield on Dec 20th, and 45 Lesser and four Mealy Redpolls were at Rostherne on Dec 19th.

Vale Royal

Three Whooper Swans were on Neumann's Flash on Oct 8th, a possible Ruddy Shelduck was on Ashton's Flash on Sep 10th, with two on Oct 7th, and two Goosanders were on Neumann's Flash on Sep 13th. Two Black-necked Grebes were at Frodsham Marsh on Oct 3rd, a Bittern at Neumann's Flash on several dates and a Little Egret there on Sep 14th. A Marsh Harrier was reported at Neumann's Flash on Oct 10th, Honey Buzzard S over Hartford on Sep 15th, Merlin at Helsby on Nov 12th and Hobby at Vale Royal Cut on Sep 24th and 25th.

Waders of note included: Knot at Ashton's Flash on Sep 2nd, Sanderling at Neumann's Flash on Sep 27th, Little Stint at Frodsham on Oct 3rd and 84 Snipe on Neumann's Flash on Dec 15th. A Little Gull was at Neumann's Flash on Sep 23rd and a Kittiwake on Oct 27th, seven Black Terns were at Marbury CP on Sep 12th, Common Tern on 11th and Arctic Tern on Oct 10th. A Rock Pipit was reported W at Ashton's Flash on Sep 2nd with two Crossbills at Delamere on Nov 22nd.

Warrington

Wildfowl of note included: six Whooper Swans at Lymm on Nov 21st with three at Woolston Eyes the next day, a White-fronted Goose at Moore NR on Nov 30th, and Scaup there on Nov 5th, a Goosander at Woolston Eyes on Sep 6th and at Moore NR on Oct 19th. Two Little Egrets were at Norton Marsh on Sep 15th, with up to three Bitterns at Moore NR. A Honey Buzzard flew S over Warrington on Sep 18th, a Goshawk was at Woolston Eyes on Sep 13th, an Osprey flew over Lymm on Sep 4th and Woolston Eyes on 6th, a Hobby was noted at Moore NR on Sep 8th and another chasing Swifts over Lymm on Sep 16th.

A Little Stint at Norton Marsh on Nov 30th was the only wader of note for the period. Caspian, Iceland and Glaucous Gulls were at Moore/Arpley area from late Nov. A Richard's Pipit flew S over Woolston Eyes on Oct 4th, 2100 Redwings were noted W over this site on Oct 18th, and a Cetti's Warbler was ringed here on Oct 25th. Six Waxwings were near Warrington on Dec 12th, with 30+ near Lymm on Dec 24th, 100 Tree Sparrows were near Moore NR on Dec 23rd.

Wirral

Wildfowl included: a Whooper Swan at West Kirby Marine Lake on Nov 24th, 3000 Pink-footed Geese over Hilbre on Oct 5th, with a max of 133 Brent Geese in the area on Dec 7th, a record count of 970 Pintail at Thurstaston on Dec 27th, 140 Common Scoters at Hilbre on Nov 17th, a Long-tailed Duck off New Brighton on Oct 2nd and on West Kirby Marine Lake on Dec 14th, and eight Eiders off Hilbre on Nov 21st. A Red-throated Diver was off West Kirby on Nov 7th and 8th, a Great Northern Diver was off Hilbre on several dates and a juvenile on West Kirby Marine Lake from Nov 10th to Dec 16th. 235 Gannets were off Hilbre on Sep 1st, 44 Manx Shearwaters off Red Rocks on Sep 3rd and 120 Leach's Petrels were off Hilbre on Oct 1st.

59 Little Egrets were at Heswall on Sep 1st, 11 Little Egrets at West Kirby on Nov 30th was a new site record, and a possible Snowy Egret was reported off Meols on Oct 18th. Up to two Hen Harriers were noted at Heswall, a Rough-legged Buzzard was in the West Kirby area on Nov 5th to 7th and Ospreys were over Hilbre on Sep 4th and Heswall on Sep 17th. High wader counts included: 15,000 Oystercatchers at Thurstaston on Nov 4th, the first ever Dotterel at Hilbre on Sep 27th, 20,000 Knots at Meols on Oct 20th, 600 Sanderlings at Wallasey on Nov 24th, 18 Purple Sandpipers at New Brighton on Nov 18th, 20 at Hilbre on Dec 22nd, 1230 Black-tailed Godwits at Thurstaston on Dec 29th, eight Whimbrels at West Kirby on Sep 2nd, two Grey Phalaropes at New Brighton on Oct 3rd and another on 22nd.

Two Pomarine Skuas were off Hilbre on Oct 3rd, with eight Arctic Skuas there on Sep 6th and a Long-tailed Skua off New Brighton on Oct 1st and 2nd. 14 Little Gulls were at New Brighton on Oct 1st, a Sabine's Gull was off West Kirby on Sep 22nd, New Brighton on Oct 1st and Leasowe on Oct 2nd. c700 Sandwich Terns were off Hilbre on Sep 1st, and a Black Tern was at Heswall on Sep 1st. A late Swift flew over Clatterbridge on Sep 29th, a Richard's Pipit was at West Kirby on Sep 23rd, a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was at West Kirby on Nov 16th, 500 Fieldfares flew over West Kirby on Oct 18th, 500 Redwings flew over Thornton Hough on Oct 9th and West Kirby on Nov 16th.

Late migrants included: two Lesser Whitethroats at Hoylake on Sep 15th, two Yellow-browed Warblers at Red Rocks on Sep 26th, a possible Booted Warbler at Bebington on Dec 14th, a Pied Flycatcher at Hoylake on Sep 15th, a Spotted Flycatcher at Heswall on Sep 14th, and three Firecrests at Greasby on Nov 30th. A Black Redstart was at Hilbre on Oct 30th, with others at New Brighton on Nov 5th and Red Rocks between Dec 27th and 29th, 30 Waxwings flew W over West Kirby on Nov 12th, 13 Twite were regularly seen along Thurstaston shore during late Dec, and five Snow Buntings were at Red Rocks on Nov 12th and Hilbre on Nov 22nd.

Tony Parker, 41 The Park, Penketh, Warrington, Cheshire, WA5 2SG.

Tel: 01925 726986 Email: tonyparker@cauos.org

Thanks/acknowledgements to: Birdcall, Birdguides, Birdwatching Magazine, Dee Estuary website, Jack Canovan (Rostherne Mere), Moore NR website, Macclesfield RSPB, SECOS, NNHS and everyone else who passed records on.

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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

HIGH PEAK RSPB GROUP

We call ourselves the High Peak Group, but in reality most of our members come from only the northern fringe of the High Peak, that is to say the Marple, Disley, New Mills and Glossop areas, with only a very few from as far afield as Buxton. We have sometimes thought of changing our name to something like the "Goyt Valley Group", but "High Peak" sounds better so we've stuck with it.

The Group was founded in 1974 by Stan Dobson who is still an active member, as are several others who were in at the beginning. We believe we were either the 2nd or the 3rd RSPB members' group to be formed, and possibly the oldest surviving one, although records at the Lodge seem to be vague on the subject. The Group has an early link with CAWOS in that Stan was previously Secretary of the Cheshire Ornithological Society, one of your forerunners. Rather unusually, there are four RSPB Groups within 10 miles of each other, South Manchester, Stockport, High Peak and Macclesfield, but we respect each other's territory and all seem to flourish.

Our activities are similar to other RSPB Groups. These are primarily to inform and entertain our members, while at the same time supporting the Society through recruitment, fund-raising and generally waving the flag. Our policy is to get bums-on-seats by hiring the best available speakers for our evening meetings and then hoping to lead our members on to our other activities such as field trips, fund-raising and school visits. We are fortunate in having in Marple a well-appointed and convenient venue for our meetings, which are very well attended, currently attracting an average turnout of 50% of our members, one of the best in the RSPB.

For our Sunday outings we go to all the best bird places. We used to be able to run coach trips but, rather sadly, numbers attending no longer justify a 53-seater. Stockport RSPB Group still manages it, and we do our best to support them. So it is normally a few cars which set off early on Sunday mornings to see what we can find. An 8am start means that we can often fit in two or more sites in a day. Weekends away and longer spring breaks in the UK or Europe are also much enjoyed by many of our members.

We have a successful school visiting team which grew out of a long-standing YOC Group. The team usually manages twelve or more visits to local primary schools each year. We follow up a bird video or slides with various classroom activities which are much appreciated by staff and pupils alike.

Conservation work is limited to managing about 60 nest boxes throughout the district, although we are also now carrying out an ongoing bird survey of Lyme Park, at the invitation of the National Trust.

We publish a well-received quarterly newsletter which helps to hold the Group together and, of course, almost all our members are also members of the RSPB, although this is not a condition of joining us. So we would be delighted to see any local CAWOS people at our meetings or outings where we will give them a warm welcome, be they beginners or old hands. Our members are not generally out-and-out twitchers; we just enjoy the countryside and all its wildlife. If anyone would like a copy of our programme, please phone (or look on the RSPB website).

Meanwhile, very best wishes to CAWOS and keep up your good work!

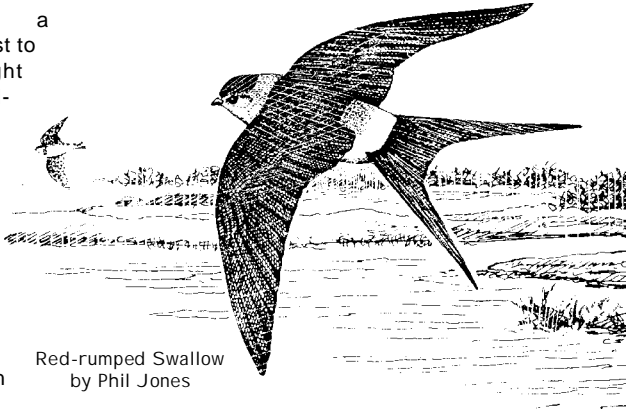
Peter Griffiths, Group Leader Tel: 0161 427 5325



County Rarities

RED-RUMPED SWALLOW *Hirundo daurica*

Usually associated with a Mediterranean-style climate, at least to my mind, warm and dry, a light southerly breeze blowing, Red-rumped Swallows actually utilise a variety of habitats that can be less than kind at times. They also occur throughout the 'old world' in many guises with many distinctly plumaged subspecies, some of which have been elevated to full species status in the last few years. However, the range of the birds closest to Britain is distinctly southern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East.



Red-rumped Swallow
by Phil Jones

As far as our county goes, Red-rumped Swallows are rare migrants, mainly coastal, but with one or two records inland. Perhaps the best time to have a chance of connecting with one would be in spring when Continental overshoots occur outside their usual range. Single 'flybys' are the expected sighting but there have been 'multiples' that have lingered longer than a few minutes.

Anyone familiar with Red-rumped Swallows will be aware of how different their jizz is when compared to Barn Swallows. Adult Barn Swallows are slim, streamlined flying machines that cut through the air with ease, wings flicking fluidly with abrupt changes of direction as they pursue their aerial prey. Adult Red-rumped Swallows look distinctly different, with a 'blunter' head and a more elongated rear end, more rounded wings, and a slightly slower, less flicking, more gliding, flight action. Perhaps subtle at times and possibly due to plumage features, these differences, once learnt, are enough to raise alarm bells if confronted with even a silhouetted flying bird.

