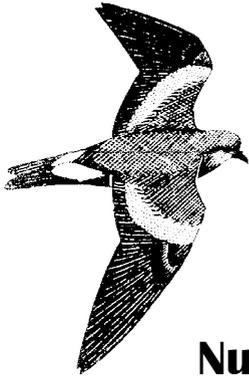


Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society

Reg. Charity No. 702484 www.cawos.org



BIRD NEWS

Number 125

March 2024



Barolo Shearwater

Rostherne Mere NNR - Water Quality

County Rarity: Rock Pipit

Exceptional Numbers!

OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

Chairman : Tony Parker

1 The Park, Penketh, Warrington, WA5 2SG Tel: 01925 726986

Email address : tonyparker@cawos.org

Vice-Chairman : Vacant

Secretary : David Hiley

23 Greenfield Road, Waverton, Chester, CH3 7NE Tel: 07484 836652

Email address : secretary@cawos.org

Treasurer : John Patterson

10 Mere Hall, Mere, Cheshire WA16 0WY Tel: 01565 830677

Email address : treasurer@cawos.org

Recorder : Jane Turner

Quaintways, Marine Road, Hoylake, Wirral, CH47 2AS Tel: 0151 632 3308

Email address : countyrec@cawos.org

Membership Secretary : Carolyn Bailey

24 Brickhurst Way, Woolston, Warrington, WA1 4LG Tel: 01925 852432

Email address : memsec@cawos.org

Newsletter Editor : Sheila Blamire

Woodruff Cottage, Clamhunger Lane, Mere, WA16 6QG Tel: 01565 830168

Email address : sheilablamire@cawos.org

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

The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Society, the Council of the Society, or the Editor. Appearance of advertisements in this publication does not infer any recommendation or approval by the Society for the products and services being promoted.

Front cover: Short-eared Owl by Ray Scally

Other illustrations by Tony Broome, Phil Jones, Dave Pullan and Thelma Sykes

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 15th June 2024

Guest Editorial

Welcome to another edition of *Bird News*, suitably packed with interesting articles, local sightings and informative comment. It is an interesting phenomenon that nearly all County bird organisations across the UK use a regular newsletter as a medium for keeping in touch with their membership, and many smaller local bird clubs and societies also publish, mostly online these days, newsletters with local sightings, along with information on future evening events and speakers and trips out. In addition, social media inevitably also plays a part, notably What's App groups, of keeping birders, at a local level as well as regionally, in touch with each other and what's been seen, allowing up-to-the-minute photographs and comment.

It is good that CAWOS covers all these bases, and Cheshire and Wirral also have a wealth of local groups, but like many societies, at both the County level and at the local level, its ends up being a few volunteers who manage and deliver so much of this. Recent communication on-line has shown that we are not alone, and that many Bird groups/societies in the UK are all struggling to find enough volunteers to maintain the outputs and communication avenues, and there has been much discussion on ways to try and resolve membership issues, getting a younger demographic into the societies and sorting tasks to continue to deliver for the paying membership. It seems the only ones that do well are ones with large memberships from big counties, so there seems to be no easy answers.

However, it's not for the lack of birds and great birdwatching sites. Richard Smith's article on "Exceptional numbers" reminds us how lucky we are to have the Dee estuary on our doorstep, and its ability to attract both spectacular wader and duck numbers, as well as migrants and wind-blown scarcities. I am sure in 1889 Emily Williamson of the Plumage League and fledgling RSPB, could never have imagined 500+ Great Crested Grebes wintering off the Wirral shore! Also of note is the story behind the County's third BBRC accepted Barolo Shearwater, which took an age to make it to the record books, mainly because of the difficulty BBRC have had with adjudicating records of this species. At the time BBRC told me it most certainly was one, but don't wait up for any positive response in the near future! Eventually a comprehensive review of all UK records included acceptance of this sighting.

As for species County wide? I was recently reminded on a bird race we did in 1993, when myself and a small team recorded 149 species in a 24-hour period in May that year, as part of the then, National competition. We came first equal against a team from Norfolk who were amazed at the variety of our sightings, principally all of common birds. In today's world, with luck, we would still be able see most of what we saw, with perhaps a few changes to one or two species on the list. The reason is still here, Cheshire and Wirral have the habitats, from upland moors, deep wooded valleys, across a county of ponds, a mosaic of hedgerows, arable and grass lands running down into the Mersey and Dee estuaries and their significant wetlands and marshes. Rupe Randall's article on the improvement to habitat and water quality at Rostherne Mere NNR highlights a series of habitat projects at a local level that have resulted in a significant improvement in reducing runoff, creating pools and natural barriers, wet meadows and more. All to the benefit of flora and fauna.

Returning to the question of getting the membership more involved in the running of the Society - one suggestion that a few Counties have tried in getting more volunteers involved in the running of the Societies and its outputs is to dissect the activities required down to a specific minimal task, something that would take, at most, a few hours in any week, perhaps even at an appropriate time of year. Of course, it would mean needing more volunteers to complete what may have taken one individual several weeks to do, but making the result look less onerous and defined has worked for some. A thought for CAWOS perhaps?

Hugh Pulsford

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 15th June 2024

CAWOS News

As this is the first *Bird News* of 2024 I think I am allowed to wish you all a Happy New Year! It's a time of year to be positive from a birding point of view - the first signs of spring yet still plenty time for winter storms to blow in some rarities. It has been a very good 'Waxwing Winter' with many of these wonderful birds still around though I have to admit that it has been necessary for me to leave the county and cross the border into Wales to see mine - something I've done on several occasions.

2024 will be a year of change for CAWOS as, subject to confirmation at our forthcoming AGM, we will have a new Chairman in Tony Parker following Phil Hampson's decision to step down. As mentioned in the last *Bird News*, Phil will continue to be involved with CAWOS, so we will have the benefit of his experience for some time yet.

Two Council meetings have been held since the last edition of *Bird News* and we are, of course, preparing for our AGM on 1st March.

The 2022 *Bird Report* was published in January and has, as usual, been very well received. We have also been able to review the sales of the 2021 report which have seen a marked improvement on 2019 and 2021 - undoubtedly due to the impact of COVID. Long may that improvement continue.

There have been four member meetings since the last edition of *Bird News* and I am sorry to have to say that, after an increase in attendance, the number of people joining our Zoom meetings has declined and there were just 22 participants at the last talk on 'Antartica, Falklands and South Georgia' by Mike Watson on 2nd February. We hope to soon be able to seek your views as to how these meetings can be made more appealing. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me with any suggestions. At the time of writing we are, as already mentioned, preparing for the AGM, which will have another very interesting speaker in Dermot Smith, who will deliver a talk on the 'Mersey WeBS 2023' which is, of course, very relevant to our area. This meeting will be face to face at the Mere and Tabley Community Club and I hope many of you will have been able to attend.

David Hiley, Secretary

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Many thanks to the **260** paid-up members for promptly renewing their membership. Thank you also to those who have made additional donations. There are still 38 members who have not yet renewed - if you receive a reminder letter with this copy of *Bird News* then that is a hint that we haven't yet received your 2024 payment!

Rostherne Mere: for those who are unaware, it's possible to visit the beautiful Rostherne Mere (Knutsford) with permit-access to the Boyd Observatory for a small additional fee. If you are interested please do get in touch.

In memoriam: condolences are extended to the families of Barry Shaw, Steve Turner and Ken Williams.

Thank you everyone for your membership, your continuing support is much appreciated. If you have any comment or queries about membership, please don't hesitate to contact me at memsec@cawos.org.

Carolyn Bailey, Membership Secretary

BIRD REPORTS 2022 and 2023

The 2022 *Bird Report* was sent to members early in January. The Editor role is split between me for all data and checking thereof, and the checking and proofing of the report, which is a long and intense process taking many weeks, very ably undertaken by Ted Lock and supported by David Steventon. Ted has decided that the 2023 report will be his last and we must all thank him for all his hard work and attention to detail. Producing the *Bird Report* is a prolonged and hard job involving a team of people. Initially the data is got by me and then sent to the compilers who go

through the data and write their sections. This part of the process is very time consuming and as a Society we must recognise and thank the people doing this work for their dedication and attention to detail. Just to illustrate the size of the task for the 2022 report we were using well over a quarter of a million records split between the compilers. Over the last few years we have moved to a larger format and colour-printed report that includes photographs. We are indebted to Mark Woodhead for his hard work in compiling the photographs into a manageable number, adding the legends and interacting with the photographers for queries. Mark also reviewed the draft report for 2022 and provided comment to Ted. For the 2022 report Ted and I had to review and decide which of the 650+ photographs to use in the report with a final number of 80-85 needed. We try and spread the photographs throughout the report and use as many different photographers as possible, thank you to all for the ones we used in 2022. Inevitably, we cannot use everyone's photographs and apologies to those who submitted theirs that we didn't use. It is no reflection on the quality just that the species wasn't needed in this report and for the next one we do consider those we didn't use previously. Please do continue to send your images into Mark Woodhead (woodheadmwa@aol.com). All the sections are generated in Microsoft Word and submitted to our typesetter, Dave Bickerton, who continues to do a superb job for us. He always goes beyond just typesetting and provides us with comments and corrections. Again thanks are due to him from the Society.

So that brings me to my bit, the data. As I have said earlier, we had well over ¼ million records for the 2022 report. The uploading and checking of the records not input into BirdTrack takes a considerable amount of time. There will always be the odd hiccup in this number of records. Before 2022 the records from BirdTrack were extracted and processed by Graham Palmer. Sadly, we lost Graham in 2023 after a long illness. He was unable to do the extract and processing from BirdTrack for the 2022 report. Graham did this role pre-BirdTrack helping Sheila and Geoff Blamire and I worked with him on two *Bird Reports*, an absolute pleasure and I will miss his phone calls and chats about how we should do things. Rest in peace Graham, we are indebted to you. This meant my writing processes to do the work he did for us which largely revolved around locations. We try and ensure that the locations in the data are aligned to the CAWOS Gazetteer. This may sound simple but people use such a variety of names for the same location. Some of the key ones are the RSPB locations in the Wirral. Please when entering your records just spend 5 minutes to review the names in the gazetteer and use them, it would save a great deal of time for me personally, but especially the compilers. The gazetteer is available online on the CAWOS website. Onto the 2023 *Bird Report*: a few people have already sent their records in for 2023, thank you. ***The closing date for submissions is 31 March 2024 for your records to be used in the 2023 report.*** Any records submitted after this date are very unlikely to be used for the 2023 report and would be included in the next one.

Phil Hampson, Bird Report Co-editor

GRAHAM PALMER

On 8th November 2023 CAWOS lost someone who contributed enormously to the Society. Graham Palmer was a member for many years who was a regular at the indoor meetings in the Church Hall in Knutsford. It may not seem much to make this statement but Graham had serious issues with his mobility but still managed to get along and join in. He was a real supporter of the Society and dearly loved his birds. Over the years though Graham has been one of the people who were instrumental in producing the annual *Bird Report*. He helped and supported Sheila and Geoff before their 'retirement' and that carried on for me after this. He was very dedicated in his work around locations and it is to his credit that the CAWOS bird data was of such a high quality, unlike some other sources. When I took over from Sheila and Geoff in 2021, Graham was there to help and support me and I am enormously appreciative of that. The last year of his life was very hard for him but he still made sure that he handed things over to me.

Graham made a point of mentioning to me that the car park situation and footpath at the Church Hall where we used to meet were not suitable for people with mobility issues, bordering on dangerous. So remembering this, the Council, namely John Patterson, has found a new meeting location and hopefully we will have the first meeting there very soon.

Phil Hampson, November 2023

BARRY SHAW

Barry was a very good birder. He loved seeking out rarities in Britain and was also a prolific traveller and World birder. But not only birds. He also saw over 2000 British native plants, quite an achievement as it involved many twitches ranging from the Scottish Highlands to Channel Islands (the latter count for flora but not birds). He also had a very decent plant list for the island of Crete, where he often visited. He was Cheshire Butterfly recorder for many years and successfully challenged himself to see all the UK Butterflies in one year. He climbed all 282 Monroes, he ran marathons and, as a youngster, cycled from Manchester to Gibraltar and back. An interesting individual to say the least.

