

# **BIRD NEWS**

**Number 43**

**July 99**



**Hilbre Island • Balearic Shearwater  
CAWOS Photographic Competition Results  
Dunlin Races Update • Tree Sparrows  
Identification Workshops**



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4 Larchwood Drive, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 2NU. Tel: 01625 540434

Membership Secretary : David Cogger

113 Nantwich Rd, Middlewich, Cheshire, CW10 9HD. Tel: 01606 832517

Newsletter Editor : Jeff Clarke

90 Simonside, Hough Green, Widnes, Cheshire, WA8 4YN. Tel: 0151 423 4275

*Articles, Letters and Comments would be welcomed by the Editor.*

*The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Society,  
the Council of the Society, or the Editor.*

Front cover: Broad-billed Sandpiper by Tony Broome.

Other illustrations by Tony Broome, Tom Lowe and Thelma Sykes.

# Editorial

A year ago I resigned as the Editor of *Bird News*, but nobody noticed. Finally a white knight has ridden over the hill to save the day. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to welcome your new Editor, Simon Edwards, to the fold. Though only with the Society for a relatively short period, Simon has already shown himself to be a committed member of CAWOS, becoming involved on a number of fronts, not least by assisting with the stand at Parkgate High Tides and as a co-opted member of Council. Simon has kindly provided us with a potted history of his background just to help you get the measure of the man (see pages 27-28). As will be revealed Simon is a Scot (since Scotland's devolution Council has taken the decision not to allow Simon to vote on any purely English constitutional matters). By the way, that last bit was a joke. I don't want any more Mr. Angry letters as there are quite enough in this edition already. Mind you, on second thoughts I won't be the Editor, so it shouldn't affect me.

It is normal at this point for the outgoing Editor to review the successes and failures of his tenure of office. Well I'm not, other than to say it's been a real 'curate's egg' and of course to thank each and every person who contributed to *Bird News*, particularly Sheila and Geoff Blamire, during my time as Editor.

Now that I'm hanging up the Editor's mouse, what am I going to do? Well for one thing I'm going to start writing again, but perhaps most significantly I'm going to devote more time to the new recording group that we have developed at Moore Nature Reserve near Warrington. To paraphrase a hit song from the 1970s "Birding was my first love, and it will be my last", but I want to be a better all round naturalist, the more I find out the more I want to know. My commitment to CAWOS remains strong and I want to develop the identification workshops, and hopefully find ways to engage CAWOS members in active conservation projects.

That last aim will of course be determined by the outcome of the 'Way Forward' process currently being undertaken by the Council. We have divided into a series of sub-committees to discuss various topics. Once each sub-committee has examined the potential for development in its particular remit its recommendations will be brought back for discussion by the full Council, who will then inform the wider membership about the possible ways in which CAWOS could, or should, develop. It is probably important to point out that each sub-committee is comprised of Council and non-Council members, the aim being to broaden the views and knowledge of each group and to democratise the process.

I think that I am leaving the editorship at a good time; we now have our highest ever level of membership and the Society itself is at something of a crossroads. This will give Simon and the editorial team plenty of options. Apart from which I never intended to do more than two years in the Editor's chair and now I've done three. So I'm off to pastures new. Please give my successor as much support as you have given me and I'll look forward with anticipation to reading the forthcoming editions of *Bird News*.

One final thought. The birdlife of Cheshire is still being dramatically affected by the destruction and degradation of various habitats. The most damaging changes are occurring on farmland. Almost all members can relate tales of woe about the loss of Corn Buntings and Tree Sparrows, to name but two, from a very long list of declining farmland species. A few weeks ago I visited a piece of local farmland where as a twelve year old I had watched dozens of pairs of Lapwings, Grey Partridges and Corn Buntings. Twenty four years later not a single individual of any of those species could be found. The question this raises is, can CAWOS do anything to halt, or preferably reverse, this trend? Or are we here solely to record the changes that are taking place?

**Jeff Clarke (Gone birding!)**

**Ooops!** - Apologies to James Walsh for printing the wrong Yule Log article in the last *Bird News*. Eds.

## **Imminent dates for your diary:-**

Sunday 29th August	'In Search of Skuas and Terns Workshop' - see page 29 for details
Saturday 25th September	'Wader Workshop' - see page 29 for details
Friday 1st October	'Harriers' by Roger Clarke - see Diary page 30 for details
2nd, 3rd, 17th October	'Migration Watch '99' - see page 22 for details

**[Note: copy date for the next issue will be 5th September - please be prompt]**

# County Rarities

## BALEARIC SHEARWATER (*Puffinus mauretanicus*)

Identifying shearwaters falls into that frustrating category of brief, distant, often intermittent views, and most likely to be through a telescope, and if you are not sitting on an exposed headland somewhere, trying to get out of the wind, you are probably in less than favourable weather conditions elsewhere. So the key is to know the relevant features and in particular the differences that separate the species and to focus on them as soon as you get onto a bird.

Balearic Shearwater has recently attained full species status and is mainly a summer visitor in varying numbers to be found off the south coast, but occasionally ventures up the east or west coasts of Britain as well. It has been split from the other newly separated eastern Mediterranean Shearwater, Yelkouan, although no claims for the latter have, as yet, been accepted. Both show a variety of overall plumages ranging from light brown to very dark brown.

So, on picking up a shearwater moving across your field of vision, with classic rapid, stiff wing beats, shearing, then gliding and banking low over the waves, remember that you are seeing alternately the upperparts and then the underparts. So how black and white does it look? If there is major contrast between the dark upperparts and the white underparts, then this is almost certainly a Manx Shearwater. Basically Manxies look like long-winged auks. If there isn't much contrast between the upperparts and the underparts, with the two blending together and the bird appears more brown than black, but it's still showing some white on the belly or breast, then it's probably not a Manx and we are left with Balearic or Sooty Shearwater. The key distinguishing feature here is that Sooty has a very noticeable silvery white centre to the underwing, contrasting with dark armpits, whilst even the darkest Balearic Shearwater never shows this contrasting feature.

If there are several birds passing then size and structure differences are features which help, such as the slightly chunkier, longer-winged look to Balearic Shearwater compared to Manx, with a thicker head and neck and short-tailed look, but unless there is a direct comparison I find subtle size and shape aspects of little use during sea watches. However, Sooty Shearwater does have a more angled shape to the wing, which with its silvery underwing gives a skua-like impression, and is a much bigger bird overall. If seen close up, Balearic Shearwaters have a brownish head that merges into the paler throat and those with particularly pale underwings have a dark trailing edge effect. If you can get a good view of birds sitting on the water, then Balearic Shearwater looks very much like a Sooty Shearwater, but the latter is dark brown all over. So if the bird you are looking at is brown but showing some white/pale areas on the flanks and neck, then it's likely to be a Balearic Shearwater.

County records are few and all are off Wirral of course. Up to 1999, there would probably have been a dozen records or so, but this is probably a great underestimate. They're regular off the south-west of Britain and even off the east coast. Some must move through the waters of the Irish Sea each year and if the wind's right there'll be Balearics!

**Hugh Pulsford, 19 Tudor Way, Congleton, Cheshire, CW12 2AS**



A Grey Heron chick from Dundee  
Said "There's one thing that's puzzling me,  
With legs that are long  
And I can't sing a song,  
Why on earth was I born in a tree?"

**Hazel J Raw**

# Sites to Watch

## HILBRE ISLAND

The mouth of the Dee Estuary is very different from the inner reaches. Clean golden sands instead of mud and marsh, banks pounded by surf instead of calm water, but one thing above all that sets it apart is the islands of Hilbre - Little Eye, Little Hilbre (or Middle Eye) and of course the main island of Hilbre itself. Seen from the top of Caldy Hill at high tide the three islands appear like ships steaming through the surf, catching the eye whenever they are in sight. A visit to these islands is a true wilderness experience and they are justly renowned for their birds.

### The Birds

The birds of Hilbre fall roughly into four main categories:

1. Hilbre specialities such as Purple Sandpipers. Although not rare, these birds are not particularly common and the seaweed-covered rocks around Hilbre provide an ideal habitat.
2. The more common estuary birds - most importantly at high tide when vast flocks of Knot, Dunlin and Oystercatcher roost on the rocks which remain above the water.
3. Then there are the land migrants. During spring and autumn large falls of birds can be seen, particularly with the right weather conditions.
4. Last are the seabirds - terns, divers, auks, Gannets, skuas and petrels to name but a few.

### The Observatory

All these birds are studied by the Hilbre Bird Observatory established in 1957 by John Gittins of West Kirby.

Although not manned continually the Observatory has amassed a huge amount of data and a report is issued annually. This includes seal and mammal counts and lists of butterflies and moths as well as the birds. A ringing station is maintained and approximately 24,000 birds of 90 species have been ringed since 1957. Sea-watches are carried out from the hide on top of the old Lifeboat Station on the north end of the island. The hide is often manned from dawn to dusk and as the best observations are made in gale force winds it takes much dedication and stamina!

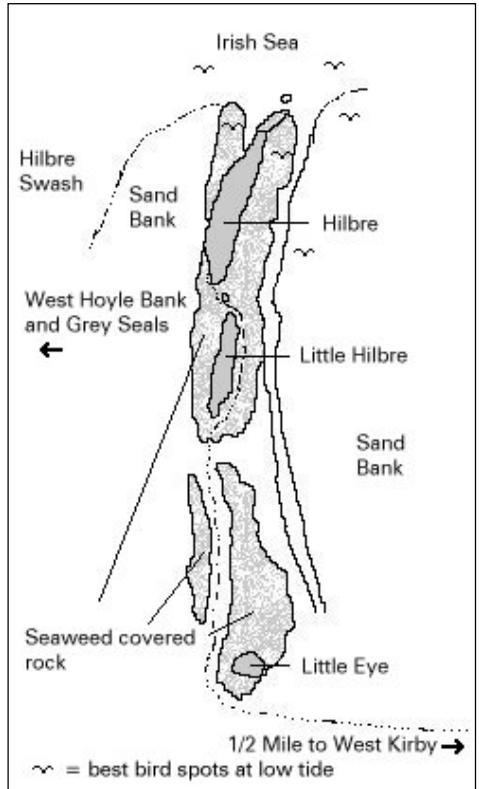
### WHEN TO GO AND WHAT TO SEE:

#### The Waders

Good numbers of wading birds are present from August to April with the largest numbers between October and February. Many of these birds can be seen at low tide with Purple Sandpipers and Turnstones particularly favouring the seaweed-covered rocks surrounding the islands. Both the nearby sand bank at West Kirby and the rocks on the islands are used as high tide roosts when spectacular numbers may be present. During a high spring tide the birds will be driven off the sand bank and many large flocks fly over, either on their way to the Point of Ayr or further up the river to more secure roosts.

#### Migrating Land Birds

Spring migration peaks between the last week in April to about 10th May. In favourable conditions, south-east to south-west winds with cloud cover, large falls of birds can be seen. Insectivorous birds, including warblers, migrate at night and tend to arrive on the island at dawn. They usually leave by 9am so unfortunately most people visiting Hilbre during the day miss all the excitement.



Autumn migration tends to be more drawn out lasting from early August to well into September. East to north-east winds are favoured, particularly for young Willow Warblers in August. Rarities turn up from time to time including Woodchat Shrike, Hoopoe, Woodlark, Blue-headed Wagtail, Nightingale and Icterine Warbler.

### Sea-Watching

No doubt that the best time of year is August and September, but any time can bring unusual and rare visitors flying past. August brings the terns - Little, Common and Sandwich in particular. On a good day hundreds can be seen passing through. September is the time for gales, which in their turn bring Leach's Petrels. Several days of north to north-west gales can bring hundreds into Liverpool Bay. They get funnelled into the mouth of the Mersey whence they fly along the north coast of Wirral and out past the north end of Hilbre. Good conditions for petrels are usually also good for other birds such as skuas and some of the rarer shearwaters. Other regulars include Gannets, divers, sea ducks of various sorts, grebes, auks, Kittiwakes and a good selection of gulls.

### How to get there

Start from the slipway at the end of Dee Lane in West Kirby, Merseyside. Walk straight out to Little Eye then turn sharp right to the north leaving the rocks to your right. Ahead is Little Hilbre and beyond Hilbre itself, a track on the south end takes you onto the island. Always check the time of the next high tide. It takes about one hour to walk to the main island. If visiting during low tide it is essential that you return to dry land no later than two hours before high water. If staying over a high tide leave West Kirby at least three hours before high water, three and a half hours if you have slow walkers such as young children.

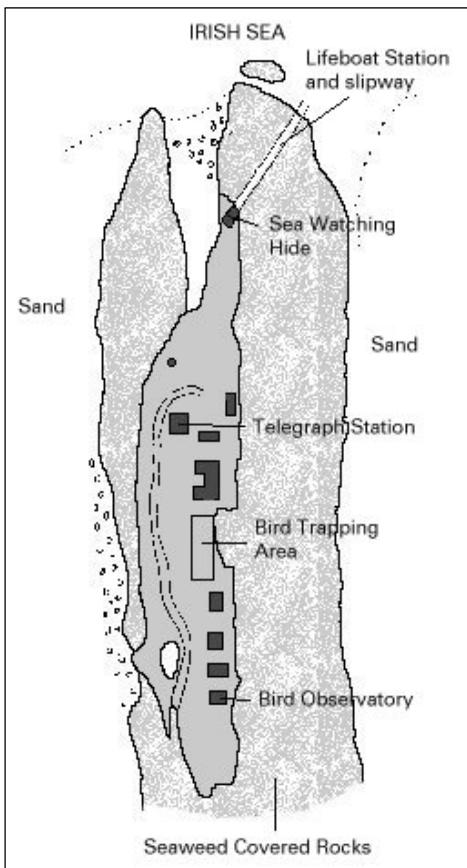
More information about Hilbre Island and the whole of the Dee Estuary can be had in *A Birdwatching Guide to the Dee Estuary*. The web site on the Internet includes maps of the best birding sites, a monthly newsletter and latest sightings page. See it at Internet address <http://dSPACE.dial.pipex.com/town/lane/xdx84/>

**Richard Smith, 12 Thurstaston Road, Irby, Wirral, Merseyside, L61 0HE**

## FRODSHAM NEWS - The best spring ever?

After a good beginning to the year that put 1998 in the shade, the birding at Frodsham was set to get even better as spring progressed. The local patchers managed to see most things, but the honours for doggedness and timing must surely go to Paul Miller. His Pomarine Skua in February was a first for the marsh but was, for the rest of us, totally untwitchable. It did set the target for quality however. Bill Morton found a Long-billed Dowitcher on No6, on the 19th, possibly the one from Marshside. It disappeared and reappeared several times over the next month leading birders astray, but most caught up with it in the end when it was almost in full summer plumage.

