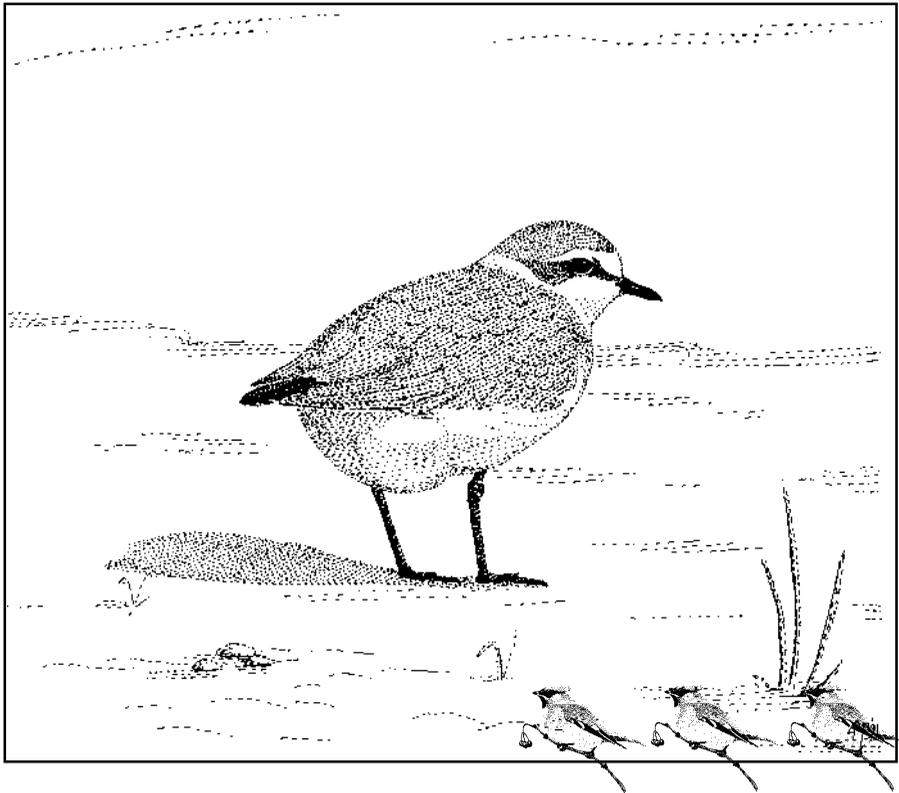


*Cheshire and Wirral
Ornithological Society*

BIRD NEWS

Number 11 July 91



House Martins * Recent Reports * Notes and Letters

Records and Atlas * Conservation * Ringers Notebook

Bird Race 91 * Diary * Book Review



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Articles, Letters and Comments would be welcomed by the Editor

Front cover - Kentish Plover by Tony Broome

Editorial

Anyone who has been a member of CAWOS since its inception and who has read all the issues of BIRD NEWS can hardly have failed to note the repetitive and largely futile pleas for the submission of articles, increases in membership or generally for more people to become involved in the Society. As Editor I have reduced the number of such requests on the basis that growth can only come if there is genuine interest and in this respect a decline in membership from last year is certainly disappointing.

After the early issues we received mild and limited criticism regarding a perceived accent in BIRD NEWS on information regarding rare birds in the County. This was noted and every effort has been made to provide a balanced newsletter with a range of articles to suit most tastes. Yet perhaps if we had indeed concentrated upon "twitching" reports we may have been more successful in attracting members. Of course this is only conjecture yet sales of the annual Cheshire Bird Report containing only authenticated records amounts to only about 500 copies which can be contrasted with a reputed sale of over a 1,000 copies of Birdline North-West's annual report. Perhaps there is a moral here for someone, but who?

It is often said that the more one puts into a situation the more one is likely to gain, with the converse being equally true. Give and take, but in that order! I have mentioned Poynton Pool on a few occasions although this can hardly be described as a County hotspot for birds. Yet it may again serve to illustrate a point as its serious decline over the last couple of decades surely mirrors that which has occurred at many other sites. No doubt the reasons for this decline are diverse and interrelated but one factor surely predominates, namely the effects of human pressure through increased leisure pursuits. The future for wildlife at the pool has been brought to the fore by recent events. A very limited area of the edge is now free from fishing and this restricted area is almost certainly due to the influence of the owners of substantial houses at the north end of the pool who are concerned for their views. A small reed bed had grown at this end which afforded the best habitat in the area of least disturbance for the few birds which are left. Several pairs of Great Crested Grebes usually breed, although acts of mindless barbarity in recent years has seen females shot dead on their nests. Imagine therefore the great concern when it was seen that one of the house owners, whose garden ended at the reed bed, had arbitrarily cut the reeds down! Meetings with the Parish Council have ensued where the question of balance between human leisure pursuits and wildlife interests were discussed. The fishing lobby quite properly pointed out that their members' subscriptions contributed substantially to their usage of the resource and the key question was inevitably asked, what was the wildlife lobby putting in to support their interests. Regretfully the answer was much in keeping with the level of support for CAWOS, although the local RSPB members group have done some work at the site.

I wonder however just what level of interest there would be if a Least Sandpiper or Falcatel Teal took up residence for a few days. No doubt the ensuing hoardes would be marshalled and collection buckets put out for donations which might just be used to replant a new reed bed. Although this is an unlikely scenario it will serve to underline the main point that unless we are prepared to give before we take there is likely to be little left to enjoy within a very short time.

Richard Gabb.

