

Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society

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BIRD NEWS

Number 117

July 2021



Hoylelake Beach Update

County Rarity: Red-necked Phalarope

Species Spotlight: Dunlin

Rostherne Mere Wetland Project

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Front cover: Ring-necked Duck by Ray Scally

Other illustrations by Tony Broome and Phil Jones

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 16th October 2021

Guest Editorial

Welcome to *Bird News* 117 for July 2021. I hope all readers have enjoyed their birding as much as possible in spring and the first part of summer. Certainly Cheshire and Wirral has hosted some exciting visitors during these periods. As is normal in birding some of these sightings were fleeting: a Subalpine Warbler species apparently stopping off only briefly and photographed by one lucky observer, or frustrating: the hard to catch up with Collared Pratincole, while other birds remained for several days or more and were enjoyed by many. And then there was the Black Stork, a first for the county if accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee which doesn't even appear to have had the decency to set foot on the ground in Cheshire and Wirral, being seen and photographed in flight by one alert watcher. I know though that for many readers great pleasure, and not a little welcome distraction, will have been obtained on their local patches by welcoming back familiar summer visitors and observing their progress as the breeding season gathered pace.

Bird Information Services have played a part in putting out news of the rarer species among the local arrivals while, to the best of my knowledge, acting with discretion where rare or scarce potential breeding species are involved. My wife and I were lucky enough to discover a Slavonian Grebe in full breeding plumage on our local patch at the Chelford Sand Quarries. Realising this bird had stopped off in transit to its breeding grounds we put the news out on the County WhatsApp group. The viewpoint over the particular quarry pool is accessed from a narrow country lane edged with grass verges. In very recent years more and more of these verges are being mown to an almost lawn-like state not just in front of the few houses scattered along the lanes but for hundreds of yards on either side where they border farmers' fields. Along one lane on the local patch, as well as the verges being cut the ground beneath the hedgerows is sprayed regularly the result being that nothing grows under the hedge - surely verging on the ridiculous! Some locals are very protective of the mown verges and do not welcome parking on them. Anyway, our WhatsApp group message asked birders to respect the mown verges and we have heard no complaints from the locals.

There is a point to my ramblings about mown verges and hedgerows with no bottoms. I can understand the necessity to cut verges to maintain sightlines at road junctions but what on earth is the point of mowing verges along hundreds of yards of a straight country lane? How widespread within the county is this apparently unnecessary vandalism at a time when homeowners are being encouraged to let parts of their lawns grow for the benefit of wildflowers, pollinators and birds? The mind boggles!

Returning now to a subject raised in my Guest Editorial in the previous issue of *Bird News*, that is the potential importance of bird records. Financial donations to political parties, or one political party in particular, have been in the news recently. Developers and builders who make such donations may well expect something in return. That 'something' may well be a further easing of the planning process. It is one thing for birders to enjoy the immediacy of the sighting of a rare or scarce bird or the pleasure of a morning birding on their local patch. However, if the birding sites of today are to exist into the future it is important that good data exists demonstrating the value of these sites. To this end please submit records to BirdTrack.

Among the 'usual' features this issue of *Bird News* includes big news from Burton Mere Wetlands, an article looking at allowing nature to take its course on Hoylake beach and habitat enhancement at Rostherne. I think you will find plenty of interest herein.

Steve Barber

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 16th October 2021 - *please be prompt*

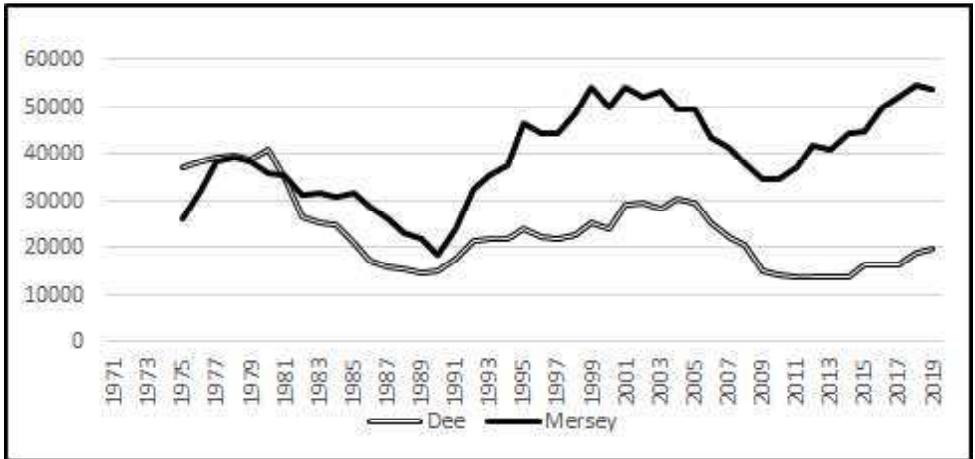
We cannot guarantee that material received after this date will be published in that issue. If you are aware that your material may be delayed, please let the Editor know as soon as possible.

Species Spotlight

DUNLIN *Calidris alpina*

This article was first published in the November 2020 On-line Newsletter of Dee Estuary Birding (www.deeestuary.co.uk).

The Dunlin is the most numerous wader along the East Atlantic Flyway which includes the British Isles. The Dee estuary and North Wirral are important sites for them, but it is our neighbouring estuary, the Mersey, which holds huge numbers through the winter and is easily the most important site in the country for them. The latest five-year average has the Mersey Estuary as holding 53,862 Dunlin compared with the second most important site, the Severn Estuary, which has 30,204. The Dee Estuary/North Wirral has a more modest 19,657. Dunlins obviously love the mud of the Mersey which is sheltered and largely undisturbed, and recent counts include two of just over 68,000 which were record high counts for the site, and the highest in the country since 72,113 at Morecambe Bay in January 1992.



Wetland Bird Survey Counts for Dee and Mersey Estuaries 5-year moving average

The WeBS counts for the two estuaries both show similar trends, nearly all the max annual counts are in winter so the fluctuations reflect that of the nominate *alpina* race which breeds in northern Scandinavia and western Siberia and winters in western Europe. The trend for the Dee is very similar to that of the UK as a whole except that in the last 10 years numbers have levelled off nationally rather than showing an increase as the Dee does. Interestingly, numbers on the Mersey increased sharply over that same 10 years so becoming increasingly important for this species and now typically holds 20% of the UK's population. Whether the declines in the 1980s and again early this century affected the whole of the *alpina* population or just those in the UK is not clear. The more recent decline has been attributed to a run of mild winters with birds short-stopping on the Waddensea, but recent counts there have also shown declines suggesting a more widespread drop in numbers - perhaps due to a run of poor breeding seasons.

Dunlin Mega-Site

Peak counts for the Dee and Mersey are nearly always on different months through the winter, suggesting that there is movement of Dunlin between the estuaries and perhaps they use it as



A mega-site for Dunlin?

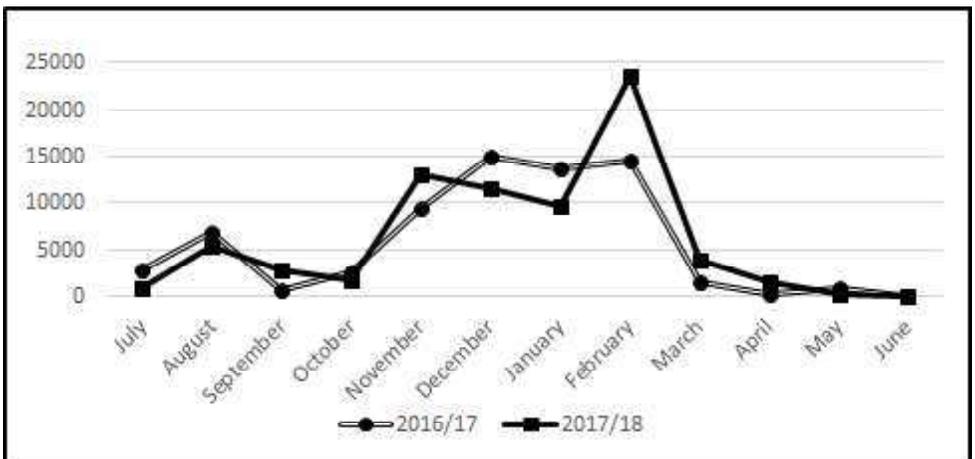
one big site. But for birds using north Wirral, and a lot do feed on the mud banks off Leasowe and New Brighton, the Sefton/Ribble Coast (from Crosby up to the Ribble Estuary) is only a short flight away and typically holds up to 15,000 wintering Dunlin. Ringing tells us little about local movements within winters but it does seem likely that all these estuaries are used as one big mega site.

A Winter Refuge

Early February 2012 brought a Siberian blast of cold air to our shores, but it was even colder further east and Gdansk, on the Baltic shore of Poland, recorded a temperature of -28°C. It was bitter at Thurston on 3rd but not quite freezing when I was met with a strange sight - at least 5,000 Dunlin stretched out in a long line close to the beach, all the way from Heswall Marsh to the Dee Sailing club causeway. Unless roosting, Dunlin are always on the move feeding and flying from spot to spot - but these weren't roosting, they were busy feeding yet hardly moving and they just looked exhausted! I've never seen Dunlin

behave quite like that before or since but presumably they must have just flown in to escape the freezing weather further east. This is an example of how important our west coast estuaries can be as refuges during abnormally cold weather and something similar happened when the 'beast from the east' struck in February 2018 with high numbers of Dunlin on all our local estuaries.

The graph below contrasts the monthly distribution in a 'typical' winter (2016/17) with that for 2017/18 when the 'Beast from the East' struck in February. Many other waders, particularly Knot, were similarly affected.



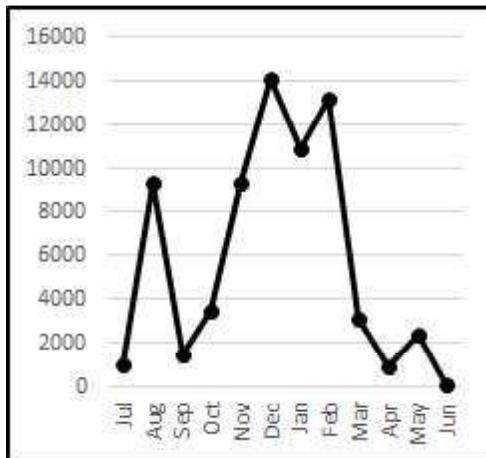
Dunlin WeBS Counts - Dee Estuary 2016/17 and 2017/18

Where to see Dunlin in the Dee Estuary and North Wirral

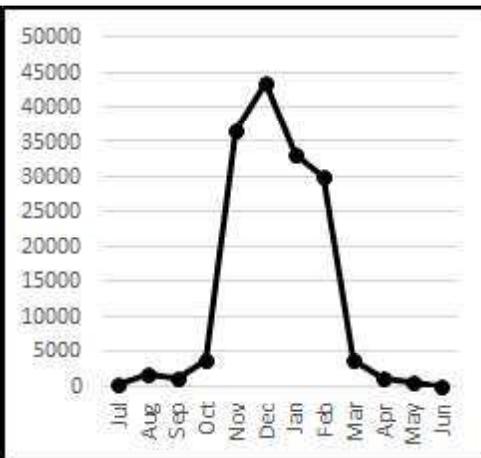
In the winter Dunlin utilise the whole estuary wherever there is mud and sand, and even the marshes may be used as a roost site if the grass is short. I took part in the Low Tide Wetland Bird

Survey in 2014/15 (November to February) and I remember the counters in the inner estuary expressing surprise at just how many Dunlin they were seeing off Burton and Parkgate Marshes by the River Dee Channel, with up to 9,000 completely out of sight from the shore. But many more can easily be seen at the main high tide roost sites at Point of Ayr, West Kirby and Hoylake. For some really close encounters with hundreds of Dunlin it's difficult to beat the rocks at the old swimming baths site on West Kirby Marine Lake, I've seen as many as 3,000 just a few feet away from the passing walkers along the promenade and it's a great spot to get some fabulous photographs. These birds often feed on the thick mud just to the south of the Marine Lake and you can get good close views of them from the lake wall.

