



# **BIRD NEWS**

**Number 113**

**March 2020**



**County Rarity: Ferruginous Duck**

**South Mersey Marshes WeBS**

**Species Spotlight: Purple Sandpiper**

**Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows 2020**

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**Front cover: Siberian Stonechat by Ray Scally**

**Other illustrations by Phil Jones and Ray Scally**

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**Note: the copy date for the next issue is 20<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

# Guest Editorial

These editions of *Bird News* come around so quickly and it reminds me a little of groundhog day. I'm sat in the same seat, looking at the same screen and wondering how I can lift the hearts of the faithful or more likely cast a veil of gloom, much like a fisherman would cast his net from a boat in the old days.

Well, it's early March and the first migrants have appeared today, the 5th, a Wheatear and a Sand Martin. Twitter tweets have been full of news of raptors roosting on the north coast of Africa ready for their sea crossing to Spain and Common Cranes, already wintering in Spain, watched heading north over the last few days. More subtle signs that spring is upon us in our own country are local influxes of species not immediately associated with migration, an increase of Stonechats on a local patch being a good example. Only the local birder who tramps around the patch religiously every day would understand the significance of three or four of these birds that weren't there the previous day. Likewise, the high "sip..sip..sip" of unseen Meadow Pipits moving north high up in a bright sky with a following south-westerly breeze, signal migration is well and truly happening around us. Thinking of Stonechats, the Siberian Stonechat at Ashton's Flash will be moving soon. I wonder where it will end up? If there is ever a reason to satellite-tag a bird, then the unknown course of this eastern gem must provide justification enough to fit one.

Anyway, what have we got in this issue? Bob Anderson has written a few lines of silage. Sorry Bob, about silage I meant. His words paint a picture, in my mind's eye, a watercolour out of *What to look for in Winter*, a Ladybird Nature Book from 1959 and illustrated by C.F.Tunncliffe. Bob talks about Starlings noisily feeding on freshly-cut silage from a clamp that had been opened up and Redwings feeding on a muck-spread field, their mousy colouration blending in with the furrows as the afternoon light begins to fade. I felt cold as I could see myself standing by a gate, peering into the gloom, trying to count the shapes. He also mentions that further down the field was a flock of Lapwings, the scare-mongers of the winter countryside, flying around in a twinkling flock as though in response to an unseen raptor, before nervously settling down once more. I always under-estimate flocks like this when I try and count them in the air and Bob had the same problem. We're more alike than Bob cares to imagine....

Richard Smith has written an excellent article on Purple Sandpipers, a favourite of many birders. Their numbers are declining as shown by the counts undertaken on the Dee around Hilbre and the Wirral shore. I didn't realise there was a small but definite movement in the UK in July and August and Richard poses the same questions as most birders would.... where have they come from, why and where are they going at that time of year? Shaun Hickey has also written an interesting article on WeBS counting in the South Mersey Marshes and his account takes me back to happier days birding on Frodsham Marsh before Peel Holdings, amongst others, trashed the place. More about wind turbines later. County Rarities is about Ferruginous Duck identification, by Hugh Pulsford, and the status of them in the county by Steve Barber, a thorough and well-researched account that illustrates their status as a true rarity. Finally, there is an appeal for a new co-ordinator for heronries census. Brian Martin is stepping down after forty years and it would be good for an enthusiastic birder to take up the reigns.

So, I mentioned wind turbines, that magical source of clean energy that has no down-side. I'm joking of course. I hate them with a passion. Apart from them being visually repulsive, noisy and are responsible for the deaths of millions of birds and bats across the world, I do accept that at this moment in time, they are a slightly better option than fossil fuels for electricity generation. I'm hoping that technology will replace them, sooner than later, with devices less damaging to wildlife. Last week my employer sent a number of us on a mandatory one-day course entitled 'Carbon Literacy'. It was surprisingly very good and quite an eye opener, I would guess for those in the audience that had little real understanding of global warming. Basically it gave everything a value in terms of carbon dioxide, from humans to aircraft, from cattle farming to oil palm and everything in between. The figures were staggering. It also discussed the average temperature rise and everyone sat in complete silence as videos were shown that gave an idea of what would happen to the planet as the temperature rose in one degree increments. I knew some of what discussed

on that day, but even so it made me realise that a) human beings as a species are greedy and selfish and have little chance of ever agreeing a coherent strategy to address the problem of global warming and b) we've probably run out of time anyway so it does it really matter? As a birder I would say that we should keep trying as long as we can make a difference. The person who gave the lecture was himself originally a wind-turbine engineer and had worked on those along the Mersey in Liverpool by the docks, but not on those at Frodsham Marsh. I threw a few bits and pieces in during the day as you might expect. I asked if they were going to mention the elephant in the room, population control, seeing as the population doubles every 67 years which means that in little over a century from now there will be some 30 billion humans on this planet that is struggling to cope with 7.5 billion now. The subject wasn't mentioned specifically but I think that 'not enough resources for the current population' slipped in somewhere. Best of all, at the end of the day I went up to the speaker and asked them if they understood the cost of wind turbines in terms of bird and bat fatalities. There was a surprised tone to their voice as they admitted that they'd never realised that was the case and where did the information come from? After all, they used recognised 'Environmental Survey Consultants' before any wind turbine projects were given planning permission. Rather than argue for the next three hours I just walked away muttering.....

Finally, on a more optimistic and much brighter note. Two things: firstly, a European car manufacturer has just unveiled a car that runs on saltwater. It is based on NASA technology and is completely safe and un-polluting. Let's hope the big oil companies don't block it...and secondly, the UK government has just announced that badger culling is to end, in favour of a vaccine for cattle. Mr Toad will be pleased.

**Tony Broome**

**Note: the copy date for the next issue is 20<sup>th</sup> June 2020 - *please be prompt***

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

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## Looking back.....

### **THE BIRDING RECORDS OF AR SUMERFIELD 1897 - 1984**

A year or so ago a member passed over to me for safekeeping two books containing the birding records of Arthur Raymond Sumerfield. Arthur was born in Stretford and lived in Urmston until 1966 then he moved to Abergele, Clwyd (Denbighshire in the old days). He had a 5-year period living in North London but gives no more information on this time.

The records from the 1930s through to the 1970s and cover many areas of the UK. Quite amazing considering how much travel has changed between then and now, sadly there isn't anything to expand on how he travelled about, he just gives his birding companion's names.

There are a few places named that will resonate with some of our members: Altrincham Sewage Farm, Flixton Sewage Works, Worsley Sewage Farm, Carrington Moss. I know some of these are not in Cheshire as we see it today, but it was different in those days and they will be places many members have visited for birding before these boundary changes.

Some of the people he birded with will be known as well: AW Boyd after whom the Rostherne Observatory is named, W. Mulligan who I think was Bill and may well have run birding classes if my memory serves me correctly from late Tony Murphy telling me, Norman Rowbotham who I think now resides on Anglesey. Finally, the late Peter Wolstenholme of the famous mac and flying tripod legs for those of us who knew him, with the nickname of Windy! Other names will be known but these just stand out to me.

The order is different to the one we are now familiar with today and I will only use some of the interesting records in the old Cheshire, in the order of Arthur's notes. And quoting his wording not mine. I am not going to try and reflect every species he has recorded but those of interest or in these challenging times for our wildlife some of those of conservation concern. There are far too many to detail in one article so, with the agreement of the Editor, I'll split them over a few *Bird News*.

**Corn Bunting:** Common locally but difficult to find in winter months with the first song usually being heard at the beginning of March.

Many of the 'Cheshire' records are from Carrington Moss, Dunham Massey, by the ship canal at Thelwall - now Lancs he records and known to us as Manchester Ship Canal and of course pre viaduct. Frodsham is mentioned in many species records and was clearly a birding hotspot for him and also Parkgate on the Wirral. Nowadays we would be very surprised to find one at any of these localities I suspect.

**Little Bunting:** 1 April 1962. Bidston Hill, marsh in 'Arctic' terrain. Up to three birds seen and described.

**Snow Bunting:** In January 1954 one at West Kirby, near the Shorelark he notes, and in 1959 another at Burton Saltings. In the 1960s records at Denhall Lane, Hilbre Island and Hoylake Point.

**Yellow Bunting (or as we now know it Yellowhammer):** Beginning of song on Carrington Moss, mid-February in 1944 and 1946. Then in 1963 he records on 16 March, the coldest spell of the century (20th) and also since 1740. Half the resident birds exterminated between 1963 and 1964 due to the weather.

**Land Rail (now of course Corncrake):** In September 1955 a single bird flushed twice at Altrincham Sewage Farm, when he was birding with Peter Wolstenholme but, with other observers. There are a number of records in Lancashire.

**Chough:** Whilst reading I had hoped there would be some records of Chough in the area, but they are all in Wales and Isle of Man as we would expect today.

**Hooded Crow:** In the winter of 1934/35 a single bird was seen at Altrincham Sewage Farm and I would strongly suspect the same bird at Rostherne. He highlights these records as being 'inland'.

**Raven:** A bird that we are seeing more and more in the modern CAWOS area, but his notes have no records at all.

**Cuckoo:** Some early and late dates with the locations are noted as Cheshire, showing how the boundaries have changed: Ashton on Mersey, 19 April 1944; Partington, 22 April 1944; Flixton, 20 April 1946, two heard and flying; Altrincham Sewage Farm, 22 April 1949; Thelwall, 20 April 1949; Altrincham Sewage Farm, 16 July 1943; Altrincham Sewage Farm, 1 July 1945; 28 July 1947 at Thelwall a pair of Yellowhammers feeding a juvenile.

The latest date I can see is 15 September 1959. Reading through the Cuckoo records the overall feel is that they were common at the various birding locations he visited.

**Turtle Dove:** The 'Cheshire' records are noted in: Partington, Dunham, [Little] Bollington, Sinderland, Leasowe, Carrington Moss, Marbury Mere, Rostherne. He notes that nests were found in hawthorn, elderberry, birch and rowan and found across the various locations in Cheshire.

This is just a small representation of the records but even these demonstrate how times have changed over the years. Nowadays we are lucky in that we can easily travel around so easily to do our birding with the vast majority of us owning cars, aside from the traffic that is. I don't know how Arthur travelled around, as he made no mention of it. I would suspect he owned, or had access to, a car. It must have been far easier for him to pull over if he saw something, unlike now. Bird records are extremely important in the ability to show differences in populations and trends. These records in a small way show how populations have changed in a relatively short time, even though I have only shown a very small extract.

**Phil Hampson**

## VALE ROYAL - FEBRUARY 2004

It was a cool, bright February morning, and I had not done any serious birdwatching in 2004, so I set off to the river and the Vale.

Almost as soon as I had left the house I noted five species: Blackbird, Collared Dove, House Sparrow, Robin and Starling. There was little of note until I passed under the railway bridge, heading for the river. A Blue Tit, no more. On arriving at the river, I stood, enjoying the glorious weather and lovely scene. I turned my attention to the little wood of birch and alders by the river. A tiny bird was busily investigating the higher branches - a Goldcrest. And a movement against the trunk of a birch caught my eye; a Tree Creeper, the first I had seen for two years, beautifully marked and very close. And then a busy party arrived - Great Tit, Coal Tit, and high in the alders, a small party of Siskins feeding on the cones. Most were females, a lovely lemony and grey-green, with soft dark speckles along the flanks.

A small party of Canada Geese on the river regarded me warily, and a succession of Herons on the far bank took off as I approached. I was delighted to see that a heronry has now appeared in the tall trees near the park homes. As I watched, a bird swept down to one of the nests and presented a soggy branch to its mate, which inserted it into the nest and then joined in mutual preening. I left the little wood and headed down the path, spotting a little bird perched in a bush up on the hilltop by the fields. Its head was a brilliant yellow in the sunshine - a Yellowhammer!

I cautiously approached the big pond, and was horrified to see a family party of half a dozen swans swimming threateningly towards me. I marched briskly past and enjoyed lovely views of Little Grebe, Tufted Duck, Mallard, Coot and four Gadwall. As I left the pond, two birds swept past overhead —a [Carrion] Crow fiercely pursuing a Kestrel.

After a brisk walk along the muddy path, I arrived at Vale Royal locks and studied the board with bird information recorded by the lock-keeper. He noted 'incessant' activity by the Kingfishers by the locks. Doubtfully, I surveyed, then crossed the locks. Nothing. Then suddenly, the characteristic pinging call behind me, and a Kingfisher sped away, low over the old river. I returned my gaze to the locks, and almost immediately another bird emerged from the locks, chestnut and brilliant electric blue. It perched briefly on the quayside, and then flew off upriver.

I searched Hulse Island for wagtails; nothing, but a tree full of Cormorants was quite spectacular.

As I returned to the locks, the unmistakable call of a Pied Wagtail welcomed me, and I headed along the path by the lock-keeper's cottage towards the viaduct. I felt that the birding highlights must be over, but resolved to enjoy the walk through lovely scenery and perfect weather.

As I approached the viaduct, I noticed a movement among some greenery on the river held up by one of the pillars of the viaduct; a Grey Wagtail, showing its brilliant yellow as it picked through the debris, then paused to preen itself in the sunshine.

As I emerged from the muddy path through the woodland, I heard the loud mew now becoming more frequent over Vale Royal; a Buzzard. Not one, in fact, but six, which wheeled and soared over the river, calling loudly as they played and courted overhead.

They disappeared as quickly as they appeared, perhaps catching sight of a straggling line of ramblers who were trekking along the riverside path. Sixty of them, as it turned out, the rather geriatric Altrincham Ramblers club.

This disturbance clearly meant an end of the birding by the river, and I re-joined civilisation at the blue bridge, and happily yomped home....

Goldcrest  
by Phil Jones



# 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 2019.*

## SITE REPORTS

### Chester area

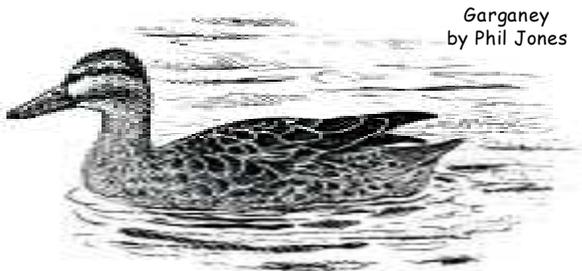
A Red-backed Shrike was at the Gowy Meadows on an unknown date and a Firecrest at Burwardsley on Nov 4<sup>th</sup>.