As their name suggests, adults can show 'reddish-orange' upper rumps, fading to cream towards the rear. In some birds, the whole rump can be cream-looking and even whitish at a distance, particularly in juvenile birds, which invites confusion with House Martins at a distance, but never so white as that species and the flight action is different. At long range, perhaps in heat haze or high up in bright sunshine, these differences can become even less distinct. They have a dark blue crown, cap-like, with a reddish-orange nape and ear coverts, with a creamy face and forehead. Like the rump colour, the intensity of the orange can fade to cream and juveniles are duller. The long, forked tail is black, without the white feather edgings shown by Barn Swallows and the black extends to the lower rump and wraps itself around the undertail coverts in a clear-cut line. These emphasise the creamy-white underparts, throat and underwing coverts, making the whole bird look pale, particularly in strong light from below. The fine streaking on the underparts isn't always obvious unless close views are obtained. True, Barn Swallows are whiter below, but to my eye, the pale underparts of Red-rumped Swallows are more eye-catching, probably due to their pale throats. The back and wing coverts are glossy deep blue like the crown, whilst the flight feathers are duller and greyer. Juveniles are duller and greyer above with whitish-buff feather edgings to the coverts and tertials.

The call is also a good pointer, being totally unlike Barn Swallow; it's more of a chippering "tveek" with slurred "keers" thrown in, difficult to describe, but obvious once learnt.

They are common in a lot of their range around the Mediterranean and can be as tame as Barn Swallows, landing a few feet away on dusty tracks or at their nests.

The further east one goes, the different the 'subspecies' becomes, with birds exhibiting a range of plumages that include bright orange underparts, heavier streaks or maybe very different calls.

The 'splitters' are having some success and several 'new' species have been described. Okay, so the birds will have known that they've been different for thousands of years, but us frail humans are only just beginning to understand the complexities of hirundine genetics. Whatever the form, they are always an eye-catching bird and one that gets noted down no matter where I am. They are a favourite, I must admit.

Tony Broome

In Cheshire and Wirral there have been seven records involving eight birds up until the last *Bird Report* was published. In some years there are national influxes in weather with southerlies in spring, and then birds turn up in the north-west of Britain. Five records are from Wirral with three of these recorded in April-May: Red Rocks 3rd May 1980, Hilbre 7th May 1988, and Heswall 20th-21st Apr 2003, and the other two in August-September: Red Rocks 28th Sep 1985 and adjacent to Inner Marsh Farm RSPB 9th Aug 2002 (being seen mostly over the border at Shotwick). The two inland records both occurred in the April-May period: Sandbach Flashes 15th May 2001 and Hurleston Reservoir 24th-25th Apr 2003. Both twitchable and multiple occurrences are rare in our county, but the two Red-rumped Swallows which turned up at Hurleston Reservoir provided many birders with excellent views, as the birds stayed for a welcome second day.

Sheila Blamire

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Rarities Team News

GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSING SCARCE COUNTY BIRD RECORDS

The Rarities Team want to keep the records process as transparent as possible, and with this in mind have produced the following guidelines which the team considers when assessing county rarities:

1. A description should outline the circumstances of the record, including dates, observers' names, optics, light conditions, and distance from bird. It should include key features of the species claimed. Supporting plumage, jizz, and vocal details, together with sketches and/or photographs should be included. Experience of the claimed and similar species should also be indicated. Where possible the standard Rarity Form should be used.



2. Records based solely/mainly on identification by call or song should be supported with a description of the call or song. Ideally, the bird should have been heard more than once and also, ideally, should have been seen at least well enough to eliminate anything else that may have been making the sound heard. Other details should include the number of times the call was heard, the previous experience the observer has had of the species and all possible confusion species, a full description of the call to include a description of the call notes (including length) and if the bird is seen, a description of the 'jizz' of the bird eg: size, shape, mode of flight.

3. The description should contain sufficient detail to eliminate common or confusion species, including eliminating possible hybrids. It should also contain, where possible, sufficient detail to support age and sex determination.

4. Records based solely on unambiguous photographs can be accepted, provided the team is satisfied with the provenance of the photograph.

5. While the experience and reliability of the observer is a factor in evaluating a record, the description needs to be of a standard where someone who does not know the observer would consider that it is far more likely that the identification is correct than that it is not. The level of certainty will depend upon factors such as the rarity status in the county, or any complexities of identification of the species claimed.

6. Acceptance or otherwise of records is based upon the votes of the six team members. In the first round of voting members are not aware of the opinions and comments of other members until

after voting is complete. Team members should not make assumptions about things not included in the description. Team members can vote to pend a record if they have questions about the description, require more information or would value a discussion with their fellow team members.

7. The process for evaluating the record will be on the basis of votes cast to either accept, or reject/deem not proven, or pend for further discussion. The voting system is applicable to all circulations of the record.

6:0 = accepted

5:1 = accepted, unless the team secretary decides, on the basis of comments received, to pend it. The team does feel that it is important that a majority of evidence for acceptance is employed in this case.

4:2, 3:3 or 2:4 = pended

1:5 = rejected/not proven, unless the team secretary decides on the basis of comments received to pend it for discussion.

0:6 = rejected/not proven

Pended records are discussed at a team meeting, taking into account the team's comments from the first circulation. The team members should make a firm decision after the discussion/second circulation, unless further information becomes available. If the decision after the final circulation is still not at least 5:1 in favour of acceptance, the record is considered rejected/not proven.

8. For records submitted by team members, the secretary, in consultation with the County Recorder and other team members, will decide how to resolve them; this may simply be via a vote by the other team members.

9. Team members' comments about reasons for acceptance or rejected/not proven should be filed with the description by the secretary. The reasons for non-acceptance of records should, in a timely fashion, be fed back to the observers who submitted the record. Options to publish either accepted or not proven records in the CAWOS newsletter *Bird News*, or on the CAWOS website, should be explored to facilitate good practice on a regular basis.

Rarities Team: Steve Barber, Allan Conlin, Howard Fearn, Hugh Pulsford (County Recorder), Jane Turner (Rarities Secretary), Steve Williams



Conservation News

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

Once again the first signs of spring are on us and providing we do not get a prolonged late cold snap we should soon be seeing the first of our summer species back with us. On the Wildlife Crime front things are hotting up. The main problem we are having at present are countless reports of "men with dogs". There have been a number of reports of badger setts being dug and as this goes to press a male from Widnes is awaiting a court appearance for tampering with a sett at Preston-on-the-Hill, after being seen at two further setts at Frodsham. The brown hare population is taking a real battering from the lurcher men who are coming into Cheshire from all over the North-West. The biggest task at present is trying to locate these males when they are out and about and getting them reported under *The Hunting With Dogs Act*.

Although it may be seen as a thing of the past the illegal capture of finches for the cage bird trade is still alive and well and flourishing. Whilst out and about please keep your eyes open for areas of scrub that have been 'gardened' with a view to clearing a 'ride' through the scrub, feeding it then fixing a mist net. These areas are usually fed for a couple of weeks before the net is used. If any large patches of seed are seen also make a note.

With the deregulation of some birds of prey this will put the egg and chick thefts back on the map. The Police at the moment are dealing with several issues over the keeping of wild caught birds of prey. Please keep your eyes on your local population of raptors, and remember just because someone has a pair of binos and a field guide, does not mean they are there for the same reason you are. There is big money to be had in sales of raptors. Cheshire's Peregrine population will again be the main target for thefts. I am aware that Beeston will be setting up a 'watch' this year and I am hoping Helsby will be resurrected. Again, if you have any Peregrines in your area please consider starting a 'Watch scheme'. These birds need our help. **THEY WILL BE TARGETED.**

Whilst on the subject please do not forget 'the Egg Collectors'. Again this network of offenders is still very much alive, active and it will not go away. Many of these collectors plan their operations with military precision, and it is not just the rarities that are targeted, they will clear many clutches of the same species at a time. Please keep your eyes and ears open whilst out and about.

Whilst this may seem like a doom and gloom article, please do not class all bird keepers and falconers as offenders. Many of them are as passionate about conservation as we are. In fact the majority of offences reported to us are from bird keepers and falconers, who are disgusted at the antics of certain persons who bring their hobbies into question.

Please keep your eyes open for illegal use of traps and poison, these methods are still used especially to control raptors.

You are the eyes and ears of the Police. You are out and about in areas that are not normally covered in the day-to-day duties, and will see things that are happening before we get to hear about them. If you feel it is suspicious please report it, and whilst it is no excuse please be patient with our operators, many of them will not have a full working experience of the problems you are trying to relate, and may not be familiar with the area you are in at the time.

The main points we need are vehicle numbers, descriptions of offenders, what you saw them doing, and the fact that you know that particular species are in the location. Please do not put yourselves in any danger.

Any problems please get in touch.

Steve Turner, Conservation Officer

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CAWOS CONSERVATION OFFICER:

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Halton Tony Parker, 41 The Park, Penketh, Warrington, WA5 2SG.
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Macclesfield **Vacant - please let Steve Turner know if you are willing to take on this role**

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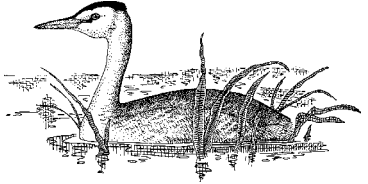
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One Man's Birding

Counting Robins (and applying Naismith's Rule?)

A year or two back I heard that one birder, who fancies himself as a bit of a twitcher, had made a dismissive comment about "people who spend their time counting Robins". That seemed to me not only arrogant, but rather stupid - after all, we all know birders who are red hot on rarities who also do their stint on local patches or surveys. Personally, I've spent quite a bit of time lately counting Robins (among other species), and I recalled this remark when I found myself comparing experiences of the CAWOS and BTO Atlas projects.



Of course, there cannot be direct comparisons. One is a national survey, the other confined to a single county; one is largely quantitative, the other was not; the intention and the methodologies are different. But for the individual observer, spending time looking for birds, often in the same territory, the temptation to compare the two is irresistible.

Take the counting business first. The basis of the BTO survey is an hour (two if you wish) walking in the designated tetrad and counting the number of birds seen; CAWOS only asked us to record the maximum number of birds seen at one time. So, in covering a tetrad for CAWOS I might have recorded two Blackbirds - maximum seen together. In an hour, working the same tetrad for the BTO, I may well log about twenty. I do find this more interesting: I'm sometimes surprised by the relative abundance (or scarcity) of some common species, and I sometimes speculate about variations. Why is it that in two or three tetrads I recorded more Blackbirds than Robins before Christmas, but the position was reversed in the second part of the winter? Did Robins survive the January cold spell better? Did more Blackbirds move out with the onset of cold weather? Or (and I suspect this is the answer) am I just picking up more Robins later in the winter, because more are singing and they are therefore more obvious? Whatever the reason, the counting makes me think a bit - which can't be a bad thing.

What does strike me as odd is the BTO's selection of an hour's walking, time rather than distance, as the unit of measurement. I would describe myself as a slow walker, getting slower as the years advance. I'm conscious that two friends who are surveying over the border in Wales are the sort of distressingly fit hillwalkers who stride effortlessly across the landscape. Keeping up with them would probably kill me (and nearly did, long ago when we were all still young). That's what made me start thinking about Naismith's Rule, used for estimating journey times in the hills; this says you should allow one hour for every three miles over the ground, plus half an hour for every thousand foot of ascent. In practice, and bearing in mind that ascent in my part of the world mostly involves climbing stiles, I seem to be managing more like three kilometres, if I'm lucky, on the BTO survey.