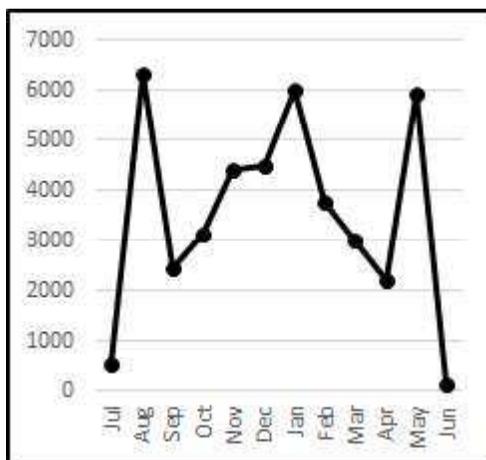
But perhaps the time we most look forward to is migration, when the Dunlin are going to and from their breeding grounds. These are mostly birds breeding in Greenland and Iceland which winter in West Africa, and pass through here on their way north in May and return in August. At this time



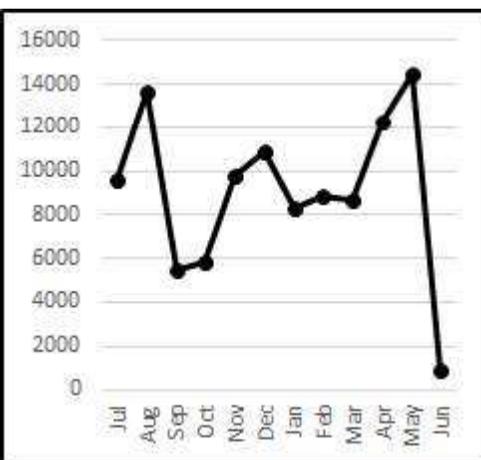
Dee Estuary/North Wirral
Average Monthly Distribution (WeBS)
For 2013/14 to 2017/18



Mersey Estuary
Average Monthly Distribution (WeBS)
For 2013/14 to 2017/18



Hoylake
Average of max Monthly Counts
For 2013/14 to 2017/18



Ribble Estuary
Average Monthly Distribution (WeBS)
For 2013/14 to 2017/18

they are in full breeding plumage and make for a fantastic sight often carpeting Hoylake shore. The requirements of these passage birds must be different from the over-wintering birds as they are rarely seen on the thick mud in the inner estuary but much prefer the wet sand* found off north Wirral and between Point of Ayr and Gronant. It's presumably why these passage birds are virtually absent on the Mersey, with its thick mud, yet love the extensive sand banks of Ribble/Sefton coast (the site designated as the 'Ribble Estuary' for WeBS includes the huge area of sand going from just north of Formby at Ainsdale all the way past Southport and RSPB Marshside most of which is not actually in the Ribble Estuary proper - as you can see in the map above). These passage Dunlins seem to be more tolerant of human disturbance than the over-wintering birds and many will come to within a few feet of watching birders as they forage for food on the beach.

*in reality this could be described as a patchwork of sand, muddy sand and sandy mud! But the thick estuarine mud found in the inner estuary (for example off Thurston) is largely absent.

The monthly distributions tell the story. Numbers do peak on the Dee in winter but the graph shows the sizeable numbers coming through in May and August which are largely absent on the Mersey. The sand of East Hoyle Bank off Hoylake (included in the Dee Estuary WeBS counts) and the large stretch of sand stretching along the Sefton Coast past Southport to the Ribble attract thousands of Dunlins on passage. Recent large counts of passage birds include 24,232 on the Dee Estuary in August 2014 and 33,006 on the Ribble in August 2018.

References

1. On-line Wetland Bird Survey data - <https://app.bto.org/webs-reporting/>.
2. *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Reports* 2013 to 2018.
3. *Lancashire Bird Reports* 2013 to 2018.

Richard Smith

Editor's Note: Recommend Richard's follow-up article 'Dunlin - Rings, Races and Genes', published in December 2020 on www.deeestuary.co.uk

County Round-Up

Some of the records may be unauthenticated and therefore will require review by the Society's Rarities Panel or the BBRC. This report covers the period from January to April 2021.

SITE REPORTS

Chester area

Two Garganeys were at the Gowy Meadows on Mar 25th. Seven Cattle Egrets were at Puddington on Mar 6th. A Marsh Tit was at Churton on Mar 6th, three Grasshopper Warblers were at Gowy Meadows on Apr 26th, single Redstarts were at Shocklach on Apr 4th and Upton on 18th, two Whinchats were at Gowy Meadows on Apr 26th. A Channel Wagtail was at Puddington on Apr 18th and 23rd and a Water Pipit at the Gowy Meadows on Mar 9th.

Congleton area

A White-fronted Goose was at Middlewich on Jan 27th and four Egyptian Geese at Rode Heath on Feb 2nd. 10 Woodcocks were at Middlewich on Jan 9th. A Kittiwake was at Astbury Mere on Feb 2nd. A Black Stork was at Marton Heath on Apr 26th. A Red Kite was at Congleton on Feb 14th and a Hobby at Holmes Chapel on Apr 3rd. The Dusky Warbler remained at Astbury Mere from Jan 1st to 24th.

Crewe and Nantwich area

Six Whooper Swans were at EHF on Mar 21st, an Egyptian Goose at Doddington on Mar 10th, a Garganey at Burleydam on Apr 4th, a Scaup at Bar Mere on Jan 10th. The first Swift was over

Crewe on Apr 26th. The first Little Ringed Plover was at Sandbach Flashes on Mar 7th, 25 Black-tailed Godwits were at EHF on Mar 21st, eight Woodcocks at Foden's Flash on Feb 5th and a Spotted Redshank at Sandbach Flashes from Apr 24th to 27th. Two Common Terns were at EHF on Apr 30th. Great White Egrets were at Audlem on Feb 17th and Bar Mere on Mar 13th. A Wryneck was at Nantwich on Apr 14th. Ospreys were over EHF on several dates in Apr and one at Bar Mere on Apr 27th, single Red Kites were over Bickerton on Apr 15th, Crewe on Mar 28th, EHF on Feb 23rd and Mar 25th and over the Llangollen Canal on Feb 21st. Hobbys were noted at EHF on Apr 27th and Haslington on Apr 29th. A Wood Warbler was at Bickerton on Apr 15th, two Lesser Whitethroats at Maw Green Tip on Apr 24th, two Firecrests at Quaker's Coppice on Mar 7th and 13th. Ring Ouzels were present at Bickerton on several dates during Apr, a Pied Flycatcher was at Lawton Woods on Apr 25th. A Black Redstart was at Sandbach on Jan 4th and 6th and Nantwich on Mar 3rd, Redstarts were at Bickerton, Marbury Big Mere and Scholar Green during Apr and a Richard's Pipit was at Haughton on Apr 7th. A Dipper was at Marbury on Mar 9th.



Wryneck

Ellesmere Port and Neston area

Up to 13,400 Pink-footed Geese were counted in the Ince Marshes area, three White-fronted Geese were at BMW on Mar 5th and five Bewick's Swans on Jan 27th with 28 Whooper Swans on the same day. Two Garganeys were noted at Ince Marshes from Apr 4th to 19th and Decca Pools on Apr 5th, a Green-winged Teal was at Ince Marshes on Feb 7th. Swifts were over Little Neston on Apr 24th. Waders included: 13 Avocets were at BMW on Feb 23rd with two Bar-tailed Godwits on Apr 6th and 23rd with up to 1400 Black-tailed Godwits at Manisty, two Knots appeared at BMW on Apr 6th and 23rd, single Little Stints present at BMW on various dates and two Wood Sandpipers at BMW on Apr 25th and 26th, 23 Spotted Redshanks at BMW on Apr 23rd and a Greenshank at Parkgate on Mar 29th. A Kittiwake was at BMW on Mar 14th, Little Gull on Apr 25th and 10+ Mediterranean Gulls on Apr 25th. Five Spoonbills were at Parkgate during late Apr, a Bittern at BMW on Mar 17th and Apr 19th, six Cattle Egrets at Burton Marsh on Apr 30th and at least eight Great White Egrets at Parkgate on Apr 3rd.

An Osprey was at Burton Marsh on Apr 13th and another was at Burton Point on 17th and Neston on 11th, seven Marsh Harriers at Neston on Jan 23rd and two Hen Harriers at Parkgate on Jan 3rd, a single Red Kite was at BMW on Apr 16th. A possible Great Grey Shrike was at Burton Point on Mar 19th, Bearded Tits were noted at Neston on Jan 2nd and BMW on Mar 19th. A Siberian Chiffchaff was at Parkgate on Apr 15th, with the first Sedge Warbler on Apr 9th, a Subalpine Warbler was at Burton Marsh on Apr 19th and seven Grasshopper Warblers were at Neston on Apr 25th. Single Ring Ouzels were in the Parkgate/Burton area on several dates, a Redstart at BMW on Apr 11th and Burton Point on 12th and 17th, three Whinchats were at Burton Marsh on Apr 21st, a Channel Wagtail was at BMW on Apr 21st and two Water Pipits at Neston on Mar 29th. Six Twites were at Parkgate on Mar 21st and 30th, 12 Crossbills at Ness Gardens during late Feb and a Little Bunting at Ince Marshes on Mar 19th.

Halton area

A single Brent Goose was at Hale on Mar 23rd and Apr 4th to 16th, and a Garganey was at Carr Lane Pools on Apr 8th and 10th. 124 Avocets were at Hale on Apr 27th, two Whimbrels were at Hale on Apr 1st and Pickering's Pasture on 22nd, one or two Little Stints were at Pickering's Pasture throughout the period with three Woodcocks at Carr Lane Jan-Mar. Spotted Redshank was at Hale on Apr 9th and a Greenshank on Mar 17th. At Hale five Little Gulls were present on Apr 27th, with 15+ Mediterranean Gulls on Apr 10th, three Sandwich Terns on Apr 27th and a Little Tern on Apr 9th, elsewhere an Arctic Skua was on the Mersey at Wigg Island on Mar 13th. A Cattle Egret was noted at Hale on Apr 30th, seven Great White Egrets were at Hale on Apr 4th.