### Congleton area

Two Scaups were at Astbury Mere from Oct 27<sup>th</sup> to Nov 9<sup>th</sup> with Common Scoter on Nov 10<sup>th</sup> and Short-eared Owl on Oct 6<sup>th</sup>.

### Crewe and Nantwich area

800 Pink-footed Geese were at Bickley Hall Farm on Dec 2<sup>nd</sup>, nine Whooper Swans at Doddington on Oct 21<sup>st</sup> and four Egyptian Geese at Elton Hall Flash on Oct 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>. Two Garganeys were at Railway Flash on Sep 22<sup>nd</sup> and six Red-crested Pochards at Doddington on Nov 4<sup>th</sup>. A Great White Egret was at Quoisley



Mere during Nov. A Red Kite was over Shavington on Oct 1<sup>st</sup>. Two Woodcocks were at Sandbach Flashes on Nov 29<sup>th</sup>. Merlins were at Maw Green Tip on Oct 2<sup>nd</sup> and Pump House Flash on Oct 31<sup>st</sup>. A Marsh Tit was at Bickerton on Dec 21<sup>st</sup>, 12 Chiffchaffs at Maw Green Tip on Sep 19<sup>th</sup>, two Spotted Flycatchers at Scholar Green on Sep 11<sup>th</sup> with Redstart at Mow Cop on Sep 8<sup>th</sup> and Elton Hall Flash on Sep 11<sup>th</sup>. A Richard's Pipit was at Maw Green Tip on Oct 4<sup>th</sup> with two Tree Pipits at Mow Cop on Sep 8<sup>th</sup>.

### Ellesmere Port and Neston area

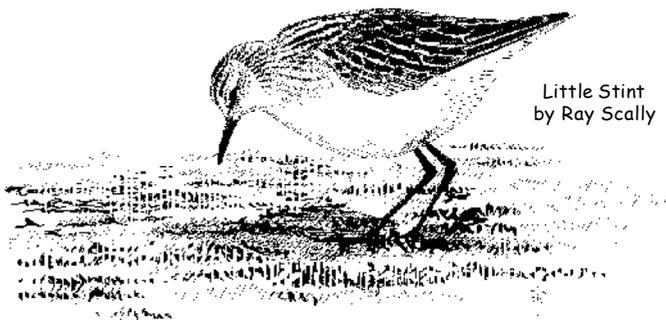
Wildfowl included 3000 Pink-footed Geese at BMW on Oct 11<sup>th</sup>, 18 Bewick's Swans on the Mersey marshes on Dec 15<sup>th</sup>, five Whooper Swans at BMW on Oct 10<sup>th</sup> and six Egyptian Geese at Denhall Lane on Oct 17<sup>th</sup>. Two Garganeys were at BMW from Oct 3<sup>rd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>, a single Scaup was at Shotwick on Oct 30<sup>th</sup>, Nov 16<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> with a Long-tailed Duck present from Nov 22<sup>nd</sup> into the new year. A Slavonian Grebe was at Shotwick on Nov 15<sup>th</sup>, seven Spoonbill at Parkgate From Sep 2<sup>nd</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>, one or two Bitterns roosted at Neston from late Oct, four Cattle Egrets were at BMW on Oct 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> with a max of 29 Great White Egrets at BMW on Nov 4<sup>th</sup>. A Goshawk was an unusual visitor to Ince Marshes on Dec 15<sup>th</sup>, c20 Marsh Harriers were at Neston on Nov 29<sup>th</sup>, three Hen Harriers at Neston on Dec 27<sup>th</sup> and Red Kite at Neston on Oct 26<sup>th</sup>.

Single Avocet was at BMW on Oct 16<sup>th</sup> with 1700 Black-tailed Godwits on Oct 4<sup>th</sup>, two Curlew Sandpipers on Sep 16<sup>th</sup> and two Little Stints on Sep 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. A Pectoral Sandpiper was at Parkgate on Oct 7<sup>th</sup>, seven Spotted Redshanks at BMW on Oct 6<sup>th</sup> with five Greenshanks at Parkgate on 7<sup>th</sup>. Black Tern were at Neston on Sep 5<sup>th</sup> and BMW on 6<sup>th</sup>. Four Short-eared Owls were at Denhall Lane on Oct 27<sup>th</sup> and Dec 4<sup>th</sup>, two Merlins at Parkgate on Dec 20<sup>th</sup>, two Hobbys at Parkgate on Sep 14<sup>th</sup>. 40 Ravens were at Decca Pools on Oct 16<sup>th</sup>, 15 Waxwings at Hooton on Oct 25<sup>th</sup>, Firecrest at BMW on Nov 25<sup>th</sup> with Ring Ouzel on Oct 19<sup>th</sup>. A Great Grey Shrike was at Little Neston on Oct 30<sup>th</sup>, three Bearded Tits were at BMW on Nov 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, Water Pipit were at BMW and Neston on several dates with four Lapland Bunting at Shotwick on Sep 4<sup>th</sup>.

### Halton area

12 White-fronted Geese were at Carr Lane Pools on Nov 29<sup>th</sup>, three Bewick's Swans at Pickering's Pasture on Dec 3<sup>rd</sup>, seven Whooper Swans at Hale on Oct 12<sup>th</sup> with 87 Gadwalls at Carr Lane on

Sep 19<sup>th</sup>. Three Cattle Egrets were at Hale on Sep 14<sup>th</sup>, five Great White Egrets at Hale Duck Decoy on Sep 21<sup>st</sup> with 31 Little Egrets at Hale on Sep 15<sup>th</sup>. A Hen Harrier was at Carr Lane pools on Sep 2<sup>nd</sup> with Red Kite at Hale on Oct 21<sup>st</sup>. 500 Golden Plovers were at Pickering's Pasture on Nov 5<sup>th</sup>, with two Curlew Sandpipers here on Sep 9<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, two Little Stints on Nov 1<sup>st</sup> and Dec



Little Stint  
by Ray Scally

15<sup>th</sup> and White-rumped Sandpiper on Nov 1<sup>st</sup>. 36 Snipes were at Carr Lane Pools on Sep 19<sup>th</sup>. An Iceland Gull was at Hale on Dec 7<sup>th</sup> with a Guillemot at Pickering's Pasture on Oct 28<sup>th</sup>. A Merlin was at Hale on Oct 15<sup>th</sup>.

Elsewhere, five Waxwings were at Hale on Nov 4<sup>th</sup>, a late Swallow on Nov 5<sup>th</sup>, Yellow-browed Warbler at Pickering's Pasture on Oct 17<sup>th</sup> and Hale on 24<sup>th</sup> and two Garden Warblers at Pickering's Pasture on Sep 10<sup>th</sup>. Firecrest were at Pickering's Pasture on Oct 16<sup>th</sup> with another here and at Hale on Nov 9<sup>th</sup>. Ring Ouzel were at Hale on several dates during Oct and Nov, 1898 Fieldfares were counted flying S over Hale on Nov 9<sup>th</sup> with 2551 Redwings on Oct 17<sup>th</sup>. Three Water Pipits were at Carr Lane Pools on Oct 24<sup>th</sup>, two Rock Pipits at Pickering's Pasture on Oct 28<sup>th</sup> and Dec 22<sup>nd</sup>, 18 Bramblings were over Hale on Nov 4<sup>th</sup> with Hawfinch on Oct 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> and Crossbill on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. A Lapland Bunting was at Hale on Oct 19<sup>th</sup>.

### **Macclesfield area**

Three White-fronted Geese at Redesmere on various dates in Dec, eight Egyptian Geese at Redesmere on Dec 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. 20+ Goldeneyes at Redesmere on Dec 4<sup>th</sup> with two Smews at Lapwing Hall Pool on Dec 30<sup>th</sup>. A Red Kite was over Rostherne on Oct 30<sup>th</sup>.

### **Vale Royal area**

20 Whooper Swans were at Frodsham Marsh on Dec 30<sup>th</sup> with a single Bewick's Swan with 14 Egyptian Geese at Frodsham Marsh on Nov 14<sup>th</sup>. Nine Mandarins were at Tatton Mere on Dec 8<sup>th</sup>, a single Garganey at Frodsham Marsh and Marbury CP on Sep 3<sup>rd</sup>, 239 Wigeons at Neumann's Flash on Dec 18<sup>th</sup> with four Pintails on Dec 12<sup>th</sup>, Scaup at Frodsham Marsh on Dec 21<sup>st</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, Long-tailed Duck on Dec 28<sup>th</sup> with nine Goosanders at Brereton Heath on Dec 24<sup>th</sup>. A Bittern was present at Marbury CP from late Oct onwards, three Cattle Egrets at Frodsham Marsh from Nov 24<sup>th</sup> into the new year. Up to four Marsh Harriers were in the Frodsham area with a Hen Harrier at Whitley Reed on Oct 23<sup>rd</sup>.

c40 Avocets were at Frodsham Marsh on Sep 27<sup>th</sup>, 340 Grey Plovers on Dec 25<sup>th</sup>, Little Stint on Sep 7<sup>th</sup>, 46 Snipes at Ashton's Flash on Sep 24<sup>th</sup> and two Greenshanks at Frodsham Marsh on Sep 19<sup>th</sup>. Common Tern at Marbury CP on Sep 6<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> whilst a Black Tern was at Winsford on Oct 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>. Four Hobbys were at Comberbach on Sep 2<sup>nd</sup>. 19 Chiffchaffs were in the Witton Mill area on Sep 23<sup>rd</sup>, two Yellow-browed Warblers at Frodsham Marsh on Oct 17<sup>th</sup> with Firecrest on Nov 12<sup>th</sup>. A Bearded Tit was along the River Weaver at Frodsham on Oct 2<sup>nd</sup>. Cheshire's first Siberian Stonechat was at Ashton's Flash from Dec 24<sup>th</sup> into 2020. Three Water Pipits were at Frodsham Marsh on Nov 24<sup>th</sup>. 17 Crossbills were in the Delamere area on Nov 13<sup>th</sup>.

### **Warrington area**

Six Egyptian Geese were at Woolston Eyes on Oct 22<sup>nd</sup> with Garganey at Woolston Eyes on Sep 2<sup>nd</sup> and Oct 13<sup>th</sup> and Red-crested Pochard on Sep 9<sup>th</sup>. Bittern at Woolston Eyes on Oct 9<sup>th</sup> with Great White Egret on Oct 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. Marsh Harrier at Woolston Eyes on Sep 2<sup>nd</sup> and Dec 19<sup>th</sup> with Hen Harrier on Nov 27<sup>th</sup> and Dec 19<sup>th</sup>. Five Common Cranes were S over Penketh on Oct 20<sup>th</sup>. A Kumlein's Gull was at Woolston Eyes on Oct 28<sup>th</sup> with a single Black Tern on Sep 27<sup>th</sup>.

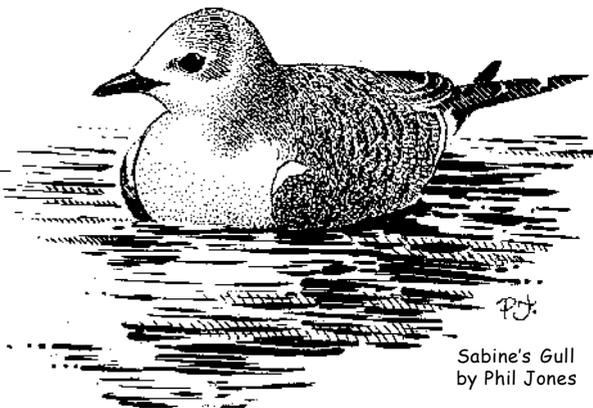
Long-eared Owl at Houghton Green Pool on Nov 18<sup>th</sup>, a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was caught at Woolston Eyes on Nov 26<sup>th</sup>. Merlin at Woolston Eyes on Sep 12<sup>th</sup> and Oct 31<sup>st</sup>, two Hobbys at

Woolston Eyes on Sep 2<sup>nd</sup> and Silver Lane Pools on Sep 26<sup>th</sup>. A Siberian Chiffchaff was at Woolston Eyes on Dec 5<sup>th</sup>, Yellow-browed Warbler at Houghton Green Pool on Oct 4<sup>th</sup> and Moore NR on 6<sup>th</sup> with 530 Fieldfares and 2400 Redwings over Woolston Eyes on Oct 30<sup>th</sup>. A Whinchat was at Woolston Eyes on Sep 16<sup>th</sup> with Hawfinch on Oct 31<sup>st</sup> with two Bearded Tits on Oct 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> with a Little Bunting on Oct 21<sup>st</sup>

## Wirral area

345 Brent Geese were at Hilbre on Dec 3<sup>rd</sup>, four Whooper Swans at Greasby on Dec 1<sup>st</sup>, 810 Pintails at Thurstaston on Dec 29<sup>th</sup>, three Eiders off Hoylake on Sep 29<sup>th</sup>, four Velvet Scoters at Hilbre on Dec 25<sup>th</sup> and 10,000+ Common Scoters off Leasowe on Oct 15<sup>th</sup> with a max of 11 Goosanders on West Kirby Marine Lake on Dec 21<sup>st</sup>. 35 Red-throated Divers were off Hilbre on Oct 15<sup>th</sup> with single Black-throated on Dec 25<sup>th</sup> with a Great Northern Diver in the Birkenhead/Wallasey area from Dec 27<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>. An unidentified dark Petrel was predated by a Peregrine at Meols on Sep 6<sup>th</sup> while 32 Leach's Petrels were at Hilbre on Sep 4<sup>th</sup>, two Fulmars at Hoylake on Sep 5<sup>th</sup> and 28 Manx Shearwaters at Hilbre on 4<sup>th</sup>. Four Great White Egrets were at Heswall on Dec 15<sup>th</sup> with 136 Little Egrets at Heswall on Sep 8<sup>th</sup>. Three Shags were at West Kirby Marine Lake during late Dec. Raptors of note included: two Marsh Harriers at Heswall on Dec 27<sup>th</sup> with single Hen Harrier, Red Kite at Heswall on Sep 20<sup>th</sup>, Leasowe on Oct 6<sup>th</sup>, 19 Buzzards at Heswall on Sep 20<sup>th</sup>.

