

Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society

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BIRD NEWS

Number 114

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County Rarity: Aquatic Warbler
Future of Recording in Cheshire and Wirral
Status of Rock Pipits at Hilbre
and in the Dee Estuary

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Front cover: Cuckoo by Ray Scally

Other illustrations by Tony Broome and Phil Jones

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 17th October 2020

Guest Editorial

This time of year is the beginning of summer for most people and in the days before Covid, children would be looking forward to breaking up and enjoying a long summer holiday; the airports would be packed with families flying out to Mediterranean beaches and the UK domestic holiday market would be welcoming visitors from around the world. How things can change without much warning. Two of us stayed on the Isle of Skye in February in a beautiful place on the west coast. I've just found out that we were the last to stay. What a strange feeling. I just get the impression that the changes in the world are because of something bigger than Covid. An area across the Russian arctic all the way to Finland has just had the hottest period on record, 30c above normal. 30c above normal! It's unprecedented and no-one knows, except for a few clued-up scientists, what to expect next. Every corner of the globe (that has always been a strange saying to me) is experiencing unusual weather and the average temperature continues to rise. If predictions are correct, our human future looks bleak.

Time marches on and each *Bird News* is four months apart. So each time I write an Editorial I'm aware that time is ticking. This week two of my birding acquaintances passed away bringing not so much a sadness, but a realisation that nature has a way of reminding you that despite your own best endeavours to keep fit and healthy, perhaps rather arrogantly believing that you've got loads of time left, you actually haven't. My first friend who went to that great reserve in the sky was Steve Madge, a brilliant birder and a person I was fortunate to share a few days with in Eastern Turkey on the Ardahan Plateau in September 1978 I think, although I might be a year out. The birds were amazing, Green and Marsh Warblers passing through, *variagata* Stonechats with their Wheatear-like tail pattern, Lanner Falcons sitting on telegraph poles, Mountain Chiffchaffs, Crimson-winged Finches and Red-fronted Serins around every corner - great birding. We even got held at gun-point by Kurds on a mountain track who wanted to take us hostage. Only our Turkish guide managed to get us out of quite a serious situation. My second 'friend' who has gone to watch birds elsewhere is our own 'One Man's Birding' Bob Anderson. My early days with Bob were adversarial as we both sat on the newly-formed CAWOS council and faced each other across a table on numerous occasions. I was heavily into twitching in those early days and Bob, along with some of the other council members regarded twitchers with contempt and we weren't considered real ornithologists because we didn't spend hours doing worthwhile work such as surveys. For my part, the exciting new world of twitching vagrants and learning about migration and birds from further afield meant that I considered most council members at that time to be fuddy-duddies and so boring that 'my pants fell off regularly'. However, over time, ageing tends to instil a sense of wisdom and priorities change. I probably now appear to be a fuddy-duddy to some of the 'young birder upstarts' at Spurn who think that they know everything, but actually don't as far as I'm concerned. It's just a cycle. I really came to appreciate Bob when I began to read his 'One Man's Birding' and realised he had a similar sense of humour to myself, quite dry and at times delightfully mickey-taking. He was a very knowledgeable birder who noticed things that a lot of birders miss. I used to look forward to reading what he'd written and chuckle at some of the comments. This issue contains the last article he will write for us and I smiled as I read it, an account of his time being imprisoned in his own home due to Covid, unable to go birding in the glorious spell of spring weather and only was officially let out for an hour as the weather changed. Even so, his observations in his garden are typically Bob with mutterings of 'they', whoever they are, and hobbling Magpies and squirrel-eating Sparrowhawks. I will miss him and his ramblings as I once told him they were. He feigned outrage, but I noticed a twinkle in his eye and the sneaky smile that crossed his lips...

Sheila Blamire has written a piece on the selfishness of people during and after the Covid lockdown. Fly-tippers, portable barbeques causing fires, mountain bikers, dog walkers and anglers trespassing on nature reserves and people partying in reedbeds at Marbury. People are selfish on the whole and I wonder what chance nature really has. Michael Miles' account of the ringing activities at Woolston is interesting with a comparison between years supporting some of the things I'd noticed over the last few months whilst birding. Where have all the Chiffchaffs gone this

spring? Finally, John Elliott has done a nice piece on the status of Rock Pipits on Hilbre, from historic records through to the present year. A very interesting read indeed.

Tony Broome

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 17th October 2020 - 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 the Editor know as soon as possible.

Looking back.....

THE BIRDING RECORDS OF AR SUMERFIELD 1897 - 1984, continued

Thank you for the positive feedback from the last article. Steve Barber sent me some information about AR Sumerfield; he was known as Ray and may well have used a motorbike to travel around. The records were digitised and sent to the BTO by Ray's nephew Norman Rowbotham and I shall be contacting the Cheshire Archive for them to hold going forward. I have just selected a few species to look at this month.

Dipper: It is very interesting to read that he recorded Dipper in the area that I and other members regularly watch them around Wildboardclough and on the Rivers Dane and Bollin.

Collared Dove: We are all aware that this is a bird that has relatively recently colonised the UK, in the 1950s, so in Ray's day it would have been a rarity. The first record Ray noted in the notes is 1961 at Ness. There are odd records thereafter at Altrincham Sewage Works and Carrington Moss.

Crossbill: There is only one Cheshire record in 1964 at Delamere Forest.

Hawfinch: At Rostherne there are annual records from 1941 up to 1953; generally 1 or 2 birds, but a peak of 8 in 1950. There are also records for Lymm Woods, Arley Pool and Tatton Park. Between 1954 and 1957 he located nests at Rostherne and Lymm Woods.

Serin: Just a single record in 1981 at Parkgate.

Twite: The only location these are recorded is Parkgate with a maximum of c.100 in 1958.

Spotted Flycatcher: This is a species that Ray clearly studied from the detail in the notes. The type of breeding habitat he located them in Cheshire: cavities in birch stumps, ledges on the underside of leaning trees and holes in brick walls. The earliest and latest dates noted are: 13 May 1945 at Sinderland in a birch tree; the latest breeding date 16 August 1943, again in birch with 2 fledglings in the nest; and the latest sighting date 29 September 1946 on Hilbre.

Pied Flycatcher: There are a number of records at Delamere Forest, Sinderland 'oak wood' and Marbury, with nesting proven in Delamere Forest. The earliest arrival date noted was 20 April 1949 at Sinderland and latest at Hilbre on 9 September 1956.

Black Grouse: 2 were seen walking into Cheshire at Wincle, from Staffordshire, on 29 April 1959. On 6 August 1938 and male and female were on Shuttingsloe.

Rough-legged Buzzard: 12 November 1955 a single bird at New Brighton perched on a wall, railway signal (which moved), trees and house roofs. Excellent views and saw white tail feathers, legs and all details closely. Also saw the white leading edge to the wing as it approached along the railway cutting. Sadly, it was later found dead.

Hen Harrier: Most records are for Parkgate, not surprising as similar nowadays, but also seen at Carrington Moss and Hoylelake Marsh.

Marsh Harrier: A single bird at Lymm Golf Course on 29 November 1946.

Red Kite: A juvenile at Frodsham Marshes on 7 August 1964.

Peregrine: All the Peregrine records are from the Wirral at Hoylake, Parkgate and Hilbre.

Shore Lark: A single bird in January and February 1954 at West Kirby.

Long-eared Owl: Between 1943 and 1945 seen at Sinderland in birchwood near Altrincham sewage farm with a maximum of 2 birds. 1 was shot in April 1944! Again, a single bird in winter 1947/48 was at the same location. The last note is 1972 at Burton Bluff [sandstone bluff at Burton Point] in bushes, 200 yards from the Flintshire border.

Redstart: Earliest arrival date 19 April 1947 at Delamere Forest, and a latest date of 21 October 1956 at Hoylake.

Great Grey Shrike: Between 1953 and 1956 a single bird was present every winter at Witton Flashes. The last time it was seen was 14 April 1956. In winter 1964/65 a single bird at Elton Flash.

Ring Ousel (spelt as per the notes!): Regular sightings at Danebower with a maximum of 10 on 30 June 1946.

Willow Tit: Breeding birds at Sinderland in May/June 1941 - 1943. Also, at Tabley, Capesthorpe, Hatchmere, Chelford, Bollington Sewage Farm, Carrington Moss and Marbury.

Desert Warbler: A single bird at Meols on 7 November 1979 at the end of the promenade towards Leasowe which stayed for at least a week and was seen by 100s of ornithologists from all over Britain. It was pronounced as Asiatic race by Eric Hardy.

Bonelli's Warbler: A single bird in Delamere Forest for 2 or 3 weeks in June 1963.

Nightingale: A single bird noted at Crewe Hall on 12 June 1966.

Phil Hampson

Species Spotlight

THE STATUS OF ROCK PIPITS *Anthus petrosus* AT HILBRE AND IN THE DEE ESTUARY

Introduction

David Norman, in the 2008 CAWOS atlas *Birds in Cheshire and Wirral*, pointed out the lack of verified information about Rock Pipits in Wirral and raised a number of interesting questions for Wirral birdwatchers and ringers to answer. He pointed out that very little information regarding the race of birds found on Wirral was available. There are known differences in diet between races of Rock Pipits which he outlined and he noted that, although the bulk of the records are from the winter, the autumn and spring migration periods there were some records that birds had been present in the summer.

This note gives some more background and documents the ringing of Rock Pipits undertaken by the Hilbre Bird Observatory in the past 20 years. This ringing data provides concrete evidence, albeit in relatively small quantities, that supports the idea that British race Rock Pipits *Anthus petrosus petrosus* sometimes spend the winter around Hilbre and breed on the island and that Scandinavian race Rock Pipits *Anthus petrosus littoralis* visit Hilbre but probably spend the winter in the Dee salt marshes.

History

Coward and Oldham, in their book *Birds of Cheshire* published in 1900, say that most of the Wirral coast is unsuitable for breeding Rock Pipits, but they are to be found breeding on Hilbre. They

mention a visit they made in May 1894 when they saw several pairs of breeding Rock Pipits themselves. They mention Mr Brockholes who had seen Rock Pipit eggs from Hilbre and Mr A O Walker had found three nests there in 1858. This was a time before ornithologists accepted there were races of birds and Rock Pipit and Water Pipit had not been split. They only write about breeding birds and made no comment about migration or wintering.

Eric Hardy, in his book *Birds of the Liverpool Area* published in 1941, mentions that Rock Pipits are birds of passage at Hilbre but noted that he found a pair breeding on the island in May 1940.

J D Craggs, in his book *Hilbre, The Cheshire Island* published in 1982, notes that Rock Pipits have been seen on Hilbre in every month except June and July and highlights the autumn passage as a regular phenomenon. He notes that there are records of Rock Pipits breeding but classifies them as old and not well documented.

So there are eyewitness accounts from the mid-19th century up to 1940 of breeding Rock Pipits on Hilbre and accounts of spring and autumn passage from the 1930s to the 1980s. Norman mentions a breeding record in 2007 and notes another possible breeding record from 2005.

The 21st Century

There have been 73 ringing encounters with Rock Pipits on Hilbre in the period 2002 to 2016 that involved 28 different birds. One bird was identified as breeding on the island in 2015 and 2016, 2637605 a male. Two birds were identified as breeding on the island in 2016, 2637605 for a second year and 2637609 a new female. Four young were ringed on the island at dates when they could be identified as the outcome of breeding success. Two birds were found to have spent the winters around the island but had not been recaptured during the breeding season. Thus the 28 ringed birds represent: two wintering birds; two birds that had been part of the breeding population; four young, the results of breeding; and the other 20 birds were classified as passage birds. One of the passage birds had a colour ring, yellow TXC, which was attached to the bird in the summer of 2016 on the island of Giske, an island off the west coast of Norway.

Analysis of 21st Century Data

Two Rock Pipits, 2637605 and 2637609, were re-trapped during the breeding seasons of 2015 and 2016 on Hilbre. It was possible to identify the first as a male from his cloacal protuberance and the second as a female because she was developing her brood patch. More important than this though was that both birds could be identified as the British race because they were both dark and did not have a trace of a pink flush, reduced streaking or white features that would be expected with Scandinavian birds. So we were able to reason that the birds breeding on Hilbre were the British race, this was the first evidence identifying *petrosus* as the race of Rock Pipits breeding on Hilbre. This was not a surprise but the corollary to this, because one of the breeding birds spent the winter of 2015 on the island, was that we could also assert that British race birds spend the winter on Hilbre as 2637605 had done just this.

