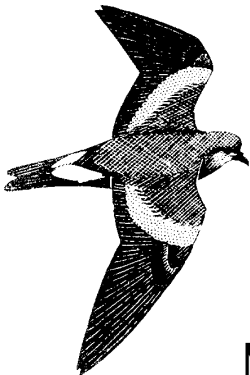


Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society

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BIRD NEWS

Number 48 October 2000



**Honey Buzzard • North Wirral Shore
County Rarities Request
'Birds of Sandbach Flashes' Book Review
CAWOS Committee Structure**



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*Bird News welcomes articles, letters and comments relevant to birdwatching in Cheshire & Wirral.
Please either e-mail or post (on disc) your contributions to the Editor at the address shown above.*

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

Front cover: Pomarine Skua by Tony Broome

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

Editorial

Computers! They're everywhere and in everything! They control the smallest minutiae in our lives, from producing our gas bills to ensuring we microwave our mass-produced ready-meals to a turn. Many of my daughter's toys even contain simple processors, helping her one-year-old intellect to learn to talk, read and count. They have the potential, often simultaneously, to be either the most powerful tool or the most frustrating pile of junk we have ever created.

No doubt these statements are being met as you read them with derisory cries of "Oh, really; so what's new?" or the like. Of course we all know that computers have invaded every aspect of our existence, but it's only relatively recently that they have become both affordable and accessible to the mass market and small enough to be truly portable. Now, even the wildest, remotest God-forsaken spots on the globe (Frodsham Score?) are only a 'phone line' away. I can receive e-mail on my PC, digital television (it was our joint present this Christmas!), mobile phone or electronic organiser (if I owned one). To quote a line from *The Fast Show*, "they're brilliant!" and rapidly getting more so.

For those of you who are thinking to themselves that I'm about to start skating on that thin ice called "the computerisation of records issue", think again. That's one hot potato that even this Editor is not brave enough to handle. However, it is surely unarguable that, applied correctly, computers have a huge amount to offer with regard to how records are submitted, analysed, reported and archived. A main aim of the new Local Record Centres is to use the specially written software, *Recorder 2000*, to assist in all of these areas with the ultimate aim of increasing our ability to monitor and conserve threatened populations. CAWOS hopes to be able to liaise closely in the future with Steve McWilliam and the LRC for our recording area, which can only be of benefit to the county's bird-life. As always, *Bird News* will keep you up to date of progress, though more will, no doubt, become apparent at the forthcoming second Recording Forum in February.

On the contrary, I am more concerned in this Editorial to express how grateful I am to all of those members who have submitted articles and letters recently. The number of e-mails that I've received has literally overwhelmed me. This is our preferred mode of receiving contributions, followed by on a posted floppy disc, as it saves the editorial team a great deal of time when putting the newsletter together, allowing us to almost immediately edit, spell-check and typeset the article. I am sure that if it wasn't for the high level of computer ownership and use that exists now, we would neither receive as much material as we do nor be physically able to produce *Bird News* regularly every three months. It is a testament to both the quantity and quality of the articles that we've received that we now have enough material to hold over to each successive issue. So if you've sent me something for publication and it's not here, don't panic, it will probably appear next time; sometimes it is just necessary to hold back a piece in order to maintain the issue's overall balance.

Lastly, as a precursor to its possible publication as a separate entity, 'Sites to Watch' now has its own editor, Bob Anderson. It is these regular features that form the backbone of *Bird News* around which the other pieces are fitted. Without them the newsletter lacks substance and structure. Please support Bob in his new role; there are plenty of great sites in Cheshire and Wirral that haven't been covered yet, so if you feel inspired to write about your local patch, please do.

Keep the notes, letters, reports, etc. coming. They are essential ingredients of the mix that makes *Bird News* one of the best amateur county birding publications in the country. And it's all the product of the greatest computer of all: the human brain. With a little help from its electronic counterparts!

Simon Edwards

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 8th March - please be prompt

We cannot guarantee that material received after this date will be published in that issue.

If you are aware that your material may be delayed, please let the Editor know as soon as possible.



CAWOS PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION



Closing date Saturday 10th February 2001.



See page 31 for further details

Recent Reports

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

SEPTEMBER

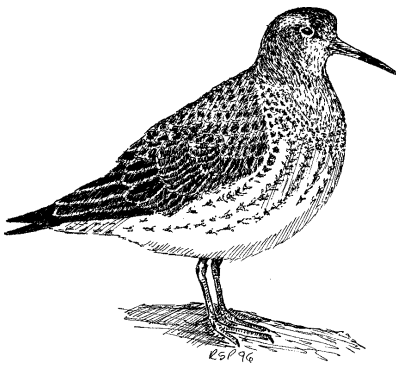
Highlights: A moulting adult **White-rumped Sandpiper** off Hoylake (2nd & again 9th-13th) was the first county record since 1994. A **Little Shearwater** was reported off Hilbre (6th). A possible female **American Wigeon** was at Sandbach Flashes (1st-18th). The national **Honey Buzzard** influx (estimated at 750-1000 individuals) produced two south-west over Hale Lighthouse (25th) with singles north over Middlewich Lime Beds (25th) and south over Frodsham (30th). At least 52 birds were reported in NW England during the month. The juv **Pectoral Sandpiper** at Sandbach Flashes (to 3rd) was followed by further birds at Frodsham (6th-8th) and at Inner Marsh Farm (20th) later relocating to the Decca Pools (30th). This increased the year's total number of different birds to seven - a new county record.

15 **Red Throated Divers** flew past Hilbre (16th) and a **Great Northern Diver** flew past Hoylake (30th). A juv **Little Grebe** at Poynton Pool (30th) was an excellent local record. A **Black-necked Grebe** visited Frodsham No6 tank (17th) while two birds lingered at Woolston Eyes. 40 **Fulmars** an hour flew past Hoylake (6th). A **Sooty Shearwater** flew past both Hoylake and Red Rocks (6th) while three **Manx Shearwaters** past Red Rocks (15th) and two past Hilbre (6th). Only small numbers of **Leach's Petrels** were seen including 10 on 6th (four Leasowe, four New Brighton and two Hilbre), 18 on 8th (10 Leasowe and eight Hilbre) with one past Hoylake (12th). **Gannets** flew past Hoylake at the rate of 250 an hour on 6th with many past Hilbre (1st while three **Shags** flew past the same day). Three different **Bitterns** were at Rostherne Mere on 30th - a unique occurrence in Cheshire!! Two **Little Egrets** visited Decca Pools. 10 **Grey Herons** at Rostherne Mere (17th) was a good count here for recent years. Seven **Greylag Geese** at Fiddler's Ferry (16th-17th) was the first Sept record there, elsewhere 55 were at Capesthorpe (3rd) and one at Poynton Pool (29th). c300 **Canada Geese** were at Pickering's Pasture with 343 at Fiddler's Ferry and a small race bird was at Inner Marsh Farm (7th). Three Pale-bellied **Brent Geese** flew past Hoylake (16th), before appearing at Hilbre (17th) and then West Kirby (18th & 27th). An **Egyptian Goose** was at Frodsham No6 tank (8th) and the **Ruddy Shelduck** remained at Inner Marsh Farm all month.

Large counts of **Teal** included 400 at Fiddler's Ferry, 491 at Sandbach Flashes and 620 at Woolston Eyes. 549 **Mallard** were at Hale. Up to four **Garganey** were seen daily at Inner Marsh Farm with singles at Frodsham and Sandbach Flashes. Large **Shoveler** counts included 98 at Fiddler's Ferry, 99 at Neumann's Flash and 240 at Woolston Eyes. 100 **Tufted Ducks** were at Redesmere (21st) and a **Scaup** visited Frodsham the next day. 12 **Common Scoter** flew past Hoylake (16th) with a female **Goosander** at Astmoor (29th). Hilbre had a probable **Red Kite** (6th). **Marsh Harriers** visited Astmoor (9th), Fiddler's Ferry (1st, 5th & 9th), Frodsham (2nd), Inner Marsh Farm (1st) and Woolston Eyes (2nd-13th). Multiple **Buzzard** sightings are now becoming the norm with six at both Sandbach Flashes and Tatton, four at Manor Park and Middlewich Lime Beds, three at Fiddler's Ferry and pairs at Parkgate, Vale Royal Locks and Woolston Eyes. Five **Ospreys** flew through the county but none lingered - Red Rocks (10th), Hoylake (28th), High Legh (21st), Poynton (23rd) and Sandbach Flashes (29th). A **Merlin** at Hoylake (27th) was followed by two at Parkgate next day. The only **Hobbies** reported during the month were at Allstock (12th), Little Budworth (30th), Marbury No1 tank (11th), Sandbach Flashes (25th), Tatton (6th & 18th) and Wybunbury (19th). Multiple records of **Peregrines** included four at Hoylake, three at Inner Marsh Farm, two at Fiddler's Ferry, Heswall, Hilbre, Parkgate and Sandbach Flashes with singles at Congleton, Hale, Neumann's Flash and Thurstaston. A **Spotted Crake** was at Inner Marsh Farm (from 10th) with two reported (12th & 29th) and a juv at Marbury No1 tank (7th-22nd). One or two **Water Rails** were at Inner Marsh Farm, Marbury No1 tank and Sandbach Flashes.

5000 **Oystercatchers** roosted on Little Eye (15th) and four **Little Ringed Plovers** were at Neumann's Flash (11th). 500 **Ringed Plovers** at Frodsham was a good count and 150 at Fiddler's Ferry (a site record). Large **Golden Plover** flocks included 220 at Fiddler's Ferry, 40 at Neumann's

Flash and 300 at Pickering's Pasture. The same three sites held 1500, 2000 and 3000 **Lapwings** respectively. An estimated 3000+ **Knot** were off Leasowe (30th) with 70 at Frodsham (2nd). One/two **Little Stints** were at Fiddler's Ferry, Inner Marsh Farm, Neumann's Flash and Parkgate. Hoylake had a peak of 15 on 5th-6th and Frodsham had 50 on 2nd. The largest counts of **Curlew Sandpipers** were 70 at Frodsham (2nd), 18 at Heswall Shore and 30 at Hoylake (both 2nd) with five at Hilbre, two at Inner Marsh Farm, two at Parkgate, one at Red Rocks and one/two at Sandbach Flashes. Hilbre had an early **Purple Sandpiper** (1st) with another past Hoylake (12th). **Ruff** sightings included



60 at Frodsham (2nd), 17 at Sandbach Flashes and up to four at Fiddler's Ferry, Hoylake and Inner Marsh Farm. Frodsham had a large count of 150 **Snipe** on 2nd while 57 were at Sandbach Flashes (11th). 210 **Bar-tailed Godwits** at West Kirby (15th) was the largest count for the month. A sprinkling of **Whimbrel** passed through the county including eight at Heswall and 12 at Red Rocks. The peak counts of **Curlew** were 214 at Fiddler's Ferry, 2460 at Heswall and 200 at Pickering's Pasture. Single figure counts of **Spotted Redshanks** were made at Burton, Frodsham, Inner Marsh Farm, Parkgate and Sandbach Flashes. 7580 **Redshanks** at Heswall (17th) was the highest count there for several years. 65 **Greenshanks** visited Parkgate (8th) with 35 at Denhall Lane (5th), 15 at Frodsham (2nd) and seven at Inner Marsh Farm.

Otherwise up to four were seen at Astmoor, Fiddler's Ferry, Heswall, Marbury No1 tank, Melchett Mere and Sandbach Flashes. The last dates for **Green Sandpipers** were Marbury No1 tank (17th), Risley Moss (23rd) and Sandbach Flashes (7th). Single **Wood Sandpipers** were at Inner Marsh Farm (20th) and Neumann's Flash (27th) with two at Sandbach Flashes (24th with one 26th-28th).

A **Pomarine Skua** flew past Hilbre, Leasowe and New Brighton (all 6th) with another past Hilbre (9th) and two flew past Hoylake (10th). The peak count of **Arctic Skuas** past Hoylake was 30 on 6th (when 37 flew past Hilbre) and 20 flew past both Hilbre and Hoylake (9th). A **Long-tailed Skua** flew past Red Rocks and Hoylake (both 6th). Up to five **Great Skuas** were seen past Hilbre, Hoylake and Leasowe. Single **Mediterranean Gulls** were at Chelford SQs (2nd), Leasowe/Meols next day and Sandbach Flashes (16th). One or two **Yellow-legged Gulls** were at Hoylake beach (2nd-12th) with three at Fiddler's Ferry (19th) and up to four regularly at Sandbach Flashes. 20 **Kittiwakes** per hour flew past Hoylake on 6th. Nine **Sandwich Terns** at Frodsham (12th) was the largest count there for several years. Three **Roseate Terns** off Hilbre (9th) was an excellent record. Up to 250 **Common Terns** per hour passed Hoylake (6th) with one at Sandbach Flashes (20th & 26th). Seven **Little Terns** visited West Kirby (18th). A juv **Black Tern** was briefly at Inner Marsh Farm (28th) with two at Sandbach Flashes (20th) and one at Doddington (27th). Hilbre had a migrant **Long-eared Owl** (4th) while one was at Woolston Eyes. Single **Short-eared Owls** arrived at Fiddler's Ferry and Leasowe (both 30th) with another near Sandbach (22nd). The last **Swifts** were at Sandbach Flashes (24th) and Woolston Eyes (2nd). Two **Kingfishers** at Lingham Lane, Leasowe (5th) were unusual there. Five **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** together at Sandbach Flashes (30th) was a site record.

30 **Sand Martins** at Fiddler's Ferry were feeding young still in the nests (2nd-3rd) with the last sighting on 10th and at least 20 were at Penketh (23rd). A count of 5000 **Swallows** and 1000 **House Martins** came from Frodsham. 500 Swallows flew south over Sandbach Flashes (25th) in two hours with 200+ House Martins there (28th). A **Richard's Pipit** was reported at Hale Lighthouse (24th) and a **Tree Pipit** flew over Frodsham (4th). Heavy **Meadow Pipit** passage was noted across the county (29th-30th) with peak counts of 70+ at Astmoor (29th), 50 at Fiddler's Ferry (17th), 1996 over Grange Hill, West Kirby in two hours (30th), 60+ over Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (13th), 60+ over Poynton Pool in 40mins (29th) and 40 over Sandbach Flashes in two hours (30th). The last **Yellow Wagtails** were at Hoylake (10th) and Woolston Eyes (9th). 10 **White Wagtails** flew over Sandbach Flashes (30th). One or two **Redstarts** were scattered along the coast between Red Rocks and Leasowe (30th) with singles at Frodsham (28th) and Lostock Hall Farm (12th-14th). Single **Stonechats** visited Frodsham and Rostherne Mere NNR. Hoylake had a fall of 16 **Wheatears** (10th).