Of course, Naismith was assuming steady walking in hill country, and people have devised various modifications over the years; Tranter's Corrections, for example, allow for variations in level of fitness (and a bit humiliating they are to some of us). Maybe I ought to devise Anderson's Corrections - based on ambling along at a birder's pace, and with additional time for number of species seen and difficulty in getting good views in woodland. Whatever, I suppose that over the survey and surveyors as a whole things average out; even so, it sometimes worries me as I plod along, and I wonder if, say, a simple instruction to walk four kilometres might not have produced more consistency.

The BTO points out that the purpose of these Timed Tetrad Visits is to obtain a sample, rather than find all the species present in a tetrad. The latter, though, was the purpose of the CAWOS survey, and it was much more rewarding. I felt my job was to really get inside the tetrad and ferret out what was there; trying to build as complete a picture as possible of the bird life in the area became a challenge and a source of satisfaction. There was more flexibility in use of time, and I know I'm not the only one who went back to a tetrad to prove breeding, or to fill in some obvious gaps. (I don't know if my wife ever realised that my suggestion that it was a lovely evening to go for a drink out at Wrenbury arose from annoyance that I had thus far failed to record Swifts there.)

CAWOS also scored, as far as I am concerned, in the requirement to record habitat. A couple of years back David Norman wrote in *Bird News* of having to convince people that this was both desirable and possible. The *Atlas* justifies his comment in the 2007 *CWBR* that "habitat recording was worthwhile and could usefully be encouraged for all records". From the viewpoint of the individual surveyor (or this one at least) this is a dimension sadly lacking in the BTO work.

The tetrads I have covered, for both surveys, are predominantly agricultural: there are a lot of fields, grassland or arable - and you can walk quite a way through them, seeing very little. It took me nearly ten minutes of the BTO's statutory hour to cross one big field; a dozen Fieldfares, in the last hundred yards, were the only birds I saw. At least that tetrad included enough habitat variation to put some life into the day and provide some interesting totals. In contrast, its neighbour illustrated the

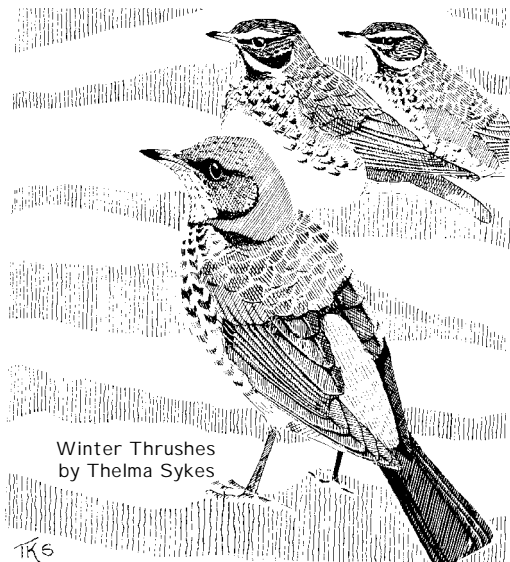
poverty of much of our farmland. My hour's winter walking, on a route which fairly reflected the limited habitat in the tetrad, began in a small wood and thereafter continued over fields. It produced just fifteen species, most of them in the woodland. A hundred or so Woodpigeons in a field of brassicas and three hundred Starlings round a farm were the only birds present in any numbers; the hedgerows yielded a handful of Blackbirds and Robins.

There are of course dangers in generalisation: for example, Woodpigeons, corvids and winter thrushes can be fairly numerous on agricultural land, and fields covered with fresh muck may attract finches or larks. But for much of the time, in our local agricultural landscapes, the greatest variety (and often the greatest number) of birds will be found in what might be termed local hot spots. These include small woodlands, game cover, scrubby damp corners of fields which have escaped cultivation - anything which breaks the monotony of good-quality farmland. They include too what the CAWOS survey identified as 'human sites - rural': farms, and the gardens of houses and cottages, which often produce small concentrations of birds. Had I been recording for the BTO not only the total number of Robins or Blackbirds or tits I found, but also how those numbers related to habitat, I think the results would have been quite revealing.

Maybe all this sounds rather gloomy - as though I've spent too much time tramping around for very little reward. Far from it; I've enjoyed myself. Whatever their differences, the two *Atlas* exercises have had features in common. They have given focus to my birding, and made me more aware of the birds about me. They have both taken me to places I hadn't visited before - some of which I will return to, some not. Both have produced some of those highlights of the day which every birder needs - the cock Stonechat alongside an anonymous ditch, the Bramblings among the finch flock in a little corner of land given over to game cover, the Kingfisher flashing away along a brook.

Counting Robins? I can think of worse ways of spending my time.....

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



PETER WILLIAMS

We regret to announce that Peter Williams, Chairman of the Hilbre Island Bird Observatory (HiBO), passed away on Saturday 7th March 2009. Peter had been involved with Hilbre for over 40 years, and had chaired the group for over 25. He was quite simply THE driving force behind the Observatory and a full obituary will appear in the next issue of *Bird News*.

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.

CHESHIRE REVIEWED FROM A DISTANT MOUNTAIN

So far during my life I have been developing a trait, well probably more than just the one, which I most often come to regret. Alas it leads me to flit from hobby to hobby and project to project, and more often than not the thing I flit away from is left unfinished, even when I embarked upon it with such enthusiasm. Some of you will know of my fascination for *Falco subbuteo*, quite by chance it became an obsession and took over so many hours of my life. On a visit to Chelford sand quarries in the early 1980s I watched in awe as an adult Hobby tore through a flock of several 1000s of Swallows, its acrobatic determination to catch supper mesmerized me. From then on I travelled to several southern counties to enjoy similar displays and to catch insights into a family life that thrives on speed, agility, affection and tension. As so often happens, my mind moved on to other things, then one night I was out walking and met a Cheshire Hobby close to my home turf. The event was made extra special by my being alerted by a call, having heard before the warning calls of the Swallows, a call kept only for their most tenacious predator. At the time I was accompanied by two deaf friends and was able to point out the Hobby to them, the first they had ever seen. We take for granted our hearing and underestimate its value in so often locating bird species for us. I cannot tell you how many times I was able to point out birds that my companions would otherwise have missed. On one special occasion a Cuckoo was perched upon a small tree only 30 yards away and calling with all its might. I drew Simon's attention to it and with hearing aids turned to full volume and me beating out the rhythm conductor style, he was for the first time able to hear what was once the very symbol of our springtime.

Anyway, I once more digress, that first Hobby was in 1991, and over the following two summers sightings became more common. This coincided with a massive increase in the acreage of maize grown both on Toft Hall Farm and across the north of Britain. Our field and those of our neighbours attracted at migration time 10,000s of migrating Swallows to roost in what posed as a dry reed bed. This in its turn attracted the following predators. It's my opinion that the coincidence of the new crop, the density of prey and a change in climate helped to draw northward the breeding range of what was predominantly a southern and eastern breeding raptor. On August 18th 1994 at one of these Swallow roosts in a maize crop, I witnessed a juvenile Hobby toying with the fringes of the pre-roost swarm; at that time I assumed it was just a bird on migration. But now I have my doubts, as I have found families to be very faithful to their home ranges until the second week of September, and even then for the following couple of weeks they are not far off the radar.

On June 20th 1995 I witnessed a pair in display and watched for 15 minutes a wonderful soaring, swooping, twisting and highly vocal display culminating in a food pass from male to female. On August 27th that same year, another juvenile, but this time not at a Swallow roost but shadowing my progress down the pasture and up the lane, as I brought the cows in for afternoon milking. Young Hobbies are very inquisitive, once I had three circling around me as I wound an electric fence on to a very squeaky reel. In 1996 my notes have 40 timed records of Hobby from May 20th to September 24th, including food passes, hunting Swallows, House Martins and even bats, and September 1st three birds together at least one being a youngster. 1997 the same routine, including adults with young from August 23rd. You are probably now wondering why this buffoon never claimed the first breeding Hobbies of the 20th century in Cheshire, and why he never pointed out the stark preference for birds on his patch to nest in Scots pines and fir trees. Well, this is where my grovelling begins, I didn't actually find my first Hobby nest until 1998 and by the time the proposed text for the Cheshire *Atlas* was shown to me we had migrated to Gwynedd and all my notes were in the loft along with 30 other boxes of odds and ends. The notebooks only recently came to light whilst rummaging for other mislaid bits and bobs, so it is with my cap firmly wrung in my hands and my forelock dutifully tugged that I offer my apologies for not putting my sixpenn'th of information into the *Atlas* text.

In 1998 I made observations of Hobby on 87 individual days, between their first arrival on May 19th and their departure on September 25th; that year they reared three young. In 1999 they raised two, 2000 three young, 2001 three young, 2002 two young, 2003 two young, 2004 three young, 2005 three young. Having talked with other experienced Cheshire Hobby watchers it is strange to note that birds in different areas have differing preferences for nesting trees. All the nests I observed were in pine/fir trees located in deciduous woodland, but each was a 'sentinel' tree, projecting above the surrounding trees and offering unbroken vistas to all points of the compass. Others find that their birds nest exclusively in hedgerow oaks. It could just be possible that the pioneer pairs passed on their preference of tree to their young and that these young recruit a mate and return to breed in similar habitat, close to that which their parents found so successful. This may also explain why there appear to be pockets of birds with similar preferences alongside birds with differing preferences, but each having had just as positive experience of their chosen nest sites.

Pete Hall, Hen Dy'r Ysgol, Llithfaen, Pwllheli, Gwynedd, LL53 6NH

BIRDING IN AN URBAN TETRAD

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For the last four years I have been birding and recording in the tetrad SJ75C, a 2km square covering Crewe East, firstly for the *Cheshire and Wirral Atlas*, then the British Trust for Ornithology National Atlas. It has been very rewarding and has thrown up a few surprises, although I knew it had potential from having had several unusual sightings in the area prior to the surveys.

The area in the tetrad includes the town centre shopping complex, Victorian housing, railway embankments, industrial estate with waste ground, two allotments, football ground, railway station, university and grounds, two small parks and a large open grassed area with mature trees. The River Waldron (known locally as the Valley Brook) with tree-lined valley and a large reed-fringed pond bordering another tetrad is also included. Overall there was a wide range of habitats to explore. Visits were often made early in the morning so as not to arouse suspicion. Wandering around with binoculars in a built-up area may seem peculiar to some people, but I made every effort to introduce myself to members of the public and inform them of what I was doing, which led to them often volunteering information regarding their own sightings.

Breeding Birds

As well as the commoner urban breeding birds that you would expect, Sparrowhawk, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Coal Tit, Goldcrest, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Bullfinch, Whitethroat, Chiffchaff and Blackcap all successfully fledged young. Reed Bunting, Lesser Whitethroat, Garden, Sedge and Reed Warbler were all encountered singing during the recording period, and on a private railway site at the southern end of the tetrad Yellowhammers were commonplace. Remarkably, a male Black Redstart was seen by one observer on two occasions, unfortunately breeding wasn't confirmed despite intensive searching. It's worth mentioning that several species nest colonially within the tetrad, these being House Sparrow, Jackdaw, Swift, House Martin and Feral Pigeon.