In October 2016 TXC, the Norwegian bird, was recaptured twice before it disappeared. We were lucky enough to catch one of the juvenile birds that had been ringed on Hilbre in 2016 while we had TXC in the hand. TXC had been ringed as a juvenile in 2016 in Norway. We were able to compare both birds and to confirm what was expected that the birds could not be identified to race from plumage features at that time of year. However, the Norwegian rings identified the bird as a Scandinavian race bird *littoralis*. The consequence of this was that we had the first piece of ringing evidence that Scandinavian birds pass through Hilbre in the autumn.

When we look at the 29 new birds that have been captured on Hilbre we see that two birds spent the whole winter on the island, two birds bred on the island and four of the other birds were young produced on the island. This leaves 21 birds that we have classified as passage birds. TXC, the Scandinavian bird, was placed in this category as it only spent a week on the island in the autumn of 2016.

The area of the Hilbre Island group is about 4.4 hectares, a small area when considering the available breeding locations for Rock Pipits. The island group is the only rocky area that is not covered by the tide in the Dee estuary. This being the case it is the only area suitable for Rock Pipit to breed. The consequence of these issues is that Hilbre clearly has supported and does support breeding Rock Pipits of the British race, but the area where they can breed is small and limits the number of birds able to use the island to breed.

In the winter the available feeding areas are larger as British race Rock Pipits can use the intertidal areas that are uncovered at low tide and the Scandinavian birds that we know come to the island prefer to feed in the salt marsh environment of the Dee, a much larger area. The fact that TXC only stayed round the island for a week before moving is a small piece of evidence confirming that Scandinavian birds pass through Hilbre rather than remain round the island for much time. The Rock Pipits that have been trapped on Hilbre since 2002 have been passage birds and most of them have been first-year birds, so it would seem reasonable to suggest that a high proportion are Scandinavian birds that are about to winter in the Dee salt marshes, rather than British race birds that would be expected to stay around Hilbre to take advantage of the considerably smaller intertidal areas to feed.

Moving forward in time to March 2020, the day before the COVID19 lockdown started, a Rock Pipit was caught on Hilbre. This bird was paler-looking than a British race bird would be expected to look, it had a pale supercilium, it had a greyish tinge to its head and tail (the central tail feathers were still growing indicating that it was near the end of its prebreeding moult), it had very little streaking on its belly and flanks and it had a very faint pinky/buff tinge on some of its breast feathers. It had a relatively short wing length, 85mm, so there was a reasonably high chance of it being female. All of these features lead to the bird being classified as a Scandinavian race bird *littoralis*. This was the first bird ever caught on Hilbre that could be attributed to the Scandinavian race on plumage features and the first Scandinavian race bird ringed in the spring.

Summary

Rock Pipits breeding and wintering around Hilbre since 2002 have provided evidence for the following: 1 The British race *petrosus* breeds on Hilbre from time to time; 2 The British race also spends some winters in the vicinity of Hilbre; 3 The Scandinavian race *littoralis* is a passage bird in autumn but does not spend much time on Hilbre during its journey to suitable feeding sites. It would appear that the speculation regarding Scandinavian race Rock Pipits wintering in the Dee salt marshes is probably true. The Scandinavian bird caught and ringed in March 2020 suggests a return passage of Scandinavian birds and may have been a wintering bird from the Dee salt marshes.

Post Script

In the Cheshire Atlas David Norman noted the feeding preferences of both races of Rock Pipits. We are able to add the following observation of feeding behaviour from our current investigation. During the summer of 2015 a Rock Pipit was seen to kill and eat a common sea slater *Ligia oceanica*, an inhabitant of the rocky cliffs of the island and known to the Hilbre regulars as jaspers. This insect is the largest of the UK's woodlice, about 3cm in length. The Rock Pipit flipped it onto its back, killed it, then ate the flesh from its underparts leaving the shell untouched.

John Elliott, Hilbre Bird Observatory

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- T.A.Coward and Charles Oldham, *The Birds of Cheshire*, published by Sherratt and Hughes, Manchester, 1900
- J.D.Craggs, Hilbre, *The Cheshire Island*, Liverpool University Press, 1982
- Eric Hardy, *Birds of the Liverpool Area*, Merseyside Naturalists' Association Handbook, published by T.Buncle and Co. printers of Arbroath, 1941
- J.P.Guest, D.Elphick, J.S.A.Hunter, D.Norman, *The Breeding Bird Atlas of Cheshire and Wirral*, Bath Press, Avon, 1992
- David Norman, *Birds in Cheshire and Wirral*, Liverpool University Press, 2008

Note: 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 the Editor's 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. Editor's contact details are on the inside front cover of *Bird News*.

County Round-Up

Some of the records may be unauthenticated and therefore will require review by the Society's Rarities Panel or the BBRC. This report covers the period from January to April 2020

SITE REPORTS

Chester area

Two Tundra Bean Geese were at Puddington on Feb 11th with a Cattle Egret on 26th and 29th and 38 Little Egrets on Feb 24th. An Osprey was over Mollington on Apr 7th, a Rough-legged Buzzard over the Gowy Meadows on 28th and a Red Kite over Saughall on Mar 1st. A Whimbrel was at Chester Meadows on Apr 9th with a single Redstart on 5th.

Congleton area

500+ Pink-footed Geese were noted over Mow Cop on Jan 19th, a Little Gull was at Astbury Mere on Mar 30th, and a Hobby over Mow Cop on Apr 23rd. The first Sand Martin was at Astbury Mere on Mar 16th, a Whinchat at Arclid on Apr 17th and two Dippers on the River Dane at Congleton on Feb 14th.

Crewe and Nantwich area

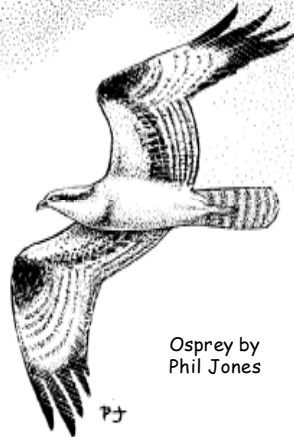
11 Whooper Swans were at Elworth on Jan 11th, a Garganey at Pump House Flash on Mar 27th, 27 Goldeneyes at Doddington on Mar 13th, 14 Goosanders were at Doddington on Jan 29th, whilst a female Goosander with nine young were on the River Dane at Nantwich on Apr 28th. Single Red Kites were over Doddington on Mar 23rd, Audlem on Apr 12th, and Alsager on Apr 29th. Three Little Ringed Plovers at Pump House Flash on Mar 23rd and six Common Sandpipers there on Apr 13th were the only waders of note. An Iceland Gull was at Sandbach Flashes on various dates with Kumlein's Gull in the same area on several dates during Feb, whilst a Caspian Gull was at Elton Hall Flash on Mar 6th. A Common Tern was at Elton Hall Flash on Apr 26th.

Three Swifts were at Elton Hall Flash on Apr 27th, a Great Grey Shrike at Wrenbury on Feb 28th, six Ravens over Alsager on Feb 6th and Sand Martins at Elton Hall Flash on Mar 9th. A Sedge Warbler was at Watch Lane Flash on Apr 18th with Reed Warbler on 12th, and a Lesser Whitethroat at Maw Green Tip on Apr 17th. A Ring Ouzel at Bickerton Hill on Apr 4th, Pied Flycatcher at Pump House Flash on Apr 9th, Black Redstart at Sandbach on Mar 23rd and Dipper at Lawton Lake on Jan 30th to Feb 4th.

Ellesmere Port and Neston area

10000+ Pink-footed Geese were at BMW on Feb 12th with two Tundra Bean Geese on Jan 29th and 30th and two Egyptian Geese on several dates in Feb. A Garganey was at BMW on Mar 19th and 20th, Long-tailed Duck at Shotwick on Jan 10th, 29th and Feb 1st and a single Red-breasted Merganser at BMW on Feb 13th. Two Spoonbills were at Parkgate on Mar 23rd, 25th and 28th, two Cattle Egrets at BMW on Mar 4th and 6th, 14 Great White Egrets at Burton Marsh on Feb 10th with four Common Cranes over Denhall on Apr 16th. An Osprey was over Burton Marsh on Mar 29th, up to six Marsh Harriers were at Parkgate, single Red Kites over Burton Marsh on Jan 5th, Shotwick and BMW on Mar 21st.

The first Avocet was at BMW on Feb 13th increasing to 113 on Mar 1st, with Long-billed Dowitcher on Feb 24th and 25th and six Spotted Redshanks at BMW on Feb 4th. A Glaucous Gull was at Shotwick on Mar 8th. Four Bearded Tits were at BMW on Mar 14th, the first Sand Martin on 16th, a Swallow at Neston on 24th, Reed Warbler at Burton Marsh on Apr 4th with Grasshopper Warbler on 10th. Redstart at Saughall on Apr 15th, three Water Pipits at BMW on Jan 17th, five Rock Pipits at Parkgate on Feb 9th with five Crossbills at Burton Marsh on Mar 11th.



Osprey by
Phil Jones

Halton area

Five Whooper Swans were at Hale on Feb 2nd with two Egyptian Geese, Common Scoter at Hale on Mar 1st and a Goldeneye being an unusual visitor to Hale duck decoy on Mar 26th. Single Ospreys were over Halebank on Apr 7th and Runcorn on 19th, a Marsh Harrier was in the Hale area on several dates with Red Kite noted on Mar 26th. Waders included: three Avocets at Hale on Feb 23rd, Whimbrel at Pickering's Pasture on Apr 30th, 32 Black-tailed Godwits at Carr Lane Pools on Apr 26th and two Little Stints at Pickering's Pasture throughout the period. A Spotted Redshank was at Hale on Feb 11th, 17th and Apr 9th, whilst Greenshanks were at Hale on Apr 22nd and Carr Lane Pools on Apr 26th.

A Caspian Gull was at Pickering's Pasture on Mar 7th. Four Swifts were over Runcorn on Apr 26th. Two Merlins were present at Hale for most of the period. A Swallow was over Hale village on Apr 1st, at Hale a Grasshopper Warbler was noted on Apr 17th along with a Ring Ouzel on 9th and Redstart on Apr 18th with Whinchat at Carr Lane on 24th. 45 White Wagtails were at Hale on Apr 11th, three Water Pipits at Hale on Mar 6th and 14th and three Rock Pipits at Pickering's Pasture up to Mar.

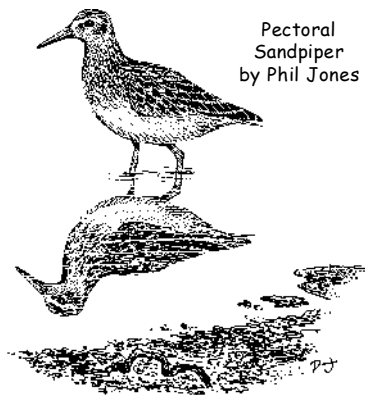
Macclesfield area

Three White-fronted Geese were at Redesmere on Jan 9th, with probably the same three at Catchpenny Pool on 11th and Lapwing Lane Pool on Feb 1st, 17 Whooper Swans were observed over Disley on Mar 21st, 20 Goldeneyes were at Rostherne Mere on Jan 12th and two Smews at Lapwing Lane Pool on several dates between Mar 8th to 21st with eight Goosanders at Rostherne Mere on Jan 12th. A Black-necked Grebe was at Lapwing Lane Pool on several dates in Mar. An Osprey was over Macclesfield on Apr 16th, Marsh Harrier at Disley on Mar 22nd with Red Kite at Handforth Dean on Mar 21st and Macclesfield on Apr 8th. An early Swift was over Macclesfield on Apr 20th, Swallow at Styal on Mar 25th, five Ring Ouzels at Mow Cop on Apr 20th, two Pied Flycatchers at Sutton Reservoir on Apr 21st, Redstart at Rainow on 8th with Tree Pipit at Macclesfield on the same day.