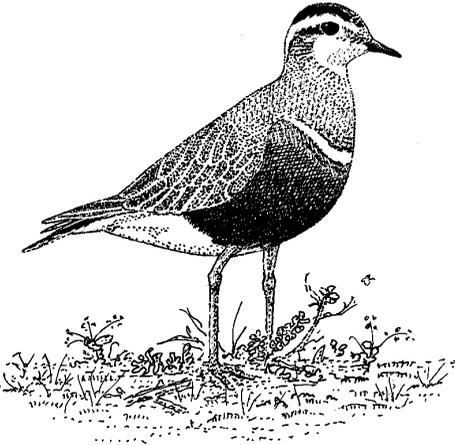
Things really began to happen on April Fools' day, the 1st. Two Avocets dropped in to No6 for a brief rest and to pose for photographs, leaving before any regulars saw them. The next day, the 2nd, a circling Osprey and a flyover Hoopoe also defeated the above. Could it get any better, or worse, depending on how you look at it? Fortunately for most of us, the male Kentish Plover found by Guido D'Isidoro on Saturday the 3rd near the inflow pipe area on No6, reappeared the next day for a few hours. Had our luck changed? Maybe, but we did miss Garganey and Marsh Harrier.....



Lots of common migrants appeared from about April 9th, including the first Cuckoo of the year and another influx of Whitethroats, Reed and Sedge Warblers occurred on the 24th. A Twite on the 10th stayed only a day, whilst a Honey Buzzard on the 25th performed for only a few minutes for just two observers..... Paul and Hilary Miller. I said they were lucky, didn't I? Two of the Dunlins on No5 were so big that they were reported as Curlew Sandpipers many times. Their final destination could only be guessed at, but as you will see later in this issue, I think it was way to the west.

The real surprise of the year and probably the decade, turned up on Monday the 27th. Gary Bellingham looked out over No5 around lunchtime in the hope of finding the dowitcher again and instead was amazed to see a Terek Sandpiper feeding in amongst the Dunlin flock. It stayed an hour and only the fastest off the mark saw it. To the relief of all, including the local patchers, it was found again next day by Dave Quinn and performed for four hours or so (even if it was asleep for over three of them!) before being flushed by a Hobby, which we all missed. The bird of the year without a doubt ..... a mega by any standards. After it left it appeared at the RSPB reserve at Conwy to be enjoyed by all those birders that had missed it at Frodsham. Gary's photos were great; surely worthy of a pint or two?

Padders came and went. A Grasshopper Warbler, two Black Terns and Curlew Sandpipers, Whimbrels, Lesser Whitethroats and Whinchats. A strange falcon caught and plucked a Stock Dove in front of me one day, but its precise parentage defied logic. I could only think that it was a Lanner/Peregrine hybrid, but I couldn't be sure. I did find out that one was lost locally in the last twelve months though.



More goodies were to come and on May 5th, Vernon Munday chanced upon two Dotterels on No4 tank, a fabulous female in full summer plumage and a bird in mainly winter plumage. The news filtered out and on the 6th a steady stream of birders enjoyed their first views of Cheshire Dotterels, down to a few feet at times! (A pity for some birders who'd picked May to go to Lesbos ... well, we did say it was bad timing!). The weather worsened and heavy rain from May 8th to the 13th dampened things down. Alan Wraithmell heard a Corncrake which called very infrequently on the 7th, but a little group of hopefuls who gathered in the evening only got wet as the rain got heavier.

As the weather cleared and high pressure brought sunshine and easterlies, optimism rose steadily. The country was full of Continental migrants, some

actually making it to the west coast..... and Frodsham. Early in the morning of Sunday, May 16th, I set up just below the bank of No5 and began to go through the Dunlin flock and was delighted to see a full summer-plumaged Broad-billed Sandpiper right in front of me. It stayed four days to the relief of the hundreds of people that came from all over the country, giving views down to 25 metres at closest. Apart from some isolated parking problems caused mainly by strangers not familiar with the area, visitors behaved very well and there were no major incidents. The generosity of the landowner was to be commended. Like the Terek, it was to reappear at the Conwy RSPB reserve. Why do eastern waders go west? Perhaps they just go with the flow and head out with the Dunlin flocks.

A couple more Marsh Harriers (all missed by the patchers), three Med. Gulls and a male Garganey added to the quality and made the spring at Frodsham all the more memorable. Even if you forget the rarities, the Dunlin flock was always a talking point. The varieties of plumage and structure were innumerable. There were up to 1000 birds at times on No5, most very close and very tame. One beautifully frosted, Sanderling-type individual was a stunner and like the two mentioned above, will be discussed elsewhere in this issue.

May ended and June began..... with storms. Things quietened down at Frodsham.

**Tony Brome on behalf of the 'Frodsham Birders' Club'**

# Recent Reports

Some of these records may be unauthenticated and require review by the Society Records Panel or the BBRC. The records cover the period from early March to May.

## MARCH

Single **Great Crested Grebes** at Neumann's Flash (20th) and Marbury No1 tank (from 30th) were unusual at those sites with a new March record of six at Fiddler's Ferry. This last site had a new March record of 42 **Cormorants** on 21st while five were at Poynton Pool (4th-5th) and 262 at Rostherne Mere (7th). The **Bittern** at Rostherne Mere was last seen on 6th. Three **Little Egrets** were in the Burton area (18th). Several **Grey Herons** were at a nest site on the River Mersey by 7th while a pair at Redesmere was the first breeding record ever there. The Mauritanian **Spoonbill** returned to Inner Marsh Farm (from 14th). Two **Whooper Swans** visited Inner Marsh Farm (8th) with an adult at Redesmere (from 8th) which appeared to be ill and was then taken into care. Poynton Pool had two **Pink-footed Geese** (14th) with one on 13th and 18th, followed by a **Barnacle Goose** (27th) and two **Greylags** (25th) were the first there for some time. The same two Pinkfeet were at Sandbach Flashes (21st) and a presumed escapee **Snow Goose** was at Moreton (23rd). A Greylag was at Fiddler's Ferry (20th-21st) with up to 35 **Canada Geese** there.

A female **Ruddy Shelduck** was at Heswall (6th, 15th, 20th & 23rd). The **Wigeon** flock at Chelford SQs declined from 122 on 12th to one a week later. Up to 16 **Gadwall** were at Neumann's Flash with five at Fiddler's Ferry (14th & 20th). Drake **Green-winged Teals** visited Frodsham (6th & 13th) and Inner Marsh Farm (17th-26th). Two drake **Garganey** were at Frodsham No6 tank (1st) and a high count of 29 **Shovelers** was at Neumann's Flash (20th). Marbury No1 tank held nine **Pochard** and 29 **Tufted Ducks** on the 13th. A drake **Scaup** was at Frodsham No6 tank (1st) with three birds there next day. Rostherne Mere had a peak of 31 **Goldeneyes** (3rd). The pair of **Smew** remained at Inner Marsh Farm (to 17th) while the drake lingered until the 29th at least with two redheads lingering at Frodsham to mid-month. A **Red-breasted Merganser** was at Decca Pools (14th). A **Hen Harrier** was at Woolston Eyes mid-month. A female **Goshawk** flew over Budworth Mere (13th & 29th). Five **Buzzards** seen from Fiddler's Ferry (14th) was a new site record and up to five visited Rostherne Mere. Migrant **Ospreys** flew over Hartford at 6.15pm (26th) and over Tatton at 7.45am (31st). Three **Red-legged Partridges** at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (15th) were the observer's first ever local record while two were at Rostherne Mere (20th & 30th) and a single at Tatton (15th).

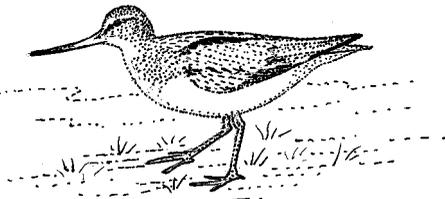
Two **Common Cranes** were reported flying SW over Irby at 9.45am on the 16th. Up to five **Oystercatchers** visited the Marbury area during the month with birds returning to Fiddler's Ferry (13th) and Tatton (23rd). The first returning **Little Ringed Plovers** were at Budworth Mere (30th), Chelford SQs (15th) and Fiddler's Ferry (21st) was the earliest ever there. 3000 **Golden Plovers** were at Frodsham with eight at Fiddler's Ferry (14th). A **Little Stint** was at Inner Marsh Farm (24th, 27th & 31st) while numbers at Frodsham peaked at 28 on the 16th. Nine **Dunlins** flew over Budworth Mere (6th). Two male **Ruff** were at Fiddler's Ferry (28th) and four visited Inner Marsh Farm (27th). Five **Jack Snipe** were at Parkgate (21st) while 47 **Snipe** at Rostherne Mere (21st) was a high count there. **Woodcocks** were at Anderton Nature Park (15th), Fiddler's Ferry (7th) and Tatton Park (6th). A **Green Sandpiper** was at Fiddler's Ferry (28th) with two at both Rostherne Mere (28th) and Tatton (23rd). A **Mediterranean Gull** at Fiddler's Ferry (14th) was the second reserve record and other sightings came from Arpley Tip (ad on 5th, two ads on 8th), Frodsham, Inner Marsh Farm (ad on 20th), Leasowe and New Brighton. The Arpley Tip/Richmond Bank area held numerous gulls including ad **Ring-billed Gull** with a limp (30th), 1st win **Glaucous/Herring hybrid** (1st), ad **Caspian Gull** (10th), five each of **Iceland** and **Glaucous Gulls** during the month along with four **Yellow-legged Gulls** on 5th. Single **Kittiwakes** were at Rostherne Mere (7th & 12th).

Two **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** were at Poynton Pool (14th) with one at Tatton (11th). The first dates for **Sand Martins** included Fiddler's Ferry (27th), Poynton Pool (29th), Redesmere (21st), Rostherne Mere (21st), Tatton (13th) and 20 at Budworth Mere (27th) were late there. An early **House Martin** was at Frodsham and **Swallows** were at Ollerton (27th) and Woolston Eyes. One observer noted a rather poor passage of **Meadow Pipits** over Poynton with numerous birds back

on breeding territory in the eastern hills by mid-month. Three **Rock Pipits** and a **Water Pipit** were at Parkgate (21st). An early **White Wagtail** was at Budworth Mere (27th). **Wheatears** were at Frodsham (13th) and Rostherne (27th) with birds back on breeding territory at Danebower (16th). 300 **Fieldfares** visited Inner Marsh Farm and the last of the winter was at Rostherne Mere on 28th. **Chiffchaffs** returned to the Marbury area (15th with five on 20th), Rostherne (21st) and Tatton (14th). An early **Willow Warbler** was at Storeton Woods (15th). A **Firecrest** visited Stapledon Woods (18th-19th) with 50+ **Goldcrests** there. A Mere garden had 38 **Tree Sparrows** on 7th and nearby a **Brambling** was at Rostherne (11th) with a flock of 50 **Siskins** there (5th).

#### APRIL

Frodsham was certainly the place to be this spring with an almost continuous stream of county and national rarities. Highlights included (in order of arrival) two **Avocets** reported on 1st, a **Kentish Plover** on No6 tank (2nd-3rd) which was seen for only c4 hours in total (the first record since 1991), a **Hoopoe** which flew over on 2nd (it was earlier seen at Fiddler's Ferry and was the second ever there), the **Long-billed Dowitcher** returned to No6 tank (5th, 10th, 17th & 22nd), a **Honey Buzzard** on 25th and a **Terek Sandpiper** on No5 tank (26th-27th) - the first county record. A **Savi's Warbler** was reported singing at Fiddler's Ferry (11th) - first ever there, if accepted.



Single **Black-necked Grebes** visited Arpley Tip (six dates from 10th-30th), Budworth Mere (14th-16th) and Rostherne (11th). Up to six were at Woolston Eyes while six at Fiddler's Ferry (2nd-3rd) was the second record ever there with four seen on 4th and singles on 11th, 17th and 19th. A **Little Egret** visited Inner Marsh Farm (6th) and Burton (18th). The Mauritanian **Spoonbill** was at Inner Marsh Farm all month and was joined by an imm Eurasian bird irregularly from 3rd-25th. Two **Barnacle Geese** were at Budworth Mere (23rd) with singles at Frodsham, Inner Marsh Farm and Poynton Pool. A **Ruddy Shelduck** visited Frodsham (3rd) while a drake was at Chelford SQs (from 4th). Three **Mandarins** were at Tatton (8th), with four at Raby Mere (18th) and three at Rostherne Mere (17th) were followed by irregular sightings there. A pair of **Garganey** were at Frodsham No6 tank (2nd) with a drake there (26th-27th) and another pair at Inner Marsh Farm (4th-8th). Fiddler's Ferry held a peak of 24 **Shovelers** on 4th. A female **Long-tailed Duck** was again at West Kirby ML (25th-27th). The peak count of 41 **Goldeneyes** at Chelford SQs (18th) was a high number there. A pair of **Goosanders** over Poynton Pool (11th) was a very late record there.

**Marsh Harriers** were at Frodsham (4th & 26th), Inner Marsh Farm (18th), Parkgate (18th) and near Prenton mid-month. At least five different **Ospreys** were seen with one over Frodsham at 7am (3rd) and reported over Marsh Farm, Frodsham at 3.15pm next day, over Tatton (16th & 20th-21st), over Rostherne Mere (26th), over Burton (28th) and past Hilbre on 30th. **Hobbies** were at Burton, Frodsham and Hilbre (all 27th). Two **Red-legged Partridges** were by Budworth Mere (25th-29th) and others visited Frodsham during the last week of the month. A pair of **Oystercatchers** nested at Marbury No1 tank and the first **Little Ringed Plover** of the year at Inner Marsh Farm arrived (4th). **Ringed Plovers** were in display flight at Fiddler's Ferry late in the month with small numbers passing through Chelford SQs and Sandbach Flashes. Up to 20 **Little Stints** were at Frodsham with a single at Inner Marsh Farm on five scattered dates. Frodsham also had two **Curlew Sandpipers** (17th & 27th). **Black-tailed Godwits** peaked at Inner Marsh Farm with 1363 on 24th. A migrant **Whimbrel** was at Inner Marsh Farm (22nd) along with 14 **Spotted Redshanks** on 4th and 16 **Ruff** on 16th. **Green Sandpipers** visited Frodsham (27th), Sandbach Flashes (4th) and Rostherne Mere (10th). A **Wood Sandpiper** was reported at Fiddler's Ferry (24th). The first **Common Sandpipers** were at Budworth Mere (17th), Chelford SQs (11th), Parkgate (18th), Poynton Pool (25th) and Rostherne Mere (11th).