Species Spotlight

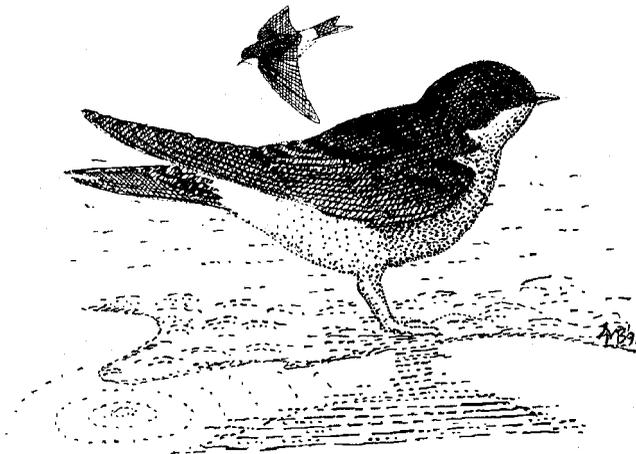
HOUSE MARTIN

What happened to the House Martins this year? During mid-May several friends and I were passing comment on the distinct lack of one of our most familiar summer visitors. Normally this is a bird seen in good numbers almost everywhere, with colonies spread from the edges of farmland to the depths of the urban sprawl, but this year I had only seen a handful by 20th May.

Britain's population is estimated to be somewhere between 300,000 and 600,000 pairs and is spread throughout all but the most remote places, basically anywhere with houses. They normally arrive during April and May and stay until September when the bulk of the population leave. They often raise two broods and some usually hang on into October to do so. They are familiar to most people with their mud nests cemented to the eaves of houses, in colonies normally up to ten but occasionally holding as many as a hundred nests.

It must have been wonderful for the species when men first started building houses. Imagine being restricted to cliff overhangs and the regions where they occur, then suddenly having square box cliffs sprouting up right across the countryside. Not only that but the new cliffs had overhangs all round so they could pick the best side to build.

Generally House Martins like to feed within 500 yards of the nest site and do not often travel much more than a mile and a half, with their favourite feeding areas being near water or deciduous trees. Combining suitable nest sites with feeding sites must have increased the population vastly, a pleasant change from man's effect on many other species.



They feed on flying insects such as aphids, midges or small flies and often do so at heights up to 70 feet during the breeding season. On the wintering grounds the height increases to an average of 165 feet and this combined with a tendency to stick to the highland areas of Southern Africa means that little is known about populations away from their breeding areas. An interesting fact from South Africa is that far more Swallows are seen than House Martins. But on occasions when abnormally bad weather has caused deaths, House Martin corpses are usually found in higher numbers than those of Swallows. This is perhaps due to their respective feeding heights, meaning that House Martins are there but not as obvious.

Throughout most of their breeding range from Europe across to Asia, House Martins are usually common, with some fluctuations in local populations. Due to their social behaviour, obviously what affects one bird may affect many. Local problems, such as pollution or food shortages, can cause population crashes and food availability on migration can severely affect their numbers. Add to these fluctuations the fact that some countries such as Holland and Belgium are reporting generally declining numbers in the species, so our own shortage takes on a more sinister appearance. However I do not like to be pessimistic so I looked back through past Cheshire Bird Reports to see if there was any history of this and what the picture was like in our area.

As with most counties House Martin is common throughout and although it is a late bird to arrive the bulk are normally in by mid-May. Several years' reports have noted the biggest spring gatherings in early June and in one or two years have mentioned an almost inconspicuous spring arrival. Considering the first birds are often in by the first week of April and in 1989 were recorded at the end of March, it does seem that a long sprawling arrival is relatively normal.

Our biggest concentrations are often in Autumn with a definite move out in September. Two thousand over the Weaver Bend on 6th September 1983 is the exception but 200-300 is quite normal at this time of year. Again they spread their migration and we have plenty of records of young birds being fed in the nests in early October. Perhaps one of the most encouraging aspects is the increase in reports of colonies springing up in town centres. A colony highlighted by Brian Martin in Warrington was first used in 1980 and became a home for 8 to 10 pairs, one pair actually nesting inside the roofspace.

So speculation in May as to the lack of House Martins is hopefully unjustified but it does make one wonder what future generations will find if huge numbers continue to be killed on their migration through the Mediterranean region, and the Sahara Desert continues to widen and create an ever more difficult barrier for our migrants to cross.

Alan Roberts.

Hybrids amongst hirundines are recorded from time to time. The most recent case involved House Martins and Swallows, the young having certain characteristics from both parents and perhaps suggesting Red-rumped Swallow. Albinism is also not as rare as maybe expected with records of white winged and white rumped hirundines. Interesting isn't it ?

Recent Reports

Some of these records may be unauthenticated and require review by the Society Records Panel or BBRC. Records refer to the period early March to early June.

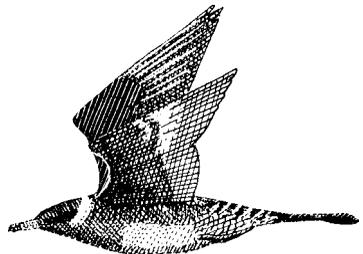
A **Great Northern Diver** was off Hilbre in late March. **Black-necked Grebes** returned to Woolston on March 24th with better than ever numbers settling down to breed, four pairs had young by late May. Elsewhere, an influx was noted in mid-May when six at Budworth Mere on May 11th moved to Chelford next day, when two were also on Rostherne Mere. A **Shag** was reported from the Weaver Estuary on March 17th. A **Bittern** was on Frodsham Marsh in early April and a **White Stork** flew over Bromborough around the same time while, courtesy of the RSPB, birders were able to catch up with a **Spoonbill** that stayed at Inner Marsh Farm from May 27th to June 2nd.

Bewick's Swans were on the move in mid-March, a party of 54 was seen at Frodsham Marsh and Farmwood Pool on 14th and singles appeared at Tatton and Rostherne towards the end of the month. A single **Whooper** was at both Burton and Frodsham in early April. The Dee mouth still held 13 **Brent Geese** in mid-March. A drake **Green-winged Teal** appeared on Frodsham Marsh on April 26th and May 12th. Odd **Garganey** were in the Burton area from early April, a drake was at Frodsham Marsh on April 26th and a pair at Budworth Mere on May 12th. Seven **Long-tailed Ducks** were seen from Hilbre on March 17th with eight here on April 28th, seven remained at the Weaver Estuary well into April with a single bird here for a few days in mid-May. A drake **Common Scoter** was on Tatton Mere for over a week in mid-March. A drake **Smew** was on Marbury Mere, South Cheshire, in March and a "red-head" remained at Rostherne until April 28th. A pair of **Red-breasted Mergansers** was inland at Farmwood Pool on March 30th and a female was at Rostherne on May 25th.