An Osprey was over on Mar 30th and Apr 23rd, two Marsh Harriers on Apr 27th, Red Kite on Mar 27th whilst a White-tailed Eagle was tracked over the Hale area on Apr 15th. Hobbies were at Hale on Apr 12th, 15th and 30th. A Firecrest was at Hale throughout the period with two Ring Ouzels at Carr Lane Pools on Apr 15th, Redstart at Hale on several dates in Apr and Channel Wagtail on Apr 6th, 11th and 30th and 25+ White Wagtails at Pickering's Pasture on Apr 18th. Four Tree Pipits at Hale on Apr 15th, three Water Pipits at Carr Lane Pools from Mar 22nd to 26th and three Rock Pipits at Pickering's Pasture up to Mar. A Lapland Bunting was at Hale on Jan 7th and Mar 22nd.



Lapland Bunting

Macclesfield area

63 Whooper Swans were at Mere Farm SQ on Mar 21st, Common Scoters were at Tatton on Mar 17th and Poynton Pool on 19th, 18 Goldeneyes at Tatton on Apr 11th, two Smews at Lapwing Lane Pool on Feb 1st and several dates in Mar and Red-breasted Merganser on the River Bollin at Wilmslow on Mar 17th. Four Black-necked Grebes were at Acre Nook SQ on Mar 26th with single Slavonian Grebe on Apr 18th. An Avocet was at Acre Nook SQ on Mar 1st, three Little Ringed Plovers at Mere Farm SQ on Mar 26th and Apr 23rd with Knot at Acre Nook SQ on Feb 27th and 28th. An Osprey was over Mow Cop on Apr 9th and Red Kites were at Macclesfield Forest on Feb 21st, Capesthorpe on Apr 1st and Danebower on Apr 18th. Two Marsh Tits were at Brown Knowl on Mar 6th, a Dusky Warbler was in a Chelford garden on Feb 10th, up to 14 Ring Ouzels were in the Macclesfield Forest area on Apr 13th and a Pied Flycatcher was at Tegg's Nose on Apr 18th. A Bluethroat was at Arley on Mar 24th, Redstarts were noted at Bosley, Little Budworth Common, Poynton and Tegg's Nose during Apr.

Vale Royal area

Wildfowl included: two Brent Geese at Neumann's Flash on Apr 13th, up to 13,400 Pink-footed Geese in the Ince Marshes area, single White-fronted Geese were at Frodsham Marsh and Marbury CP, four Bewick's Swans at Frodsham Marsh on Mar 6th and 26 Whooper Swans on Feb 12th. Garganeys were at Frodsham Marsh on Apr 18th with a drake Scaup for most of the period and a Ring-necked Duck at Newchurch Common on Apr 11th to 23rd and 33 Goosanders at Oakmere on Jan 18th. 28 Swifts were over Frodsham Marsh on Apr 27th. Three Black-necked Grebes were at Frodsham Marsh on Apr 4th. Waders at Frodsham Marsh included: 134 Avocets on Apr 2nd, 11 Whimbrels on Apr 25th, seven Bar-tailed Godwits on Mar 4th and a Little Stint on Apr 29th. Up to 90 Snipes were at Whitley Reed on Jan 28th, four Woodcocks at Carey Park on Jan 25th, seven Green Sandpipers at Lostock on Mar 26th and two Greenshanks at Ashton's Flash on Apr 24th. A Little Gull was at Marbury CP on Apr 26th, Caspian Gull at Oak Mere on Jan 18th and 25th, Marbury CP on Feb 7th and Winsford on Mar 28th. A White Stork was over Sandiway on Mar 3rd and at Frodsham Marsh on Apr 16th, three Bitterns at Marbury CP on Jan 3rd and six Great White Egrets at Frodsham Marsh on Feb 12th.

Ospreys were over Tatton on Mar 26th, Marbury CP on Apr 1st, Frodsham Marsh on Apr 9th, a Goshawk was at Great Budworth on Feb 28th and Frodsham Marsh on Apr 2nd, three Marsh Harriers at Frodsham Marsh on Apr 5th. Red Kites were at Allostock on Mar 20th, Anderton NP on Apr 6th, Frodsham Marsh on Apr 4th, Sutton Weaver on 16th, Whitley Reed on Feb 21st and Winsford on Apr 4th, 17 Buzzards were in the Whitley Reed area on Apr 29th. Two Merlins were at Frodsham Marsh on Feb 3rd and Hobby at Marbury CP, Neumann's Flash and Winsford. 1500 Sand Martins at Marbury CP on Apr 6th, Siberian Chiffchaff at Frodsham Marsh on Jan 3rd, Sedge Warbler at Marbury CP on Apr 20th and Reed Warbler at Witton Mill on Apr 4th. Firecrest at Marbury CP on Mar 17th, Ring Ouzel at Marbury CP on Apr 21st and Pied Flycatcher at Delamere on Apr 25th and 27th. A Black Redstart was at Winsford on Apr 30th, Redstart at Marbury CP on Apr 30th, 11 Stonechats at Frodsham Marsh on Feb 12th. 25 Tree Sparrows were at Whitley Reed on Jan 23rd, Yellow Wagtail at Frodsham Marsh on Mar 15th with Blue-headed Yellow Wagtail at Whitley

Reed on Apr 24th and two Water Pipits at Frodsham Marsh during early Apr. 40 Bramblings at Newchurch Common on Mar 12th, 34 Lesser Redpolls at Ashton's Flash on Mar 21st, 20 Crossbills at Delamere on Mar 27th, single Lapland Buntings were at Frodsham Marsh on Mar 18th and 29th, a Corn Bunting at Whitley Reed on Feb 28th with 50 Yellowhammers on Jan 28th and a Little Bunting at Frodsham Marsh on Mar 19th.

Crossbill by Phil Jones



Warrington area

A Brent Goose was at Woolston Eyes on Apr 13th to 14th, 29 Whooper Swans over Silver Lane Pools on Apr 1st, 10 Mandarin at Woolston Eyes on Jan 2nd, Garganey on Feb 22nd to 24th and a Scaup from Jan-Mar. Four Swifts at Woolston Eyes on Apr 27th. The first Black-necked Grebes were at Woolston Eyes on Mar 4th. A Little Ringed Plover was at Woolston Eyes on Mar 3rd with Greenshank on Mar 30th. A Kittiwake was at Woolston Eyes on Mar 13th to 14th, a Little Gull at Woolston Eyes on Apr 18th, an Iceland Gull at Gatewath on Feb 16th and 23rd, a Caspian Gull at Great Sankey on Feb 12th and an Arctic Tern at Woolston Eyes on Apr 19th and 28th. A Bittern was at Woolston Eyes on Apr 18th and 19th, a White Stork was over Rixton Moss on Mar 3rd. Ospreys were over Warrington on Mar 25th and Woolston Eyes on 30th, three Marsh Harriers at Woolston Eyes on Apr 15th, a Red Kite at Lymm on Feb 13th, single Hobbies at Woolston Eyes on Apr 3rd and Lymm on 4th. A Marsh Tit remained at Silver Lane throughout Jan, a Woodlark at Woolston Eyes on Mar 9th, 9400 Sand Martins were over Woolston Eyes on Apr 2nd with 150 Swallows on Apr 1st. 116 Chiffchaffs were counted at Woolston Eyes on Mar 30th and a Firecrest was at Moore NR on Jan 10th. A Redstart was at Woolston Eyes on Apr 22nd, a Tree Pipit at Silver Lane Pools on Apr 21st, 30 Lesser Redpolls at Woolston Eyes on Jan 2nd.

Wirral area

Max of 417 Brent Geese were at Hilbre on Mar 19th, 21 Barnacle Geese at Heswall on Mar 1st, 2915 Pink-footed Geese at Hilbre on Apr 16th and six Whooper Swans at Hilbre on Mar 23rd. Single Scaups were at Hoylake on Feb 2nd and Leasowe on 22nd, four Eiders at Hoylake on Feb 27th with three Velvet Scoters here on several dates with possible Black Scoter on 9th, 3200 Common Scoters off Hilbre on Jan 12th. A Long-tailed Duck was off Hilbre, Hoylake and Leasowe on various dates with 19 Red-breasted Mergansers at Hilbre on Apr 4th and 16 Goosanders at West Kirby ML on Jan 8th. An early Swift was at Raby on Apr 16th, a Common Crane was reported from Greasby on Apr 16th with White Stork on 17th, Slavonian Grebe at Hilbre on Feb 28th. Waders included: a Collared Pratincole at Leasowe on Apr 22nd, 143 Whimbrels at Heswall on Apr 30th, 126 Bar-tailed Godwits at Heswall on Feb 9th, 760 Black-tailed Godwits at Caldly on Apr 19th. 313 Turnstones were at New Brighton on Mar 2nd, 680 Sanderlings at Hilbre on Feb 11th and 18 Purple Sandpipers here on Jan 29th with two Greenshanks on Apr 24th. 63 Little Gulls were at Hilbre on Mar 23rd, 400+ Sandwich Terns on Apr 18th, two Little Terns at Hoylake on Apr 9th, 100+ Common Terns at Heswall on Apr 23rd, two Arctic Terns at Hilbre on 18th and two Arctic Skuas at Leasowe on Apr 24th and Hoylake on 27th.

Seabirds included: 20 Guillemots at Hilbre on Apr 27th and three Razorbills at Leasowe on Mar 5th. 48 Red-throated Divers were off Hilbre on Apr 13th, Black-throated Diver at Wallasey on Apr 27th and two Great Northern Divers at Hoylake on Jan 9th and Leasowe on Mar 5th. 150 Gannets were off Hilbre on Apr 25th with Shag on Mar 15th. Spoonbill was at Hilbre on Apr 16th, four Cattle Egrets at Arrowe Brook Farm on Apr 24th, four Great White Egrets at Heswall on Apr 30th. Two Ospreys were over Arrowe Park on Mar 30th with others at Greasby, Hilbre, Hoylake, Meols, Thurstaston and West Kirby. Four Marsh Harriers at Heswall on Mar 16th with Hen Harrier on 31st, and a Red Kite at Leasowe on Mar 24th, Meols on Apr 1st and Thurstaston on Feb 14th. Two Merlins were at Heswall on Feb 22nd. A Siberian Chiffchaff was in a Wallasey garden from Feb 5th to 23rd, Sedge Warbler at Red Rocks on Apr 9th with Reed Warbler on 12th, a Firecrest at Heswall on Feb 10th and 11th, three Ring Ouzels were at Leasowe on Apr 19th. Three Redstarts at Leasowe on Apr 30th,

also at Leasowe two Whinchats on Apr 30th, 90 Wheatears on Apr 24th, two Channel Wagtails on Apr 14th, a Tree Pipit on Apr 14th, and four Rock Pipits at Hilbre on Feb 22nd. Elsewhere six Twites at Hilbre on Feb 5th, 250 Redpolls at Hoylake on Apr 18th, a Serin on Apr 22nd, a Lapland Bunting at Hilbre on Jan 7th, Mar 18th and 29th and up to eight Snow Buntings in the Hoylake area up to mid-Feb.

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Notes and Letters

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

PLEA FROM THE EDITOR

I have not received any submissions for this issue's 'Notes and Letters' section.