Vale Royal area

Wildfowl of note included: White-fronted Goose at Frodsham Marsh on Mar 15th, 25 Whooper Swans at Blakemere on Mar 22nd, two Egyptian Geese at Ollerton on Jan 13th, Garganey at Newchurch Common on Apr 8th, Scaup at Frodsham Marsh on Jan 1st until Feb 8th with another at Neumann's Flash on Feb 4th, the Long-tailed Duck remained at Frodsham throughout the period and 11 Goosanders at Newchurch Common on Feb 4th. Great Northern Diver was at Marbury CP on Jan 17th, two Bitterns at Marbury CP on Feb 17th and 18th, three Cattle Egrets at Frodsham Marsh into mid-Feb. An Osprey was over Middlewich on Mar 25th and 26th, Middlewich on Apr 5th, Lostock Green on Apr 10th and Marbury CP on 12th, five Marsh Harriers were at Frodsham Marsh on Jan 3rd with Rough-legged Buzzard on Feb 21st. Waders included: 88 Avocets at Frodsham Marsh on Mar 11th, 239 Golden Plovers at Rudheath on Feb 27th, 15 Whimbrels at Rudheath on Apr 25th, Knot at Marbury CP on Mar 8th, Sanderling at Neumann's Flash on Apr 30th with Pectoral Sandpiper at Frodsham Marsh from Apr 18th to 20th.

A Kittiwake was at Marbury CP on Feb 14th, two Little Gulls on Apr 20th, three Common Terns on Apr 17th, 50+ Arctic Terns on Apr 21st and two Black Terns on Apr 20th and 27th—all at Marbury CP. A Guillemot was at Frodsham Marsh on Feb 26th. Two Swifts were over Frodsham Marsh on Apr 19th, Hoopoe at Cuddington on Apr 23rd. Hobby was at Marbury CP on Apr 23rd with two over Great Budworth on 29th. 700+ Sand Martins were noted at Marbury CP on Apr 30th, two Swallows on Mar 23rd, Sedge Warbler at Neumann's Flash on Apr 9th, Reed Warbler at Witton Mill also on 9th with Grasshopper Warbler at Marbury CP on 14th. Two Ring Ouzels were at Winsford on Apr 15th, Pied Flycatcher at Middlewich on 6th. The Siberian Stonechat remained at Ashton's Flash to Apr 14th. A Dipper was at Marbury CP on Feb 7th and Mar 4th, three Yellow Wagtails were at Higher Marston on Apr 10th.



Pectoral
Sandpiper
by Phil Jones

Warrington area

A Bean Goose was at Woolston Eyes on Jan 3rd and 23rd, two Whooper Swans at Culcheth on Jan 22nd and 63 Common Scoters over Warrington on Apr 1st were part of a county-wide late evening migration of this species around this time. 958 Tufted Ducks were at Woolston Eyes on Jan 22nd. Three Black-necked Grebes were at Woolston Eyes on Mar 14th, four Common Cranes over Woolston Eyes on Apr 16th. An Osprey was over Penketh on Apr 13th, three Marsh Harriers at Woolston Eyes on Apr 18th, Red Kite over Burtonwood on Feb 18th, Culcheth on Apr 8th and Woolston Eyes on 16th.

Three Whimbrels were at Woolston Eyes on Apr 30th with 34 Black-tailed Godwits at Gatewarth on Mar 17th. A Kittiwake was at Woolston Eyes on Mar 18th with three Little Gulls on Apr 18th, a Common Tern on Apr 25th and 25 Arctic Terns on Apr 18th. Two Bearded Tits were at Woolston Eyes on Mar 16th along with three Sand Martins, a Swallow on Mar 28th, a Siberian Chiffchaff remained at Glazebury for most of Feb, a Ring Ouzel was at Culcheth on Apr 8th, four Yellow Wagtails and a Tree Pipit at Rixton on Apr 16th with five Corn Buntings on Feb 8th.

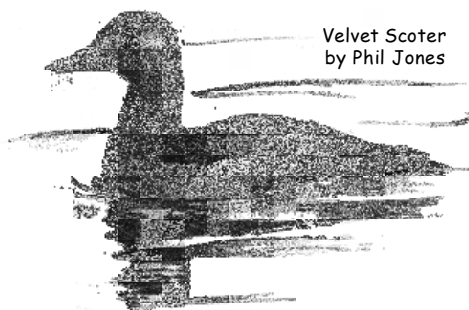
Wirral area

A max of 349 Brent Geese were at Hilbre on Mar 2nd, 3890 Pink-footed Geese were noted over the Wirral on Apr 5th, two Whooper Swans at Hilbre on Mar 5th and Leasowe on Mar 7th. Two Garganeys were at West Kirby on Apr 25th, two Scaups at Hoylake on Jan 25th, two Eiders at Hilbre on Mar 17th and 21st, Leasowe on Apr 23rd and West Kirby on 27th. Two Velvet Scoters were off Hilbre on Jan 3rd, 1000+ Common Scoters off Meols on Feb 6th, two Long-tailed Ducks at Hoylake on Apr 11th and nine Goosanders at West Kirby on Jan 6th. 60+ Red-throated Divers were off Red Rocks on Mar 20th, a Great Northern Diver at Hilbre on Jan 23rd and Hoylake on 25th, two Slavonian Grebes at Hilbre on Jan 29th. Two Great White Egrets were at Heswall on Jan 23rd, 100+ Gannets off Hoylake on Apr 30th with five Shags at Hilbre on Jan 29th. Single Ospreys were over Leasowe on Apr 6th, Hoylake on 7th, Meols on 10th, Meols and Irby on 11th and two over Hoylake on 19th, elsewhere Marsh Harriers were at Hoylake on Apr 24th, three Hen Harriers at Heswall on Jan 1st, a Red Kite at Liscard on Apr 11th, Leasowe on Apr 13th, Meols on 13th and 14th and Eastham on Apr 21st.

Waders of note were: 440 Grey Plovers at Hilbre on Jan 27th, 80+ Whimbrels at Heswall on Apr 21st, 790 Black-tailed Godwits at Caldy on Apr 19th, 250 Bar-tailed Godwits at Hilbre on Jan 25th, 22000 Knots at Thurstaston on Jan 4th, 420 Sanderlings at West Kirby on Apr 5th, a Grey Phalarope at Hilbre on Jan 29th, two Greenshanks at Heswall on Feb 10th and Thurstaston on Mar 26th. 150 Kittiwakes were at Hoylake on Feb 12th, six Little Gulls at Hilbre on Feb 12th, 230 Sandwich Terns off Hoylake on Apr 30th, 45 Common Terns at Hoylake on Apr 30th and 40+ Arctic Terns at Hoylake on Apr 21st. A Guillemot was off Hilbre on Mar 10th with 11 Razorbills and single Puffin on Feb 12th. A Hobby was at Leasowe on Apr 30th, Hooded Crow at West Kirby on Apr 25th, 12 Ravens at Heswall on Feb 14th, Sand Martin at Leasowe on Mar 16th with Swallow on 23rd, 75 Swallows and 75 House Martins were over Heswall on Apr 12th. The first Sedge Warbler was at Leasowe on Apr 14th, Reed Warbler at Red Rocks on Apr 6th, Grasshopper Warbler and Whitethroat at Leasowe on 8th with Lesser Whitethroat at Heswall on 16th. A Spotted Flycatcher was at West Kirby on Apr 22nd with Pied Flycatcher on Apr 21st, Redstart at Leasowe on 9th, Whinchat on 15th with seven on 23rd, 32 Wheatears at Leasowe on Apr 19th, White Wagtail at Leasowe on Mar 1st with 49 at Red Rocks on 18th, Tree Pipit on 9th with six at Hoylake on 23rd and 10 Water Pipits at Heswall on 10th Apr.

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Tel: 01925 726986 Email: tonyparker@cawos.org

Thanks/acknowledgments to: Dee Estuary Website, SECOS, WECG, Dermot Smith (Mersey WeBS), NNHS, Frodsham Marsh Birdlog, *Birdwatching* Magazine, Manchester Bird Forum, whatsapp groups (Cheshire, Marbury and Sandbach), Rob Cockbain, Bill Bellamy and everyone else who passed records on.



Velvet Scoter
by Phil Jones

Ringling News

Ringling plays an important part in developing our knowledge of birds. In this feature we invite ringling groups (or individual ringlers) active in Cheshire and Wirral to contribute their own accounts of their activities. In general, the idea is that these should provide a means of updating local birders on the groups' work - both by way of information about birds ringled or recovered, and news of other events (or incidents).

Future contributions from other groups and/or individuals will be welcomed.

RINGING AT WOOLSTON

Winter 2019/2020

This note covers the winter period from October 2019 through March 2020 ('this winter'). The last ringling took place on 21st March after which the reserve closed and ringling was suspended nationally in response to the lockdown regulations. In this slightly foreshortened winter period 2308 new birds of 44 species were ringled at Woolston, which compares with 1941 new birds, also of 44 species, ringled in the 2018/2019 winter period ('last winter'). This increase of 367 birds (or 18.9%) has a number of causes. Last winter low water levels meant that it was not possible to operate the fixed duck trap on No.3 Bed until early February. As a result just 57 Teals were ringled. This winter higher water levels allowed the trap to be in operation from November onwards and a very good total of 222 Teals were ringled. For the second year in succession a Woolston Teal has been shot in the Russian Federation, in this case in Western Russia, just over the Estonian border. In addition, a female Gadwall was found in the trap, just the second to do so. Coots and Moorhens also come to the grain put out in the trap and were ringled in slightly higher numbers than was the case last winter. Water Rails are notoriously difficult to census and an indication of the good population at Woolston is that four found their way into baited Potter Traps.

Winter ringling is a combination of resident birds and migrants from further north in the UK or continental Europe. Totals for a representative selection of resident birds are shown below. It would seem that the 2019 breeding season was significantly better than 2018, which was itself considered poor at Woolston reflecting national trends.

	2019-2020	2018-2019	Delta
Dunnock	32	19	+13
Song Thrush	19	8	+11
Robin	20	18	+2
Wren	51	37	+14
Long-tailed Tit	113	67	+46

Warblers lingered into the last quarter of 2019 with a single Reed Warbler, 28 Blackcaps, 39 Chiffchaffs and two late Willow Warblers ringled. Last winter it was notable that a further 10 Chiffchaffs were ringled in the first three months of 2019 and these were surely overwintering birds rather than late migrants. In the first three months of 2020 just a single Chiffchaff was ringled. The resident Cetti's Warblers may well have enjoyed a good breeding season. Birds trapped in winter include young birds dispersing from other natal sites, but that notwithstanding the 13 ringled, this winter is a record winter total.

There was a significant invasion of young Blue Tits, possibly dispersing from surrounding gardens and 356 were ringled compared with 198 last winter. Great Tits do not disperse to the same degree and the two winter ringling totals were very similar.

Winter visitors were evident in variable numbers. It was definitely not a 'Brambling winter' with just a single bird ringled. Chaffinches were also present in lower numbers with 182 ringled compared with 225 last winter. These numbers presumably reflect benign weather conditions and food supplies in Continental Europe and a resultant low level of migration. Lesser Redpolls are also irruptive at Woolston and were notable by their scarcity with just 18 ringled compared with 70 last winter. In contrast to the situation with finches there was a very strong arrival of Redwings in quarter four of 2019 and with 293 ringled there were echoes of the classic Redwing winter of 2017/

2018. The late autumn of 2017 had also been exceptional for the arrival of continental Goldcrests and 376 had been ringed at Woolston. 2018 was more typical of recent years with 225 ringed and 2019 has recorded another decline with just 190 ringed. As with finches, this probably reflects conditions in their breeding areas in Continental Europe.

After arriving in very good numbers last winter Reed Buntings were present in more typical numbers with 102 ringed compared with 161 last winter. As is usual, some of these found the sacrificial crop on No.3 Bed, but for the second year running other seed eaters were notable by their absence. Yellowhammers are restricted to the eastern end of the reserve and small numbers are sometimes caught on No.1 Bed. 10 were ringed in the first quarter of 2019, but none this winter.

As I write in late May a relaxation of restrictions has allowed some ringing to restart after an eight week hiatus. It is too early to have any view of the breeding season except to say that the Blue Tits and Great Tits appear to have done reasonably well in the nest boxes. A total of 134 chicks have been ringed on No.3 Bed compared with 171 in 2019 and 158 in 2018. In one brood the chicks were too large to handle safely (in case they left the box after replacement) and one brood is currently too small to ring. Adding in these two broods would imply a like-for-like total of about 150. 2019 was notable for having more Blue Tit pairs than Great Tit pairs. In 2018 and 2020 Great Tits predominated. Blue Tits, on average, have larger broods than Great Tits and that underlies the larger number of chicks in 2019.

Michael Miles, on behalf of the Woolston Ringing Team

CHESHIRE SWAN STUDY GROUP

Since my last report in February, the Swan Study Group has ringed a total of 11 swans including 5 second-years and 6 Adults. These included 1 control.