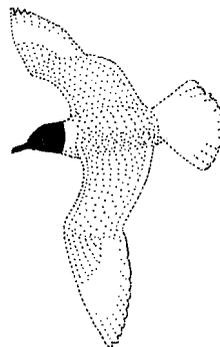
Marsh Harriers passed through Frodsham and Sandbach in mid-April and another was at Kingsley on April 28th; birds also moved through the Burton area and Hale in late May/early June. A **Hen Harrier** was at Woolston on March 28th, two remained on Frodsham Marsh well into April and it was perhaps one of these birds seen at Hale in late April. A female **Montagu's Harrier** was in the Burton area on May 28th. A **Goshawk** overhead in mid-May was a good addition to Focalpoint's growing list. Single **Ospreys** were over Poynton Pool, Tatton Park and Woolston between May 5th and 11th. Single **Hobbys** were reported from Red Rocks, Hilbre and Caldly from April 20th.

An **Avocet** was seen regularly on Frodsham Score until April 3rd and a different bird was at Chelford on March 17th. **Little Ringed Plovers** returned to their breeding sites from March 17th. A **Kentish Plover** at Witton Flashes on May 23rd was the first in our area since 1982. The Witton Flashes held good numbers of **Ringed Plover**, **Sanderling** and **Dunlin** in late May and early June with peaks of 150 : 42 : 48 respectively; **Grey Plover**, **Greenshank** and both **Little** and **Temminck's Stint** were seen here during the same period. **Ruff** were seen on the Frodsham Marsh Pools into May, but the star wader here was the **Marsh Sandpiper** seen briefly on May 22nd. **Wood Sandpipers** appeared at the end of May with a bird in the Burton area and a party of five on Frodsham Marsh. An over-wintering **Common Sandpiper** was at West Kirby on March 7th but it was the second week of April before migrants appeared. A **Spotted Sandpiper** was on the Mersey at Spike Island on April 20th.

A **Pomarine Skua** flying north-west over Crewe on April 21st must have been a sight worth seeing. Small numbers of **Little Gulls** were regularly reported from the Mersey mouth and passage was noted in the second half of April at Woolston, Rostherne and Tatton, most records referred to odd birds but the latter site hosted a superb party of 20, mostly adults, on April 18th.



The **Bonaparte's Gull** returned to New Brighton for a couple of weeks from March 21st. Small numbers of **Iceland** and **Glaucous Gulls** were reported into early April from the north Wirral shore, Frodsham, Fiddler's Ferry, Arpley, Woolston, Farmwood Pool and Witton Flashes while an Iceland Gull was at the latter site until almost the end of May. Observers at several inland sites reported the passage of one or two **Kittiwakes** but the party of 19 at Rostherne in cold, damp weather on May 17th was unusual. An early **Arctic Tern** was over Tatton Mere on April 13th, and small numbers were reported from here, Woolston and Rostherne irregularly onwards into May; I have heard of no inland Common Terns. After the riches of last spring, **Black Tern** passage was almost bound to be disappointing this year; four were over Tatton Mere on April 27th while seven at Woolston next day is the largest party reported; irregular, light passage continued into June with reports from Hilbre, the Burton area, Rostherne, Tatton and Winsford Flashes.



Turtle Doves appear to have been scarce with reports from only Heswall in early May and Witton Flashes at the end of the month. A **Cuckoo** was calling on Frodsham Marsh from April 12th. **Swifts** were present in numbers over many waters before the end of April and the subsequent cold weather appears to have kept them there. As well as holding up the return of our summer visitors, the poor spring weather has delayed the breeding of some resident species with one observer noting the **Skylarks** and **Meadow Pipits** on Frodsham Marsh as particularly affected.

Two **Sand Martins** were over Rostherne Mere as early as March 9th but it was several days before odd birds appeared elsewhere; the subsequent return appears to have involved noticeably smaller numbers than last year. Odd **Swallows** appeared over the meres at the end of March but it was the second week of April before they became really widespread and the first **House Martins** were noted; it was the end of April before the latter species had returned in numbers. **Tree Pipits** were back in the eastern hills by the last week in April. Odd **Water Pipits** were reported from the usual Dee Marshes sites and Woolston until late March. The first **Yellow Wagtail** appeared at the end of the first week in April but no substantial parties have been reported, a "**Blue-headed**" bird was at Hale in late April. **White Wagtails** were at Hilbre as early as March 23rd and inland passage of small numbers occurred in mid-April. A **Waxwing** was at Caldly on March 7th. **Redstarts** were back in the eastern hills from April 13th. **Wheatears** were at Leasowe and Frodsham on March 9th and 10th and back in the hills by 16th. The weather made searching for early **Ring Ouzels** uncomfortable to say the least, but one was back at Danebower on March 29th. Winter visitors lingering on included up to 100 **Fieldfares** in Tatton Park and a **Redwing** at Rostherne in late April.

A **Sedge Warbler** was back at Woolston on April 12th but further arrivals, as with other species, were delayed by adverse weather. Singing **Chiffchaffs** were reported from several sites around March 13th with a more general arrival over the next few days. Surprisingly, singing **Willow Warblers** were at West Kirby on March 12th and Chelford on March 17th; further, more general arrival of this species was delayed until the second week of April. Good numbers of **Pied Flycatchers** are said to have returned to the eastern hills, in contrast to neighbouring counties where numbers are reportedly down. **Spotted Flycatchers**, always late arrivals, were not widespread until the end of May and then apparently only in low numbers.