Winter Visitors

Fieldfare, Redwing, Siskin, Lesser Redpoll, Grey Wagtail and even the occasional Brambling were noted and who could forget the Waxwing invasion during the late winter of 2004, when up to 180 birds were present on the Asda car park feeding on berries, often in the company of two male Blackcaps. It's at this time of the year when roosts tend to build up. The most impressive were the Starlings and around 70,000 used the leylandiis in Pedley Street in the last winter period, which often attracted the local Sparrowhawks trying to predate them. Other roosts include Greenfinch, House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail and Blackbird.

Rarities

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Mediterranean Gull and Black Redstart are all worthy of a mention, but the rarest sighting must go to the Desert Wheatear seen on private railway land from 12th to 14th December 2007. This was a first for Cheshire and Wirral and a bird I have still not seen, but it just demonstrates what can turn up in an urban or working environment.

Flyovers

Although not directly associated with the tetrad birds flying over have been noted. Passerines such as Meadow Pipit and Skylark, raptors including Buzzard, Kestrel, Peregrine and even Hobby, but the most impressive has to be an Osprey seen heading north over Hungerford Road in spring. Wading birds, Raven and Pink-footed Geese have also been noted. The latter is not to be confused with the local resident Canada Geese that move around several sites and pass over the tetrad regularly.

General

Birds seen prior to the recording period have included Spotted Flycatcher, Kingfisher, Coot, Water Rail, Snipe, Tawny Owl and Barn Owl.

Although survey work has now been completed for this tetrad, I will continue to keep a close eye on it, as I now regard this as my urban local patch and you just never know what could turn up or return.

Mark Stubbs

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

My late mother had two older brothers who farmed in, respectively, Hulse Heath and Allstock. Both spoke Cheshire dialect, now rarely heard. Other members of the family, including my mother, knew some dialect words and phrases but were not 'broad' Cheshire. Some examples: an inquiry about someone's health might evoke the response "Amawreet" ("I'm alright"), going 'wom' means going home, "dinna meither me" = "don't bother me", slutch for mud, gawpin' (staring), jiggered (exhausted), clorping (e.g. spreading thickly), monny, being difficult in a male way, childer raggin' nests (children birds nesting).

There were dialect names for some bird species also, some were known more widely, like peewit for the Lapwing, shepster for the Starling, tomtit for the Great Tit (also, strangely, known as King Charles), and peggy wagtail for the Pied Wagtail. All these I remember; however, others were more obscure like 'worriter' for the Red-backed Shrike, which probably disappeared from Cheshire before World War 2. Widely known as the yaffle, the Green Woodpecker was also dubbed the ettwall in Cheshire, according to Christine E. Jackson, who compiled *British Names of Birds* (published by H.F.&G. Witherby in 1968). She quotes nine different Cheshire names for the Whitethroat, including straw mouse and churr muffitt! The Wren is similarly given many names, Jinny Wren I remember from childhood but the rest were rather strange, including jitty, two-fingers and stumpy Dick or stumpy Toddy. The Song Thrush was a throstle or mavis, while the Mistle Thrush had numerous names, including shrillcock and stone thrush. The Swift was a mattock or black martin.

My father had an egg collection from when he was a boy. Before he disposed of it when such things became illegal I recall him showing me the eggs of the Writing Master, which turned out to be the Yellowhammer, the name coming from the script like markings on the eggs. Other Cheshire names listed by Jackson include scribble lark, scribbling bunting, goldy or gowdie. The Yellow Wagtail, once common as a breeding bird in Cheshire, often nests in potato fields, hence such local names as potato/tater-setter/dropper. It was also known as the summer wagtail (very logical) and, the one I like best, the sunshine bird. Some names were downright confusing, like spoonbill for Shoveler and Scotch queest for Stock Dove. (I recall many years ago a former neighbour telling me, in all seriousness, that he'd seen a crane pass by. It was only after talking at cross purposes for some time that it emerged that he was brought up in Ireland, where – perversely – herons were known as cranes!) In some parts of Britain herons were known as harsers or hernsaws, in Cheshire this was abbreviated to hern, yern, yarn or varn. Another name was longnix, presumably meaning long-neck. Widely known as the windhover, the Kestrel was dubbed stone hawk or jack hawk in Cheshire. The Meadow Pipit was a moor peep or peetlark and the Greenfinch was the green lennart (linnet). The Goldfinch was a red linnet or nicker nocker. The Fieldfare was known as the French bird. Country people drew no distinction between the Carrion Crow and the Rook, all were 'crows'. Confusingly, one name for the Wheatear was 'stonechat', while the real Stonechat was a stonepricker or winter utick. Similarly, the Reed Bunting was a 'blackcap', pit or reed sparrow. A rather nice name for the Chaffinch was twink. Owls were ullets. The Nightjar was a moth owl and the Barn Owl a gil-hooter. Quite why the Tawny Owl was a hill hooter I can't imagine and as for the Little Grebe being called foot-in-arse, I'll have to leave this one to your imagination!

Bob Groom, 17 Queensway, Knutsford, Cheshire, WA16 0NJ

ATLAS

I showed the *Atlas* to a friend who, though interested in birds, would not claim to be a knowledgeable birdwatcher. She was so impressed by it that she bought a copy. A few days after she received it, she contacted my wife to say how helpful it had been. She had seen what she thought was a Siskin but could not positively identify the bird and was unsure whether or not she would see it in Cheshire. The photo in the *Atlas* helped her to confirm her identification, and the distribution map showed her that it would be quite possible to see one in the county. Another lady saw the *Atlas* and bought copies for two of her children, both in their 50s, who were delighted with it. A good example of the *Atlas* reaching out to the general public.

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

SWIFT RELAUNCH

This note was inadvertently missed out of the last issue of Bird News. Our apologies. Ed.

Having today received *Bird News* No 77, I set about revisiting some previously known Swift nesting sites and have reported my findings to Brian Martin. At one of the houses I visited, the lady who lives there, Brenda, told me a most interesting and heart-warming story concerning a baby fledgling Swift which, having failed in its maiden flight, had fallen onto the front lawn. Brenda and her husband Walter had experienced similar events previously and had often succeeded in restoring the chicks to the parents. On this occasion they judged that the fledgling could probably fly if they gave it a second start. Walter carefully picked up the young bird and carried it to the nearby hay field (soft landing ground?). He held the bird in the palm of both hands and gently thrust the bird upwards and forwards.

Immediately Walter had placed the chick in an airborne situation, the parent birds, which until now were nowhere to be seen, appeared alongside and slightly below, and somehow seemed to encourage the youngster to successfully fly with them to safety. The immediate appearance of the parents seems almost miraculous. I wonder if the Swifts, having nested at the same house for many years, instinctively knew that Brenda and Walter were sympathetic to them.

Ian Oxley, 58 Windmill Drive, Audlem, Cheshire, CW3 0BE

THE WEB, WHAT A WONDERFUL PLACE

Fear, loathed, loved and hated emotions that are all expressed when the Internet is mentioned; however, when reading the CAWOS November *Bird News* I saw the article on the newly created look for the CAWOS website. Quicker than you can say control-alt-delete I was onto the Web to admire the site. What a great improvement. Congratulations to all involved on what has been achieved so far, I look forward to the future developments.

On the subject of the Web, the 'inter-thingy', or 'tinterweb' as an old boss of mine calls it, there is now such a plethora of sites dedicated to our favourite topic, BIRDS, it's hard to cherry pick those that are good, useful or worthwhile. At the end of this article I will list a couple of my favourites I currently visit on a regular basis. Beyond those sites dedicated to the big organisations such as the RSPB, BTO, WWT, CWT and all the other Wildlife Trust sites, which although all informative may be just a little too corporate, there are just stacks that are very personal, from one-man businesses selling optics and seed, to those just writing blogs about what they have seen.

My most recent foray has been into the world of the podcast and I have managed (more by luck than skill I think) to download them onto my son's cast-off Ipod Nano (not enough Gig he tells me). I have taken to listening to www.birdwatchradio.com - an American broadcast that has only been 'on air' 12 months. These shows which can be listened to in the comfort of your home via your computer, or anywhere your laptop (or Ipod in my case) takes you, are thoroughly interesting and worthwhile ways to spend 45 minutes or so. Interview topics have ranged from optics companies discussing their products in relation to birding to a 'Birding shopkeeper', from those that work in bird rescue centres to an interview with the author Douglas Carlson on his biography on Roger Tory Peterson. Tune in, as they say, and stay listening.

Amongst those more local to home, I regularly visit the Macclesfield RSPB website, Focalpoint and Greater Manchester Birding sites for updates on what's about locally before I venture forth. I

also browse the CWT and Lancs WT sites for ideas on somewhere new to visit and explore. Checking the tides out at easytide should I venture further afield to the Mersey, Dee or Wirral shores to catch the rising tides or a north-westerly, hunting for petrels at bbc.co.uk/weather and Atlantic pressure charts.

I have also contributed my part to this growing phenomenon by adding my details and observations directly online to the BTO Atlas 2007 - 2011 survey and Breeding Birds Survey square. I am now with some confidence planning to add my records to the County Database via the wonders of the Web too. The other site for those listers of you out there is one I was introduced to by my mate Bill, called Bubo and you can add to it your own lists, Garden, Annual, County, Life and even local patch for sites such as Moore and Neumann's, Sandbach and others.

So have a look at something new and check these websites out: www.rspb.org.uk www.bto.org.uk www.fpoint.co.uk www.deeestuary.co.uk www.easytide.ukho.gov.uk www.fatbirder.com www.macclesfieldrspb.org.uk. And definitely check out: www.birdwatchradio.com and www.bubo.org

Happy Surfing

Marc Granville, Holmes Chapel

If YOU see anything of interest in your local paper, on the internet, 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.

RECORDING - TIME TO MOVE TO THE TAX YEAR?

Ever willing to stir up a bit of an argument, I have a question to ask Council - and especially the County Recorder and *Bird Report* Editor.

Why do we publish a bird report which follows the calendar year?

Just think about it. The CWBR, like every other report I can recall seeing, runs from January to December. This means that, every year, we have references to "the first winter period" and "the second winter period". The two are, of course, quite unrelated. The first may be very harsh, the second very mild (or vice versa). The first may be, say, a good Waxwing winter while in the second the species may be scarce. In between the two "winter periods" are a full breeding season, plus spring and autumn migration. What happened last winter is far removed from what happens this. Why bother including two disparate winter seasons in the same volume of records?

Many of us are, or have been, involved in the BTO and CAWOS Atlas surveys. In both, a far more rational arrangement applies. Winter runs from November to February, summer from April to July. Do a summer survey and a winter survey, and you have a reasonable picture of birdlife through an avian year. Your average bird doesn't know that it's New Year's Day (apart, maybe, from being irritated by an increase in the number of bleary-eyed birders, all starting their year lists).