The maximum counts of flocks of Mute Swans since my last news sheet are as follows:

- Acre Dell Pools, nr Congleton: 80 on 14th Feb, 79 on 8th Mar, 62 on 18th Apr and 64 on 18th May.
- Bottom Flashes, Winsford: 26 on 20th May.
- Burleydam Pool, nr Whitchurch: 11 on 11th Feb, 27 on 22nd Apr and 10 on 10th May.
- Coole Pilate, nr Nantwich: 21 on 24th Feb, 40 on 28th Mar, 8 on 4th Apr and 20 on 17th May.
- Doddington Mere, nr Nantwich: 9 on 15th Apr and 23 on 20th May.
- Trent and Mersey Canal, Middlewich: 17 on 17th Feb, 17 on 8th Mar and 12 on 20th May.
- Woolston NR, Warrington: 34 on 9th Feb and 15 on 19th Mar.

The *Cheshire Swan Study Group Report* for 2019 is available for viewing on the website (under Reports): <http://cheshireswanstudygroup.wordpress.com>

Sightings of all swans, geese and Mallard should be sent to David Cookson at cheshireswans@gmail.com giving details of place (6-fig map ref), colour/character combination of ring and, if with other birds, total number present in flock. All sightings will receive a printout of the history for the relevant bird(s).

David Cookson, Group Leader, 70 Rope Lane, Rope, Crewe, CW2 6RD
Tel: 01270 567526. Email: cheshireswans@gmail.com

HILBRE BIRD OBSERVATORY (HIBO)

Ringing January to May 2020

It was Monday morning on 23rd March 2020 and a small number of bird observatory members, applying the required social distancing rules, were on the Island. It was a pleasant morning with 4 Chiffchaffs, 1 Goldcrest, 1 Robin and a Wheatear being caught.

Several Rock Pipits were around the island and eventually one of them caught itself in a potter trap that was placed at the north end just for this purpose. When the bird was examined it was seen to be a pale bird for a Rock Pipit, with a prominent supercilium, pale tips to the median coverts and a grey head. Its body feathers showed a lack of streaking and one or two had a hint of a pinkish-buff tinge.

Its central tail feathers were growing and showed a greyish tinge. The bird was identified as a Scandinavian race Rock Pipit *anthus petrosus littoralis*. This was the first Scandinavian Rock Pipit caught on Hilbre that could be identified as a Scandinavian race bird from its plumage. The only other Scandinavian Rock Pipit caught on Hilbre, in the autumn of 2016, was easy to identify as a Scandinavian bird as it had a ring on its left leg that mentioned Norway in its inscription (and was also colour ringed).

Scandinavian Rock Pipits arriving on Hilbre in the autumn look very similar to British race birds and it is only the pre-breeding moult undertaken by Rock Pipits at the end of winter that creates the different breeding plumage of the British and Scandinavian races that enables them to be told apart.

Awareness of Scandinavian Rock Pipits in recent years has meant that they have been recorded almost annually at Hilbre in the last five years, but all in spring, when moulting into summer plumage (apart from the Norwegian-ringed bird which was seen around the islands in October 2016). These recent records were all of singles on 23rd April 2016, 13th March 2018, 18th March 2019 and more recently on 14th March 2020 (possibly the same bird caught on 23rd).

Everybody went home very pleased that Monday (23rd), but in the evening the Prime Minister announced that the UK was to move into a lockdown.

Wirral Borough Council subsequently closed Hilbre to public access and ringing stopped on the island for the first time since the 1950s. Lockdown has since moved on; however, Hilbre Islands currently remain closed to visitors (15th June 2020).

Having missed the majority of the spring migration period, we are now already looking forward to autumn back at Cheshire and Wirral's bird observatory.

John Elliott, on behalf of Hilbre Bird Observatory

MID-CHESHIRE BARN OWL GROUP

We noted in our last article that things were looking quite positive at the start of the year, with a number of pairs of Barn Owls having already been recorded. We were just hoping for good weather and quiet, normal, conservation work.

We didn't (couldn't) see the coronavirus pandemic coming, and the extraordinary circumstances it forced on us. Hopefully, everyone has survived and are keeping safe and well. The resulting lockdown stopped everything we were doing, but at least we were still receiving positive Barn Owl sightings.

Thankfully, the BTO lifted the lockdown in late May and, ever since, we've been out and about checking boxes wherever possible. The results have been as positive as they were at the start of the year. The weather has been good, there seems to be an abundance of voles and shrews, and the Barn Owls are breeding well.

In fact, although the number of breeding pairs may not be greatly different from the last 2-3 years, brood sizes are looking very good with anything up to 6 eggs or chicks being recorded. Fingers crossed for the rest of the year - continuing good weather, voles and shrews aplenty, and no second spike in the virus. Is that too much to ask for?

Finally, a silver lining to the virus - wildlife in general seems to have thrived - possibly due to less disturbance whilst we've been locked away?

As my now usual final comments - we do our best, but it stretches our limited resources to help support these beautiful and iconic birds. We get a great deal of satisfaction out of the conservation work we do. But we are always in need of more help.

To repeat our usual concerns and plea - if you have seen any Barn Owls recently please could you let us know (either direct or by our sighting report on the website www.cheshirebarnowls.co.uk); as you will appreciate it is important that we know where the birds are regularly seen.

John Mycock, Chairman Tel: 07970 235437 Email: cheshirebarnowls@gmail.com



One Man's Birding

It is with great regret that I have to tell you that Bob Anderson passed away this July, so this will be the final 'One Man's Birding'. He will be greatly missed. An obituary and/or memories of Bob will be in the November *Bird News*. Please send any contributions to the Editor. Thank you.

Spring 2020 - let it go

Older readers may remember the young and talented Millicent Martin singing the introduction to a popular BBC satirical show of (I think) the 1960s:

"That was the week that was; it's over - let it go..."

I feel that way about this spring, except that in my case it may be more accurate to say that spring was never there in the first place. A brief trip to Wales in March was obviously too early to count. The number of birds on the feeder outside the hired cottage (I've never seen 10 Coal Tits all together, and they were the least numerous of the tits by a long chalk) suggested they thought that it was still winter. Then we returned to find a stern letter from government, saying that as an older person with underlying health conditions I was to be 'shielded' from corona virus - in other words, placed under house arrest and forbidden to go anywhere.

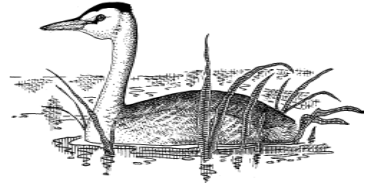
I know I am fortunate to have a half-way decent garden, but nevertheless was green with envy of those who had the freedom to get out and about for an hour each day. Nantwich NHS has a very effective email/what's app 'grapevine', and daily bulletins were flooded with news of arriving warblers and flycatchers and the rest. People were keeping 'Lockdown Lists', running in some cases into the high seventies. Believe it or not, by June 1st a few passing Swifts and House Martins were the only migrants I had recorded. Even the usually reliable Blackcap and Chiffchaff had deserted the garden; perhaps they were taking this shielding business seriously?

Of course, the summer birds are only part of what I was missing: the plunging and wheeling display flight of the Lapwings, white underparts ostentatiously gleaming; the drifts of May-blossom covering the hedges; the scent of wild garlic in a woodland. And the clear, carrying call of the Cuckoo - not that I can claim that as a regular feature of spring these days, since I now see and hear them so rarely, but it seems particularly bad luck that there have been so many local reports this year, just when I have been confined to the garden.

If a bit disappointing in some ways, the garden has not been without interest. First were the Sparrowhawks. There is a nestbox, used by Blue Tits, on a big pine and one morning the female hawk spent about an hour, perched nearby and making dashes towards the box. I guess that when she flew away she had cleaned out the tits, but there has now been a marked change in habits. Both cock and hen hawks are now perching in the lower branches of the pines with a frequency not seen before. Newton mentions small and young mammals as minor prey items of Sparrowhawk, and on one occasion there was a particularly loud, aggressive and prolonged tirade from a squirrel. This petered out when the female hawk emerged with something in her talons, and I believe she may have taken a young squirrel.

Then there was the young Magpie. He (She? It?) spent several days sunbathing on the lawn, allowing an approach to within about six feet before flying clumsily away. At first I assumed he was sick, but when he moved it became apparent that the flight feathers were not fully developed. At least one parent bird was usually on hand as protector, and the youngster was soon flying with them. However, when he came close to the house I could see that he was hobbling and lop-sided, and it appeared one leg was shorter than the other, looking as though the foot was missing or deformed. It must, I think have been some defect which sorted itself out, as he is now indistinguishable from the rest of the family.

Oddly, though, one of my most pleasing memories was not of a bird as such but finding a feather. I rarely see or hear owls in the garden these days: evidence of their presence comes in the shape



of feathers and pellets below the pines. This was something special - a beautiful, fresh, patterned buff feather which I think was a secondary from a Tawny Owl, a small treasure to be admired and wondered at. Perhaps I should regard that feather as some small compensation for restriction on my movements.

Of course, 'They' (whoever they are) have decided to cut those of us who are still shielded a bit of slack - within limits, an hour a day outside. But the timing seems almost malicious: not only is spring over, but the weather has changed. Those frustrating weeks of bright sunny mornings and pleasantly warm afternoons have been replaced by days which are often grey and cold, frequently wet, sometimes windy - not tempting one to go outside. Not springtime, but flaming June!

Bob Anderson

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.

CONSERVATION NEWS FROM STEVE TURNER

As I sit and hit the keyboard once more, it makes me wonder where this madness is all going to end. I feel that we are in for a long haul to return to normality if normality will ever return, strange times but I am sure we will all adapt to whatever happens.

We have had a very good year in Weaverham. House Sparrows and Starlings have had a bumper season. I have enough juvenile Starlings to make their own murmuration in the back garden every day. Robins have fledged four young and the Blackbirds are down on their third clutch, although the first two clutches only fledged two each. After 10 years a pair of Blue Tits has finally used one of my many boxes and they have fledged nine chicks, which managed to survive a week without the Sparrowhawk or the neighbourhood moggies taking any. One of my neighbours has had a pair of Greenfinches fledge four and to confirm this the parents brought them into the garden today. I can say these are the first young Greenfinches I have seen in the garden for at least 5 years. Again, after waiting for 10 years, I have a pair of House Martins that have completed a nest under the apex of the roof. But these glorious little birds are few and far between in Weaverham this year and they were late coming. My daughter heard a Cuckoo by the Trent and Mersey Canal at Marston last week.

Whilst we are all in some form of lockdown or working from home or furloughed, please remember that the 'dark ones' are in the same boat. From the *National Cage Bird* papers it would appear that the trend of taking birds from the wild is again rearing its ugly head; they have the excuse this year that due to the lockdown closed rings that are placed on young chicks have been unavailable. Fortunately this is not an excuse in law, several Police Forces throughout the country have been executing warrants along with the RSPB and the RSPCA, and coming up with quantities of finches and softbills. Due to the situation we are in at the moment, legitimate breeders of British birds have cut back on the number of chicks they allow their birds to have, creating a shortfall in the market which the 'dark ones' are taking full advantage of. The only good side to this situation is that with more people out and about they are being seen and reported to the authorities. Please remember that 99.9% of British bird breeders are legitimate and would not entertain any bird caught from the wild in their collections. Whilst some of us may not agree with the hobby of keeping birds it has gone on for years and will continue to do so. Whilst I was working 80% of all information on illegal capture of wild birds came from British bird breeders, after all if we all had the same ideals and hobbies it would be a funny old world.

I know I harp on about it every time but here we go again. Whilst you are out and about taking your permitted exercise and maintaining social distancing, please keep your eyes and ears open for

anyone acting 'not quite right' - trust your instincts. If you think they are up to no good, you are probably right. Gain as much info as you can, including descriptions, vehicle type and number. Please use your optics - DO NOT place yourselves in danger. Report it to the Police and please obtain an incident number. If you do not get the service you would expect drop me an email and I will chase it up.

If on your travels you come across what you feel may be a poisoned bait I must again stress do not touch it, many of the poisons used will kill and some are easily absorbed through the skin, these will lead to a horrible, slow death, by the time the doctors have found out what it is it will be too late. Police Crime Scene Officers are trained to deal with such substances, leave it to them. I hope you all have a good summer and get that lifer that you have been searching for, please keep safe and take care.