**Mediterranean Gulls** visited Frodsham and Inner Marsh Farm. Up to three immature **Little Gulls** were at Frodsham late in the month. Arpley Tip had two adult **Ring-billed Gulls** (9th & 12th) with one still on 16th, when two **Iceland**, one **Glaucous**, 1st sum **Caspian** & 2nd sum **Armenian-type Gull** were also present, while a further Glaucous and two more Iceland Gulls were seen during the month. Four **Kittiwakes** flew over Frodsham Score (7th) while an adult was at Arpley Tip (9th). Four **Commic Terns** flew over Weaver Bend (29th). The first **Cuckoos** were at Frodsham (9th),

Fiddler's Ferry (21st) and Neumann's Flash (25th). Returning **Swifts** were at Nantwich (30th) and Marbury (23rd). Single **Green Woodpeckers** were at Fiddler's Ferry (3rd & 5th), Inner Marsh Farm, Neston and Poynton Pool (all 18th). The peak count of **Sand Martins** was 150 at Fiddler's Ferry (25th). The first dates for **Swallows** arriving were Audlem (4th), Budworth Mere (14th), Fiddler's Ferry (11th), Inner Marsh Farm (1st), Poynton Pool (7th), Rostherne Mere (4th) and Sandbach Flashes (4th). **House Martins** returned to Budworth Mere (7th), Poynton Pool (7th), Rostherne Mere (7th) and Tatton (18th). **Yellow Wagtails** were at Budworth Mere (15th), Chelford SQs (18th), Frodsham (27th) and Rostherne Mere (18th). Single migrant **White Wagtails** visited Fiddler's Ferry on 18th (with five on 24th) and Rostherne Mere (18th). A **Stonechat** visited Frodsham during the first week. Five **Wheatears** at Fiddler's Ferry (11th) were the first of the year there. A male **Ring Ouzel** was back at Danebower (16th). A flock of 100 **Fieldfares** flew over Redesmere (4th) and several moved through Sandbach Flashes the same day.

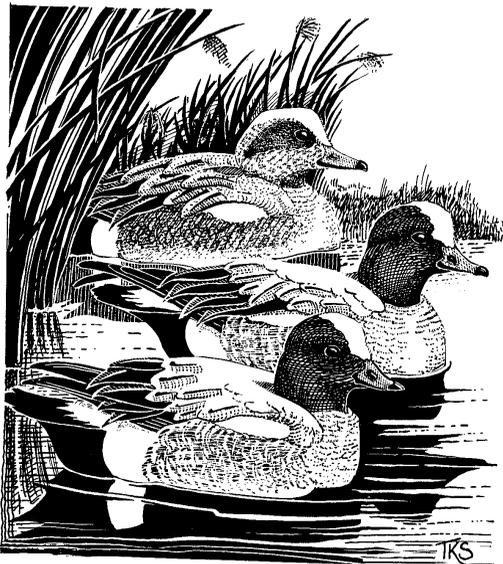
Two **Grasshopper Warblers** visited Witton Limebeds (25th). The earliest dates for **Sedge Warblers** were Arpley Tip (23rd), Butterfinch Bridge (25th), Fiddler's Ferry (2nd) - beating previous best there by nine days with seven singing males by end of the month, Frodsham (26th) and Rostherne Mere (23rd). The first dates for **Reed Warblers** included Arpley Tip (23rd), Budworth Mere (22nd), Fiddler's Ferry (24th), Frodsham (27th) and Rostherne Mere (24th). Several **Whitethroats** had returned to the Marbury area on 25th while the first at Fiddler's Ferry on 18th increased to nine males by 30th. A **Garden Warbler** was at Marbury (26th). Blackcaps returned to Fiddler's Ferry (2nd) with 10 males there by 24th, Marbury (3rd), Poynton Pool (5th) and Rostherne Mere (7th). The first **Chiffchaffs** of spring at Fiddler's Ferry and Poynton Pool were seen on 2nd and 5th respectively. **Willow Warblers** were back at Fiddler's Ferry (2nd) with 12 males there by 25th, Marbury CP (3rd), Poynton (11th) where five on 25th, Rostherne Mere (4th), Sandbach Flashes (4th) and Tatton (6th). A singing male **Pied Flycatcher** was by Neumann's Flash (28th). Two **Ravens** at Marbury CP on five dates and two at Fiddler's Ferry (3rd-4th) was the first April record there. A **Twite** visited Frodsham (12th) and a late male **Snow Bunting** was on Hilbre (23rd). **Corn Buntings** were at Marston (17th) and Warmington (10th).

## MAY

Frodsham again dominated the rarity table with the arrival of two **Dotterel** on No4 tank (6th), a calling **Corncrake** was reported (7th) and a **Broad-billed Sandpiper** on No5 tank (16th-19th), the first county record since 1990. Inner Marsh Farm chipped in with a pair of **Avocets** (2nd), a drake **American Wigeon** (7th-24th) and a pair of **Roseate Terns** on 14th was the first twitchable county record for many years. Other highlights included a pair of **Avocets** at Sandbach Flashes (1st-3rd),

**Nightingales** at Lower Heswall (1st) and Runcorn (5th), a **Hoopoe** at Chelford SQs (11th-14th), **Golden Oriole** reported at Thurston (14th), two/three **Bearded Tits** heard calling at Fiddler's Ferry (29th) - the second reserve record if accepted, while three sites on the Wirral had calling **Quails** and a 2nd sum **Laughing Gull** was reported at Woolston Eyes.

16 **Great Crested Grebes** were at Fiddler's Ferry (29th-30th). A single **Black-necked Grebe** was at Rostherne Mere (9th) with a pair at Houghton Green Flash (2nd). At least 10 **Manx Shearwaters** passed Red Rocks during high tide on the 31st while a small passage of **Gannets** was noted off Hoylake mid-month and Red Rocks late in the month. A **Little Egret** remained on the Dee Estuary. The imm **Spoonbill** remained at Inner Marsh Farm all month. It was joined by the Mauritanian Spoonbill until the 12th and an adult from 8th-12th. A pair of **Mute Swans** had two



unsuccessful nesting attempts at Poynton Pool which was the first breeding record there for 20 years. Three escaped **Bar-headed Geese** were at Budworth Mere (10th). A pair of **Greylags** bred at Redesmere and a **Barnacle Goose** was at Frodsham (16th & 31st). **Canada Geese** bred successfully at Fiddler's Ferry, Marbury No1 tank and Poynton Pool but a pair on Budworth Mere failed. Up to four **Teal** lingered at Fiddler's Ferry during the first week and five broods of **Mallards** were seen there by end of the month and nine **Shovelers** were seen (8th). A pair of **Garganey** visited Frodsham No4 tank (5th) with a drake there on 20th and another drake at Burton Marsh (16th). Two **Long-tailed Ducks** were at West Kirby ML (1st-2nd). Four **Common Scoters** at Rostherne Mere (1st) while a large flock of c150 flew past Red Rocks (31st). Up to 11 **Ruddy Ducks** were at Marbury No1 tank during the month.

Migrant **Marsh Harriers** were at Fiddler's Ferry (imm on 29th-31st which visited Astmoor on 30th & Richmond Bank on 31st and a sub-adult fem on 31st), Frodsham (17th), Inner Marsh Farm, Rostherne Mere (fem on 23rd) and Woolston Eyes. The female **Goshawk** was again over Marbury Big Wood (9th). A male **Hobby** was at Fiddler's Ferry (9th & 29th). Several **Red-legged Partridges** were on the Capesthorne Estate during the month. A **Grey Partridge** near Lamaload Resr (22nd) was unusual for that area. A **Water Rail** was still at Fiddler's Ferry (2nd). The pair of **Oystercatchers** on Marbury No1 tank hatched two young with another pair at Fiddler's Ferry. Up to 12 **Grey Plovers** were at Frodsham mid-month. A **Sanderling** visited Frodsham No5 tank (19th-21st) while eight summer-plumaged birds were amongst 5000 **Dunlins** at Hoylake (17th). A **Sanderling** was a good find at Chelford SQs (1st). A **Little Stint** was again at Inner Marsh Farm (3rd & 9th). A **Temminck's Stint** was reported at Frodsham No5 tank (20th) where up to nine Little Stints and up to six **Curlew Sandpipers** were seen. A **Curlew Sandpiper** was at Chelford SQs (25th). Up to nine Dunlin visited Neumann's Flash on five dates with 15 at Fiddler's Ferry (23rd). A flock of 36 **Black-tailed Godwits** visited Neumann's Flash (13th) while 300 were at Inner Marsh Farm (12th). Light **Whimbrel** passage included single figures at Fiddler's Ferry, Frodsham and Neumann's Flash. **Greenshanks** visited Fiddler's Ferry (3rd, 22nd & 31st) and Neumann's Flash (1st). A **Wood Sandpiper** was at Inner Marsh Farm (7th). Two **Common Sandpipers** at Fiddler's Ferry (2nd) was the only spring record there.

A pale phase **Arctic Skua** flew over the Deer Enclosure at Tatton Park (5th). One or two **Mediterranean Gulls** were regularly at Frodsham with 3 imms there on 20th. Immature **Little Gulls** were at Frodsham (two on 9th) and Inner Marsh Farm (9th-10th & 22nd). An albino **Black-headed Gull** was at Inner Marsh Farm (9th). The pair of **Great Black-backed Gulls** again bred in the county. A **Yellow-legged Gull** was at Chelford SQs (25th). A 1st sum **Kittiwake** flew downriver past Fiddler's Ferry (1st). Two **Arctic Terns** visited Fiddler's Ferry (2nd) and a **Commic Tern** was at Rostherne Mere (25th). The only **Black Terns** of the spring were at Frodsham with two on the 3rd & 6th. Two **Turtle Doves** were at Woolston Eyes. Single **Cuckoos** were at Cox Bank, nr Audlem (3rd), Inner Marsh Farm (11th) and Rostherne (1st) but they generally appeared scarcer than normal. A **Short-eared Owl** was still at Frodsham (16th). **Swifts** were back at Audlem (15th), Fiddler's Ferry (2nd with 1000 there on 29th-30th), three breeding sites in Gt. Sankey area (7th-8th), Poynton (9th) and Rostherne Mere (1st).

Two **Sand Martin** colonies at Fiddler's Ferry totalled 100+ nests with 300 birds present (3rd). There were sightings of a male **Blue-headed Wagtail** at Frodsham (3rd & 15th). Three **Whinchats** were at Frodsham (3rd) with two at Burton Point (9th). Up to ten **Wheatears** passed through Fiddler's Ferry. Three **Grasshopper Warblers** reeled at Fiddler's Ferry (2nd), the first of spring there, and another at Frodsham (3rd). Fiddler's Ferry also held 24 singing **Sedge**



**Warblers** (2nd), six singing **Reed Warblers** (29th), 14 singing **Whitethroats** (3rd) and six male **Blackcaps** (2nd). A Sedge Warbler sang by the A34 bypass at the Tesco petrol station, Handforth Dean (16th). **Lesser Whitethroats** were at Forge Bed (3rd), Poynton (from 2nd) and Rostherne (3rd). **Garden Warblers** returned to Rostherne from 15th with a pair at Neumann's Flash during the last week. A **Spotted Flycatcher** was at Audlem (15th) and two were at Red Rocks (17th). Five **Ravens** flew over both Macclesfield Forest (10th) and Tatton (18th). Two **Corn Buntings** jangled at Frodsham.

If you would like to see your Cheshire & Wirral records featured here please send them to me at the address below. I would appreciate records on a **month-by-month** basis to speed up the writing up process. Please remember to send your descriptions, if appropriate, to Tony Broome.

**Phil Oddy, 4 Swan Close, Poynton, Stockport, Cheshire, SK12 1HX. Tel:- 01625 877855**

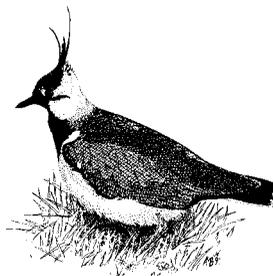
Thanks/Acknowledgements to:- S & G Barber, I Blagden, S Blamire, Birdnet, *Birdwatch* & *Bird Watching* Magazines, J Dawson, M Jones, K Kirk, K Massey (Fiddler's Ferry Reserve), D Morris (Tatton & Knutsford Moor LNR), I Oxley, Rostherne Mere NNR log, D Walters (Marbury CP & Witton Limebeds), C Williams and anyone else who passed records on.

## The View from the Farmyard

One warm evening I stood on the narrow track that links several farms dotted along the hillside. The shrub-scattered slope opposite me slowly lost its green hue, as the colours of dusk crept across the cloudless sky. Amongst the stunted trees and orchards opposite me 1000 songbirds rejoiced in the survival of another day, their voices joining in one wall of rising and falling sweet sound. Just every now and then a brief passage of song of one species then another became recognisable. By now you will have realised that this wasn't Britain; the cloudless skies bit gave that away. My first ever trip outside the British Isles ended with this memorable evening. Having to really strain to hear the churr of Nightjars above the incredible sound of thrush and warbler song will remain with me always. The preceding two weeks on the island of Lesbos in the Aegean were filled with new birds and experiences for me. The company of good friends, the great food, and warm sunshine made for me one of my best holidays ever. Knutsford Ornithological Society's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary trip was a great success.