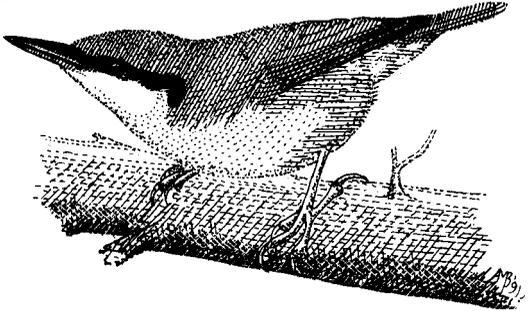
A **Great Grey Shrike** visited the Danebower quarries on May 26th. Two **Ravens** were regularly seen on Frodsham Marshes from March 17th. Seven **Tree Sparrows** and a **Brambling** were on Hilbre on April 28th and a Brambling was singing at Redesmere in early May. Macclesfield Forest hosted a superb flock of 250 **Siskins** in late March. **Crossbills** lingered in numbers at several sites with up to 20 at Peckforton, 18 in Tatton Gardens and 80 in Macclesfield Forest - all in May. Five **Snow Buntings** were at Leasowe on March 8th with possibly the same birds at New Brighton later in the month.

Steve Barber.

Notes & Letters

NUTHATCH IN STORAGE CONTAINER

While working at the redevelopment site at Woodside, Birkenhead on Wednesday 5th June 1990, I and a colleague decided to have our 3.00pm tea-break in our storage container, a converted shipping container some 20ft by 10ft by 10ft all steel construction. While sitting just inside the entrance of the container, we were surprised by a bird flying in through the container door and landing on the pipes at the back of the container.



Thinking that it was a House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), I stood up to shoo it back out. The bird recovered very quickly and started hopping and flapping along the pipes towards the light of the doorway. It was only when it drew level with me that I was startled to see that it was an adult Nuthatch (*Sitta europea*). The bird paused briefly on the end of the pipe rack and then flew out of the container.

On emerging from the container, it was joined by a second Nuthatch which must have been in company with it. Both birds flew towards the River Mersey and then turned and flew along the line of the river, in approximately a south-easterly direction, until out of sight. I always thought of the Nuthatch as a classic sedentary bird, never seeming to go anywhere or do anything out of the ordinary, making this sighting doubly surprisingly.

Barry MacDonald
17 Cobham Road, Moreton, Wirral L46 0QZ

UNUSUAL BEHAVIOUR OF SKYLARK

While working on the site of the new retail park in Bromborough in July 1990, my attention was drawn to the actions of a Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) in the site carpark. As the carpark was surrounded by cabins and a canteen, there were normally scraps of food lying around the area.

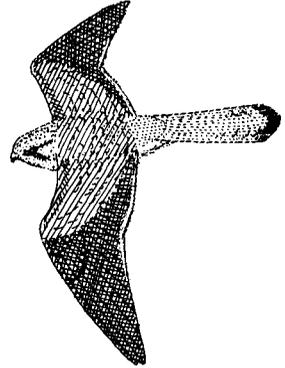
On 3rd July I watched a Skylark land in the carpark and start to feed on a partly eaten "ham batch", eating parts of the ham and also the bread. I worked on this site for the next three weeks and saw the bird daily in the carpark area, feeding on scraps of food, seemingly not perturbed by passing humans or heavy traffic. The site was situated by a large open areas of scrub, long grass and shrubs, and there were numerous other Skylarks in the area, but only the single bird seemed to utilise this source of food.

I have never heard of Skylarks feeding on scraps before. I found it even more bemusing because at this time of year there would be plenty of natural food available.

Barry MacDonald
17 Cobham Road, Moreton, Wirral L46 0QZ

KESTREL FEEDING ON DEAD HEDGEHOG

While birdwatching at Hoylake Nature Reserve on 8th April 1990, I decided to scan nearby Royal Liverpool Golf Course for the possibility of Ring Ouzels when I came upon the sight of a female Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) trying to balance on top of a hedgehog on one of the greens. The Kestrel repeatedly slid off the animal, obviously having great difficulty in gaining a proper foothold on the spines. It appeared to pick at the animal with its beak on numerous occasions as though attempting to feed from it. The Kestrel was flushed from the animal by approaching golfers and did not return while I was there.



Barry MacDonald
17 Cobham Road, Moreton, Wirral L46 0QZ

NIGHT WATCHMEN AT ICI

25,000 Starlings roosting at Soda Ash Products' plant at Winnington, Cheshire, failed to be impressed by the presence of three Eagle Owls and a Barn Owl. The owls, borrowed from the National Bird of Prey Centre in Gloucester were tethered to platforms in the shed roof each evening. Although the Starlings, which can pass half their weight in droppings each night, did avoid the immediate area around the owls, they refused to be driven away.

The Lostock site has been plagued for years but mild winters have seen an increase in Starling numbers.

"It's enough to make you 'owl'", said a spokesman.

Courtesy of an ICI employee.

PELAGIC SEABIRDING 1991

I am again encouraging birdwatchers to take advantage of the unique opportunities for pelagic seabirding in the Southwestern Approaches and across the Bay of Biscay aboard Brittany Ferries flagship, the Bretagne, sailing between Plymouth and Santander.

The superb Mini-cruises to Spain, which became the ideal value-for-money seawatching breaks last year, are once again the focus of attention. Unchanged in price they really are the break that fits all pockets. Additionally this year, you can make bookings for short breaks in Spain with or without your car - including a 24 hour return cruise.

The Thomas Cook Group, a worldwide name in travel, have kindly agreed to assist me in making reservation facilities available through their Crosby offices managed by Keith Hiller. Keith is an experienced birder with a wide knowledge of the European and International birding scene. This welcome asset has enabled me to enhance the service to the benefit of all concerned.

To guarantee availability on Mini-cruises from mid-August until 31st October an allocation of 2, 3 and 4 berth cabins + shower/WC has been secured on each sailing. With perhaps the exception of July availability on other sailings should not be a problem.