This section is a chance for members to contribute, whether a few lines, or a long article, which might be spilt over several issues. Some ideas might be amusing (or otherwise!) anecdotes, unusual avian behaviour, special memories, ringing and/or survey stories, and looking back over the years – even back to childhood! The list is almost endless – it's up to members. If you think it's worth writing, other members will think it's worth reading!

Please have a think and get writing!!

One person who kept us amused over three issues (Nos 114, 115, 116) was George Hill with his 'My Green Birding List', and so I'm pleased that he has been awarded the **Star Letter** in the latest RSPB's *Nature's Home* magazine. Well done to George. I've reproduced his letter below:

Zero-Carbon Bird List

During 2020, I kept a 'fuel-free list' of the bird species I saw within 10 miles of home using only boots and (mainly) bike. Readers of our Cheshire *Bird News* followed my reports with amusement, in what was my most enjoyable bird year. On New Year's Day, two Song Thrushes were singing - then a Goosander overflew the village chippie and I saw a Blackcap! In February, deep floods made me miss a rare Kumlien's Gull and then I mistook my squeaking bike brake for a calling Bullfinch.

Lockdown meant riding past Little Ringed Plovers without stopping, then being startled by a Kingfisher calling just above my cycle helmet. You see so much on two wheels. Jackdaws mobbed a stoat running from their tree; but I had to deter a Raven as it eyed-up a new-born lamb. Racing along a hawthorn tunnel on the National Cycling Network I met a Woodpigeon - head-on! I cycle-counted eight singing Lesser Whitethroats near my house and (for a sponsored challenge) 26 singing Chiffchaffs.

After 45 years of local birding, I expected no summer surprises - but Tree Pipit, Quail, Corn Bunting and Black-necked Grebe were all new to my local list. Hunts for Green Sandpiper and Great White Egret left me sodden, but a brownish 'pigeon' morphed into a Long-eared Owl; and one evening a Woodcock swerved dramatically away from my yellow jacket. My last species of the year? Dusky Warbler! The year's grand total was 135 species, using zero carbon. Who needs cars?

George B. Hill

County Rarities

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE *Phalaropus lobatus*

Generally, phalaropes are not difficult to separate from other waders based on overall shape and jizz, their persistent swimming behaviour and by that dark patch through the eye. In addition, in summer plumage, with the females brighter than males, Red-necked and Grey Phalaropes, are easy to tell apart, with Red-necked a daintier bird with a fine, pointed black bill, white throat and red confined to the neck, whilst Grey has totally red underparts, white face, a yellow-based, thick bill, and is a chunkier bird altogether.

Although several of the Cheshire and Wirral records of Red-Necked Phalarope have been of summer-plumaged individuals, it is autumn phalaropes that need a bit of care in sorting out, with over half the records being of juvenile/first winter plumage birds. Here, the pattern and timing of the occurrence can also help to distinguish between them. Red-necks tend to pass through on coastal marshes or fresh water habitats, from July to early September, whilst Greys are often a fly-by during a sea watch, and are late September to year-end birds. Hence most Red-necks will pass through in juvenile plumage, with dark upperparts and no moult, whilst most Greys will be in some stage of moult, and showing varying amounts of grey patches on the upperparts.



Adult summer male



Juvenile → 1st-winter

With a phalarope on the deck, either swimming or roosting, go for the structural differences, around the bill in particular, then look at the breast. Juvenile Greys have a strong buff wash, and darkish brown upperparts with a few grey patches moulting through on the back. Red-necked is also dark above, but tends to show well-defined buff lines on the mantle and scapulars, with a

noticeable white patch on the bend of the wing and also lacks that strong buff breast wash. The other point I look for is the shape of the black ear patch, which in Grey Phalarope is rectangular and runs back horizontally from the eye, whilst Red-necked seems to curve back from the eye and ends in a point. In flight, however, they are not easy to separate. I tend to view Grey Phalarope as Sanderling-like, with a prominent pale grey wing bar and a twisting flight action, Red-necked is darker brown winged, plus wing bar and very fine bill, but personally, I think it would be a bold observer who claimed a fly-by Red-necked during a sea watch!

A final comment on Wilson's Phalarope, which in juvenile plumage, although tending more to resemble a 'Tringa' wader, could be confused with Red-necked, if noted swimming at a distance. Wilson's has a distinctive 'tipping forward' appearance due to its long neck, small head and long fine black bill. This species always strikes me as very pale, with only a small line through the eye. It also shows no wing bar in flight, and yellowish legs.

Hugh Pulsford

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE IN CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL

The three oldest records of Red-necked Phalarope are all of birds which met a similar fate. Byerley's *Fauna of Liverpool* (1854) includes an undated record of "one specimen from a pit in Cheshire" reported to him by a Mr Mather, a taxidermist, and published by Coward & Oldham in *Birds of Cheshire* as "killed on a pit in Wirral". Dobie's *Birds of West Cheshire, Denbighshire and Flintshire* (1894) includes mention of a specimen preserved in the Grosvenor Museum which "formed part of the old collection of local birds". *Birds of Cheshire* adds that this "is said to have

been obtained in the neighbourhood of that city” (Chester) but there are no further details. Coward’s *The Fauna of Cheshire* (1910) has a record of one shot by a collier on the Dee Marsh in the autumn or winter of 1899-1900 and “now in the possession of Mr F L Congreve”.

There are just two records within the present boundaries of Cheshire and Wirral in the first half of the 20th century and both involve A W Boyd. The first was on 5th August 1923 when Boyd’s attention was drawn by his wife to a small bird swimming about on Budworth Mere which proved to be Red-necked Phalarope. Boyd himself found one on Witton Flashes on 3rd September 1949, which remained until 6th and was seen by a number of observers.

Although the number of records has increased substantially in subsequent years, Red-necked Phalarope has proved to be markedly less than annual in Cheshire and Wirral over this period; the run of records in each year 2014 to 2018 is the best showing. The number of records in each decade:

1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
2	3	5	5	4	4	8

Over the years September has proved to be the most productive month for arrivals:

May	June	July	August	September
5	7	4	3	11

The earliest sightings have been on 24th May, in 1973 at Sandbach Flashes and in 2006 at Neumann’s Flash. The latest ‘live’ sighting is on 30th September 1971 on the River Birkett at Moreton, where the bird had remained from 18th September. A bird was picked up dead at Burton in late October 1959. There have been no sightings in the period between 19th June, when one was at Frodsham Marsh in 2018, and 5th July, when one was at Woolston in 1985.

Half the sightings since 1950 have been on single dates, while only five of the records refer to stays of more than four days. The longest stays are of nine days at Frodsham by an adult female from 26th May to 3rd June 1976, 13 days by the River Birkett bird mentioned above, 15 days at Burton Mere Wetlands by a female from 2nd to 16th June 2015, 17 days at Frodsham Marsh by an adult female from 10th to 26th July 1996 and of 18 days at Burton Mere Wetlands by a juvenile from 4th to 21st September 2014.

Almost all of the sightings are of single birds, but two were at Sandbach Flashes on 24th May 1973 and at Frodsham Marsh on 18th June 2018.

Ten of the records since 1950 have come from the Frodsham Marsh area where recorded in every month May to September, followed by Sandbach Flashes with five, Burton Mere Wetlands with four and Woolston with two. Other sites not mentioned above are Bar Mere, Dove Point/Leasowe, Gatewarth, Heswall Shore, River Mersey at Fiddler’s Ferry, Neumann’s Flash, the Rock Channel and Seacombe.

Steve Barber

Notes: the bird picked up dead at Burton is not included in the ‘arrival’ table. Three records of birds at Altrincham Sewage Farm (Sinderland), a site no longer in Cheshire and Wirral, are not included in the body of this account; they are all of singles: from 6th to 17th October 1938, on 3rd September 1956 and 22nd and 28th May 1960.

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*.

Ringling News

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

HILBRE BIRD OBSERVATORY (HIBO)

Ringling in 2021 up to June 2021

The migration season in 2021 produced some of the birds that were expected but also turned up a couple of surprises. The normally most frequently caught migrant, Willow Warbler, was caught in reasonable numbers this year. It was nice to see three Redstarts caught and three Whinchats, but it was disappointing to catch only one Wheatear. There were Grasshopper Warblers and Sedge Warblers, Blackcaps and a Garden Warbler. The Garden Warbler is a lovely bird in the hand and it is not caught every year on Hilbre so that was very pleasing. It was a big year for Lesser Redpolls passing through the Wirral and a few found their way into the traps on Hilbre. There were Goldfinches trapped and a Collared Dove was caught. Collared Doves are not caught regularly and always surprise the ringler by the power they can generate from their flight muscles.

However, all these records were trumped on 26th April. A member was approaching one of the Heligoland traps on the island when he disturbed a wader from the grass in front of the trap, remarkably it flew into the trap and, despite his exertions (he was blowing for tugs to use the maritime expression), he removed from the catching box the first ever Common Snipe to be caught on the island. It is always good to get a first for the island and wading birds are especially nice. They are particularly serene and have a pleasant smell all of their own.

A Common Whitethroat was caught several times and has been on the island singing in all kinds of different locations for over a month. However, nobody has seen a female or found a nest. At the end of the 19th Century Hilbre was renowned as a place to see Whitethroats; Coward and Oldham in their book published in 1900 make this assertion. Eric Hardy in his book published in 1941 mentions Hilbre in the Whitethroat section, but by the time it gets to the 1980s Prof Craggs only mentions it as a migrant and refers to climate changes in its wintering grounds as a reason for its decline. We wonder if all this singing could be the harbinger of a recovery.

Swallows were very late to turn up on Hilbre and whilst there are nests there are no young large enough to ring. The breeding season is well under way, some nests have been predated, the Pied Wagtails' eggs were stolen, possibly by mice, but the ringling of over 25 newly-fledged Linnets already has demonstrated that this red list species has done well on Hilbre this year.

John Elliott, on behalf of Hilbre Bird Observatory

RINGING AT WOOLSTON - WINTER 2020/2021

This note covers the winter period from October 2020 through March 2021 ('this winter'). In what appears to be the 'new normal' I must start by pointing out that no ringling took place between January 6th and February 13th during the second national lockdown. This is a quiet period of the ringling year at Woolston and the only activity significantly affected was the operation of the Duck Trap on No.3 Bed. The 2019/2020 winter period ('last winter') was also impacted by a lockdown and finished on 21st March 2020.

In the period under review 1,538 new birds of 40 species were ringled at Woolston which compares with 2,208 new birds of 44 species in the 2019/2020 winter period. This reduction of 670 birds (or 30.39%) has a number of causes. The loss of nearly six weeks operation of the Fixed Duck Trap resulted in just 80 Teals being ringled whereas last winter, with consistently high water levels, a record 222 Teals were ringled.

As the population of ringed birds increases it is inevitable that the number shot will also increase. In the period under review 10 were reported, five from England, three from Denmark and two from France. A further bird was “found freshly dead” at Anglers Country Park near Wakefield. The cause is unknown. Coots and Moorhens also come to the grain put out in the trap but the truncated season resulted in none of these species being ringed.