John Rayner

CAWOS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1st MARCH 2024

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR 2023-24

In 2023 the Society continued to have meetings using Zoom. The speakers have been varied and sometimes maybe even controversial with the discussion on feeding birds in the garden. Unfortunately, the support for these meetings has decreased substantially. Putting together the speakers for a season of talks takes a considerable amount of time and most of the speakers make a charge. This may seem insignificant but the Society's costs are only just within the membership fees. Our costs have risen significantly over the last year or two. The Bird Report and Bird News both cost more, especially in relation to the postage of each. Every issue of Bird News now costs over £200 to post to members; the Bird Report is over 3 times that. Added onto that is the increase in paper and print cost. Now the decision has been taken to maintain membership at the same cost. The process of increasing is very difficult as most members pay by Standing Order and CAWOS cannot amend them, which must be done by the member. We still have people paying at the old rate since we increased costs 5 years ago. This then requires our Membership Secretary to ask them to pay the shortfall, we cannot afford to absorb it.

In 2024 we will be moving back to some face to face meetings. This will be very dependent on the support from the membership. We are moving to a new location as well. There had been several comments about the suitability and safety of the old meeting place with uneven pavements outside and poor lighting in the car park, this is a very important consideration as we are all getting older. Allied to this is a big increase in room hire. As a result our Treasurer, John Patterson, has found a new and far more suitable location, Mere and Tabley Community Club, Warrington Road, Mere, Knutsford, WA16 0PU, but please note access is from Warrington Road.

It cannot be emphasised enough that we do need support from the membership for the meetings, online or face to face. There is a considerable cost involved, to a lesser extent for Zoom, but more so for face to face.

In the season from the AGM to March 2025 the Council will be conducting a survey of members to establish exactly what people expect or want from the Society. This will be your opportunity to tell Council what you would like to see for the Society going forward. The Society membership is reasonably steady at around 300 but support for meetings is very low, at well below 10% attending. Maybe members are happy to just receive their copies of *Bird News* three times a year and a copy of the *Bird Report*. Please do respond and we can then plan for the future of the Society.

I'd like to take this opportunity to recognise the work that Graham Palmer who we lost last year. Graham was a member who always supported meetings and worked in the background on the data for the *Bird Report*. His contribution and work will be greatly missed by myself and previously he helped Sheila and Geoff Blamire. One of the people who worked away in the background which the majority were unaware of.

This will be the last report from me as Chairman. I have had ill health for the last few years and have decided that I will stand down. In my view the Society has very serious issues as relatively few people are attending the organised meetings, indicating that the Society is not delivering to their expectations. The people sitting on the Council willingly give their time, voluntarily and in

some cases a considerable amount of time to run the Society. We have seen support from members waning over the last year or so, it cannot continue in its present form and clearly change is needed.

Personally I would like to especially recognise and thank David Hiley (Secretary), John Patterson (Treasurer), Ted Lock (previous Secretary) and the Blamires for their support and help over the years. Also Carolyn Bailey who took over from me as Membership Secretary very smoothly and all the other members of Council for all their hard work and efforts. Good luck.

Phil Hampson

SECRETARY'S REPORT 2023-24

This is my first Secretary's Report for the AGM having, of course, taken over from Ted Lock last year. I am grateful to him for his help and guidance over the last 12 months.

Council held four meetings since the last AGM on 3rd March 2023. At that AGM Emma Jenks joined Council as a non-executive member and I was elected Secretary. Carolyn Bailey assumed full responsibility for the Membership Secretary role. We had a vacancy for another non-executive member throughout the year.

The speaker programme for the year has been conducted entirely by Zoom and despite having extremely good quality speakers member attendance has been disappointing with less than 20 attendees on some occasions. We are looking to move to more face-to-face meetings in the coming year in the hope that more social inter-action may lead to a better attendance.

We have become members of a 'Bird Club Group' which aims to share ideas between Bird Clubs/Ornithological Societies across the country. There are already some interesting ideas which we hope to share with you over the next few months so that we can ensure that CAWOS remains relevant and valuable to its members in the future.

CAWOS continues to undergo a period of change as, following Ted Lock stepping down as secretary last year, we now have a change of Chairman with Tony Parker replacing Phil Hampson. We are grateful to Phil for his guidance as Chairman and are equally grateful that he will continue his valuable work on the *Bird Report* as well as supporting the society as a non-executive member. I now look forward to working with Tony to try to maintain the good work carried out by our predecessors.

We just missed publishing the 2022 *Bird Report* in 2023 but, at the time of writing, the report has been distributed and appears to have been very well received which is a credit to all involved with a particular mention for Phil Hampson and Ted Lock.

David Hiley, Secretary

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR 2023

I have pleasure in submitting the accounts of the Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society for the year ended 31st December 2023. These accounts show that the Income and Expenditure account achieved a surplus for the year of £1,365 on our General Fund.

Membership subscriptions of £4,629 were virtually the same as the previous year and database searches contributed £962 to our revenues (but down from £1,405 in 2022). Gift Aid income of £912 was in line with previous years. As you can see, we would have been able to cover our outgoings without the need for income from database searches.

The costs of producing the *Bird Report* and *Bird News* remains stable for now but inflationary pressures, mainly due to postage costs, will be a problem in future. In 2023 the *Bird Report* was not produced and distributed until January of this year but all the costs associated with its production were provided for in the accounts and are shown in the Provisions figure on the Balance Sheet.

The evening programme meetings during 2023 were exclusively Zoom events for which we received no income though we did save on our outgoings such as room hire charges.

The results for the year were completely satisfactory, and our reserves, which increased by £1,482, now stand at £45,226 of which £24,761 is represented by our General Fund and £20,465 are in various Designated Funds.

John Patterson, Treasurer

Conservation News

A round-up of news from the CAWOS conservation representatives. If you have any issues or concerns then do contact your local representative (by letter or email preferably).

STEVE TURNER

I'm very sorry to have to tell you that Steve Turner has passed away after a long illness. Steve's been the Conservation Officer since its inception in 2007 and he always said "If anyone in the Society needs information or advice, if I do not have the answer, I know someone who does". He definitely lived up to that! For the newer members who didn't know about his background and why his nickname was 'The Poacher', his introduction from *Bird News 73* shows why he's going to be a hard act to follow.....

CONSERVATION COORDINATOR

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

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

I have been a Police Officer with the Cheshire Police for the last 26 years and throughout my service I have been a front-line officer. I have made a point throughout my service of concentrating on Rural Police Duties. During the 1980s, along with one of my colleagues, I instigated a local Rural Crime Prevention Scheme 'COUNTRYWATCH'. The main aim of this scheme was to bring together all groups that use the countryside and instead of working against one another, communicate, by means of a quarterly Newsletter, the current crime trends and also collate information passed onto the Police, and ensures this information reached the correct destination. The scheme went from strength to strength and continued to bring in useful information for a period of ten years. Due to the formulation of a specific post within the force of Wildlife and Environmental Officer, the scheme was enveloped into other Crime Prevention Initiatives. The post of Rural Affairs Officer within the force has been civilianised in an effort to maintain a full contingent of uniformed officers on the front line where they are most effective. This has been an advantage to myself and other like-minded officers. Each of the three divisions has a uniformed Wildlife Crime Officer to investigate and prepare court files for Wildlife and Environmental cases. This is not a full-time post however; I have to manage these matters alongside my role as Community Officer for 12 rural villages in the Vale Royal area. I have attended a National Course for Wildlife Crime Officers and I have made it a priority to amass a vast reference library of legislation, stated case notes and any current trends information in Rural Crime. For many years I have made a point of becoming involved in any wildlife Crimes in the County, covering many offences from Poaching to Exotic Animals Licensing.

My colleagues throughout the force are all aware that if they become involved in a Wildlife Crime advice on what to do is on the end of a phone or email. Whilst people that report crimes of this nature become frustrated with the initial response they get, I hope from my input to the officer dealing with the matter, the informant feels that the Police are taking the information seriously when they receive further contacts from the officer dealing with it. We are also very fortunate in Cheshire that we have a solicitor who works with the Crown Prosecution Service, who is of a like mind. My main aim throughout my service has been to bring together all groups that use the countryside, to enable them to pass on information to the Police, to enable that information to be collated and disseminated to the correct unit to allow the matter to be dealt with.

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

Steve Turner 'THE POACHER'

WARRINGTON AREA

There has been some progress in getting the Westy Estate in Warrington designated as a Site of Local Importance for the large numbers of Swifts that breed there. It may still take a little while as under the latest Environment Act a new process for designations is in the process of being set up. A thorough survey of Swifts there will be carried out this summer and the data forwarded to the new Cheshire Wildlife Trust's Sites Officer, Laura Sacker-George, to proceed with the most up-to-date numbers.

Brian Martin, Warrington Area Representative

CONSERVATION REPRESENTATIVES

Chester **Vacant**

Congleton **Vacant**

Crewe and Nantwich **Vacant**

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

Macclesfield **Vacant**

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, Caldy, Wirral, CH48 1LL.
Tel: 0151 625 2320 Email: richard@deestuuary.co.uk

County Round-Up

Some of the records may be unauthenticated and therefore will require review by the Society's Rarities Panel or the BBRC. This report covers the period from September to December 2023.

SITE REPORTS

Chester area

Two Quails were at Poulton on Jul 2nd and 10 Cattle Egrets there on Dec 6th.

Congleton area

An Osprey was over Congleton on Sep 11th and a Red Kite there on 15th.

Crewe and Nantwich area

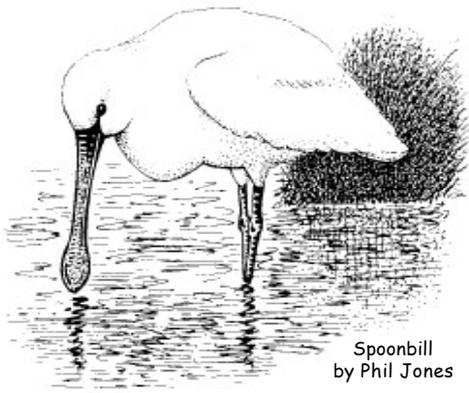
Six Whooper Swans were at Pump House Flash on Oct 16th, two Egyptian Geese there on Oct 18th and a Common Scoter was at Doddington on Dec 15th. A Common Tern was at Doddington on Oct 21st and four Cattle Egrets were at Elton Hall Flash on Nov 23rd. Two Marsh Harriers were at Doddington on Nov 25th. A single Waxwing noted at Crewe Nov 16th and two Spotted Flycatchers at Sandbach on Sep 3rd.

Ellesmere Port and Neston area

4000 Pink-footed Geese noted at Parkgate on Dec 2nd, 33 Whooper Swans were at Burton Marsh on Oct 13th and 10 Egyptian Geese at Denhall Lane on Nov 5th. Two Garganeys were at BMW on Sep 18th, also Scaup on Nov 13th and Long-tailed Duck from mid-Oct to early Nov. 13 Curlew Sandpipers were at BMW during mid-Sep, single Little Stint on Nov 6th, three Pectoral Sandpipers present on Sep 28th and 29th and two Wood Sandpipers on Sep 16th and 17th. Little Gull noted at BMW on several dates in Sep and Nov, whilst five Black Terns were present on Sep 16th. 14

Spoonbills were at Parkgate on Sep 21st, Bittern noted at BMW on Sep 15th and Neston on Nov 7th, 15 Cattle Egrets at BMW on Sep 29th and again Shotwick on Dec 24th and 20+ Great White Egrets at Parkgate on Oct 29th.

Raptors included: Osprey at BWM on Sep 12th and Neston on 30th, Goshawk at Burton Marsh on Nov 6th, 18 Marsh Harriers at Parkgate on Nov 4th and five Hen Harriers there on Oct 28th. Six Short-eared Owls were at Denhall on Nov 5th, two Merlins at Parkgate on Nov 22nd and Denhall on Dec 10th and three Hobbies at BMW on Sep 15th. A late Swallow was at BMW on Nov 13th, Barred Warbler at BMW from Nov 12th to 14th, three Ring Ouzels at Neston on Oct 22nd and three Water Pipits on Dec 24th and three Twites at Parkgate on Dec 25th.