A **Redwing** over Poynton Pool (29th) was the earliest ever there but one at Rostherne Mere (17th) was even earlier. A late **Grasshopper Warbler** was at Hoylake (28th) and single **Sedge Warblers** were at Red Rocks and Woolston Eyes (both 30th). A **Reed Warbler** was still feeding young at Fiddler's Ferry (3rd). **Lesser Whitethroats** remained at Leasowe (30th) and Sandbach Flashes (17th). The latest **Whitethroat** reports were at Astmoor (29th), Fiddler's Ferry (3rd) and Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (17th – the latest ever there). A **Garden Warbler** was on Hilbre (4th). The latest dates for **Chiffchaff** were Lostock Hall Farm (17th), Neumann's Flash (10th), Poynton Pool (3rd), Sandbach Flashes (30th) and Vale Royal Locks (16th). **Willow Warblers** lingered at Astmoor (29th), Fiddler's Ferry (10th), Inner Marsh Farm (21st) and Lostock Hall Farm (17th). A **Firecrest** was at Hoylake (10th) and two **Spotted Flycatchers** visited Lostock Hall Farm (13th). A **Pied Flycatcher** was at Woolston Eyes (2nd). Up to four **Willow Tits** were at Moore NR. A partial albino **Rook** was at Lostock Hall Farm, Poynton (13th) and partial albino **Carriion Crows** were at Handforth Dean (6th) and Lostock Hall Farm (13th). Reports of two **Ravens** came from Allostock, Fiddler's Ferry, Little Budworth and Rostherne Mere. 45 **Goldfinches** were at Manor Park, Runcorn (30th) with 50 at Sandbach Flashes (6th).

OCTOBER

Highlights: The **Honey Buzzard** influx continued with one at Alderley Edge, two at both Hartford and Lymm (all 1st) and one flew south over Manchester Airport towards Cheshire (4th). The **Spotted Crane** at Inner Marsh Farm was last seen on 1st. A **Stone Curlew** was reported flying south over Risleys Moss (16th). The **Pectoral Sandpiper** remained on the Decca Pools (1st). A **Grey Phalarope** flew west past Hoylake (2nd). A **Richard's Pipit** was reported at Red Rocks (22nd). An early **Waxwing** at Henbury, near Macclesfield (31st) was a taster for the New Year's influx. A **Yellow-browed Warbler** was well inland at Lyme Park (4th) but could not be relocated.

15 **Red-throated Divers** flew past Hoylake (24th) with single **Black-throated** and **Great Northern Divers** past on 12th and 1st respectively. The **Little Grebe** at Poynton Pool was joined by a second bird (16th) – the first multiple sighting there for many years. Inland numbers of **Great Crested Grebes** increased with 12 at Fiddler's Ferry (a new Oct record), 27 off Hoylake, 21 at Sandbach Flashes and 16 at Tatton. A juv **Black-necked Grebe** remained at Woolston Eyes all month. The only report of **Manx Shearwater** was 16 past Red Rocks (13th). A total of 13+ **Leach's Petrels** was recorded during the month including three past Hoylake (10th with five on 26th), one at New Brighton (31st), one at Red Rocks (4th with two on 10th), five in River Mersey mouth (10th) and one or two flew past Wallasey (29th). Ten **Gannets** flew past Hoylake (2nd & 17th). A **Cormorant** at Leadbetter's Resr, Macclesfield (29th) was unusual for the site. Single **Shags** were off Heswall and West Kirby with two past Hoylake. One/two **Bitterns** were seen regularly at Rostherne Mere all month. Up to three **Little Egrets** were at Parkgate all month but one at Sandbach Flashes (3rd) was only the sixth site record. This same site had three **Whooper Swans** fly over (13th – the earliest ever record there) with two over Budworth Mere (17th) and one at Frodsham (13th). Large **Canada Goose** flocks included 216 at Fiddler's Ferry (a new Oct record), 220 at Moss Side and 570 at Sandbach Flashes. Two Dark-bellied **Brent Geese** were at Hilbre (11th & 29th) with one at Hoylake (10th) and three birds flew past Red Rocks (3rd). An **Egyptian Goose** visited Rostherne Mere (8th) and 9620 **Shelduck** off Heswall shore (16th) was a record count there.

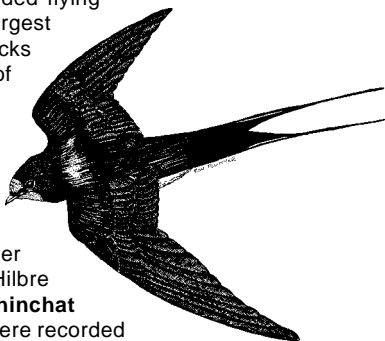
Single **Mandarins** visited Crewe (19th) and Trentabank Resr (7th). 350+ **Gadwall** at Woolston Eyes (5th) was a new county record for this species and gave the site internationally important levels (i.e. over 300 birds). **Teal** numbers increased with 505 at Chelford SQs (a record count there), 150 at Moss Side and 525 at Sandbach Flashes. A drake **Green-winged Teal** at Sandbach Flashes (20th-29th) was c5th site record. A male **Pintail** at Fiddler's Ferry (28th) was the first of the year there and up to 2000 visited Burton Marsh. Five **Garganey** seen during the month included at least two at Inner Marsh Farm (to 25th), a female at Melchett Mere, Tatton (12th), a female at Moore NR (19th & 21st) and one at Sandbach Flashes (1st-9th). A **Red-crested Pochard** at Chelford SQs (22nd) was probably the same bird seen earlier at Rostherne Mere (14th). Two **Scaup** at Fiddler's Ferry (26th) were the first there since July 1996, a single flew past Hoylake (2nd) and three visited Parkgate (10th). Up to four **Eider** were seen irregularly off Hoylake with one at West Kirby (1st-2nd). Single **Long-tailed Ducks** flew past Hoylake (29th) and Red Rocks (13th). Small numbers of **Common Scoters** were seen off Hoylake (where there was a peak of 45 on 12th), the only other record was a drake on floods by Lymm Old Mill (31st). **Marsh Harriers**

were at Frodsham, Hartford (1st) and an imm over Watch Lane Flash, Sandbach (22nd) was only the sixth record there. Raptor sightings at Moore NR (19th) included five **Sparrowhawks**, 11 **Buzzards**, six **Kestrels** and two **Peregrines**. A late **Osprey** flew over Bath Vale, Congleton (29th). The last **Hobby** sightings were at Chelford SQs (1st), Sandbach Flashes (8th) – the latest ever record there and Vale Royal Locks (1st).

Four **Red-legged Partridges** were at Frodsham with one at Weston (5th). Up to six **Water Rails** were at Woolston Eyes with others at Moore NR, Parkgate and Sandbach Flashes. The peak wader counts at Hoylake included 500 **Ringed Plovers**, 12,000 **Knot**, 1000 **Sanderling** and 9000 **Dunlin**. Nearby at West Kirby the peak counts were 505 **Grey Plovers** and 117 **Bar-tailed Godwits**. 11 Ringed Plovers at Fiddler's Ferry (2nd) was an Oct record for the site. This same site also held 2000 **Golden Plovers** (a site record) and 3000 **Lapwing**. A **Knot** visited Sandbach Flashes (28th) and two **Sanderling** were there (16th). The largest count of **Little Stints** was 32 at Frodsham (27th) with singles at Fiddler's Ferry and Sandbach Flashes. A **Curlew Sandpiper** at Sandbach Flashes (21st-28th) was the latest ever there. 10,000 Dunlin were at Frodsham (27th). One or two **Jack Snipe** were at Fiddler's Ferry, Frodsham and Woolston Eyes. Four **Black-tailed Godwits** at Fiddler's Ferry (1st) was a high count and one Bar-tailed Godwit there (11th) was the first Oct record. A late **Whimbrel** was at Heswall shore (27th) and 1380 **Curlew** were seen there. Five **Spotted Redshanks** at Inner Marsh Farm was eclipsed by 19 at Parkgate. 3400 **Redshanks** were off Heswall shore (16th) with 1000 at Parkgate (29th). One/two **Greenshanks** were at Fiddler's Ferry with five at Frodsham, seven at Inner Marsh Farm and 19 at Parkgate (7th). Single **Green Sandpipers** visited Arpley Tip (21st) and Fiddler's Ferry (1st & 12th) but three were at Rostherne Mere (8th). **Common Sandpipers** were at Fiddler's Ferry (to 19th), Heswall shore (27th) and Spike Island (13th).

A **Pomarine Skua** flew past both Hoylake and Red Rocks (10th). Up to eight **Arctic Skuas** were recorded off both Hoylake and Red Rocks. Three **Great Skuas** were off Hoylake (2nd) and Red Rocks (10th). **Mediterranean Gulls** were at Frodsham, Little Leigh, New Brighton and Sandbach Flashes. Three **Little Gulls** lingered off New Brighton (29th) and two juv **Sabine's Gulls** were seen there (2nd). Up to three **Yellow-legged Gulls** visited Fiddler's Ferry with up to five at Sandbach Flashes. Small numbers of **Sandwich Terns** were off the North Wirral shore (to 12th) but much more unusual was one at Chelford SQs (15th). Both **Arctic** and **Little Terns** were off Hoylake (1st). At least seven **Black Terns** were recorded during the month with one at Budworth Mere (16th), two flew past Hoylake (2nd), four past Red Rocks (4th) and one at Tatton Mere (5th-16th). A movement of 335 **Guillemots** off Hoylake (1st) was eclipsed by a county record of 2400 past in an hour (23rd) when 1400 were seen off Red Rocks. The **Razorbill** movement for the same day was 130 past Hoylake and a **Puffin** flew past (26th & 29th). Large flocks of **Collared Doves** included 100+ at Moore NR, 178 at Moss Side and a site record 34+ at Poynton Pool. A **Ring-necked Parakeet** was reported at Hoylake (15th) and a **Barn Owl** visited Shotwick fields. The last **Swifts** were at Red Rocks and Rostherne Mere (both 1st). A **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** caught at Woolston Eyes was the fourth ringed there.

137 **Skylarks** were recorded at Hale (1st). The last dates for departing **Swallows** were at Fiddler's Ferry (1st), Poynton Pool (15th with an Oct record count of 25+ on 2nd) and Sandbach Flashes (13th). **House Martins** remained at Alsager (25th), Poynton Pool (22nd – the latest ever site record) and Tatton Mere (8th). Good numbers were recorded flying over Blakelow (1st) and 40+ at Poynton Pool (2nd) was the largest ever Oct count there. Three **Tree Pipits** were at Red Rocks (11th) and another at Hale (1st). On 1st, large numbers of **Meadow Pipits** were recorded including 182 at Hale, 147 over Poynton Pool in one hour and 100 per hour over Tatton. Other large counts included 100 at Fiddler's Ferry (5th & 7th) and 40+ over Sandbach Flashes (4th). Several **Rock Pipits** were at Frodsham during the month. Two **Water Pipits** returned to Neston Old Quay (31st). 21 **Grey** and 19 **Pied Wagtails** were seen at Hale (1st) with nine of the latter over Poynton Pool the same day. A **Black Redstart** visited Hilbre (29th). Frodsham had its latest ever **Redstart** (1st) and a **Whinchat** there (13th) was quite late. Good numbers of **Stonechats** were recorded



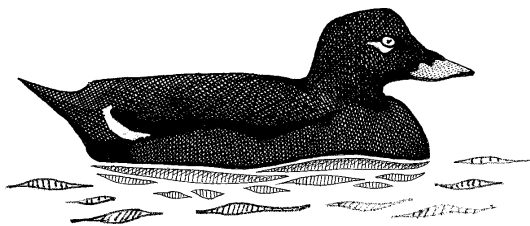
including one/two at Arpley Tip, Frodsham, Melchett Mere, Middlewich Lime Beds, Moore NR, Red Rocks with three at Burton (16th) and five at Fiddler's Ferry (28th). Two of the birds at the last site showed possible characteristics of the Siberian race, a female (15th & 28th) and a male (22nd & 28th). The last **Wheatears** were at Heswall shore (29th), near Macclesfield Golf Course (1st), Middlewich Lime Beds (1st), New Brighton (3rd), Red Rocks (11th) and Sandbach Flashes (1st). The first reports of **Fieldfares** came from Fiddler's Ferry (21st), Moore NR (29th) and Sandbach Flashes (29th). The first arrival dates for **Redwings** were Chelford SQs (22nd), Crewe (8th), Fiddler's Ferry (14th), Moore NR (19th), Sandbach Flashes (8th) and Tatton (8th) with a large movement of 85+ over Poynton Pool in one hour (15th). A **Reed Warbler** was at Red Rocks (1st) on the same day as a probable **Barred Warbler** and a **Garden Warbler** were both at Hoylake. Large **Long-tailed Tit** flocks included 35 at Fiddler's Ferry, 29 at Moore NR, 40 at Poynton Pool and 25 at Red Rocks. A **Marsh Tit** was at Abbott's Moss (1st). Single partial albino **Carrion Crows** at Poynton (21st) and Sandbach Flashes (23rd) were followed by two at Handforth Dean (22nd). Four **Ravens** flew over Red Rocks (11th) with two at Sandbach Flashes (3rd). The only **Brambling** reported was at Moore NR (19th) and 50+ **Siskins** at Poynton Pool (15th) was an excellent count there. 400 **Linnets** were at Hale (1st). One Mealy and 20 Lesser **Redpolls** were at Woolston Eyes No1 bed (22nd). A probable **Lapland Bunting** flew over Poynton Pool (1st) and two **Snow Buntings** were at Red Rocks (22nd) with one next day. 300 **Reed Buntings** roosted at Woolston Eyes.

NOVEMBER

Highlights: The only notable rarities were the returning drake **American Wigeon** seen at Inner Marsh Farm (5th, 8th & 21st-25th) and three **Green-winged Teals**. Drakes were at Chelford SQs (30th) – first record for that area, Frodsham and Inner Marsh Farm (24th-25th & 29th).

A **Black-throated Diver** flew past Hoylake (1st) and the **Black-necked Grebe** remained at Woolston Eyes (to 24th). A seawatch off Hoylake (1st) produced 75 **Gannets**. Rostherne Mere had a Nov record of 281 **Cormorants** on 26th. Single **Bitterns** were at Neston (21st) and Rostherne Mere (to 12th). Up to five **Little Egrets** were regular at Burton Marsh. Up to 46 **Bewick's** and six **Whooper Swans** were at Inner Marsh Farm during the month. Elsewhere, Whooper Swans were recorded at Frodsham (two), six adults at Rostherne Mere (2nd followed by 11 more on 9th), an adult at Poynton Pool (9th-21st at least - only the second ever there) and one over Woolston Eyes. 300 **Pink-footed Geese** flew over Rostherne Mere (19th) with 120 over Thurston (2nd) and 80 'on the deck' at Shotwick (8th). Nearby, 28 **Greylag Geese** visited Inner Marsh Farm (14th). Peak counts of **Canada Geese** included 250 at Fiddler's Ferry (a Nov record), 208 at Moore NR and a small race bird was at Inner Marsh Farm (15th). 11 Pale-bellied **Brent Geese** were at Little Eye (24th) and an **Egyptian Goose** was off Denhall Lane (11th). The female **Ruddy Shelduck** remained in the Inner Marsh Farm area all month with 9000 **Shelduck** off Thurston (2nd). A large count of 12 **Mandarins** was at Tatton Mere (28th) and 10 **Gadwall** were at Pickmere (19th). 670 **Teal** at

Sandbach Flashes (3rd) was one of the largest counts there in recent years. A **Red-crested Pochard** was at Inner Marsh Farm (6th). 68 **Pochard** at Doddington Pool (4th) was followed by 224 at Woolston Eyes (19th). 29 **Tufted Ducks** at Styperson Pool was a good count there and 281 were at Woolston Eyes. A pair of **Scaup** visited Fiddler's Ferry (27th) with three at Woolston Eyes (30th). Four **Eider** were off Hoylake (1st) with a drake



Long-tailed Duck at Rostherne Mere (8th) – the first there since 1992. A drake **Velvet Scoter** flew past Hoylake (1st) and three **Goldeneye** at Poynton Pool (23rd) were both good records. Up to three **Goosanders** were at Leadbetter's Resr during the month.