It is still easy even now to close my eyes and imagine the clang of goat bells, the cicada and frog sound laying the backing track to some of the most incredible bird songs I have ever heard. Here in Britain on the urban fringe, where the callous fingers of creeping urban sprawl reach ever deeper into the rural greenery, it is a far more difficult place to feel at ease. On my typical evening walk near home I often need to cup my hands behind my ears to catch the song of the Yellowhammer, or to find which direction the ever-rarer Corn Bunting song came from. Sitting in the woods I often close my eyes to focus my energies into listening for the various songs of typical woodland species, trying to tease out the Garden Warbler from the Blackcap, the pew of the Bullfinch from the phweet of warblers; all the while attempting to pretend that the whoosh of traffic on the nearby M6 is really the crash of waves upon a distant shingle beach. On our return from the Lesbos trip I must admit to being disappointed with the bird song on my local patch, in fact it was a dull whisper, a damp squib in comparison to the huge congregation that had entertained me only days earlier. But that didn't last long. Once the grey skies had cleared and the dawn chorus was at its peak again, with the backdrop of lush British countryside with a morning mist and the promise of a beautiful sunny day, who could want for more.

Our setaside land has found itself sandwiched between three potato fields. The strip of land about 40 yards wide totals about five acres and forms the north-facing bank of a small hollow. In the bottom of this tiny valley is the boundary that runs between Tabley estate and us. The hawthorn hedge is now rather incomplete, low and wide and dotted at intervals with Scots pine. A rough grass strip up to seven yards wide borders our side of the boundary. This strip has never been cultivated, and is used by quite a variety of wildlife. One of the very few Grey Partridge pairs on the estate is usually found



about here. The area has supported a breeding pair in most seasons over the last 20 years and was the prime reason for locating the setaside here. The Scots pines are fairly typical of their type with a high canopy supported by a fairly slender trunk which has dead stumps of branches randomly dotted around its length. Often not much longer than a foot they are commonly used as song posts by many birds, as the hedge is cut back each year and sports few suitable uprights. These are commonly used by Yellowhammer, Blackbird, Chaffinch, Wren and Whitethroat. Dunnock and Robin choose to sing from the hedge side though the latter faced with a nearby competitor will gain advantage by singing from a higher branch if available. Goldcrest is also common in these pines; more often to be found in the canopy, but also venturing into the lower hedge particularly when the greenfly are abundant.

The setaside has been sown with grasses that are not too dense and mature late in the season. This will we hope provide open areas in which Skylarks can nest and finches find room to forage. At the time of writing this two pairs of Skylarks have raised first broods. Over the last 10 years Grey Partridges have used the boundary strip for nesting on several occasions, rearing coveys of between four and 12; this despite the hedge line being used as a highway by fox and badger alike. As with the summer of 1998, so this summer has so far been rather wet and cool. The combination of these two meteorological conditions together with dense rank vegetation has been shown to be high up the list of the causes of chick mortality in both Grey Partridge and Pheasant. It is hoped that the less dense grass sward in the setaside plot will encourage the chicks to forage here, and that the increased air circulation in the sward will aid drying both of chicks and grass. Another side effect of this more open structure is the formation of mini glades which, sheltered by the surrounding vegetation, should aid insect numbers and in turn the birds dependent on that food source.

On three consecutive Mondays, each of which turned out to have dull wet mornings, I sat in the same spot on a small bank beneath Garden Wood to eat my lunch, dining on each occasion in the company of Swallows. The first such day adult birds with young eagerly awaiting food back at the nest, flew almost at grass height taking any fly bold or daft enough to take flight. The wet weather earlier had been quite a deluge and the cows had stood under the trees sheltering. Their accompanying flies, taking refuge on the underside of leaves, were left behind when we brought the cows in for milking. Now at lunchtime fleeting shafts of sunshine appeared then quickly vanished again as small but threatening clouds raced across the sky, the rising temperature stimulating insects into activity and providing the Swallows with a feasting opportunity. Sitting with my back to the fence and my legs stretched out in front of me I was treated to a high-speed display of precision flying, coming from all directions over my outstretched legs, sometimes so close to my face that I felt the draught from their wings. A sharp clip sounded as their beaks snapped shut upon the fly; on odd occasions two birds flying head to head intent upon the same insect, but never have I seen them collide, one always veering off at the last second whilst the other takes the prey.

On the second Monday it was drizzling and dull, the wire fence that divides the fields and runs at right angles to the wood had about 20 newly-fledged Swallows perched upon it. The warm sunshine of the previous day had encouraged them to leave the cover of the buildings, some days after actually leaving the nest. Now faced with poor weather once again the adults resumed the feeding techniques of the previous week, taking boluses of food to the insatiable gapes arrayed upon the fence, the young rising and calling to any approaching adult then sinking back into a hunched squat when the food was delivered. On the third Monday the young now stronger flew with the adults up and down the wood margin, sometimes taking an insect for themselves and at other times being fed on the wing. This they achieve by flying on a converging course with the adult. When about a yard distant from each other they make a steep climb. Ceasing to propel themselves they stall face-to-face. At this point the food pass is made, then both birds turn and fall away gaining speed and so resume flight. This is quite a feat and requires a degree of precision. Should slight adjustments need to be made this is always done by the adult bird, and as a consequence seldom have I seen a food pass aborted.

**Pete Hall, The School House, Toft Road, Knutsford, Cheshire**

### **OOOPS!!!**

This note appeared in the *Knutsford Guardian* - a new species for Cheshire?:-  
"A bout of lead poisoning left a **Hooper Swan** too weak to fly to Iceland. Instead of migrating it was recovering at Lower Moss Wood animal sanctuary, near Knutsford."

# Species Spotlight

## DUNLINS, DUNLINS AND MORE DUNLINS - *Calidris alpina*

After the necessarily brief article on races in the last *Bird News*, I thought that I'd take my own advice and look a bit closer at one of the species mentioned. If you forget the rarities at Frodsham for a moment, one of the most enjoyable experiences, at least for me, has been while I've been searching through the Dunlin flocks. The myriad of plumage and structural differences have been simply amazing and the birds so close and so tame. I couldn't resist the temptation.....

A quick bit of research revealed that generally there are six recognised subspecies throughout the Northern Hemisphere, breeding right around the top of the world from Siberia to Alaska. For ease, I've grouped them together in order of size and geographical distribution, the two logically going together.

### The two smallest and shortest-billed of the group:

<i>C.a.schinzii</i>	Breeds: SE Greenland, Britain, Iceland, S Scandinavia. Winters: W Africa.	Spring passage: mid April - early May. Autumn passage: Jul - Sept, adults then juveniles.
<i>C.a.arctica</i>	Breeds: NE Greenland. Winters: W Africa.	Spring passage: late May. Autumn passage: Aug - Sept.

### The two medium-sized and medium to long-billed of the group:

<i>C.a.alpina</i>	Breeds: N Scandinavia, NW USSR. Winters: W Europe, Mediterranean to India.	Spring passage: May. Autumn passage: mid-July - Nov, adults then juveniles.
<i>C.a.sakhalina</i>	Breeds: NE USSR, N Alaska. Winters: China, Japan.	Recorded?

### The two largest and longest-billed of the group:

<i>C.a.pacifica</i>	Breeds: W Alaska. Winters: Pacific USA, Mexico.	No accepted records.
<i>C.a.hudsonia</i>	Breeds: Central Canada. Winters: SE USA.	No accepted records.

(*BWP* uses *arctica*, breeding in N Alaska, instead of *hudsonia* used by *Shorebirds*).

The size and bill comparison is of course subjective. Also, the smallest with the shortest bills generally have the shortest legs and wings but there is overlap. Extra large individuals as well as runs in each race and of course sexual size differences will complicate any attempt to place an individual bird that looks odd into one of the six categories, but occasionally with a bird in summer plumage, it may just be possible. There is however some overlap on plumage features. Many of the European populations moult within their general wintering areas, unlike their American congeners, although a small percentage do so further north.

As can be seen from the above, there should only be three regularly occurring races in the UK but common sense says that the others must turn up from time to time. Vagrant waders from Siberia and America arrive each year in varying numbers. 'Rare' Dunlins will be no exception.

In mid-April through May, the vast majority of birds at Frodsham will be *schinzii* on a route north which takes them from West Africa through western Europe, up the western seaboard of Britain and on to their breeding grounds in northern Britain, Iceland, south-east Greenland and southern Scandinavia. Their spring moult begins in late February, some four weeks earlier than *alpina* and is completed by mid-March to late April. In the latter part of May, flocks of *arctica* on their way to north-east Greenland from West Africa can be expected to join the *schinzii* on No5. These are the two smallest races and the two shortest-billed. *Schinzii* are usually more heavily streaked on the breast than *arctica* which are also paler. Northern birds can show better marked supercilia than southern ones.

Around the time of the Terek Sandpiper in late April, there were several noticeably large Dunlins in the flock on No5 tank. Using the above table you could assign them to *alpina* without too much of a problem. In autumn they move south to moult and part of the population winters around the North Sea estuaries reaching a peak in October and November, some moving over to the west coast. They begin to move east pretty early, moulting from late March to late May and their spring migration is of a mainly eastern route, up through Europe along the eastern North Sea towards northern Scandinavia and north-west Russia.

They pass up the east coast of

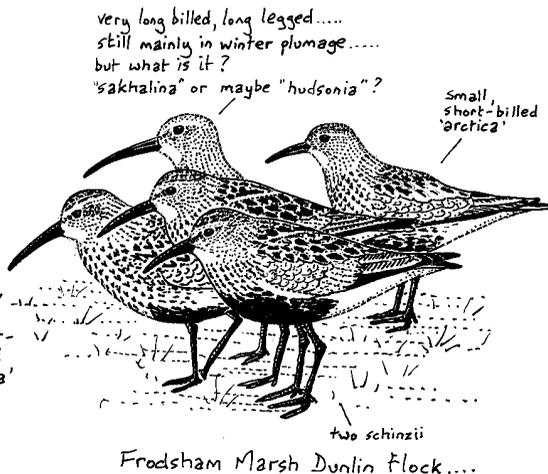
Britain and are caught by the Wash ringers. As with any waders, a good easterly airstream will push them westwards in varying numbers each year and their brighter chestnut crowns and almost solidly chestnut scapulars made them stand out on No5.

But not all Dunlin puzzles are solvable. In late April there were also two really big Dunlins on No5, with long legs, long, well-curved bills and as big as some Curlew Sandpipers. They were both mainly in winter plumage and were frequently mis-identified as Curlew Sandpipers by a lot of observers. "Where were they from?" A question asked each time we looked at them. Well, the choice would appear to be between the three races that are left, *sakhalina*, *hudsonia* and *pacifica*. Perhaps the last is least likely, wintering on the Pacific coast of the USA, but what of the other two? They may have been *sakhalina* on their way back to NE Russia or northern Alaska, but it's a long way from their wintering grounds of China and Japan. There is, however, at least one record attributed to this race (Norway, October 1961). Two others could have been *schinzii* or *hudsonia*. What about *hudsonia*? They're one of the largest races and can be as big as Curlew Sandpipers. OK, so they winter in SE USA and move north to breed in central Canada, but trans-Atlantic migration by waders is the norm, both in autumn and spring. Pectoral Sandpipers and a host of American waders do the crossing each year and it's not inconceivable that small numbers of *hudsonias* reach our shores regularly, caught up in big autumn movements of other eastward-bound species, returning north in spring up our west coast. There weren't many other Dunlins still in winter plumage either.....

Even stranger was a smallish Dunlin in May, in summer plumage. The usual buff and brown scapular fringes of *schinzii* or *arctica* were replaced by a beautiful silvery grey around the black centres with any chestnut confined to the central crown and odd lower scapulars. From behind it was reminiscent of a Sanderling and only the solid black belly patch gave the game away. I referred to it as 'the frosted Dunlin' and other birders that had seen it, knew instantly which one it was. It was simply the smartest Dunlin I've ever seen! Was it an extreme *arctica*? Perhaps I'll never know. The most Dunlins I saw on No5 were probably around 1000 birds, most frantically feeding in an ever-moving carpet, building fat reserves up for their final push north and there would usually be some small groups asleep at the back of the flock, perhaps just arrived from a long flight from further south. Their shrill 'shreee' calls and odd snatches of song filled the air and on some evenings when Frodsham was devoid of any other birders I found it hard to tear myself away, being completely and intimately engrossed in the world of one of our commonest waders.

The above is of course a simplification of a very complex subject and I'm not professing to be an overnight expert on all the races of Dunlin..... but they are fascinating and when the next big westerly blow in autumn occurs and 'yank' waders are found all down the west coast, it may be worth bearing in mind that big, really long-billed and long-legged Dunlins may have crossed the Atlantic with them.

**Tony Broome, 4 Larchwood Drive, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 2NU**



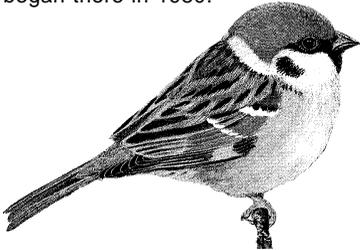
Frodsham Marsh Dunlin Flock....

## TREE SPARROWS IN CHESHIRE & WIRRAL

National monitoring of Tree Sparrow fortunes by the BTO has shown a dramatic fall in numbers of this species in the last few years, so much so that even the national press has contained many references to this. *The Breeding Bird Atlas of Cheshire & Wirral*, dealing with the position up to 1984, says that "populations are thought to have decreased for most of the first half of this century to a low in the 1950s, increased very rapidly in the 1960s, to a peak each side of 1970 and then declined again, with the trend to cleaner arable agriculture clearly implicated". This accords with the opinion of the BTO's *Population Trends in British Breeding Birds* (published 1990) that "The now widespread use of herbicide in weed control on farmland is probably a major contributor to the recent decline".

Summers-Smith, author of the monograph on Tree Sparrows, estimated that nationally there were 130,000 pairs in 1950, over 850,000 pairs in the mid-1960s and 285,000 pairs in 1985 and thought that upsurges in the British population were caused by irruptions from the Continent, following high population levels there.

Examination of *Cheshire & Wirral Bird Reports* shows that Tree Sparrows were so common prior to 1973 that they were not thought worth a separate mention. In that year they were noted as common, which meant "easily found, often in substantial numbers, or generally distributed". In 1977 flocks of 100 to 400 were referred to but by 1982 there were few large flocks and in 1984 only one flock of 100 was reported. In 1985 the species was "generally considered to be in decline, in breeding terms, not being noted as common anywhere and apparently disappearing in some areas". The decline was greatest in the east of the county, where the species had been less common anyway. The late 1980s seem to have seen a resurgence in fortune (or was it simply better reporting?) with 1987 showing "many records of feeding flocks", though "still not many records of confirmed breeding" and there were several flocks of 100+ in 1989. By 1993, however, the decline was confirmed by reports that year of "in steep decline", "flock missing", "appears to be declining", "decline complete" and in 1994, for example, Arclid sand quarry had no records for the first time since recording began there in 1980.