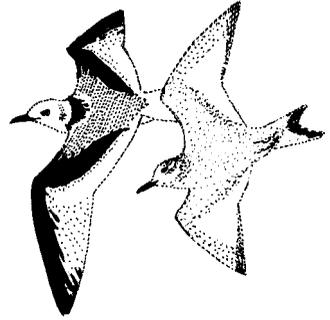
To make reservations is extremely simple. All you need to do is telephone me here, or if I am away speak directly with Keith on 051-931-5074, let me know your requirements and confirmation of your reservation will be sent to you to ensure that the booking matches your request.

Ian Macnamee
West Lodge, Puddington, South Wirral L64 5ST telephone 051-336-8441

1990 RECORDS AND DESCRIPTIONS

As you may or may not know, the latest County Bird Report is well under way and without any unforeseen hitches should be out again in September. The task has been phenomenal with many records and descriptions being dealt with, and these having to be processed at the same time as the final Atlas work.

For those who like figures, there were 57 County rarities and 12 BBRC rarities submitted, among 443 records involving about 463 individual birds. Although these figures may not be 100% accurate, they do give a good impression of the sheer volume of work.



To everyone who took the time and effort to send in records and descriptions - a big thank you. Your work is appreciated! If you don't normally bother submitting records then why not have a go? It is worthwhile and helps build up a good overall picture of the past twelve months avian events, perhaps highlighting the decline of a species that might otherwise have been missed. You are also supporting ornithology in the County.

One last thing, without trying to sound ungrateful - records submitted on the correct forms (general record sheets and rarity sheets) instead of scraps of paper, do make the job easier. They are designed to separate information and observer so that when split into sections no detail gets missed.

Writing out a description

So you've found a rarity and at once get a mental block about what you should be looking for in order to note down all the most important features.

It happens to all birders, being worse for those who don't even carry notebooks, but still tricky. Even if you know at once what species you're dealing with, how do you describe what you actually see? Bill Oddies' Little Black Book reference to a Skylark and a Pectoral Sandpiper is a classic. Certain plumage characters are shared by both but it's the way you describe them that counts.

The rarities committee who have to deal with hundreds of descriptions annually do appreciate concise notes and field sketches. The latter are a great help. It's worth practising with your garden birds or the ones regularly seen on a walk around your local patch. Did you know that Moorhens have yellowy-green and RED legs? Half of a quiz team failed miserably on that question when asked one afternoon on Fair Isle whilst waiting for the horizontal rain to stop.

It isn't easy I know, but it does become less difficult. Being familiar with the pointers in a good field guide does give you an advantage but often it's those that they don't mention that can clinch an identification. Jizz - the way a species moves and acts, those little subtleties that fail to hit you like a brick, are valuable.

Write out a lengthy full description of a Wren for example. You can probably fill six or seven sides. Most of it will be unnecessary though and a single side of the vital features are worth more to someone who has the unenviable task of judging the record.

It can be fun and satisfying to feel confident about a bird's identification. Everyone makes mistakes however, but they should get less each time you pay attention to detail.

Have a go with county rarities - you're certain to make life easier for the county records committee if everyone sends in neat, well written descriptions as requested each year. Maybe a prize should be given to the person who does the best?!

THE BREEDING BIRD ATLAS OF CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL

As mentioned by Dennis Elphick in the last BIRD NEWS, the mystery species mapped on the front of the pre-publication leaflet was Jackdaw. A total of 13 correct entries were received and the senders of these were entered in a draw which was made at the March AGM.

The three lucky winners of a free Atlas and a year's free subscription to CAWOS are :-

A. W. Martin
R. W. Rhodes
G. Williams

The winners have been notified.

As can be imagined, the Atlas Committee and CAWOS council were watching the progress of the pre-publication offer with more than a little interest and perhaps a little trepidation. Once the scale of success of the offer was apparent it became possible to make final preparations for publication. At the time of writing, mid-May, work is continuing apace on the final page-proofs. When these are ready they will be passed to the printer. The Atlas Committee is looking forward to the conclusion of many years hard work!

Steve Barber for the Atlas Committee.

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WHITE-BILLED DIVER
AMERICAN BITTERN**

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CONSERVATION

Conservation issues continue to become increasingly complex, making it difficult for bodies such as CAWOS and even "English Nature" (formerly the NCC) to decide how to tackle particular problems. Three Cheshire issues serve to illustrate.

1. **Golf Courses** can, in certain circumstances, be beneficial to wildlife: new habitats can be created on farmland of otherwise low biological diversity. On the other hand, landscapes of high wildlife value can be spoiled by a new golf course. Having objected to a proposal for a course in the Dane Valley near Holmes Chapel, CAWOS and CCT have been invited by the applicant to become involved in the design and management of the course so that the sites of biological importance within the area can be adequately protected. Tempting of course but what of the risks? What written safeguards can we realistically obtain? What if the owner sells up? How much real influence could we expect to have? And, if we sustain our objections, what happens if planning permission is granted? We're in the proverbial cleft-stick!

2. **Waste Disposal** Companies might be regarded as some of our traditional enemies. Cheshire's unimaginative policies mean that many wildlife sites are threatened by tipping. However, a pragmatic approach on the part of conservation bodies might result in some good deals being struck: guaranteed nature-reserves and the resources to manage them in return for some land for tipping. Perhaps we should learn the lessons of the Moore episode. It is becoming increasingly apparent that, despite SSSI status, the exceptional quality of the Manchester Ship Canal Dredging Lagoons at Woolston are threatened by the changed economic fortunes of the Manchester Ship Canal Company. There is no doubt that the use of some of the beds at Woolston for refuse dumping is a much more attractive option financially, than continued and declining use for canal dredgings. Conservationists are inevitably facing some unpleasant decisions in the near future in the Warrington area.