Winter ringing is a combination of resident birds and migrants from further north in the UK or continental Europe totals for a representative selection of resident birds are shown below. It would seem that the 2020 breeding season was more in line with 2018 and significantly poorer than 2019.

	2020-2021	2019-2020	Delta
Dunnock	19	32	-13
Song Thrush	11	19	-8
Robin	23	20	+3
Wren	31	51	-20
Long-tailed Tit	53	113	-60

Chiffchaffs were present all winter with 38 ringed compared with 40 last winter. Most of these were late migrants but five, ringed in the first quarter of 2021, must have been overwintering birds. The Blackcap autumn passage finished earlier than in 2019 and just eight were ringed in quarter four of 2020 compared with 28 in 2019. Overwintering Blackcaps are uncommon at Woolston and none were ringed in the first quarter of either year. A Yellow-browed Warbler was ringed on No.3 Bed on October 11th continuing the ‘one every second year’ pattern of recent years. After a record 13 ringed last winter a more normal five Cetti’s Warblers were ringed. The resident Cetti’s Warblers may well have had a more modest breeding season but birds trapped in winter include young birds dispersing from other natal sites so it is not easy to draw conclusions.

Last winter’s invasion of young Blue Tits did not repeat and 124 were ringed compared with 256 last winter. There was also a decline, albeit less pronounced, in the arrival of juvenile Great Tits which do not disperse to the same degree as Blue Tits, with 97 ringed against 147 last winter.

Winter visitors were evident in variable numbers. For the second year running it was not a ‘Brambling winter’ with just two birds ringed. Chaffinches were ringed in similar numbers to last winter although both totals are below the average of recent years. These numbers presumably again reflect benign weather conditions and food supplies in continental Europe and a resultant low level of migration. Lesser Redpolls are also irruptive at Woolston and there was a big arrival in quarter four of 2020 with the result that 120 were ringed compared with 18 last winter. Goldfinches also appeared in small flocks and 60 ringed eclipsed the 15 last winter. After a big influx in the fourth quarter of 2019, Redwings were only present in small groups and just 64 were ringed compared with 293. Of course, this is another irruptive bird responding to conditions in Scandinavia.

In last winter’s report I wrote “The late autumn of 2017 had also been exceptional for the arrival of continental Goldcrests and 376 had been ringed at Woolston. 2018 was more typical of recent years with 225 ringed and 2019 has recorded another decline with just 190 ringed.” This decline has continued and this winter just 104 were ringed. Many of these birds are continental migrants so the explanation for this trend may well lie across the North Sea. Reed Buntings were attracted to the weedy area on No.3 Bed where a sacrificial crop is grown in normal years and were caught in good numbers on both beds. A total of 170 were ringed compared with 102 last winter.

As I write in early June it is too early to have any view of the breeding season except to say that the Blue Tits and Great Tits appear to have done reasonably well in the nest boxes despite the adverse weather conditions in April and early May. A total of 137 chicks have been ringed on No.3 Bed compared with 134 in 2020, 171 in 2019 and 158 in 2018. Of these 137, a total of 116 are already confirmed as fledged with seven dead before fledging and 14 still alive across three boxes. Of 29 nesting attempts we will have 23 successes and six failures which appears to be somewhat better than some of the anecdotal reports from other sites. A feature that is unusual for Woolston is that in two ‘successful’ nest boxes, I found the adult female lying dead on the deserted nest which is a sign, I think, that 2021 has been a difficult nesting season, at least for early nesting species.

Michael Miles, on behalf of the Woolston Ringing Team

MID-CHESHIRE BARN OWL GROUP

What can you say, when will this end; the pandemic goes on with no realistic end in sight, even given the positive effects of the vaccines. But we must try and stay positive because, at least, wildlife and Mother Nature continue as ever.

A very wet May, as well as the virus, tried to dampen our enthusiasm but, thankfully, our Barn Owls continue apparently unaffected. Although a couple of isolated areas have, apparently, reported complete failure of Barn Owl activity, I can report that in north, south, east and mid-Cheshire things look to be quite positive (so far).

There are reports of good clutch sizes (5-6 eggs being common) with subsequent broods sizes of 3-4 chicks also being common. Also food seems to be in abundance, with caches of voles, shrews, mice etc being found regularly in the nest sites. However, there are some variances in hatching times. For example, in early June we have some birds still on eggs whilst others have chicks around 4-5 weeks old. But, as ever, we must rely on the weather being kind. Barn Owls are not, as you will know, 'weather-proof', so any prolonged periods of wet weather can prove devastating. So, fingers crossed for a decent summer.

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

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

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

CHESHIRE SWAN STUDY GROUP

Since my last report in February, the Swan Study Group has ringed a total of 12 swans including 8 second-years and 4 adults. These included 1 control.

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

- Acre Dell Pools, nr Congleton: 51 on 16th May.
- Barmere, nr Whitchurch: 34 on 1st May.
- Bottom Flash, Winsford: 32 on 13th Apr and 9 on 10th May.
- Burleydam Pool, nr Whitchurch: 42 on 3rd May.
- Comber Mere near Whitchurch = 35 on 23rd May.
- Coole Pilate, nr Nantwich: 22 on 5th Mar and 25 on 16th Apr.
- Doddington Mere, nr Nantwich: 36 on 26th May.
- Trent and Mersey Canal, Middlewich: 14 on 2nd Mar, 22 on 15th Apr and 7 on 10th May.
- Redes Mere, nr Macclesfield: 26 on 18th Mar and 15 on 13th Apr.
- Sandbach Flashes: 36 on 2nd Apr.
- Spike Island, Widnes: 61 on 17th Mar, 85 on 18th Apr and 92 on 19th May.
- Woolston Eyes, nr Warrington: 29 on 14th Mar and 51 on 11th Apr.

Breeding Season: This season is well under way with one pair which had 8 cygnets now caring for 5 extra ones from another brood. The usual pool in Marton, near Congleton, produced 9 cygnets again this year. Around the county there are broods of between 2 and 7 cygnets. Whether they all survive or not we shall have to wait and see.

The *Cheshire Swan Study Group Report* for 2020 is now available to view on the website (under Reports): <http://cheshireswanstudygroup.wordpress.com>

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

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

Sites to Watch

BURTON MERE WETLANDS AND DEE MARSHES

The big news from BMW is that we have nesting Bittern. We couldn't quite believe our ears when a male was first heard booming on 16th March, and while it was great to think that a Bittern had chosen the small reedbed at BMW as an area suitable enough to set up territory, none of us at the time thought that this booming male would result in an actual breeding attempt. Booming stopped about 2 weeks later, but the male bird stayed and looked like it was happy to summer at BMW. However, in mid-May things changed. Regular feeding flights were observed with the Bittern leaving the reedbed to hunt before quickly heading back again with prey, and always to the same place. Surely not...

We then started to trawl social media to look at photos visitors had taken of Bittern at BMW, to see if we could make out 2 different birds. Most of the recent photos showed a bird without the blue around the gape that the male had shown when first booming. Was this the female? Or had the male just lost the blue colouration? It was becoming apparent that we needed to see both male and female birds together to confirm. And then on 8th June a visiting birder reported a second bird flying in while already watching a Bittern in the reedbed. Furthermore, the first bird boomed and greeted the returning bird. Since then, there have been more sightings of the 2 together. The female always returning with a full crop, while the male brings food back in his bill and leaves it for the female. Hopefully, in the next few weeks we should see the fledged juveniles.

In 2009, 3,500 reed seedlings were planted by volunteers to create a new reedbed at Burton Mere Wetlands. 12 years later that same reedbed now has a breeding pair of Marsh Harrier, breeding Bittern, and a small population of breeding Bearded Tit. A story of conservation optimism if ever there was one.

Great White Egret have had another good breeding season too, with 3 pairs fledging 10 young in total (1 brood of 4 and 2 broods of 3). Displaying Cattle Egrets were seen again this year in the Marsh Covert heronry, at least 2 pairs, but they disappeared during a miserable spell of weather in May. Another year passes without a breeding attempt by Spoonbill, although up to 7 birds are currently present, including at least 2 second-year birds with noticeably smaller bills. We remain ever hopeful that surely, they will breed one day.

Our other big news with regards rare breeding birds is that this year we have had a pair of nesting Pintail at BMW, with a nest containing 3 eggs found on 18th May. The nest is on the Welsh side of the reserve and is the first confirmed breeding of Pintail in Flintshire. The last confirmed breeding of Pintail in Wales was in Pembrokeshire in 2002, with a probable breeding pair on Anglesey in 2004.

Lapwing have had a poor breeding year nationally, with a very dry April and then a cold, wet May, nearly all first broods failed, and things were no different on the Dee. However, second broods are doing much better locally at least. Redshank and Avocet have had a better year and nesting later than Lapwing has certainly paid dividends this year. All of our breeding waders have suffered from avian predation this year, and not from the usual Carrion Crows or Buzzard, but from the Bittern pair who have been observed on numerous occasions catching Lapwing and Avocet chicks and taking them back to the nest. The Bitterns have also been partial to Black-headed Gull chicks, although most seem too big for them to catch now.

We have 4 pairs of Marsh Harrier this year, with a pair at BMW and 3 pairs currently feeding young out on the marsh.

Bittern by
Tony Broome



At least 2 pairs of Bearded Tit are breeding again this year, and an incredible 28 Cetti's Warbler territories were confirmed at BMW this year, with more on the marsh.

In late summer we plan to do a major refresh of the ditches and drains on both wet grasslands at BMW, in order to provide optimum conditions for breeding waders and wildfowl. New scrapes are also planned with one next to the new Border Hide (just in front of Border Pool), which will hopefully help to bring the birds closer to our visitors, and fingers crossed, may even bring in an autumn rarity.

Graham Jones, Site Manager at RSPB Dee Estuary Reserve

MARBURY COUNTRY PARK

Most regional birders will have visited the hide at Marbury Country Park overlooking the western end of Budworth Mere and the Coward Memorial Reedbed. Built to replace a screen at the same site back in 1995, it was the best vantage point for seeing the Bitterns that regularly winter in the reedbed, had an active feeding station, and was a good place to catch up with friends and visiting birders. I say "was" because overnight Wednesday 23rd to Thursday 24th June the hide was badly vandalised and had to be dismantled. There has been much discussion subsequently about whether the hide should be replaced and if so where it should be located. Thanks to the support of Cheshire West and Chester Council, the park's Countryside Officer and the Friends of Anderton and Marbury (FoAM) it has been agreed that the hide should be replaced. With the help and guidance of FoAM it is also expected that appropriate funding can be obtained. The new hide's location has yet to be finalised but is expected to be positioned such that it remains in proximity to the reedbed as well as offering views along the mere. The plan is to have the new hide ready for visitors before the likely return of the Bitterns in late autumn.

Greg Baker

ROSTHERNE MERE NNR WETLAND ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

During March 2021 work started on an exciting plan to create a series of bunds, scrapes and ponds in several areas on Rostherne Mere National Nature Reserve (NNR) by Natural England (NE) as part of a wetland enhancement project. The main focus of the work so far has been in Dolls Meadow where a series of 23 pools and scrapes have replaced the old ditch system. The design of the bunds has enabled the pools to join up and provide shallower areas as well as deeper standing water. Even through the recent dry spell the water levels have stayed up in all but two of the higher pools. It is expected that the field will become a lot wetter during winter months.