A Dotterel was at Leasowe on Sep 14<sup>th</sup>, Whimbrel at Heswall on Sep 3<sup>rd</sup> and Hilbre on Oct 15<sup>th</sup>, 220 Bar-tailed Godwits at Thurstaston on Nov 9<sup>th</sup>, 5300 Black-tailed Godwits at West Kirby on Sep 3<sup>rd</sup>, 280 Turnstones at New Brighton on Oct 17<sup>th</sup> and 20000 Knots at Thurstaston on Dec 4<sup>th</sup>. Four Curlew Sandpipers were at Hoylake on Sep 1<sup>st</sup> and 800 Sanderlings at Hoylake on Sep 28<sup>th</sup>, two Woodcocks were at Heswall on Dec 7<sup>th</sup> and three Grey Phalaropes were at Hilbre on Sep 4<sup>th</sup>. Up to 300 Kittiwakes were at Hoylake on Sep 4<sup>th</sup>, Sabine's Gulls were at Hilbre, Leasowe and Wallasey on Sep 4<sup>th</sup> and Hoylake and Leasowe on 5<sup>th</sup>, four Mediterranean Gulls at Thurstaston on Sep 16<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> with Caspian Gull at Hoylake on Sep 3<sup>rd</sup> and Birkenhead on Dec 14<sup>th</sup>. 335 Sandwich Terns were at Hilbre on Sep 10<sup>th</sup>, single Arctic Tern at New Brighton on Sep 4<sup>th</sup> with Black Tern at Hilbre on Sep 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>. Nine Great Skuas were off Hilbre on Sep 4<sup>th</sup>, two Pomarine Skuas at Hilbre on Sep 4<sup>th</sup> and Hoylake on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> with 101 Arctic Skuas at Hilbre on Sep 4<sup>th</sup> with Long-tailed Skua at Hilbre and Hoylake on Sep 4<sup>th</sup> and New Brighton on 6<sup>th</sup>. A single Guillemot was at Hoylake on Sep 13<sup>th</sup>, 80 Razorbills at Hilbre on Oct 15<sup>th</sup> with Black Guillemot on Dec 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>.



Sabine's Gull  
by Phil Jones

Two Merlins were at Hilbre on Nov 4<sup>th</sup>. 11 Ravens were at Red Rocks on Oct 17<sup>th</sup>, Swallow at Hoylake on Nov 25<sup>th</sup>, Yellow-browed Warbler at Hilbre, Hoylake, Meols and Thurstaston with three Firecrests at Bidston Hill on Nov 3<sup>rd</sup>. 2000 Fieldfares were over Red Rocks on Oct 21<sup>st</sup> with 500 Redwings on the same day. A Black Redstart was at Thurstaston from Oct 31<sup>st</sup> to Nov 4<sup>th</sup>, Whinchat at Heswall on Sep 16<sup>th</sup>, Richard's Pipit at Hoylake on Oct 19<sup>th</sup> and three Rock Pipits at Hilbre on Dec 4<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>. Two Twite were at Hilbre on Oct 15<sup>th</sup> with six Crossbills at West Kirby on Nov 22<sup>nd</sup> and two Snow Buntings at Leasowe on Nov 25<sup>th</sup>.

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**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.

# Sites to Watch

## BURTON MERE WETLANDS AND DEE ESTUARY

After a very wet February, Burton Mere Wetlands is the wettest it's been for a long time, with the wet grassland at the back of the reserve looking especially dazzling. The birds have responded accordingly, and numbers of waders and wildfowl have been impressive, with the flooding deep enough for a male Red-breasted Merganser to happily feed for 3 days between 11-13 February - a rare bird at BMW. This time of year, it is very much a case of the wetter the better, as this provides the optimum conditions for our breeding waders.

On 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> February, a combination of high spring tides and Storm Ciara produced the highest surge tides on the estuary for some years, with the predicted high tide of 9.5m reaching 11m; a further 1.5m than predicted. The associated wildlife spectacle was indeed spectacular, with the resulting tidal wrack similarly impressive, and a good place to hunt for feeding Water Pipits.

Pink-footed Goose numbers have been at similarly high levels to previous years, with at least 10,000 roosting at Burton Marsh in December and January. And as we come into the peak count months of late winter and early spring, it will be interesting to see if we can break our recent count record of 14,000. On 29<sup>th</sup> January a pair of Tundra Bean Geese was found feeding amongst the Pink-footed Geese on the wet grassland at BMW and was enjoyed by many visiting birders over the coming days, although they could be difficult to see. They were last reported on 13<sup>th</sup> February feeding with Pinkfeets in fields around Puddington.

The biggest rarity of the winter has been this week's Long-billed Dowitcher at BMW on 24<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> February. Looking at photographs it was obvious that it was the same bird that had wintered on the Ribble at Marshside RSPB and Martin Mere WWT. Its jaunt to the Dee, however, was short lived as it's back at Martin Mere again today (26<sup>th</sup>).

Every year our first Avocets appear around Valentine's Day, and this year was no different with the first arriving on 13<sup>th</sup> February. This time last year we had 48 Avocets on the scrape at BMW, while this year we have just the three birds so far. However, last February was one of the warmest on record which helps explain the disparity.

Our Lapwings are back on territory in good numbers on the wet grassland and began displaying in early February. A single Cattle Egret arrived back a week or so, which is the usual time our breeding birds arrive. So, despite the poor weather, spring is very much just around the corner, and it's interesting to think what breeding birds I'll reporting back in the next edition of *Bird News*.

**Graham Jones, Site Manager at RSPB Dee Estuary Reserve**

## THE SOUTH MERSEY MARSHES (MOUNT MANISTY) Part 2

*First posted on 18/12/2019 on the Frodsham Marsh Bird Blog:*

*<https://frodshammarshbirdblog.wordpress.com/2019/12/18/the-south-mersey-marshes-mount-manisty-by-shaun-hickey/>*

A small group of birdwatchers is lucky enough to have access to the South Mersey Marshes once a month to carry out a BTO Wetland Bird Survey. We have three areas to cover which include: Mount Manisty, the Point and Ince/Frodsham Marshes. When a WeBs counter is issued an area on the Mersey Marshes to count birds, then it would be advisable to have a pair of decent wellies, because you will return across a marsh that has just been covered with the tide and is very, very wet. During the summer months the area of the marsh is waist high in vegetation so that can add to difficult walking conditions. Today I have been issued the task of counting the wildfowl and waders at Mount Manisty. The other site within the vicinity is Stanlow Point. This area is a sandstone outcrop on Stanlow Island and is part of the sandstone ridge that extends south-east to Whitchurch.

The counters' day begins 3-4 hours before high tide and we all meet at the oil refinery to be checked in with site security. From here we head to another part of the site to receive a visitor pass and another security check. We park our vehicles and get ready for the day ahead.

An oil refinery minibus takes us to the small ferry where we cross the Manchester Ship Canal and onto the Mersey Marshes. This part of the refinery is very much in use with oil tankers bringing crude oil in and other tankers taking the finished products out and beyond to the outside world. Once across the ship canal we pass through a locked gate and onto Stanlow Island. A small walk takes us past some disused buildings and down to the area where the River Gowy enters the Mersey Estuary after syphoning under the Manchester Ship Canal we have just passed over.

We usually approach the river where the Gowy enters a deep tidal channel and it is from this point we get to see what birds are feeding on the exposed mud. The usual species are Eurasian Teal with Common Redshank, Common Shelduck and Mallard. The Eurasian Teal can be in their 1000s during the winter months and to see them take to air in one huge flock is truly magical. After an initial briefing we head off in our various directions to cover the estuary. For me it's a six-mile round trip to Mount Manisty and Manisty Bay and to give you some perspective for people who are not familiar with this area, then the site is alongside the Manchester Ship Canal at Ellesmere Port, Cheshire and directly opposite from Liverpool Airport across the mile wide river.

We head around Stanlow Point where we are greeted with a huge expanse of exposed mudflats at low tide. Out on the mudflats the birds are well spread out feeding away, there are Dunlin, Red Knot, Grey Plover, Eurasian Teal, Eurasian Curlew and Common Redshank being the main species. Overhead a few hundred Northern Lapwings are fluttering about looking for a safe area to settle. There's quite a few Canada Geese along the marsh edges with a few more wallowing in the mud out on the estuary. Good numbers of gulls are present with Great Black-backed Gull standing out from the crowd. I say my farewells to Ian Coote and Ruth who are staying at the 'Point' and I head off across the saltmarsh with Mount Manisty far off in the distance.

A couple of Grey Wagtails is a good start to the day on the high tide mark right behind the 'Point'. The first area that I pass is a rather large flash of water tucked away in the corner of Manisty Bay against the ship canal bank. I often look at this place and think maybe it was once used as a type of duck decoy pond? There's a Great Egret patrolling the far bank with a dozen Little Egrets keeping guard and always on the lookout. A small group of Common Redshanks see me and take flight and circle around before heading over the high banks towards the ship canal. As I walk around the right-hand side of the flash I flush 2 Water Rails from the long grass plus a few Common Snipes. There are more egrets scattered over the marsh towards the river's edge with a total of 22 being noted.

I hug the canal bank to my left approaching the Ellesmere Port Boat Museum on the opposite side of the canal. There's a metal gantry perched on steel sheet piles that keep the ship canal separate from the marsh from here, I gain access on top of the gantry to see what's on the canal and have a good look over Manisty Bay. There are reasonable numbers of Black-headed Gulls here with a solitary Great Crested Grebe alongside a fishing Great Cormorant and more Mallards boosting their numbers.

Back down on the marsh the walk continues. Most of the waders and ducks are out on the river, or in the long vegetation out of sight from me. I can hear Eurasian Curlew and Common Redshank with the odd whistle of Wigeon. A fox is keeping its eyes on me occasionally standing on its hind legs to gain a bit of height over the long grass. A female Marsh Harrier is patrolling the edge of the marsh disturbing everything it approaches. I in turn push Chaffinch, Linnet and European Goldfinch flocks all along the canal bank always keeping a good distance away. The numbers of Wren that I'm flushing out is unreal, and really I should have kept a count, but an estimate of 70 is a conservative one.

Along the lower bank of the ship canal is a row of timber posts that must have been used to carry a pipe line in years gone by. These posts provide great plucking stumps for the local raptors. I always like to have a look for pellets and slowly rip them apart to see what's been on the menu (I guess Chris Packham would love it here).

I approach a large gully on my right-hand side; it's roughly 3-4m deep. This gully was once a main channel to Ellesmere Port docks before the ship canal was built and cut it off. Along the route of the gully is an old wooden tripod that was once a lamp post when the waterway was used

for shipping. These posts are also another great plucking post for raptors. The hollowed out timbers are a raptor catchment base with pellets, lots of seeds and shells from the crops of the dead birds. A quick glance over my shoulder and a large Common Buzzard is having a tussle with another raptor that I first take to be a Marsh Harrier, which I spotted a short while earlier. Not entirely convincing myself about its identity, I untangle my binocular strap that had wrapped around my camera strap and then both birds disappeared behind the canal bank out of sight. I continue onwards and westbound, the 'mount' is very much in touching distance now and I approach it to my left with a huge reed bed that I have to navigate first. A large mixed flock of finches was feeding on the floor, mostly Chaffinch, Linnet and European Goldfinch with a few Greenfinches, 4 Common Bullfinches with both Blue and Great Tits in good numbers too. Reed Buntings were everywhere and two more Water Rails are flushed with one calling as it flew into the reeds. At that moment I receive a text from Ian Coote who was at the 'Point', stating he had seen a large hawk with the possibility it was a Northern Goshawk which had flown over him and his fellow counter earlier and had put up all of the egrets, but more importantly it was now heading towards me! This got me thinking about the buzzard/harrier tussle I had seen earlier... was it/wasn't it? The last bird you would expect to see hunting the marsh would be a Goshawk.

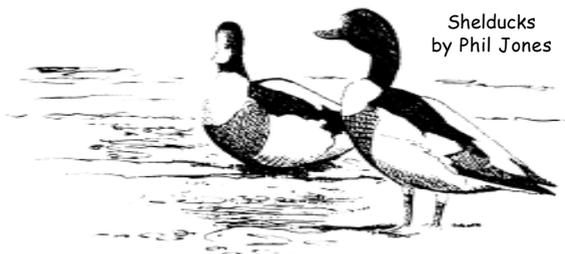
Mount Manisty is a man-made mound of rubble and spoil from the excavation of the Manchester Ship Canal 125 years ago this year. Archive photographs show the 'Mount Manisty' without a single tree on it. Today, the 'Mount' is completely covered in trees and bracken. I have battled my way to the top over many counts and years, but not today. On top of the 'Mount' is a trig point that was built by the Ordnance Survey when they mapped the UK in the 1930s. There's also another trig point at Stanlow Point.

As I walk along the bottom of the 'Mount' this is the first time I can see the water's edge up close. A flock of Red Knot and Grey Plover are feeding with Common Redshank and good numbers of Eurasian Teal which are dotted about. Right around the corner is a small beach where Rivacre Brook syphons under the canal before discharging into the River Mersey. It's strange to think that the small brook at the end of the road where I live ends its course at this point. There are some old workings which have been left next to the syphon head and they look like some kind of sluice gate? A wintering Common Sandpiper is bob-bobbing about with a few more Grey Wagtails along the waterline. More Common Shelduck are out on the river with good numbers of Eurasian Curlew being spotted on the river's edge towards Eastham Locks.

With high tide an hour or so away I start to head back as I don't want to be cut off by the tide and then have to wait for it to recede, or battle my way through trees and bracken instead.

More Eurasian Teal and Common Redshank are noted being pushed upriver by the ever approaching tide. This end of the 'Mount' is quite square in shape and as I turn the first corner there are two Carrion Crows mobbing a bird at ground level. At first I thought it was a Sparrowhawk, but when it takes flight right towards me less than 30m away it gains a bit more height and is most definitely the Goshawk which I and Ian *et al* had seen earlier - a dark, heavily-streaked individual and presumably a juvenile. It flew right through the trees and disappeared in a flash. I was very happy with that one as I've only ever seen them at a distance before and definitely a Mersey Marsh tick!

Back around the reed bed I just beat the tide and I head to one of my vantage points on the elevated canal bank. From this spot I can see where the large gully enters the Mersey Estuary. The tide has now filled the gully and covered the edge of the marsh. Wigeon, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Eurasian Teal, Eurasian Curlew, Common Shelduck and lots of Common Redshank are counted. A large group of Great Cormorants are watching the tide come and go as they stretch their wings out. I had forgotten about the looming clouds that are approaching from the south and the rain begins to fall. I wrap up and head back towards the 'Point' with my hood up and head down. A few Stonechats and Common Snipes are added to today's list and a few more Common Buzzards as well.