**Steve Turner, Conservation Officer, 11 Pinfold Way, Weaverham, Northwich, CW8 3NL
Tel: 01606 853796 Email: conservation@cawos.org**

CONSERVATION REPRESENTATIVES

Chester	Neil Friswell, 8 Oaklands Crescent, Tattenhall, Cheshire, CH3 9QT. Tel: 01829 770463 Email: neil.friswell@btinternet.com
Congleton	Vacant - please let Steve Turner know if you are willing to take on this role
Crewe and Nantwich	Colin Lythgoe, 11 Waterloo Road, Haslington, Crewe, CW1 5TF. Tel: 01270 582642 Email: colin.lythgoe@uwclub.net
Halton	Tony Parker, 41 The Park, Penketh, Warrington, WA5 2SG. Tel: 01925 726986 Email: tonymarker@cawos.org
Macclesfield	Vacant - please let Steve Turner know if you are willing to take on this role
Vale Royal	Roy Leigh, 8 Hall Drive, Marston, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 6DT Tel: 01606 892032 Email: roysleigh@aol.com
Warrington	Brian Martin, 45 Albert Road, Grappenhall, Warrington, WA4 2PF. Tel: 01925 264251 Email: brianmartin1940@hotmail.com
Wirral	Richard Smith, March Wall, King's Drive North, Caldley, Wirral, CH48 1LL. Tel: 0151 625 2320 Email: richard@deeestuary.co.uk

RUDHEATH LAGOONS DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

For a couple of years, commencing in 2018, I have been undertaking ecological surveys of two of the lime lagoons that occur up on the bunds adjacent to Griffiths Road and Cooke's Lane, opposite the Tata chemical works, Lostock. The surveys were undertaken to assess the baseline status of species and habitats occurring on the two lime lagoons.

The lime lagoons occurring within the bunds are private, mostly in the ownership of Tata, which prevent (and are not willing to allow) access, even to me. The two lagoons I have been surveying are numbers 4 and 5, these are in the ownership of my client.

The proposal will see the lime beds drained and the lime sludge extracted, the removal / excavation of black ash mounding that forms two of the bunds of Lime Bed 4. The excavated black ash material will then be manufactured on the site (utilising a temporary 'egg laying' production unit) to create medium density clinker blocks to be used by the construction industry.

The proposal has been through the planning process and planning was granted in May 2020.

The Lime Beds 4 and 5 offer two very differing habitats, whereas Lime Bed 4 has open water lagoon with lime flats and shorelines, Lime Bed 5 has been seeded with calcareous grass matting. These habitats are great for birds through the seasons, particularly in spring/autumn and winter when the lagoon holds water, and as the site is private the birds are not disturbed as much as they would be on other nearby sites.

The breeding season offers challenges to ground-nesting wildfowl, waders and passerines using the site; predation on the site is a big problem, and as the lagoons dry out the opportunities to

evade predators is lessened significantly. The Tata lagoons, which are separated from the site by a few metres, offer similar drying patterns, therefore removing the option of moving their young to them to evade the ground-based predators.

The impacts to the birds whilst the works are undertaken will be two-fold, loss of habitat and disturbance. Mitigation proposal and restoration plans have been submitted along with the planning proposal.

With regards to the disturbance, we are expecting the birds to be displaced to the adjacent lagoons owned by Tata; we are hoping to agree access so this can be monitored.

Screening will be erected around the proposed groundworks to ensure that birds are not frightened by the operations, and again this will be strictly enforced and monitored.

The loss of habitat impact should be temporary, and it is expected that whilst the Tata lagoons will absorb the displaced birds it is important that some biodiversity gain is achieved.

An original planning amenity-based habitat restoration plan was submitted with the planning submission; this proposal was dropped after discussions with CWAC and RSPB as the original proposals did not target the specific species frequenting the lagoons. However, an updated and completely new design has been developed with input and agreement from the RSPB, this has now been submitted. This proposal provides lagoon, lime flats and shoreline habitat which currently occur, but it also is designed to hold water all year and has island features which will provide safer nesting habitat for ground-nesting waders.

Going forward, we are looking to develop the site as a bird reserve with a hide and limited access to minimise disturbance. I am hoping that we can turn this into something which we can be proud of and in time we have a site that will significantly improve the current situation.

It is early in the process, but I am hoping that the ongoing management will be funded by the applicant and managed by a committee, within which I hope CAWOS will play a contributing role.

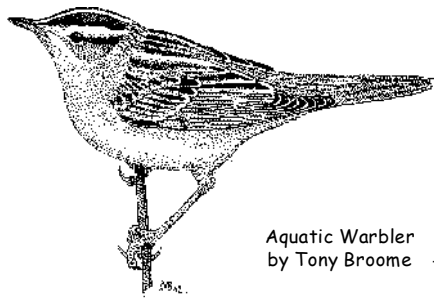
Roy Leigh

County Rarities

AQUATIC WARBLER *Acrocephalus paludicola*

I can picture the scenario, it's the end of August, and we are having a good ringing session at Knutsford Moor, there are clearly migrants feeding up on the reedbed and scrub areas, with quite a few Blackcaps, Willow and Reed Warblers being caught. We have already had two 1CY [calendar year] Sedge Warblers, not common here, when a third striped *Acrocephalus* warbler is brought back from a net round, with a comment that this one is very well marked.

Once out of the holding bag and in the hand, this is very obviously not a Sedge Warbler. The whole jizz of the bird is different. The upperparts are heavily striped black on a yellowish buff background, with two broad creamy tramlines towards the sides of the mantle, the streaking goes all over the upperparts, including the rump. The head has a round profile, a strong pale bill, and has pale lores, plus an obvious broad creamy down-turned supercilium and a wide creamy crown stripe, widest at the base of the bill with a touch of brown on the forehead. The underparts are clean off white; it lacks any spotting on the throat necklace that ages Sedge Warblers as birds of the year and the legs are pink not grey. The end of the graduated tail feathers are noticeably pointed giving a spiky effect.



Aquatic Warbler
by Tony Broome

Okay, so you can comment that it's easy if you have the bird in the hand, but with this species, most, if not all these features can be seen in the field. Of course *Acrocephalus* warblers can be skulking, but Aquatics prefer sedges, low vegetation and the edges to dense reedbeds and respond to "pishing", and sometimes sit out in the open at the edge of reed or sedge beds, particularly in early morning to avoid the dew-wet reed stems. The so called 'tiger-striped' appearance looks very different from browner, much less well marked back of a Sedge Warbler; the streaked rump, compared to the unmarked warm brown one of a Sedge Warbler, and that spikey graduated tail stands out. Whilst 1CY Sedge Warblers may show something of a median crown stripe, it is never as clear cut as an Aquatic Warbler and they have a deeper "tucc" type of call.

Over the last couple of decades they have become far less frequent, even at south coast sites that used to record them annually and they are now back to being a real rarity and are back to being a BBRC description species. Not that we have had many Aquatic Warblers in Cheshire and Wirral, but they have turned up elsewhere on the west coast in autumn. So next time you come across a young Sedge Warbler at some coastal migration point, do a sanity check of why it isn't an Aquatic Warbler, and who knows!

Hugh Pulsford

AQUATIC WARBLER IN CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL

Aquatic Warbler is a species rare enough in Britain for reports of its occurrence to have, at various times, come under the consideration of the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC).

Such was the situation in 1975 when the first for Cheshire was discovered at the Weaver Bend, Frodsham Marsh on 31st August. This bird, an immature, remained until 12th September and BBRC accepted the record. Twelve months hadn't quite passed before what the 1976 *Cheshire Bird Report* referred to as the 'Red Rocks ringing team' caught the first Wirral bird on 28th August. This also proved to be a 'stayer' with sightings until 4th September and again BBRC accepted the record. BBRC also accepted the record of an immature bird caught by the Merseyside Ringing Group (MRG) at Frodsham Marsh on 20th August 1978. This run of records proved to be a flash in the pan as it was 2012 before Aquatic Warbler made its next appearance in the systematic list of a *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report*. This appearance was due to the record of the presence of a juvenile at Red Rocks on 19th and 20th August being accepted by the County Record Panel, BBRC no longer adjudicating reports at that time.

For the sake of completeness it should be mentioned that a report of one caught by MRG at Frodsham Marsh on 5th August 1977 appears never to have been submitted to BBRC. *The Birds of Frodsham Marsh* Garner & Morton (1987) mentions an immature "caught, ringed and photographed" on the marsh on 7th August in 1983, a year in which BBRC didn't consider Aquatic Warbler reports; there is no mention of this bird in the 1983 *Cheshire Bird Report*.

Steve Barber

Sites to Watch

BURTON MERE WETLANDS AND DEE MARSHES

After nearly three months of being closed to visitors during the initial phase of lockdown, Burton Mere Wetlands finally opened to visitors again on 15th June, and it was great to welcome old friends back again to the reserve. Though hides remain closed and trails only partially open, the hope is that over the coming weeks and months we will be able to open more of the reserve, piece by piece, until full access is available once more.



We have had mixed success with our breeding birds this year. Lapwing and Redshank have had a poor year. The very dry spring saw the wet grassland dry out completely, and water levels dropped so fast that we were unable to move water around through the network of ditches and sluices as we would normally do. Breeding Shoveler, Gadwall and Teal were also impacted badly by the same issues. Avocet, however, fared better, as the bulk nested around the main scrape that is deep enough to always retain water.

Breeding highlight of this year must go to Great White Egret, with three pairs nesting in the heronry. Two pairs have been seen with two fledged young each, and we await with some trepidation to see fledged young from the third nest. The first Spoonbill appeared at BMW on 17th March with three around to date, but none have shown any inclination to breed. The Cattle Egret pair was still on the reserve on 20th April but disappeared after then. It is possible that they may have bred out of sight, but even though they are extremely secretive when nesting, the odd glimpse in the heronry or on early morning feeding flights normally helps to reassure us that they are still about and nesting.

Reedbed specialists have had an excellent breeding season. Three pairs of Bearded Tit have nested at BMW this year, and reports from visitors last week of family groups of fledged Beardies with noticeably short tails and yellow gapes, suggested successful second broods. As well as the regular pair of Marsh Harrier at Neston Reedbed, Marsh Harriers have nested in the reedbed at BMW this year too. There has always been some nervousness about how a breeding pair of Marsh Harriers would impact on the breeding waders at BMW, but interestingly this pair has done nearly all their hunting out on the saltmarsh. As soon as either appear they do get a real battering from the Black-headed Gulls nesting on the main scrape, so perhaps this is the main reason for this. Or is hunting simply better and easier out on the saltmarsh?

Amongst the Black-headed Gull colony, Mediterranean Gull pairs continue to increase with 18 breeding pairs counted this year. Not all were successful, but it is interesting to see how numbers continue to increase year on year.

While BMW remain closed over April and May, I was relieved not to find any rarities and the main spring passage, while still enjoyable, didn't produce anything that local birders had not seen before. It was a quiet spring for Garganey, with just a single drake found on 19th April and hanging around for a week or so after then. Wader passage was a little livelier with the highlight being two Wood Sandpipers on 7th and 8th May. Spotted Redshank peaked at 10 on 23rd April, all in stunning jet-black finery. Two Sanderlings graced Border Pool on 22nd May, a scarce wader at BMW, and a Curlew Sandpiper dropped in for a few hours on 24th May. Bar-tailed Godwit passage was also noticeable with up to three birds on three days in spring, most in breeding plumage.

It was a good spring for Little Gull, with up to three birds present between 15th-20th April, and a single bird on 4th May. Other spring passage highlights included: an Osprey through on 11th April and a male Whinchat on 18th April, while passage Wheatears were strangely lacking. A singing male Wood Warbler was around the meres on 6th May. Recently, Wood Warblers have become almost annual at BMW, with singing males often hanging around for a few days. Another warbler that is becoming more regular at BMW is Garden Warbler, with singing males around in early June for the last 2 years.

It has also been a good year for breeding warblers too. Four pairs of Lesser Whitethroat have successfully bred at BMW this year, which is well above average, and Grasshopper Warbler appears to have had a good breeding season as well. An impressive 17 Cetti's Warbler territories were mapped at BMW this spring, with most pairs successful. And a quick walk around the mere on 15th June produced three fledged families with up to four juveniles each. A similar expansion in numbers is also happening out on the marsh.

While the breeding season continues for a little while yet, the autumn wader passage has already begun, with 260 Knots on the main scrape on 22nd June sounding the starting bell. An impressive number for the reserve. Our first returning Green and Common Sandpipers appeared on 22nd June, and Greenshank and Spotted Redshank returners have also made their first appearances. July and August can be excellent for rare waders at BMW, such as last year's Terek Sandpiper on 9th July. Here's hoping that we are graced with another quality wader this year.