So, I suggest that it would make far more sense (and be more consistent with the patterns of bird life) if our recording year ran from April to March. We would see the same birds, record them as we do now, but collate the records into a 'natural' year rather than one dictated by (traditional but not very logical) human calendars. It wouldn't stop us keeping year lists. Indeed, we could have two year lists: one for the calendar year, one for the recording year - quite a benefit for obsessive listers. And now, while many of us are grooved into Atlas recording patterns, would seem a good time to make the change.

It seems to me that the case for such a change is unanswerable. The only arguments I can see against it are a) that we've always done it this way, and b) that everyone else does it this way. These are just about the weakest arguments that can be advanced: they were probably used when people objected to those new-fangled wheels - if not before then, when somebody dared suggest that a hut might be warmer than a cave.

Why shouldn't CAWOS be the society to break the mould and adopt a more realistic approach to recording? Answers from Council would be greatly appreciated.....

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

RESPONSE TO BOB'S LETTER

On reading Bob's suggestion to change the recording year to run from April to March, with November to March recognised as winter and April to July as summer, my immediate response was "What happened to spring? Spring is far too good a season to only enjoy it for one month!" Flippantly put, but the problem is that seasons do overlap as far as the birds are concerned. By splitting the calendar year in March our *Bird Report* based on the 'new' reporting year would simply be splitting records for spring migration across two reports instead of splitting winter records as we do now. Looking at the months and seasons, I firmly believe there would not be a 12-month period that would not have similar problems, as late winter overlaps with early spring and the summer breeding season overlaps with the 'autumn' return passage.

And what about the logistics? Much of the data from which the *Bird Report* is compiled comes from reserves or societies such as Woolston Eyes, Dee Estuary RSPB Reserve, SECOS, Rostherne Mere, Hilbre Observatory, ringing groups, etc. Unless all of these change their systems CAWOS could be waiting for 14-15 months after the end of our 'new' recording year before receiving data for the 2nd calendar year period January to March. Also, what about the 12-month data we supply to other organisations, such as the RSPB and RBBP (Rare Breeding Birds Panel)? It simply would not work. It would be like our county unilaterally deciding that from now on everyone should drive on the right hand side of the road; chaos would ensue. (This reminds me of a rather funny Irish joke, which would not be considered at all PC today!).

I did, though, forward Bob's note to others who may have wanted to comment. One suggested that perhaps Bob had read the following quote: "This *Report* is taken to the end of the winter season and the spring emigration of April, making a more natural year than the calendar". Source: Eric Hardy in the introduction to the 1951-52 *Bird Report of the Merseyside Naturalists' Association*. Eric Hardy obviously started off with good intentions of maintaining this recording period, which lasted into the mid-1950s. However, *MNA Reports* covering 1955-57 and 1960-62 broke the pattern and with some records it becomes very difficult or even impossible to tell which year they refer to. One solid idea has come out of all of this though, which will be explored further – that for some species, in order to put the current year's records in context, it might be appropriate to include one or two sentences referring to, for example, the late winter period (i.e. Nov-Dec) of the previous year. Waxwing irruptions immediately spring to mind, as do Starling roosts, concentrations of winter thrushes, etc. In fact, I have occasionally referred to the previous year's records when highlighting species in my 'Database Statistics' article for the *Bird Report*.

So, CAWOS will not be the society to break the mould and adopt a different 'year' for recording purposes. However, some good may come out of Bob's "rather mischievous suggestion" (his words, not mine!). So watch this space!

Sheila Blamire on behalf of the Bird Report and Database Teams

BIRDS AND THE WEATHER ANOTHER TIME

Word on the street, well a text on my mobile from my best birding buddy Bill, forwarded from his Rare Bird Alert pager (that's technology for you) Waxwings were afoot, sorry afloat in Macclesfield again. So that's why I found myself in central Macc by King's School and its environs, in the rain, determined that I did not dip again on this most charismatic of winter visitors. Well, a determined effort on a cold, gloomy Saturday afternoon with the thin, light rain setting in drew yet another blank and I dipped again. So after two fruitless hours looking at every berry tree and bush (rowan, pyracantha and cotoneaster) I could find, I gave up the ghost on them.

Apart from the light rain what's this got to do with the weather you ask? Well, noting the time of year I thought my best bet for other winter visitors was to head into Macc Forest and trust my luck to the reservoirs for duck. I was not disappointed with two male Goosanders on Trentabank, gliding effortlessly across the water in opposite directions, the spell only broken by the crass arrival of a juvenile Cormorant, in a less than graceful fashion. Not bothered by this new arrival but showing their class the Goosanders drifted off out of my sight, by comparison to the rushed paddle of this new arrival. At their departure I moved onto Ridgeway with two male Goldeneyes, six Tufted Ducks (male/female), two Little Grebes and a flock of 13 (is 13 a flock?) Pochards, eight males and five females. The Pochards were casually loafing and preening themselves whilst the

Goldeneyes, Tufties and Grebes were disappearing and then bobbing up with a spring, in quite an energetic style.

As I stood in the small recess at the side of the parking bay observing all this activity I began studying the plumage of the Pochards through my scope, as they drifted toward me, and my mind drifted back to Bob Anderson's article on weather and watching (*Bird News* 78 Nov 2008). As I became engrossed in the details of this flock, I became more conscious of the light and the weather as the light rain fell on and around the birds.

Though now with the afternoon wearing thin, the light changed and the rain had a certain lustre hard to describe, but more substantial than earlier and the colour of liquid mercury, silvery as it flowed off the Pochards' backs and into the dark mirror of the reservoir. Tiny circlets expanded around each bird as the gentle rain hit the surface followed by more again and again and again. Finally, time not the weather caught up with me and if only the light had remained a little longer I would have enjoyed, rather than endured, this rainy afternoon. This image of the Pochards in the rain will remain with me a long time, so much for Waxwings. Thanks Bob.

Marc Granville, Holmes Chapel

THE BTO BUSINESS BIRD CHALLENGE

Congratulations to the Waste Recycling Group who are winners in the 2008 BTO Business Bird Challenge. They won the 'Land Management' category in the 'Community Awards' section for the management of Arpley Landfill Site, including Moore Nature Reserve. This follows on from their success in the previous competition, held in 2006, when they won the 'Restoration' category in the 'Birds Awards' section with an impressive count of 131 species of birds recorded.

A celebration of the partnership between business and the environment

In Britain today, more people are members of environmental organisations than political parties. In this climate of environmental awareness, it is vital for businesses to demonstrate a commitment to conservation. The results for businesses can be astounding, improving competitiveness and building trust between employees and the local community.

What is the Challenge?

The Business Bird Challenge began in 1994 and is a unique partnership between businesses, the BTO and local communities which encourages biodiversity on business and industrial sites. Held every two years, the Challenge has become a celebration of environmental initiatives by businesses throughout the UK, in the categories of Conservation, Community and Birds.

Who can participate?

A wide variety of companies enter the Challenge. Sites range from working quarries, power stations and oil refineries, to research establishments, company headquarters and restored nature reserves. Categories include Wetland, Quarry, Commercial and Research and Light Industry, but are tailored to allow for the largest diversity of participants, so that each site has a good opportunity to win. The Challenge is not just for big businesses, it is about maximising the potential of business sites for birds and other wildlife whatever the size.

DISTURBANCE

This was first published under the January Bird News section of the February newsletter on the Dee Estuary Birding website www.deeestuary.co.uk.

It has been a disappointing month for me, not because I've dipped out on a rarity or whatever - no, I've been disappointed by the behaviour of a small number of photographers and birders. So I thought, rather than have a bird summary this month I would suggest some guidelines in what is probably a vain hope they will make some difference:

NEVER deliberately disturb birds.

NEVER walk through an area in order to deliberately flush birds which may be hidden.

ALWAYS keep your distance from birds so they can feed/roost without being stressed or disturbed.

REMEMBER - If during watching or photographing birds they are disturbed by your presence then **YOU ARE TOO CLOSE**. No photograph is more important than the birds.

I believe that the large majority of birders and photographers are already fully aware of the above and I have to say that has been my experience; but there seems to be a minority spoiling it for others, and the birds!!

You will probably gather from the above that there have been a few incidents over the past few weeks; I will describe three as examples:

1) A certain award-winning photographer (not one who contributes to this website, I hasten to add) was observed out on Parkgate Marsh within the Hen Harrier roost area. He was escorted away by the RSPB before he could do any harm. There was the possibility that the harriers would have been so disturbed that they would have moved their roost elsewhere, not only causing stress to the birds but destroying the great spectacle which birders have of this roost site from the Old Baths car park. Incidentally, in the past few days there has been an interesting thread on BirdForum where it is alleged that "a certain award-winning photographer (again not one who contributes to this website, I hasten to add) has been putting photographs on his website and onto BirdGuides claiming they were wild birds when in fact they were captive".

2) Some birders were wading through the middle of West Kirby marsh during the recent cold spell in order to flush Jack Snipe. These birds will already have been under stress due to the cold weather so no way is there any justification in making them fly just so you can put them on your year list (or whatever). Additionally, all other birds in the marsh will have been disturbed. A certain local RSPB warden strongly implied that I was encouraging such activity by putting Jack Snipe records on this website; so I hope this article redresses the balance.*

3) It was good to have the small flock of Waxwings [across the county border] at Wepre Park, Connah's Quay, for several days. As they were the only local flock to stick around for a while they attracted a good number of both photographers and birders. It was a pity, therefore, that some chose to stand far too close to the small rowan tree where the Waxwings were feeding, undoubtedly making them nervous and flighty. I'll give you a couple of quotes from one of the bird forums: "The person was also there on Friday, wearing a bright yellow coat and strolling around right underneath the tree", "There was one particularly obnoxious 'cameraman' who seemed to want to stir up his mates against anyone who suggested that they may be a little close. Why do they need such big lenses if they have to stand so close?". Need I say more?

* This requires a bit of explanation. Firstly, I was unaware that some birders were deliberately wading through the marsh in order to flush them when I published the Jack Snipe records - naive of me, perhaps, but I wasn't being hypocritical and certainly not knowingly encouraging the practice. Secondly, I don't want to imply that all birders who send me Jack Snipe records are doing this; snipe can be flushed for a number of reasons including a high tide covering the marsh.

Richard Smith, Dee Estuary Birding www.deeestuary.co.uk

106 - NOT OUT

No, not my age but there were many times towards the end of last year when I felt like it! During the latter half of 2007 it began to dawn upon me that in the following year I would be entering my eighth decade. A pretty sobering thought! Not being particularly fit and at that time suffering increasing 'fuel poverty', I thought it might be a sensible idea to go back to basics by trying to see as many species as I could, walking from my house (and back!). Nothing too strenuous was envisaged and certainly there would be no chance of my 'having' to see a bird. But, needless to say, as the year passed, and the list grew, an inevitable compulsion set in.

At the outset I had to decide whether to walk as far as I liked or to define some boundary. In the interests of our county records I decided to limit myself to that part of the SJ98 10km square which fell in Cheshire and not to stray over the border north into the 'foreign' territory of Greater Manchester. This still gave me a good range of habitat. Looking to the east there was the potential of walking a fair distance over the Pennines if fitness progressed and the incentive was there.