A **Red Kite** flew over the M56 into Cheshire (11th) and one/two **Hen Harriers** were at Frodsham (from 11th). Three **Buzzards** were at Fiddler's Ferry (5th – a Nov record) and Inner Marsh Farm (19th) with one over Warrington town centre emphasising how common this species is becoming. A **Kestrel** at Poynton Pool (30th) was the observer's first record in 11 years watching the site. 560 **Coots** at Redesmere (19th) was a high count there. 1200 **Golden Plovers** at Fiddler's Ferry was a Nov record and 1300 visited Frodsham. 150 and 500 **Grey Plovers** were the peak counts at

Frodsham and Hoylake respectively. 12,000 **Knot** were at Hoylake (11th) with 43 **Purple Sandpipers** at Hilbre the same day. 3000 **Dunlin** off Hoylake (1st) was eclipsed by 30,000 at West Kirby (12th) with up to 2000 at Hale and 15 at Sandbach Flashes. Four **Jack Snipe** were at Fiddler's Ferry (12th) with singles at Neston and Tatton. A **Woodcock** at Redesmere (26th) was a good find. 3500 **Bar-tailed Godwits** were at Hoylake (26th) with two at Fiddler's Ferry (18th) the first Nov record there. Three **Spotted Redshanks** at Inner Marsh Farm (17th) was the highest count during the month. A **Green Sandpiper** returned for the tenth winter at Little Budworth (from 3rd).

An **Arctic Skua** flew past Hilbre (1st). Single **Mediterranean Gulls** were at Frodsham and Moore NR. A seawatch off Hoylake (1st) produced 975 **Kittiwakes**, three **Arctic Terns**, 120 **Guillemots** and 10 **Razorbills**. A **Barn Owl** at Frodsham (2nd) was a good site record. Two exceptionally late **Swallows** flew over Hoylake (15th) and a Rock/Water Pipit flew over Sandbach Flashes (16th). Up to five **Water Pipits** were seen daily at Neston Old Quay with three at Denhall (11th). **Stonechats** remained at several sites including Burton (two), Chelford SQs (two), Fiddler's Ferry (two), Frodsham (up to six), Gatewarth (one), Inner Marsh Farm (two), West Kirby (two) and Woolston Eyes (two). **Fieldfares** have been scarce this winter but an influx on 5th produced 400 at Fiddler's Ferry (a Nov record there), 800 over Neston and 60 at Redesmere with 170 at Rostherne Mere (2nd). 50 **Mistle Thrushes** at Fiddler's Ferry (5th) was a Nov record and a **Chiffchaff** there (26th) was only the second Nov record for the site. Single **Firecrests** were at Sandbach Flashes (9th) and at Woolston Eyes (trapped early in the month). Single **Marsh** and **Willow Tits** were at Peckforton (26th) and Capesthorpe (19th) respectively. A pair of **Ravens** at Sutton Resr (30th) was unusual. A sprinkling of **Bramblings** reported included two at Rostherne Mere NNR (1st), one over Sandbach (8th), three at Sandbach Flashes (3rd with one on 22nd) and 40+ at Tatton (11th). A flock of 50 **Siskins** were at Redesmere (26th). Large **Linnet** flocks included 62 at Sandbach Flashes and 300+ at Stretton Airfield. A **Twite** was reported at Inner Marsh Farm (19th). Nearby on Burton Marsh, two **Lapland Buntings** (3rd) and a **Snow Bunting** (29th) were seen.

If you would like to see your Cheshire and Wirral sightings featured here then send details to me, to arrive by the *beginning of March*. Please remember to send your rarity descriptions to the County Recorder.

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

Thanks/Acknowledgements for Recent Reports go to: - S. Atkins, S. & G.Barber, *Birdwatch* and *Birdwatching* Magazines, A. Booth, J. Carroll, M. Jones, K. Kirk, B. Martin, K. Massey (Fiddler's Ferry Reserve), P. Mathews, D. Morris (Tatton Park and Knutsford Moor LNR), T. Parker, B. Perkins (Sandbach Flashes), Rostherne Mere Log, R. Smith (www.deeestuary.co.uk) and anyone else who passed records on.

Members' Noticeboard

Do you have any helpful tips; requests for information; small items for sale (ornithological of course!) etc etc? Well, this is the place for you! Write in with your thoughts or requests.

RECORD - Biodiversity Information System

Would you like to receive regular electronic newsletters from your Local Record Centre? Send your name, (position if applicable), address, telephone number, and e-mail address to info@record-lrc.co.uk.

PLEASE HELP RAISE MONEY FOR CANCER RESEARCH!

Geoff Lightfoot (Waxwings) is undertaking a sponsored Cheshire & Wirral Moth List in 2001 to raise money for Cancer Research. Please give Geoff **your** support and help him raise some significant money for this worthwhile cause. Either pledge so much per species - with an upper limit if you like (Geoff is hoping to see about 250 species in the year) or else give a 'one-off' amount if he stays the course!

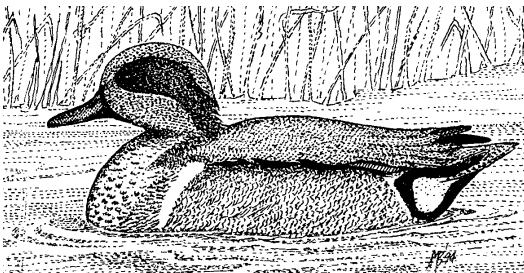
Please write to Geoff direct or give him a ring - let's show we care.

Geoff Lightfoot, 12 Bellfield Avenue, Cheadle Hulme, Stockport, Cheshire, SK8 7AG
Tel: 0161 486 0784. Fax: 0161 485 3536.

County Rarities

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (*Anas carolinensis*)

After years of being regarded as a mere subspecies, Green-winged Teal finally gained full specific status on January 1st 2001. In Cheshire, they have become a regular winter vagrant, with one or two in most years. As I write, there are birds being reported from the Sandbach Flashes, Inner Marsh Farm RSPB Reserve, Acre Nook Sand Quarry and Frodsham Marsh. There's even another across the Mersey at Seaforth.



Whether you agree with the split or not, or you doubt the species' credentials as a genuine wild bird this side of the Atlantic, it has been added to the National BOU list and also to the county list. Their apparent abundance this year may actually indicate genuine vagrancy as other Nearctic ducks also made it across the pond in good numbers. American Wigeons were found in flocks last autumn and there's been a smattering of Lesser Scaups, Ring-necked Ducks and Black Ducks. There was even a Hooded Merganser. On Fair Isle in 1986, an exhausted female American Wigeon on the pool at Field Croft bore a ring marked 'Write Mus Washington DC USA' proving beyond doubt its origins. It's only a matter of time before a ringed Green-winged Teal is found.

Between 1958 and 1998, 390 individuals were recorded in Britain with 18 in 1998. The highest total in any one year is 30, recorded both in 1995 and 1996. Most new birds are found in winter or spring. (Ref : *BB Vol 93 No 12*)

Males in full plumage are relatively easy to identify. They look like male European Teals but with a vertical white fore-flank stripe on the side of the breast instead of the horizontal white stripe above the flanks. They also show less of the thin buff lines bordering the dark green patch on the side of the head with the line above the patch being absent and the one below being reduced. The flank feathers show rather coarse vermiculations on European Teal and very fine vermiculations on Green-winged Teal. The undertail coverts look a deep golden yellow (pale lemon yellow on European Teal), the breast is washed with a deeper pink wash and the mid-wing bar is invariably a bright cinnamon-buff rather than the variably cinnamo-washed bar shown by European Teal.

Females, immatures and eclipse males must outnumber adult males as they do in Blue-winged Teal, but their identification is extremely difficult. Eclipse males may however show some of the above features and with care may therefore be identified. Features shown by females and immatures include a much stronger head pattern, recalling Garganey at times. The bill lacks much of the pale area at the base shown by European Teal, at best restricted to the lower mandible and the upperwing bar is rich cinnamon-buff as on males. This last feature may be as reliable as 90%. The non-male plumage of Green-winged Teals may have a colder ground colouration overall to the plumage but this of course is subjective and the breast mottling may be of a smaller and more compact pattern, looking darker in the field.

Hybrids do occur although they are reputedly very rare, presumably because the male Green-winged Teals know the difference between the two females. I'm glad they do!

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

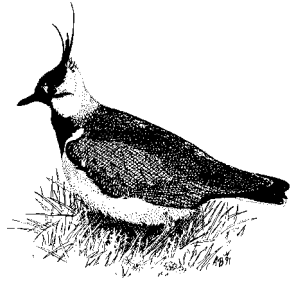
HOUSE MARTIN SURVEY

Please take part in this year's House Martin survey. Survey forms will be sent out with the next issue of *Bird News*. Further information and forms available from:

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

View from the Farmyard

Swallows generally shun modern farm buildings, they instead use the older brick buildings for their nest sites. This is partly due to the higher light level experienced in the steel framed asbestos clad structures that are better suited to modern farming needs. Roof lights created by the inclusion of clear poly-glass sheets help to make for a more wholesome living environment for the cattle than was the case in the rather cave like brick buildings. Though the modern buildings give some great improvements they also have drawbacks, adequate ventilation must be provided, as stale air is an excellent breeding ground for all kinds of cattle disease. The traditional brick buildings of Cheshire were very good at being cool in summer and warm in winter, whereas the opposite is true of the modern structures; direct sunshine will raise the temperature very quickly indeed. So it happens that the combination of light streaming through the roof lights and high temperatures are all most insects could wish for. Hordes of flies, the odd butterflies and flying beetles congregate at these portals to the sky, drawn by their instincts but unable to stray beyond.



Some of the farmyard birds have caught on to this larder of delicacies, and visit the source frequently. Robin, House Sparrow, Wren, Chaffinch and even Greenfinch can tackle the clever aerobatics needed to reach the prey. Blackbirds, Magpies, even Starlings take insects there, but struggle to remain in the window long enough to take much food. Another regular visitor is the Brownhawker dragonfly, though they themselves are often as much captive as the other insects, living out their short lives surrounded by a feast.

As the building becomes home to more and more cattle as the autumn progresses, a warm atmosphere is maintained within. Provided with this warmth and a ready supply of fresh blood the cattle-flies' season is lengthened, ensuring food for birds willing to take the trouble to enter the shed. On cold days the flies are torpid and hold fast to the underside of the roof or onto the walls. Here they are vulnerable to the Sparrows and Robin, which pick them off at will. On warm days the flies are active and fall prey to Swallows which swoop in and out of the building snatching flies while in flight. This food source is vital to late broods of Swallow, and on odd occasions even late House Martins take advantage. Another of the predators that is a common visitor lies in wait on the walls. When a fly bloated with blood strays close it is pounced upon, its legs are removed along with the wings, and the head snipped off. But this predator is no bird but a wasp, taking the fly to utilise its blood-filled abdomen.

Reading the farming press these days can be a very depressing pastime: the problem of 1000s of acres of un-harvested crops, many of which will never be reaped. And to add to that 10,000s of acres of autumn sown crops that haven't been sown yet, and further 1000s of acres drowned beneath the flood waters and you can start to realise that almost no farm has remained unscathed. But these problems are only the latest twist of the knife in a farming industry experiencing its greatest ever revolution. I think you would agree that the small, perhaps least intensive farms are the best in general for wildlife, and that the peasant farmer on his small family unit tends to provide by his ignorance maybe, the best habitats - scrubby hillsides with patches of grazing, small fields with a broad mix of crops, the rampant weeds unsprayed and only partly dealt with by other means. Well, if you know where these exist, and you may have to go abroad to find them, take your camera and get some photos because you will then be able to show your grandchildren what we lost.

British Dairying is one of the top magazines for the trade, its October 2000 issue carried a tiny article with a small table attached. Despite its low profile position in this magazine, I feel it should have made the headline in all the environmentally aware media. I must admit that I didn't spot it anywhere, so just in case you missed it also, I will fill you in. The headline reads "220,000 EU dairy farmers go out of business in 4 years". These weren't all small units, but the vast majority were. Here reproduced is the table, which shows the decline in dairy farmer numbers over only four years in various European countries.

The decline in dairy farmer numbers over four years in various European countries:

| | | |
|-------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Denmark - 26% | France - 14% | Spain - 48% |
| UK - 11% | Belgium - 15% | Portugal - 26% |
| Netherlands - 14% | Ireland - 18% | Greece - 39% |
| Sweden - 16% | Italy - 30% | Austria - 15% |
| Germany - 21% | Finland - 18% | |

Total numbers of cows in many of these countries have also fallen; in areas of the UK where large tracts have few or no livestock on the farm, both insect and Swallow numbers have also fallen dramatically. Arable farmers are disappearing at an alarming rate, but in the short term we will see little change to our eating habits, in fact it is our eating habits that have been one of the prime movers in the current recession in agriculture. The consumers' apparent lust for uniform food with little local character and a flavour identical in the Spanish Costa as in the high street at home has powered the need for change so European farmers must thin out a little, so that large agribusiness can provide that uniformity. The cost alas will be regional diversity of habitat and culture. You will be able to find the same scarcity of species in whichever state of Europe you visit. "It's the way of the world, so get used to it"; well, that was the message from our government to British farmers. And I'm sure that our Euro neighbours will be of a uniform opinion.

When the small farmers are all gone, then the countryside and its nature will be all the poorer for it. Look at where the crofts of Scotland and Wales disappeared from in the last 40 years and it is easy to see why the RSPB is expending such energy in trying to revive just a few crofts. Though to be wise you would say don't despoil them in the first place.

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

Sites to Watch

HOYLAKE BIRD OBSERVATORY!

About five years ago, as part of a one-to-one coaching programme lavished on me by my employers, I set myself a number of work and life goals. One of these was to live in a house with a garden where I could see a Siberian *Phylloscopus* Warbler. This of course was a thinly disguised plan to move so the appearance of a Pallas's Warbler in the garden of our old house was something of a mixed blessing!

Fortunately, the imminent arrival of our third daughter in May this year gave us just the incentive we needed! We were prepared to live almost anywhere, as long as there were enough bedrooms, a 180° sea view and a garden with Siberian *Phyllosc* potential. Fortunately for us, one of about eight candidates came onto the market, between Kings' Gap and Hoylake lifeboat station. From the lounge it was possible to see Hilbre, the Point of Ayr and Formby Point. The gardens were huge - both more than 100ft long and it had enough bedrooms. We moved in on May 12th, just four days before Heather was born. We thought that it might be quite good for birds; Snow Bunting and Siskin overhead while we were viewing was obviously a good sign, but it was only after living there a few weeks that it became clear just what we were in for. Our first morning produced two Cuckoos and a Spotted Flycatcher, the second a Sedge Warbler, a Whitethroat and a good selection of overhead birds including Tree Pipits, Redpolls, a Whimbrel and a Peregrine. Yes, as hoped, the North Shore flight line really did go clean through the front garden. The only catch was that we had no bushes or shrubs to slow things down.