Nearby in Rostherne Brook six leaky dams have been built to slow the flow and encourage flooding into the adjacent fields which will help deposit silt and create a more dynamic wetland.

Woven willow coirs, positioned at the mouth of Rostherne Brook, help divert water back into Brook Meadow pooling the flow and directing it to filter through a young willow bed.

It is early days for the project but already over 40 bird species have benefitted from the new habitat and it is hoped that several of these will breed. Furthermore, it is hoped passage migrants will descend to explore the area in the coming months. Numbers of Canada and Greylag Geese, Coot, Gadwall, Goosander, Mallard, Mandarin Duck,



Mandarin Ducks

Shelduck, Shoveler, Teal and Wigeon have increased, while Grey Herons are often seen on the fields. Several wader species have been recorded feeding on the edge of the scrapes including Common Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Curlew, Lapwing, Little Ringed Plover, Oystercatcher, Snipe and Whimbrel. Interestingly, the first-ever Avocets visited the Reserve in late March but they were only seen briefly on the Mere. Both Peregrine Falcon and Red Kite have been recorded circling the area while Meadow Pipits and Pied, White and Grey Wagtails are often seen feeding on the bunds. The diversity of flora and fauna, especially of aquatic invertebrates, has already greatly increased with Black-tailed Skimmer, Broad-bodied Chaser, Four-spotted Chaser and Emperor Dragonflies recorded recently.

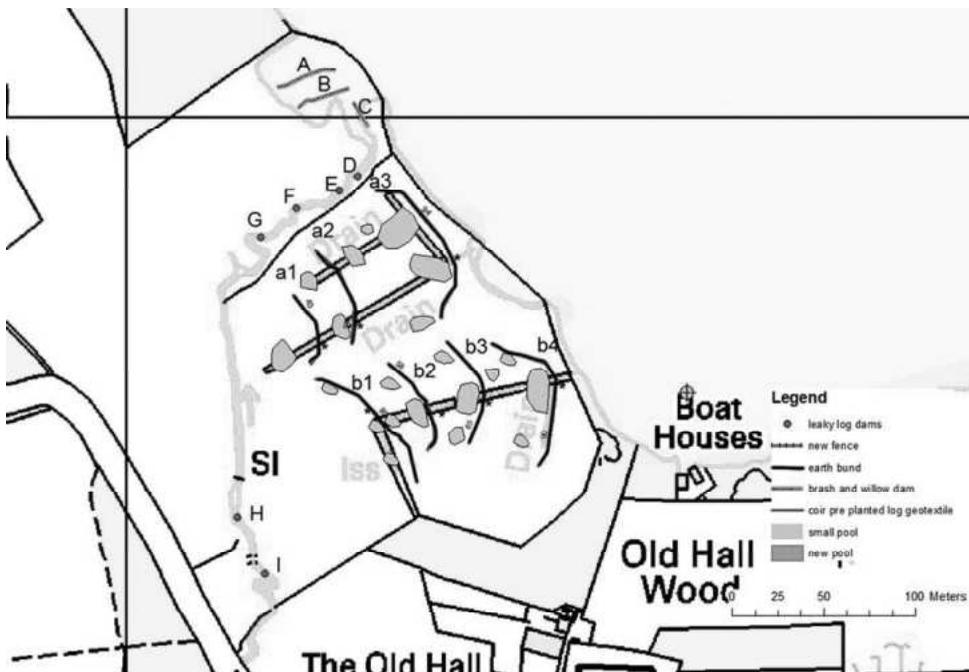
The Dave Clarke Memorial Hide, which was built in 2019, provides the ideal viewpoint to observe the new wetland habitat in Dolls Meadow.

Six pools have also been dug at the southern end of the Mere in Mere Field, near the Bittern Hide and close to Shaw Green Willows. Much more enhancement work is being planned in this area during the autumn and this will also be an opportunity to add to and adjust some of the early work.

In conclusion, the wetland enhancement project will greatly help strip nutrients out of the water flowing into the mere by slowing down flows, encouraging wetland plants and the deposition of silt, whilst also providing a much more diverse habitat.

The A W Boyd Memorial Observatory reopened on 24th May after a closure of over a year due to COVID restrictions. Permits can be obtained from the Membership Secretary, Sheelagh Halsey, via email at rostherne_permit@btinternet.com. Costs of permits are: Family Permit £15, Individual Permit £10, Student Permit £5. Access to the Dave Clarke Memorial Hide and the Bittern Hide can be made by permit holders accompanied by NE volunteers on Wednesdays and Sundays. Unaccompanied access can be made in agreement with Natural England.

Bill Bellamy



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

What a spring we have had - April was dry but cold and May was wet and again very cold. Trees late coming into leaf and no insects and about the birds here at Weaverham have been shifting large amounts of seed and normally by this time they have eased off a bit. A pair of Long-tailed Tits have nested in next door's garden and successfully fledged eight young. Both Blue and Great Tits have nested and failed in the boxes. Greenfinches have been successful with four chicks and Goldfinches have just gone down on eggs in a laburnum bush. However, NO House Martins in our area and the first pair of Swifts arrived on 6th June, just one pair, normally there are about a dozen pairs about. The Robins and Blackbirds have gone down for a second time but on 5th June a pair of Magpies with two young cleared the hedges of both nests and also nests of a pair of Woodpigeons and a pair of Collared Doves. I know it is the circle of life but I wish they would go somewhere else. If I had told my late father I have had Magpies in the garden he would not have believed me. Since persecution of corvids has ceased they have lost all fear of man. I regularly have Jays in the garden, whilst growing up in Norfolk Jays and Magpies would be heard but very rarely seen and then it took a 10-mile walk away from all houses and places that man frequented only to get the view of a rear end disappearing over the next field.



Speaking with friends down in Norfolk and Cornwall it would seem that with the late breeding season the egg collectors are still out and about. If whilst you are doing your rounds you see anyone who looks 'not right' they are probably up to no good. They will be dressed the same as us, carry a good pair of bins, and now it would seem that the latest piece of 'must have' gear is a field guide in their hands; ok we all carry one (or is it just me), but not on public display. One of my gamekeeper friends challenged someone on his patch who was waving a *Collins Field Guide* and my friend is not sure why, perhaps because he was reading the guide upside down, but he thinks the shotgun under his arm probably had something to do with it. This particular male scuttled off and caught the next train to Norwich. No he wasn't carrying his gun to down raptors, he was after mink that are predated a great deal of his ground-nesting birds he has on the land he looks after (did I tell you how much I hate North American Mink). These egg-collecting vermin are still about, please keep your eyes open and make a note in your book of descriptions and any car registration numbers you see on your travels, BUT please do not place yourself in danger we don't all have a 12-bore under our arms to make them think twice - they will have a go, so please do not put yourselves in harm's way. We all have good optics use them and note anything you can in your field notebook.

Whilst on the subject of mink the Mute Swans at the twin fishing pits at Marston have had all their cygnets predated by mink that use the Trent and Mersey Canal as base. (Have I mentioned before how much I hate mink?)

Every piece of spare land seems to be sold on for building, please keep an eye on any pieces of land in your areas that are being developed. If you see any let your local conservation reps know about it. They may already be aware but no harm is done to highlight it. Builders do not abide by the Wildlife and Countryside Act and it's surprising how many times a digger bucket or a bulldozer blade slips. Hope you enjoy the rest of the summer and you find that lifer you have yet to tick off.

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

WARRINGTON AREA

The main conservation issue in the Warrington area has been a matter involving a very low-flying paramotor (a smaller version of a paraglider) that flew over Woolston Eyes on 17th April. I have already supplied details of this to Steve Turner. What happened was appalling. It was seen flying at a height of only ten feet over the centre of No.3 bed where 20 or more Black-necked Grebes were on the water before proceeding east over the Thelwall Viaduct on to No.1 bed, where once again it skimmed a matter of feet over an area that was then holding five pairs of Little Ringed Plovers. David Bowman and others were on the bed at the time and David took an excellent photograph of the machine, a copy of which I have. There were no identifying letters or numbers on it. We reported the matter to the Cheshire Police Rural Crime Unit which is investigating.

David Bowman has also spoken to the National Paraglider Association which apparently has 8000 or so members. Unfortunately, many operate these machines who are not members of the association which is not compulsory. I also supplied information to the Warrington Guardian which carried a long article about the incident. Sadly, to date, the offender has not been found. We are hopeful that he will be found as the machine is a new one that was made in Poland and only a few have apparently been sold in the UK. Certainly, we do not want a repeat of this incident. There has been a posting on Facebook that suggests that the same paramotor has been causing similar problems in the Frodsham area so he does need to be caught.

Brian Martin, Warrington Area Representative

Editorial note: This issue of low-flying paramotors has been reported previously in *Bird News* - in March 2020 and also November 2020, both times by Richard Smith about the north Wirral and the Dee Estuary. I would refer members to the following 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/>

WIRRAL AREA

Overleaf you'll see an interesting article about Hoylake Beach and possibly its future.

Richard Smith, Wirral Area Representative

CONSERVATION TEAM

Conservation Officer	Steve Turner, 11 Pinfold Way, Weaverham, Northwich, CW8 3NL Tel: 01606 853796 Email: conservation@cawos.org
Chester	Vacant - please let Steve Turner know if you are willing to take on this role
Congleton	Vacant - please let Steve Turner know if you are willing to take on this role
Crewe and Nantwich	Colin Lythgoe, 11 Waterloo Road, Haslington, Crewe, CW1 5TF. Tel: 01270 582642 Email: colin.lythgoe@uwclub.net
Halton	Tony Parker, 41 The Park, Penketh, Warrington, WA5 2SG. Tel: 01925 726986 Email: tonyparker@cawos.org
Macclesfield	Vacant - please let Steve Turner know if you are willing to take on this role
Vale Royal	Roy Leigh, 8 Hall Drive, Marston, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 6DT Tel: 01606 892032 Email: roysleigh@aol.com
Warrington	Brian Martin, 45 Albert Road, Grappenhall, Warrington, WA4 2PF. Tel: 01925 264251 Email: brianmartin1940@hotmail.com
Wirral	Richard Smith, March Wall, King's Drive North, Caldy, Wirral, CH48 1LL. Tel: 0151 625 2320 Email: richard@deestuary.co.uk

HOYLAKE BEACH

This article is written by Cheshire Wildlife Trust and its local group Wirral Wildlife, using the guidance issued to Wirral Borough Council by Natural England, and with further advice on geomorphology, sediment accretion and estuarine habitats from coastal experts who know Wirral. Coastal change is natural; we are fortunate that here it is providing new habitat to help tackle the climate, environmental and well-being emergencies we face.

During the last ice age, Wirral was under a thick layer of ice. This gouged out the Dee Estuary and pressed down our part of the earth's crust. Since the ice melted about 10,000 years ago, the Dee Estuary has been slowly filling up with nutrient-rich sand and mud, known as sediment. The sediment comes mostly from the sea, by longshore drift along the North Wales coast. It is this accumulated sediment that makes the Wirral shores internationally important for nature conservation. It is full of worms, snails, crabs and other invertebrates. On these feed the thousands of birds which winter here, which would not be able to survive without this rich food.