January

Little did I realise on January 1st what pleasure lay in store as the year progressed. The original plan of a rather laid-back approach was reflected in a gentle circular walk on New Year's Day. Birds recorded that day were species to be expected from gardens, local fields and pools. The full list can be seen at the end of this article. This shows the date each species was first seen and the

distance within half-mile increments from the house. Quite a few species were subsequently seen nearer to home but as so many are relatively common, and others are uncommon breeders, I haven't named any specific site. Inevitably, the first few days provided the bulk of the year's sightings. Over 30% of the year's list was seen by walking just a short distance on New Year's Day. Living in a house which has Poynton Brook edging the west of my garden those birds which are attracted to the bankside alders and which use the stream as a flying 'corridor' are regular garden birds. The early winter period of 2008 was certainly a year when many Siskins were at the feeders, with between 40 and 50 at times in the garden. Grey Wagtails visited the back lawn on January 1st and frequently during the rest of the year. They fed young here later in the spring which means nesting probably occurred nearby. Other encouraging changes from a January list thirty years ago was a Raven flying over the house towards Adlington on 5th and a few Shoveler on a small pool within 1.5 miles of home. Distances are as the Raven flies and the true mileage covered to reach some sites within each radius was on average rather more than this. In fact all of the 54 species seen during January were within two miles of the house.

February

I was away abroad for the majority of this month and I thought it unlikely that I would miss any rarity in the winter months. My feelings can only be imagined, however, when I was told of a rumoured Cattle Egret somewhere in Poynton parish as I was waiting to board the plane on 4th! A first taste of that sinking feeling and the realisation that the LIST had some significance. Needless to say, I thought that by the time I returned home the Egret, if it had existed at all, would be long gone. The bird was indeed found and the site notified to the national bird lines. Luckily, it stayed until I returned home on 27th and for some time afterwards, being just one of a large influx into the country of Cattle Egrets that winter.

March

Tawny Owls are frequently calling in my garden and with an early rise I can usually locate one from the bedroom window. The first of our local Oystercatchers was back on 2nd. It is interesting to contrast this relatively recent inland breeding with comment in Boyd's *Country Diary of a Cheshire Man*. He refers to this "big handsome wader rarely occurring inland and seldom being seen away from salt water as it is in Scotland and the North of England" (1). Peregrines flying over the same area are also a welcome sign of the improvement in their numbers. Buzzards have now become our most common raptor with up to a dozen seen circling at times within a mile of the house. A Stonechat seen on 14th is also not that uncommon.

Spring passage was starting and a Redshank on 16th, feeding around the edge of a temporary flood which forms each year, was quite a rare inland wader for the square. A Little Ringed Plover was at the same site on 29th, with a male Blackcap in a nearby hedge the following day.

April

Rather foolishly I was away again in Spain for a few days at the beginning of this month. On 5th I was drinking a pleasant cup of coffee in a little café above Tarifa looking out across the straits to Morocco. Passage was still in full swing with plenty of Black Kites arriving. It was then that I received a text message to say that an Osprey has just flown along Poynton Pool! My reply is unprintable but of the nature that the senders were not welcome to join me! In defence I also rather weakly said that two more Ospreys had just arrived from Africa and were on their way.

A spate of migrants was seen back home from 11th onwards with numbers of Wheatear in the more open areas. A Green Sandpiper was another good wader found a few hundred yards from the 'Redshank' flood. A pair of Ring-necked Parakeets was more often heard than seen in my garden and along the brook running north from my house. This brought back memories of their past breeding in Cheadle Hulme and of the Poynton Parrot. A walk further afield towards the hills on 26th brought good views of Redstarts and Pied Flycatchers, another species to have increased over the years. A Green Woodpecker on the following day proved rather more elusive. Surprisingly, it took until 28th to catch up with a Whitethroat.

May

Another walk to the hills on 2nd provided good views of 'parachuting' Tree Pipits. The morning of 5th started with that down feeling. Being alerted by an early (for me) morning text to a stables area

where six Yellow Wagtails had been seen there was no sign on my arrival. Within a short while, however, four of them, or even a different group, were in the same field with the horses. This is a bird which has now become notable on passage rather than relatively commonplace as it was years ago. A Whinchat stayed briefly nearby over the next few days. Towards the end of the month a heroic trek of some 15 miles up over Bowstones towards Kettleshulme and back provided views of a Dipper! Of course, they breed much nearer to home but in the Greater Manchester part of SJ98. To think that I needed to do this when, some thirty years ago, they were breeding just over a mile from home! By now new species were becoming more difficult to see. Quite a lot of time was spent looking for Barn Owl which is being helped by the breeding boxes put up around here by the Barn Owl Groups, as elsewhere in the county. Eventually, I had brief views of one flying without in any way disturbing such a sensitive breeder. Sadly, two were later reported dead in the same area, probably due to poisoning.

June

The 100th species for the year and the only new one seen this month was that elusive small bird, the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Often one hears from people who have a casual interest that they have seen a Lesser Spotted in their gardens and some reports are even convincing regarding the size of the bird. As the excellent recent Atlas confirms they may be inconspicuous but they are also in very low numbers in Cheshire. The reason for their nationwide decline is often speculated upon, with both the increasing usage of their nest holes and predation by Great Spotted Woodpeckers put forward as possible causes.

July – December

The second half of the year provided only six further new species for several reasons. The summer months are, of course, less likely to bring different species until the second winter period starts. Also as a real 'excuse', despite feeling fitter than I had done for years, I picked up some pretty debilitating viral illness which meant it was a struggle to summon up the energy to walk far. I did manage right at the end of the year to see a real rarity in the form of a Green-winged Teal which presumably came in during the cold weather with a larger party of Common Teal. I'm ashamed to say that I gave up at the prospect of walking to two other rarities during what has been described as a 'purple patch' for this 10km square. But I did drive to see both the Hawfinches at Disley and the Snow Bunting on the Gritstone Trail beyond Bowstones.

Missed Species

Inevitably, species were missed, either because they were flyovers for other observers, or very short stayers, which I didn't get to, or simply because I didn't latterly have any luck. For the sake of completion the 16 species missed were:

Feb 7:	Willow/Marsh Tit	Aug 11:	Crossbill
14:	Wigeon	14:	Hobby*
19:	Water Rail	Oct 30:	Merlin
Mar 3:	Barnacle Goose	Nov 6:	Brambling (despite much looking)
Apr 5:	Osprey	Dec 17:	Great Black-backed Gull
23:	Wood Warbler	22:	Hawfinch
Apr-Jul:	Cuckoo	24:	Snow Bunting
	Sedge Warbler	25:	Waxwing

*Quite the most frustrating miss, having watched an almost certainly breeding pair from the edge of SJ98

Altogether for the Cheshire portion of the SJ98 10km square this makes an annual total of 122 species including the few which can be kindly described as 'feral'.

Finally, none of this would have been possible without the information and directions supplied by three more mobile friends. I should also add that one of them was able to see more species than I did under his own steam by covering hundreds of miles over the full 10km square on his bicycle.

Perhaps it is foolish to conclude with a challenge but it should be quite easy for a younger person to exceed my modest total covering a full inland 10km square on foot. I can assure them that they will be treated to a very pleasurable experience. No CHEATING now!

Richard Gabb, 72 Chester Road, Poynton, Cheshire

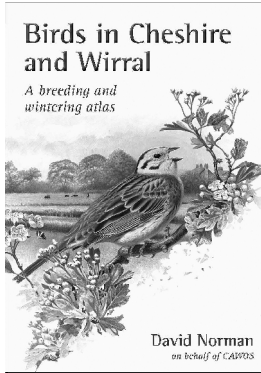
SJ98 CHESHIRE

No	Date	Species	Walking Distance	No	Date	Species	Walking Distance
1	Jan 1	Siskin	0.5ml radius	54	Jan 26	Feral Pigeon	2.0ml radius
2	Jan 1	Great Tit	0.5ml radius	55	Feb 20	Sparrowhawk	0.5ml radius
3	Jan 1	Blue Tit	0.5ml radius	56	Feb 28	Cattle Egret	2.0ml radius
4	Jan 1	Long-tailed Tit	0.5ml radius	57	Mar 2	Kingfisher	0.5ml radius
5	Jan 1	Duncock	0.5ml radius	58	Mar 2	Tawny Owl	0.5ml radius
6	Jan 1	Woodpigeon	0.5ml radius	59	Mar 2	Skylark	1.5ml radius
7	Jan 1	Blackbird	0.5ml radius	60	Mar 2	Meadow Pipit	1.5ml radius
8	Jan 1	Greenfinch	0.5ml radius	61	Mar 2	Oystercatcher	1.5ml radius
9	Jan 1	Bullfinch	0.5ml radius	62	Mar 2	Tree Sparrow	1.5ml radius
10	Jan 1	Chaffinch	0.5ml radius	63	Mar 6	Peregrine	1.5ml radius
11	Jan 1	House Sparrow	0.5ml radius	64	Mar 14	Stonechat	1.0ml radius
12	Jan 1	Jay	0.5ml radius	65	Mar 14	Reed Bunting	1.0ml radius
13	Jan 1	Robin	0.5ml radius	66	Mar 14	Little Grebe	1.0ml radius
14	Jan 1	Starling	0.5ml radius	67	Mar 15	Little Owl	1.5ml radius
15	Jan 1	Magpie	0.5ml radius	68	Mar 16	Curlew	1.0ml radius
16	Jan 1	Collared Dove	0.5ml radius	69	Mar 16	Pheasant	2.0ml radius
17	Jan 1	Jackdaw	0.5ml radius	70	Mar 16	Redshank	1.0ml radius
18	Jan 1	Nuthatch	0.5ml radius	71	Mar 29	Woodcock	1.5ml radius
19	Jan 1	Carrion Crow	0.5ml radius	72	Mar 29	L. Ringed Plover	1.0ml radius
20	Jan 1	Redwing	1.0ml radius	73	Mar 30	Blackcap	1.0ml radius
21	Jan 1	Canada Goose	1.0ml radius	74	Mar 31	Chiffchaff	1.0ml radius
22	Jan 1	Mistle Thrush	0.5ml radius	75	Mar 31	Cormorant	1.0ml radius
23	Jan 1	Black-hd Gull	0.5ml radius	76	Apr 11	Wheatear	1.0ml radius
24	Jan 1	Grey Wagtail	0.5ml radius	77	Apr 12	Swallow	1.0ml radius
25	Jan 1	Mallard	1.0ml radius	78	Apr 13	Golden Plover	1.5ml radius
26	Jan 1	Moorhen	1.0ml radius	79	Apr 15	Sand Martin	1.0ml radius
27	Jan 1	Coot	1.0ml radius	80	Apr 21	Common S'piper	1.0ml radius
28	Jan 1	Tufted Duck	1.0ml radius	81	Apr 21	Green Sandpiper	1.0ml radius
29	Jan 1	Mute Swan	1.0ml radius	82	Apr 22	Willow Warbler	0.5ml radius
30	Jan 1	Fieldfare	1.5ml radius	83	Apr 26	Ring-nk Parakeet	0.5ml radius
31	Jan 1	Pied Wagtail	1.5ml radius	84	Apr 26	Redstart	3.0ml radius
32	Jan 1	Wren	1.0ml radius	85	Apr 26	Pied Flycatcher	3.0ml radius
33	Jan 1	Goldcrest	0.5ml radius	86	Apr 27	Gn Woodpecker	3.5ml radius
34	Jan 1	Coal Tit	0.5ml radius	87	Apr 27	Linnet	1.0ml radius
35	Jan 2	Rook	1.0ml radius	88	Apr 28	Whitethroat	1.0ml radius
36	Jan 2	Buzzard	1.5ml radius	89	Apr 28	House Martin	1.0ml radius
37	Jan 2	G. Spot W'pecker	1.0ml radius	90	Apr 29	Swift	1.0ml radius
38	Jan 3	Stock Dove	0.5ml radius	91	Apr 29	L. Whitethroat	2.0ml radius
39	Jan 3	Goldfinch	0.5ml radius	92	May 2	Tree Pipit	3.5ml radius
40	Jan 3	Common Gull	1.0ml radius	93	May 5	Greylag Goose	1.5ml radius
41	Jan 3	Gt Crested Grebe	1.0ml radius	94	May 5	Yellow Wagtail	1.0ml radius
42	Jan 3	Song Thrush	1.5ml radius	95	May 6	Whinchat	1.5ml radius
43	Jan 3	Grey Heron	1.5ml radius	96	May 7	Garden Warbler	2.5ml radius
44	Jan 3	Snipe	1.5ml radius	97	May 10	Red-ig Partridge	3.0ml radius
45	Jan 3	Lapwing	1.5ml radius	98	May 23	Dipper	5.5ml radius
46	Jan 5	Raven	0.5ml radius	99	May 30	Barn Owl	1.5ml radius
47	Jan 5	Kestrel	1.0ml radius	100	Jun 7	L. Spot W'pecker	1.5ml radius
48	Jan 8	Teal	1.0ml radius	101	Nov 8	Mandarin Duck	2.5ml radius
49	Jan 8	Pochard	1.0ml radius	102	Nov 9	Whooper Swan	1.5ml radius
50	Jan 8	Herring Gull	1.5ml radius	103	Nov 14	Pink-ft Goose	1.5ml radius
51	Jan 17	Lesser B-b Gull	1.5ml radius	104	Dec 7	Lesser Redpoll	1.0ml radius
52	Jan 23	Showeler	1.5ml radius	105	Dec 16	Jack Snipe	4.5ml radius
53	Jan 23	Goosander	2.0ml radius	106	Dec 22	Gn-winged Teal	1.5ml radius