Within days of moving in Mark and I had taken to wearing bins in the house to avoid cartoon style collisions when trying to find optics in a hurry. We now have old pairs of bins ready to hand at the less frequently watched windows. We also found that seawatching is much less demanding when you can do it from an armchair with a beer in one hand. Though some distance from the low tide mark, the height of the bedroom window and the comfort factor more than compensate. We soon smashed a number of the Red Rocks record counts, most memorably a stunning passage of Manxies on Jun 23rd, peaking at 1000 per hour and 1280 Guillemots on Oct 23rd.

We spent the three days of summer putting in a large pond and stream into the back garden, with hopes of attracting more migrants and started to plant a small forest in both the front and back in an attempt to hold onto them longer in the future. We also started to plan an extension to the house, with purpose built seawatching facilities and a view over the extensive cover in next door's garden. Heavy seeding of the front drive quickly attracted an excellent flock of around 50 House Sparrows and similar numbers of mixed finches.

By October it was starting to feel like we were living in a Bird Observatory. We were seeing unusual or interesting birds every day. We were recording significant counts of many species and even hosted a small scale "twitch" two weekends running. We had seen four species of skua, three species of diver and 15 species of duck. Five species of chat graced the front lawn, including six Greenland Wheatears on one evening and we had seen nine species of warbler. The patch of beach directly in front of the house had produced Richard's Pipit, up to 35 Curlew Sandpipers, 15 Little Stints and two different adult White-rumped Sandpipers. One of these was found from the front room while watching England v West Indies and the other from the bedroom, while checking out a Roseate Tern off the north end of Hilbre. All this in one of the least inspiring autumns I can recall.

At the start of the year I set myself the testing target of seeing 150 species at Red Rocks. As I write this the new house list stands at 148 and we have yet to see Rook or Stock Dove! Five months after moving in, I'm now sure that we could see almost anything and I can't help wondering what has moved unseen through the North Wirral gardens in the past. Arctic Warbler and Red-breasted Flycatcher on the same day in Meols, our own Pallas's Warbler in Hoylake and a Nighthawk in Moreton give a hint at what there has already been. Hopefully we will be able to add to this list in the near future - I can't wait for some SE winds in May.

So what are the downsides? Well, for one we have only been to Red Rocks about five times this autumn - it's so much easier to stand in the garden. Also we have been singularly incapable of doing anything to the inside of the house - once again it is just too easy to look out of the window or better still stand outside. However this is a small price to pay for the privilege of regularly seeing Peregrine and huge Knot packs from our bed. I would certainly advise anyone who had fantasised about living in a location where birding was possible to just do it!

Jane Turner, 'Hoylake Bird Observatory'

FRODSHAM MARSH UPDATE

The year and the last Millennium ended with sub-zero conditions across the country. A walk around the tanks at Frodsham with Chris Done on December 31st was the coldest I ever remember. Lying snow and an icy -4°C was dramatically lowered by a force 7 - 8 south-easterly, making the temperature with wind chill feel like -20°C. Birds were huddled under hedges, where there were some. Where there weren't, there were no birds. A Barn Owl that flew past at dawn perched briefly in the bottom of a hawthorn bush before resuming its daylight hunt for food. Reed Buntings and Song Thrushes hopped about at my feet. A Woodcock flushed only when almost trodden on. But it had been a good year with 160 species recorded and most of the regular local patchers in the 140s.

Highlights of the year were undoubtedly the Pomarine Skua on January 8th and the Honey Buzzard on September 30th. But there were plenty of other good birds - displaying Mediterranean Gulls, a Long-eared Owl in a hawthorn hedge as close as two metres, an Avocet, both male and female Blue-headed Wagtails, a pair of Little Egrets, three full summer plumaged Black-necked Grebes together on No6, Garden Warbler, Barn Owl and Arctic Terns (all three species new for me for the marsh), Pectoral Sandpipers, and a summering Marsh Harrier.

I did miss three other good birds. A Common Crane on March 22nd whilst I was away in Israel, a summer plumaged White-winged Black Tern in May which passed through in minutes and even rarer, a Green Woodpecker which spent half an hour around No5 tank on April 30th, only the third ever. But if I didn't miss some, birding wouldn't be as attractive..... Would it?

New Year's Day 2001 and the real 'New Millennium' saw the stalwarts out at dawn again. At least I'd had a decent night's sleep, unlike Chris Done who, after all the previous day out in atrocious conditions and then all night partying in Manchester, turned up at the old log site for sunrise having had only two hours' sleep!.... And he was still birding until dark! That's youth for you. I'd have been dead on my feet. The other 'regulars' straggled in during the day, most of them after eleven o'clock. The morning went fast and then the afternoon died just as quickly, with only a handful of

species added. Even so, between us all we managed about 75 species including Green-winged Teal, Stonechat, Woodcock, Long-eared Owl and Yellowhammer. The Barn Owl didn't perform for us unfortunately.

So there you have it, a respectable beginning to the year with twelve months ahead. There are plenty of big tides in 2001, so there should be some good wader counts. The place is waterlogged, as is much of Britain. We could do with a dry summer!

One last thought. Now that Jane and Mark Turner have the 'Hoylake Bird Observatory', they have shown beyond doubt that intensive birding in comfortable conditions delivers the goods. Since May last year, they have recorded almost 150 species, as many as a whole year's slog at Red Rocks and without moving from their garden. It proves that you undoubtedly miss a huge percentage of the species actually present at a site. Frodsham Marsh is an area of three square miles (3 x 1) and even if the six regulars each put in two full days a week only a fraction of the habitat would ever get looked at properly. The average yearly species total of 160 is actually in reality probably over 200. Having to walk the long distances means that it is a huge effort to concentrate on every bit of herbage that you pass. Some species that sit still in cover are simply walked past. Maybe hides are the answer....

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

Annual Report Review

DEE ESTUARY WeBS ANNUAL REPORT - WINTER 1999/2000 **Compiled by Neil Friswell and edited by Colin E. Wells**

The Dee Estuary is currently internationally important for 12 species of wildfowl and wader and nationally important for another six species. How, you may ask, do we know this?

The simple answer is that Neil and Colin, in their introduction to the *Dee Estuary WeBS Annual Report for Winter 1999/2000*, tell us that this is so. However, like so many things in life the apparently simple is not altogether easy to arrive at.

The Dee Estuary is not a small area and anyone who has watched from Parkgate Old Baths at one of the highest tides of the winter will know that the estuary teems with waterfowl and waders. To count these birds the estuary is split into 44 compartments on both sides of the estuary including feeding and roosting sites 'inland' from the shores of the estuary and North Wirral. These compartments are illustrated in the Report by two maps. WeBS counts are made monthly and in all but exceptional weather conditions.

This Report firstly presents, for some seventy-odd species, the results of the counts made in the period April 1999 to March 2000. The data is split between the two years so that it is possible to consider the counts for a complete winter period and compare them with counts for previous winters. The Report then does this by showing, for the most numerous species, the peak winter counts (often from as far back as 1981/82) and also the five year moving average. These are presented both in tables and graphs. The graphs make it easy to see, for instance, the consistent upward trends for Cormorant and Mute Swan and the downward trend for Mallard.

The counts on the Dee are not made in isolation. When the Dee counts are considered together with those made across Britain and internationally then trends in the fortunes of particular species can be followed and conservation strategies adopted accordingly. Back on the Dee, Neil and Colin intend that this Report will be the first of a long series of annual reports and hope that it will be of significant value in the constant battle to conserve, and hopefully extend, the habitats on which these birds depend. They and all the counters deserve success in their ambitions and also deserve the support of all those of us who so enjoy the spectacle of birding on the Dee.

Steve Barber, 14 Thornfield Grove, Cheadle Hulme, Cheshire, SK8 6AZ

For your copy of the Report send £4 (including p & p) to Colin Wells at RSPB Reserve Office, Burton Point Farm, Station Road, Burton, nr Neston, CH64 5SB. Please make cheques payable to the RSPB.

Notes & Letters

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

WIRRAL BIRD RACE 2000

We had selected the 24 hour period starting at 7:00p.m. on 14th May for our annual Wirral Bird Race. Rob Bithell and I have been doing this each year since 1993, scoring between 90 (1995) and 100 (1997 & 1998) species. We have seen 130 species in these years with such highlights as Short-toed Lark in 1995 and American Wigeon in 1999. There has been the odd dodgy tick along the way, most notably the pair of Cinnamon Teals at Thurstaston in 1997 which gave us our hundredth species for the first time.



The kick-off saw us at New Brighton starting with Herring Gull and Common Tern. By the time we had arrived at Inner Marsh Farm at 7:40 our total had increased to 23, most of the birds being picked up as fly-bys on the way, including Pied Wagtail, a bird we had famously missed in 1996. Inner Marsh Farm soon had our list increasing, particularly with warblers and ducks, including Gadwall, Wigeon and Teal, the last a dip in 1995. Waders were, however, scarce with only Black-tailed Godwit, Dunlin, Redshank and Common Sandpiper on offer. There was no sign of the Ruffs or Curlew Sandpipers that had been present there when I visited two days earlier, nor of the Marsh Harrier, Black Tern or Spoonbill, although, according to the log, the last had been present earlier in the day. However, a bonus in the shape of a Great Spotted Woodpecker near the reserve's car park saw us leaving the site at 9:00 with 53 species in only two hours. We then visited the mid-Wirral site where we have seen Barn Owl each year since 1997, and yet again it didn't let us down, leaving its roost site at 9:45 before disappearing into the gathering gloom. This site also gave us calling Grey Partridges. The final bird of the day at 10:10 was a Great Crested Grebe, picked out in the car's headlights as it slept in Birkenhead Docks. We then proceeded to our respective houses for a couple of hours of sleep having recorded 56 species.

Rob picked me up at 4:00a.m. and first light found us at Leasowe watching a fox picking its way through the car park whilst we listened to singing Skylarks, Song Thrushes and Grasshopper Warblers. A quick drive to Brimstage gave us real cause for optimism, as we were able to listen to a Lesser Whitethroat singing in a roadside hedge and saw a Red-legged Partridge in exactly the same tree-lined ride where we had seen a pair last year. A Little Owl landed on a nearby telegraph pole before being chased off by a Blackbird. This was a real bonus as we have never before seen this species (Little Owl, not Blackbird!) on a Bird Race day. At Raby Mere we picked up several more new birds including the hoped-for Mandarin Duck (a male and two females with 12 young) and our first Blue Tit! We then went on to Gilroy Road in West Kirby where an injured and/or feral Pink-footed Goose raised our total to 75. Stapledon Woods at Caldy, a site with so much potential but which has disappointed recently, failed to produce a Treecreeper or a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and yet again there was no sign of any Wood Warblers, where up until 1997 this was a virtually guaranteed site for this species.

The next site was Hilbre Island where we stayed out the tide. Here our hopes were raised during the walk across to the islands by a large second-summer gull with brilliant white primaries. Thoughts of Glaucous Gull disappeared as other features ruled this out and we had to put it down as a probable hybrid (Glaucous/Herring?). We didn't even claim a half for this bird! The walk did produce several much-needed waders, including Whimbrel and Sanderling. Common Scoters, Guillemots and Shags were seen off the north end of the island, but we missed the only Gannet of the day as we searched the gardens for passerines. However, on returning, we were astounded to see a Ruddy Shelduck fly close in past us in the direction of Hoylake, a rare bird at Hilbre. A Peregrine allowed us to leave the islands on a total of 93. Red Rocks Marsh failed to produce any singing Reed Warblers, so we pushed on to Thurstaston. Here the feeding station at the Visitor Centre produced a superb male Bullfinch, and the nearby fields gave up Yellowhammer and Sparrowhawk, although there were no signs of either the Stonechat or Cuckoo present three days earlier.

The final destination was a return visit to Inner Marsh Farm. En route we were delighted to see a Little Egret on Burton Marsh off Denhall Lane. The reserve had much the same birds as the previous day, but we found Tree Sparrow near the car park and as we walked down towards the hide we also saw a Barnacle Goose with the Canadas on the pools at the back of the reserve. We also 'scoped a small wader on number two lagoon, but it wasn't until we were in the hide that we were thrilled to be able to confirm it as a Pectoral Sandpiper which must have just arrived. It moved around the small islands giving excellent views. A full description was naturally taken for the County Recorder! This, together with Ruddy Duck and Little Ringed Plover, took our total up to a new record (for us) of 102 species in almost 16 hours in the field, and we didn't even need the female Ruddy Shelduck that eventually ambled out of the vegetation at the back of the lagoon.

It was an excellent day with some superb birds and when we thought of the ones we had missed, the only option was to go to the pub to start planning for next year and a new record.

Colin Schofield, 5 Dawlish Road, Wallasey, CH44 3DP

A very impressive total, Colin, which really puts our 118 species for the whole county into context! However, I am slightly suspicious about your reference to Caldys: are you sure that you didn't count anything within the wildfowl collection there? Only kidding! Ed.

IN SYMPATHY

I read Simon Edwards's Editorial in *Bird News* 47 with interest and much sympathy, having experienced the situation he describes in most of the organisations with which I have been involved over the years. To be in the position of the CAWOS Council is very frustrating and it is depressing to plough on year after year with no *apparent* interest and feedback, or offers of help from the majority of the members, some of whom must have the necessary skills and/or knowledge. I find it amazing that just a few individuals can keep on producing such an interesting magazine. It seems a great pity that the birdwatching of the Editor, and probably some of the other contributors, should be so limited partly as a result of making *Bird News* as good as it is.

It is a shame that Hilary Woodhead found it necessary to be so defensive in her comments on Simon's Editorial in *Bird News* 48. As he says, no one would dispute her right to remain an ordinary member enjoying her birding as and when she can. However, how does she propose the face-to-face requests to be conducted? How are the Council members to know who has what skills or time to offer? Perhaps she should put herself in their shoes before taking them to task over their requests for help.

Rosalind Martin, 45 Albert Road, Grappenhall, Warrington, WA4 2PF

LOOKING BACK AT YOUR NOTES

Have you, as a religious note taker, ever looked back through an old book? You look at a list of species on a particular day, detailing where you saw them and how many of them there were. A glow of self-satisfaction envelops you until someone asks the awkward question "How common is such a species?" or "Why did that species suddenly disappear?" or "Why was that year good for such a species?" The questions are endless.

Reference to your local patch notebook suddenly reveals not the perfect field birder's notebook but one that is full of holes, full of inexplicable sightings, full of..... just numbers.

I thought that my notes at the top of each day's birding exploits were ample. I carefully note day, date, weather at intervals through the day and temperatures as they change. Unusual sightings are even timed and direction of migrants noted. Even high tide times and heights are mentioned! So what was the problem?

A couple of years ago, I was looking through my notebook, actually for Frodsham Marsh records. It suddenly dawned on me that even though I had a wealth of information, some crucial points were missing, in fact, the very reasons why I was recording the birds I was. I couldn't give a reasonable explanation of why I was seeing certain species. It got me thinking.