Graham Jones, Site Manager at RSPB Dee Estuary Reserve

Notes and 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.

MY GREEN BIRDING LIST

When I started writing this article, I thought at the time - I see my first draft was dated 10th January 2020 - that my idea would seem trivial, or even lazy to any hardened birders who heard of it. Even for a car-weary naturalist it might feel too tame. But after watching our grim Boris yesterday, flanked by two long-faced medics as he almost literally pulled down the hard overnight shutters on our fast old lives, I think I shall continue to plug green birding.....

It was New Year. So how, I wondered, could I ensure that more of my birding would be planet-friendly in 2020? Share a car when birding? Already ticked off. Spend some of my birding time on needful BTO or other local recording work? Yep - a long established good habit. Attempt a big British year total in 2020? Already decided not to. That decision, by the way, was soon reinforced by some vain 2020 attempts to see that infuriating Siberian Stonechat at Ashton's Flash. Where is it, after the little critter had been so obliging in December? If you can't see the bird you thought was in the hand, what price the bush? In that case, should I instead abandon 'ticking off' species altogether? Not a bad idea - some would say a great one; but I am so lazy that I stir myself only when trying to meet a target.

Or, could I focus on more birding closer to *home*, without using any fossil fuels at all? A fine challenge; but would it be satisfying all year? Would the novelty not wear off? I could call it my Green Birding List (no, I don't mean greenfinches and parakeets). And I would need *Rules*...

So what Rules should one make for Green Birding? To start with, I shall count how many bird species I can see in or over my garden, or can walk to see, or can cycle to, or can hang-glide from off my house roof to (not really). But will that keep my interest for long enough? And how far will I want to carry all my optics? Not very far - even though I have a cycle-pannier-friendly Mighty Midget v2 scope with full height Slik tripod and strap, which together weigh a mere 1.7kg (they're great for birding in any wind-speed below 2 mph).

So, can I allow myself further Rules? Back at New Year (before coronavirus!), I decided on three more categories. For my second category, I will allow birding using public transport, probably buses and trains (but *not* in combination with a car - not even driving to the railway station). Thirdly, I'll count any birds I see when using fossil fuel *purely* to do genuine census work - like my monthly BTO WeBS waterfowl counts, or my annual heronry survey. Finally, I'll also include birds I spot during any required journey of duty for, say, family or work or charity or youthwork purposes. In summary (when lockdown allows) I shall count all birds I see under these Green Birding List Rules:

- a) When birding at or from *Home*, on foot or bike with no fossil fuel use;
- b) When birding using public transport *Only*;
- c) When any fossil-fuelled travel is solely to do *Official* census work;
- d) Any birds seen during a journey of genuine social *Duty*.

I see that the words that I have italicised in my list spell *HOOD*. Perhaps that's a good aid to remembering my system? Doubtless Robin Hood lived a very green existence. Alongside lots of robins.

The last category that I listed has been a profitable one for me in the past. There was the youth group trip to the ice-cream shop which had a Laughing Gull coming to bread, in its car park. And there was the time I took my mother-in-law shopping and glanced through my car window, en route, to see a line of Leach's Petrels flying by. And, of course, one can *choose* the route and perhaps the destination for a genuine journey: I deliberately took the youth-group to *that* ice-cream shop and not the other one with no gull. The Military Orchid was famously rediscovered in England by means of a carefully located family picnic.

Yet I must take the 'Duty' category seriously. If a non-birding partner or friend fancies a walk somewhere nice, that does not permit me to drive them ten miles and stalk grimly through a wood

at their side, wishing they would make less noise and that the Lesser Spot would make any noise. They would have enjoyed an unspotted walk near home more. And I *won't* count birds that I see on any *leisure* birding events, not even on driving to my favourite local patch, or in a full car club, or on a tour. Or even, if I walk or cycle after making a fossil fuel journey to a holiday destination; it takes almost no green commitment to walk from the bird observatory round to the ringing nets.

Episode One - A Fine Start (1st to 4th January 2020)

I must confess to having a small advantage when birding from home. I live adjacent to Sandbach, a simple bike ride from the famous Flashes. Thus, on New Year's Day I took an early walk around my village, then cycled (in nice weather, thankfully) to Elton Hall Flash. Would it be a good first day? Some surprises in both places. The first surprise was that my garden and the village gave me more ticks than the Flashes. My list built up rapidly with expected garden and local birds. Then a brisk stroll along the canal was halted when two Song Thrushes started to sing against each other - a species I sometimes struggle to spot at New Year, and a glorious sound to thrill the early season.

Mallards were the only birds visible on the canal itself; plus what looked like a white Mallard flying over. Yawn - it was a late New Year's Eve last night. Is it even worth raising my bins to focus on a farmyard duck? What? That's no duck, it's a stunning male Goosander! Who needs a bird reserve, when there's a Goosander over the chippie? Garden and village total? 29, even after I missed the thirty Goldfinches leaving their roost in next door's holly.

Down at the Flashes, the entire flock was in view - of local birders! They all eyed me sideways, when I arrived on two wheels in a fluorescent yellow jacket, even though I took it off before approaching them. I did a rapid survey of the salt pan and added a total of 16 more species. I explained to the crowd the point of my ethical mission, whereupon they became somewhat interested and began to point out things I might have missed. Had I noticed the female Blackcap on the bird feeders? Wow! No - number 47 for the day. Dare I dream of 50 in my Green Birding List straightaway? Sadly no; yet I set off happy through the twilight, before realising that (unlike everyone else) I now had to flog home in cold near-darkness.

I was half-way home when a car slowed and a grinning face peered out of a window. He gestured backward. "Little Egret has just dropped in!" Then he drove away; but when he was out of sight I looked at the darkening sky and turned for home regardless. I was home in just enough light to see the Goldfinches dropping into next door's holly.

On January 2nd we walked up to Sandbach via the nature trail. It was a fine walk but disappointing for my List, until a magnificent male Sparrowhawk shot close overhead. My wife was thrilled by a showy Great Spotted Woodpecker. Next day it was back on the bike to the Flashes, still in good weather, hoping for the egret or the Black-tailed Godwits I'd missed. Ah, there are the 'wits'; oops, no - those are Curlew.

By next day I was tallying my bad misses so far. I compiled a list of what I hadn't yet seen; and set off on a country cycle along the lanes through Bradwall. Something sitting on a wire looked rather less than thrush size. Another Chaffinch? Wow! No - a gorgeous male Yellowhammer, one of three. It's always fun when the bird you find is a surprise replacement for the one you expected; and when it's nearly on your doorstep, the pleasure is doubled. I rode on. Massive flocks of Starlings; I must ride this way again. A couple of expected ticks were Fieldfare and Rook; then a distant Greenfinch and a Jay. I arrived at the Flashes to find absolutely nothing new there in return for my long ride - until, just as I was leaving, the Mediterranean Gull was spotted in the roost on Elton Hall.

Could I make 60 on my Green Birding List in the first week? Just one more was needed. Still no Coal Tit, despite the fact there had been one on my neighbour's bird feeder (why not mine?) over Christmas. Where are all the Mistle Thrushes in the district? A long walk with Christine along the canal found no Linnets or Grey Wagtail - but she did point out a solitary bird in a bush. Gotcha - a fine Reed Bunting, for my 60. Across the canal was a big flock of Chaffinches. And amongst them - what was that? Could it have been, by any chance? But never a good view and now it's flown. It *might* have been a Brambling, but honesty has to break through occasionally. (Three days later, in the Flashes log, Andy Goodwin recorded one Brambling in the same flock. Aaah! Well, that undermined any scruples I had - I added it gratefully.)

A wet day off, then back to the Flashes, but the water was high. Even cycling through the flood down the lane did not find me the rumoured Chiffchaff. A long ride around Watch and several

other lanes added nothing new, except - ah, *that* was surely a Bullfinch call. Repeated; and again, and again. Where on earth is the bird? But just a moment.... ouch - I had never realised my bike's sticking disc brakes could sound so like a Bullfinch. Gloom. But wait! I heartily disapprove of pishing a bird by playing a recording of it on a mobile phone; but could there be any moral objection to pishing with a *bicycle*? So I rode on, squeaking hopefully. No Bullfinches anywhere. Well, it was a good idea while it lasted.

Episode Two - Storm and Flood (early January to mid-March 2020)

So, my Green Birding List had reached 61 by 4th January, with the aid of some excellent cycling weather. But then the jet-stream moved closer so that cycling became horrible; so my list went into suspended animation and started growing very slowly. A walk with my wife Christine produced a Nuthatch; and a bike ride in a brief weather lull added Mistle Thrush. But a boost was at hand, because the first WeBS count of January was due.

I knew, of course, what species to expect from the Cheshire mere where I have been counting ducks for (with the odd break) 43 years. On reaching the mere it took a quick glance to add Mandarin to my Green Birding List and - but wow! This is adding Mandarin in *style*. How many of those beautiful ducks are out there today? Mandarins are the worst duck of all to count, because an entire flock can vanish into a few trees to rest. It took half an hour's hard work to determine that there were 73 Mandarins out there. A single Pochard was the only other newbie. But since I was here on true ornithological business, a walk through the woods was allowed under my rules - until yes, eventually one Woodcock flew up noisily.

After that, it was back to riding round by Sandbach Flashes on a bike from home - and now the nightmare started. That dratted Kumlien's Gull! At least, that was what *they* said it was, despite the Iceland that was also reported. I never saw either (partly for reasons about to be explained), so I can't comment and am too disgusted to, in any case. The weather was, of course, filthy around that time and often not fit for a gull, let alone a cyclist. Eventually, a day came when after heavy rain it was humanly reasonable to cycle along the Haslington bypass and down Clay Lane. Another hundred yards, and I'll be able to see across Pump House Flash; and - oh, *no!* - the flood is across the road. Looks deep, too; far too deep to cycle through. And I can't *quite* get a decent view up Pump House Flash without wading; the hedge is in the way. In any case, through tiny gaps in the hedge all I can see is a few large pale gulls. I decide that it probably doesn't matter that I can neither get a scope on them, nor cycle any further.

I ride back home, put my bike away, get a drink and check my phone. You cannot be serious! Kumlien's Gull on Pump House Flash! Reported just *ten minutes* after I had turned back from the flood!! Was it one of those that I had glimpsed through the hedge? I gave a heavy sigh, got my bike out again and cycled off into the wind again. It took me another half hour to flog round to Pump House, this time the other way round, against the wind through Ettiley Heath - to find no big gulls. That became the story of the fortnight. Huh! I hope this Green Birding List gets some appreciation from someone. So most of February added only one species to my Green list, at Crabmill Flash, where three Oystercatchers were hiding among the Mallards.

I also allow birds seen during trips of social duty. A big disappointment came on a trip to Snowdonia, where our work-party was building new facilities at our youth house-party centre. It was a fine morning as we drove toward Betws-y-Coed; and as we were approaching Llanrwst I suddenly realised that we would drive within a hundred yards of the tree that last month had reported two Hawfinches. I remembered the tree well from a fine bird there in 2019. Yes! Yes! This could be a legitimate Green Birding List twitch.... or not, as I and some damp, disconsolate 'real' birders all found. No haws. Not funny.

The last day of the month was our church weekend, for which my wife and I went to Llandudno. In the afternoon it was my job to entertain less mobile folk with a drive round the Great Orme. Storm Dennis was just coming in heavily, so the cliffs were disappointingly empty of auks; and I was not chuffed to find the Chough had just flown (or even been blown) away. But Fulmar, Shag and Rock Pipit were new. On the way home next day at Rhos some Common Scoters, Turnstones, a Redshank and a Razorbill were in sight (although no Guillemots or divers and no Purple Sandpipers, the main target). Next came the February WeBS duck count. That added, oddly, a couple of Ravens and (at last) a Bullfinch. A youth group trip back to Wales, on the following weekend, required a drive down to the beach at Black Rock Sands for football and paddling, and

allowed distant views of Sanderling, Ringed Plover and Dunlin, to bring up a nice-sounding 77. Then came another teeth-gnashing miss. For a charity training weekend we had to drive to Kent. I happily ticked off Red Kite over the M40 as my wife drove; then I decided to look for somewhere a bit nicer than a service station to stop for lunch. Browsing on my phone, I opened BirdGuides and it occurred to me to look at the BirdMap feature, one I don't often use. I woke up suddenly. What was that rare bird symbol doing on the map, apparently almost on top of the M40? *What?* Black-bellied Dipper in High Wycombe! Reported only an hour ago. Almost exactly on our route! Come to daddy! Or rather, daddy will come rapidly to you. Lunch beside the water in High Wycombe sounded suddenly like a glorious idea. Well, it was very nice, but the dipper had gone (infuriatingly, it came back the next day). Huh - dipped out on a dipper.