3. **Wargaming** activities are becoming tempting enterprises for farmers looking to generate some income from their long-neglected woodlands. Even in the Peak District National Park, it is proving extremely difficult to prevent such unwelcome activities. All it needs is one bloody-minded individual to flout planning regulations and even the most sensitive and rich woodland in a remote valley can be devastated within months. Landowners enjoy many privileges, one of which is the so-called "28-day rule", wherein activities such as wargames, motorcycle scrambling and clay-pigeon shooting can occur, without planning permission on up to 28 days per year.

Conservationists may complain, local authorities may doggedly attempt to enforce planning law, politicians may be persuaded to review the legislation. But - there's no doubt that the threats to wildlife in the countryside now come mainly from recreation rather than the farming industry itself.

Without the benefit of having public opinion firmly on our side, it seems to me that our best course of action is to work WITHIN the recreation lobby to achieve sensible management of the countryside, rather than try to work AGAINST it.

A co-operative approach would seem to be more desirable these days than ever it was.

Richard Blindell

Ringers Notebook

One of the purposes of individually marking a bird by ringing is to map out its life history. In spring there are always many instances of birds taking up the same breeding territory as in the previous year. Particularly nice examples are those we know have undertaken long distance migrations and still successfully returned to exactly the same site. A male Blackcap first ringed in April 1988 has now held the same territory four years running at Woolston. A Garden Warbler netted on territory in Delamere in May 1991, had been ringed as a singing male there in May 1989. A female Nuthatch at Delamere is using the same nest box in which she bred in 1989, and was probably there in 1990 as well, when Nuthatches used the box but the female was not trapped.

The long-running studies of Grey Herons and Rooks continue to show that counting nests from the ground gives only part of the story: the success at rearing young can only be discovered by examining nest contents. The cold weather in April and May led to many pairs raising only one or two young, with the smaller ones in each brood dying of starvation. However, Heron populations are at a high level following three mild winters and the species can easily survive one season of poor productivity.



Domestic cats have provided evidence of long distance movements for two Robins ringed in Wirral as first year birds. One from Bidston, 17th September 1986, was in Devon on 17th December 1990 (316km S), while one ringed at Bromborough on 15th March 1990 was found in Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands on 8th January 1991 (117km S). A female Shelduck found dead on Frodsham Marsh last winter had been ringed two years before at Slimbridge, while another mist-netted at New Brighton in February had been ringed on the Solway, suggesting a wide catchment area for the Mersey wintering flock.

A total of six Cheshire-ringed Sand Martins were caught at Djoudj in Senegal, by the Anglo-French ringing expedition, including three in March when I was there: one of them had been ringed in summer 1988 and retrapped at the same colony in 1989 and 1990 as well. For more news of this exciting expedition, please come and listen to my illustrated talk at the CAWOS indoor meeting, 3rd February 1992!

Dr. David Norman, Rowswood Cottage, Ridding Lane, Sutton Weaver, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 6PF.
(telephone Runcorn 711064)

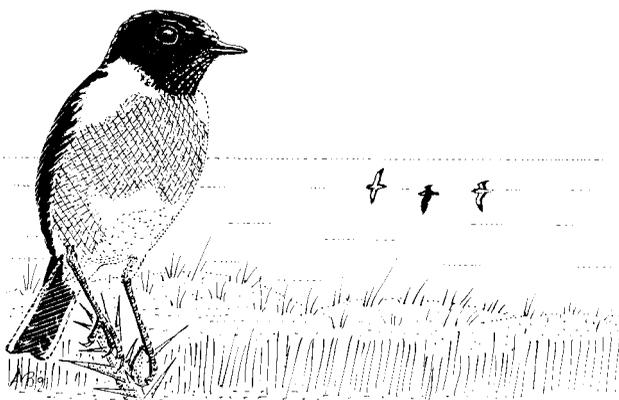
BIRD RACE

When approached with the idea of trying to better the County day list and raise money for the Society, it seemed that a good days birding was in the offing. In Focus, the optical company, were sponsoring the event held all over the country during May. Last year's winning team from Yorkshire managed to see 86% of their handicap figure, so if we were to stand any chance at all, we had to see around 130 species.

The local team would be myself, Mark and Jane Turner from Wirral, and Dave Taylor from Nantwich. Past experience of Wirral bird races had given Mark and Jane a good advantage when it came to the planning stages - which weekend would coincide with the best tide, where should we be at dawn etc. At least £100 had to be collected first in sponsorship money to enter the competition and with this hurdle sorted we awaited the day.

Starting in the east at 00:00hrs on 11th May, we would work our way westwards for sunrise on the Dee Marshes. Although the night had been calm and clear, by 07:00hrs the wind was freshening and woodland birds hard to hear. So far we'd had moderate success - a hunting Long-eared Owl, Grasshopper Warbler and a Badger which, although not counting, provided enough adrenalin to survive what even now seemed an eternity. And we still had 17 hours to go!

The dead-cert Barn Owls failed to materialise and as we headed towards a wind blown coast, wipers on all too frequently, we needed luck. Migrants on every post and in every bush on a fine, warm May dawn with a slight south-easterly blowing could not have been further from reality. Fortunately the drizzle was not to last for long and the clouds lifted. The north-westerly blow brought us a superb seawatch from Red Rocks - a Black-throated Diver, Common Scoters, Guillemots, Kittiwakes, Fulmars and Gannets... plus a handful of totally unexpected Manxies. Maybe we could achieve our target after all.



By 12 o'clock we'd found most of the expected species. Pied Flycatchers were on territory, a Stonechat sat alongside a Whinchat, Green Woodpecker yaffled, a Peregrine had dutifully put in an appearance and the Dee Black-tailed Godwits had not chosen Clwyd as their morning feeding grounds. The wind continued to frustrate attempts to hear distant songsters and it became all too obvious that there were at least some migrants that had not arrived. Where were the Little Terns, Spotted Flycatchers and Garden Warblers? The late spring had meant that falls of birds were non-existent and that migration had been a trickle. Fewer species were to be tallied as the hours ticked by!