True, weather during the year does influence bird movements but I think that the habitat type at the time of observation should also be noted, especially, if not most importantly, if changed by the weather or by land use. It makes more sense of bird sightings and your notes.

If you look through a bird report, very little reference, if any, is made to habitat. The review of the year gives an overview of the previous year's weather.

Take Frodsham Marsh, (you've got to forgive my enthusiasm for the place but it does give a good example of what I'm trying to explain) the basic habitat structure remains the same throughout the year - dried lagoons, wet lagoons, agricultural land, cattle and sheep, turf fields, river and saltmarsh. But visit regularly and the little piece of land that held several hundred finches, buntings and the odd Tree Sparrows, a week ago, can be seen to apparently hold nothing on your latest visit. No5 tank can hold 5000 Dunlins in spring, suddenly becoming deserted for no apparent reason. Likewise, 1000 Black-tailed Godwits on No6 tank can dwindle to a few dozen almost overnight.

If I'd made additional notes at the end of my days' sightings, as I have recently begun to do, the reasons for the changes would have become evident. In the case of the finches and buntings, the field was ploughed, No5 tank had dried up making it also unattractive and No6 tank had been flooded with water levels covering feeding and roosting sites. Obvious causes at the time, but unless noted also at the time, quickly forgotten. Reference to your notes two or three years down the line can leave you scratching your head.

With more factual comments to refer to, however brief, species, numbers and movements become much clearer and do actually make much more sense. A short paragraph at the end of your days' sightings detailing changes in land use and/or weather-influenced changes, can make all the difference understanding why you've seen what you have. It also makes them much more fun and certainly more interesting from a personal point of view. It's surprising what memories are brought back about individual days out in the field. Give it a try.

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

A BBRC ADMISSION AND SLANDER

As usual, BBRC (British Birds Rarities Committee) published the annual rarities list in *British Birds*. Eagerly awaited by many as the official acceptance of their own records or those of others, it does create a degree of satisfaction or in some cases dissatisfaction. For the first time, in black and white, the BBRC have come clean and admitted that records are not only judged on plumage characters etc. To quote a paragraph

"We are aware that both geography and a birder's degree of sociability affect the proportion of single observer records and we know that most good observers will have seen some birds that evade everyone else. It would be naïve to think, however, that the circumstances and observer profiles do not play some part in record assessment. For far too long, the assessment process has been clouded with secrecy but now we prefer to open it up to scrutiny and we would not seek to pretend that both circumstance and observer profile are not important."

So, what does all this 'around the bushes' statement mean? It means that the reliability and reputation of a birder submitting the record count a great deal towards acceptance or non-acceptance (the word "rejected" was dropped some time ago, as it gave the wrong impression).

It either goes one of two ways. If you've a past history of finding and identifying correctly the birds that you submit, the record has a lot more flexibility when the plumage details are scrutinised. If some or all of your previous records have been misidentified or described incorrectly, then your records have got to be perfect when it comes to plumage. Even then, if there is a suspicion that you've 'made it up' it will not be accepted.

It is a difficult task for the committee, made easier of course if the bird in question is also seen by other observers who know what they're looking at, or made impossible if other observers who didn't see the bird decide that you didn't either more in a moment.

At county level, observers firstly fall into two categories, those who are happy to send in a description and those who won't, or can't be bothered. As County Recorder I can see both positions but would always advocate the first. Those of you who have read my thoughts on writing descriptions will know that I actually 'enjoy' doing them. If you practise, a decent description only takes minutes. Complex ones can take hours and even then, as the light changes, you can find yourself adding notes all over the place! You learn a lot when you write notes.....

But on the whole I would hazard a guess that most birders appreciate the need for descriptions and feel happier that their records are accepted formally to go onto a county list or into the county records. It is a recognition of the many hours they spend in the field. So what happens when the record is "not accepted"?

Most records at county level are of birds that are well described. In the majority of cases, a first reading will show that the record is genuine, not copied out of a field guide and even though there may be certain details not noted or not seen, the bird has been identified correctly. A lot of things are subconscious when you look at a record. The time of year is logged, the place, the habitat and as with BBRC, the person. If all the pieces don't add up, the record is often referred back to the observer for more details or to other named observers for their notes. Records are assessed without prejudice unless you know that 'the wool is being pulled'.

This only happens once every so often but it does happen. In a very memorable case, an observer was asked for a description to back up a record. Once supplied, it was found that he had already actually sent in a description with the record in the first place. A casual glance at the two descriptions revealed so many inconsistencies that there could have been two original birds. They were so different! When asked for the original field notes, taken at the time, they had been conveniently mislaid.

It is often difficult to be 100% sure and unless an observer does indeed have a good track record, descriptions are taken in good faith, if of a high standard. Everyone has to start somewhere and everyone makes genuine mistakes, even the best do! But it is a balancing act and it is the overall picture that is looked at, including the rarity value. More documentation is required for a first for the county than for say a county rarity in a big invasion year when there are dozens of the species about and a pattern emerges. BBRC did this with Arctic Redpolls in the invasion year.

So, back to my comment earlier, what happens if someone else decides that you haven't seen it? This is the one subject that enrages me more than any other. There are indeed many people out there who are jealous and totally gripped-off if someone finds a bird that disappears before they get there. They are usually the type of character who goes to great lengths to discredit a person and his/her record for no other reason than envy. Their own reputations may be shaky; they may have misidentified birds many times themselves or suppressed birds so that no one else could see them. They even claim records of birds that they didn't actually find but were told about by someone less experienced. It is called 'character assassination'. Legally it is probably defamation of character and certainly slander.

At county level this sort of thing isn't a great problem. Most observers are known and records more easily proven or not. But at BBRC level, when the committee doesn't know the observer from the other end of the country, they do rely to some extent, as mentioned in the latest BBRC Rarities Report, on reputation. They make enquiries and often (quite wrongly in certain cases in my opinion) go to people other than the County Recorder through whom the record was submitted. Sadly, in some of the cases, the people approached by BBRC have personal axes to grind and in the latest case, one involving a mega rarity on the Wirral coast a couple of years ago, it has indeed resulted in the record being not accepted. I won't mention the species, the observers (because there was actually more than one in this case, both experienced, both reliable) or the perpetrator of the slander.

It is a sad day for the county that people like this still persist in this action. I know of another birder who didn't submit two more BBRC rarities because the same person had pronounced him unreliable and he didn't want the committee to label him as such.

As for the BBRC, they have a difficult enough job and if a case can't be proven one way or another, I can see why they sit on the fence and announce "not accepted". They should, however, choose their advisors (and for that matter, some of their own members who are known to unfairly slander) much more carefully. My advice for the slanderers is to watch your backs, it may be your records, your reputations that suffer next time.

It is interesting to note that Britain's first Marmora's Warbler wasn't accepted for years because rumour had it that a dealer kept them locally. I only found out by accident that it had been said as a joke by a single observer and before you knew it, every pet shop for miles had cages stuffed with them. I explained this to the BBRC and the record went through unopposed.

One last point. It may be that BBRC or slanderers in the birding world are actually open to legal action. If proven in a test case, record assessment could become a little trickier. But why should the good reputation of an individual be trashed by another, just on a whim? Caution in assessing records is certainly a requirement but the line has to be drawn between reasonable caution and unreasonable accusations.

25 YEARS AGO

Here is an article by the first president of the Knutsford Ornithological Society, the late Bill Mulligan, published in *The Manchester Evening News* in January 1974. It reveals something of his enthusiasm and love of birds and birding.

“PEACE AND PLENTY

Some call it the Lay-by; others, striving for a more colourful description, say Bird Wood. Neither term does the place justice, for if ever a tiny area of woodland, enclosed on the roadside by a wire fence, deserved a name which hinted at the magic spell it could exercise, this is it. Go there any day of the week, any time in the daylight hours, and you will invariably find a string of cars, and from every window a hand protruding offering crumbs or nuts for the birds perching expectantly on the wires.

It is a ritual which enchants us all. Just no one can pass without stopping, if there is room for a car to squeeze in. The place? Immediately before you get onto the road along the Tatton Park wall, quite close to the main entrance, there is a narrow fringe of trees lining the back road from Rostherne village. If one is unfamiliar with the spot, the tin lids sitting on top of the score or more fence posts, with their offerings of titbits for the birds, will identify it for you. Can we squeeze in? Sure, there's just enough room, gently does it! Slide the car windows down, keep perfectly quiet. Push out a hand, keeping the palm taut, and in no time at all you should have one of the vivacious company of small birds coming to snatch at the morsel presented or even, if one is more than usually favoured, lingering there searching for more.

Don't we all in this harsh and bitter world find joy in the simple things that give relief from pressures? We certainly do. The warm-blooded touch of a Blue Tit's tiny feet on the hand; the flicker of the slightly larger and more boldly plumaged Great Tit as it swoops and retreats with its prize; the transcendent pleasure of playing host to the lovely and acrobatic Nuthatch, if only for a second or two - these are some of the simple pleasures which make so many bird lovers, expert or otherwise, regular visitors to the wood.

Whatever your degree of ornithological experience there are thrills to be had here. The titmouse - the Marsh and Coal Tits, the Long-tailed Tits as well as the Blue and Great - are always the more venturesome. The House and Tree Sparrows, the Dunnock, the Robin, the Chaffinches, the Blackbirds and thrushes come eagerly to the fence but stop short of more intimate contact, preferring to pick the dainties from the ground. An occasional Jay will come up close and survey the offerings with a wary eye, and on the great days a Great Spotted Woodpecker may swoop boldly on to the fence showing off his brilliant vestments, of black, white and reds.

Winter is the best time to enjoy this pageant of birdlife, for then the natural food supplies are scarce, and the birds are glad to welcome the hand that feeds them.”

Bill Mulligan

PEREGRINE ATTACK

On 5th November, 2000, I watched, along with others in the Rostherne Mere Observatory, an example of unusual Peregrine behaviour. The bird had been perched for some time, when suddenly it appeared over the mere, repeatedly stooping at a small bird which I quickly realised was a Kingfisher, flying low across the mere. The Kingfisher ducked under the water several times to avoid the attacks before escaping across the shore and into cover.

In his book *Flashing Wings (The Drama of Bird Flight)*, American writer John Terres recounts an incident in which a Peregrine was seen to “dart at a [presumably Belted] Kingfisher repeatedly making it dive under the water until the Kingfisher almost drowned, without ever seriously trying to kill the bird”. Terres also describes an incident in which a Peregrine repeatedly attacked a Turkey Vulture (not in territorial defence). Peregrines not infrequently seem to indulge in behaviour which, while seeming to be hunting, is actually a different instinct, satisfying something else in its psyche.

I recall some years ago seeing a Peregrine pursuing a Cormorant all the way into Tabley Mere from at least a mile away, sometimes getting ahead of it (perhaps impatient at its lack of speed) and then dropping back onto its tail until the terrified bird dropped down to the water, uttering desperate croaks. The Peregrine then shot off to spook the local Woodpigeons.

Is part of a being a Peregrine simply to revel in its aerial dominance, a lion-like pride in being top predator?

Bob Groom, 17 Queensway, Knutsford, Cheshire

NESTING OF REED WARBLERS WITHIN HAWTHORN HEDGE

At Rostherne Mere NNR, a hawthorn hedge has become engulfed in common reeds extending from marshland. This dominant plant is gradually destroying this hedge, which has been adopted within a Reed Warbler breeding territory since 1997. In that year a nest was built on old canes within the shelter of the hedge. The first egg was laid on 5th May, then a reserve first egg-date record. A further reed-based nest was constructed within the hedge in 1999, and again a new egg-laying record was noted with the first of the clutch being laid on 2nd May. The female Reed Warbler was mist netted on 1st May bearing a full brood patch and having an egg-producing weight of 15.6 grams.

The same female was again caught on 1st May 2000, with a 'normal' weight of 11.5 grams and she was then in the initial stages of developing a brood patch. She laid her first egg on 12th May and the nest was again built on the reeds within the hedge. The first two breeding attempts failed, but the three or four young from the most recent nest fledged on 8th June.

Malcolm Calvert, "Hilbre", 12 Hill Drive, Handforth, Wilmslow, SK9 3AR

SILENT WINTER

Those familiar with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* may, in retrospect, regard it as overly pessimistic. Yet the decrease in numbers of once common birds is chronicled regularly in our national press. This week, the first of the New Year, there is the almost familiar cry of despair regarding farmland species reliant upon undisturbed nesting sites and ample grass seed. Numerous cuts of grass for silage deny them both. Yet I fear there is a more general loss over many species with causes which are less obvious and more complex.

Why am I prompted to write with such views? I have been using bird feeders in my garden, mainly in the winter, for nearly 25 years. The type of feed used, numbers of feeders, their positioning, commencement dates are all factors which have varied. Over recent years I've used the most nutritious black sunflower seed rather than peanuts and fine canary seed rather than the 'mixed bird seed', half of which regularly remains uneaten. My number of feeders has increased, as has my battle (largely won) with the grey squirrels. Siting of the feeders has varied from being close to a tall hawthorn hedge, which provides the most secure cover, to hanging from the crack willows along the side of the stream. Whilst this is without doubt a more vulnerable position to predation by the relatively frequent Sparrowhawk, the difference in the number of feeding birds seemed marginal in past years. This year, however, over the coldest few days for some time my feeders are only being visited sporadically, although a small group of Greenfinches do regard one feeder as 'theirs'. The ground feeding Chaffinches, Goldfinches and Bramblings of previous years are largely non-existent and only a regular pair of Collared Doves enjoys the best in canary seed.

Few of us can have failed to notice the absence of House Sparrows (hearing one prompts comment) and Starlings no longer descend onto the lawn in flocks. I just don't believe 'my' birds are simply living it up on superior fare over the hedge. Rather I'm convinced they are not around in the numbers of even three years ago. Perhaps in addition to the changes in farming the level of vehicle pollution in suburbia is also having its toll. The effects of the exhausts from up to 30,000 vehicle movements daily past my house may prove to have had an earlier effect on avian life than as yet upon humans. Or is it the lead in my brain which has brought about such a subjective letter? I would welcome other views, on the state of our garden birds that is, and not of my mind!

Richard Gabb, 72 Chester Road, Poynton, Cheshire, SK12 1HA

THERMAL IMAGES

Back on 13th October 2000 I paid a visit to Moore Nature Reserve which forms part of my local patch in order to carry out a fungi survey. It proved to be a significant visit when I realised the conditions were ripe for looking for soaring raptors. A combination of fluffy cumulus clouds, blue sky and a steady SE breeze encouraged me to take a route via the Wildfowl Lake overlook. All thoughts mycological rapidly dissipated as I was rewarded with a succession of raptorial delights including stunning eye to eye views of a juvenile Common Buzzard. In just over an hour eight Sparrowhawks, six Kestrels, two Peregrines and six Common Buzzards meant that hardly a moment passed when there wasn't at least one bird of prey in view at the watchpoint. If only the long winged, loose limbed Buzzard that showed briefly twice had been resolved beyond reasonable doubt - ah but that's birding, there's always one that gets away.