From *Bird Reports* it seems that the *Population Trends in British Breeding Birds* statement "strongly in decline since 1976-77" might, perhaps, have been premature so far as Cheshire & Wirral were concerned. At that time there were still many flocks of 100 to 200 Tree Sparrows and the years of very large flocks on Burton marshes and at Frodsham were only just coming to an end. The reason for a later decline might be that Cheshire is a much less arable county than many in the south so that overall change was slower or less. *Bird Reports* from 1992 to 1995 inclusive qualify

the status of the Tree Sparrow in Cheshire & Wirral, "common, widespread resident" as "overly optimistic" but this qualification was dropped in 1996 and 1997, which, at first, seems surprising. However, resident the species certainly is.

*The Breeding Bird Atlas of Cheshire & Wirral* shows that during 1978 to 1984 Tree Sparrows were encountered in 78% of tetrads, with breeding confirmed in 62.5% of these and there is no later firm evidence to suggest that the species is not as widespread now, albeit in low numbers. 'Common' is the most surprising of the words used in the status, for one would not now regard Tree Sparrows as such. The definition of common has, however, changed over the years of *Bird Reports* from the one mentioned above, to 1001 to 5000 pairs. The *Atlas* suggested 1700 to 2500 pairs in 1984 and there is nothing to show that the number of pairs has dropped to 1000 or less, so that within this definition common is correct, although a total of say 4000 birds throughout the recording area does not seem 'common'.

*Population Trends in British Breeding Birds* states "The long-term oscillations in Tree Sparrow population levels are not easy to explain" and it is tempting to add "and neither are the short-term ones". The *Bird Reports* show the number of sites with flocks of 40+ birds to have been 1990 - 5, 1991 - 7, 1992 - 6, 1993 - 5, 1994 - 12, 1995 - 8, 1996 - 4, 1997 - 2. Unfortunately very few sites were reported regularly year on year but the few for which some figures are available show how numbers of birds fluctuate:-

	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99
<b>Sandbach</b>	80	?	30	30+	17	50	100	60	?	70	60	?	?	?	?	>35	?
<b>Woolston</b>	100	100	<10	70	40	?	150	?	?	?	?	2	?	?	?	?	?
<b>Tattenhall</b>	?	70	70	?	15	30	?	?	?	?	?	?	45	85	65	?	?
<b>Mere Garden</b>	----- not reported -----							49	61	62	19	12	0	4	40	38	
<b>Timbersbrook Garden</b>	----- not reported -----						2	----- rising to -----				32	32	?	?	?	
<b>Somerford Garden</b>	----- not reported -----										19	20	30	32	23	22	

In CAWOS *Bird News* No. 22 April 1994, Sheila Blamire asked, "Where Have All The Tree Sparrows Gone?". They first appeared in her Mere garden towards the end of 1991, after she had started to put out seed and by December 1991 there were 49. In less than five years they had virtually gone, and then they reappeared again, with maxima of 40 in 1998 and 38 in 1999. Where did they come from in the first place? Presumably they were in the area and moved in to take advantage of a new source of food, but why did they desert this between 1994 and 1997? And where did they go to? In the words of the *Atlas* "Ringing has suggested that local breeders are sedentary, even in winter". If this is so, it suggests that the Mere birds might be non-breeders moving around and that in 1994 to 1997 they found sufficient food away from Mere. Or they could have deserted their Mere breeding area and then returned. Fascinating and confusing, but only a consistent ringing programme would be likely to throw much light on the position.

The Tree Sparrow habit of suddenly deserting a breeding site and its unpredictability are both illustrated by my Somerford garden flock. In 1996 two pairs nested, one raising two broods. In 1997 four pairs nested, two of which raised two broods. At the end of April 1998 a flock of up to 23 birds was still visiting the garden and additional nest boxes were available, so at least the same number of breeding pairs as in 1997 might have been anticipated in 1998. In fact there was only one pair, which raised two broods (one pair/two broods again in 1999).

I start to scatter seed at the beginning of November and the number of Tree Sparrows usually builds up to a maximum in late winter and spring but not in 1998/99. Until the middle of February 1999 the regular number of Tree Sparrows was two, occasionally three and then suddenly 19 appeared with a maximum of 22 on 20th March. Summers-Smith says "that when good food supplies become depleted large flocks split into smaller ones and also that birds return to their nesting areas in March". Did 'my' flock find a particularly good source of food for much of the 1998/99 winter? If so, where do most of the birds nest? Away from the garden I hardly ever see a Tree Sparrow in the surrounding countryside, the February 1999 Grey Partridge and finch flocks survey being typical. In hours of intensive coverage by walking the local lanes, fields and woods not a single Tree Sparrow was seen. Nest boxes erected in a small wood 300 yards across a field behind my garden have never been used by Tree Sparrows. Even in a normal winter Tree Sparrows only visit the garden several times a day for spells of intensive feeding, so obviously 'my' flock is also someone else's, but whose? Presumably it is to the west because the birds always fly away in that direction. I have not yet made time to try to follow them.

The Tree Sparrow is a bird of some mystery and, if its fluctuations in Cheshire & Wirral are to be followed and understood, regular recording and consistent reporting are essential, particularly if it is of a good spread of the same sites.

**J V Oxenham, Birchwood, 176 Holmes Chapel Road, Somerford, Congleton, CW12 4QB**

The Tree Sparrow is one of the species currently under review for a change of status. This review is delayed partly because (in spite of various appeals for information) we lack hard and fast data on a number of the species under review, across enough parts of Cheshire & Wirral to be able to establish a satisfactory status. The suggested new status for Tree Sparrow is likely to be: fairly common, thinly-spread resident. Steve Barber



**PROJECT MOONWATCH** The following suggestion appeared in the latest *Lipu UK* magazine:- "Some two-thirds of migrating birds move at night, flying too high to be identified. The Swiss Ornithological Centre at Sempach is studying migration by observing birds as they fly across the moon's disc. Observing the moon through a telescope it is possible to see a bird every so often and from observations over fixed time periods it is possible to deduce the amount of migration activity..... During periods of full moon, from March to October, it is quite easy to gather data, with just some report forms, a good telescope, hot coffee and a few friends for company." You never know you might just spot ET travelling across the face of the moon!!

**Sheila Blamire, Woodruff Cottage, Clamhunger Lane, Mere, WA16 6QG**

# Notes & Letters

## **MORE NOSTALGIA**

I am writing to say how much I appreciated the Editorial in *Bird News* No 41. At first I thought Jeff Clarke was writing his opening paragraph 20 years ago, but was delighted to read on and find his experience in Nottingham was current.

My birding is mostly local and has been for the last few years, although I have been birding in the same area for 40 years. I get very depressed, when I return home from an hour or two's walk, at the lack of birds. The fields around here are increasingly empty and the process has been going on for years. I have little knowledge of farming practices, but a gut feeling tells me that it is farming which has had the biggest effect on the loss of birds: the pristine condition of fields where insects have been eradicated, and earlier growing and cutting, giving ground nesters little chance and no stubble fields in winter. All of which is confirmed by Jeff's comments. Near Morley Green is a small farm which appears to be run in a traditional way and it is a little haven for a number of species which I do not see elsewhere around here - a few Yellowhammers, odd Tree Sparrows, Linnets etc.

For the last few years a small number of Skylarks have been resident on the old Morley Tip, but since last April when one bird was singing, I have not seen or heard one. Lapwings have become rarities. Song Thrushes seemed to disappear from last summer onwards, but in the last couple of weeks I have heard two or three birds singing, which is at least something. Lindow Common always held a small party of Reed Buntings in winter, but they disappeared a few years back. Glad to say I have seen one party of half a dozen there a few weeks back. Redpolls are seen, but from being a very common bird I would class them now as rare.

We keep a couple of nut hangers in the garden and put out seed regularly - the result is that there seem to be more birds in the garden than out and about! Whilst so many species have declined, I have to say there are some apparent increases - Long-tailed Tits and Goldfinches I believe to be more common than they were. On the debit side, in the garden, we have not had a House Sparrow for over two months and Starlings have rarely exceeded half a dozen. For the last few years we have had Siskins regularly - some arriving in October, but usually around Christmas and birds still being seen until the end of April. A curious feature this winter is that we have had one single bird for a short period. I am not suggesting for a moment that Siskins have collapsed in numbers - perhaps more likely is the comparatively mild winter. Usually flocks of up to 50 birds could be found in Styal Woods, but not this winter.

To return to Jeff's comments in *Bird News* - thank you for reminding me of what it was like at one time and on the positive side winter birds still exist in at least one district!

**J C Hillmer, 31 Priory Road, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5PR**

## **BARDSEY BIRD AND FIELD OBSERVATORY**

I've been involved with the Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory for a number of years now and I would like to encourage other CAWOS members to find out for themselves what makes Bardsey so special. The foundation of the Observatory in 1953 (the only accredited bird observatory in Wales) enabled thousands of people to stay on the island. Its aims are to promote visitors' interests in ornithology and all other aspects of natural history and to ensure that its visitors, either experts or beginners, have an enjoyable stay. The Observatory library contains identification field guides in most branches of natural history, and talks and slide shows are held in the School House every week during the season.

The season opens in late March with the busy spring migration period. Visitors assist the daily censusing of birds and the full scale ringing programme starts. Up to 8,000 birds of 97 species have been ringed in a year, caught mostly in mist nets or heligoland traps. Censusing the breeding birds takes increasing precedence in late May, June and early July. Over 30 species nest regularly and Bardsey is famous as a stronghold of Chough (up to seven pairs nest and valuable research work is carried out on them) and Manx Shearwater (visitors can accompany nocturnal ringing expeditions). By late July autumn migration has started, with August to October the busiest period. Mist netting and ringing takes place whenever possible. Bardsey is well known as one of the few

sites where night migration can actually be watched taking place. Under certain weather conditions following the new moon, migrating birds are attracted to the revolving beams of the lighthouse. Since 1978 the Observatory, in co-operation with Trinity House, has had a unique 'false lighthouse' - powerful quartz-iodide lamps atop a high mast, in place near the lighthouse proper. The lamps draw some bird species safely away from the lighthouse to the gorse bushes, so that as many as 3,000 migrants have roosted there on one night alone.

Please contact me if you would like further information - once you have made one trip to this lovely and interesting island you are likely to wish to return, as so many do, time and time again. I first visited Bardsey in 1988 and I've been back every year since!

**Gwen Newton, 15 Brookside Avenue, Poynton, Cheshire, SK12 1PW. Tel: 01625 874847**

### **MOTH-ERS**

The world of the moth-er's a night-time affair,  
With beautiful creatures that fly through the air,  
There are Kittens and Carpets and various Pugs,  
Which are not baby felines or canines or rugs;  
There's a Footman who's Common and a Prominent Iron,  
And although there's a Tiger there isn't a lion,  
There's a Middle-barred Minor, a Double-square Spot,  
A Tawny-barred Angle and True Lover's Knot.

But unlike the beautiful songs of a bird  
Moths are quite quiet and not often heard,  
But birders and moth-ers enjoy what they do  
So give it a try - it just might be for you!

**Hazel J Raw**



### **BIRDING MOTHERS**

Not quite correct, it should read Moth-ers. Most birdwatchers are interested in other aspects of natural history and it seems that one of the most popular areas is moths.

Some CAWOS members including myself have been trapping since 1978 and operate mercury vapour traps in our gardens. The average suburban garden can boast a list of over 250 species of macro-moths and a similar number of micro-moths; the differences, roughly translated for the uninitiated, being big ones and little ones. There are, however, exceptions and there are big micros and tiny macros..... clear, isn't it?

Rarities turn up just like birds and common migrants from the Continent are regular, blown north by southerlies. One particularly unexpected species turned up in Cheadle Hulme, attracted to the light operated by Geoff Lightfoot. It was identified as a Least Carpet, a species with a south-east distribution around London and locally along the south coast, flying from mid-July into August. But this was May ..... and it was Cheadle Hulme! Was it a northern England first, or was it a British first of the nominate species on the wing on the Continent in May? Let's hope the photographs can sort it out.

**Tony Broome, 4 Larchwood Drive, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 2NU**

### **CUNNING CORVIDS**

On the theme of uncommon records of common birds, I have received the following letter from Mrs Marlen Hughes (152 Oldfield Road, Altrincham, WA15 4BJ):

"Last week, sitting in the conservatory and watching the rain falling like stair-rods, I noticed a Jay behaving in a rather curious manner. It hopped onto the railing around a garden pond, then flew into the pond and re-appeared with a fish in its beak - or at least it looked like a fish. We have several fish in our pond: too many to count so as to make absolutely certain.

Later that afternoon the Jay, or another one, repeated the exercise. I wonder if anyone else has noticed similar behaviour? We have problems with Herons taking our fish, hence the railings; but we have never thought that perhaps Jays also are fish thieves! Can you shed any light on this curious behaviour?" Maybe the Jay in question has been watching an Osprey?! Corvid cunning knows no bounds.