Spoonbill
by Phil Jones

Halton area

c50 Common Scoters were at Hale on Sep 15th. 10 Avocets were at Hale on Dec 13th, Caspian Gull at Runcorn on Nov 5th and Black Tern at Pickering's Pasture on Oct 1st. Seven Cattle Egrets were at Hale on Oct 19th and 17 Great White Egrets here on Oct 26th. Single Ospreys were noted over Pickering's Pasture on Sep 13th and Hale on 17th and Red Kite at Hale on Oct 18th. Seven Waxwings were at Runcorn on Nov 28th, Siberian Chiffchaff at Hale on Oct 18th, Ring Ouzel at Pickering's Pasture on Oct 30th and two Water Pipits at Hale on Nov 10th and Dec 29th.

Macclesfield area

12 Whooper Swans were at Acre Nook SQ on Nov 5th and Black-necked Grebe at Lapwing Hall Pool on Sep 15th. Grey Phalarope was at Lapwing Lane Pool on Oct 2nd to 9th, two Caspian Gulls at Rostherne on Dec 6th and 7th, Arctic Tern at Acre Nook SQ on Sep 6th. Four Cattle Egrets were at Acre Nook SQ on Oct 6th, 14 Waxwings at Bollington, Dec 1st and Ring Ouzel at Henbury on Oct 28th.

Vale Royal area

Five Egyptian Geese were at Tatton Park on Sep 19th, Garganey at Neumann's Flash on Oct 4th, Scaup at Marbury CP on Dec 18th, 19th and 23rd. Common Scoter was at Marbury CP on Sep 15th with another at Tatton on Sep 17th and 19th and 24 Goosanders at Marbury CP on Dec 2nd. Two Black-necked Grebes were at Tatton on Sep 17th. Five Whimbrels were at Winsford on Sep 6th and 14 Curlew Sandpipers at Frodsham Marsh on Sep 19th.

A Kittiwake was at Frodsham Marsh on Oct 30th, Little Gull at Marbury CP on Oct 24th with Common Tern here on several dates, a Manx Shearwater was an usual visitor to Tatton Park on Sep 19th. Glossy Ibis was at Dairy House Meadows on Sep 26th, two Bitterns at Marbury CP on Dec 28th. Red Kites were at Lostock Green on Sep 5th, Moulton on Oct 8th and Marbury CP on Oct 18th whilst two Hobbies were at Acre Nook SQ on Sep 4th. 23 Waxwings were at Frodsham on Dec 25th, Black-throated Thrush reported from Wilmslow from Nov 16th and Spotted Flycatcher at Acton Bridge on Sep 7th.

Warrington area

3000 Pink-footed Geese were at Woolston Eyes on Nov 3rd, seven Whooper Swans over Silver Lane Pools on Nov 4th, two Garganeys were at Woolston Eyes on Sep 5th with two Scaups on Nov 23rd, elsewhere a Long-tailed Duck was at Moore NR on several dates in Nov and Dec. Grey Phalarope was at Woolston Eyes on Sep 20th. Bittern was at Woolston Eyes on Oct 17th. Two Hobbies were at Woolston Eyes on Oct 7th.

At least 50 Waxwings were in Warrington town centre on Dec 17th, Siberian Chiffchaff at Woolston Eyes on Dec 16th, Yellow-browed Warbler at Silver Lane Pools on Oct 23rd and Moore NR on 26th. A Firecrest was at Woolston Eyes on Nov 9th, Ring Ouzel at Silver Lane pools on Nov 3rd and 1700 Fieldfare here on Nov 7th. Single Spotted Flycatchers were at Silver Lane Pools on Sep 7th and 15th, eight Stonechats at Silver Lane Pools on Oct 5th, five Tree Pipits on Sep 21st, single

Water Pipits were at Woolston Eyes on Oct 31st, Nov 2nd and 18th and 110 Siskins at Silver Lane Pools on Dec 13th and a Corn Bunting here on Nov 14th.

Wirral area

Wildfowl of interest included: c500 Brent Geese at Hilbre on Nov 11th, 3500 Pink-footed Geese at Heswall on Oct 29th, White-fronted Goose at Leasowe on Sep 4th and 11 Whooper Swans at Meols on Oct 31st. A Garganey was at Heswall on Oct 16th, nine Eiders at Hilbre on Oct 11th, four Velvet Scoters at Hoylake on Nov 25th with



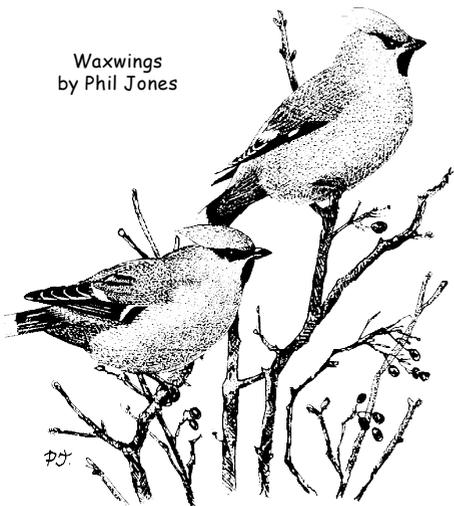
Garganey
by Thelma Sykes

c14,000 Common Scoters on Nov 26th and Long-tailed Duck on Nov 25th, 18 Goosanders were on West Kirby ML on Oct 24th and 23 Red-breasted Mergansers at Heswall on Oct 29th. Waders included: Whimbrel at Meols on Nov 4th and Hilbre on 11th, 160 Bar-tailed Godwits at Heswall on Nov 26th, 3650 Black-tailed Godwits at Caldy on Sep 27th, 320 Turnstones at West Kirby on Oct 17th, Baird's Sandpiper at Hoylake on Sep 20th to 21st, seven Curlew Sandpipers at West Kirby on Sep 13th, 18 Purple Sandpipers at Hilbre on Dec 2nd, seven Little Stints at West Kirby on Sep 9th, seven Woodcocks at Moreton on Dec 13th and Grey Phalarope at Birkenhead on Sep 29th.

Seabirds of interest included: 300+ Sandwich Terns at Hilbre on Sep 10th, two Little Terns at New Brighton on Jul 2nd, 120 Common Terns at Hilbre on Sep 10th, 190 Arctic Terns at Hoylake on Sep 18th with 10 Black Terns here on Sep 18th. Great Skua was at Hoylake on Sep 1st, six Arctic Skuas on Sep 10th with single Pomarine Skuas at New Brighton on Sep 8th and Wallasey on 23rd. 65 Guillemots were at Hilbre on Oct 11th, Razorbill on Sep 9th, 20 Red-throated Divers here on 12th and single Great Northern Diver at West Kirby ML for most of Nov until mid-Dec. Two Storm Petrels were at Leasowe on Jul 2nd, three Leach's Petrels at Wallasey on Sep 22nd, single Fulmar at Hoylake on 18th, 12 Manx Shearwaters at Leasowe on Jul 2nd and Hoylake on Sep 18th, 60 Gannets at Hoylake on Sep 18th and Shag in the West Kirby area on various dates. Three Spoonbills were at Hilbre on Sep 30th whilst 196 Little Egrets were at Heswall on Oct 8th.

A probable Honey Buzzard was at Moreton on Sep 4th, Red Kite at West Kirby on Sep 10th, two Merlins at Hilbre on Oct 14th and Heswall on Oct 26th and two Hobbies at Thurstaston on Oct 7th. 17 Waxwings were at Saughall Massie on Dec 30th, a late Swallow at Leasowe on Nov 16th, possible Siberian Chiffchaff at Leasowe on Oct 31st, Yellow-browed Warbler noted at Leasowe on Oct 11th, Rock Ferry and Leasowe on Oct 12th; Hilbre on 23rd and Bidston 30th. Pallas's Warbler was at Hilbre on Nov 4th and Caldy, Dec 28th, Firecrest at Saughall Massie on Nov 15 and Bidston on Nov 17th and 24th. Spotted Flycatcher was at Thurstaston on Sep 4th, Black Redstart at Hoylake from Nov 25th to 29th with Richard's Pipit at Leasowe on Oct 26th. Eight Bramblings were at Heswall on Oct 16th, four Crossbills at Irby on Oct 28th, 220 Siskins at Heswall on Oct 24th, Lapland Bunting at Hilbre on Oct 10th and up to three Snow Buntings in the Hoylake area on various dates with Ortolan Bunting over Hoylake on Sep 2nd.

Waxwings
by Phil Jones



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

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.

Species Spotlight

BAROLO SHEARWATER

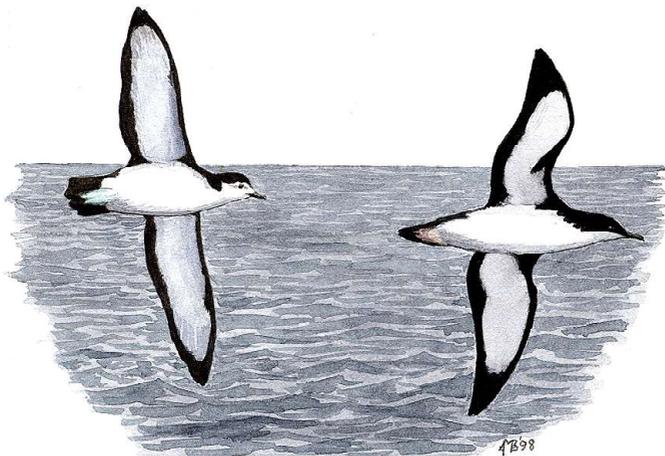
I received October's edition of *British Birds* on 16th and saw it was the one with the 'Report on Rare Birds 2022'. So I quickly scanned through the article looking for any local records which had been accepted. First there was the Hoylake Pallid Swift, then the Wilson's Phalarope at Burton Mere Wetlands (seen in 2021 but submitted late) then - well, I got a shock as I saw my name. It was the Little Shearwater from 2010 - now called Barolo Shearwater.

Barolo Shearwater *Puffinus baroli* (0, 51, 0) Rare

2010 Cheshire and Wirral Meols and Hoylake, 1CY+, 14th September (A. Conlin, A. Orton, R. Smith).

I remember very well the day I saw it. It was the first day of strong north-west winds which lasted five days producing one of the best Leach's Petrel passages ever seen here with several hundred each day from 15th to 17th September. I went down to Hoylake Lifeboat Station on 14th on the falling tide hoping to see a few of the petrels. I was thrilled to see 10, but I remember being surprised at also seeing a shearwater. As 99.99% of shearwaters coming past here are Manxies it didn't occur to me it might not be one of those, but what surprised me was that (a) it was late for a Manxie to still be here, (b) it was flying over the surf on the tide edge - every other Manxie I'd seen was always well out over the sea, (c) it's flight was quite fluttery, not fast and strong like a Manxie and (d) its wings were noticeably white underneath and they seemed to be relatively stubbier and wider than a 'normal' Manxie. Did I immediately realise that I'd just seen my first Little Shearwater and start jumping for joy? Well, no, I'm ashamed to say my total inexperience with shearwaters meant I just assumed it was just an odd looking Manxie.

However, others, who did know their shearwaters, were jumping for joy just a short distance down the coast, as I was soon to find out. I met Chris Williams as I was walking back to the car and, after a brief chat about the Leach's Petrels, he says "Allan Conlin had a Little Shearwater off Dove Point". A quick phone call to Allan confirmed that the bird flew west from Meols (i.e. towards where I was) and he had seen it (with Al Orton) just a few minutes before I saw my 'odd-looking Manxie'. So I take no credit whatsoever for identifying it, but at least I was aware that I had seen something different and the Cheshire Bird Recorder urged me to submit to BBRC what I had seen, and 13 years later it has been accepted! The first ever Barolo Shearwater (as Little Shearwaters are now called) to be accepted for the Dee Estuary/North Wirral coast. A great record, thanks to Allan and Al.