My appetite whetted, I couldn't wait for the next instalment. The opportunity finally arrived on 19th October when similar conditions, but this time with a gentle south-westerly breeze, prevailed. I arrived at 11:30am and proceeded to have one of those rare purple patches which throws all the hours of relative tedium into sharp relief. Wildfowl were everywhere wheeling over the woods and plunging on to the dark waters of the lake. Some 60+ Eurasian Wigeon filled the air with their high whistled "sweooo" calls, while the 100+ Teal jostled along the reedy margins, the males flashing their yellow flagged bottoms to any willing female. A quick scan of the Teal revealed a stranger in their midst. Suspicions aroused, a thorough grilling at 32x magnification gave feather by feather confirmation. A female Garganey.

So much for the antipasto, what about the main course? Without boring you with an exhaustive list of birds, it's fair to say, this was kitchen sink day. It was as if somebody had lit the blue touch paper and I just stood back and feasted on a fantastic array of goodies. Sparrowhawks and Kestrels seemed perpetually to be in view and within minutes of reaching the watchpoint a juvenile male Peregrine cruised by at close quarters having produced the 'enema effect' on all the wildfowl on the lake away to my right. I then became aware of a fox staring at me quizzically 30 metres away



below the watchpoint. After a few minutes it loped off into the woods opposite. At the same moment a movement in my peripheral vision resolved into a male stoat on the pathway. This bundle of nervous energy bounded past so close I could almost touch it. The Hawthorn wood opposite produced a rash of noteworthy sightings, with Willow Tit, Chiffchaff and a pair of Green Woodpeckers all in rapid succession. The first Common Buzzard of the morning loomed over the wood sending most of the passerines dashing for cover.

The rear edge of the Hawthorn wood appeared to be a roadway for raptors with a procession of Sparrowhawks, Kestrels and Buzzards passing by at close quarters. At 12:40pm it went dead dull for something approaching 90 seconds. This came to an abrupt end when Woodpigeons and Redwings erupted from the Hawthorn wood. The reason resolved itself into a tension-filled adult male Sparrowhawk which perched in full view 25 metres away, its vivid amber eyes searing the surrounding vegetation in search of a meal. Like a missile from a siege engine he catapulted away to my left scattering more Woodpigeons in his wake.

The ringing call of a Kingfisher momentarily dragged my attention back to the lake, but as the hands of the clock climbed towards 1:00pm increasing numbers of raptors climbed into the sky. Every sweep around the compass revealed another Kestrel here, a Buzzard there. At any one time in the next half hour it was possible to see as many as 10 raptors, of three species, in the air. I was then joined by CAWOS compatriot, Brian Dyke, during his lunch break. He arrived just in time to see the first Brambling of the autumn emerge from the Hawthorn wood. Meanwhile the raptor-fest continued unabated. At 1:40pm the high point was reached with a personal site best of 11 Common Buzzards visible from the watchpoint. Though probably nowhere near the Cheshire record, it testifies just how far this species has come in the past decade. Just five years ago a Common Buzzard at Moore would have been a stellar bird, with less than a handful of records per year; a decade ago it was a less than annual.

At 1:45pm I left the watchpoint and immediately connected with a second Peregrine, this time an adult, and then added a day-calling Tawny Owl for good measure. Well, time was up and I took a moment to reflect on a truly amazing two and a half hours of birding on the local patch. It proved that Moore NR has its own genuine Raptor Watchpoint. By noting individual plumage variation I was able to confirm a minimum of six different Kestrels, six different Sparrowhawks, two different Peregrine Falcons and 11 Common Buzzards. That's some going for inland Cheshire. If only I could have been at Moore in late September when the Honey Buzzards were popping up all over the place. I'm making a note in my calendar now. I'm sure there are other places in the county with comparable raptor watchpoints, but this is definitely the outstanding spot on my local patch and I'll be making it a regular feature of my visits from now on.

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

EXCERPTS FROM CAWOS DISCUSSION FORUM (www.cawos.org)

OLD NEWS

On checking the CAWOS site I usually leap straight into the Discussion Forum to see what's new. Today though I had a little time to spare so 'surfed' into the *Bird News* section. Back copies of old *News* to download - brilliant. Whoever is responsible for putting all this data on-line deserves a pat on the back. I for one shall certainly be using it as an additional historical resource - who knows, it may eventually serve to save some space in my own bookcase!

Bob Harris

Reply

For those members who have not been with the Society since the year dot (well 1988 actually) and so do not have a much 'sought-after' set of old *Bird News* - don't despair! We have been printing them since approximately No. 11 so, except for the very early issues, all of them are stored on our computer anyway (in Pagemaker format). We are also scanning those early issues in as well so that we don't lose them for all time. So for those newer members who like the feel and look of ink on paper it would be possible to reprint old issues if there is the demand. There would be a small charge to cover printing and postage. Also I do have a quantity of some back issues available. Let me know what numbers you need and I'll see what I can do. We are also considering archiving *Bird News* on CDs, so we could make copies available to members, in pdf format, perhaps in 'lots' of two to three years. Again we would have to work out a suitable cost. Would anybody be interested?

Finally, is anybody willing to update and maintain our ***Bird News* index**? Steve Barber started a very comprehensive index up to No. 32 (in word format). I have added to this but only in certain categories. It would be so useful for historical and research purposes - there is too much information in these old issues, even in the 'Notes and Letters' section - for it all to go 'to waste'. It was always our aim to produce a simple index to accompany *Bird News*, but lack of manpower has always prevented this. **Any offers?!?**

Sheila Blamire

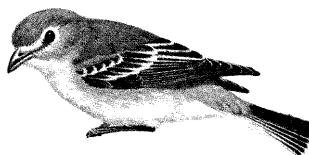
WATER PIPITS' LEGS

What colour legs do the Dee Water Pipits have? The bird books mostly say grey/black, although the new Collins guide has an alternative of "paler red-brown". The bird(s) I saw today at Neston Old Quay would definitely fall in the latter category. Although their legs were not the (almost translucent) pink of the Meadow Pipits, they were much more red-brown than the black of, e.g. Beaman and Madge in HBI. So much so that two other birders present rejected one bird as a Meadow Pipit. Otherwise it/they had the white supercilium, pale brown unmarked upperparts, not as distinctly streaked breast and flanks on a white background, and larger size, which made it stand out as different from the Meadows. I came home perfectly happy until I got out the books just to check, and then began to worry about the legs.... **What do people think?**

John Kirkland

The Scilly Isles - what a great spot,
Where vireo ticking is hot,
A rumour was floated,
A rare Yellow-throated
Was seen on St Martin's - or not!

Hazel J Raw



RUMOURS... RUMOURS...

A little birdie has informed CAWOS that it was one of our members who caused the Yellow-throated Vireo panic on Scilly this last autumn. On the information received, a boatload of desperadoes set off from the quay on St Mary's in appalling weather, bound for St Martin's. It was later discovered that the information that there was a vireo of any description on the island was false. The list of expletives was reportedly long and explosive and apparently the occupants of the boat had to have their belts, binocular straps and all sharp objects removed by the boatmen on the way back to St. Mary's. At least the boatmen were happy!

Projects and Surveys

BUZZARD WING TAGGING PROJECT (supported by CAWOS)

Project Overview

The Buzzard Wing Tagging Project began in spring 2000. The aims of the Project are:

- * To gain information relating to the direction and distance of dispersal of first year birds.
- * To monitor the movements of the birds during their pre-breeding phase.
- * To monitor the return to their natal area for breeding, to study the 'filling in' concept of an increasing breeding population.

Methods

The Buzzards are fitted with a BTO leg ring for long term identification as well as tags on each wing. The wing tags will be of different colours for each year over a five year period. The wing tag will also display a number for individual identification by field observation.

Wing tag attachment is carried out under BTO ringing licence by Steve Binney and Roy Leigh. The method of attachment is the one used by the RSPB and English Nature on the Red Kite Reintroduction Programme.

Year 2000 Results

This was the first year of the Project and it was felt by the fieldworkers that it should be used as a pilot year to fine-tune the attachment methods and gain experience in handling etc.

The total number of Buzzards tagged in 2000 was 10. This was split down into five fledglings in Mobberley and Warford and a further four fledglings and one adult on the Wirral.

The attachment went well in all cases. The birds were tagged with brightly coloured tags particular to the year 2000. The adult's tag was distinguished by a symbol.

Observations

In all cases observations were made after the birds had fledged to ensure the tags had not fallen off and that they could be visible to observers.

Observations of the tagged birds so far (November 2000) show that they are still frequenting the natal area. The furthest movement recorded is that of a bird from Warford seen soaring near Manchester Airport.

Thanks are due to CAWOS for funding the Project and to Ian Carter at English Nature for his advice on equipment and attachment techniques. Thanks in advance to all of the nest finders who will be contacting us in 2001 to tag the birds in their nests!!

Steve Binney & Roy Leigh, on behalf of the Cheshire & Wirral Raptor Study Group

Note: CAWOS members are invited to help the Project by checking to see if any Buzzard they see is tagged and if so noting the colour and number or symbol and reporting the information to either Steve (0151 608 4049) or Roy (01606 892032).

BIRD FEEDING STATION AT ELTON HALL FLASH, SANDBACH

The feeding station was started several years ago with the provision of one or two peanut feeders, which were filled only in the winter. These have been added to over the years and presently there are a variety of seed and peanut feeders in and around a willow tree in a mature hawthorn hedge near to the usual viewpoint at Elton Hall Flash.

Species regularly present are Blue Tit, Great Tit, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, House Sparrow, Magpie and the star attraction of Tree Sparrow, which is virtually always present. Since all year round feeding replaced winter feeding the numbers of Tree Sparrows built up and became present all year. This is the only site in the area where they can be seen regularly, a fact much appreciated by visiting birdwatchers. Others seen less frequently include Brambling, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Nuthatch. Coot, Mallard and Pheasant are frequently present cleaning up the spilt seed from under the feeders.

Around eight nest boxes have been provided in the area in the last two years. Blue Tit and Great Tit as expected have used these, but more excitingly one was used by a pair of Tree Sparrows this summer. More boxes will be provided this winter and it is hoped that the provision of nest boxes, together with the feeding, will lead to more pairs of this colonial nesting species breeding at the flashes.

Tree Sparrow is one of the species seriously affected by the changes in farming practice and numbers have declined by over 80% in the past 25 years. It is on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern and the actions taken are in accordance with the Biodiversity Action Plan for this species.

The feeding station has proved to be very attractive to birds and also provides a lot of enjoyment to local birdwatchers, both the flashes' regulars as they wait for the next rarity and to the increasing number of casual birdwatchers. It is maintained almost entirely through the generosity of one local birdwatcher (the financial contribution from CAWOS was gratefully received), with another member providing and maintaining the nest boxes.

Colin Lythgoe, SECOS (South-east Cheshire Ornithological Society) Recorder

Rarities, Records & Report!

CAWOS RARITIES COMMITTEE AND RECORDS

In 2001, the **Rarities Committee** would like to welcome Dave Walters as a new member. Dave is already a compiler and has also agreed to handle all the county rarity descriptions prior to adjudication by the committee. This is a particularly important and time-consuming role as the descriptions received have to be cross-referenced with the ordinary records received, and a list of species and contributors compiled. Contributors who have failed to supply descriptions have then to be contacted and a final list prepared. I must applaud Dave's willingness to take on the position, but also know that his expertise in the field of identification and also of computers will give him a head start.

The Rarities Committee at present consists of Steve Barber, Hugh Pulsford, David Steventon, Jane Turner, Dave Walters and myself. A regular request for new members usually falls on deaf ears but it is felt that there should be a change to the team every so often. Anyone else who is interested should contact me in the first few months of 2001. Give it a try.

Please note that there have been some major changes to the **County Rarities** list. The necessity for descriptions of Snow Goose, Long-tailed Duck, Garganey, Ruddy Shelduck, Yellow-legged Gull (*michahellis*), Mediterranean Gull and Chukar has been relaxed. Further information will be listed in the *Bird Report*.

We have two new 'species', Lesser Redpoll and Green-winged Teal for the county. BOURC has split these from Mealy Redpoll and Eurasian Teal respectively. Descriptions will be required for both the latter until further notice although there has always been a requirement for them as subspecies.

Chiffchaffs still cause a headache. The BOURC recognises the nominate European, Canarian and Iberian forms as full species but has at the moment avoided deliberating on the Northern European and Siberian forms until more is known about them. So for now, *tristis* and *fulvescens* are not split from *abietinus* which is a subspecies of the nominate form *collybita*. Follow? Never mind, if you think that you have a good *tristis*, submit a description to me and I will file it for future submission to the BBRC when a decision is made. When I submitted the Frodsham Marsh bird to them a couple of years ago, I was told that they would also file it until such time.

A *reminder* is that the National Rarity list includes from 1999, Ferruginous Duck and Savi's Warbler. The British Birds Rarities Committee now decides on these species. Anyone submitting a singing-only Savi's Warbler may find that it is a difficult task. If they want me to submit one however, I will seek guidance from the BBRC. All **National and County Rarities** should still be submitted through me at this time.

The guidelines for submission of national rarities to the BBRC do ask observers to submit all national records through the **County Recorder**. This makes it easier for me to answer queries and when records are lost in the process as has happened in the past, it is simple for me to provide a

duplicate, which I do keep for each one submitted. *I can't answer questions if I never received the record in the first place.*

RECORDS AND COUNTY RARITIES

Make a New Year's Resolution now – send in your records to the respective people listed on the **new Record and Rarity forms**. Also get rarity descriptions in as soon as possible (there are less to worry about this year!) and help us to get the *Bird Report* out earlier. Simply photocopy the forms if you need extra ones or download them from our web site - www.cawos.org. **Thank You.**

1999 BIRD REPORT

Due out soon, it is another good publication. Special thanks to all those who sent their records in early and especially to those of you who compiled area reports. I must mention Steve Williams who single-handedly supplied the *Hilbre Report* information by April, a great achievement. Please don't let the late publication of the *1999 Report* deter you from doing the same this year. We are 'aiming' to have the *2000 Report* out before the end of this year! If you'd like to help out in any way, contact either myself or any of the Council members.

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

Ringers' Notebook

Each year, ringers may receive several hundreds of recovery sheets, either directly from the BTO or through the secretaries of the various ringing groups to which they belong. These sheets carry the information of particular individual birds which have been re-trapped by other ringers or groups - or maybe found by members of the public - and the circumstances, place and date of finding. This can, therefore, tell us where and how a certain bird ended its life or can give us back information on migration routes, feeding areas, roost sites and what age, weight, condition, etc., the individual was in at a particular moment during its lifetime. Multiply this information a hundred-fold for some species or families of birds, and we can get a good picture of how those groups live their lives and for how long.

Looking back through 2000's 300 or so recoveries from the Merseyside and South Manchester ringing groups, 51 were from members of the public who'd found dead birds for all of whom it was known what the cause of death was. In approximate percentage terms, the reasons were established as follows: intentionally killed by man (usually shot or poisoned) 25%; by cats 25% (mostly Greenfinches); by flying into windows 20%; road casualties 15%; by flying into pylons, fencing or buildings 10%; taken by birds of prey 5%. In other words, 95% of a known group of birds died due to man. So, if this figure is presumably applicable to all the other birds that are also found dead but unringed, or never found at all, then a huge number must die each year because of our activities. So perhaps it's not always due to the normally given reasons of changing farming practices, climatic change, etc., that some parts of certain bird populations are declining, and perhaps we can all help to reduce this toll by making some simple changes ourselves. Why not fit a brick, sorry bell, to the neck collar of your cat, or perhaps put a sticker on large windows to break up their outline, or drive that bit slower? Sorry if this sounds a bit like preaching, but the point is that we can all do our little bit as individuals instead of always leaving it to the main conservation bodies.