At Chester a disastrous couple of hours lost us some ground. High security at Eaton Hall meant some areas were definitely out of bounds, together with their Mandarin Ducks and Hawfinches. Still we had Woolston to look forward to and the Black-necked Grebes would not be a problem. They were, refusing even the briefest of glimpses. A Gadwall that dropped in was nice but morale was sinking. We needed a boost and this occurred as we walked back to the car..... an Osprey flying east of the lagoons. Immediately spirits rose and optimism flooded back, even if senses were beginning to dull, we were now within reach of a respectable total.

With Tatton Park giving us Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Marsh Tit, a nearby site should have revealed Willow Tit and Red-legged Partridge - needless to say it didn't. It had to be a mad dash back to the Macclesfield Forest area and the high moors. There were still some certainties - surely? Isn't it funny how the hours shorten when you least want them to - and the distances between sites lengthen! On finding that the resident Dippers had decided to take the day off, we did manage Red Grouse and Ring Ouzel, and the final bird, a Woodcock squeaking its way across an otherwise silent Ridgeway Reservoir.

How did we do? Well moderately so I think - 128 species in a day was indeed respectable but we missed some "sitters" and with them we would have been up in the 140s. Our total maybe equals the County record within the boundaries and as no other list has been presented this year, we could perhaps just claim it - couldn't we? All there is to say is thanks to the rest of the team whose eyes and ears contributed everything to the day, to the kind lady whose car we used, and also to all the friends who did their best to line things up. There's always next year!

[Until the results of the In Focus competition are published in "Birdwatching" magazine, the final placing of the Cheshire and Wirral team will not be known - keep your fingers crossed - Ed.]

Tony Broome

Footnote:-

Since the article was written, the national results of the birdrace have been published. "Jane's Men" came eighth overall with 84.21% under the handicap rules but managed the third highest species total in the country.

The winners with 91.72% came from Devon and the highest total of any team was 142 species , a good effort by Hants!

Over £15,000 was raised by the event, proof once more that properly organised, so called undesirable birding can pay dividends.

Surely the same sort of criticism that is directed towards twitching could be channelled more positively to produce a bonus for the various organisations.

Diary

AUGUST

4	CRSPB	AINSDALE, ring 0244-343574 for details
10	WBC	HILBRE ISLAND, meet Dee Lane at 9.00am
11	LOG	WERN MOSS, meet Lymm Cross at 8.00am
13	WRSPB	"WHERE & HOW TO PHOTOGRAPH BIRDS" by Dr. Mike Lloyd
14	CADOS	FRODSHAM, meet Overleigh Cemetery at 6.00pm
18	HPRSPB	WEAVER BEND, meet Hazel Grove car park at 9.00am
21	CRSPB	GRESFORD FLASHES, ring 0244-682018 for details
30-31	RSPB	BRITISH BIRDWATCHING FAIR 1991 at Rutland Water

SEPTEMBER

1	RSPB	BRITISH BIRDWATCHING FAIR 1991 at Rutland Water
1	CADOS	FLAMBOROUGH, ring 0928-723871 for details
8	CADOS	HILBRE, meet Overleigh Cemetery at 8.00am
8	CRSPB	ARLESTON BEET FACTORY, ring 0829-270654 for details
8	SECOS	SEAFORTH MARSH & HALE LIGHTHOUSE, ring for details
8	WBC	WEAVER BEND, meet Main Street Frodsam at 9.00am
9	HPRSPB	"AGM" & "A DIFFERENT VIEWPOINT" by Malcolm Calvert
10	WRSPB	"FLOWERS ROUND THE MATTERHORN" by Hilda Summersgill
11	HO	"AGM & SLIDES"
12	MRSPB	"WILD ALASKA" by Val McFarland
13	SECOS	"OWLS AND THINGS" by Malcolm Ingham
14	KOS	HILBRE ISLAND ring for details
15	HPRSPB	SPURN by coach ring for details
18	CRSPB	"FLORIDA BIRDS" by Mike Wilkes
22	WRSPB	HILBRE ISLAND, meet bottom of Dee Lane at 7.45am
18	MRSPB	"SWINGS & ROUNDABOUTS" by John Armitage
27	HPRSPB	BLITHFIELD RESERVOIR, meet Hazel Grove car park at 9.00am
27	KOS	"GEESE, GULLS AND WAXWINGS" by Gordon Yates
27	SECOS	SOUTHPORT MARSHES & WIGAN FLASHES, ring for details
31	HPRSPB	GLOSSOP FILM SHOW

OCTOBER

3	CADOS	"AUSTRALIAN ADVENTURES" by Don Coan
4	SECOS	"BIRDWATCHING IN S.E. AUSTRALIA" by Andrew Cadman
4-6	KOS	HOLY ISLAND, ring for details
6	CADOS	SPURN POINT, meet Overleigh Cemetery at 7.00am
6	CRSPB	WEAVER BEND, ring 0244-682018 for details
7	CAWOS	"BIRDS OF NEPAL" by Adam Davison
7	HPRSPB	"BIRDS OF A RECTORY GARDEN" by Rev. Hugh Linn
8	WRSPB	"A SCOTTISH TOUR" by Roy Rhodes
11-13	HPRSPB	SOLWAY WEEKEND ring for details
13	WRSPB	LYME PARK & ROSTHERNE, by coach ring for details
16	CRSPB	"WILDFOWL & WADERS" by John Ashworth
18	MRSPB	"SWINGS & ROUNDABOUTS" by John Armitage
25	KOS	"BIRDS OF CHILE" by Tony Holcombe
27	HPRSPB	BLITHFIELD RESERVOIR, meet Hazel Grove car park at 9.00am
27	SECOS	SOUTHPORT MARSHES & WIGAN FLASHES, ring for details
31	HPRSPB	GLOSSOP FILM SHOW