Shelducks  
by Phil Jones

A Sparrowhawk was keeping the finch flocks on edge alongside the canal bank and another raptor is patrolling the marsh, this time a fine Peregrine. I take cover against the canal bank to watch the hunt between predator and prey unfolds like I've done many times before. I'm always amazed at the speed of birds of prey and the area they cover in such a short time. It veers to my right over the canal bank out of sight. It then turns up on my left 100m away heading towards the river. Eurasian Teal, Common Redshank and Eurasian Curlew all fill the air, but it completely ignores them heading straight towards a flock of Woodpigeon. They typically panic, but the falcon hurtles straight through them heading out over the estuary towards the Dunlin flocks that are flying over the river. The Peregrine makes a stab right into them but with the poor visibility I lose sight of the bird and don't see it again. More Common Snipes are flushed on my way back across the recently flooded marsh with me almost standing on one.

By the time I arrive at the 'Point' the rain has settled in for the duration. The sight of 35,000 Dunlins landing on the recently exposed sand banks spread out as far as you can see, they are joined by Grey Plover, Red Knot, Common Redshank, Oystercatcher, gulls and geese. A superb spectacle to witness and such a privilege to have all this wonderful wildlife on our doorstep. I eventually meet up with Ian and we trudge back towards the ferry chatting and enthusing about the Goshawk and how well Liverpool FC is doing in the Premiership and how poor Chelsea (Ian's team) are.

WeBs is coordinated by the British Trust for Ornithology and they are always looking for extra counters to join us at this amazing place. If you would like to experience just some of the Mersey magic come and join us.

**Shaun Hickey**

**NB *The South Mersey Marshes (Part 1)*** by Shaun Hickey was posted on 28/11/2019: <https://frodshammarshbirdblog.wordpress.com/2019/11/28/the-south-mersey-marshes-by-shaun-hickey/>

## SUBMISSION OF 2019 RECORDS

### **Please submit your 2019 bird sightings as soon as possible!**

The preferred format is to receive an email with an attached simple spreadsheet (excel or csv file) with the minimum column headings of: **Date**, **Species**, **Site**, **Number**, plus **Comments** for extra detail or to put the record in context. A separate column with **breeding** information (preferring using BTO breeding codes) and another with a more precise **grid ref** (preferably 6-figure) is also appreciated.

**Note:** *Actual* dates and numbers are preferred if possible. Site list (gazetteer) is available in electronic format - simply download it from [www.cawos.org](http://www.cawos.org) (under Recording), or email me for the latest version. The same with the list of the Breeding codes - just email me.

*If you are at all unsure how to send in your records please get in touch - a few minutes on the phone could save both you and us a great deal of time!*

### **For further information or advice contact:**

**Sheila Blamire, Woodruff Cottage, Clamhunger Lane, Mere, WA16 6QG**  
**Tel: 01565 830168 Email: [sheilablamire@cawos.org](mailto:sheilablamire@cawos.org)**

**Email electronic records to: [submissions@cawos.org](mailto:submissions@cawos.org)**

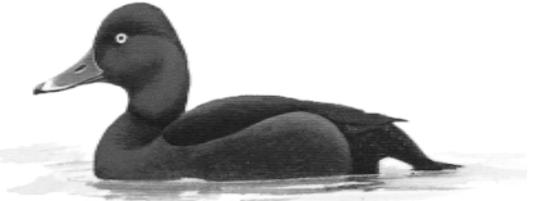
**Send (preferably by email) rarity descriptions to:**

**Jane Turner, Quaintways, Marine Road, Hoylake, Wirral,**  
**CH47 2AS Email: [rarities@cawos.org](mailto:rarities@cawos.org)**

# County Rarities

## FERRUGINOUS DUCK *Aythya nyroca*

These small *Aythya* ducks used to appear more frequently in the UK, but are now a true rarity from a decreasing breeding population in Eastern Europe. A rather compact duck, slightly smaller than the much more familiar and similarly shaped Tufted Duck, but with a rather steep forehead, giving the crown a pronounced central peak with a rather slender bill. They appear dark chestnut coloured rather than the brown of a female/immature Tufted Duck and have bright white undertail coverts, which are always more noticeable and extensive than in Tufted Duck. The male also shows a white iris, a darker upper back with a dull greyish bill with a small black tip. A male in eclipse plumage is duller but always has that white eyed appearance. Female Ferruginous Duck is browner with a brown iris but in flight both sexes show a contrasting defined white belly patch and undertail coverts which are more obvious from the diffuse, duller Tufted belly patch. Also, the upper wing in particular shows a distinctive white wing stripe extending across the outer primaries unlike Tufted which only just extends past the secondaries. 1CY birds are similar to female in plumage but show brown flecking to the undertail coverts but by mid-winter are difficult to separate from adults. Ferruginous Ducks tend to be a bit unobtrusive, not often in open water, preferring vegetated channels and reed bed edges.



There has historically been an issue with hybrids, usually Pochard x Ferruginous duck, although as both species range is shrinking, these occur much less frequently. Generally, Pochard like features of a rather sloping forehead, longer, bigger bill, often with an extensive black tip, occasionally grey plumage in the upper back and dark flecking in the undertail coverts are noticeable in these birds. Any apparent Ferruginous showing dark within the undertail coverts past mid-winter is most likely a hybrid.



Ferruginous Duck records in the UK have now become few enough for BBRC to now consider it a National rarity once more, so if you are lucky enough to find one, please send a good description with photographs to me please for onward transmission to BBRC.

**Hugh Pulsford**

## FERRUGINOUS DUCK IN CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL

The first mention of Ferruginous Duck in our area appears to be by Isaac Byerley in his *Fauna of Liverpool* (1856). This refers to birds shot at Newton-cum-Larton (Wirral) in November 1853 and at Weston near Runcorn in January 1854. In *Birds of Cheshire* (1900) Coward dismisses both these as, he wrote, "It is impossible to verify these records, as unfortunately neither of the birds appear to have been preserved".

I have been unable to trace any further local mention of the species until the early 1960s. Eric Hardy in the Bird Report of the Merseyside Naturalists Association for 1960-62 refers to a female diving with Pochard and Tufted at Winsford Flash on 28th December 1960. The observer credited with that sighting is the same referred to by Hedley Bell in his *Birds of Cheshire* (1962) as seeing a female at the same site but on two dates in February 1961. Bell's *Supplement* (1967) to his main work mentions a bird at Rostherne on 30th December 1962. During the period 1950-1968 reports of Ferruginous Duck were considered by the British Birds Rarity Committee (BBRC). It appears that none of these records was submitted for consideration.

BBRC ceased to consider Ferruginous Duck records from 1969, on the grounds that they were 'so commonly kept in captivity under free-flying conditions that it is impossible to estimate how many observations really relate to wild observations', although opposing views were expressed subsequently. The number of records has varied over subsequent years and the species was reinstated to the BBRC list from 1999 to 2005, removed from 2006 to 2016 and reinstated from 2017. When not on the BBRC list it was treated as a scarce migrant.



It is interesting to note that none of the records published in *Cheshire (and Wirral) Bird Reports* is for years when the species was on the BBRC list.

The first such record was on 2nd October 1971, when two observers saw an immature drake on Frodsham Sludge Pools. The second fell on 28th June 1976, when a lone observer watched a bird on Tabley Mere.

New Year's Eve 1980 saw the start of a sequence of sightings which ran from the winter of 1980/81 to 1986/87, all but one of which was thought to involve the same individual. First identified on Rostherne Mere as an immature drake, by the time of the last sighting of that winter on 3rd March 1981 it had acquired full plumage. During the winters of its stay the bird appeared to associate with the large Pochard flock which moved between sites along the Mersey Valley. Although the bird initially favoured Rostherne, as the winters passed it also ventured further afield, even though it was usually most often seen at Rostherne. There were no Cheshire reports away from Rostherne until single drakes were at Fourways Sand Quarry on 10th January 1982, followed by Winsford Bottom Flash on 20th November 1982 and Woolston on 13th and 17th November 1984. These are believed to refer to the Rostherne bird. The individual at Moreton on 11th November 1982 is known to have been a different bird by virtue of it being an immature drake: it remains the only Wirral record. Woolston also had sightings on 2nd and 3rd February 1985. Tatton Park was particularly favoured at the start of the 1986/87 winter, when the bird was often seen between November 9th and 29th and visited the adjacent Knutsford Moor. Presumably though it was absent from Tatton between November 16th and 20th when there were reports from Woolston, which was also favoured on 24th January and from 14th to 18th February 1987.

After its first winter, the dates of arrival and departure varied considerably. The earliest sighting was on 8th October 1981, but in 1986 it was first seen as late as December 7th. Last dates ranged from as early as 14th January in 1983 to as late as 9th March in 1986. All these dates are from Rostherne sightings. The range of the dates, from October to March, is, according to *Birds in England* (Brown & Grice, 2005), the range within which the majority of birds are found and coincident with their main migration periods.

The very last Cheshire sighting of this returning bird may have been on 18th February 1987 at Woolston, where it had been from February 14th. However, Woolston also recorded a drake on three dates from 29th July to 10th August 1987. If this was the returning bird then it had appeared quite outside its previous date range. Subsequently, records have been limited to a female at Rostherne on three dates 14th February to 5th March 1988 (also seen at Chorlton Water Park, Greater Manchester), a drake at Rostherne on eight dates 6th to 27th February 1991 and a first-winter drake at Woolston on 19th February 1995. Since then nothing!

With a single drake responsible for the large majority of the records outlined above, it seems likely that just seven or eight different birds have been recorded in Cheshire and Wirral. Whatever their origin, Ferruginous Duck truly is a rare visitor to Cheshire and Wirral.

**Steve Barber**

# Ringling News

Ringling plays an important part in developing our knowledge of birds. In this new 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 from other groups and/or individuals will be welcomed; contact Bob Anderson 01270 623044 or email [Robert@andersons.myzen.co.uk](mailto:Robert@andersons.myzen.co.uk).

## MID-CHESHIRE BARN OWL GROUP

In the end, Barn Owl breeding for 2019 throughout Cheshire was not quite as bad as previously feared, with 172 breeding pairs and 402 chicks being recorded; a decent return given the weather extremes during the year.

I'm always tempted to say that the start of any year is relatively quiet, while we wait to see what Mother Nature throws at us, and how that affects the forthcoming breeding activities of our Barn Owls. However, and repeating my comments from last year, this time of year is actually still a busy one for us. We have to check the many boxes we manage to see how they've coped over winter, and to repair, re-erect or replace any which have suffered.

This is particularly the case as, at the time of penning this report, storm Dennis is ravaging the whole of the UK with extremely strong winds and very heavy rainfall - both conditions which we and the Barn Owls complete hate. Without doubt we are going to see Barn Owl box damage which will add to our continuing work load.

But, notwithstanding the above, current indications are quite positive, with a number of pairs of birds having already been recorded. We can only hope, with fingers tightly crossed, that once 'Dennis' has passed through and similar extreme weather does not become the norm (as many doomsters predict), we can get down to some quiet, normal, conservation work.

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](http://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](mailto:cheshirebarnowls@gmail.com)**

## HILBRE BIRD OBSERVATORY (HIBO)

### Ringling November 2019 to January 2020

The winter period on Hilbre is usually a quiet period for ringling birds and the winter of 2019 to 2020 was no exception. Only 9 new birds were ringling in this period: 1 Redwing, 2 Blackbirds, 3 Song Thrushes, 2 Goldcrests and a Wren. The Wren was the first and only new bird ringling so far in 2020. The Goldcrests and the Redwings were migrant birds that were passing through the island in early November, but the Blackbirds and Song Thrushes may have been migrants. However, at least one of each could be claimed to be winter residents as they were re-trapped as well as being ringling. Like the rest of the Wirral, Hilbre has a history of foreign Blackbirds spending the winter in the company of UK residents. The origin of birds is confirmed by the information on the ring, but North European and Scandinavian Blackbirds tend to be significantly bigger than UK residents.

Despite the small number of new birds ringling, the winter of 2019/2020 has been interesting from the point of view of colour ring sightings of Pale-bellied Brent Geese. Quite a number of birds that

have wintered on Hilbre in previous years have been found this winter, as well as some new birds, never seen before. Twenty years ago Pale-bellied Brent Geese were rarely seen on Hilbre. Since that time the winter flock has been growing to its present total, which is in excess of 300 birds. This is a sustained development and may well be attributable to global warming.

As global temperatures have risen the winter climate on the northwest coast of England has become slightly warmer and damper, making it quite similar to the climate in Ireland where the Brent Geese have always wintered. The broadening of the wintering range under these circumstances seems like a natural progression. To support this idea the migration of Blackbirds breeding in the northwest of England has changed completely from the way it was in the 1950s and 1960s. A paper written by Iain Main, a local ringer, documented how Blackbirds in the Northwest were partial migrants with large numbers spending the winter in Ireland. Iain pointed out that this had all changed by the end of the 1980s when no more migration of Blackbirds to Ireland was observed. The assumption was that the climate in Northern England was now the same as the climate in Ireland; consequently there was no need to move because both locations were the same. The Pale-bellied Brent Geese were something like 20 years behind the Blackbirds in making this discovery.

We mentioned our Rock Pipit project in our last report. We have continued to try to catch Rock Pipts on Hilbre but, despite Rock Pipts regularly visiting the island during the winter, we have not caught any since September 2019.

**John Elliott, on behalf of the Hilbre Bird Observatory**

## References

Iain G. Main (2002) Seasonal movements of Fennoscandian Blackbirds *Turdus merula*, *Ringing & Migration*, 21:2, 65-74

## CHESHIRE SWAN STUDY GROUP

Since my last report in October, the swan study group has ringed a total of 52 swans including 42 cygnets, 1 third-year and 9 adults. These included 1 control and 1 retrap.