Following on from that, some of the above recoveries are detailed below:

- A Sparrowhawk ringed in the nest at Newton-le-Willows, Merseyside in July 1999 was reported shot at Middlewich in October the same year.
- A Blackbird ringed in the roost at Norton Priory in Runcorn in January 1993 was killed by a cat just 2km away in May 2000. A Coal Tit ringed at Marple, Greater Manchester as a bird of the year in November 1999 survived another six months before suffering the same fate, as did an adult Linnet ringed at Woolston LNR in August 1998 which was taken in April 2000 in south Manchester.
- The Tree Sparrow that crashed into a window at Meols, Wirral in June 2000 was unfortunately carrying food, so its demise may also have led to the death of several nestlings. It had originally been ringed nearby in December 1995, five years not being a bad age for a small passerine. Also meeting an untimely death due to a close encounter with a window pane was a Siskin in Marple at the beginning of March 2000, having been ringed there just one month before.

- A Blackcap died after a collision with a car at Oswestry, Shropshire in July 2000 after being ringed as a juvenile at Bidston, Wirral in July 1997. Two Blue Tits also met the same fate in 2000 in Wirral, both having been ringed nearby in previous years. It was not all bad news re road casualties though when in May 2000 a Peregrine, which had been ringed in August 1997 as an adult bird, was struck by traffic in the Vale of Conwy. After just one day in care it was successfully released back into the wild.

- A Grey Heron chick, ringed in the nest at the Oakmere colony in March 1993, was found with multiple injuries after presumably flying into wires at Rotherham, South Yorkshire in April 2000. A bird which died after flying into pylon wires was a Mute Swan at Wigan, Greater Manchester in December 1999, having originally been ringed 10 years before as a juvenile at Birchwood in Warrington. Lastly in this section of 'man-made' fatalities is the Sparrowhawk that collided with telephone wires at Newton-le-Willows in March 2000, after having been ringed as a nestling in July 1998 at Halewood in Liverpool.

Of the three birds known to have been killed by raptors, two were Sand Martins taken by Kestrels in the breeding colonies at Cookson Green (east of Kingsley) and Moss Farm (near Sandiway) in June 2000. A Peregrine was probably responsible for the death of a Knot that was found as a pile of feathers and a leg on the tideline at Hale in February 2000. It had first been ringed in March 1987 at Banks, Lancashire as an adult bird, and though 13 years is a good time-span between ringing and recovery the actual BTO longevity record for this species is in fact 24 years.

Two species of birds that we ring in large numbers each year, and therefore generate a lot of re-trap history from, are Sand Martins and Swallows. In both cases, ringing shows us where 'our' birds winter and the migration routes that they take. Sand Martins migrate to the south coast where they take the short sea route across the Channel, continuing down the west coast of France and past the western end of the Pyrenees. There then seem to be two main routes to the Spanish Mediterranean coast, some birds choosing the short route along the Ebro River in the north-east. From here they fly directly over to Morocco and then move south to the Sahel region where they spend some time together in flocks wherever water, and thus food, is available. Ringing recoveries of British birds also suggests that many then move slowly eastwards in winter through such countries as Mali and Niger, before moving northwards again on the long journey back. As would be expected, there are a lot of birds recovered on the south coast of England that had originally been ringed in this area, as well as many local movements recorded.

Following on from this, here are two recently received Sand Martin recoveries concerning this region. A bird re-trapped at the Oakmere colony in June 1995 had been ringed on its wintering ground in the national park at Djoudj, Senegal in January 1993. Although some five years ago, we have only just received this information – not an uncommon occurrence when dealing with some overseas ringing schemes. The second record concerns a bird that was ringed to the south-east of Madrid, Spain on its way north in April 1999 and then re-trapped at the Cookson Green colony in June of the same year.

Swallows, of course, spend the winter a lot further south than Sand Martins, the BTO total of birds ringed in the British Isles and recovered in South Africa now standing at about 400. Adding to this was the bird mentioned in the previous Notebook, which was ringed as a nestling at Hoylake, Wirral at the end of May 1999 and subsequently re-trapped at Bloemfontein, Orange Free State in February 2000, a total of 9604 kilometres south.

Finally, the BTO has now printed a colour leaflet explaining the basic outline of the ringing scheme, so if anybody would like a copy please send an s.a.e. to the address below.

Chris Benson, 39 Redesmere Park, Urmston, Manchester, M41 9ER

EXTRACTS FROM LIVERPOOL BAY WADER STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER OCT 2000 NEW ALERT FOR DECLINING SPECIES

Lapwing: alert for four years, population decline 52% with an increasing trend in nest failure at the incubation stage. Also, during 1998, the Lapwing exhibited significantly lower clutch sizes than normal (averaging 0.27 of an egg smaller). Lapwings are under serious threat at the moment due to changing agriculture. It is likely that the Nest Recording Scheme data show the impacts of high livestock numbers, which increases trampling and disturbance of nesting birds, or of increased damage from machinery used in crop management.

WIRRAL LAPWING SURVEY

A survey of breeding Lapwing in the South Wirral area was undertaken last spring resulting in a total of 320 pairs being recorded. High concentrations were located in several areas of spring-sown cereal and an area of maize surrounded by pastureland. A number of juvenile birds were radio-tagged at this latter site but unfortunately many died after falling into drainage ditches as they moved to adjacent pastures to feed and, unable to escape, were drowned.

RINGING NEWS

The following ringed birds have been reported by the Merseyside Ringing Group:

Oystercatcher:

- ringed 20.8.82 in Lincolnshire, found dead 16.11.97 at West Kirby.

Dunlin:

- ringed 30.9.97 on North Ronaldsay, controlled 11.8.99 at Hoylake.

- ringed 15.8.83 at Gdansk, Poland, controlled 1.12.97 at Hoylake (distance travelled 1423km).

- ringed 18.2.91 at New Brighton, controlled 7.8.98 at Ottenby, Sweden (distance travelled 1281km).

Black-tailed Godwit:

- colour-ringed female ringed in eastern Iceland 4.5.00, sighted 24.8.00 at Eastham.

- colour-ringed on The Wash Aug/Sept 93, sighted at New Ferry 12.12.98.

Curlew:

- ringed at Point of Ayr 17.11.74, controlled Weser-ems, Germany 17.5.96 (distance travelled 701km).

Redshank:

- ringed 21.8.93 in Dumfries & Galloway, controlled 9.9.99 at Hoylake (distance travelled 176km).

- ringed 20.3.88 at Moreton, found dead 15.6.95 at Selfossbar, Iceland (distance travelled 1555km).

Turnstone:

- ringed 22.11.90 at New Brighton, found dead 15.6.99 on Baffin Island, Canada (distance travelled 3770km).

- ringed 22.11.90 at New Brighton, found dead 9.7.96 at Moriussay, Greenland (distance travelled 3881km).

- colour-ringed bird at Seaforth from 26.3.00 to 7.5.00 ringed in Netherlands.

- colour-ringed bird at Seaforth 9.5.00, ringed Washington, USA.

Membership News

Welcome to the following new members: Sandy Baines, F A Latham and P & M Thompson. A late membership for 2000 gave us a final tally of 339 members, compared with 353 in 1999.

Council held a meeting in November at which the following points were discussed:

- the new committee structure had been placed on the CAWOS web site, and there would also be a link between our site and that of the Local Record Centre.
- Editorial and Records had requested the views of compilers on the compiling process.
- Tony Parker had represented CAWOS at the recent Biodiversity Conference and would write an article on it for *Bird News*.
- Tony Parker together with Jeff Clarke and Phil Oddy would evaluate Recorder 2000 and would discuss with the Record Centre the best way of transmitting records.
- details of the Forum meeting to be held in February, to discuss how records throughout the county could be collected, collated and sent through to the Record Centre, were agreed.
- Local area conservation representatives for CAWOS would be as follows: Colin Lythgoe (Crewe and Nantwich), Brian Martin (Warrington), Jeff Clarke (Halton), Derek Kelly (Macclesfield), Congleton, Chester, Vale Royal and Wirral have still to be covered.
- the recent membership survey was discussed. It was agreed to look at the feasibility of a 'Cheshire Young Ornithologist of the Year' award; articles and visits to local patches; a joint conference on surveying techniques; and proposals to have some indoor meetings in Wirral.

David Cogger, 113 Nantwich Road, Middlewich, Cheshire, CW10 9HD. Tel: 01606 832517

E-mail memsec@cawos.org

CAWOS WORKSHOPS 2001

Below you will find a varied selection of workshops being run by CAWOS this year. Some of the events are being run in partnership with the Wirral Ranger Service and Moore Nature Reserve. A few of the sessions are old favourites such as the annual gull fest at Arpley/Gatewarth. For the first time this year we will be starting ringing demonstrations and David Cookson of the Swan Study Group has kindly offered to host the first session. Please find the time to try out at least one of the sessions. They are always relaxed, affable occasions, where people have the opportunity to learn new birding skills, share our pooled knowledge and enjoyment of the truly fantastic variety of birds to be found in Cheshire.

Sunday 11th March 2001 9:00am

Swan Ringing Workshop (CAWOS & Cheshire Swan Study Group)

If you've ever wanted to know what it's like to do a swan drive and subdue Britain's biggest bird, in order to get a ring or two on its leg, then this is the session for you. Join CAWOS's own swan expert David Cookson for a morning session at Winterley Pool. Find out about the exciting life histories of individual birds which David and the Swan Study Group have uncovered over many years of ringing this avian leviathan. The pool is located at the Whellock end of the Haslington bypass. Meet: 9:00am. For further details and to register your interest please contact David Cookson on 01270 567526 or Jeff Clarke on 0151 423 4275.

Saturday 17th March 2001 9:30am - 1:00pm

In Pursuit of Iceland Gulls (CAWOS)

A chance for beginners and experts to catch up with some of the rarer gull species. Richmond Bank is a famous gathering point for 'loafing' gulls which feed on the nearby landfill site. Late winter and early spring usually bring small numbers of Iceland and Glaucous Gulls mixed with their commoner fellows. Meet: Ferry Tavern Car Park, Station Rd, Penketh, Warrington. If you want to catch up with these enigmatic Arctic wanderers you can book your place by telephoning Jeff Clarke on 0151 423 4275.



Thursday 24th May 2001 8:30pm - 10:30pm

In search of the Long-eared Owl (CAWOS)

Join a small band of night birds in search of Britain's most elusive species of owl. The late evening walk should produce dramatic close encounters with pre-dark, hunting owls as they scour the rough grasslands for voles and shrews. Other delights include Grasshopper Warbler, brown hares and foxes. Meet: Ferry Tavern Car Park, Station Road, Penketh, Warrington. Places are strictly limited and booking is essential. Tel: Jeff Clarke 0151 423 4275 or 0151 648 4371.

Saturday 7th July 2001 10:00am

Of Hobbies and Skimmers (CAWOS & Moore Nature Reserve)

Moore Nature Reserve is one of the best places to visit in the Mersey and Dee region for dragonflies and damselflies. As such it regularly attracts Hobbies to feast on this aerial prey. Join the local experts as they show you the avian and insect highlights of high summer on this superbly diverse reserve. Meet: Lapwing Lane entrance, Moore, Warrington. Tel: 01925 444689 or 0151 423 4275.

Saturday 4th August 2001 8:30am

A Gathering of Terns (CAWOS & Wirral Ranger Service)

If you have never been to Hilbre Island then there is no better time than August when several species of tern gather around the island. They use Liverpool Bay as a staging post on their southward migrations. Find out how to tell Arctic from Common Tern. Watch out for 'squeaky' Little Terns and 'kirriking' Sandwich Terns. Booking is essential. Cost £1 per person. Tel: Wirral Country Park, Thurstaston 0151 648 4371/3884.



Saturday 22nd September 2001 6:00am - 10:00am

Swallows Go South (Migration Watch 2001) CAWOS & Wirral Ranger Service

The first in a series of migration watches to be held around the region. For this session we will be focussing on the departing martins and Swallows, Meadow Pipits and wagtails and various waders. Late September also sees birds of prey on the move and if the day warms up we can expect a variety of raptors to rise into view on the thermals. You can turn up at any time during the watch. Meet: Denhall Lane, Burton, South Wirral. Further details: tel: 0151 648 4371/3884.

Sunday 23rd September 2001 9:30am - 2:30pm

Raptors on High (CAWOS & Moore Nature Reserve)

Join the local experts for a raptorial exploration of Moore Nature Reserve. We can anticipate seeing five or more species of birds of prey in the right conditions. We will probably be spending several hours at the 'Raptor Watchpoint', so bring a folding chair and a packed lunch. This is an excellent location for budding bird photographers and it should be possible to get good flight shots of the raptors from this vantage point. Meet: Lapwing Lane, Moore, nr. Warrington. Tel: 01925 444689 or 0151 423 4275.

Sunday 21st October 2001 7:30am - 11:30am

Migration Watch 2001 (CAWOS & Wirral Ranger Service)

Further details will appear in the next issue of *Bird News* or check out www.cawos.org.

Note: Several of the above events require prior booking to secure your place. Places on events are also open to non-members of CAWOS and so may book up well in advance.

If you would like to run a workshop or have good ideas for future sessions please contact Jeff Clarke on 0151 423 4275 or e-mail him at conservation@cawos.org

CONSERVATION NEWS

It came to my attention a few days ago that 3C Waste has put in an application for an extension to the Arpley Tip site. This is despite giving assurances as recently as six months ago that no further applications would be forthcoming for at least the next 15 years. The area of land in question is on the flood plain of the R. Mersey immediately west of the current tip site. It is proposed on an area of land known locally as Moss Side.

This is an extremely valuable piece of land in terms of its biodiversity. It is important locally for many Red Data species. There is a healthy population of water voles. The land contains at least one active badger sett and a good population of brown hares. Good numbers of Reed Buntings breed, as do Grey Partridges. In addition Corn Buntings have traditionally bred, as have Tree Sparrows. The latter still maintain a small wintering population. The land is also a valuable winter site for Curlews. Up to 400 regularly feed in these fields. There are over 1000 metres of mature hedgerows that provides important nesting sites for lowland farmland birds including Linnets and Yellowhammers. In the winter these hedgerows are important feeding grounds for winter thrushes. I have already raised my concerns with Warrington Borough Council who are processing the application. I don't think Warrington will support the application. As far as CAWOS is concerned it is apparent that the bio-audit carried out by Jonathan Guest has missed out on a number of important points. Not least the badger sett. This is inevitable as any external surveyor only has a short period in which to gather information and will doubtless miss much that is present. Having said that, Jonathan picked up Corn Bunting during his survey period, something the recording group for the area has so far failed to find in recent years. I think we have a strong case on the biological side to defeat this proposal. However our strongest case comes in terms of flood plain development. As far as that is concerned the application could not have come at a better time.