Tony Broome's drawing of a Little Shearwater (left) and Manx Shearwater (right) gives you a good idea of the difference between the two species, although in the field, and at some distance, these differences are unlikely to be so obvious.

(First published on the cover of *Bird News* 40 October 1998)

But why did it take 13 years? I quote from *British Birds*:

This Report finally sees the results of BBRC's review of 'Little Shearwaters'. The review stalled for several years but, with today's greater knowledge of the species' identification criteria and welcome input from acknowledged seabird experts, the Committee has now completed its work.

In total 14 Barolo Shearwaters were accepted in that *British Birds* report - some going back all the way to 2000.

To give you an idea how lucky we were to see our bird I quote Magnus Robb who writes in the excellent 'The Sound Approach' website:

Barolo Shearwater *Puffinus baroli* is easily the most elusive shearwater in the North Atlantic. Not that this species is incredibly rare, although with just 3000 to 4400 pairs (Brooke 2004), it could hardly be described as common. Its population is twice that of Balearic Shearwater *P mauretanicus*, and yet Barolo is far more difficult to see. A typical view is from the rear, a tiny shearwater flying away from your boat as fast as its little wings will carry it.

Although the 2010 bird was the first to be accepted for the Dee Estuary and North Wirral it was not the first to be seen there as one recorded from Seaforth on the River Mersey on September 5th 1992, and accepted by BBRC, was also seen from New Brighton, but not submitted as views were poor and they couldn't rule out Manx Shearwater.

There have been several other possible/probable records plus two from inland Cheshire, and I finish by quoting from my 'Pelagic Seabirds in Liverpool Bay' article (September 2021 Newsletter), you may be amused by the last paragraph!

Barolo Shearwater (*Puffinus baroli*)

Most birders refer to these as Little Shearwaters, which is what they used to be officially called. These have now been split into three very similar species - Audubon's, Barolo and Boyd's which in the field are near impossible to tell apart. But where it has been possible to identify the species in the UK they have all proved to be Barolo and these breed in the Azores, Canaries and Madeira.

There have been several records of 'Little Shearwaters' off the Dee Estuary and north Wirral, but for one reason or another none have, so far, been accepted by BBRC. Strangely, there are two inland records for Cheshire which have been accepted - one was found moribund on May 10th 1958 at Stockport and a sick individual was present at Rostherne Mere from Jun 29th to Jul 3rd 1977 when it was picked up and later died.

Here are the other records:

- 1971 One off Meols on 20th October. Not proven.
- 1976 One off Hilbre on 1st September. Not proven.
- 1984 One off Hilbre on 2nd September. Accepted but later withdrawn.
- 1985 One off Hilbre on 21st September. Not proven.
- 1992 One in River Mersey mouth on 5th September. Recorded from Seaforth (Lancs) and accepted. Apparently seen from New Brighton but no record from there was submitted.
- 2000 One off Hilbre on 6th September. Not proven.
- 2010 One off Meols and Hoylake on 14th September. Record submitted but pending whilst under review.

So all a bit frustrating but this comment in the 1993 Report of *Rare Birds in Great Britain* caught my eye "This species continues to cause the BBRC severe headaches, since most descriptions just fail to provide that convincing element of proof. The Committee acknowledges, however, that this is a difficult species to prove on paper and one which, by its nature, seldom gives observers a second chance." Looking at BBRC's 'work in progress' spreadsheet no less than 67 records of Barolo/Boyd's/Audubon's Shearwater are currently under review, going as far back as 1967! But from 2018 BBRC now seem to be either accepting or rejecting records and there was one accepted in 2018 and two in 2019 - all as the species group of Barolo/Boyd's/Audubon's. It would certainly be nice if the 2010 bird seen off Meols and Hoylake was accepted as I was one of the birders who saw it.

Richard Smith (article first published in the December 2023 Newsletter on the Dee Estuary Birding website <http://www.deeestuary.co.uk>)

Projects and Surveys

ROSTHERNE MERE NNR - WATER QUALITY

The Problems

Various things influence water quality at Rostherne Mere National Nature Reserve (NNR). In recent years this has been the overflow from the sewage system, diverse pollution from agricultural runoff, such as fertilizers and soil erosion, also surface water from the roads. Add to this run-off from farm building areas which can bring manure and silage liquor into the water courses. Water running off agricultural land, especially arable fields, has dramatically increased due to higher annual rainfall and heavier more torrential downpours. This in turn is increased as the water is channelled by the roads and builds a body of force which is much more erosive to soils. More problems are caused by the amount of soil which then gets deposited in the streams and brooks and when this is washed downstream can increase the flooding areas along our rivers.

The enriched water from pollution then arrives in the mere and this is then fed on by the algal blooms when the water warms up in the summer. These algal blooms are toxic and do kill livestock. I'm not entirely sure how the algal blooms work, but it causes a crash in the zooplankton, and this has a knock-on effect up the food chain and is undesirable to say the least. This was a problem in that the algal blooms went on for weeks.

Local Solutions

Natural England (NE) and the Environment Agency (EA) looked at various ways to target these problems:

- United Utilities installed a new collection tank and pumping system about eight years ago at the bottom of the village to improve the situation. This has been calculated to only overflow as a once in a 30-year event and that's deemed suitable by the Environment Agency.
- Farmyard's pollutants were detected and those were addressed with help from the farmers.
- An arable field on the NNR was returned to grass which means that it's not ploughed fertilised and sprayed every year.
- Leaky dams have been installed on all the water courses coming into the mere and this work is ongoing.
- The margins of the mere were moved back into the fields, which in turn allow these areas to become wetland habitat with no poaching by livestock and taller herbage to help absorb nutrients. The bulkier dense vegetation then acts as a physical filter for sediments.
- Catchment pools have been built and wetland habitat in and around them has been encouraged. This all helps slow the flow which drops silt deposits and the wetland plants then absorbing the nutrients.
- Some of these catchment pools have been built to encourage water to travel its natural course and divert it so it meanders for longer stretches across more wetland habitat. It's all about keeping the water on site for longer and stripping it of naughty stuff as much as possible. This also maintains more water on site for longer and can help to reduce flooding downstream.
- Tatton Estate has been very helpful in allowing NE to carry out a lot of this work but have helped in other ways. One is that they are not ploughing as much and trying to go to what is called a 'no-till' policy. The harvested ground is sprayed off for weeds and then direct drilled. This removes the costly action of ploughing and heavy use of diesel. It also reduces harrowing and tilling the soil, so the soil structure returns and becomes a living thing again and the now alive soil becomes glued together with all that lives in it. The soil can take 5 years to become alive again. This will hopefully mean the soil isn't lost so easily from being worked over and from wind and rain. (When the 'Beast from the East' came a few years back there was a 2ft pink sand drift in Rostherne Lane). This no till then benefits the farm as they're not losing their topsoil to fill in the water courses and the now alive soil retains water and so is more drought resistant and crops can potentially crop heavier. It takes time to adjust though.
- Tatton Estate has also replaced an old septic tank at one of the cottages and that's connected to our filtering systems too.

WETLAND ENHANCEMENT PROJECTS

Table of projects from March 2021 to January 2024

Dates All March 2021
Contractor Redfox, Jim Kay
Funding SSSI Condition/Nature Recovery Network project
Project Dolls Meadow 26 pools, Rostherne Brook 5 dams, 3 pools in Mere Field by the Bittern Hide.

Dates All Sept 2021
Contractor Wildbanks
Funding Natural Course NE
Project Leaky dams built in Shaw Green Willows and Wood Bongs. Series of pools dug in Old Meadow to create a wetland. Some ditches blocked; pools dug along the edge of Mere Meadow compartment 14, some are just winter catchments.

Dates July-August 2021
Contractor Anthony Clarke, Marsh Farm
Funding Tatton Estate
Project Bobby field, arable to hay meadow.

Dates Summer of 2021
Contractor Now under Dom Fenton, tenant farmer autumn 2021
Funding Tatton state
Project Old silage fields now not grazed for a summer season, but grazed in late autumn to spring then saved for hay and aftermath grazed from then on until end of September.

Dates Throughout winter of 2021 to 2022
Contractor McEwan's Contractors
Funding P Thomas seed corn budget NE
Project Putting fences up to increase the wetland margin vegetation around the reed beds comp 12, 14, 15, 24 and 22. Also creating 4 or 5 scrapes for winter flushes in comp 24 and 22.

Dates Parts of February, March, and April 2023
Contractor McEwan's Contractors and NE staff
Funding Rostherne budgets and NE underspend from others
Project Digging a few extra pools in Mere Field behind the Bittern Hide and improving previous ones and diverting flows. Building leaky dams in Harpers Bank Wood. Adjusting flows on Dolls Meadow and modifying some of the pools previously made. Put in three pipes to assist in wetland water levels. Making faggots* to use in water management of stream and pools. Also put a drain in to take water away from the double gate and hedge in comp 14 by Marsh Lane.

Dates 10 Mar to 22 Mar 2023
Contractor Redfox, Jim Kay
Funding SSSI condition/Nature Recovery Network project
Project Creating three pools above Wood Bongs in small field by Marsh Lane. Digging out pond in comp 21 by the keeper's house and creating a shallow flash next to that.

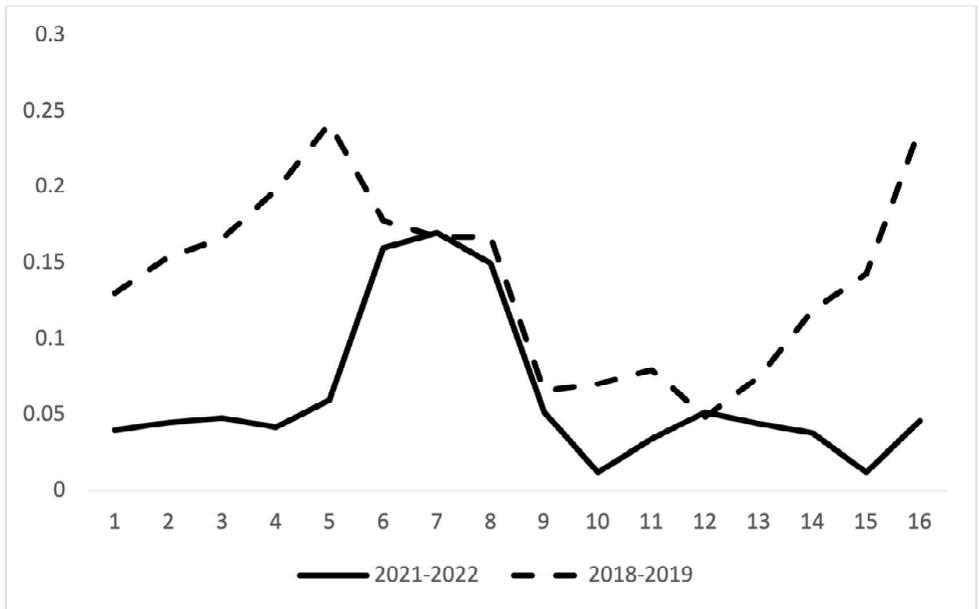
Dates October and November 2022
Contractor NE volunteers and me
Funding No cost
Project Making leaky dams on the small stream that runs down Harpers Bank and into the reed beds. Also on the Wood Brook as it comes out of Wood Bongs.

Dates April 2023
Contractor Redfox, Jim Kay
Funding Condition/Nature Recovery Network project
Project Working above Harpers Bank to slow the flows.

Dates May and October 2023 and ongoing
Contractor NE volunteers and me
Funding No cost
Project Making brushwood faggots for use in the water courses and leaky dams and for holding back bank erosion. These are very excellent in wetland management! Faggots stakes and thicker wood can all be used in different ways.

Dates September 2023
Contractor Private contractors
Funding Tatton Estate
Project Installed a new septic tank system above Harpers Bank for the cottage there.

Results of the Wetland Enhancement Projects



Comparing Phosphorus levels within Rostherne Mere before and after interventions

Water Quality Monitoring

Rostherne Mere has a Phosphorus water quality target of <0.033mg/l. Pre-works Phosphorus levels within the mere consistently failed to meet the target with high seasonal spikes throughout the year. Post-works Phosphorus levels have generally fallen with several consecutive months achieving the WFD (Water Framework Directive) target. However, major improvement work has been done on another inlet and other works still need to be done in the upstream catchment. As the new wetlands settle in and the wetland plants develop they will be more effective.