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

- Acre Dell Pools, nr Congleton: 74 on 26<sup>th</sup> Oct, 77 on 17<sup>th</sup> Nov, 76 on 15<sup>th</sup> Dec and 79 on 26<sup>th</sup> Jan.
- Burleydam Pool, nr Whitchurch: 15 on 13<sup>th</sup> Oct, 12 on 25<sup>th</sup> Nov and 8 on 9<sup>th</sup> Dec.
- Comber Mere, nr Whitchurch: 44 on 13<sup>th</sup> Oct, 26 on 17<sup>th</sup> Nov, 8 on 15<sup>th</sup> Dec and 8 on 13<sup>th</sup> Jan.
- Coole Pilate, nr Nantwich: 29 on 4<sup>th</sup> Nov, 28 on 9<sup>th</sup> Dec and 14 on 26<sup>th</sup> Jan.
- Doddington Mere, nr Nantwich: 33 on 13<sup>th</sup> Oct, 6 on 17<sup>th</sup> Nov, 10 on 29<sup>th</sup> Dec and 10 on 1<sup>st</sup> Jan.
- Trent and Mersey Canal, Middlewich: 31 on 17<sup>th</sup> Oct, 44 on 30<sup>th</sup> Nov and 62 on 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan.
- Neumann's Flash, Northwich: 27 on 13<sup>th</sup> Oct, 32 on 30<sup>th</sup> Nov, 12 on 15<sup>th</sup> Dec and 12 on 12<sup>th</sup> Jan.
- Sandbach Flashes: 9 on 13<sup>th</sup> Oct, 21 on 17<sup>th</sup> Nov, 23 on 15<sup>th</sup> Dec and 24 on 12<sup>th</sup> Jan.

The *Cheshire Swan Study Group Report* for 2019 should be available for view in March on the website (under Reports): <http://cheshireswanstudygroup.wordpress.com>

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

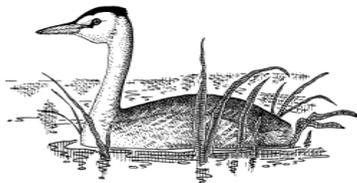
**David Cookson, Group Leader, 70 Rope Lane, Rope, Crewe, CW2 6RD**  
**Tel: 01270 567526. Email: [cheshireswans@gmail.com](mailto:cheshireswans@gmail.com)**

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

# One Man's Birding

## .....ON A WINTER AFTERNOON

Twice a year Nantwich NHS organises a 'bird count' - an unscientific but harmless bit of fun in which we try to find as many species as possible in our recording area. It does mean that we tend to roam around places we don't usually visit, and invariably something of interest (not necessarily in terms of unexpected visitors) does turn up.



This January, I found myself driving past a farm where a silage clamp had just been opened up. A sheer, clean yellow face looked as though it had been cut with a guillotine - and the Starlings flocked to it like flies to a honey pot. At any one time there might have been about fifty to a hundred of them hanging on to the face, and probing with their bills - before dropping off to join many more feeding on the spillage in front of the clamp. Some of these would then fly up to take their turn at the low yellow cliff; watching the to-and-fro movement between the clamp and the ground was fascinating.

A mile or two further on I pulled into a gateway leading to a freshly mucked field (is it my imagination, or are mucked fields harder to find these days?). Close at hand, Redwings were in constant movement across the ground, from one furrow to another. Yet, they were quite hard to make out. Viewed from behind, as the light faded on a winter afternoon, they were anonymous, well-camouflaged birds, their backs appearing a sort of mouse-grey so that their low scurrying foraging created an impression almost akin to small rodents.

I found this unexpected, because Redwings are really such attractive birds. Consider the facial pattern and eye-stripe when seen in good light, and it would not be too much to describe them as pretty. Certainly quite feminine, when compared with their relatives the Fieldfares - big, butch creatures by comparison, hopping about in macho fashion, owners of their particular bit of territory. I guess that the old Cheshire name of 'pigeon felt' for the Fieldfare acknowledges the size of them.

No Fieldfares in sight that day, but in complete contrast to the well-concealed Redwings were the Lapwings further down the field. The brilliant white of their underparts flashed whenever a group took to flight. (Why do they do this? Are they just neurotic? There can't be a birder in the country who hasn't twisted around, looking for a raptor that isn't there, before realising that all the other waders and waterfowl are quietly going about their business - as though to say "Oh, it's just that lot again...")

Several times part of the flock rose and flew around - never the whole lot together; each time I tried to make a count of the birds in the air, adding those still on the ground, and concluding that there were about 400 Lapwings present in total. Now I know I have mentioned this before, but it may be worth repeating. Years ago, John Craggs had a slide made up to represent a known number of birds in the air, and invited a group of experienced members of Liverpool Ornithologists

Club to estimate the numbers. None of us came even close; we all underestimated the size of the 'flock' by quite a margin.

The same was true this January day. When the Lapwings had settled down, I had a clear line of them in view along a slight ridge — and counted at least 600 birds visible, as opposed to my previous estimate of just over half that. I keep finding that the Prof was right....

They were there when I left - presumably settled down for the night (or until the next panic attack) - a bright, silvery-white line gleaming in the fading winter light. Neither they, the Redwings nor the Starlings had done anything for the bird count - but I had enjoyed some memorable birding moments on an initially unpromising afternoon.



**Bob Anderson**

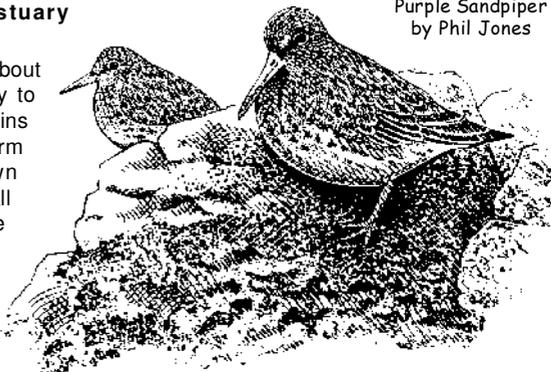
# Species Spotlight

## PURPLE SANDPIPER *Calidris maritima*

This article was first published in the February 2020 On-line Newsletter of Dee Estuary Birding ([www.deeestuary.co.uk](http://www.deeestuary.co.uk)).

Disappointment. That's what I remember about my trip to Hilbre 30 years ago specifically to see my first Purple Sandpipers. John Gittins (sadly no longer with us) had waved his arm towards the rocks "I've counted 26 down there this morning". I felt inadequate as all I could see were Turnstones. Purple Sandpipers can be difficult to see, they are well camouflaged against the seaweed and they seem to spend an awful lot of time hiding behind rocks, but eventually I realised what I thought was a large dumpy-looking Dunlin was in fact

what I was looking for. I don't know what I was expecting but with a name like Purple Sandpiper it was something a bit more exotic. Not many waders are named after a colour, but Grey Plovers are obviously grey, and Golden Plovers definitely show gold in their plumage especially in the sun, but this bird didn't show a hint of purple! Since that day I've seen lots of Purple Sandpipers and found out a lot more about them, and grown to love this hardy little wader - but I've still not seen any purple on them!



Purple Sandpiper  
by Phil Jones

### Why are they called Purple?

Despite the *Collins Bird Guide* making no mention of the colour, they ARE actually purple, but it's very subtle and rarely seen or photographed. It's more of a sheen which is only seen in certain light conditions. In the on-line version of this article Matt Thomas's photograph shows it really well.

### Hilbre Bird Observatory

The Hilbre Bird Observatory (HiBO) was founded in 1957. It was an exciting time as, up until then, little was known exactly where our waders went to after they left the Dee estuary, but the ringing activities of HiBO and other observatories were revolutionising our knowledge of bird movements. HiBO took a leading role in studying Purple Sandpipers and the first ever foreign recovery of a British ringed Purple Sandpiper was one ringed at Hilbre which was seen in southern Greenland in October 1964. Various other results of this work included finding out just how site faithful these birds are with colour ringing showing they kept on returning to Hilbre for up to 12 years. Catching these birds for ringing revealed that there were small differences in size, particularly of bill length, and it was noted that long-billed Purple Sandpipers predominated on west and northern coasts of the UK whilst short-billed birds predominated on the east coast. This gave a big clue as to where the birds were breeding as it was known Norwegian breeding birds had these shorter bills whilst Canadian breeding birds had the longer bills. But despite all this work not a single British ringed bird has ever been recovered in Canada and it wasn't until 2014 that it was at last confirmed that some British over-wintering birds did indeed breed in Canada, more of which below.

Craggs, in his Hilbre book (Ref 1), dedicates several pages to the Purple Sandpiper and is a source of much information I have used in this article, but this paragraph particularly intrigues me:

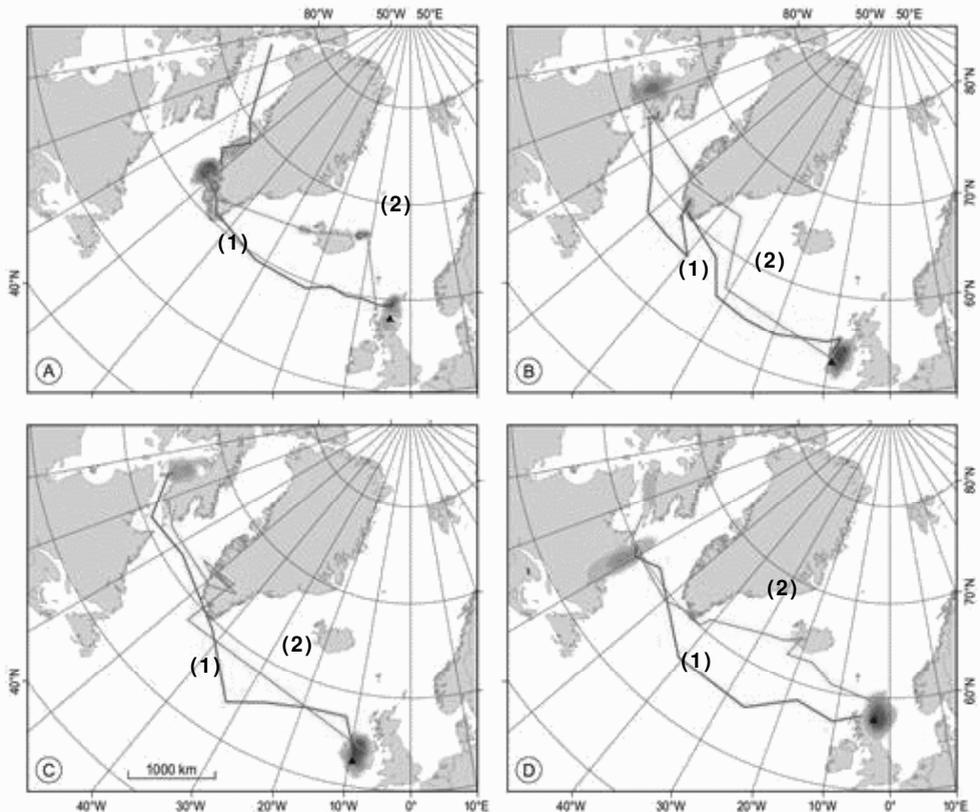
The departure of the Hilbre Purple Sandpipers in May is impressive and has been witnessed several times. Thus, on 13 May 1961 a party of these birds was observed to become silent, after excitedly chattering amongst themselves, and at that moment to rise into the air as a flock and after gaining a very considerable height to fly off in a northwards direction. This behaviour

suggests, although it does not prove, that the spring migration of Purple Sandpipers from Hilbre involves not a gradual movement out of the island but a long-range purposeful flight.

What a pity that nobody thought to take a compass bearing as we may have established whether they were heading towards southern Greenland, Iceland or Norway. Work with other wader species has enabled us to do just that (Ref 2).

## Migration

The migration of Purple Sandpipers is quite complex with different populations using different strategies. The populations in Iceland and west Greenland are sedentary, whilst those breeding in northern Canada travel the longest distance to north-west Europe, most to the western and northern coasts of the United Kingdom including Hilbre and north Wirral. Although this latter migration has been long suspected it was only when geo-locators became small enough to fit to small waders that this route was confirmed and a paper published in 2014 (Ref 3). The map below is taken from that paper showing that some birds staged in Iceland in spring (1), whilst a more direct return migration (2).



All Purple Sandpipers winter on north Atlantic coasts with some wintering the furthest north of any wader, including within the Arctic circle if they can find rocks free of ice. Those on the northern tip of Norway have developed a bigger digestive system than those wintering further south, allowing them to process more food and therefore generate sufficient heat to survive the winter (Ref 4).

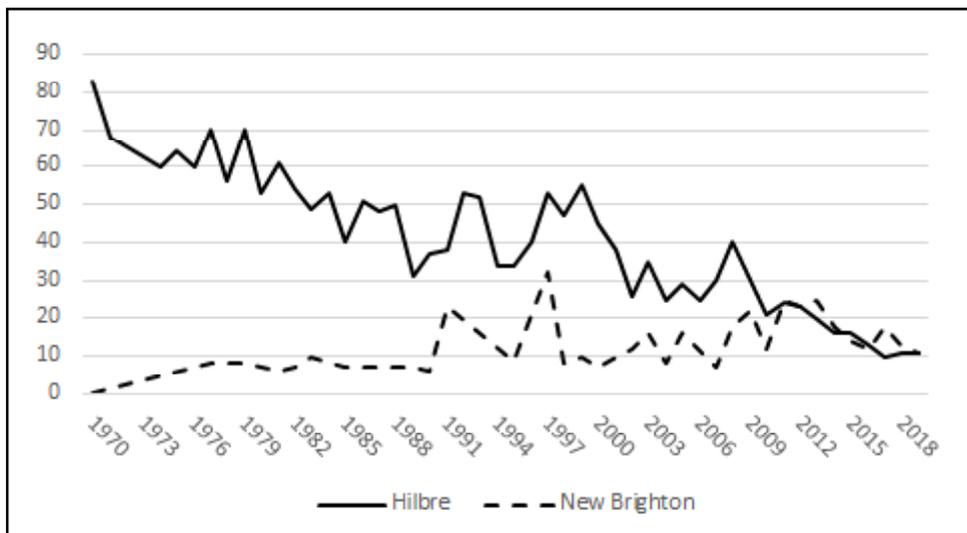
## Status

Because Purple Sandpipers feed on rocky coastlines, often far from the normal Wetland Bird Survey sites, they are not easy to count. However, the Non-Estuarine Waterbird Survey (NEWS) takes place every few years and that shows a steady decline in numbers. In 2011 an estimated

13,000 Purple Sandpipers were counted in the UK, and this had dropped to 8,900 by 2019 (Ref 5 and 6). The BTO Bird Atlas 2007-11 quoted a decline of 27% between 1984/85 and 2006/07. Nobody knows why numbers are declining. We don't know whether the population as a whole is dropping or they are just shifting their wintering grounds. It is well established that, presumably due to global warming, some waders are staying nearer their breeding grounds and it seems quite plausible that many of the Purple Sandpipers which breed in Canada are now only migrating as far as Iceland where there is a large sedentary population of around 90,000 birds - but at the moment that's just speculation.

At the end of the 20th century work on differing bill lengths suggested that the split between our wintering birds which breed in Canada or Norway was 75/25. We don't know if that is still the case, it would be very interesting to see if that ratio has changed to suggest, say, that it is the Canadian breeding birds which are now more likely to short-stop in Iceland, or further west, and perhaps Norwegian breeding birds are still migrating the much shorter distance to the UK.