I will be calling into Warrington Unitary Authority's offices ASAP with a view to seeing the proposed bid and the biological assessment. According to Gary Nancarrow, the Borough Officer concerned, we should have at least until February 2001 to get our initial objections brought before the planning authority.

Jeff Clarke, Conservation Officer, 90 Simonside, Hough Green, Widnes, WA8 4YN

COMMUNITY GRANT SCHEMES

A number of councils in Cheshire operate grant schemes to support and encourage community-based natural history or 'biodiversity' projects. Such grants are available for a variety of activities ranging from biological recording, nest box schemes to practical conservation work according to the priorities of the awarding council.

Generally, awarding such grants requires the involvement of a local community group, examples of which can include local RSPB members' groups or other natural history societies, eg Butterfly Conservation. The grants are awarded for a twelve month period and are generally up to a maximum

of £500, although £1000 may be available in some areas. In all cases grants are awarded on the basis of the availability of 50% matched funding from the applicant.

On completion of the project a written report is generally required by whoever awards the grant (probably necessary for audit purposes); in some cases an interim report may be required after the first month of the project.

The existence of many of these schemes is not well publicised and often come across by accident. If however you feel your group can benefit, the following table lists all the relevant contacts. (Information supplied by Paul Oldfield.)

Local Authority

Grant scheme covering biodiversity projects
Contact name
Phone number

Cheshire County Council

No scheme in operation at present. Please contact officer if you have a particular idea.
Mandy North
01244 603119

Chester City

No scheme in operation at present. Please contact officer if you have a particular idea.
Steve Woolfall
01244 402015

Congleton

Landscape & nature conservation grant.
50% of scheme up to £500
Jo Kirwin
01270 763231

Crewe & Nantwich

No scheme in operation at present. Please contact officer if you have a particular idea.
Alan Leah
01270 537777

Ellesmere Port & Neston

Seedcorn Fund
Dean Skrabania
0151 356 6669

Halton

Halton Environment Fund. Up to £500
Paul Oldfield
01928 583917

Macclesfield

Landscape conservation grant
Trevor Bithell
01625 504652

Vale Royal

Scheme in operation
Derek Richardson (from 2/2001)
01606 867724

Warrington

Scheme in operation
David Bell
01295 442837

Tony Parker, Recording Liaison Officer, 41 The Park, Penketh, Warrington, WA5 2SG

THE ATLAS FUND & SMALL GRANTS FROM CAWOS

Roughly speaking, subscriptions from members (with a few other items like *Bird Report* sales) cover the annual running costs of CAWOS. Those who study the balance sheet will know that there is a substantial sum of money in the Atlas Fund. This originally arose from sales of the *Breeding Bird Atlas*, and was earmarked by Council to fund future publications - notably, an Avifauna of the county.

For a variety of reasons, attempts to get the Avifauna project off the ground have not succeeded (so far), and the Atlas Fund has gradually grown. A number of suggestions for using the Fund has been considered, but Council has decided:

1. to retain most of the Fund, against the time when there is a need to finance an Avifauna or some other publication
2. to use some of it (mainly the accumulating interest) to make small grants to assist conservation or research.

Over the past two years, we have contributed £350 to the BTO's Nightingale Appeal (we know we don't have any Nightingales - but other woodland species benefit from the work!); £750 to assist provision by the Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens of information/noticeboards; £150 to the Raptor Study Group towards the cost of the Buzzard survey; £50 to Rostherne Observatory towards production of its annual report; £50 to SECOS to help maintain its feeding station at Sandbach

Flashes; and £44 towards ring costs of the Cheshire Swan Study Group. (This last was a donation to CAWOS, by way of thanks for a demonstration of nest box construction, which we decided to pass on as a grant.) We also offered a loan (which was not in the end required) to assist publication of the recent book on the *Birds of Sandbach Flashes*.

These examples give an idea of the size and scope of grants we are likely to make. There are no fixed rules at present, though in general CAWOS is likely to make a contribution to a project (rather than meet full costs), and to ask for an acknowledgement of our support and/or a report for publication in *Bird News* or the *Bird Report* - so members can see how the Society's money is being spent. Applications will be considered by Council, who will decide whether to support them, and to what extent, in the light of the project's value and available funds.

We believe that we can do more, in the long run, to promote the study and conservation of birds in Cheshire by making a number of small grants (and still retaining a fund for future publications) rather than spending a large sum on a single project. If you are working on, or planning, a survey, conservation project, ringing scheme or something else which you think might qualify for and be helped by a grant from CAWOS you should contact the Secretary, David Cogger, giving as much information as possible about the work and its finances. We can't guarantee to help, but we will consider your application.

Bob Anderson, 102 Crewe Road, Nantwich, CW5 6JD



FEBRUARY

- 1 CADOS 'BIRDING NORTH AMERICA' by Steve Holmes
- 2 CAWOS 'AN ALASKAN JOURNEY' by Tom Lawson
- 2-4 LOG Solway weekend, contact Peter Tonge 01606 891274
- 9 High Tide Birdwatch, Old Baths car park, Parkgate - 10:30am (HT 12:02, 10.1m)
- 10 High Tide Birdwatch, Parkgate - 11:00am (HT 12:47, 10.2m) followed by lunch & talks at the Boathouse Inn, details from Lynne Greenstreet on 0151 648 5011
- 9 MCOS 'THE SEARCH FOR THE SYLVIA' by David Cottridge
- 9 SECOS 'THE WILD BEAUTY OF SCOTLAND' by Mark Hamblin
- 11 KOS Tatton Park, meet at Mallard Close layby (Dog Lodge entrance) at 9:00am
- 11 CADOS Pennington/Richmond Bank, contact Chris Done 01298 724994
- 11 MCOS Marton Mere/Rossall Point, contact Mike Allsopp 0151 348 4500
- 11 CRSPB Hest Bank/Morecambe Bay, leaving 8:30am, contact Brian Roberts 01352 714758
- 12 SRSPB 'THE HOME LIFE OF A GOLDEN EAGLE' by Terry Pickford
- 13 ADNHS 'INSECTS' by Steve Garland
- 13 MRSPB 'THE WHITE PEAK' by John Power
- 14 HO '(NORTH) RONA - ISLAND ADVENTURE' by John Roberts
- 16 NCRSPB 'TOUR OF THE RSPB RESERVES IN THE NW' by Roy Taylor (RSPB)
- 18 SRSPB North Wales by coach departing at 7:30am - ring for details
- 18 SECOS Blacktoft Sands RSPB Reserve, ring for details
- 18 NCRSPB Welshpool and Gigrin Farm, meet at Welshpool Nature Reserve at 10:00am
- 18 MRSPB Park Hall Country Park, depart Duke St car park at 9:00am
- 21 CRSPB 'LOOK NORTH' by Rev. Hugh Linn
- 23 KOS 'SIBERIAN SUMMER' by Steve Woolfall
- 23 WGOS 'THE HOME LIFE OF A GOLDEN EAGLE' by Terry Pickford
- 23 LOG AGM & 'THIS BLESSED PLOT' by Andy Harmer
- 24-25 CADOS Norfolk Weekend, contact Dave Goff 01244 345043
- 24 ADNHS Broadbottom Historical Trail, meet public car park, Cecil Road, Hale at 9:30am
- 25 HO Rutland Water, by coach, contact Marion Haigh 0161 903 9163
- 27 ADNHS 'MOUNT KENYA & KILIMANJARO' by Geoff Brammall
- TBC WGOS Inner Marsh Farm/Rivacre Valley Nature Reserve by car - ring for details

MARCH

- 1 CADOS AGM + MEMBERS' EVENING
2 **CAWOS AGM followed by MEMBERS' SLIDES and SHORT TALKS**
2-4 SECOS Dorset weekend, ring for details
9 MCOS 'A WEEK IN EILAT' by A Garner, L Goulding, M Hems
9 SECOS 'A DROP OF WATER' by Graham Green
10 **High Tide Birdwatch, Old Baths car park, Parkgate - 10:00am (HT 11:45, 10.2m)**
10 CADOS Tregaron, contact Alun Harley 01925 269430
10 NCRSPB Wirral coast, meet at Parkgate car park (SJ 273789) at 9:00am
11 **CAWOS Swan Ringing Workshop, Winterley Pool, Whellock, at 9:00am, for further details contact Jeff Clarke 0151 423 4275 or David Cookson 01270 567526**
11 **High Tide Birdwatch, Old Baths car park, Parkgate - 10:30am (HT 12:27, 10.3m)**
11 WGOS Old Moor Wetland Centre/Fairburn Ings by coach departing at 8:00am - ring for details
11 LOG Leighton Moss by coach, contact Peter Tonge 01606 891274
11 CRSPB Point of Ayr, leaving 9:00am, contact Peter Stevenson 01352 716886
12 SRSPB 'WANDERINGS IN CENTRAL ASIA' by Tom Lawson
13 ADNHS 'BIRDS BY CHARACTER' by Jeff Clarke
13 MRSPB 'SOMEWHERE BEGINNING WITH A' by Brayton Holt
14 HO 'BIRD SONG' by Roy Croucher
16 NCRSPB GENERAL KNOWLEDGE QUIZ & HOT-POT SUPPER
17 **CAWOS Gull Workshop, Richmond Bank, 9:30am - 1:00pm, to book your place contact Jeff Clarke 0151 423 4275**
17 KOS Pennines, meet at Sessions House at 9:00am
18 SRSPB Fairburn Ings by coach departing at 8:00am - ring for details
18 MCOS World's End, contact Paul Kenyon 01606 77960
18 MRSPB Marshside RSPB Reserve, depart Duke St car park at 8:00am
21 CRSPB 'THE FARNE ISLANDS' by Martin Jamieson
23 KOS Speaker tbc
25 SECOS Draycote Water, ring for details
27 ADNHS AGM, followed by short talk
30 WGOS 'LOOK NORTH (FROM ANGLESEY TO THE ARCTIC)' by Rev Hugh Linn
30 LOG 'CONSERVATION OF BIRDS OF THE DEE ESTUARY' by Colin Wells

APRIL

- 6 MCOS AGM & MEMBERS' SLIDE EVENING
8 KOS Lake Vyrnwy, meet at Sessions House at 8:30am
8 SECOS Southport/Mere Sands Wood, ring for details
9 SRSPB AGM followed by a MEMBERS' EVENING
10 MRSPB 'PROTECTION & CONSERVATION OF BIRDS OF PREY' by Terry Pickford
11 HO 'HOME LIFE OF THE GOLDEN EAGLE IN SCOTLAND' by Terry Pickford
18 CRSPB AGM, followed by 'ON THE EDGE OF SURVIVAL' by Andre Farrar
19 MRSPB Middlewood Way, meet at Adlington Road car park, Bollington at 6:30pm
20 SECOS AGM & MEMBERS' EVENING
20 NCRSPB 'NIGHTJARS' by Paul Kenyon
21-28 LOG Central Spain, contact Peter Tonge 01606 891274
22 ADNHS Lighthouse & Wirral Country Trail, meet public car park, Cecil Road, Hale at 9:30am
22 NCRSPB World's End, meet on road from Minera (SJ 232484) at 7:00am
22 CRSPB Malcolm's Mystery Trip, leaving 9:00am, contact Malcolm Leigh 01244 348238
24 ADNHS 'A NATURE PHOTOGRAPHER'S DIARY' by Geoff Simpson
26-29 MCOS Devon weekend, contact Ray Evans 01829 752494
27 KOS AGM & MEMBERS' SLIDES
27 WGOS AGM followed by 'WILDLIFE OF THE SHETLAND ISLES' by Steve Knell
27 LOG 'AUSTRALIA REVISITED' by Norman Catchpole
29 WGOS Carsington Reservoir by car, meet Wilmslow Guild at 8:00am or Carsington at 9:30am
29 SRSPB Sandwell Valley, West Midlands, by coach departing at 8:00am - ring for details
29 MRSPB Leighton Moss by coach, bookings: Ian Taylor 01260 275248
30 SRSPB Tatton Park, meet Mallard Close, Knutsford at 7:15pm

MAY

- 8 ADNHS 'LOCAL BOTANY' - The Philip Newton Memorial Lecture, by Elizabeth Blackman
8 MRSPB AGM, followed by MEMBERS' SLIDES
9 HO 'WADING ABOUT - A WORLD TOUR OF WADERS' by Brayton Holt
9 NCRSPB Inner Marsh Farm, meet in car park at 7:00pm
12 ADNHS Spring Wood/walk to Sabden, Lancs, meet public car park, Cecil Road, Hale at 9:30am
13 WGOS Ynys-hir by coach departing at 7:30am - ring for details
13 HO Coed Garth Gell, by coach, contact Mavis/David Caldwell, 0161 962 3626
13 MCOS Ynys-hir, meet at RSPB reserve at 9:30am
13 SECOS Anglesey, ring for details
17-20 NCRSPB Norfolk weekend, for further details ring Cliff Gibson on 01925 817874
18-20 MRSPB Dorset weekend, for details ring Ian Taylor on 01260 275248
20 LOG Aber Valley by coach, contact Peter Tonge 01606 891274
21 SRSPB Pennington Flash, meet at Golf Club, off A572 Golbourne, Wigan at 7:15pm
24 CAWOS In Search of Long-eared Owls, 8:30-10:30pm, contact Jeff Clarke 0151 423 4275

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. Nick French 01928 856522
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. Carol Davidson 01925 635967
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

CAWOS PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

Open to members only and restricted to those photos taken in 2000.

Closing date Saturday 10th February 2001.

There will be three categories which can be either slides or prints:-

1. **Foreign**
2. **Great Britain**
3. **Humorous** - all entries should be accompanied by an appropriate caption. There will be equal weighting regarding the originality and humour of the caption and the quality of the photograph.

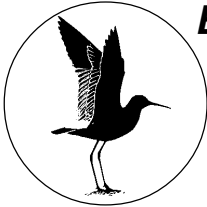
Make sure each entry is clearly marked with the following:-

1. your name
2. where the photo was taken and approximate date
3. the species depicted

Please include your address and contact number with your entry. There will be an entry fee of 25p per entry with a prize of £5 awarded to the winner of each section. Winners and runners-up will be shown at the March AGM/meeting and reported in *Bird News*.

If you want your entries to be returned by post please enclose an appropriate S.A.E. We will take the utmost care of your photos but wish to point out that we cannot be held responsible for any loss or damage. If you require further details please contact Richard Gabb on 01625 262946. Please hand or send your entries to:-

Richard Gabb, 72 Chester Road, Poynton, Cheshire, SK12 1HA



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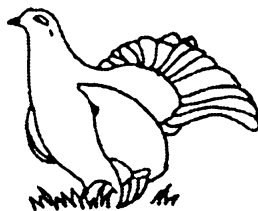
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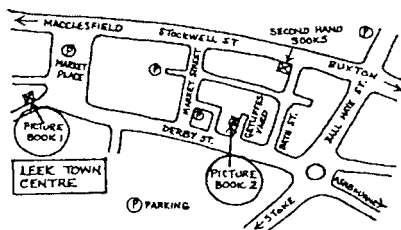
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Imminent dates for your diary:

Fri 1st December 'A Bird Painter in Israel' - see Diary page 30 for further details

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