The seabeds of the Dee and Mersey estuaries also store lots of carbon that has been absorbed over thousands of years, sealed underwater. If disturbed, this carbon is released, making our climate warmer and our seas more acidic. Readers will know about the effects of the climate emergency and current efforts to tackle it through the COP26 conference: we are part of nature, not separate from it. Salt marsh is one of the best habitats at taking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, on a par with peatlands and woodlands. (See Natural England report cited at end)

Sea levels have fluctuated widely since the last ice age and are currently rising as a result of increasing sea temperatures. Our piece of crust has been slowly coming up again since the weight of ice was removed, so the net sea level rise at Liverpool is currently about 5mm a year - which does not sound much until it is added up over a century and more. Our coasts are dynamic places, always changing. For the last century many of our coasts have been 'frozen' in place by coastal defences. Can and should this be continued?

To help answer this, the national government has put in place a Shoreline Management Plan (SMP), about which there were local public meetings in 2012. Rev. Paul Rooney, Head of Geography and Environmental Science at Liverpool Hope University, tells us that there has been a "tectonic change" in knowledge of coastal processes in the last 20 years - but we still cannot accurately predict the future from the past.

So what about Hoylake? The SMP decision for North Wirral, made by national experts, is to "hold the line" i.e. maintain the existing hard defences for at least 50 years from when the plan was made. After that defences may be removed at Leasowe Bay and natural sand dunes encouraged to take over. The SMP principle is to work with nature - but Liverpool Bay is not entirely natural, being affected by the canalisation of the Dee and Mersey and the dredging of the Liverpool Port approaches for shipping. At Hoylake, the energy of the water and sediment supply are key. The Hoyle Lake is now full of sediment. Hilbre and the East Hoyle Bank break some of the energy of the waves, tides and currents. So sand and some mud is being deposited on Hoylake shore, raising its level to the point where it provides excellent conditions for specialist plants. The colonisation by coastal plants is the result. Sand dunes are wonderful habitats for a suite of fascinating plants which we need to respect and which provide us with service by holding the sand together, so less blows inland. An on-going study of Hoylake shore by an expert professional botanist (Joshua Styles) has so far (by spring 2021) recorded 110 plant species, including twelve rare and unusual ones of at least regional significance. *Spartina* (cordgrass) occupies much less than 5% of the vegetated area. All the species are native to the UK. Most of the species are now those characteristic of sand dune rather than salt marsh. This excellent collection has arrived naturally, because the shore provides the correct environment for their needs. This special and natural environment we now have on our shore is why every time the vegetation has been sprayed or scraped off, it returns. Natural England's opinion is that at Hoylake the balance would be more towards sand dune than salt marsh, but detailed studies are needed to test this. These have now been commissioned by Wirral Borough Council.

In 2000, a report by Dr Alan Jemmett (then Dee Estuary Conservation Officer, now head of Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service) looked at the Hoylake foreshore and did a report to Wirral BC, which judged the continued removal of vegetation to be "unsustainable" on ecological

and financial grounds. With money needed for other matters, surely we should embrace the natural opportunity that has developed on our coast.

At Parkgate, well up the Dee where there is less movement of waves, mostly mud was deposited, leading to permanent salt marsh. In contrast, Red Rocks Nature Reserve, round the corner from Hoylake shore, has been allowed to develop fairly naturally for the last twenty years. Here a new salt marsh, reed marsh and sand dune line have formed and are still increasing. In these new habitats natterjack toads sing, rare moths breed and much other wildlife is flourishing. Rats, mosquitoes and cordgrass are not problems at Red Rocks. West Kirby beach by the Sailing Centre is kept clear of plants by mechanical methods.

The best comparison to Hoylake, because it likewise faces Liverpool Bay, is in Sefton, all the way from Birkdale to Marshside, where coastal sediment has formed wildlife-rich new habitats. At Southport an amenity beach is kept as sand. We encourage you to walk along this shore and enjoy the wildlife.

North Wirral foreshore is internationally important for wintering birds, with many thousands there every year. How would development of salt marsh and sand dune affect them? Developing salt marsh and sand dune would slightly reduce the feeding ground for the wading birds. The RSPB does not think the loss is significant, given the large amount of inter-tidal habitat available. The new salt marsh and sand dune could provide more roosting places at high tide. This would be valuable space for the birds, which have few places to go because of urban development round the Dee. We can help the resting birds by keeping ourselves, our dogs and our horses from disturbing the birds at high tide in autumn and winter.

The previous agreement between Natural England and Wirral Borough Council on the beach management has finished. In 2019 Wirral Borough Council declared an Environmental and Climate Emergency, as have many other local and national bodies. In the last few years, new evidence on the effects of the weedkiller formerly used on the beach (glyphosate) has emerged. It has been shown to reduce invertebrate populations, including those in the beach sediments. These invertebrates are the food supply for the wintering birds. The guidance of the Government's ecological advisor, Natural England, is now in favour of letting nature take its course (see their guidance to Wirral Borough Council). They do allow the possibility of creating a limited amenity beach, as at West Kirby, using mechanical means.

Money is tight - is our money best used making the climate and environmental emergencies worse? Or could it be used to manage the natural sediments, keeping open sand where an amenity beach is needed and access for RNLI? Wirral Borough Council has at long last agreed to have a proper scientific investigation done, as Dr Jemmett recommended two decades back, to model what would develop naturally on this beach.

Look ahead 50-100 years. Sea level will continue to rise. Dunes and salt marsh would protect the sea wall. What would our grandchildren want us to do?

For all these reasons, we should allow nature to take its course on Hoylake shore. We are very lucky to have more coastal wildlife able to thrive on our peninsula. New coastal habitat is a rarity in the UK and we should celebrate it.

Our mission, as Cheshire Wildlife Trust, is to bring wildlife back. We want to see more and better-connected wild spaces and the pressures on the environment reduced, and we work to improve the resilience of nature and restore broken ecosystems. We also believe that people's wellbeing and the economy relies on a healthy, natural environment. Coastal processes are changing the beach at Hoylake and increasing the diversity of wildlife found there. There needs to be more understanding of the coastal change, habitat development and the value that this brings, and we are in favour of further studies to help achieve this. Hoylake beach is designated for nature conservation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. As such, any management of the beach requires the written agreement of Natural England.

Wirral Wildlife Committee, Cheshire Wildlife Trust

References

Shoreline Management Plan - www.mycoastline.org.uk

Wirral Coastal Strategy - www.wirral.gov.uk

A Jemmett and T Smith, *The Beaches at West Kirby and Hoylake*, Options for Managing Windblown Sand and Habitat Change, Jan 2000, http://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/report_for_wbc_on_wind_blown_san

Natural England Research Report NERR094 'Carbon Storage and Sequestration by Habitat: A Review of the Evidence' (second edition), <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5419124441481216>

ENGLAND COAST PATH: BIRKENHEAD TO THE WELSH BORDER

The Birkenhead to the Welsh Border length reports BHW1 and BHW3 - part of Natural England's coastal access report compendium for Birkenhead to the Welsh Border was submitted to the Secretary of State on 16 December 2020.

On 7th July 2021 the Decision Notice by the Secretary of State under section 52 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949: Birkenhead to the Welsh Border, lengths BHW1 and BHW3 was published.

Basically Natural England has answered and resolved the objections raised by Cheshire West and Chester Council, various local businesses and local people, such that The Secretary of State has given its approval. Section BHW2 is still under discussion.

There are two reports:

1 Notice by the Secretary of State under section 52 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949: Birkenhead to the Welsh Border, lengths BHW1 and BHW3

2 Coastal access report - Birkenhead to the Welsh Border lengths BHW1 and BHW3: representations with Natural England's comments

Both are available from the following link:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coastal-access-section-52-notice-for-birkenhead-to-the-welsh-border?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_source=c291918d-ea87-4484-a17a-20baa47fcbc0&utm_content=daily

Ted Lock, Secretary

Editorial note: If you want to read the two reports, but have difficulty typing in the URL, please email me requesting the URL and I will reply with the link which you will only need to click on: sheilablamire@cawos.org

WANTED: NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS

There are three vacancies for Non-Executive (Ordinary) Members of Council

For further information, please contact:

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

THE SOCIETY NEEDS YOU!!!

CAWOS News

I hope everybody is keeping safe and well. The Covid-19 position has greatly improved since writing my March report. I hope over the last couple of months you have been able to get out and about more freely and catch up with the summer migrants and endemic species. It's my impression from the Wilmslow area of the county that numbers are down and few-and-far between. Willow Warblers, Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps seem to be doing well, as are Garden Warblers but I have not seen a Whitethroat so far!! Large numbers of Sand Martins, Swifts and to a lesser extent for me Swallows and House Martins arrived, but many moved on. These days hirundines are few and far between, although it could be where I bird. It will be interesting to read the reports from various parts of the county in this issue of *Bird News*.

We warmly welcome: S. Merchant and family, I. Williams, E. Youngs and R. Black as new members of the Society.

The AGM of CAWOS was held during our last Zoom meeting in March. Phil Hampson was duly elected as the new Chairman. Our thanks go to David Steventon, the outgoing Chairman, for his 5 years of service and he has agreed to stay on as an Ordinary Council member. We also welcome David Hiley to Council as an Ordinary member; David is our representative on the Dee Estuary Conservation Group. The Society also wishes to thank three long-standing members who have stepped down from their positions in CAWOS. Sheila and Geoff Blamire have been involved with the Records and *Bird Report* for many years bringing an end of an era for the Society. Sheila has agreed to continue with editing *Bird News* and Geoff has been active in transferring the CAWOS database of records into BirdTrack, for which we are extremely grateful. Sheila and Geoff were made Vice-Presidents at the AGM in March as recognition of their services to CAWOS. Brian Dyke also stepped down at the AGM after more than 40 years of service. He was a member and Treasurer of the COA (Cheshire Ornithological Association), the forerunner of CAWOS. He then became Treasurer of the newly-named Society and over the years did time as Chairman on three occasions and served on Council as an Ordinary member for many years, his knowledge and experience will be missed. Council have agreed to put Brian forward for Life membership at the AGM in March 2022.

Council has only met once in April since my last report. Under the new Chairman we focused on the key issues facing the Society. The first was a discussion on our failure to attract any members to give up time to help Council. We have advertised for over a year in *Bird News* and by word of mouth for members to help. We are three ordinary council members short and lack a Vice-Chairman, we need a Systematic Editor and a Project Manager for the *Bird Report* and a member to organise our indoor/Zoom speaker programme. Without full support the Society cannot continue as it is. We also need younger members as most in current positions are retired and not getting any younger. **The future of the Society is in your hands.** We have 300+ members with < 5% active in running the Society.