### Purple Sandpipers at Hilbre and New Brighton Max Annual Counts 1970 to 2019



Locally the decline in numbers is very evident. The graph above shows the decline in annual max counts from Hilbre, and it seems that Purple Sandpipers in years to come could become a rare visitor, which would be sad. The graph for numbers at New Brighton suggests an increase but that is somewhat misleading. I'm not sure exactly when New Brighton Marine Lake was re-vamped with a new pontoon, and when waders started to use it as a high tide roost, but the first mention of it in the *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Reports* was in 2008. But since then that pontoon has become one of the most reliable sites to see Purple Sandpipers in the area, particularly on a spring tide with a strong wind which means the nearby rocks are swept by waves. Max counts were regularly above 20 for a few years but now even here has seen a decline to half that number. Before 2008 counts along that shore were very irregular as the birds would roost scattered anywhere between Leasowe, along to Fort Perch and even on the groynes off Egremont and Seacombe in the River Mersey. Interestingly the highest count recorded, 32 in 1997, was of birds sitting on the mud in the drained Marine Lake and I suspect this would have been during a gale when the empty Marine Lake would have been nice and sheltered.

Elsewhere, one or two Purple Sandpipers can turn up further west along North Wirral but 20 at Red Rocks in January 2003 were exceptional. One or two are sometimes with the waders roosting on the rocks at West Kirby Marine Lake, although recently that's a rare sight.

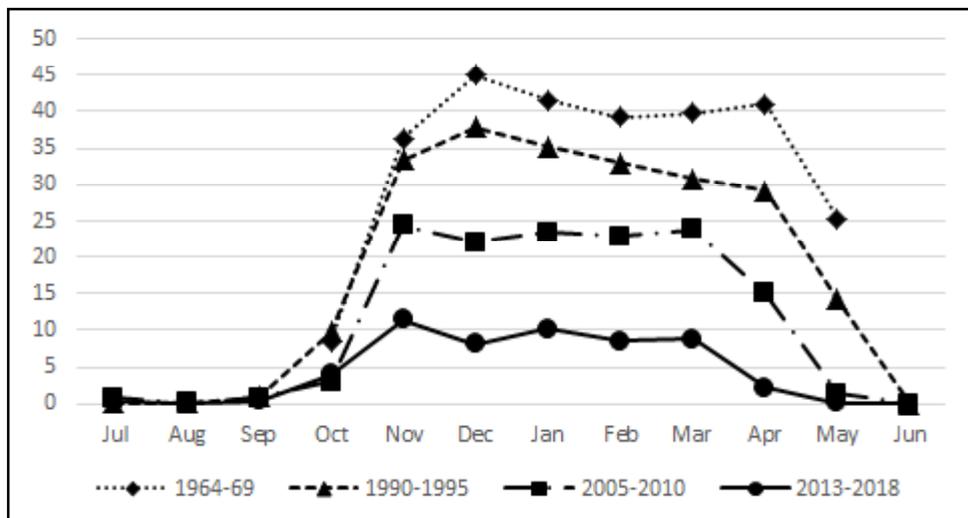
## Annual Distribution

Apart from one or two occasionally spotted in summer the first ones arrive in October and build up rapidly through November. Those numbers then stay pretty steady through the winter until they leave; colour ringing strongly suggests that it is very likely the same birds that stay throughout with very little interchange between sites within the country. It is not known whether there is any interchange between Hilbre and New Brighton, although it has certainly been suggested that during gales at least some of the Hilbre birds seek shelter in New Brighton Marine Lake.

### Purple Sandpipers at Hilbre

#### Average of max monthly counts over four 5-winter periods

Note: 1964/65 to 1968/69 only Oct to May figures shown



Apart from the significantly smaller numbers, the most obvious change in distribution over the years is the earlier departure and perhaps this is also linked to global warming. The table shows the April and May counts as a percentage of the winter average (Nov to Mar). In the 1960s all birds were still present in April, whilst less than a quarter of winter numbers are now still seen in April, and virtually none in May.

|                         | 1964-69 | 1990-95 | 2005-10 | 2013-18 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| <b>winter ave count</b> | 40.4    | 34.0    | 23.3    | 9.4     |
| <b>Apr %</b>            | 101.5   | 85.8    | 64.4    | 23.3    |
| <b>May %</b>            | 62.9    | 41.7    | 6.0     | 2.1     |

In some years one or two appear at Hilbre in the summer, nearly always in July. They don't stay long so must be on passage. Where do these birds come from as they are way ahead of the main influx which doesn't occur until October and November? WeBS data gives no hint of a summer passage but Bird Observatory reports suggest quite a strong passage through the country in July. To the west of us numbers on Bardsey Island in July can be as much as a third of those present in winter, interestingly counts at Bardsey are usually zero in June and in August drop to at least half the July peak. On Fair Isle the annual peak often occurs in July and early August. For example, in 2015 54 were counted on July 23rd and 80 on August 3rd. Numbers then dropped to single figures before 40 arrived in September. So there seems to be good numbers of Purple Sandpipers which arrive in the country in July and early August, they then move on before the main arrival September to November. I've not found any work done to establish where these birds come from. Possibly they are non-breeding birds from the Canadian population which perhaps fly only as far as Iceland for the breeding season before returning early. Perhaps the

more likely source for these birds is Norway, but we don't know. Another question is where are these birds going to? Some do winter on the Atlantic coasts of France and northern Spain and it would be interesting to know if these birds arrive back there in late summer. One thing for certain is that there is still an awful lot we still don't know about these birds!

**Richard Smith**

## References:

1. J.D. Craggs, *Hilbre the Cheshire Island*, 1982.
2. Peter Knight and Rose Maciewicz, Waders Heading Off, June 2019, <http://www.deeestuary.co.uk/news0619.htm#second>.
3. R.W. Summers *et al.*, Contrasting Trans-Atlantic Migratory Routes of Nearctic Purple Sandpipers *Calidris maritima* Associated with Low Pressure Systems in Spring and Winter, *Ardea*, 1 July 2014.
4. *BTO Migration Atlas*, 2001.
5. Waterbird Population Estimates, *British Birds*, July 2011.
6. Population estimates of wintering waterbirds, *British Birds*, March 2019.
7. *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Reports (1964 to 2017) - CAWOS*.
8. *Bardsey Island Bird Observatory Reports (various)*.
9. *Fair Isle Bird Observatory Reports (various)*.

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# Conservation News

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

## CONSERVATION NEWS FROM STEVE TURNER

I hope you all had a good Christmas and Santa brought you what you asked for. Although we have had a wet winter I do not think we can complain about the frosts, we can count them on one hand. Whilst we all say why can't we have winters like we used to, to a certain degree I think that also. But going back to when I was a lad back in darkest Norfolk, I can remember picking up bagfuls of dead birds that had simply starved to death in the frost and snow and I am not talking about one or two I am talking in the hundreds. At least now with more people ensuring our feathered friends get a good meal, those scenes are in the past and with the warmer weather, they have a bit better time, many of you will be in the same boat I am, the birds cost more to feed than I do.

Here at Weaverham we have plenty of House Sparrows and Starlings and a good spattering of both Blue and Great Tits. I have a pair of Coal Tits that can eat their own weight in sunflower hearts a day and a regular flock of 20+ Long Tailed Tits that come for the fat balls, if the Sparrows and Starlings have left them any. Over the last week a pair of Goldcrests has been in the garden every day, all day. We also have a regular visit from a pair of Wrens and the Robins are so tame when I am gardening I have to be careful I don't tread on them. My next door neighbour has Woodpigeon on eggs.

Again, whilst you are out and about please keep your eyes open for the dark ones. As nesting season approaches they will be out and about nest spotting. Please trust your instincts; if you think something does not 'look right' you are probably correct. Make a note of any descriptions, numbers of vehicles and make and colour, but PLEASE do not put yourselves at risk. We all have state of the art optics and we all (I hope) carry a notebook, use them and keep you out of harm's way.

In the National press, Cage Bird magazines and Shooting (yes believe it or not) magazines there are continuing reports of birds of prey being poisoned - this is not accidental, it is deliberate. If you come across bait or animal carcase that you think may be poisoned PLEASE do not touch it.

Report the matter to the Police and stress that you think poison may be involved. Many of the substances used are highly toxic and many can be absorbed through the skin and they WILL result in a horrible death, by the time the substance has been analysed to find out what antidote to use it WILL be too late. Please remember that the toxins used have a legitimate use for spraying crops when diluted at perhaps one part chemical to a thousand litres of water. These idiots are using it highly concentrated and undiluted. Police scenes of crime officers have all been trained to handle these noxious materials, leave it to them. Please keep yourselves safe when out and about. I keep harping on but PLEASE DO NOT EXPOSE YOURSELVES TO DANGER.

Doom and gloom out of the way, I hope you all have a good spring and perhaps in the droves of feathered friends getting ready to invade will be that lifer that we all need. As a footnote has anyone seen any Ring-necked Parakeets? They seem to be colonising everywhere else but here. I know they are not native but they are very impressive.

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

## **WARRINGTON AREA**

**Woolston Eyes:** The big news from me is that all the money is now in place to fund the development of the new wetland on No.4 bed at Woolston Eyes. We already had money from the Carbon Landscape Project, £100,000, our share of the £2 million + granted to a number of projects in the North West by the Heritage Lottery Fund. This is to cover the cost of Phase 1 and a week or so ago the funds for Phase 2 were confirmed. This has been the result of lengthy negotiations with Natural England with payments being received in due course from the Rural Payments Agency. In addition, WECG will receive as part of the whole project annual payments for 10 years under a Countryside Stewardship scheme to cover management of the wetland. This will amount to a total of £140,000. This is a major project that will treble the area of wetland at Woolston Eyes!

Our contractor has already begun work on Phase 1, clearing a large area that was covered with acres of giant hogweed. The water table is currently very high on the bed and it is possible that work may have to be suspended until the spring. The exposed mud is attracting large numbers of Black-headed Gulls and up to 50 feeding Lapwings.

Much hard work has been involved in reaching this point with considerable support and encouragement from the landowners, Peel and the Manchester Ship Canal Company. Several officers from WECG have liaised, negotiated and had numerous meetings over the past few years with significant input also from Natural England and the RSPB who designed the wetland. WECG has received a lease on the land from Peel and this will hopefully be signed soon and the funding from the RPA officially accepted.

These are indeed exciting times for Woolston and wetland birds in the county. More details will appear on the Woolston Eyes website <https://www.woolstoneyes.com/> as the development progresses. Health and safety regulations will apply during the works so access to No.4 bed could be restricted.

**Brian Martin, Warrington Area Representative**

## **WIRRAL AREA**

**Paramotors on the Dee Estuary:** Paramotors (also known as powered paragliders) continue to be a source of much bird disturbance, as well as causing a serious public safety risk on the Dee Estuary, North Wirral and adjacent shoreline.

On November 18th 2019 one was observed by Colin Wells (ex-RSPB Dee Estuary Manager) flying along the edge of Parkgate and Burton Marsh disturbing all the roosting wildfowl and waders. He was purposefully flying at the roosting birds, circling above them and then dive bombing them!

On January 19th 2020 no less than seven were seen by several people over the course of the day, sometimes together and sometimes in smaller groups. They were flying low over the marshes causing much disturbance to all the birds there. In the afternoon one dropped very low over the marsh and appeared to be deliberately disturbing Knot and Pink-footed Geese, off Target

Road (Lower Heswall). Earlier in the day one landed on Little Eye whilst his mates circled low overhead, i.e. over the many people walking to Hilbre and back.

These people are continually and blatantly breaking both Wildlife and Civil Aviation Authority regulations. Photographs were and have previously been taken, but as they have no identifying marks it is virtually impossible to prosecute. Unfortunately, it will probably take an accident with somebody badly hurt, or worse, before any effective action will be taken.

**Richard Smith, Wirral Area Representative**

**Editorial note:** Read the article "Birdwatchers and conservationists are raising their concerns over 'unbelievably dangerous' powered paragliders on Wirral's coastline." <https://www.paramotorclub.org/topic/10663-flying-in-the-wirral-area/> It was written on **12 January 2017!!!**

## CONSERVATION REPRESENTATIVES

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

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## WOOLSTON EYES CONSERVATION GROUP

Excerpts from WECG *Newsletter* January 2020.

### New Wetland on No.4 Bed

After several years of planning and negotiations we are pleased to announce that Phase I of a new wetland on No. 4 bed has begun to the south of the Loop. The wetland has been designed by the RSPB and our contractor has already cleared a large area that had been covered by acres of Giant Hogweed. Work is scheduled to continue until March, although this may be subject to review given the current high water table on No.4. We have been working closely on this project with the landowners, Peel Holdings and the Manchester Ship Canal Company, both of whom have been very supportive throughout. This has led to WECG being granted a lease on the land. This is an exciting development which, if all goes to plan, will treble the amount of wetland at the Eyes, with funds for all of the project now secured. Vital help and expertise has also been received from the RSPB, Natural England, Defra and many others, including the landowners.

### Not Such Good News

While illegal activities on the SSSI such as rough-riding motorcycling, shooting and fishing have reduced significantly in recent years, serious incidents still occur from time to time. In late November, for example, a group of men believed to be badger baiters appeared at Woolston Weir with dogs, and spent some time on No.2 and No.1 beds. This was during daylight hours and by all accounts they were quite brazen, playing hunting horns and generally making no attempt to keep a low profile. The incident was reported to the Police Rural Crime Unit, which is investigating this serious matter.

## **New Feeding Station on No.3 Bed**

In the past few months much work has been done to create a new feeding station in front of the Hogg Hide on the south bank of No.3 bed next to the viewing platform. It is already attracting lots of birds, with a growing list of species that can be found on the white board inside the hide.

## **Reserve Management**

Dan Gornall and his team of volunteers have worked hard in the past year to improve habitats across the Eyes, including removing large amounts of Himalayan Balsam, coppicing trees which is already having benefits for Willow Tits, reed bed improvements and the construction of rafts to attract more breeding Black-headed Gulls, whose numbers have been declining at the Eyes.

## **Sightings**

Late in 2019 a Starling roost formed on No.1 bed, with spectacular murmurations. At its peak 100,000 were thought to be present, and they attracted many birds of prey, including a long-staying Hen Harrier. The roost moved on to No.3 bed and reduced in size to about 10,000. At the time of writing, however, it appears to have broken up completely.