The projects have made a massive difference to the site, it feels a different place and certainly wilder. Anecdotally, I've noticed many more frogs and voles across the rougher areas and Dolls Meadow has just come alive with all sorts of life which is quite mesmerising. It's great to see our volunteers logging all this and compiling the fantastic report at the end of the year, it's so important and registers the changes. It takes a while for habitats to develop and adjust and we are very much observing this in action now. As for water quality and another anecdotal remark is that I used to see the mere as a green water and not necessarily think this was right, or wrong, except for the algal bloom periods. The water is now blue, and you can see this from the lanes where there's a view of the mere. As for the blooms this is now being monitored by Andy Dean from

Manchester Metropolitan University. There's hardly been a bloom in the last two years, and it's been of a less harmful algae indicating better water quality. I see this as a big endorsement for all the right kind of projects in progress at Rostherne and which are continually being added to. They've been fantastic and exciting projects to work on and it bodes well for the future of Rostherne Mere National Nature Reserve.

Rupe Randall, Natural England Reserve Manager for Cheshire, 26th Jan 2024

*Faggot, or fascine, is a bundle of sticks, twigs, or branches bound together and used to regulate river flows and remove sediment and pollutants.

OUR DEE ESTUARY Newsletter January 2024

IMPROVING RED ROCKS NATURE RESERVE FOR WILDLIFE AND PEOPLE

Sand dune works at Red Rocks

At the start of January Our Dee Estuary, Cheshire Wildlife Trust and Royal Liverpool Golf Club undertook some work to improve habitat at Red Rocks Nature Reserve, under licence from Natural England. Vegetation on the sand dunes is becoming too dense and scrubby to support threatened species including natterjack toads and grayling butterfly. Work has included removing trees and invasive species, creating new areas of open sand, cutting reed beds and clearing the natterjack toad breeding ponds. This will be the start of what we hope will become an annual programme of maintenance on this site to keep it in tip top shape for people and wildlife using it.

Why is this necessary?

Sand dunes are a natural habitat, but various factors are threatening that habitat. Sand dunes, including those at Red Rocks used to be a dynamic habitat, kept fresh and mobile by large grazing animals. Now the vegetation is becoming old and dense, and there is much less bare sand available for the animals that need it. The work we are doing at Red Rocks includes removal of invasive non-native plants such as brambles and roses. This will allow the sand to move more freely as it should do in a dynamic sand dune system. It will also open up space for native sand dune plants such as sea holly to colonies the area which is a really important plant for the endangered grayling butterfly which can be found on the reserve.

What if we do nothing?

The coastal environment has always been very dynamic with erosion and deposition of sediment creating a constantly transitioning landscape. As new marshes and dunes are formed in one area, others will be eroded, and the sediment returned to be carried on the tides. As the coastal habitats migrate along the coastline the species would move with them. Due to human development and encroachment, we are now experiencing the effects of coastal squeeze, meaning that there is less space available for this dynamic process to take place. This means that we need to intervene to maintain these habitats in the right state to support the wildlife that has evolved within and adapted to it. If left, over time this area would become over stabilised and transition into dense scrub and then woodland causing us to lose the reed bed and sand dune specialist species reliant on this reserve.

DEE ESTUARY VOLUNTARY WARDENS (DEVW)

Nearly half a century ago, data on winter waders started to be collected at every single high tide over 8.7m along the shores of West Kirby. This data is collected by a group of remarkable people who all share the same aim of protecting wader roosts at West Kirby; these people are volunteer wardens. They are the Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens which was created back in 1986 by Wirral Borough Council at the request of English Nature, the predecessor to Natural England, due to the developments of the marine lake in the area. The data that has been collected here, spanning 48 years, makes West Kirby an incredibly well documented stretch of English shoreline with a wealth of information that is useful for research purposes - the data is openly available through Liverpool Museum and University of Liverpool.

Do you fancy getting involved?

DEVW are looking for new recruits! If you could give just 3 hours a month it would be a massive help. Wardens are required to be on the beach at any tide above 8.7m between September and March for around 3 hours at a time. These tides are anticipated only a handful of times a month. A rota system is created so it is likely you would be asked to be on the beach around once a month.

What would you be doing?

- Actively monitoring the roosting waders by counting numbers and species.
- Showing the birds to any interested passers-by.
- Helping to alleviate disturbance to the wading bird roosts.

If you're interested in the work of DEVW and want to become involved or learn more, feel free to contact them: **Wirral Coastal Rangers on wcp@wirral.gov.uk or Wirral Council Ranger, Matt Thomas, on matthomas@wirral.gov.uk.**

Our Dee Estuary is a Tidal Dee Catchment Partnership project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and led by Cheshire Wildlife Trust. Any questions email: **ourdeestuary@cheshirewt.org.uk**.

Sites to Watch

RSPB DEE ESTUARY RESERVE

First published on the RSPB Dee Estuary Blog on 29 January 2024
– see <https://community.rspb.org.uk/placestovisit/deeestuary/b/deeestuary-blog>



December 2023

Perhaps the biggest job of the year has recently started on the reserve - the replacement of the electric fence around the wet grassland and scrapes. The current fence is over a decade old and coming to the end of its natural life, with many of the posts rotten and in need of replacing. Not only will the new fence replace the old one, but the design will ensure that it is more effective in stopping foxes and badgers getting into these parts of the reserve. Natural England has supplied funding for the project through the 'Species Recovery Programme'.

We are very fortunate to have a lot of badgers and foxes within the boundaries of the reserve, but for the sake of the ground-nesting birds, it is important to keep them off the wet grassland and scrape. Our breeding **Avocets**, Redshanks and Lapwings will hugely benefit from the work being undertaken, which will be finished before the 2024 breeding season begins.

January 2024

January has been a real mixed bag for weather, with some freezing spells, some warm(ish) spells but the most noticeable thing has been the storms that have battered the UK through the month. The storms have had a big effect on the reserve and the birdlife - more of which to come later.

Hopefully, by the time the next blog is written in late-February, the first Avocets will have arrived back from their wintering grounds as they prepare for their breeding season. It's a fantastic sight to see them as you walk through the Visitor Centre door to be greeted by them on the Main Scrape.

Recent Sightings

It may seem cold and damp out there, but a lot of the birds are already turning their thoughts to the breeding season. A male Marsh Harrier has already started the occasional display flight in an

attempt to attract a female. It's great to sit and watch it from the Visitor Centre, Café or Marsh Covert hide, as he is a spectacular looking bird. Last summer one male had two nests in the reed bed, so we hope for a repeat performance this year.

As well as looking to attract a mate, the Marsh Harrier has also had to contend with chasing away Hen Harriers from its territory, despite the fact Hen Harriers do not breed here. A ringtail Hen Harrier has been seen almost daily throughout January ranging across the reserve, with the occasional male Hen Harrier also being seen. 23 January saw two separate ringtail Hen Harriers at either end of the reserve, one attacking a Common Buzzard, and one being chased by the male Marsh Harrier!

Winter is the time when many duck species choose their mate for the breeding season. Many waterfowl pair bonds form between the months of December and March on wintering grounds, so it's lovely to see the Shoveler and Tufted Duck displaying on the Mere, Reception Pool and Bridge Pool. The female chooses a partner from the groups of males that perform for her, and she picks her favourite drake with the best plumage and the best display.

The woodlands that surround the reserve really have been alive with birds this winter, with Siskin and Redpoll in particular showing well. In the wetter areas of the woodland, especially on the path to Border Hide, Water Rail and Woodcock have been seen regularly - though these are difficult birds to spot, as they are secretive and well camouflaged.

Talking of secretive birds, a Bittern showed extremely well for a number of visitors (and staff who could break away from their role!) at Reedbed Screen, tucked in amongst the reeds at the back of the pool.

During the middle of the day on 31 January an Otter showed really well for a small number of visitors at the Reedbed Screen, and seen again on 2 February.

Star Sightings

An American Wigeon was found on the Main Scrape by one of the reserve regulars on Monday 22 January, and was seen all day immediately outside the Visitor Centre. This was great for the visitors who specifically came to see it, and it was a huge bonus for those who were here and didn't expect to see it!

An American Wigeon is essentially the North American equivalent of the Eurasian Wigeon, a bird you can see in its 100s on the reserve during winter. However, this bird was a variant of an American Wigeon, known as a 'Storm' Wigeon - quite apt given the weather. Initially seen on Anglesey at Cors Ddyga RSPB in November, it was seemingly blown towards Burton Mere Wetlands by Storm Isha. It was seen again all day on Wednesday 24 January from the Visitor Centre, but sadly not seen again at the time of writing.

Another unexpected storm blown bird was a probable first winter Arctic Skua, which landed on the Main Scrape for about 5 minutes on Tuesday 23 January. Not only is this an unusual bird to find inland, but it's also an unusual bird to see this time of year. Locally, we would expect to see them off the North Wirral coast in autumn, harassing gulls and terns, so this was a great bonus for the reserve.

Warden Wanderings

The replacement of the electric fence around the wet grassland and scrapes continues apace and is expected to be finished on time. This will give excellent protection to the ground nesting birds, such as Snipe, Avocet, Redshank and Lapwing across the areas that it protects.

As mentioned earlier, Storms Isha and Jocelyn, so close to each other, did have an impact on the reserve, with trees falling in certain areas, the most obvious one being next to the café. As well as this, the roof of the Bunker Hide was damaged. Our Warden and Volunteer Wardens did an amazing job of clearing up the damage prior to us opening the following morning, but scenes like this show why we do need to sometimes close the reserve in extreme weather.

The next job for the warden teams is the cutting of rush near to both the Border Hide and Main Scrape. This is done to ensure that the areas concerned are in their optimal state for the arrival of breeding waders.

James Smith

ROSTHERNE MERE NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE

Newsletter Oct-Dec 2023

Welcome to the final newsletter of 2023. I write this as another storm, this time Henk, sweeps across Cheshire bring yet more rain to already saturated ground and flooded watercourses. Despite the weather, there have been many interesting records within the quarter.

Noteworthy wildfowl counts have included 24 Egyptian Geese which were often seen on a field near Rostherne village, over 1000 Pink-footed Geese flying over in several skeins during Oct and nine Whooper Swans which visited one day in Nov. The number of Gadwall peaked at 19, Pochard at 52 and Shoveler at 101. The first Goldeneye arrived in Oct and there were seven by the end of Nov. During Dec up to 70 Mandarin Ducks, 105 Mallards, 122 Teals and 142 Wigeons were recorded. A maximum of 10 Goosanders roosted during the evenings. There were 36 Great Crested Grebes and four Little Grebes recorded and up to four Water Rails were heard 'sharming' in the reed beds.

Waders logged included Lapwing, Common Snipe and Jack Snipe. Two Green Sandpipers were seen feeding on floating islands of vegetation dislodged from Gale Bog after heavy rainfall in Nov and Dec. Woodcock were occasionally flushed around the Reserve.

A cold snap in early Dec brought thousands of gulls into the evening roost on the Mere. These included nearly 3000 Black-headed Gulls, 470 Common Gulls, 400 Lesser Black-backed Gulls and 185 Herring Gulls. A Great Black-backed Gull often visited during the day and Caspian Gull and Yellow-legged Gull were also recorded.

A juvenile Hobby stayed until 9th Oct. Both male and female Marsh Harriers were seen during this time providing spectacular views as they swept low over the reed beds. Up to four Buzzards and two Kestrels were often recorded. A Peregrine was hunting over the Mere in Oct and two Sparrowhawks stalked the Starling roost in Nov. Several wonderful Starling murmurations were witnessed. However, the roost was modest in size (peaking at around 7000 birds) and short in duration. There were no Starlings roosting on the Reserve by the middle of Dec.

Barn Owl and Tawny Owl were both present during the quarter and a Little Owl box was erected in Old Meadow kindly donated by Hugh Pulsford.