**Peter Walton, 13 The Meade, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 2JF**

## GLOSSARY OF BIRDING TERMS

<b>Tick</b>	A new bird for either your year list or your life list.
<b>Tart's Tick</b>	A tick that everyone else has but you.
<b>Mega Tick</b>	Sensational, Unbelievable, Whoopee!!!
<b>Lifer</b>	A new bird for your life list.
<b>Biggy</b>	A species that has only appeared in Britain a handful of times or a species that has not been twitchable on previous appearances.
<b>Big Lister</b>	Someone with a life list exceeding 400.
<b>Bonus Birds</b>	Extra ticks.
<b>Cleaned Up</b>	Having seen all the birds of note in an area or could refer to a particular target bird.
<b>Crippler</b>	A tick that renders you helpless.
<b>Dip</b>	To fail to see the bird you have travelled for.
<b>Dude</b>	Someone who dresses very conventionally and who isn't into racing round the country after rarities. Extreme cases give themselves away by carrying their binoculars in their hands.
<b>Duff Gen</b>	False information.
<b>Flushed</b>	Disturbed.
<b>Gen</b>	Information from the grapevine.
<b>Grilled</b>	Having studied a single species in great depth or to have looked through a flock of birds with utmost care.
<b>Grip Factor</b>	The degree of being gripped on a scale of 1 - 10.
<b>Gripped</b>	When fellow team members or associates see a bird and you don't.
<b>Jammed In</b>	To just happen to be where a rare bird appears.
<b>Kit</b>	Anything from a lens cleaning cloth to your new scope.
<b>Nancy's Cafe</b>	A cafe in Cley, Norfolk, that was the national shrine for all twitchers. Nancy was a superb, middle-aged lady who ran a small eating house, complete with 'phone which birders ran during opening hours. Nowadays a B&B.
<b>Need a Bird</b>	To need to see a species which is not yet on your list.
<b>O.M.L.</b>	On my list.
<b>Over the Wall</b>	An escaped bird. Or a bird which leaves just before you arrive (e.g. "well it was here but it's just flown over that wall!").
<b>Own Patch</b>	The area you visit on a regular basis.
<b>Phasing</b>	To lose interest and put other things before your birding.
<b>Scope</b>	Telescope.
<b>So-sh</b>	A contraction of social. To see lots of familiar faces at the twitch.
<b>Split</b>	Usually refers to a subspecies that may be about to achieve full species status.
<b>Street Cred</b>	Originality in clothes or birds that you have found.
<b>String</b>	Refers to a bird that has been wrongly identified (whether innocently or maliciously!!) or even worse, didn't exist at all.
<b>Target Bird</b>	The main bird for which the trip was organised.
<b>Tourist Ticking</b>	To arrive after daybreak or even in the afternoon in true dude fashion.
<b>Unblock</b>	To tick a species that has been eluding you for a long time.
<b>Under the Belt</b>	On your personal list.

**Mike Crawley, 17 Leaside, Heaton Mersey, Stockport, SK4 2DN**

## FREEZE-FRAME

I was grateful to Sheila Blamire for her vivid anti-raptor explanation of the 'freezing' behaviour of garden birds, as set out last autumn in *Bird News* No. 40. Though I cling a little to my 'rest and digest' theory for Siskins, her evidence is certainly convincing - especially since we, too, are on the raiding run for a Sparrowhawk (a superb male). Perhaps I could add another thought?

The Siskins are back for another winter, at the time of writing; the same band of half a dozen, I am sure, which have visited us before (allowing for some mortality and replacement). They are extremely active and sociable, touring several large trees and at least one other feeding station in the neighbourhood. At dawn and dusk, and often during the day, their chorus of songs and calls is a very welcome sound. It is rare for a singleton to detach itself from this tight flock, but when it does, sure enough I observe the intermittent freezing on which I commented earlier. Sometimes it shades

off into a kind of slow feeding, untypical of Siskins. I wonder if, deprived of the active group-alertness of the flock, such isolated birds modify their behaviour because they have to do all the watching-out for themselves - even when a hawk is not actually present.

**Peter Walton, 13 The Meade, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 2JF**

## **CHESHIRE BIRDING AND THE WORLD WIDE WEB**

These days it seems more and more people are surfing the World Wide Web and even those without access to a computer at least have a good idea of what it is all about. When first confronted with the World Wide Web it's tempting to start looking at web sites from exotic locations across the world. However, it's well worth looking a lot nearer home where you might be surprised at the high quality and number of sites dedicated to birding right here in Cheshire and Wirral. Below are descriptions of seven excellent web sites produced either by dedicated individuals or local organisations.

**Birds of a Cheshire Garden** (web address <http://www.abcissa.force9.co.uk/birds/>)

This is a charming site describing the birds and other wildlife seen in a Wilmslow garden over several years. There are photographs, latest sightings, studies of migration patterns, with a total species list for the garden of 110 birds.

**The Woolston Eyes Bird Reserve** (web address <http://home.clara.net/franklinley/index.htm>)

The reserve is run by the Woolston Eyes Conservation Group and they have produced a comprehensive web site. Pages include latest sightings, WeBS counts, arrival dates of migrants, duck populations, extracts from the latest annual report and ringing activities.

**Chester RSPB Group** (web address <http://www.antram.demon.co.uk/page11.html>)

A professional-looking site with full details of the Chester RSPB activities and a diary of events throughout the region including high tide watches on the Dee Estuary. Among the many interesting pages on offer is the Migration Watch Report.

**Witton Area Conservation Group** (web address <http://freespace.virgin.net/dave.walters/wacg/Default.htm>)

The WACG is dedicated to conserving and recording wildlife at Marbury Country Park and Witton Lime Beds near Northwich. One of the main aims of the group is to raise public awareness of conservation issues and the web site achieves this admirably. Lists of flora and fauna found in the area are given including full details of the birds seen and latest sightings. The recent history of Marbury and Witton and the WACG part in this is described in detail.

**Knutsford Ornithological Society** (web address <http://www.usher.u-net.com/home.htm>)

An impressive-looking site with a lovely painting of Redshanks on the home page. The KOS local patch is Tatton Park and this is described fully including the story of the over-summering Osprey in 1998. Among the other pages to explore is a collection of local bird sounds to download and fascinating reports of the area from 25, 60 and 100 years ago.

**A Birdwatching Guide to the Dee Estuary** (web address <http://dSPACE.dial.pipex.com/town/lane/xdx84/>)

A comprehensive guide covering all aspects of birdwatching on the Dee Estuary which should appeal to both hardened twitchers and casual birdwatchers alike. Maps and full descriptions of all the best sites are given for both the Wirral and Welsh sides of the estuary. A latest sightings page is updated daily and a newsletter published monthly.

**Mid-Cheshire Ornithological Society** (web address <http://www.hems.u-net.com>)

The society maintains a reserve by the River Weaver near Kingsley and a good description of this is given including details of the very active nest box programme. The society has a series of interesting field trips and the trip reports make fascinating reading.

**Richard Smith, 12 Thurstaston Road, Irby, Wirral, L61 0HE**

**E-mail: [richard.ob@bigfoot.com](mailto:richard.ob@bigfoot.com)**

### **ON A FINAL NOTE:**

**Birds of a Cheshire Garden** has regularly been praised in different newspapers and magazines, including *The Guardian* and *Bird Watching* magazine. To quote from *The Times* July '99, "Phil Barnett, a teacher now confined to a wheelchair with ME, divides his time between watching birds in his Cheshire garden and maintaining his website. It is a treasure trove of observations, pictures, information and links to other bird-related sites." He recently attended the Yell UK Web Award ceremony to receive the 'Best Personal Site' award, at which it was announced that Phil's website had also been voted 'Site of the Year' as well! This prestigious award was presented by Jonathan Ross, no less!! Well done Phil, obviously well deserved.

## MERLIN AND SKYLARK

February was November-like, dark, dank, dismal and with spring seeming an age away, but there was *one* bright day and I shared it with a group visiting the Reserve at Connah's Quay where birds were plentiful and the action was superb. It was just after the Peregrine had made a low sortie over Oakenholt and flushed two thousand Dunlin into the air, that we found ourselves witness to a thrilling chase and came to recognise how well adapted the two protagonists were; a female Merlin the pursuer and the Skylark its potential prey.

We had enjoyed a few chortles of early song from Skylarks foraging in the rough pasture, so when we heard the sudden dry "sprt" of Skylark alarm we instantly felt for the lark's plight. A female Merlin appeared from nowhere passing low, swift and menacing, over the wetland meadow. She startled the Skylark into the air where it struggled upwards in an effort to prevent the falcon getting a stooping height above it. The Skylark led the falcon in figures of eight over the meadow, always rising when the Merlin attempted to gain the advantage of height. What were the Skylark's chances?

As the pursuit became prolonged the odds shifted against the Merlin. She had lost that vital element of surprise now and the lark was aware of her every move. Moreover Skylarks are strong flyers; powerful flight muscles bulge under that pouty breast whilst short, blunt-ended wings give total control for aerial manoeuvres. Falcons, with their long pointed wings, may excel in fast level flight but the ability to jink and turn is sacrificed to speed. The Skylark was leading the Merlin a merry dance but it was flying for its life and still it could not shake off the raptor.

Suddenly the lark changed direction and headed straight towards two of our group who were standing beside their car. The Skylark flew directly at them, veering only at the last minute to catapult beneath the car. The Merlin dropped, exhausted, among the plastic barricades surrounding the re-planted shrubs and sat there too tired even to furl her wings. She stayed spread-eagled for perhaps two minutes, then roused and after another pause flew off. I had no doubt that the Skylark used the people by the car as a deterrent to the falcon and I'm equally sure that it correctly identified the bird that was pursuing it, since this behaviour would have proved fatal had the raptor been a Sparrowhawk, agile in confined spaces and with an amazing reach of leg.

Dr Glen Morris told me of a similar incident in almost the same spot. He was sitting inside his car on the road at the west end of the Reserve when a female Merlin startled a flock of young Starlings out on the marsh. One became separated from the flock and the pursuit began. Again the chase was prolonged until the Starling hurtled beneath the car. The Merlin thumped into the front tyre and then, apparently believing that the Starling had flown inside the car, she jumped up onto the bonnet, gripped the windscreen wipers in powerful talons and glared into Glen's astonished eyes — barely inches away. The Merlin gave up, but the Starling remained hidden beneath the car until eventually the car began to move away.

I had a similar experience back in 1985 in May at Loch Buidhe in Sutherland. I was standing on the edge of the loch watching divers when a male Merlin flashed by close on the tail of a Meadow Pipit. The chase continued and the male was joined by two female Merlins. Eventually the Meadow Pipit flew towards us, crashed in the tussock grass within a yard of my feet and just disappeared! All

three Merlins ditched close by, one female calling loudly all the while. Then they too, seeing nothing and startled at our proximity, gave up and flew off over the moor. I never saw the pipit again, but none of the Merlins was carrying prey so its stratagem succeeded, and it survived. I had no doubt that the pipit used my presence to deter the raptors.

It seems that the skills of predators and prey are finely tuned and that most encounters won by a Merlin are hard fought — meals don't come easy. But whatever the outcome I feel it a privilege to share in such a skirmish: I will *never* forget Loch Buidhe and that little jack Merlin crash-landed on the ground almost at my feet. In full sun he was so blue; blue shot through with lilac, and the tarsi were such a vibrant yellow.

**Thelma K Sykes, Blue Neb Studios**



# Membership News

Welcome to the following new members: U Trickett, RE Taylor, A Stott, A Challoner. We are sorry to hear of the death of Mrs Peggy Scott, of Grappenhall, who had been a member since the foundation of CAWOS. As I write this on 31st May membership has now reached 352 - so we have topped the 350 mark! This is the highest ever. Of last year's membership five resigned and 13 did not renew for various reasons. This is a much lower turnover rate than many other organisations have - many work on a 10% change each year.

At the Council meeting held in April Jeff Clarke and Laurie Fairman were co-opted as Editor of *Bird News* and Press Officer respectively. Richard Gabb indicated that he did not want to continue as Events Officer; we thank him for his efforts and will in due course advertise the post. A special Council meeting will be held towards the end of June to review the work of CAWOS and redefine its objectives (the start of the 'Way Forward' process as outlined in the Editorial). We came 9<sup>th</sup> in the *British Birds* Best Bird Reports Award; and the exhibition we mounted at the Grosvenor Museum will appear at Thurstaston in September for the World Birdwatch weekend.

The Beeston Peregrine Watch has reached a successful conclusion - only one chick hatched and fledged early in June but the two other eggs were taken away for analysis. The Watch has received for the first time information about a ringed chick from Beeston; one of last year's chicks was picked up in Leicestershire in April in poor condition and taken to a wildlife hospital. Although it appeared to be making good progress unfortunately it died suddenly of a lung infection.

The Cheshire Wildlife Trust informed us of a small correction which should be made to the Chairman's report on p28 of the April issue. We stated that the Barn Owl Officer was appointed by the Barn Owl Trust; in fact he is employed by the Wildlife Trust, steered by the Cheshire Barn Owl Biodiversity Action Plan Action Group and funded mostly by 3C Waste Landfill Tax contributions.

**David Cogger, Membership Secretary, 113 Nantwich Rd, Middlewich CW10 9HD - 01606 832517**

## SONGS AND CALLS WORKSHOP REVIEW

Due to a change in my working situation the Songs and Calls Workshop was delayed until 12<sup>th</sup> June. The event took place at the Wirral Country Park, Thurstaston. A total of 14 people attended and one of the pleasing aspects was that seven of these people were from a newly formed 'Phoenix' Group.

Despite the increasingly inclement weather the morning proved very successful with close audio encounters with several warbler species despite the late date. The group was very fortunate to have excellent views of Goldcrest at close quarters. To find this species in such marginal habitat probably indicates a healthy population level, no doubt due to the previous mild winter.

Most people expressed their satisfaction with the event and hopefully everyone left with one or two hints or tips to help them resolve future identification difficulties.

**Jeff Clarke, 90 Simonside, Hough Green, Widnes, Cheshire, WA8 4YN.**



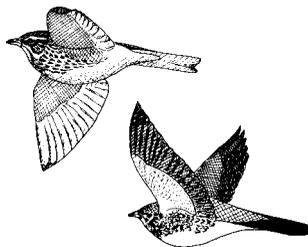
For all those compilers busy 'cutting and pasting' their sections for the next *Bird Report*, this should strike a chord! (Apologies to Schultz)



## MIGRATION WATCH '99

It's migration time again and CAWOS will once more be running a co-ordinated watch during October. This year's Migration Watch dates are as follows:

<b>Saturday</b>	<b>October 2<sup>nd</sup></b>	<b>7:00am – 11:00am</b>
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>October 3<sup>rd</sup></b>	<b>7:00am – 11:00am</b>
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>October 17<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>7:30am – 11:30am</b>



Migration Watching can be one of the most exhilarating forms of birding and if weather conditions are just right truly spectacular numbers of passing migrants can be recorded in just a few hours. There are two ways to take part in Migration Watch. Firstly for those less experienced in identifying overflying passerines they can join the experts at various public locations. Secondly the more adventurous can cover their own watchpoints. This form of birding is particularly suited to people who work a regular patch, even more so if it is located on a natural flyway. Anybody wishing to man their own watchpoint will be sent a Migration Watch pack which contains instruction sheets and recording forms.