Book Review

BIRDS IN CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL: A BREEDING AND WINTERING ATLAS

by David Norman, on behalf of Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society. Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2008. 708 pages; over 300 colour photographs; vignettes and line-drawings; over 500 maps. ISBN 978-1-84631-152-9. Hardback, £44.99.



This is the second tetrad *Atlas* of Cheshire, this one including winter distribution as well as breeding range, and the degree of change since the first *Atlas* is fascinating. The surveyors who completed the first *Atlas* in 1984 could hardly have predicted the developments revealed and, importantly, quantified, by this second *Atlas*. Who would have thought, for example, that Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* and Raven *Corvus corax*, two species still absent in 1984, would be fighting over the last few suitable nest sites in the county by 2008?

Something else has changed in the last two decades – our ability to collect, handle and publish data. The first *Atlas* required seven years of fieldwork, the second, just three. It took eight years for the first *Atlas* to be published; this book has appeared just 18 months after the last data were collected. The first book was modest in size and presentation; this volume is in full colour throughout and weighs over 2kg – it is another book that will have purchasers considering reinforced bookshelves. After a short

introduction explaining how the *Atlas* was organised, there are 18 pages devoted to habitats, dominated by annotated colour photos and augmented by maps of habitat distribution. An excellent analysis of the bird data, including tables which clearly show the winners and losers over the last two decades, is followed by an analysis of the possible reasons for change.

The species accounts comprise the bulk of the book. For most species there are two accounts (where appropriate), for breeding and wintering populations, and four maps, illustrating breeding distribution, changes in breeding distribution since the first *Atlas*, winter distribution and differences between summer and winter distribution. The accounts are quite brief and chatty, helping to point out what the maps show, rather than providing detailed analysis. They are accompanied by a mixture of colour photographs (all, I assume, taken in Cheshire and Wirral) and either colour or black-and-white illustrations.

Overall, Cheshire and Wirral seems to have had more winners than losers over the last two decades. 12 species have been gained as breeders, compared with six lost, although only 10 species have a net gain of over 100 tetrads compared with 17 with the same net loss. The declining birds include most of the expected species, dominated by farmland birds and trans-Saharan migrants. Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* shows the greatest decline (a net loss of 305 tetrads), but the biggest winner is Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, present in 560 tetrads compared with just 12 a mere 20 years ago!

There are population estimates for the commonest breeding species, which reveal that, while Swallow *Hirundo rustica* is the most widespread species, House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* is still numerically the commonest. This is despite a previously unnoticed and unexplained retreat from the eastern hills above 350m, a distributional change shared with Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*. These small-scale changes are particularly revealing. For example, Skylark *Alauda arvensis* and Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* still breed in every 10-km square in Cheshire, yet they show net losses of 150 and 161 tetrads respectively, and the maps reveal an increasingly patchy distribution.

This *Atlas*, beautifully produced and presented, is an excellent example of what a local atlas adds to the national picture. By showing bird distributions in finer detail and incorporating comparisons with the earlier survey, the data become even more valuable.

Mike Pennington

This review was first published in British Birds 102 March 2009 pg 148 and is reproduced with their kind permission www.britishbirds.co.uk

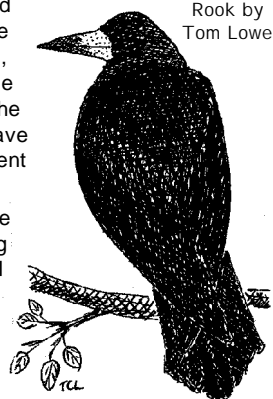
Projects and Surveys

URGENT CAWOS ROOKERY SURVEY 2009 ***URGENT***

This survey, organised by the recently formed CAWOS Monitoring and Surveys Sub-Committee, aims to provide a Rook population estimate for Cheshire and Wirral on the basis of 'apparently occupied nests', targeting tetrads identified by CAWOS *Atlas* fieldwork as containing one or more rookeries. Plans for the survey are now well advanced. The methodology has been defined, around 75% of the target tetrads have been allocated to volunteer fieldworkers, and survey packs have been sent out to those who have already volunteered to take part.

Fieldwork is planned to take place towards the end of March and in the first half of April. There are still plenty of tetrads available for surveying and anyone else who is interested in taking part should contact **David Cogger**: email davidcogger@kawos.org or tel **01606 832517**.

Further information about the survey methodology is also available through the CAWOS website.



RSPB LAPWING SURVEY

This RSPB survey is focused on a limited number of farms that are receiving government grants to enable them to implement conservation management plans intended to benefit breeding Lapwing. The survey aims to monitor how effective this is being. It is a simple 3-4 visits survey, spread across the Lapwing breeding season, with some simple habitat data also collected.

The RSPB are very grateful to CAWOS members for volunteering to assist with this survey. Most sites have volunteer surveyors but there are a couple of sites remaining. Anyone interested in this survey should contact **Mark Eddowes**: email markeddowes@kawos.org or tel **01565 621683/07968 707088**.

BTO SURVEYS – National Atlas, Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)

There are plenty of opportunities for survey fieldwork in Cheshire and Wirral in support of the British Trust for Ornithology. As an affiliated organisation, CAWOS aims to support the work of the BTO. The National Breeding and Wintering Atlas 2007-2011 is their current main focus and provides scope for involvement anywhere across the county following quite simple survey methodologies. There are also a few squares available in the annual Breeding Bird Survey. Further information about these surveys can be found on the BTO website (www.bto.org) which also provides contact details of local BTO Regional Representatives who should be contacted by those wishing to take part. Otherwise contact Mark Eddowes in the first instance, using the contact details shown above.

REQUEST FOR VOLUNTEERS

More help is urgently needed with WeBS surveys on the Mersey, and with the Heronries census. Please contact me in the first instance.

David Cogger, 113 Nantwich Rd, Middlewich, CW10 9HD
Tel: 01606 832517 Email: davidcogger@kawos.org



British Trust for Ornithology

FARMERS AND AMERICAN GIANT JOIN FORCES FOR WILDLIFE

Five Cheshire farmers are joining forces with an American giant, the RSPB and Natural England to boost the county's wildlife-rich wetlands.

The RSPB's unique 'big wheel rotary ditcher' has helped a number of farmers create the wet pools, ditches and scrapes needed to encourage declining birds, such as Lapwing and Redshank, to feed and breed. The ditching machine is a giant rotating digger pulled by a tractor. Around ten times faster than a conventional digger, it chisels accurately through the surface of fields to create shallow ditches and pools that are excellent for wetland wildlife. It was the ditcher's first trip into the north-west of England.

Wetter is better

Many of Cheshire's wet meadows have disappeared over the past 50 years due to development, land drainage and changes in agriculture, and with this loss, so the populations of breeding wading birds that were once widespread in this area have declined.

Farmers on the River Gowy will be using the ditcher to improve their riverside meadows for wading birds. Sites near Knutsford and Sandbach will also see the ditcher creating new habitats. Together these sites will restore and create wet grassland habitat, important not only for Lapwings, but also other wetland wildlife such as scarce plants and insects. All the farmers involved have entered Natural England's flagship Environmental Stewardship Scheme, and the work is funded through this. The farmers have entered into a 10-year agreement with Natural England with the aim of increasing the number of breeding waders on their land.

Andrew Gouldstone, RSPB Area Conservation Manager, said: "This is an exciting opportunity for more wetland creation in Cheshire. We are delighted to see the ditcher in the county, and it is great that these farmers have been willing to use it on their land. The Stewardship Scheme will fund the work, but the involvement of the farmers is crucial. The ongoing management they undertake will help the long-term survival of these habitats and birds."

A big thumbs up

Hannah Gay from Natural England said: "Our vision is to see the county's special wetland landscapes being restored. To see wading birds using the meadows next spring will be a great thumbs up for the work of the ditcher and the farmers' efforts to support wading birds on their land."

Mr Huw Rowlands, from Mickle Trafford, one of the participating farmers said: "This innovative machine will work wonders for the wildlife on our farm, and the wetland restoration project funded by Natural England is attracting a great deal of interest. Collaboration between the farmers and other organisations involved is going to prove a cost-effective and innovative way to give Cheshire's wetland wildlife a much-needed boost."

NON-NATIVE SPECIES – BREEDING INFORMATION REQUIRED

On behalf of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP), can I make a plea for better coverage of breeding non-natives such as Black Swan, Bar-headed Goose, rarer pheasants and parrots, etc? It's really important that we keep a handle on these species so action can be taken should they show signs of becoming the nuisance that Canada Geese are today. With Black Swan, there are a lot kept in private gardens or estates; when they breed, the owners often call in swan rescue groups, or take them to wildlife sanctuaries – so it is worth liaising with any in the county. It's amazing what turns up at such places. I once found, at a sanctuary in Rochdale, a brood of White Wagtails that had come off a boat in Hull; these places often swop birds around depending on their specialities.

Please send in any sightings, along with as much detail as possible, to the county database team in the usual way (submissions@cawos.org), who will then pass on any relevant information to RBBP.