Once back home, Boris started to pull the shutters down as isolation became a public requirement; but next morning, on a fine spring day, a bike ride via Elton Hall Flash was no burden. Moreover, for once I had hit the jackpot. A pair of Gadwall was slinking across a pool, seven Black-tailed Godwits were giving an aerial display and, best of all, the Flashes' first five Whooper Swans for a long time were cruising nervously across Elton Hall Flash. Not everything I found was evidence of spring winging through the air; I was freewheeling past a possible Cetti's Warbler haunt, using my ears more than my eyes, when I nearly ran down a pair of frogs copulating on the road.

I now have a Green Birding List of 86 by mid-March 2020, with nearly all the summer migrants still to come. This is starting to look like a worthwhile challenge. *Or unless the world turns upside down....*

George B Hill

TRIO OF NESTS

When lockdown started (March 23rd), with the Government's encouragement to take daily exercise, we started to explore the countryside around us, going further afield and for longer walks, now usually 8-9km. We found 'Public Map Viewer' on <https://maps.cheshireeast.gov.uk/ce/webmapping> very useful to identify circular walks using footpaths, small lanes and tracks, all from home.

First we sorted out a few walks to Rostherne, taking the permissible footpaths which included a distant view of Rostherne Mere, woodland, fields, angling pool, and reasonably quiet lanes. On one of these walks, on 1st May, we came across a **Treecreeper** going up the side of a tree but then it disappeared behind a loosened piece of bark. This was quickly followed by another doing the same. We'd found their nest! On subsequent visits we watched them returning to the nest about every 1 minute or so with beaks full of insects and caterpillars and occasionally flying off with a faecal sac to dispose of it some distance from the nest. We hoped to see their young fledge, an event I've only seen once before, so we went daily. Then, after about 17-18 days, we arrived and waited, but no birds returned to the nest. As far as we could see, the nest behind the bark was still intact, so unlikely to have been predated; we can only assume that the young birds had fledged successfully, probably very early that morning.

Other walks were around Mere, Tabley Hill and Knutsford Moor. We always paused by a couple of small pools. On 5th May we saw a **Long-tailed Tit**, then realised there were actually two, and they were going to their nest with beaks full of invertebrates! The nest was low down, almost hidden by brambles. We decided to go back and, with a huge amount of luck, we might get the timing right and see the young leave the nest. The next day it was blowing a gale, but the two parents were still actively bringing small prey items to their growing chicks. On our third trip there was no sight of the adults, but the nest was still intact so hadn't been predated. Obviously they had fledged sometime after we'd left them and before our return. We were both sad and pleased: sad that we wouldn't be seeing them and pleased that they had had a successful outcome.

Our third nest was discovered by an angling pool on the way to Rostherne. Our first sighting of **Grey Wagtail** was on 23rd April, but on subsequent visits there were two adults and then success when we observed them dropping into the reed beds, again —yes you've guessed - with beaks full of insects. Then on 14th May there was one youngster on an angling landing stage occasionally being fed by both parents, whilst one or more still being fed in, or near to, the nest, again being fed by both parents. It was brilliant to watch both adults fly-catching over the water which, at that time, was covered in emerging insects; sometimes by hovering close to the water, other times actively pursuing their prey.

So without Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdown, and encouragement to take daily exercise, we wouldn't have found these nests. So some clouds do sometimes have silver linings.....

Sheila Blamire

DOWNSIDES OF LOCKDOWN

Everyone's talking about the positive effect of 'connecting with nature', but what about the negative effects on wildlife and damage done to the countryside, as lockdown relaxed - both officially and unofficially. Conservationists have also warned about the impact on grass verges and further damage to the environment as visitor numbers soared as lockdown restrictions were eased.

It was really brought home to me when there was a piece on the TV local news about firefighters who were called to a fire in Macclesfield Forest caused by a disposable barbecue, which caused a lot of damage in a woodland area. It wasn't a lone incident either. The headlines on 1st June were "Fires at Delamere Forest and Macclesfield Forest prompt another safety plea", either caused by disposable barbecues or smouldering camp fires.

Other people have witnessed negative effects on our green spaces.

For example, Steve Barber has seen this locally at Lapwing Hall Pool - supposedly a nature reserve. Here dog walkers have increased several-fold, dogs almost always off leads and in the water (resulting in broods of Little and Great Crested Grebes being pushed out into deep water), mountain bikers on the banks, anglers sneaking in, paddle boarders and swimmers, etc.

Steve Turner added in about the amount of fly tipping that occurred during the time the tips were closed. I have noticed examples of large amounts of household waste being dumped that obviously contain foodstuffs wasted by idiots panic buying. These sites do have a visible presence of brown rats, even in daylight hours, this will have an effect on our birdlife as these creatures are on the increase and will, as we all know, raid nests especially the birds that choose to nest on the ground or low down in hedgerows and banks. I have seen brown rat numbers increase greatly over the time of the lockdown. I have passed my concerns on to the Council, but I have not seen any efforts to remove these piles of rubbish or any sign of bait stations being in place. The Council assure me the matter is in hand, which hand I am not sure.

Then Greg Baker emailed about the regular misuse of the Marbury Reedbed Cheshire Wildlife Trust Reserve [Budworth Mere] due to regular drug and drink parties, fires and even an overnight camp. Litter is continually dumped there by the 'party animals'. Another incident was brought to my attention when someone has purposely smashed glass and put in all the bird feeders in the Big Wood in Marbury Country Park!

I despair sometimes.....

Sheila Blamire

BIRD MIMICRY

Hearing the call of a Raven whilst out in my back garden, I automatically looked up only to see the open beak of a Starling as it continued to do other imitations (Curlew, Oystercatcher), interspersed with the usual clicks and whistles. I was once shaving with the bathroom window open and heard the beautiful song of a Golden Oriole. As it was autumn I knew it couldn't be the real thing, especially not in a cul-de-sac on a housing estate. A quick trip down the stairs confirmed the expected explanation, an immigrant Starling sat on the roof, chortling away to itself. It had obviously learned the song somewhere on the Continent.

The New World family *Mimidae* comprises some 16 species of mockingbirds, many of which can imitate other birds, insects and amphibians, etc. I have certainly heard Northern Mockingbirds exercising their amazing versatility as mimics. Australia's lyrebird reputedly can reproduce any sound it hears. Some parrots are also amazing mimics. The question arises, why do some birds mimic other birds, not to mention other sounds; the Starling being notorious for reproducing music, ringing telephones etc. Surely it has often to be purely for fun as there is no obvious reason to indulge in it, unlike territorial song or song to attract a mate. Many other species indulge in mimicry. I was once puzzled hearing a Buzzard calling in a tree in Marbury Park and yet I couldn't see the bird. It then slowly dawned on me that a Jay was the culprit! Readers will no doubt have had similar experiences and it would be interesting to hear about them.

Bob Groom

CAWOS News

Council has had one virtual meeting in April due to the continuing lockdown as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. We did, however, manage to hold our **Annual General Meeting (AGM)** on 6th March before events overtook our meetings. David Norman, our President, was unable to attend and we are grateful to Brian Dyke who took on this role. The annual reports by the Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer were published in the March *Bird News*. The Council membership remains much the same as last year, except Richard Sturman, who ran the Indoor meetings programme, stepped down and his effort was acknowledged at the AGM. Council also welcomed Barry Jordan as a new ordinary council member. The recommended change to the Constitution: section 10, Conduct of Meetings, e) The quorum for a General Meeting shall be **20** voting members. Change to: The quorum for a General Meeting shall be **15** voting members, which was unanimously approved. Fortunately, the meeting was well attended with >20 voting members present! In early April Barry Jordan 'with a heavy heart' resigned from CAWOS Council.

Council currently is as follows: David Steventon, Chairman; Phil Hampson, Vice-Chairman and Membership Secretary; Ted Lock, Secretary; John Patterson, Treasurer; Hugh Pulsford, County Recorder; with two Ordinary members: Brian Dyke and Tony Parker.

Thus we are **four ordinary Council members short**, one of whom should assume the role of Programme Secretary. Despite advertising for replacements in the March *Bird News* and earlier *Bird News* issues, no-one has shown any interest and now **the situation is getting desperate**. This is your society and as members we need people to step forward to help get the society fully functional again.

Current vacancies are:

1 Records Manager

Sheila and Geoff Blamire are stepping down at the end of the year, only 6 months away, so we urgently need people with some time to help maintain our database. See the report in this issue by David Steventon on the future database.

2 Programme Secretary

Richard has organised most of our indoor meetings for 2020/2021 and somebody is needed to become familiar with the system and work alongside Richard so they are able to start to plan talks for 2021/2022. You will have the freedom, within a budget, to invite speakers of your choice or those recommended by others to come to CAWOS. There are six talks/year.

3 Bird Report Project Manager:

The role is to set the timeline and co-ordinate the production of the annual county *Bird Report*, which involves working with the Records Manager to get the records out to the compilers of species accounts, ensure the compilers' reports are with the Systematic List Editor on time, work with the Photo Editor to ensure photographs are available to be considered for the report. Work with the County Recorder regarding the Annual Review and Rarities Committee Report and seek short articles, including the Ringing Report. Seek advertising and the cost for printing and publishing. Generally co-ordinating the process!

None of these jobs are full-time, so please give them serious consideration, and help will be available in all these posts.

Council has met once with a virtual meeting in April, which involved members sending in reports of the current position which is co-ordinated into a report format. This kept Council members informed, but there was little feedback or discussion as one has at a normal meeting!

The key points raised were as follows:

Membership

Currently stands at 307; despite the message from the Membership Secretary in the last issue of *Bird News*, 17 members have still not updated their standing orders. Council is discussing the

option of ***not providing the Annual Bird Report to those who have not paid their full membership subscription***, despite being reminded several times.

One member, RS Atkinson has sadly died and three members have resigned. We warmly welcome 3 new members: A. Jurgis, M. Warren and family, and D. Smith and family.

Database

Key members of the society met with the Database Manager and Bird Report Editor from Shropshire Ornithological Society together with the Database Manager / Bird Report Editor for Staffordshire (which is part of the West Midland Bird Club), to discuss their experience with using BirdTrack as their database to prepare their *Bird Reports*. A list of questions had been provided ahead of time which led to a useful discussion for some members but not all! David Steventon, as Chairman, has since been running with this, see the report in this issue by David Steventon on the future database.

Bird Report 2018

The report has made good progress (the lockdown having helped!), with the Systematic List complete apart from proof reading and other minor amendments, the yearly review and short articles are in, as is the ringing report and early and late dates. Photographs are available with decisions to be made on choice. The report will need putting together, proof reading and organising printing. ***Need a project manager to take overall control of this.***

Rarities

Only two reports both that have been mentioned in the March *Bird News*. The Siberian Stonechat (see front cover of March *Bird News*) at Ashton's Flash was reported until mid-April when it had started to show a black head and throat confirming the identification as a male. The other report was the Long-billed Dowitcher that turned up at Burton Mere Wetlands on 24-25th February, being the same bird reported in Lancashire on the Ribble, at Marshside RSPB and Martin Mere returning there on 26th February.

Indoor Programme

This is almost complete just two slots vacant at the time of writing. Thanks go to Richard Sturman who stood down in March. ***Still looking for Richard's replacement see earlier.***

Rostherne Bird Observatory

For those who have permits the Observatory is still closed and we are waiting for the decision to reopen from Natural England. The WeBS counts for the site did not take place in April, May or June and we are eager for them to be open again, with the appropriate safety precautions in place.

Bill Bellamy wrote: "It is a pleasure to inform you that one of our CAWOS members, Malcolm Calvert, who does ringing at Rostherne Mere NNR, very recently ringed his 20,000th bird, appropriately a juvenile Reed Warbler. Altogether he has ringed a total of 73 different species over the years, while his primary interest is Reed Warblers that account for the majority of the birds. Malcolm embarked upon his 'tour de force' in 1972 and is still to be found mist-netting in the reed beds some 48 years later. He humbly reminds me that he didn't ring them all but he did ring the overwhelming majority and his dedication to the task and contribution to the study of Reed Warblers cannot be underestimated."

Congratulations Malcolm!