2019 was excellent for birds, with a total of 154 species recorded, the highest number for many years. In the breeding season the highlight was a brood of Garganey seen and photographed on the Reserve, the first brood seen in Cheshire since 1960! Our Black-necked Grebes continue to do well, with at least 10 pairs fledging up to 10 young despite the very wet June and July. Other wildfowl had a mixed year, however, with Pochard breeding well including one amazing brood of 17 young.

There has, though, been a huge fall in their wintering numbers. Tufted Duck also had a good 2019 with big flocks present in winter and many broods seen. Mallard, however, had a poor year, as did Little Grebe and Great Crested Grebe, both of which fledged few young. Other fine records included Bearded Tits (the first since 2007), Bar-tailed Godwit (the first since 2011), Wood Sandpiper and Scaup. There were four records of Kittiwake, a Black Tern and an Osprey. Two unexpected species were a Little Bunting, ringed on No.1 bed, only the second-ever at Woolston, and an Iceland Gull of the race *kumlieni*, a Reserve first. Finally, on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2020 Dan Owen found and photographed another new Woolston species, a Tundra Bean Goose, which is a rare visitor from Arctic Russia. Field notes and photographs have been submitted to the County Recorder.

In the late autumn we received some interesting film from underwater cameras at Woolston Weir of salmon and an otter, confirming how clean the Mersey has become.

**Brian Martin**

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## **MERSEY ESTUARY**

Liverpool City Region is committed to be a renewable energy centre, hence the number of wind farms in Liverpool Bay. They are also looking at harnessing power from the huge tidal range around Liverpool. They have appointed Shaun Benzon as Head of Tidal Project Development. He is looking at three potential tidal power options. Two tidal lagoons: one off shore from the Wirral coast and one connected to the Wirral shore. The third idea is for a tidal barrage along the same route as the last one that was proposed and abandoned in 2012. It is still very early stages, but they have done some modelling which shows impacts on the Mersey Estuary of all three options, and the tidal lagoons would have impacts on the Dee Estuary, all be it seemingly quite small changes in water levels.

The technology has moved on from the last proposal for a barrage. They would have far more control over the flows through the barrage and would generate power on incoming and outgoing tides, mimicking the natural tidal cycle very closely, albeit with a delay. Shaun thinks this new technology would drastically reduce the environmental impact that the previous proposal would have had. Whether that is so it is hard to say, especially as nothing has been built on this scale before using such technology. However, with the current political push to reduce our carbon emissions the possibility of a scheme to generate tidal power is more likely than ever. CAWOS will be keeping a close eye on these proposals and will keep you informed as they develop.

**Dermot Smith, Mersey WeBS Co-ordinator, Email: [dermot.smith71@gmail.com](mailto:dermot.smith71@gmail.com)**

# CAWOS News

Council has met twice since the last *Bird News*, in November when we were not quorate and then in January.

I am pleased to say a warm welcome to six new members: J. Williams & family, D. Hulme & family, David Knass, Carl Tyson, Philip Geiger & family and John Chrystal & family. Most members are aware by now that the membership fee was increased, as agreed at the Annual General Meeting in March last year, to start in January 2020. Members were asked to change their standing order to the new amount, however, a number of members still re-joined submitting the old price. This has added extra work for our Membership Secretary, having to contact people to top up their fee. So if you are one of these members please send the balance as soon as possible, with clear notification of your name and address if sending by post. Membership currently stands at 316 but this number includes about 65 people who have not paid as yet or underpaid, as mentioned above, please join up or let the Membership Secretary know you are not re-joining.

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) is only a week away and the agenda and minutes of the last meeting have been circulated. The AGM requires 20 members to attend for it to be quorate and at our last Council meeting we discussed the issue raised at last year's AGM about members being able to have a proxy vote or send their vote by email. After much discussion it became clear that although it is feasible it would involve quite a lot of extra work. The AGM notice needs to go out at least 21 days before the meeting, while nominations for election of officers must be made to the secretary 7 days before the meeting. This would give little time to arrange and extra effort involved for the Secretary. So Council decided the best way forward was to reduce the number of members required at the AGM to make it quorate by reducing 20 to 15. This will be put to the meeting next week as a minor change to our Constitution.

Council has continued to discuss the issue of the database for our records as at the end of the year Sheila and Geoff are giving up this role after many years of service. The main options are to use Birdtrack, a British Trust for Ornithology system, or to reconsider rECOrd, the Local Record Centre system, which we explored a number of years ago but decided at that time not to go with it. BirdTrack is now used by many counties to prepare their annual Bird Report so a meeting has been set up early in March to meet up with the county recorders of Shropshire and Staffordshire and their relevant people. CAWOS members include Geoff and Sheila, Phil Hampson, who has agreed to take on the role of project managing the move to the new system, Hugh Pulsford, County Recorder, and Andy Livermore, Systematic Editor, both involved in the preparation of the Bird Report. Comparison will then have to be made between the two systems and a decision taken in the coming few weeks. That is however only the start, plans will have to be made on the way forward to start live after 1st January 2021. We urgently need someone to take on the role of managing the data and others will be needed to enter records into the database, so if you are prepared to give up a little of your time to do this and/or you are a birder with IT skills, please offer your services to Phil Hampson ([philhampson@kawos.org](mailto:philhampson@kawos.org)).

Richard Sturman, who some of you will know as he has organised the speakers for our indoor meeting for the last 5 years, has decided to step down from Council. Richard has done a great job and he is willing to continue to sort out the programme for the coming year, but would like his replacement to work alongside him. So if you fancy taking on this role please contact Richard and discuss it with him so you know what is involved ([richardsturman@kawos.org](mailto:richardsturman@kawos.org)).

The compilers for the 2018 *Bird Report* were sent their data back in November last year by Sheila with the usual clear guidelines and have been working away to the end of January deadline to get their reports to Andy Livermore, the Systematic Editor. I gather there are still a couple outstanding so please keep working otherwise you will slow the process down!! Good progress is being made but there is still plenty more to do.

Lastly on the Conservation front some members are continuing to work to try to keep habitats for birds. Changes in legislation last year has made it somewhat easier to make a case for building on green belt. One such example is Mere Farm Quarry, Chelford where an independent planning inspector ruled in favour of keeping it as it was, namely green belt land in October 2017. However,

the proposer has resubmitted a building plan to use the site as a Water Sports facility has re-applied under the more relaxed rules and despite objections from ourselves and many of the local Councils Cheshire East Council is recommending it should go ahead. The final strategy Board meeting is due on 26<sup>th</sup> February. We just hope that the local councillors against the project will be listened to.

So I hope that gives you a flavour of the issues that Council are dealing with and please if you have any expertise on these issues or just want to help please get in contact with our Chairman (davidsteventon@cawos.org).

## **THE SOCIETY NEEDS YOU!!!**

**Ted Lock, Secretary**

## **MEMBERSHIP**

As I write the membership of the Society stands at 315. A surprising number many will think when we seem to get only between 20 and 35 at our regular indoor meetings. The membership total has been boosted by 6 new members and one person re-joining since October, welcome all. Richard Sturman has done so well in providing us with such a varied and often thought-provoking programme. Who can forget the magnificent work of Mark Sisson's, the photography of Richard Steel or Keith Offord's talks? All different but each unique and simply superb. If you haven't been to one of the talks do come along and enjoy them with us.

This year we had to increase our membership rates for the first time in many years. We have had many members, 65, who have not amended their Standing Orders; by now you will have received a letter about this, can I please ask that if you haven't paid the amount due could I please ask you to do so. If your Standing Order was incorrect with the wrong amount, please have it amended for next year.

The current membership rates are: single Adult £15, Family £18.75 and Juniors are free up to the age of 21 or 25 if in full-time education. This represents great value with a free copy of the *Bird Report*, 3 x *Bird News* a year (that has to be one of the best internal Society/Club publications - thanks Sheila), and a wonderful programme of talks. I genuinely believe that is tremendous value for the subscription costs.

Each time I write the membership report I mention Standing Orders; we currently have 60% of members who pay their subscription by SO, if you don't would please consider doing so. Please email me memsec@cawos.org, or write to PJ Hampson, Membership Secretary, 2 Winsfield Road, Hazel Grove, Cheshire, SK7 6ES, or alternatively give me a call 07545 465069 and I will be happy to send you a form. It is very easy if you use online banking to set up a Standing Order without the need to visit the bank. Our bank details are NatWest, Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society, Sort code: 01-09-69, Account: 91769647, using your name as a reference. We can also accept payment by Bank Transfer, just use the bank details mentioned previously and use your name as the reference. I would ask that you email me, and I can amend the records accordingly to reflect this. It may seem a trivial matter that I keep mentioning this, but it is becoming increasingly difficult and time consuming to deposit cheques. Those of you who bank with NatWest may well be aware that they have removed the Quick Deposit system, it now means queuing often for a long time. Using the SO or Bank Transfer payment method also saves you writing a cheque and the associated postage.

Many of us use email as a correspondence method, 261 of our members have given us theirs. This means that when we need to communicate with you there is no cost, however, using the postal system costs us nearly £1 each time. Your email address is totally secure and confidential between CAWOS and yourself, we do not ever share them with any other organisation outside our Society. Just email me at **memsec@cawos.org** with your name and I can update the records. It is very important for us to try and save money, we do have a very tight budget, superbly managed by John Patterson, our Treasurer.

I apologise to new members for my prolonged absences over the last 4 years from meetings due to my health issues, hopefully these are behind me now and I will be a regular attendee. If you would like to discuss any aspect of your membership, please do come and speak to me. Any Council member can point me out. All my contact details are in this note and I'm always happy to chat and help with anything to do with CAWOS.

**Phil Hampson, Membership Secretary**

# **CAWOS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 6th MARCH 2020**

## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR 2019-20**

This report covers the period from the last AGM on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019, up to the current AGM on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2020. There have been five Council meetings since the last AGM, in April, July, September and November 2019 and in January 2020. These covered the usual topics of habitat management at Frodsham Marsh; Rostherne Mere; progress with the *Bird Report* for 2017 (now published); grades and rates of membership, postal voting and quora at meetings. There was also discussion about the proposed Water Sports development at Mere Farm Sand Quarry. The original plan was clearly rejected by an external Government Inspector reviewing the developer's appeal at a public meeting in September 2017. Despite this, the developer put forward revised plans, to which we have objected again. These and other business are reported by Ted Lock in the CAWOS News section of *Bird News* and in the Secretary's report to the AGM.

Richard Sturman has continued to set up the speakers for our winter programme of indoor meetings. The talks have been about both foreign and UK birds, the scientific and the entertaining: March 2019 - Conor Jameson spoke after the AGM about 'Looking for the Goshawk', he had been scheduled to do this after the 2018 AGM, but we had to postpone that meeting due to bad weather; October - James Pearce-Higgins, the Director of Science at the British Trust for Ornithology, spoke about 'Birds and Climate Change', he made the science behind the changes look easy; November - Gary Jones spoke about Wales under the title 'From Mountains to the Sea', this talk was preceded by a short Extraordinary General Meeting to vote through the approval of the small changes to the Constitution about membership types and rates; December - Keith Offord spoke about 'An Indian Winter'; January 2020 - Richard Steel took us to northern Scandinavia inside the Arctic Circle in a talk entitled 'Beyond 66.5 North'; February - Mark Sisson took us on a journey 'From Alaska to Argentina, Wildlife through the Americas' covering bears, salmon and arctic foxes as well as roadrunners and flamingos; March - concluding the programme at the AGM, Dermot Smith is talking about 'Mersey Estuary's Birds'.

The *Bird Report* for 2017 was distributed in December 2019. Thanks once again to the Systematic List Editor, Andy Livermore, for bringing new ideas to the table. The report size changed, from A5 to B4, and there was much more use made of colour, from page headings and species names to histograms and more than 70 species photographs, collated by Mark Woodhead. Thanks also go to Dave Bickerton in Lancashire, who did the desk-top publishing work to interweave the photographs and pull the whole package together before it all went off to the printer. We are still looking for a volunteer to perform the production/project manager role of collecting all the contributions together (systematic list and all the other articles) to go to the desk-top publisher. Work on the report for 2018 is well underway with a plan to publish in the autumn of 2020. We are gradually catching up, aiming to return to the practice of publishing about 12 months following the end of the year being reported.

From an organisation perspective, we seem to be holding our own. Membership is stable and we have been getting a few new volunteers to fulfil some roles. David Hiley has been appointed to be our representative on the Dee Estuary Conservation Group (Tony Parker is already our representative on the Mersey Estuary Conservation Group). Barry Jordan has volunteered and has been co-opted onto Council from the January meeting. Thanks go to all Council and subcommittee members for their work during the year.

**David Steventon, Chairman**

## **SECRETARY'S REPORT FOR 2019-20**

The Chairman has touched on most of the key points during the year. I will make a number of additional thanks to people who supported the various needs of CAWOS, in addition to those serving as Council members.

Steve and Gill Barber have, over the last 4 years, spent hours birding at Mere Farm Quarry and preparing rebuttals to the building of a Water Sports Centre on the site. Despite all our efforts, in the latest proposals the Cheshire East Council are supporting the case for it to go ahead. The final decision will be made at the Strategic Planning Board meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> February. Our hopes are with the local Councillors who have objected to it all along.

The wind farm on Frodsham Marsh has been another project which CAWOS has been involved in for around 10 years. The wind farm is now functional and work has been, and is being done, via the Habitat Creation Management Group where our representative is David Norman. David like others has given his time to help keep the marsh a place for the birds to come to feed and roost. The main issue seems to be controlling the thistles on the site.

Mike Hems also needs a thank you for keeping the CAWOS website functioning from his home in Scotland.

The Chairman mentioned some recent appointments of CAWOS representatives to the Dee Estuary Conservation Group and the Mersey Estuary Conservation Group. These groups have a very important function as guardians of the two major rivers with largest coastal areas for birds. These are the most important sites in the county where development or placing of tidal barrages could have a major impact on bird life.

I would also like to thank our Membership Secretary, Phil Hampson who, despite major surgery to his back last year and again this year, has maintained his role of collecting subscription from members. This year he has had to deal with the subscription increase where a large number of members paid by standing order but at the old rate. It does make one wonder if members do not read the messages sent out in *Bird News*. I am pleased to say that Phil is making a speedy recovery.

As an aside, the *Bird News* Editor would like to thank all the regular contributors, who help to maintain the quality and appeal for this newsletter. But, would like to make a plea to all members to contribute in some way, even a short note or comment would be welcomed.