Judith Smith on behalf of RBBP

I would like to support Judith's request for better coverage of non-native species. The British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) is responsible for assessing species for admission to the British List, but we can only base our assessment on published material such as county reports, research papers, etc. Many thanks.

Steve Dudley on behalf of BOU

CAWOS News

Welcome to the following new members: David Bullock, Peter Barber, Clare Thomson, Michael Roberts, Jeff Clarke, Sylvia Dervin, Robert Brown, Steve Seal, Ken Williams.

We hope that the success of the *Atlas* will encourage more people to join; an advert for CAWOS is being placed in the next issue of CWT's *The Grebe*.

At Council meetings held on 13th November 2008 and 22nd January 2009 the following points were agreed:

- all involved were congratulated on the production of the *Atlas*. Sales were going well.
- there would be no raising of subscriptions for 2010, though the matter would be considered.
- a grant was made to SECOS following their request for the provision of nest boxes, feeders and feeding material to help the local Tree Sparrow population .
- all involved in the production of the 2007 *Bird Report* were congratulated.
- Rostherne permit fees would be increased for 2010, and repairs to the Observatory roof were in hand.

Members will be sorry to hear of the sudden and unexpected death of Peter Mathews in mid-January. Peter had been a member for several years, had taken part in the *Atlas* survey in the eastern hills and for a couple of years had taken over the responsibility of distributing the *Bird Report*. In his career as a teacher he had introduced many young people to birdwatching. David Cogger attended the funeral at Macclesfield Parish Church on behalf of CAWOS.

Please note that any requests for the *Bird Report* should be made to David Cogger, who has temporarily taken over the task of distribution; there has been a delay in the distribution of the *Bird Report* to certain outlets.

WOOLSTON EYES CONSERVATION GROUP

OPEN DAY - Sunday 28th June 2009

10am to 4pm

Admission - Free to All

Attractions include:

**Guided tours of No.3 bed with close-up views
of Black-necked Grebes and other wildfowl**

Bird ringing and moth trapping

Dragonfly, amphibian and bat exhibits

Colin Woolf - wildlife artist

Further information: www.woolstoneyes.co.uk

OCTOBER 9 5 APR Sat 15 7 SEPTE 8 May 7th 3 Jan Sun 28

Diary

APRIL

- 5 KOS Conwy RSPB Reserve, meet at the Sessions at 8:30am
- 8 HO 'FLOOD PLAINS OF THE ORINOCO' by John Raines
- 13 SRSPB 'LIFE IN A WILDLIFE HOSPITAL' by Ray Jackson MBE
- 14 MRSPB 'FROM ANGLESEY TO WALNEY' by Charles Owen
- 16 NNHS AGM followed by 'CHESHIRE BUTTERFLIES' by Nicholas Hutton
- 17 SECOS AGM and MEMBERS' EVENING
- 17 NCRSPB 'SNOWY OWL, KING OF THE ARCTIC' by Gordon Yates
- 18 CRSPB World's End, ring Bernard Wright 01829 782243 for details
- 19 SECOS Rutland Water, ring for details
- 19 MRSPB Northwich Woodlands, meet Duke Street car park at 8:30am
- 19 NCRSPB Etherow Country Park/Lyme Park, meet Etherow CP at 9:30am
- 20 HPRSPB 'OBAN, MULL AND IONA' by John Linton Smith
- 22 CRSPB AGM followed by 'DOWN ON THE FARM' by Charles Owen
- 24 KOS AGM followed by 'NORWEGIAN ADVENTURE' by Sheila Blamire
- 24 WGBC AGM followed by 'BIRDS OF THE PYRENEES' by Patricia Thompson & Judith Rees
- 25 CADOS World's End, ring Ron Shewring 0151 339 0696 for details
- 26 SRSPB Moore, meet 10:30am at the junction of Moore Lane and Lapwing Lane, Moore
- 26 HO Moore, meet 10:30am at the junction of Moore Lane and Lapwing Lane, Moore
- 26 WGBC Potteric Carr and Blacktoft by coach, ring for details
- 26 MRSPB Potteric Carr and Blacktoft by coach, ring for details
- 26 HPRSPB Leighton Moss, ring for details
- 27 SRSPB Etherow CP, meet 7pm at George Street car park , off B6104 Compstall Rd, Compstall
- 27 HO Etherow CP, meet 7pm at George Street car park , off B6104 Compstall Rd, Compstall

MAY

- 2 NNHS All day spring Bird Log, contact Charles Hull 01270 628194 for details
- 2-9 KOS Hungary Anniversary Trip (fully booked)
- 6 NCRSPB Neumann's Flash, meet Witton Mill car park at 7pm
- 10 WGBC Ynys-hir by coach, ring for details
- 10 MRSPB Ynys-hir by coach, ring for details
- 11 SRSPB Sale Water Park, meet 7:30pm in car park at Visitor Centre, off J6 M60
- 11 HO Sale Water Park, meet 7:30pm in car park at Visitor Centre, off J6 M60
- 12 MRSPB AGM followed by MEMBERS' SLIDES
- 13 HO 'LITTER AND WILDLIFE' by Brian Hallworth
- 14-17NCRSPB Dorset weekend, contact Tony Parker 01925 726986
- 15-17MRSPB Anglesey Weekend, ring Graham Palmer 01625 420179 for details
- 16-17CADOS East Anglia weekend, ring Don Pawlett 01244 677477 for details
- 17 SRSPB Potteric Carr by coach, ring Jayne Skelhorn 0161 282 8758 for details
- 17 HO Potteric Carr by coach, ring for details
- 17 SECOS Wyre Forest, ring for details
- 17 CRSPB Ynys-hir by coach, ring Margaret Bain 01244 380447 for details
- 17 HPRSPB Woolston Eyes and a Cheshire Mystery Tour, ring for details
- 18 HPRSPB 'THE DEE ESTUARY: A SURVIVING WILDERNESS' by John Raines
- 23 KOS Goyt Valley evening walk, meet at the Sessions House, Knutsford at 6:30pm
- 28 MRSPB Three Shires Head evening walk, ring Tom Gibbons 01625 520317 for details

JUNE

- 3 CRSPB Whixall Moss evening trip, ring Roger Nutter 01829 782237 for details
- 3 NCRSPB Moore Nature Reserve, meet at Moore at 7pm
- 3 MRSPB Gradbach evening walk, meet at Gradbach car park at 6:30pm
- 6 CADOS Anglesey, ring Alun Harley 01925 269430 for details

- 10 HO 'A FUNNY WAY TO MAKE A LIVING' by Mike Leach
- 10 NCRSPB Aber Valley, meet in car park (before the bridge) at 10am
- 13 NCRSPB Leighton Moss RSPB Reserve, meet in reserve car park at 10am
- 14 KOS Leighton Moss, meet at the Sessions House, Knutsford at 8.30am
- 14 SECOS Anglesey, ring for details
- 14 HPRSPB Gronant and the North Wales coast, ring for details
- 18 NNHS Nantwich Lake to Beambridge walk, contact Charles Hull 01270 628194 for details
- 26 KOS Delamere Forest evening walk, meet at the Sessions House, Knutsford at 6:30pm

JULY

- 4 CADOS Shropshire Meres, ring David King 0151 327 7212 for details
- 5 MRSPB Anderton and Marbury (for dragonflies), meet Anderton Boat Lift car park at 10:00am
- 8 NCRSPB Gowdy Meadows, meet lay-by in Thornton-le-Moors at 7pm
- 8 HO tba
- 11 KOS Formby, meet at the Sessions House, Knutsford at 8.30am
- 16 NNHS Whixhall Moss, nr Whitchurch, contact Ged Barlow 01782 722979 for details
- 24 KOS Witton/Marbury CP evening walk, meet at the Sessions House, Knutsford at 6:30pm
- tbc SRSPB RSPB Puffin Island Cruise by coach, ring Jayne Skelhorn 0161 282 8758 for details
- tbc HO RSPB Puffin Island Cruise by coach, ring for details

AUGUST

- 20 NNHS Deer Park, Cholmondeley evening walk, contact Keith Wild 01270 569163 for details
- 22 NCRSPB Point of Ayr meet in car park at 10am
- 22 CADOS Migration watch, ring Nick French 01829 271945 for details

SEPTEMBER

- 6 KOS Hilbre, meet at the Sessions House, Knutsford at 8.15am or West Kirby at 9.15am
- 7 HPRSPB AGM followed by Pennine Edge Barn Owl Trust
- 8 MRSPB 'SNOWY OWL, KING OF THE ARCTIC' by Gordon Yates
- 9 HO AGM
- 13 HPRSPB Flamborough Head, Bempton Cliffs and Filey, ring for details
- 14 SRSPB AGM and MEMBERS' EVENING
- 18 NCRSPB 'WILDLIFE AROUND BRITAIN'S COASTS' by David Tolliday
- 19 CADOS North Wirral, ring Roger Wilkinson 01244 318343 for details

AFFILIATED SOCIETIES

- ADNHS Altrincham & Dist. Natural History Soc, mtgs Hale Methodist Church Hall 7.30pm, contact Prog. Sec. Anne Mason 0161 980 8645
- CADOS Chester & Dist. Ornithological Soc, mtgs Caldley Valley Community Centre 7.30pm, contact Prog. Sec. Nick French 01978 856522
- CAWOS Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Soc, mtgs Knutsford Civic Centre 7.45pm, contact Clive Richards 01625 524527
- CRSPB Chester RSPB Group, mtgs St Mary's Centre, Chester 7.30pm, contact Chris Kay and Peter Stevenson 01352 716886
- HO Hale Ornithologists, mtgs St Peter's Assembly Rooms 7.45pm, contact Prog. Sec. John Knight 0161 486 0106
- HPRSPB High Peak RSPB Members' Group, mtgs Senior Citizens' Hall, Marple 7.30pm, contact Peter Griffiths 0161 427 5325
- KOS Knutsford Ornithological Soc, mtgs Jubilee Hall, Stanley Road 8.00pm, contact Tony Usher 01565 873508
- LOG Lymm Ornithological Group, mtgs Lymm Village Hall 8.00pm, contact Prog. Sec. Hilary Unsworth 01925 860155
- MCOS Mid-Cheshire Ornithological Soc, mtgs Hartford Village Hall 7.45pm, contact Paul Kenyon 01606 77960
- MRSPB Macclesfield RSPB Members' Group, mtgs Senior Citizens' Hall 7.45pm, contact Ray Evans 01625 432635
- NCRSPB North Cheshire RSPB Members' Group, mtgs Appleton Parish Hall, Appleton 7.45pm, contact Olive Giles 01928 733405
- NNHS Nantwich Natural History Soc, mtgs RSPCA, Stapeley Grange at 7.30pm, contact Sec. Dr Paul Griffiths 01270 780626
- SECOS South-East Cheshire Ornithological Soc, mtgs St Peter's Church Hall, Elworth 7.30pm, contact Sec. Colin Lythgoe 01270 582642
- SRSPB Stockport RSPB Members' Group, mtgs Stockport College of Technology, Lect Theatre B 7.30pm, contact Peter Hugo 0161 485 4024
- WGBG Wilmslow Guild Birdwatching Group, mtgs Wilmslow Guild HQ 7.45pm, contact Indoor Prog. Sec. Judith Rees 0161 980 5034

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

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