The last Chiffchaff and Swallow were seen in early Oct as the first Fieldfares and Redwings arrived but numbers of these were low throughout the period and usually only in single figures.

Up to three Cetti's Warblers were heard singing in every month. A Green Woodpecker visited in Nov and Ring-necked Parakeets were also recorded on several days.

Around 35 Chaffinches and small flocks of Linnets and Goldfinches were seen on the Sprout Field.

There were 45 House Sparrows in the hedgerows around Briddonweir Farm and c150 Jackdaws and Woodpigeons roosting in Mere Covert in Dec. Around 100 Siskins were occasionally seen in the alders near the Boat House and the year ended with three Bullfinches and a striking male Lesser Redpoll visiting the bird table in front of the Observatory.

Bill Bellamy

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 are clear.

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

County Rarities

ROCK PIPITS *Anthus petrosus*

I could make this section really short and say, it's not possible to safely identify Rock Pipit races and that would be on face of it true!

British Rock Pipits are notoriously sedentary. They seldom move out of sight of their birthplace, and very much stick to rocky coasts. Scandinavian Rock Pipits (*A.p. littoralis*) are migrants, wintering in SW Europe so if you find a Rock Pipit in an unexpected location on spring or autumn chances are it's a Scandinavian bird, especially so if it's in a wet field acting like a Water Pipit.

It's not that long ago that Water, Rock, Buff-bellied and Siberian Pipits were all treated as subspecies of a superspecies and I have an entirely unsubstantiated suspicion, that though DNA supports the current taxonomic position, they might share a super gene which alters their appearance over a few generations to match their habitat preferences. This does occur in Redpolls, where size, structure, eg tail length, claw/bill shape and plumage are fluid and clinal* and appear to be determined by whether they are migrants, tree or ground feeders or from the north etc.

So, what features make some Scandinavian Rock Pipits stand out?

(i) **Outer tail feathers:** *littoralis* is more likely to have extensive white or apparent white in the outer tail feathers, and there are even examples with strong white wedges in the second outermost, a supposedly diagnostic feature of Water Pipit. Some of course just look dirty off white like a typical *petrosus*.

(ii) **Wing bars:** Some *littoralis* can have striking white wing bars, again like Water Pipit, though others have the grey or brownish dull edges of a typical *petrosus*.

(iii) **Face pattern:** Some *littoralis* can have strong white supercilia, comparable to Water Pipit, others can have just an eye-ring like a typical *petrosus*.

(iv) **Underparts:** Extreme *littoralis* can have rather neat and well-defined underpart streaking in winter, rather than the diffuse grey brown 'blotchy' underside of a typical *petrosus*, and they can get very pink below in summer.

These features are all clinal and seem to vary independently, though some Rock Pipits, with a 'full house' of these characteristics can look strikingly like Water Pipits, enough so to confuse experienced observers and we still get photographs of Rock Pipits submitted as Water Pipits. They should never be so strikingly clean underneath nor are they warm brown on the rump.

It's important to remember that *petrosus* are variable too. There have been a few Rock Pipits in the saltmarsh at Hoylake all winter, and I can never get close enough to them to check them out properly. Then last week I happened to put my head over the promenade wall and saw a Rock Pipit feeding on the sea wall facing away from me. It had white wing bars, white in the outer tail and at least a hint of a supercilium, so I was thinking to myself, this is looking like it could be Scandinavian. However, it was ringed in Hilbre in July, so a nailed-on *petrosus*. On reflection, feeding exclusively on the wall should have been a clue!

Jane Turner

*Cline: A gradual change in a character or feature across the distributional range of a species or population, usually correlated with an environmental or geographic transition.

ROCK PIPIT: CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL STATUS INLAND

The status of Rock Pipit in the County is "Uncommon winter visitor to the Dee marshes, rare elsewhere as a migrant. County rarity inland" (*Cheshire and Wirral BR 2022*).

Prior to 1986 when the BOURC recommended they were treated as separate species, Rock and Water Pipit were considered as being conspecific under the scientific name *Anthus spinoletta*. This presumably affected the way they were reported by some birders. Thankfully however,

Lancashire & Cheshire Fauna Committee Reports from the late 1950s, followed by *Cheshire Bird Reports* from 1964 listed Rock and Water Pipits records separately.

Having removed Water Pipit from consideration - at least in theory, this account attempts to look at the status of the Scandinavian (*littoralis*) and British races (*petrosus*) of Rock Pipit away from the coast and estuaries of Cheshire and Wirral. The account is based primarily on records in the Cheshire (and Wirral) Bird Reports.

There are no inland records of Rock Pipit within the present county boundaries prior to 1973 when single birds were reported from Sandbach Flashes and Tatton Mere on Mar 26th and Apr 3rd respectively. These records sparked off a run of reports each spring to 1977. During the period 1974 to 1977 single Rock Pipits were recorded from Sandbach Flashes as early as 20th March in 1977 and on five April dates from 4th to 29th, while three were reported from Tatton on 4th April 1976. The April 29th date remains the latest inland record.

After 1977 there are no inland records until 1981. There are such records for seven years in the 1980s and six years in the 1990s, but in only six of the years in the present century to 2022. Rock Pipit was not found in the breeding season during survey work for the *Cheshire and Wirral Breeding and Wintering Atlas* (2004-2007) and in winter was present at estuarine and coastal sites only. The later national Atlas (2007-2011) repeated those results.

October is the busiest month with 15 records of 17 birds in 12 years. Sandbach Flashes had two on 20th and 22nd in 1983 and one on one date in 1985. October birds turned up at 'new' sites - Disley Reservoir in 1984; Middlewich Lime Beds in 1987, 1988 when a bird was also noted in November and in 1996; Hurlleston Resr where in 1989 a bird remained from 6th into November; Baddiley Mere on 14th in 1990, by Tatton Mere from 12th to 18th in 1994, Mere Farm Quarry on 16th in 2005, Poynton Pool on 13th in 2011 and Woolston on 25th in 2022.

There are November records in just four years, all of single birds. Records not mentioned above being at Sandbach Flashes in 1984 and 1999 and Cuedley Marsh in 1985.

Inland records are at a very low ebb in mid-winter and are limited to a bird on the sprinkler beds at Prestbury Sewage farm on 10th Dec 1981 when the ground generally was covered in several inches of snow and single birds on one day only at Fiddler's Ferry in January 1997 and Lapwing Hall Pool in February 2016.

There are four March records including a bird at Gatewath Tip from 7th to 17th in 1988, while the Marbury Country Park/Neumann's Flash area had two on 24th in 2012 and one on the same date and on 25th in 2013.

In April Fiddler's Ferry had a 'one-day' bird in 1987 and a long-stayer in 1991, while a bird was at Lapwing Hall Pool from 9th to 11th in 2013.

So, based on the approximately 39 records detailed above, what can be said about the status inland of Rock Pipit? It would appear that the species is a rare passage migrant with most records being from late September into November and from late March through April, and very rare in winter. The most favoured sites are Sandbach Flashes with around a dozen records followed by Middlewich Lime Bed with five.

As to Scandinavian *littoralis* among the records listed above, the only birds identified in autumn were on 22nd October 1983 at Sandbach Flashes, actually with a *petrosus* individual, and on 13th October 1984 at Disley Reservoir; there have been no winter sightings. *Littoralis* have been noted most often on spring passage: the 1975 CBR has one at Sandbach Flashes on 22nd April and the 1976 CBR adds three birds at Tatton Mere and one at Sandbach Flashes on 4th and one at the Flashes on 14th April; one was at Marbury Country Park/Neumann's Flash in March 2013 and one at Lapwing Hall Pool in April 2013.

Just to confuse things, unusually, in the 1984 CBR all Rock Pipit records are under the scientific name *Anthus spinoletta littoralis*. These included two inland records at Sandbach Flashes and one at Disley Reservoir. The Rock Pipit species account in *The Birds of Sandbach Flashes 1935 to 1999* (Goodwin & Lythgoe (2000) lists the two 1984 dates, but doesn't number them among the birds which 'answer to the description



Rock Pipit
petrosus
winter

of the Scandinavian race' whereas the Disley bird was reported as *littoralis*. The two 1984 Sandbach records are omitted from the list of eight *littoralis* above.

There appear to be just eight inland records of birds positively identified as *littoralis* out of a total of approximately 39 inland Rock Pipit records. As it is unclear from the C(&W) Bird Report accounts whether the balance of 31 records were submitted just as Rock Pipit or as Rock Pipit *petrosus* it would be unsafe to assume anything of their origin. However, as pointed out by David Norman in the Rock Pipit account in *the Cheshire and Wirral Breeding and Wintering Atlas* (2004-2007) most British Rock Pipits *petrosus* are sedentary whereas large numbers of *littoralis* migrate to Britain every winter. Given the timing of most of the inland Rock Pipits it might be logical to think that the majority actually refer to *littoralis*.

Steve Barber

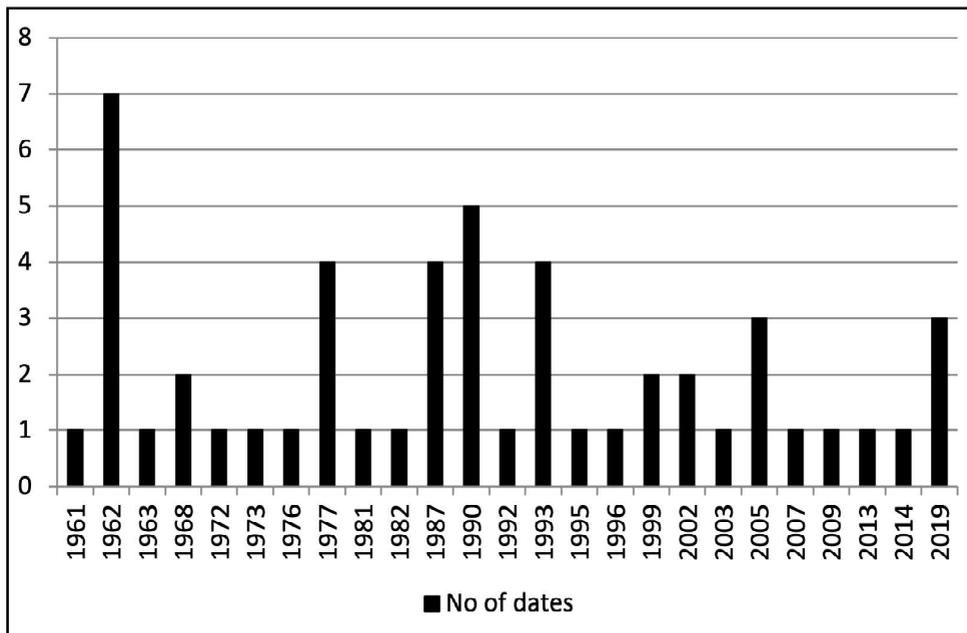
The Species Spotlight by John Elliott on 'The Status of Rock Pipits *Anthus petrosus* at Hilbre and in the Dee Estuary' in the July 2020 CAWOS *Bird News* and on the Dee Estuary Birding website is recommended reading. Details on the Hilbre Bird Observatory Blog of Rock Pipits breeding on the island in recent years might suggest that the County status needs consideration.

CORRECTION FROM THE NOVEMBER BIRD NEWS:

BLACK GUILLEMOT: CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL STATUS

There was an error reproducing the graph of the annual distribution (which shows that Black Guillemot remains an irregular visitor to our waters with sightings in just 25 of the 62 years from 1961 to 2022). We've printed the correct version below:

**Black Guillemot annual distribution of records 1961-2022 (no of dates)
(the long-staying bird of 1993 is counted just once for each month of its stay)**



Ringling News

Ringling plays an important part in developing our knowledge of birds. In this feature we invite ringling groups, or individual ringling, 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 ringling or recovered, and news of other events (or incidents). Future contributions will be welcomed.

COLOUR RING REPORT

This report is a summary of the records obtained by the Dee Estuary Colour-ring Birding Group from October 2023 to January 2024.