Conservation

CAWOS objected to the removal of two lime-beds at **Rudheath** last year on the grounds that it is an important roosting site for many birds in late autumn and winter, such as Curlew, Golden Plover, Lapwing and many species of gull. It was felt that the ecologist had not conducted survey work late in the evening, only early morning when the birds were coming in or leaving and hence did not have an accurate picture of its use as a roosting site. In addition, it was known that little Ringed Plover had bred on the lime beds in previous years.

CAWOS was invited to make a 3-minute presentation at the Cheshire West and Chester Planning Council meeting to be held on 5th May to explain its objection.

A few days before the meeting it was brought to my attention that the RSPB had put in an objection, namely that "the applicant's ecologist has not valued the breeding bird assemblage

anywhere near high enough and has missed regionally-important breeding wader species”.

They provided new bird observations that the site has become an important regular passage site for Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* to roost, with in excess of 50 birds being recorded (at one time) in the last week in April/first week in May.

Regarding breeding birds:

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* Several pairs this spring and confirmed to breed on the complex; long history of breeding here (see Cheshire Atlas). Certainly, the only regular inland site in Cheshire and possibly the NW. For this species alone, we believe the site is of Regional Importance. Possibly nesting within the redline boundary.

Redshank *Tringa totanus* Multiple pairs, at a guess perhaps 7-9. Probably the only lowland nesting site in inland Cheshire. Probably nesting within the redline boundary.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* Hard to know but perhaps 5-10 pairs across the complex. Nesting within the redline boundary.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avocetta* One pair nesting within the redline boundary with probably another elsewhere on the complex. First known breeding only this year.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* Multiple pairs.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* Multiple pairs.

I attended the Council meeting and just prior to me giving my talk, the Chairman announced that the RSPB had **withdrawn their objection**. I gave my presentation, but it had been torpedoed before I started. Other local people objected but in the decision meeting afterwards it became clear that the planning application would be supported, to bring more business into the area.

I gathered afterwards that some deal had been struck for additional mitigation, involving the RSPB and BTO with a view to forming a Committee to ensure the mitigation took place. This might involve CAWOS but I have heard nothing since. I was very cross at the rug being pulled from under my feet by the RSPB and once I had calmed down, I wrote to Jeremy Sutton, and received an apology saying he was unaware I was giving a presentation. I think it shows that there needs to be more communication between societies interested in bird conservation when tackling these issues, in this case it all happened at the last minute.

Hopefully, the RSPB intervention will be helpful, my personal concern is that the removal of material in two lime beds will enable other lime beds to be de-commissioned such that the roosting site will be lost and perhaps green space returned or used for housing. The Company doing the extraction has a set time period to complete the work, as HS2 will be moving into that part of Rudheath. In addition, a number of requirements were placed on the contractors who need to be satisfied by Cheshire West and Chester Council before work can start, such as the need to take bore hole samples from the beds to determine what chemicals are present and to ensure that any unwanted chemicals do not get in land drainage and hence the water supply, as two examples among several.

The ecologist involved is Roy Leigh who is a member of CAWOS and is writing an article for this newsletter, hopefully we may learn what agreement the RSPB obtained.

Please give serious thought to offering your services to help maintain the function of CAWOS to provide the Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report.

THE SOCIETY NEEDS YOU!!!

Ted Lock, Secretary

MEMBERSHIP

The membership currently stands at 307. People who did not renew this year have now been removed from the database and will no longer receive any publications. There are still 17 people who have not responded to the reminders that they underpaid their subscriptions last year. Luckily since the start of the year we have had 10 new members, welcome to you all and if you come along to the next meeting we have, whenever that is allowed, please come and have a chat. I'm the big guy with a grey beard and head!

Phil Hampson, Membership Secretary

CAWOS DATABASE

THE FUTURE OF RECORDING IN CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL

There will be a change to the way we store records of birds in Cheshire and Wirral for 2020 records onwards. This has been brought about by the pending retirement of Geoff and Sheila Blamire from running the existing database. This article reports on the history of recording up to this point and looks ahead to how we plan to do it in the future using BirdTrack, run by the British Trust for Ornithology.

In the early years from the formation of CAWOS late last century, we asked observers to send in their records on paper in a predefined format. These submissions were cut up into piles for each species and sent out to the compilers. They in turn cut the records for each species into strips that they then reassembled into an order that suited them (e.g. by date or by site) and pasted or taped the strips onto sheets of A4 paper. The compilers could then view the several sheets of paper to pick out the points they wanted to write for each species in the Systematic List. At the end of the report-writing process, the pasted-up records were collected and formally archived. Manchester Museum was one place where these were stored for posterity, thanks to the late Mike Hounsome. Referring to old records could be done but was difficult.

As the volume of records grew, and with the demands from organisations for summaries of records over several years for sites, it made sense to computerise the records. Package software choices at the time, in the early part of this century, were rather limited. We were therefore grateful that Geoff Blamire volunteered to write an application based on the Microsoft Access database for storing our records. This has served us well but inevitably we come up against the problem of succession planning. We are not the only county to be in this position.

A small group of us have considered the computer system options now available. Key considerations were that: the solution could not be stand-alone PC based; that it should be internet-enabled; should be self-service (direct entry by the observers themselves); be capable of being updated with legacy system records; and be assured of being backed-up securely. We recognise that there will be compromises to be made with respect to functionality (e.g. date ranges, number ranges, site names to name the obvious). We also assumed that other software tools would be used to help in the process of writing the *Bird Report* Systematic List, such as downloading from the system of record to spreadsheets for sorting and filtering. But we expect that records in these subsidiary systems would be disposed of at the end of the process, that they would not be the system of record. The conclusion is that BirdTrack, run by the British Trust for Ornithology, is the system we should now use. As it is, the majority of contributors of records to CAWOS already uses BirdTrack.

Many other county bird clubs and ornithological societies have already gone down the BirdTrack route, including the Scottish Ornithological Club (for the whole of Scotland), the Welsh Ornithological Society (for the whole of Wales), and our neighbours in the Shropshire Ornithological Society and the West Midlands Bird Club. A small group of us had a meeting in March with Shropshire and Staffordshire representatives, to take advantage of and learn from their experiences in using BirdTrack so far. We plan to have Scott Mayson, the lead person on BirdTrack at the BTO, hold a workshop meeting in Cheshire at sometime soon to help us make best use of the system. However, this will not happen until the Covid-19 pandemic situation is resolved. We expect to provide instructions to observers as to how to use BirdTrack and enter data, with examples, on the CAWOS website and/or in *Bird News* and/or by email. This will cover uploading from a spreadsheet at the end of the quarter or end of the year, as well as direct entry after a field visit. We also expect to provide assistance to the *Bird Report* compilers on how to deal with the records extracted when writing the species accounts for the *Bird Report*.

BirdTrack will be used as the system of record for observations for 2020 and onwards. Over time, we will organise the transfer of our historic records from the existing database (the application written by Geoff Blamire using Microsoft Access) into BirdTrack. There will be problems on the way, just as there were in the early days with the existing database. We recognise that there will

be some observers who continue to submit records to CAWOS on paper or in spreadsheets, for which we need volunteers to upload to BirdTrack. There are some observers who are using other software tools for their records, such as eBird and Recorder. Some records come to us from PDF/MSWord site reports. Ideally these should all end up in BirdTrack so that we have a single repository and source for our records.

We will provide an update on the project timetable for the cutover in the November issue of *Bird News*.

David Steventon, Chairman

Hugh Pulsford, County Recorder

Andrew Livermore, Systematic List Editor

CAWOS Programme

We are hopeful that Covid-19 will not disrupt the programme this autumn. We will follow the government guidelines which hopefully will be relaxed to allow small gatherings.

Announcements will be made nearer the time on the website www.cawos.org and via emails to the membership (please make sure we have your up-to-date email address).

2nd OCTOBER 2020 ‘WHY THEY FLOCK (and other intriguing behaviours)’ by Jeff Clarke

This talk explains many of the fascinating behavioural aspects of the lives of birds. It answers many of the questions Jeff gets most frequently asked about why birds do what they do.

6th NOVEMBER 2020 ‘BELARUS - BIRDING BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN’ by Mike Watson

Mike will be talking about Belarus and why it is one of the final frontiers of birding in Europe. Vast swathes of countryside are still under natural vegetation and therefore the abundance of birdlife is still impressive in a way that can no longer be experienced in most of Western Europe. Great Snipes indulge in their peculiar lekking display in riverside meadows, Aquatic Warblers buzz away in vast sedge fens and Great Grey Owls peer down from their nests in untouched forests where bison roam.

4th DECEMBER 2020 ‘CALIFORNIA PELAGIC AND WESTERN BIRDING’ by Dennis Atherton

A rush flight to catch the last Pelagic of the season in the world-famous North Pacific waters around Southern California, after 26 hours with no sleep I then go on a bumpy boat to be stranded at sea for 12 hours looking for birds. And who said birders are mad? After checking out the sea birds I spend two weeks up and down the California coastline looking for all the speciality birding on offer; from the seas off San Diego to the mountains of California and finally looking for the elusive California Condor in Santa Barbara, Condor Country.

8th JANUARY 2021 'SOUTHERN PORTUGAL' by Mark Woodhead

From Azure-winged Magpie to Zitting Cysticola the ornithology of Portugal is both diverse and spectacular. The result of many trips to south-east Portugal, this talk will illustrate the bird life of the marshes, cultivated areas, marine environment and the dry interior.

5th FEBRUARY 2021 'WOOLSTON EYES' TBC

5th MARCH 2021 'BITTERN DIARIES' by Mike Roberts

Whilst this focuses on my photography of wintering Bitterns I have broadened this out to include breeding and wintering Bitterns away from Moore NR, such as on the Somerset Levels and I try and explain Bittern behaviour and their status in the UK, as well as attempts to bring about their recovery.



This section of Bird News has been temporarily suspended because the *majority* of events have been cancelled due to Covid-19. If you need any clarification please check with each society on their website or ring the contact number below.

AFFILIATED SOCIETIES

ADNHS Altrincham & District Natural History Society

Meetings Jubilee Centre, The Firs, Bowdon, Altrincham 7:30pm, contact Jacky Johnson 0161 928 7896

CAWOS Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society

Meetings St Vincent's RC Church Hall, Knutsford 7:45pm, contact Ted Lock 01625 540468

CRSPB Chester RSPB Members' Group

Meetings Christleton Parish Hall, Christleton, CH3 7AS 7:30pm, contact Norman Sadler 01244 335670

HPRSPB High Peak RSPB Members' Group

Meetings Senior Citizens' Hall, Marple 7:30pm, contact Tim Walters 0161 449 0299

KOS Knutsford Ornithological Society

Meetings Jubilee Hall, Stanley Road, Knutsford 8pm, contact Derek Pike 01565 653811

MCOS Mid-Cheshire Ornithological Society

Meetings Cuddington & Sandiway Village Hall 7:45pm, contact Andrew Aldridge 01477 534873

MRSPB Macclesfield RSPB Members' Group

Meetings United Reformed Church, Macclesfield 7:45pm, contact Daryll Bailey 01625 430311

NCRSPB North Cheshire RSPB Members' Group

Meetings Appleton Parish Hall, Appleton 7:45pm, contact Olive Giles 01928 733405

NNHS Nantwich Natural History Society

Occasional meetings throughout the year, contact Sec. Mike Holmes 01270 611577

SECOS South-East Cheshire Ornithological Society

Meetings Ettiley Heath Church Community Centre at 7:30pm, contact Sec. Colin Lythgoe 01270 582642

WGBG Wilmslow Guild Birdwatching Group

Meetings Wilmslow Guild 7:30pm, contact Brian Dyke 01625 525936

SITUATIONS VACANT

“THE SOCIETY NEEDS YOU”

RECORDS MANAGER

PROGRAMME SECRETARY

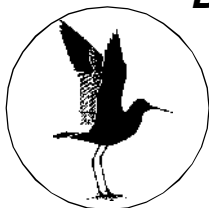
BIRD REPORT PROJECT MANAGER

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For further information, please contact:

Ted Lock Email: secretary@cawos.org Tel: 01625 540466

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***** **CAWOS INDOOR PROGRAMME** *****

We are hopeful that Covid-19 will not disrupt the programme (see page 27-28). Announcements will be made nearer the time on www.cawos.org and via emails to the membership, or contact Ted Lock on 01625 540468.

FRESHPAK is a DELIVERY ONLY service delivering to Stockport area (Wednesday), north Cheshire (Thursday) and Manchester (other days). Simply ring by 4pm the day before delivery is required.

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