**For further information and to receive your Migration Watch '99  
Pack telephone Jeff Clarke on 0151 648 4371/3884.**

## ANNUAL CAWOS PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

Although there were seven entrants this year (slightly down on the nine last year), only 34 slides were entered in total (and no prints). Eight were in the British section, 10 in the Foreign and 16 Humorous. Is no one taking serious photos anymore?! This was very disappointing for me (was it my fault? – I hope not!) having taken over from Sheila this year. At least some of the entrants were first timers, and there were new winners, too. Our previous judge, Tony Bond, also suggested that it was time for a change of judge, and I am very grateful to Colin Smith FRPS of Chorley for responding so positively. His comments on the winning entries are listed below. There was one bright side to the low numbers of entries - Colin was able to make detailed comments on all entries, which I read out at the AGM. The humorous slides were judged by a volunteer panel. (Actually it was a case of you, you and you!!) So, who were the winners?

### CATEGORY 1 - FOREIGN

#### 1<sup>st</sup> CROWNED PLOVER, SOUTH AFRICA by VERNON LUNDY

This is a cracking shot. The bird is exactly the right size and perfectly exposed. The lighting really makes the bird almost three-dimensional.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> White Ibis, Australia by Brian Dyke

This is sharp and the white colours are spot on. The bird is in an interesting and different position and is a good size. The foliage on the left is a minor distraction, being in front of the bird and out of focus.

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> Pacific Black Duck, Australia by Brian Dyke

This is very pleasing to the eye, especially the background. The lighting and exposure are both good and it is acceptably sharp. The bird is perhaps a bit central.

#### Highly Commended Ground Hornbill, South Africa by Vernon Lundy

This is an excellent composition, sharp and perfectly exposed – capturing the black feather detail of a bird in shadow is commendable. It is only luck which rules this out as a winner – too much black in the centre of the picture is not the most aesthetically pleasing colour.



## CATEGORY 2 – GREAT BRITAIN

### 1<sup>st</sup> ARCTIC SKUA, SHETLAND by JOHN HEADON

An excellent combination of sharp image, good lighting and an interesting soft background showing the habitat well. The overall quality makes up for the slightly small image.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Puffins, Hermaness, Shetland by John Headon

This is a very attractive little group which would be improved by being off-centre. It is good to see the sea in the background, and the slope makes an interesting composition. It is sharp in the right place.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Siskin, Farne Islands by Colin Williams

A good opportunistic picture with an interesting composition and lovely background colour. It is sharp, especially the eye, which has a nice catch light. Unfortunately, there is just too much of the bird obscured – the white seedhead is particularly distracting.

Whilst judging the slides, Colin made several general points which could help entrants next year to come up with winning slides, and also just to improve standards for your own satisfaction:

1. Too many birds are placed in the centre of the picture. This is probably the result of modern focussing systems, but can be solved with care.
2. Out of focus items which are **in front** of the subject are very distracting, and should be avoided if at all possible.
3. Correct exposure and avoidance of camera shake are essential for a winning photograph – many camera magazines give advice on techniques to avoid these drawbacks.
4. The eye of the subject should be visible, and preferably have a catch light.
5. The subject should not be either too small or too big, unless there is no choice.

## CATEGORY 3 – HUMOROUS

### 1<sup>st</sup> “THIS BIRD SHIT IS TERRIBLY DIFFICULT TO WASH OFF, I WONDER WHAT THEY USE?” –

COLIN WILLIAMS

An albino Shag contemplates its neighbours!

### 2<sup>nd</sup> “I don’t care what it says in the books, your undertail coverts still look off-white to me”

by Hugh Pulsford

A Moorhen examines its neighbour’s private parts and muses on a tricky identification feature!

### 3<sup>rd</sup> “Heads down lads, here comes Sheila”

by Richard Gabb

Frigatebirds hiding from a photographer. Personal references are always good for a laugh!

Some people are saying that I took over from Sheila just so that I could win! (Well, I am saying it!!) So, here is a challenge to all you potential entrants – you must be able to take better photographs than me – so let’s see them in next year’s competition. Don’t forget the £5 prize for each section either! Seriously though, if you have any suggestions for boosting the number of entries, I would be extremely grateful to receive them – I look forward to hearing from you.

**John Headon, 6 Holland Road, Bramhall, Stockport, SK7 2PQ. 0161 439 8557**



## ANNUAL CAWOS PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

**Please note:** The closing date for the next competition (for photographs taken in 1999) will be 5th February 2000 - further details and an entry form will go out with the next edition of *Bird News*.

## **REVIEW OF BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLANS (BAPS) in Cheshire & Wirral**

The importance of BAPs have recently been given publicity in *Bird News* with the publication of the Grey Partridge BAP and the Jan '99 Editorial of Jeff Clarke. It is timely now to inform members of proposed changes to the above project especially those members who spent time on the surveying of the then envisaged project area in February. As Peter Hall mentioned in his last 'View from the Farmyard', the changes taking place in our countryside are creating many problems for our wildlife. Even Peter with his direct involvement and experience has found implications that he himself did not expect. The habitat changes detected in the February survey have confirmed how wide-reaching and quickly our farmland habitats have changed. In the light of these results, the emphasis of the project will now be put on 'Hot Spots' within our area where Grey Partridge are still found and where landowners and farmers are sympathetic to regimes that will enhance their numbers further. In July a comprehensive questionnaire will be distributed through the Country Landowners' Association, (CLA) to their members. This will cover approximately 80% of the land in Cheshire & Wirral. The results of this questionnaire will be processed ready for the autumn, when the project will be revised.

Other developments have occurred with the Barn Owl BAP. Alex Turner, Barn Owl Officer has established that our population of Barn Owls seems to have stabilised. There are good indications that work already done has begun to produce beneficial results. A new local Barn Owl Group has been established on the Wirral and another in mid-Cheshire will shortly be formed.

Chris Mahon of the Cheshire Wildlife Trust has requested CAWOS to help in establishing further species BAPs and certain members have expressed interest in this valuable work. The species on Chris's list are Turtle Dove, Reed Bunting, Corn Bunting, Spotted Flycatcher, Tree Sparrow and Bullfinch. Lapwing is another species that several members have indicated should also be considered. Several CAWOS members have expressed their interest in helping with the new BAPs. The most interest seems to be for Tree Sparrow and Reed Bunting. However, some members have shown interest in all the species listed above with the exception of Turtle Dove. It would be appreciated if members who would wish to be involved in any of the above proposed BAPs contact me, giving their views as to the species that they wish to be involved with and their ideas as to how to develop such plans.

**Derek Kelly, Conservation Officer, 5 Avon Road, Heald Green, Cheadle, SK8 3LS**

As will become apparent to readers over the next few pages the issue of the Grey Partridge Species Action Plan has produced a great deal of concern to some members of CAWOS. This has been a contentious and at times difficult issue for the CAWOS Council to resolve. As such it has caused an unfortunate, and for the correspondents irritating, delay in bringing the following letters to the attention of the CAWOS membership. Hopefully the majority of members will concur with Council's judgement on the issue; if not, we anticipate you will let us know.

Let the saga begin.....

### **GREY PARTRIDGE RECOVERY PROJECT**

I have read with growing consternation the recent correspondence concerning the Grey Partridge Recovery Project (*Bird News* Nos. 40, 41). Can I firstly state that I absolutely support the need to do whatever is legitimately and morally right in order to protect our birds, especially those under threat. What I find difficult to accept is the way the country sports fraternity manipulate the agenda to suit their own ends. What possible justification can there be in spending £4,500 on Larsen traps to control predators? For those not in the know, the common method of use is to enslave a 'predator' such as a Carrion Crow or Magpie in the trap for days on end, acting as a lure for others to enter and be similarly captured. The unfortunate captives are then summarily executed. Just what benefit this has for conservation ought to be beyond the imagination of any rational person, but we seem quite prepared to let landowners and their willing minions control our conservation agenda; I presume for fear that they will turn the screw even harder on our dwindling stock of farmland species.

Let's try a few facts: the historical reasons for depletion of Grey Partridges and other farmland specialities have little if anything to do with the predatory activities of a few Crows, Magpies and foxes. Changes in farming practices, such as monoculture agriculture, the systematic destruction of hedgerows and their associated grass margins, and the intensive and thoughtless use of agrochemicals are responsible. This looks like yet another case of landowners benefiting from the consequences of their own irresponsible actions.....

**Mark Turner, 12 Dovedale Road, Hoylake, Wirral, L47 3AW**

## DOES CAWOS SUPPORT THE CULLING/KILLING OF BIRDS?

Several articles in *Bird News* No. 40 referred to the Grey Partridge Recovery Project, developed by the Cheshire Grey Partridge Species Action Plan Group of which CAWOS is a member. I have no criticism of 90% of the document and in fact congratulate CAWOS for actually getting involved in a major *conservation* initiative. However, I do wish to adversely comment on the sections concerning 'legal predator control'.

I extract from the original document:- "In addition to sympathetic management of existing land and the creation of new habitat, the Project aims to increase the Grey Partridge population by reducing predation pressure through legal predator control. Predation of Grey Partridge is thought to operate mostly through removal of incubating females on nests by foxes, and the loss of eggs and young to Crows and Magpies. As such the voluntary keepers will advise on or implement legal means of predator control (e.g. shooting and the use of Larsen and cage traps), to reduce the effects of predation by the species." A further extract concerns finance if this is forthcoming for the Project, (presumably via Landfill Tax?). It says that "it is proposed to support the part-time Gamekeeper Network to a total of £16,500. This includes 90 Larsen traps at £50 each, i.e. £4,500, plus £4,000 per annum for three years to cover their out-of-pocket expenses, i.e. £12,000."

Legal or not, I do not agree with this 'predator control' for both scientific and political reasons:-

1. As most of the Project document is at pains to point out, the decline of the Grey Partridge has been almost entirely due to increasingly destructive farming practices over several decades (e.g. hedgerow loss; field margin loss; loss of winter stubble and food source loss through pesticide application).
2. *BTO News* No. 219 highlighted research over the last 25 years showing absolutely no correlation between increasing Magpie (and Sparrowhawk) numbers and the collapse of songbird populations. Could it therefore also be true that there is similarly no correlation between the increase in Magpies and the Grey Partridge collapse?
3. If CAWOS agrees with, or agrees to, the culling/killing of Crows, Magpies (and possibly Jays?) to help out another bird species, this sets a principle in writing which will be latched onto again at some point in the future. For example, should CAWOS now support the control of Peregrines in the Peak District as they appear to be ousting the even rarer Merlins? I also wonder which species predate Black Grouse if their recovery project comes to fruition? On a slightly different tack, I seem to recall a recent uproar about calls to cull/kill Cormorants because of their impact on inland fish stocks.
4. What then happens if everything goes to plan and the Grey Partridge population recovers? Does CAWOS then support the reintroduction of game shooting of the species? If so, all this £100,000+ of effort is as much for the benefit of shooters as the Grey Partridge itself.

Originally I was delighted to see CAWOS joining the wider environment and conservation movement in Cheshire via a major Biodiversity Action Plan. It is therefore a great pity that CAWOS Council, who have presumably discussed this issue at length, either supported the killing of birds, or were unable to successfully argue that 'legal predator control' was *neither acceptable nor required* for the Project to achieve its overall objectives.

If obtained, the £16,500 allocated for this aspect of the Project should be redirected to further habitat restoration and creation which is the clear root cause of the Grey Partridge demise.

CAWOS Council...urgent answers to the above issues and questions please!

**Bryan Roberts, 55 Mereheath Park, Knutsford, Cheshire, WA16 6AS**

## GREY PARTRIDGE SPECIES ACTION PLAN DILEMMA

From the above letters it is obvious that some members have severe misgivings about CAWOS giving tacit support to The Grey Partridge SAP because it is likely to involve the culling of certain predators. The Grey Partridge was chosen as a flagship species. A bird that most people could identify and identify with. It is a species with a broad appeal. It also has an economic value. These factors mean that any proposed rescue plan for the species has a good chance of gaining support from a broad spectrum of the community, not just the ornithological fraternity.

There is absolutely no doubt that the Game Conservancy's principle motive for supporting the SAP is to ensure that they have enough Grey Partridges to shoot. It is also true that the Game Conservancy are widely acknowledged, including by the RSPB, as the experts on the biology of

the Grey Partridge. The Game Conservancy is a powerful lobby group and without their support it is doubtful that a viable continuous tract of land, where there is already a viable Grey Partridge population, could be recruited to the SAP.

This means that if conservation and ornithological organisations are serious about increasing the population of Grey Partridges they have a stark choice. More Grey Partridges - Support the SAP, or, the same number/fewer Grey Partridges - Don't support the SAP. The pay-off is a contentious and painful one. We either accept culling of certain species, notably the corvids and mammals such as foxes and stoats and gain more Grey Partridges and hopefully many other farmland species which are also struggling, namely Yellowhammers, Corn Buntings, Tree Sparrows etc, or we stand on our 'no culling' principle and say we are happy with the status quo and pray that the greening of the Common Agricultural Policy will, like the US Cavalry, come charging over the horizon in the nick of time.

The lead for this SAP, from the ornithological side, is coming from the RSPB, an organisation which is not averse to carrying out predator control where it is deemed in the best interests of certain endangered breeding species. At the time of writing the SAP has been re-drafted and the latest plan has a reduced emphasis on predator control and greater focus on improving habitat. This will be achieved by working in conjunction with sympathetic farmers and landowners. This should mean an even greater pay-off with regard to a vast array of threatened farmland species as well as for Grey Partridges. The RSPB are the premier wildlife conservation organisation in the UK, and although we should not give unquestioning support, the Council has as yet not been presented with a viable alternative strategy which would give the desired result of increasing the population of Grey Partridges within the county and that of other declining farmland birds. Until such time the Council sees little alternative but to support the RSPB's decision to pursue the SAP.

Perhaps the bottom line is that we are minor players on a big stage and when the credits roll for the success of this project we won't even make 'best boy'. So we are left with a bit of a Hobson's Choice. Perhaps it's worth remembering that sometimes Hobson's Choice works out for the best. Finally it's worth restating that the membership has the right to raise this issue and put it to a vote at the next general meeting. As a democratic organisation the Council would have to act upon the wishes of the membership.