Knots: The majority of our over-wintering Knots arrived back on the Dee Estuary in early November and between 1st November 2023 and 31st January 2024 we obtained a remarkable 786 records of colour-ringed birds. Colour rings give the birds an individual identity and some we saw almost on a daily basis which enabled us to monitor their movements between different roosting and feeding areas. It was fascinating to see some routinely turning up at several different sites, whilst others were only ever recorded at one site. Is this a real effect or just random finding? We don't know! Some other Knots are rarely seen, and they can go 'missing' for several years and we wonder where they've been. For example, Yellow Flag PPT was ringling on the northern tip of Norway in May 2013, it was seen in the Netherlands later that year before turning up at Meols in January 2022 and Thurstaston in January 2024, with no other sightings.

Oystercatchers: An Icelandic-ringed Oystercatcher recorded at Hoylake at the end of October was our 15th from that country since that scheme started in 2016. This one had been ringling in southern Iceland in 2022 as an incubating female. In contrast, we had our first ever Irish-ringed Oystercatcher at Thurstaston in November. This had been ringling in January 2020 as part of the Dublin Bay Birds Project which was started in order to find out all about the movements of the waders found in that area.

Black-tailed Godwits: In contrast to the record-breaking numbers of this species last summer, there have been very few present this winter so it was good to spot two colour-ringed birds among the few remaining birds. It's now 25 years since the start of 'Operation Godwit' which was started to study the growing population of the Icelandic sub-species of Black-tailed Godwits, so it's good to know that they are still ringling birds and one we saw in November was ringling at Terrington, on the Wash, in August 2023 - its first sighting. The second bird, also ringling on the Wash, has a more interesting history with 30 records since it was ringling at Snettisham in September 2019. This bird visited northern France in November 2019, but since then it appears to visit Snettisham every year after breeding in August and September, then moves north to the Humber estuary in late autumn before flying across the country to Morecambe Bay in the spring before flying to Iceland. Our record of it at Thurstaston, in January 2024, was only its third winter sighting.

Black-headed Gulls: Thanks to HPAI (Avian Influenza) Black-headed Gulls had a disastrous breeding season in 2023 which makes it all the more important that we continue to monitor the birds that have survived. Thankfully, hundreds have been recorded on the Dee Estuary and adjacent fields over the past few months and these have included several colour-ringed birds. These were ringling in Windermere, West Kirby, Oslo and Poland.

If you want to be part of the Dee Estuary Colour-ring Birding Group all you have to do is submit a colour-ring sighting either to myself or copy me in on any submission you may make elsewhere so I can include it in our database. Email: richard@deeestuary.co.uk.

Note there is a monthly colour-ring update on the Dee Estuary Birding Website: www.deeestuary.co.uk.

Richard Smith

MID-CHESHIRE BARN OWL GROUP

2023 proved to be yet another good year for Barn Owls in Cheshire. In fact, in the last eight years, we've experienced solid, unbroken period of results from these magnificent birds. Usually, within such a lengthy period of time, we would have expected to have experienced at least one poor year of Barn Owl breeding since, historically, voles and shrews (and other small mammals) have a poor breeding year and, hence, result in a similar effect on the Barn Owl.

One theory is that climate change, which has resulted in periods of extreme weather conditions, i.e. alternating very wet and very dry periods within a single year, has resulted in disruption to the breeding activity of ground-dwelling mammals (upon which Barn Owls depend) and, in so doing, has 'evened out' their breeding activity - i.e. no one bad breeding year. The views on this theory vary somewhat, but something is definitely happening out there.

As to 2024. Who knows? It's too early to say at the moment. The birds will be pairing up and looking for suitable nest sites. As for breeding - that will depend upon the weather (Mother Nature again) and the availability of food. Unfortunately, 2024 has started off with alternating weather conditions, very wet, warmer than usual, strong winds and gales, frost and occasional snow. All conditions disliked by the Barn Owl.

But fingers crossed. The birds have survived for thousands of years and will continue to do so (with a bit of help from ourselves). Hence, all we can do at present is get out there and repair and clean out existing boxes and erect new ones in the anticipation of another good year.

As noted in our last reports, we've still found no obvious signs of bird flu deaths within the Cheshire Barn Owls. Fingers crossed again in this respect, because we have no obvious controls over this desperate decease at the moment.

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

HILBRE BIRD OBSERVATORY (HiBO)

Ringing October 2023 to end of December 2023

Only 47 new birds were caught in the period covered by this report which is a significantly smaller number than we would hope for, however, it does continue the trend of low catches demonstrated in this period in recent years. There was frustration in November when a Yellow-browed Warbler turned up but was not caught, however, the Pallas's Warbler which was caught more than made up for this disappointment. We have caught 18 Yellow-browed Warblers on Hilbre since 2001 but this was only the second Pallas's Warbler that we have ever caught.

We like to monitor the number of Goldcrests caught during October each year because this gives an indication of the breeding performance of these birds, probably in Scandinavia. This year 16 were trapped which suggests a reasonable breeding season in 2023.

Yellow-browed Warbler
by Phil Jones



We continue to operate using the hygiene regulations related to bird flu (HPAI-highly pathogenic avian influenza) set up by the BTO at the start of 2023. The on-line system developed in Europe to monitor the outbreaks of bird flu in Europe (focused on water birds currently) has not reported any outbreaks for the last 3 months. We see this as encouraging but we have to suspend judgement until the seabird breeding season is underway. We hope that the local colonies of breeding terns and Black-headed Gulls will not be affected in 2024 like they were in 2023. The good news for Hilbre and lots of local bird ringers is that there have been no reports of passerines presenting with the disease.

We initiated a colour-ringing project in 2023 for Rock Pipits, a species that we have focused on for over 20 years. We put colour rings on a lot of birds during 2023 and we are pleased to report that local birders helped us out by reporting several of them on the North Wirral Coast from Wallasey around to the West Kirby marine lake. The birds that we colour ringed during 2023 were first ringed before the start of the year and it is rather surprising to us that we have not caught any new Rock Pipits despite what we believe was a successful breeding season in 2023. We would expect to retrap Rock Pipits on Hilbre all year but despite the presence of colour-ringed birds we have not retrapped a Rock Pipit during the last three months of the year. The project continues and we would encourage local birders to report any colour-ringed birds they see.

The winter is usually a slow period on Hilbre for catching birds but we are still kept busy finding colour-ringed Brent Geese from our local wintering population and we encourage other birders to find and report colour-ringed birds. The Merseyside Ringing Group also colour ringed waders and their colour-ringed Knot are around now for us and other birders to find. As 2024 starts all we can do is wish all local birders a Happy New Year and ask that you keep finding and reporting colour-ringed birds.

John Elliott, on behalf of the Hilbre Bird Observatory

CHESHIRE SWAN STUDY GROUP

Since my last report in October, the group has ringed just two swans, both cygnets. The RSPCA at Stapeley Grange, Nantwich has informed me that they are still not accepting wildfowl.

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

- Acre Dell Pools, nr Congleton: 32 on 26th Oct, 32 on 29th Dec and 32 on 27th Jan.
- Bottom Flash, Winsford: 24 on 6th of Nov, 42 on 27th Dec and 40 on 19th Jan.
- Comber Mere, nr Whitchurch: 9 on 15th Oct, 18 on 19th Nov, 9 on 17th Dec and 8 on 14th Jan.
- Doddington Mere, nr Nantwich: 11 on 3rd Oct, 4 on 11th of Dec and 1 on 23rd Jan.
- Neumann's Flash, Northwich: 13 on 6th Nov and 11 on 15th Oct.
- Sankey Valley CP, Warrington: 26 on 15th Oct, 14 on 19th Nov, 7 on 17th Dec and 18 on 14th Jan.
- Spike Island, Widnes: 35 on 27th Dec and 35 on 19th Jan.
- Trent and Mersey Canal, Middlewich: 45 on 20th Nov, 42 on 15th Dec and 34 on 19th Jan.
- Woolston Eyes NR, Warrington: 37 on 15th Oct, 34 on 19th Nov, 35 on 17th Dec and 23 on 14th Jan.

Movements

W48699 ringed as a cygnet on 21-7-21 on the River Thames, Sonning Caversham, near Woking. Seen 3-12-23 on Christleton Pool, near Chester = 231kms.

CPC0 (G) ringed as a female cygnet on 14-9-19 at Mill End Pool, Audley. Seen 7-9-23 at Aber Ogwen, Bangor, North Wales = 189kms and 12-11-23 on Leeds and Liverpool Canal, Hapton, near Burnley = 81kms.

Sightings of all swans, geese and Mallards 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 the flock. All sightings will receive a printout of the history for the relevant bird(s).

David Cookson, on behalf of Cheshire Swan Study Group
<https://cheshireswanstudygroup.wordpress.com>

Notes and Letters

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

This section is a chance for members to contribute, whether a few lines, or a long article, which might be split over several issues. Some ideas might be amusing (or otherwise!) anecdotes, unusual avian behaviour, special memories, ringing and/or survey stories, and looking back over the years – even back to childhood! The list is almost endless – it's up to members. Also, we are always interested in your views on any of our articles or on the newsletter itself. Ed.

EXCEPTIONAL NUMBERS! Part 1

In many ways 2023 was a pretty horrible year, what with Global Warming, Bird Flu (HPAI) and Insect Armageddon - to name just three major environmental issues - then there were two nasty wars, huge increases in the cost of living..... So I thought I'd try and cheer us all up by remembering some good times when exceptional numbers of birds have been present on the Dee Estuary and the Wirral coast. But it's not just about remembering the past, it's also about anticipating the future as many of these exceptional numbers could be repeated, indeed two of these events have taken place in the past two years.

I've chosen nine species* when exceptional numbers have been present here, and I have only chosen those which have been exceptional in a national context, not just local. *Three of those species are lumped together in one section under 'Terns' - Sandwich, Arctic and Common. I've split the article into two parts - the 2nd part will appear into *Bird News* 126. I hope you enjoy reading about them.

Common Scoters

It was October 21st 2016 and one of those lovely autumn days when the sea was like a mirror - and covered in Common Scoters. 40,000 of them! These were counted from Hoylake when the birds were off East Hoyle Bank with ideal conditions - no wind and excellent visibility.

As far as I know that remains the highest ever number of Common Scoters counted in the UK from a single site. But perhaps the most surprising thing about that count is that it wasn't actually a huge surprise as we'd been seeing really big numbers since the winter of 2013/14. The first five-figure count of scoter ever made off the Dee Estuary in January 2014 with 12,000, followed by a whopping 27,000 counted from Hilbre in March that same year. We then had at least 22,500 in March 2015 and 36,000 in February 2016 before that 40,000 count in October.

But we've not finished with exceptional numbers of scoters yet. It wasn't until aerial surveys carried out between 2004/05 and 2010/11 that it was realised just how important Liverpool Bay was for them, and the mean peak over those five years for the whole of Liverpool Bay was found to be 57,995 - compared to previous estimates of no more than 10,000. Because of those numbers, plus a large gathering of Red-throated Divers, Liverpool Bay was made into a Special Protection Area. But more recent aerial surveys using better cameras and some clever bird identification software have come up with a massive 160,000 Common Scoters in Liverpool Bay! (as per *The Birds of Wales*, 2021).

Great Crested Grebes

In the winter of 2005/06 the Dee Estuary was something like the 100th most important site for Great Crested Grebes in the country with a max count of 33, not a very impressive statistic for one of the foremost wetland sites in the country. But the following winter it was the eighth most important and by 2010/11 it was the second with more birds present than the traditional major sites in Northern Ireland, such as Belfast Lough and Loughs Neagh and Beg. What had happened was that we started seeing, and counting, Great Crested Grebes off North Wirral whereas previously the only ones recorded were in the estuary itself, mostly in the main channel off Bagillt. Out in the open sea Great Crested Grebes are not easy to count - firstly they are little more than grey dots out there, and you have to distinguish them from the black dots (scoters) and the white

dots (gulls), not to mention divers and auks! But if there is any wind and a sea running you are wasting your time anyway, so you need a flat calm and, lastly, good seeing conditions - no mist or heat haze. All this I found out as the majority of the counts in those years were mine. Having been used to counting just a handful of scattered Great Crested Grebes in the estuary to see big rafts of them was just amazing; I'd never seen rafts of grebes before!