SOCIETIES

- ADNHS:** Altrincham & District Natural History Society, mtgs Hale Methodist Church Hall, 7.30pm
Sec. Vincent Pedley 061-748-4717.
- CADOS:** Chester & District Ornithological Society, mtgs Caldley Valley Community Centre, 7.30pm,
Prog. Sec. Marion Barlow 09282-3871.
- CAWOS:** Cheshire & Wirral Ornithological Society, mtgs Knutsford Civic Centre, 7.45pm,
contact Sheila Blamire 0565-830168.
- CCTNG:** Cheshire Conservation Trust(North Group), mtgs Altrincham Library, 7.45pm,
Pub. Off. Ann Mason 061-860-5104.
- CRSPB:** Chester RSPB Members Group, mtgs St. Marys Centre Chester, 7.30pm
Prog. Sec. Brenda Legard 0244-682018.
- HO:** Hale Ornithologists, mtgs St. Peters Assembly Hall 7.45pm,
Prog. Sec. Barbara Vercambre 061-980-8362.
- HPRSPB:** High Peak RSPB Members Group
- KOS:** Knutsford Ornithological Society, mtgs Knutsford Methodist Church Hall, 7.45pm,
contact Peter Perkins 0565-632784.
- LOG:** Lymm Ornithological Group, mtgs Lymm Village Hall 8.00pm,
Prog. Sec. Peter Tonge 0606-891274
- MCOS:** Mid-Cheshire Ornithological Society, mtgs Hartford Village Hall, 7.45pm,
contact Paul Kenyon, 196 Chester Rd, Hartford.
- MRSPB:** Macclesfield RSPB Members Group, mtgs Senior Citizens Hall, 7.45pm,
Prog. Sec. Julia Thornburn 0625-582433.
- NCRSPB:** North Cheshire RSPB Members Group, mtgs Runcorn Library, Shopping City,
Sec. Lynn Fewster 0928-575876
- SECOS:** South-east Cheshire Ornithological Society, mtgs Sandbach Library, 7.30pm,
Prog. Sec. John Clowes 0270-872435.
- SRSPB:** Stockport RSPB Members Group,
mtgs contact Mike Armstrong 061-980 3986.
- WBC:** Wirral Bird Club, mtgs Kingsmead Hall Hoylake 8.00pm,
Prog. Sec. Hilda Truesdale 051-632-2705.
- WG:** Wilmslow Guild, mtgs Wilmslow Guild HQ 7.45pm,
Prog. Sec. Miss S. Ricketts 0625-583148.
- WRSPB:** Wirral RSPB Group, mtgs Williamson Art Gallery Birkenhead 7.30pm,
Prog. Sec. D. Jowitt 051-625-5534.

Waxwing Books

We are pleased to announce that Waxwing Books will have a display at each of our indoor meetings.

Any books not held in stock may be obtainable - please ask at the table.



BOOK REVIEW

SEABIRDS OF BISCAY - 90

In March I received a copy of this publication from Ian Macnamee of SEBA (Seawatching and Birding Alternatives). It comprises a report of the observations from more than 50 birdwatchers who undertook the journey from Plymouth to Santander in Northern Spain on 22 crossings between May and October 1990. The bulk of the records concern seabirds, including common species, but landbirds on passage and cetaceans are also included. These records are clearly presented for each journey with results being plotted by time, numbers seen and for a proportion of the records by a zone classification relating to five zones. These zones are defined by two degrees of longitude and are named A. English Channel, B. North Biscay, C. Mid Biscay, D. South Biscay, E. Santander.

Whilst the available data are exhaustively presented it is to be hoped that birdwatchers making the round trip this year (at a very attractive price of £75 return) will be encouraged to submit even fuller records. I can recommend purchase of this report and if bookings are made through SEBA a free SEAPACK will be provided covering all information and materials relevant to making comprehensive records. A letter from SEBA giving booking details is printed below.

Seabirds of Biscay - 90 by Ian Macnamee, SEBA 1991. (wired softback A5 52 pages including numerous tables) - £3.50 incl p&p from West Lodge, Puddington, South Wirral. L64 5ST.

Richard Gabb.

1991/1992 PROGRAMME

The indoor programme is now fixed and we will be holding meetings at Knutsford Civic Centre, Toft Road, Knutsford on the first Monday of each month from October to March, starting at 7:45pm.

7th October "Birds of Nepal" by Adam Davison

A fascinating lecture by a very entertaining local speaker. Adam gives a talk, not just about birds, but covers the culture and staggering scenery. Having already heard this talk I can thoroughly recommend it and look forward to attending again.

4th November "Kenya, West of the Rift Valley" by Mike McKavett

The second in a series of lectures which follows on from his talk last season. All that came to the first talk commented on the superb photography and interesting background information. This promises to be another excellent lecture.

9th November "BTO/CAWOS One Day Conference"

An information broadsheet is enclosed with this issue of Birdnews giving full details and an application form. It should be a good day, please give us your support and come along.

2nd December "Birds of the Middle East" by Richard Porter

An unfortunate illness prevented Richard Porter from giving this lecture last season but he has kept his promise to visit us this year to compensate. He is one of the most appropriate people to give this talk, being on the Council of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East. Apart from regularly visiting the region, he has led tours there and has co-written the standard field guide for the area

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BOOKS

With the increased space our new Unit has, we are able to offer our customers an ever increasing range of Natural History Books, with all the latest from Croom, Helm, I & AD Poyser, Academic Press, Collins, MacMillan and others

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The following is a selection from our range of outdoor clothing:

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FINE ART DEPARTMENT

We also now sell a range of limited edition artwork by Roger Tory Peterson, Lars Jonnson, Robert Bateman, Keith Shackelton and other leading artists. All work is on display at Higher Whitley together with a selection of original artwork by local artists such as Philip Snow, Gordon Trunkfield and David Quinn

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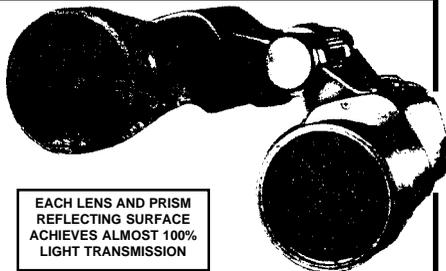
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