**Jeff Clarke, Editor**

## **CAWOS, CUSTOMER CARE AND OTHER ISSUES**

It is with genuine regret that I have to write this letter and ask for it to be published in *CAWOS Bird News* No.43. I trust that elsewhere in this issue, you will be able to read an article entitled 'Does CAWOS support the culling/killing of birds?'. This article was written by myself on 4th December 1998, and duly submitted on that day for publication in *Bird News* No.41 (January '99).

This present letter now raises concerns about how CAWOS has handled/mishandled the above article and the issues raised therein. Dates are important here, so I'll stress that the date today is June 2nd. So far the only responses from CAWOS have been as follows. In January, Jeff Clarke 'phoned to let me know the article, concerning the Grey Partridge BAP, had been held over from the January *Bird News* "so that a considered response could be given by Council". Over the next two months nothing further happened until March 3rd when a Council member 'phoned to see whether I was going to raise the Grey Partridge issue at the AGM two days later...which I wasn't! Perhaps I was naive to anticipate my article, together with Council's response, would arrive on my doorstep via *Bird News* No.42, which I received in early May. Nothing! Not a mention anywhere! I therefore wrote to CAWOS on 7th May raising a whole number of issues, some of which are repeated below. Four further weeks have now passed. Again the only response to either the original article or my letter to CAWOS has been a note on 11th May regretting the cancellation of my CAWOS membership as from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2000, and hoping that in time I will feel able to rejoin CAWOS.

As I am shortly to be out of town, and the next *Bird News* deadline is only three days away, I cannot leave it any longer to publicly raise these issues, in addition to the much more important ones originally raised about the Grey Partridge BAP back in December '98:

1. Can CAWOS not take constructive criticism?
2. Is there censorship via *Bird News*, when such criticism is made? To miss one issue I can tolerate, but to miss two issues makes me suspicious.
3. The final line of my article read "CAWOS Council...urgent answers to the above issues and questions please!" After 5 months and 29 days, I have still not received any answers at all!



from university in Glasgow. This was due to two things; firstly, I was living with my parents and was imminently about to commit patricide if I didn't get out of the house more often, and secondly, I found an old pair of 8-15x40 naval binoculars (approximate weight 0.5 tonne!) in the loft and thought these would be useful to go out birdwatching with!

### **Where did I start birdwatching?**

My parents live in Thame, Oxfordshire, so consequently I started off watching Spanish Red Kites (easy to identify because of the castanets attached to the wings!) in the Chilterns. I then discovered the Tring reservoirs and later, Little Marlow gravel pit and used to spend up to four days a week between these two sites.

### **What are my first birdwatching memories?**

Explaining, at the age of about eight, to two rather uninterested friends that Herring Gulls have pink legs and Lesser Black-backed Gulls have yellow legs. Ah, the naivety of youth! Later, experiencing the sights, sounds and smells of a seabird colony in the full throes of breeding while bobbing up and down being sick in a little boat near the Bass Rock.

### **What's my favourite bird species and family?**

My favourite family is, without doubt (future *Bird News* readers will be glad to know) not gulls but wildfowl. Why? 'Cos they're easy to identify (except males in eclipse plumage) and I got to grips with them early on in my birding career at Tring and Little Marlow. Of these, the male Smew surely stands out as one of the most visually impressive of God's avian creations. However, I'm now beginning to develop a much greater interest in waders and warblers.

### **Which bird family do I find most difficult?**

Seagulls!! The ones without black heads all look the same as each other (and according to some taxonomists might all be the same species *Larus larus* anyway) and I only ever see one species with a black head (and that's actually brown!).

### **Do I have a bogey bird?**

Yes, for some time it was a Dipper. Now I can't seem to find Lesser Spotted Woodpecker or Bearded Tit (despite numerous trips to Leighton Moss) for love nor money.

### **Where do I do most of my birding in Cheshire & Wirral?**

Principally Dee estuary sites such as Parkgate Marsh, Burton Marsh and Inner Marsh Farm, and also Frodsham Marsh/Weaver Bend. Occasionally Delamere Forest (if the weather's not too good and there are fewer maniacs on mountain bikes!) Although not in CAWOS territory, I also spend some time around Martin Mere in the winter and the Mere Sands Wood LWT reserve. I don't really work a local patch due to lack of time but rather go where the birds are.

### **What's my level of involvement in CAWOS?**

Council member, Parkgate High Tide Birdwatch stand manner, future *Bird News* Editor.

### **What other conservation groups am I a member of?**

Member of all the usual: RSPB, BTO, WWT.

Actively involved as Liverpool area support group co-ordinator for the A Rocha Trust.

### **What are my loves and hates in birdwatching?**

**Loves** - Being out in the open air: I really enjoy weather and being weathered.

The spectacle of thousands of waders at Parkgate or Pink-footed Geese at Martin Mere.

**Hates** - The combination of pagers, mobile telephones, twitchers and small hides (especially at IMF).

### **Do I have any other natural history interests other than birds?**

Recently I've really got into butterflies and moths and, to a lesser extent, other insects. I also note mammals, amphibians and reptiles on a casual basis.

### **Do I keep any lists?**

I try to keep up to date life, British and Cheshire & Wirral lists but not very successfully. I'd rather be watching birds than listing them.

On a more personal note, I'm 28, married, first child en route and a qualified food technologist imminently about to start my own food legislation consultancy business!

**Any future *BIRD NEWS* correspondence should be directed to:-  
Simon J Edwards, 24 Badby Wood, Kirkby, Liverpool, L33 7YQ.**

## CAWOS/WIRRAL RANGER SERVICE IDENTIFICATION WORKSHOPS

### In Search of Skuas and Terns

9:00am, Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> August  
Hilbre Island

If you've ever dithered over identifying passing 'sea swallows', or debated on the identity of that distant Shag or Cormorant, then this could well be the workshop for you. Could this mean the end of the Commic Tern?

Meet at the Dee Lane Slipway, next to West Kirby Marine Lake. Return approximately 4:00pm. Places are limited so please 'phone early to avoid disappointment. It is important to bring suitable warm, waterproof clothing and something to eat and drink. A telescope and tripod would be useful.

**For further information telephone Jeff Clarke on 0151 648 4371/3884.**



### Wader Workshop

9:00am, Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> September  
Bank's Rd, Heswall

If you dither over your Dunlins, or get in a tangle with your Knots, then this is the workshop for you. Excellent close views of many wader species should be anticipated from those troublesome *Tringas* to the confusing *Calidrids*. Bring your telescope and tripod if you have one. Meet at Bank's Road Car Park (near Sheldrake's Restaurant).

**For further information telephone Jeff Clarke on 0151 648 4371/3884.**



#### AUGUST

- 29 CAWOS 'IN SEARCH OF SKUAS & TERNS' Identification Workshop,  
ring Jeff Clarke on 0151 648 4371/3884 for details

#### SEPTEMBER

- 8 HO AGM and SPEAKERS  
11 KOS Hilbre, meet Knutsford Sessions House at 9:00am or West Kirby at 10:00am  
11 CADOS East Coast, contact Dave King 0151 327 7212  
12 LOG Blacktoft Sands, coaches depart 8:00am, contact Peter Tonge 01606 891274  
13 SRSPB 'THE FLORA AND FAUNA OF DERBYSHIRE' by Geoff Simpson  
17 NCRSPB 'BIRDS OF SRI LANKA' by Dr R J Raines  
18 HO Seaforth/Alt Estuary/Sefton coast, meet Cecil Road public car park, Hale at 8:00am  
24 KOS "CELEBRATION OF BIRDS" by Gordon Yates  
24 LOG 'NIGHTFALL' by Mike Berry  
24 WGOS 'BIRDLIFE OF THE BULGARIAN BLACK SEA COASTLINE' by John Lawton Roberts  
25 CAWOS 'WADERS' Identification Workshop,  
ring Jeff Clarke on 0151 648 4371/3884 for details  
25-26 CADOS Norfolk Weekend, contact Nick French 01978 856522  
28 ADNHS TBC  
30-3 KOS Holy Island Weekend, ring Roy Bircumshaw on 01565 634193 for details

## OCTOBER

- 1 **CAWOS** 'HARRIERS' by Roger Clarke  
2-3 **CAWOS** **MIGRATION WATCH '99, ring Jeff Clarke on 0151 648 4371/3884 for details**  
2-3 NCRSPB WORLD BIRDWATCH '99 at Walton Hall Gardens, Walton, 10:00am to 4:00pm  
3 SRSPB Filey Brigg/Hornsea Mere by coach departing at 7:30am – ring for details  
7 CADOS 'COSTA RICA' by Roger Wilkinson  
9 NCRSPB Hilbre, meet at Frodsham Station car park at 7:45am or at West Kirby at 8:45am  
11 SRSPB 'THE ROBIN' by Mike Read  
15 NCRSPB AGM, followed by FILM SHOW, 'KINGFISHERS' and 'TAKING TERNS'  
17 **CAWOS** **MIGRATION WATCH '99, ring Jeff Clarke on 0151 648 4371/3884 for details**  
17 WGOS Spurn Point, by coach, departing at 7:30am – ring for details  
22 KOS "BIRD HAUNTS IN WILDEST IRELAND" by Jo Moran  
23 NCRSPB CEILIDH/BARN DANCE at Frodsham Community Centre, ring for details  
24 CADOS East Coast, contact Alun Harley 01925 269430  
26 **High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - 10:00am (HT 11:58, 10.0m)**  
29 WGOS 'U.K. - SCILLY WEEK' by Dr R J Raines  
TBC LOG Holy Island, contact Peter Tonge 01606 891274 for details

## NOVEMBER

- 4 CADOS 'ICELAND' by Val McFarland  
5 **CAWOS** 'ROMANIA' by James Roberts  
7 CADOS Wirral, contact Peter Hale 01244 341074  
7 WGOS North Wales (including Conwy), by coach, departing at 8:00am – ring for details  
7 NCRSPB Mere Sands Wood/Martin Mere, meet Sainsbury's car park, Warrington at 9:00am  
14 KOS Leighton Moss, meet Knutsford Sessions House at 9:00am  
13 NCRSPB AUTUMN FAIR at Frodsham Church Hall, 10:15am to 1:00pm  
19 NCRSPB 'MILLENNIUM BUGS & BIRDS' by Andy Harmer  
20 BTO/RSPB 'BIRD TRENDS INTO THE NEXT CENTURY' BTO/RSPB CONFERENCE,  
Rivington Hall Barn, near Horwich, ring Judith Smith on 01942 712615 for details  
21 LOG Blithfield Reservoir, coaches depart 8:00am, contact Peter Tonge 01606 891274  
24 **High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - 9:45am (HT 11:38, 10.0m)**  
25 **High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - 10:30am (HT 12:23, 10.0m)**  
26 KOS "BIRDING IN INDIA & NEPAL by Adam Davison  
26 LOG 'IN SEARCH OF HIMBRINI' by Gordon Yates  
26 WGOS 'SEARCH FOR THE ROADRUNNER - a Look at Texas Birds' by Sue & Alan Parker

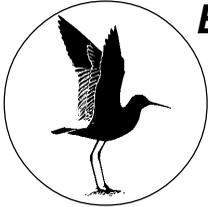
## DECEMBER

- 2 CADOS 'HEBRIDEAN SPLENDOUR' by Gordon Yates  
3 **CAWOS** 'SPRING IN SPAIN' by Mike Wilkes  
4 KOS Martin Mere/Marshside, meet Knutsford Sessions House at 9:00am  
4 NCRSPB Rostherne Mere/Marbury C P, meet Sainsbury's car park, Warrington at 9:00am

Will affiliated societies, who wish to advertise meetings of relevance to CAWOS, please send their programme to:- **Sheila Blamire, Woodruff Cottage, Clamhunger Lane, Mere, WA16 6QG Tel: 01565 830168**

## AFFILIATED SOCIETIES

- ADNHS Altrincham & Dist. Natural History Society, mtgs Hale Methodist Church Hall 7.30pm, Sec. Vincent Pedley 0161 748 4717  
CADOS Chester & Dist. Ornithological Soc, mtgs Caldy Valley Community Centre 7.30pm, Prog. Sec. Don Coan 01244 660621  
CAWOS Cheshire & Wirral Ornithological Society, mtgs Knutsford Civic Centre 7.45pm, contact Sheila Blamire 01565 830168  
CRSPB Chester RSPB Group, mtgs St Mary's Centre, Chester 7:30pm. Prog. Sec. Rob Adams 01829 270654  
HO Hale Ornithologists, mtgs St Peter's Assembly Rooms, 7:45pm, Prog. Sec. Barbara Vercambre 0161 980 8362  
HPRSPB High Peak RSPB Members' Group contact John Durell 0161 427 3018, Ken Hodgson 0161 427 6828  
KOS Knutsford Ornithological Society, mtgs St John's Church Centre 7.45pm, contact Roy Bircumshaw 01565 634193  
LOG Lymm Ornithological Group, mtgs Lymm Village Hall 8.00pm, Prog. Sec. Colin Antrobus 01925 635337  
MCOS Mid-Cheshire Ornithological Society, mtgs Hartford Village Hall 8:00pm, contact Paul Kenyon 01606 77960  
MRSPB Macclesfield RSPB Members' Group, mtgs Senior Citizens' Hall 7.45pm, contact Peter Kirk 01625 829119  
NCRSPB North Cheshire RSPB Members' Group, mtgs Appleton Parish Hall, Appleton, Mem. Sec Pam Gibson 01925 817874  
NNHS Nantwich Natural History Society, mtgs The Gables at 7:30pm, Sec. Mike Holmes 01270 216890  
SECOS South-east Cheshire Ornithological Society, mtgs St Peter's Church Hall, Elworth, Sandbach 7.30pm, Sec. Colin Lythgoe 01270 582642  
SRSPB Stockport RSPB Members' Group, mtgs Stockport College, Theatre A 7:30pm, contact Peter Hugo 0161 485 4024  
WGOS Wilmslow Guild Ornithological Society, mtgs Wilmslow Guild HQ 7.45pm, Prog. Sec. Stephanie Harrison 0161 428 5462  
WRSPB Wirral RSPB Group, mtgs Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead 7.30pm Prog. Sec. D. Jowitt 0151 337 7940



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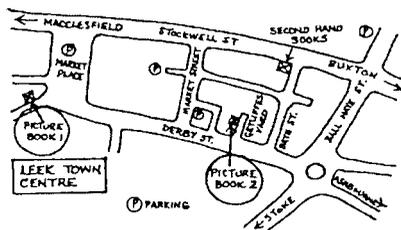
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