I found the best place to count was from a bit of high ground behind the promenade at Dove Point (Meols). The first one I did was in November 2006, and I got 378. There were then several counts of over 400 until a massive 1,195 were counted by Jane Turner in January 2011 from her rooftop 'hide' overlooking Hoylake shore. For the next five years there were several counts of more than 900, and over that period the Dee Estuary remained the second most important site for Great Crested Grebes in the UK, behind Dungeness and Rye Bay where numbers were about double ours. Since 2015/16 max numbers have dropped to around 300 annually but it was good to see more were present this last winter, 2022/23, with 589 off Meols in November.

Black-tailed Godwits

There is a small field, close to my house in Caldy, which may well be the most important site for moulting Black-tailed Godwits in the United Kingdom. This is the Caldy Wildfowl Collection which provides a safe haven for them, sheltered from gales and with fresh water available to drink and wash in, yet only a short flight to the mud off Thurstaston. Counts peak here in August, they reached an incredible 6,230 in 2020, the next two years they were a few hundred below that but on August 20th 2023 I counted an amazing 6,350. This is in one two-acre field (in comparison Burton Mere Wetlands is 250 acres), in 2021/22 the whole of the Wash had just a few hundred more with 6,930.

But there's more, on that same date of August 20th 2023 there were another 4,000 at RSPB Oakenholt, and also 3,600 on the Mersey Estuary - making a total of 14,000 and all counted at high tide for the Wetland Bird Survey. That's a third of all the Black-tailed Godwits in the United Kingdom, exceptional numbers indeed.

Knots

I have a distinct memory as a boy sitting in the window of West Kirby Sailing Club watching Knots. I'd been out sailing with my father in his old Solent Scow so the tide was on the ebb, and I'm pretty certain it was August and the year was 1963. What I saw was flock after flock after flock flying past heading from their West Kirby roost towards Thurstaston. Thinking back now about what I saw I can well imagine the total was well over 100,000.

My childhood observations may seem a bit vague, but before systematic counts started in the early 1970s that was how it was. The year following my recollections the first *Cheshire Bird Report* was produced and they certainly helped as at least records were written down. In 1965 "The autumn peak in the Dee Estuary probably occurred on or about November 13th; ca. 100,000 at Red Rocks was considered a very conservative estimate", and 1966 "The peak at Hilbre occurred on or about October 30th when several hundred thousands were present. The difficulties of estimating such a flock with any degree of accuracy are immense."

In the 1960s many of the Knots roosted on the Hilbre islands with Little Eye completely covered in them at high tide, and West Kirby Shore was also immensely important. But by the 1970s human disturbance had caused many Knots to desert Hilbre and West Kirby as their main roost site - sea anglers on Little Eye and exercising race horses on West Kirby Shore were major contributors to this disturbance. We still do get large numbers of Knots on the Dee Estuary, there have been several counts both at high and low tide between 40,000 and 50,000 since the turn of the century and what a great wildlife spectacle they make. I watched a flock of 30,000 over West Kirby shore a couple of winters ago, they were swirling around putting on a fantastic display - try to imagine what 10 times that would look like!!

Leach's Petrels

Our Liverpool Bay coasts are rightly renowned for being the best place to see Leach's Petrels in the country - but only in the right weather conditions. Well, the weather was certainly right in 1978 as described below:

Cheshire Bird Report 1978: Persistent NW gales in September resulted in the largest 'wreck' yet recorded in Cheshire.

A dawn to dusk watch was maintained at Hilbre on most days throughout the month. Birds first appeared on 11th with large numbers continuing 'through to 1st October.

Counts from Hilbre as follows:

Sep	11th	12	16th	59	20th	3	28th	28
	12th	20	17th	663	25th	4	29th	19
	14th	50	18th	34	26th	116	30th	139
	15th	328	19th	14	27th	959		
Oct	1st	4						

On both 15th and 27th September the highest hourly counts were obtained about three hours after the wind dropped and just before dusk. Counts refer to birds passing west and exclude small numbers passing east.

Along the north Wirral shore the highest accurate count was of 505 moving west off Leasowe between 9am and 3pm 17th September and there were 400 or more there in 4 hours 30th September.

In the Mersey at least 2 to 20 per day were counted off Seacombe and New Brighton between 11th September and 1st October. Peaks of 35 on 17th and 27th coincided with high counts at Leasowe and Hilbre. Early on 30th quite phenomenal numbers were present, with some hundreds off Seacombe Ferry, and many had penetrated even further up the river. On the ebbing tide an incredible number moved out of the river past large numbers of observers stationed at New Brighton. No accurate counts have been submitted, but a conservative estimate is of 800 petrels. The lack of very large numbers off Hilbre on this date is interesting.

It has been suggested that upwards of 3,500 Leach's Petrels passed the Wirral coast in September. The following is also about that remarkable passage during September 1978. It's an extract from J.D. Craggs' classic *Hilbre* book (1982) and taken from an article included in the book written by Ann and Tim Cleaves, Hilbre wardens at the time:

"On 27th September the sea-watching hide was manned for 12 1/2 hours. For the first 10 hours, petrels averaged about 60 an hour, but one of the observers' resolve began to weaken when the hourly count hit only 42 after a slight but steady decrease over the previous four hours. However, with the observatory record standing at 663 birds in 8 hours, he was persuaded to stay. The next hour the count hit 83, and the next 214. The reluctant observer realised that he would have to resign himself to remaining in the hide until it was completely dark. The count for the last hour was 130 birds and the total for the day was 959."

Not as big as the 1978 passage but 2010 was certainly the largest one over the past 20 years.

Richard Smith (article first published in the January 2024 Newsletter on the Dee Estuary Birding website <http://www.deeestuary.co.uk>)

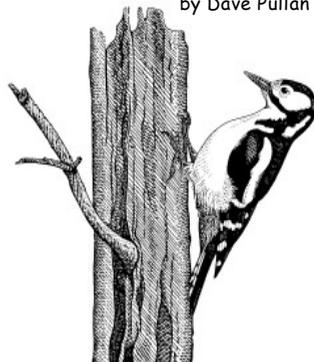
LADY WOODPECKERS

Looking back to April 2005 Bird News 66:

On an April day I watched an interesting display of controlled aggression between two female Great Spotted Woodpeckers on Knutsford Moor. The encounter went on for at least 20 minutes and probably longer than that as noisy passers-by prompted them to move farther away from the path. There was no male in the vicinity, although one could be heard drumming not too far away, in Dog Wood. The female contestants indulged in frequent sky pointing, also head and, at times, whole body shaking. They made frequent brief lunges towards each other (but never made actual bodily contact) as they moved about the branches of several trees, but each move seemed to end in stalemate. Presumably the dispute was territorial, possibly an older bird trying to move on its female offspring?

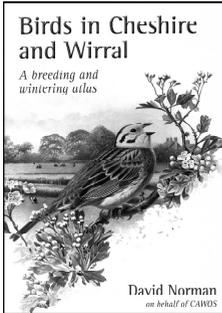
Bob Groom

Great Spotted
Woodpecker
by Dave Pullan



BIRDS IN CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL

A breeding and wintering atlas by David Norman



We are pleased to confirm that five copies of this book by our president, David Norman, are available to our members at a **cost of £5**. The book has a five-star rating on Amazon where it is still available for £37.

If you would like to purchase a copy please contact David Hiley at

secretary@cawos.org



MARCH 2024

- 10 KOS Burton Mere Wetlands RSPB, ring for details
- 22 KOS 'A WALK IN THE WOODS' by Kevin Briggs
- 24 WGBG Coach trip to Middleton Lakes, ring for details

APRIL 2024

- 20 KOS Brockholes Nature Reserve, for ring for details
- 21 SECOS Lake Vyrnwy RSPB, ring for details
- 25 WGBG 'EQUADOR' by Peter Booth, preceded by AGM
- 26 KOS AGM and MEMBERS' IMAGES
- 28 WGBG Coach trip to Rutland Water, ring for details

MAY 2024

- 12 WGBG Coach trip to Bempton / Flamborough, ring for details
- 12-13 KOS Walney Island / Leighton Moss, ring for details
- 19 SECOS Burton Mere Wetlands RSPB, ring for details
- 24 KOS Wildboardclogh evening walk, ring for details

JUNE 2024

- 2-6 KOS KOS 50th Anniversary Trip to Dumfries and Galloway
- 9-10 SECOS Short Weekend – East Yorkshire, ring for details
- 28 KOS Moberley evening walk, ring for details

JULY 2024

- 6 KOS Belvide Reservoir tbc, ring for details
- 26 KOS Neumann's Flash / Marbury CP evening walk, ring for details

SEPTEMBER 2024

- 8 KOS Leighton Moss RSPB, ring for details
- 27 KOS 'ST. KILDA: THE LONELY ISLES' by Steve Halliwell

AFFILIATED SOCIETIES

ADNHS Altrincham & District Natural History Society <http://mpettipher.me.uk/altnats>
Meetings: Jubilee Centre, The Firs, Bowdon at 7:30pm, contact Jacky Johnson 0161 928 7896

CAWOS Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society www.cawos.org
Meetings currently held by Zoom, starting at 7:45pm, contact Sec. David Hiley 07484 836652

CRSPB Chester RSPB Members' Group www.rspb.org.uk/groups/chester Meetings:
Christleton Parish Hall, Christleton, CH3 7AS at 7:30pm, contact Norman Sadler 01244 335670

HPRSPB High Peak RSPB Members' Group <https://ww2.rspb.org.uk/groups/highpeak/>
Meetings: Senior Citizens' Hall, Marple at 7:30pm, contact David Knass 07879 646856

KOS Knutsford Ornithological Society www.10x50.com Meetings: Jubilee Hall, Stanley
Road, Knutsford at 8pm, contact Sec. Karina Stanley 07532 833083

MRSPB Macclesfield RSPB Members' Group www.rspb.org.uk/groups/macclesfield
Meetings: Macclesfield Community Centre, Macclesfield at 7:45pm, contact Ray Evans 01625 432635

NNHS Nantwich Natural History Society
Occasional meetings throughout the year, contact Sec. Roger Crow, 01270 618416

SECOS South-East Cheshire Ornithological Society www.secos.org.uk
Meetings: Ettiley Heath Church Community Centre at 7:30pm, contact Mike Tonks 07484 306147

WGBG Wilmslow Guild Birdwatching Group <http://wgbwcopy.wikidot.com/wgbg>
Meetings: Wilmslow Guild at 7:30pm, contact Stuart Mollison 07505 254306

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

***** POSITION VACANT *****

BIRD REPORT CO-EDITOR

You may be aware that Ted Lock is stepping down from his role of Bird Report Co-editor after the Bird Report 2023.

We therefore invite anyone who has an interest in working with Ted on the 2023 report with a view to taking over on the 2024 report to contact David Hiley at

secretary@kawos.org

More information, including Job Description, can be supplied.

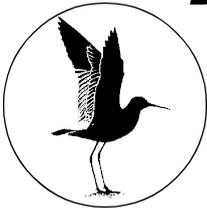
Index

Page 1	Guest Editorial	Page 12-16	Projects and Surveys
Page 2-4	CAWOS News	Page 16-18	Sites to Watch
Page 4-5	CAWOS AGM Reports	Page 19-21	County Rarities
Page 6-7	Conservation News	Page 22-24	Ringing News
Page 7-9	County Round-Up	Page 25-27	Notes and Letters
Page 10-11	Species Spotlight	Page 28	Diary

If you know anyone who might want to advertise
in future *Bird News* please let me know and
I'll contact them with all the information.

Sheila Blamire at sheilablamire@kawos.org Tel: 01565 830168

Binoculars & Telescope Sales



Low Prices, High Standards.

FOCALPOINT OPTICS LTD

Birdwatching at its Best

Phone Focalpoint on 01925 730399

Part Exchange & Repairs Welcome

Opening times

10am - 4pm Mon - Sat

Email: focalpoint@dial.pipex.com / Website: www.fpoint.co.uk

Optics----- ✓
Repairs--- ✓
Books----- ✓
Clothing-- ✓
Bird Art--- ✓
Part Ex--- ✓