In contrast to my last paragraph, members have been very good at reporting their bird records, now required in BirdTrack, for inclusion in the annual *Bird Report*. You will have received the 2019 *Bird Report* in the last day or so and will have noticed the enormous changes that have taken place over the last four years. With colour, lots of excellent photographs and reports, a thoroughly professional job. Our thanks for driving this go to Andy Livermore, who has worked tirelessly, with limited support, to produce the last four issues. Andy has stepped down as Systematic Editor as he discovered he was acting as editor for the whole report, which is not what he signed up for. In his absence Phil Hampson and I have agreed to produce the 2020 *Bird Report*, while we search for a replacement for Andy. Andy has of course been supported by Hugh Pulsford, our County Recorder and Mark Woodhead, who has put together the excellent photographs he has received from others and his own photographs. Andy has willingly offered his experience to help us with the 2020 *Bird Report*.

Much of the basic work to produce the systematic list is down to the 12 compilers who put in hours converting thousands of records into a brief overview of the species status and its winter

and summer activities. The ringing report from the two ringing groups in Cheshire is collated by Michael Miles with 3,500 birds ringed from 135 species, adding to our science on bird movement, age and other scientific parameters. I hope this gives you a flavour of what is required to pull the data all together and if you think you would like to help please contact me. Women are very welcome to get involved, we currently have two women acting as compilers, one as secretary of the rarities panel and another is Membership Secretary of Rostherne NNR.

I gather that some hides are planning on opening on 21st this month, or when the government decides, with some already opened. Can I wish you good birding during the summer and remember to submit your records to CAWOS via BirdTrack.

Ted Lock, Secretary

CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

When this *Bird News* arrives, we will be into the summer. What a strange spring we had with some dreadful weather. My experience of migration showed many species arriving very late. My local Swifts were between 2 and 3 weeks late, Swallows and House Martins are becoming increasingly difficult to see. On my patch, Willdoarclough and the Moors above there, the usual migrants are around, Spotted Flycatchers being another late arriving species, Pied Flycatchers seem to be becoming scarcer in areas where they were abundant some years ago. There are plenty of Redstarts around though as are Tree Pipits. The Goyt valley is usually full of singing Willow Warblers from April onwards and again this year they seemed late, they outnumber Chiffchaffs here. Luckily Ring Ouzels were around on the moors and gave some splendid views before they settled down to breeding, as did Northern Wheatears. I was very pleased to find Short-eared Owls again having not seen them for the last 2 years, well last year we were locked down so that explains that year! Sadly, I can't remember the last time I saw Merlin up on the grouse moors, or for that matter Peregrine. Did have three Common Buzzards just hanging in the wind one morning which was spectacular and Kestrels are nearly always present. Along with the haunting call of the Curlew, the plaintive whistles of the Golden Plover and then my personal favourite, the Lapwing with their wonderful calls, the Cheshire Moors can be simply wonderful. How things have changed over the years in the area no longer can Wood Warblers be heard, we used to drive out on a nice summer evening just to listen to the amazing call. The Little Owls have gone now as the barn they roosted and bred in was demolished!

I don't know how many of our members trap and record moths, I've been doing this for a few years and it is so rewarding and the variation within the moths and number of species is simply amazing, I'd recommend anyone to have a go, or, go along when someone is trapping. There are some absolutely stunning moths and the catches vary month by month. Having said that my TOTAL catch in May was two months on the nights I was able to trap, fortunately things have improved now.

I was lucky enough to be shown around Rostherne by two of the Rostherne committee, who are also CAWOS members, early in June. I am very embarrassed to say I have not been there for many years; I have no idea why not. I was really taken aback by what I've missed and the new scrapes that have been created will surely turn up some good birds when reverse migration starts with the non or failed breeding waders.

The *Bird Report* for 2019 will by now have arrived through members letterboxes and I'm sure you'll agree it is an excellent publication, again this is thanks to a small group of people, Andy Livermore and Ted Lock being two of them, the compilers and the Photo Editor, also Dave Bickerton for the typesetting and Mike Dawson and his team at Swallowtail for the printing, all deserve an enormous thank you from the Society, apologies for anyone I have missed here. We are starting the production cycle for the 2020 Report already.

Another piece of work going on in the background has been moving to BirdTrack. To date I have received and upload over 30,000 records with more still to come. If you have any 2020 records that you've not submitted then please send them and we will try and include

them. In the background Geoff has completed the move of the historic records from the old database to BirdTrack and again it is a thank you to him for his hard work there.

Over the last couple of years we have consistently asked for members to help with various aspects of running CAWOS. We still NEED Council members.

In the March *Bird News* I wrote: *Our membership is just over 300 and the Council has several empty roles. There is nothing mysterious about Council it is just the committee that governs the Society. Council is comprised of ordinary members like you and the roles we undertake are purely voluntary. BUT it is not possible for us to continue putting all the pressure onto a small number of people. There are 5 Council meetings a year and all are on Zoom so no travelling needed. It is very easy to gloss over these words but if we cannot generate more interest and help then there will only be one outcome for CAWOS.*

Sadly, there was no response and we really do need help. I really cannot stress enough how serious this situation is, if one or two of the current Council decided to stop then the Society would be in very serious trouble and in danger of closing and I'm sure that is not something that anyone wants to happen. There is no succession planning without having people, nor can we plan any, for existing Council Members. Surely, there are people within the Society who can give some time to help. Please contact either me or Ted Lock if you can help us, we REALLY do need more people to be involved.

Phil Hampson, Chairman

SHEILA AND GEOFF BLAMIRE

As we all know Sheila and Geoff retired this year after over 20 years of looking after all aspects of the bird records for CAWOS. The Council decided to present them with a painting as a thank you and Ray Scally, who does illustrations for *Bird News*, was asked if he would do a watercolour and a Firecrest being the subject.

Sadly, we are still unable to meet face to face and we don't know when we'll be able to do so again. But on Monday 14 June I had the pleasure of presenting Geoff and Sheila with the painting. Unfortunately, we cannot include colour photographs in *Bird News* so I will circulate a photograph with the meeting notification for October. Many thanks to Ray for taking on this for us.



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*.

SITUATIONS VACANT

“THE SOCIETY NEEDS YOU”

NON-EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEMBERS

For further information, please contact:

David Steventon chairman@cawos.org 01625 421936

“THE SOCIETY NEEDS YOU”

Phil Hampson will retire as the Membership Secretary at the AGM in March 2022, so we need a volunteer(s) to come forward to take over 2022, with some help with Phil. Below is an attempt to give some idea of the workload involved:

JOB DESCRIPTION FOR THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

- to send out reminders to members about the payment of subscriptions (usually one in the autumn and one with the *Bird Report* in January).
- to collect subscriptions, either at meetings, those received by standing order, or those received in the post, to pay these into the bank and to inform the Treasurer of the amount paid in (Oct-Feb the peak period). There is a computer programme for the collation of members' details.
- to respond to all applications from persons wishing to join the Society (it takes approx 10-15 min to process an application).
- to keep a record of the 'numbers of current members' and to inform Council through the Secretary of any significant changes.
- to keep Gift Aid records and to pass them on to the Treasurer for forwarding (they are automatically kept by the computer programme).
- produce labels, purchase stamps, fill envelopes and post *Bird News* (with help if needed).
- produce membership spreadsheet for *Bird Report* printer's use.

Anyone interested should contact Phil Hampson for more details:

email: memsec@cawos.org or phone: 07545 465069

CAWOS Programme

The 2021-2022 programme will be done by Zoom and instructions will be sent via email to the membership, so please make sure we have your up-to-date email address. Any other updates to this programme will be in the November *Bird News* and on www.cawos.org and again via emails to the membership.

1st OCTOBER 2021

'MOORE NATURE RESERVE' by Tony Parker

Our member Tony will present a talk to us about Moore Nature reserve. Moore Nature Reserve comprises almost 200 acres of woodland, meadows, lakes and ponds and is home to many diverse species of plants, animals, birds and other wildlife. The nature reserve is well known for its varied bird life and many interesting birds can be found either as year-round residents or seasonal visitors.

5th NOVEMBER 2021

'A SHROPSHIRE BIRDER'S YEAR' by Jim Almond (Shropshire Birder)

Jim keeps a County year list every year with the aim to see at least 160 species (with as many as possible photographed!) Find out how many different species were seen during a record-breaking year of 2008! This talk is based around the highlights of the past few years including quite a few rarities (e.g. the Black-necked Grebe), and some new records for the County! It takes you around many of the main birdwatching areas, the best times to go and what you might find there. From gull watching and wildfowl in the winter, to reserves and 'hotspots' in the north and south of the county, the talk is organised by the seasons and features the changing panorama of the countryside. Shropshire is certainly not one of the best counties for migrants and rarities but be prepared for a few surprises.

3rd DECEMBER 2021

SEABIRDS - to be advised

7th JANUARY 2022

SEABIRDS - to be advised

4th FEBRUARY 2022

'WILDLIFE OF A WORKING FOREST' by Mike Read

Mike regards the superb New Forest as his 'local patch' and lives on the edge of this unique location which is studded with ancient and ornamental broad-leaved woodlands, mires, ponds and streams, timber plantations and glorious heathlands. Ancient rights, local traditions and constantly changing work practices add greatly to this, Britain's smallest National Park. However, it is an area under great pressure with perhaps 15 million day-visits annually. Despite this pressure, the New Forest still contains an extraordinary range of wildlife species with many rarities and some are even unique in British terms.

4th MARCH 2022

AGM followed by 'THE REINTRODUCTION OF THE COMMON CRANE (well not so common) TO THE SOMERSET LEVELS' - speaker to be advised.



This section of Bird News has been temporarily suspended because the *majority* of events have been cancelled due to Covid-19. Some of the affiliated societies are holding zoom meetings with speakers (eg Chester RSPB, Macclesfield RSPB, SECOS). If you need any clarification please check with each society on their website or ring the contact number below.

AFFILIATED SOCIETIES

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

CAWOS Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society www.cawos.org
Meetings St Vincent's RC Church Hall, Knutsford 7:45pm, contact Sec. Ted Lock 01625 540468

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

HRSPB High Peak RSPB Members' Group www.rspb.org.uk/groups/highpeak
Meetings Senior Citizens' Hall, Marple 7:30pm, contact Tim Walters 0161 449 0299

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

MCOS Mid-Cheshire Ornithological Society www.midcheshireos.co.uk
Meetings Cuddington & Sandiway Village Hall 7:45pm, contact Andrew Aldridge 01477 534873

MRSPB Macclesfield RSPB Members' Group www.rspb.org.uk/groups/macclesfield
Meetings United Reformed Church, Macclesfield 7:45pm, contact Daryll Bailey 01625 430311

NCRSPB North Cheshire RSPB Members' Group www.rspb.org.uk/groups/north_cheshire
Meetings Appleton Parish Hall, Appleton 7:45pm, contact Sec. Dot Seed 07917 567395

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

SECOS South-East Cheshire Ornithological Society www.secos.org.uk
Meetings Ettiley Heath Church Community Centre at 7:30pm, contact Sec. Colin Lythgoe 01270 582642

WGBG Wilmslow Guild Birdwatching Group <http://wgbwcopy.wikidot.com/wgbg>
Meetings 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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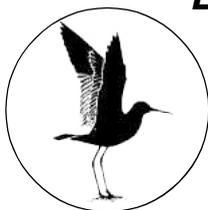
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