Richard Sturman is stepping down from Council after 5 years of organising our indoor talks, he has done a great good job in bringing some excellent speakers to CAWOS. Richard will stay in this role with the plan to work alongside his replacement, assuming we can get a volunteer!

A major issue facing Council, which we have been aware of for almost 2 years is the retirement of Sheila and Geoff Blamire from their role of data handling at the end of **this** year. Council has been pontificating for the last 2 years on the available options. Realistically there are only two - BirdTrack or rECOrd. Early on Council made a decision to discuss the way forward with Geoff and Sheila with David Steventon taking the lead. Any discussion was small, limited and took several months to happen. With hindsight, the priority should have been to find someone to takeover, particularly after several reports from Geoff highlighted this. Council learned that some counties were using BirdTrack to prepare their *Bird Report*. In November 2018 David agreed to set up a meeting with Shropshire who use BirdTrack; almost 1 year later contact was made and a meeting is now scheduled for early March to learn from other users' experience. So we now have only 9 months to make a decision on a database, then we need somebody to project manage the way forward, and decide on the input of records from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021. Who is going to do these tasks? Later in 2021 there will be the need to plan getting data collated in a suitable format for the *Bird Report*. Having managed to get a good Systematic Editor for the *Bird Reports*, we are working hard to catch up; having got 2016 and 2017 out we are working on 2018 and hope to get the 2019 data, but after that is the great unknown at present. It is very depressing that we may end up getting behind again. So we do need people with birding experience and IT skills to offer their time and support to help us continue the commitment CAWOS has to produce the annual *County Bird Report*. The future at this time does not look bright so CAWOS needs your help.

**Ted Lock, Secretary**

## **TREASURER'S REPORT FOR 2019**

I have pleasure in submitting the audited accounts of the Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society for the year ended 31 December, 2019. These accounts show a surplus for the year of £524 on our General Fund, before a donation of £400 to A W Boyd Observatory (Rostherne) to help towards the construction of a bird hide.

Membership subscriptions for the year, which amounted to £4,570 (inclusive of Gift Aid), were down slightly on the previous year. Uniquely, two *Bird Reports* (2016 and 2017) were published in the year and this has resulted in a larger than usual advertising income. Database searches at £945 were well down on the previous year (£1,785 in 2018) but demand for these searches is

outside our control. Attendances at our indoor meetings have remained steady during the year but the cost of speakers at £899 (£680 in 2018) reflects the increasing cost of attracting good presenters.

The *Bird Report* expenditure of £3,007 appears to be much lower than in the 2018 accounts (£3,943). This is partly due to the writeback of surplus provisions for the 2016 and 2017 reports. In particular, typesetting costs for the 2017 report were well down on previous years. Other administration items, such as room hire and insurance, continue to remain steady.

Considering that database income was down by £840 compared to last year, the results for the year are very satisfactory and our balance sheet shows that reserves have increased by £283 to a total of £41,069, when interest on our cash balances are taken into account.

Finally, I would like to welcome our new auditor, Alex Brinninkmeijer, and to thank her for auditing and reporting on this year's accounts.

**John Patterson, Treasurer**

## MEMBERSHIP EMAILS

We are increasingly using email to contact members, particularly with important notices and about the programme of talks. We are pleased that we are in touch with most people this way, because it is efficient and very cost-effective! Please let the Membership Secretary know your email address and please keep us up to date with any changes.

**Membership Secretary: Phil Hampson at [memsec@cawos.org](mailto:memsec@cawos.org)**

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# Projects and Surveys

## THE WETLAND BIRD SURVEY (WeBS)

**A vacancy has become available for a counter(s) to take on any or all of the following:**

Billinge Green Pools SJ681712    Pickmere SJ681770    Shakerley Mere SJ732711

Anyone can take part, even beginners to birdwatching. Nor do you have to be a BTO member. Unlike many bird surveys, you don't have to know bird songs or calls to carry out WeBS Counts - just the ability to identify common waterbirds.

The survey involves visiting a local wetland site once a month throughout the winter and count the waterbirds there. We do welcome counts from all months of the year but the main period we ask our counters to concentrate on is September through to March, these are referred to as the Core Count Dates. You can enter your own counts onto the web site or send to me and I will happily do it. If you are interested then I will go through the process of setting you up with a BTO ID allowing you full access.

If you are interested, or would be willing to help, please let me know and we can have a chat. The BTO has a very comprehensive website for WeBS and it has everything that needs to be known about WeBS and I can point you towards this should you be interested. Please contact:

**Phil Hampson, WeBS BTO Local Organiser for Cheshire North**  
**Tel: 07545 465069 Email: [pjhampers@me.com](mailto:pjhampers@me.com)**

# BREEDING WADERS OF WET MEADOWS 2020

## Help us monitor the long-term population changes of our lowland breeding waders

### Why lowland waders of wet meadows?

The purpose of this survey is to assess the importance of both existing and new wet grassland and also other breeding wader habitats in England (as provided by agri-environment schemes) for declining breeding birds such as Curlew, Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe. The survey will revisit sites from the 1982 and 2002 surveys, including sites from the 2009-10 RSPB targeted areas, as well as other new sites since 2002.

### What's required?

The survey will involve up to four visits between mid-April and end of June to count and map all waders within allocated sites featuring wet grassland and/or farmland sites containing specific agri-environment scheme (AES) options, including arable Lapwing Plots. Simple habitat and land management measures will also be recorded during the field work. Surveyors will need to be able to identify several common wader species by sight and sound, and also to be familiar with display and territorial behaviour.

The survey will require three daytime visits, with at least one week separating each, and a single dusk visit for Snipe during May - only if present at the site. It is important to make the *first visit in April* if possible, as this is an optimal time to survey Lapwing. Daytime visits should be carried out preferably between dawn and midday - avoiding cold, wet or windy weather.

A map will be provided showing you the boundary of your site. Cover all of the area indicated to ensure results are comparable to the 2002 surveys. Sites will need to be surveyed systematically, field by field, walking 100m of each part of the site. Record all waders on maps provided using standard BTO species codes.

Ducks should also be recorded and we are also keen to use the opportunity to record Yellow Wagtail and Meadow Pipit. Only wader species need to be mapped.

All the survey details are on: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/breeding-waders-wet-meadows>  
If you are interested or require any further information, please don't hesitate to get in touch:

**Hugh Pulsford, BTO Regional Representative, [ahugh.pulsford@btinternet.com](mailto:ahugh.pulsford@btinternet.com)**

### WANTED: NEW CO-ORDINATOR FOR HERONRY CENSUS

After forty years of co-ordinating the BTO's annual Heronry Census in Cheshire Brian Martin has decided to step down from this post. The heronries in Cheshire support one of the largest county populations in the UK, and it would be very good to continue with our yearly census. For more info about the Heronries Census see: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/heronries-census>.

The co-ordinator's job consists of keeping a record of the counter responsible for each heronry (some counters do more than one), and sending out the record cards in early spring. Once the cards have been returned they need to be sent on to the BTO, but most counters now enter their records directly on to the Heronry website. It is not an onerous task, with only a few hours' work in the spring contacting the counters, and later in the year checking that all the data has been submitted. There may also be some contact from time to time with the BTO staff member responsible for the Heronry Census - currently Ian Woodward.

If you would like more details about the co-ordinator role please contact:

**Brian Martin on 07926 707294 or [brianmartin1940@hotmail.com](mailto:brianmartin1940@hotmail.com)**

# SITUATIONS VACANT

***“THE SOCIETY NEEDS YOU”***

**RECORDS MANAGER**

**PROGRAMME SECRETARY**

**BIRD REPORT PROJECT MANAGER**

**For further information, please contact:**

**Ted Lock Email: [secretary@cawos.org](mailto:secretary@cawos.org) Tel: 01625 540466**



## APRIL

- 7 SECOS Tatton Park, ring for details
- 14 MRSPB 'TRACKING BIRDS, MAPPING THE MARVELS OF MIGRATION' by Ieuan Evans
- 17 SECOS AGM and MEMBERS' EVENING
- 17 NCRSPB 'ARCTIC ODYSSEY' by Norman Sadler
- 17 MCOS AGM
- 18 KOS Leighton Moss RSPB, meet in Lilac Avenue, Knutsford at 8:30am
- 18 NCRSPB St. Aidan's, meet at St. Aidan's car park at 10am
- 19 HPRSPB Middleton Lakes RSPB Reserve, meet at Marple Library car park at 8am
- 20 HPRSPB 'THE NORTHERN GOSHAWK' by Steve Watson
- 24 KOS AGM followed by 'SOUTH AFRICA: KwaZulu Natal Region' by Sheila Blamire
- 24 WGBG AGM followed by 'INSPIRING AVIANS' by Jeff Clarke (note 7:15pm start)
- 24-27 SECOS Dorset long weekend, ring for details
- 26 WGBG Fairburn Ings/St Aiden's (by coach), meet 7:30am, ring Steve McGann 01625 533652
- 26 MRSPB Fairburn Ings/St Aiden's (by coach), with WGBG, ring Steve McGann 01625 533652

## MAY

- 5 SECOS Goyt Valley, ring for details
- 6 NCRSPB Evening walk at Wigg Island, meet at Wigg Island car park at 7pm
- 10 WGBG Hodbarrow/Walney Is (by coach), meet 7:30am, ring Steve McGann 01625 533652
- 10 MRSPB Hodbarrow/Walney Is (by coach), with WGBG, ring Steve McGann 01625 533652

- 12 MRSPB AGM followed by MEMBERS' IMAGES and VIDEOS
- 13 NCRSPB Hope Mountain/Alyn Waters Country Park, meet at Waun y Liyn car park at 10am
- 15-18MRSPB Northumberland weekend (Fri-Mon), ring Graham Palmer 01625 420179
- 16 KOS Brockholes, meet in Lilac Ave, Knutsford at 8:30am
- 17 SECOS Anglesey, ring for details
- 17 HPRSPB Padley Gorge, nr Sheffield, meet at Marple Library car park at 8am
- 18 HPRSPB 'SPRINGTIME IN NEW ENGLAND' by Jim Almond
- 20 NCRSPB Long weekend in Norfolk, ring 01925 726986
- 22 KOS Wildboarclough evening walk, meet in Tatton Street car park, Knutsford at 6:30pm

## JUNE

- 4 MRSPB Prestbury evening walk, ring Ray Evans 01626 432635 or Ian Taylor 01260 275248
- 5-7 KOS Anglesey weekend, ring for details
- 10 NCRSPB Evening walk at Rixton Clay Pits, meet at the car park beside A57 at 7pm
- 14-15SECOS Lincolnshire weekend, ring for details
- 20 NCRSPB Llangynog, meet in village car park at 10am
- 26 KOS Mobberley evening walk, meet in Mill Lane, Mobberley at 6:45pm
- 28 HPRSPB Bempton Cliffs / North Cave Wetlands, meet at Marple Library car park at 8am

## JULY

- 11 KOS Leighton Moss, meet in Lilac Ave, Knutsford at 8:30am
- 15 NCRSPB Evening walk at Moore, meet at Moore car park at 7pm
- 24 KOS Witton area/Marbury evening walk, meet in Tatton Street car park, Knutsford at 6:30pm

## AUGUST

- 16 HPRSPB Whixall Moss, Whitchurch, meet at Marple Library car park at 8am
- 16 NCRSPB BMW RSPB Reserve, meet at BMW car park at 9.30am

## SEPTEMBER

- 7 HPRSPB AGM followed by 'SOME BIRDS OF EASTERN EUROPE' by Richard Stephenson
- 8 MRSPB 'TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, HOME OF THE HUMMINGBIRD' by Ashley Grove
- 19 KOS Burton Mere Wetlands followed by Hoylake, meet in Lilac Ave, Knutsford at 8:30am
- 19 NCRSPB Old Moor RSPB Reserve, meet at the reserve car park at 10am
- 20 HPRSPB Leasowe and Wirral, meet at Marple Library car park at 8am
- 21 HPRSPB 'THE SECRET WILDLIFE OF THE CAIRNGORMS' by Nick Martin
- 25 KOS 'THE NORTHERN GOSHAWK - Phantom of the Forest' by Steve Watson

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## AFFILIATED SOCIETIES

- ADNHS Altrincham & Dist. Natural History Soc, mtgs Jubilee Centre, The Firs, Bowdon, Altrincham 7:30pm, contact Jacky Johnson 0161 928 7896
- CAWOS Cheshire and Wirral Orn Soc, mtgs St Vincent's RC Church Hall, Knutsford 7:45pm, contact Richard Sturman 01477 537761
- CRSPB Chester RSPB Group, mtgs Christleton Parish Hall, Christleton, CH3 7AS 7:30pm, contact Norman Sadler 01244 335670
- HPRSPB High Peak RSPB Members' Group, mtgs Senior Citizens' Hall, Marple 7:30pm, contact Tim Walters 0161 449 0299
- KOS Knutsford Ornithological Soc, mtgs Jubilee Hall, Stanley Road, Knutsford 8pm, contact Derek Pike 01565 653811
- MCOS Mid-Cheshire Ornithological Soc, mtgs Cuddington & Sandiway Village Hall 7:45pm, contact Andrew Aldridge 01477 534873
- MRSPB Macclesfield RSPB Members' Group, mtgs United Reformed Church, Macclesfield 7:45pm, contact Daryll Bailey 01625 430311
- NCRSPB North Cheshire RSPB Members' Group, mtgs Appleton Parish Hall, Appleton 7:45pm, contact Olive Giles 01928 733405
- NNHS Nantwich Natural History Soc, occasional meetings throughout the year, contact Sec. Mike Holmes 01270 611577
- SECOS South-East Cheshire Om Soc, mtgs Ettiley Heath Church Community Centre at 7:30pm, contact Sec. Colin Lythgoe 01270 582642
- WGBG Wilmslow Guild Birdwatching Group, mtgs Wilmslow Guild 7:30pm, contact Brian Dyke 01625 525936

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**

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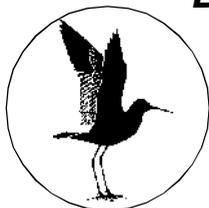
For further information, please contact:

David Steventon [chairman@cawos.org](mailto:chairman@cawos.org) 01625 421936

If you know anyone who might want to advertise  
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Sheila Blamire at [sheilablamire@cawos.org](mailto:sheilablamire@cawos.org) Tel: 01565 830168

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**Note: the copy date for the next issue is 20<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

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

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